

Hill Academy Mission Report

Mission: Ascent Through Destruction

Hill Squad Supervisor: Sadie Klein

Hill Academy Lead: Sadie Klein

Agents:

L1- Jordan Baird

L2- Logan Love

Objective:

Retrieve rogue weapon located within Skyline Co. building. The test product is to be retrieved with little to no damage to the device, and minimal destruction done upon the building. No special abilities are approved for this mission.

By 6:23 the smoke from the Skyline building fire had attracted the attention of a dozen local and national news crews. They swarmed to the disaster like ants to crumbs, begging for just a word from any one of the hill kids, though they were especially fond of agent Sadie Klein. They forced microphones towards her, asked her a dozen variants of the same question.

“What are your plans to control the fire Agent Klein?”

“Agent Klein, over here! What is the cause of this catastrophe?”

“Just one question, Agent. Will the Skyline building survive this?”

Sadie brushed them all off, focusing instead on her team beside her and the mission ahead of her.

“Fires up to the 14th floor. Building seems to be stable. There’s a total of 114 floors, all evacuated,” she informed them. It was all of the information she had been given.

“What’re we looking for exactly?” Logan asked.

“One of the devices that my dad and Blackwood developed. The transport truck crashed over there,” Sadie gestured across the way, where the supply truck lay. It was roped off and guarded by several patrol cars, still on its side.

“Yeah, but what?”

“They don’t know.”

Not much was visible from the street, aside from the shattered glass doors and the glimpse of the trashed lobby through them. Smoke was billowing around the building, so thick that it blocked the sky from where they stood.

Jordan, without taking her eyes off the building, spoke up, “What’s the plan Cap?”

“We stick together, keep your wits and weapons about you, and move quickly. Investigate anything you find suspicious, don’t worry about damaging it. The instructions said to return it in one piece, I don’t care about that. It’s already done a lot of damage, it just needs to be stopped.”

Jordan nodded slowly, moving her gaze towards Sadie’s, “the tactical plan?”

“We go floor by floor and check every room. They’re supposed to be sending floor plans to our watches, just follow the map.”

Jordan nodded again, her questions answered. Sadie looked towards Logan, who shrugged. She took that to mean he was ready. “Alright. Here goes nothing.”

Their first objective was to find the key for the stairwell, which they had been informed was always kept locked from the ground floor. Logan grumbled about how unsafe that was, though ultimately it was him that found a key card in an unlocked supply closet.

“Love, I’m sure every employee’s id can open the door,” Jordan reasoned.

“What if I was a visitor?” he countered, waving the key through the air.

“Guess you’re shit out of luck then,” Sadie interjected, taking the card from him. The door to the stairwell opened with a beep, perfectly smokeless and untouched.

The second objective was to assess the damage of the first few floors before determining a solid course of action. Luckily, Sadie thought, there was extensive damage to be assessed. The entire second floor was in flames, causing Logan to burn himself trying to exit the stairwell. The third floor was all smoke. So was the fourth. And the fifth. By the time they reached the sixth, Sadie was already trying to figure out a new plan.

“Every floor is going to be like this. Heat rises,” she sighed finally.

“So what do you want us to do, Cap?” Jordan asked. Sadie thought for a second, searching for any viable solution. She lifts her arm, moving her elbow in front of her nose.

“You can shoot with one hand.”

Jordan smirked as she moved her left elbow over her nose. Logan looked between them.

“You’re joking.”

“Just stay close, Love.” Sadie took a deep breath and pushed her own sleeve over her face before she forced the door open. It took a few seconds for her senses to adjust to the thick obstruction in the air before she was able to see the blurry outlines of debris on the floor. She waved Jordan to the right, while her and Logan moved left. The visibility through the smoke was less than a foot, and the light Sadie clicked on from her watch didn’t help any. The rooms were winding, a maze of destruction and darkness, and the protection of her sleeve was doing little to keep the smoke out of Sadie’s lungs. She abandoned the idea entirely, choosing to use her hand to guide her instead. Other than tipped chairs and the occasional tipped pot there was nothing telling around her. Her mind was running through ways that she could find something that she couldn’t see, couldn’t hear.

“Sadie, look,” Logan called from the darkness. His voice came from everywhere, muffled by the smoke.

“Logan?”

A flashing came from across the room as he spoke again, “over here.”

Following the light, her hands felt for anything solid around her, though she found nothing. Her steps were careful, until eventually she found Logan's hand.

“What happened to staying close?”

“Just look at this.” He guided her down to the floor, placing her hand on a gap in the baseboards.

“What is that?” she squinted to see the vague outline in the paneling.

“Air conditioning vent, no grate.”

It clicked, suddenly, what he was telling her. She stood up, pulling Logan with her. “Oh my God!” she whispered, “We’ve got to find Jordan. Jordan?”

She stood up, feeling her way back to the stairwell they split off on, trying to use her memory.

“Sadie?”

The voice got closer, until she felt hands on her arms, grasping her.

“Logan found... its using the vents,” Sadie was sucking in breaths, choking on the smoke.

“Ok, hold on Cap. Logan?”

“Right, I'm right here,” he responded.

“Ok, come on,” Jordan dragged Sadie back to the stairwell, quickly pulling her and Logan through the doorway. There was more space to breathe in the stairwell, and the only sound was the three sets of gasps.

“Why... did they not... give us... tanks,” Logan choked. Neither of the girls had an answer for him. Sadie shook her head, trying to put together a new plan in her head.

“So, whatever it is is traveling through the vents?” Jordan asked.

“That’s what we think. I’ll call Hux, have him find the layout for the HVAC system.” Sadie decided.

“So we’re going to crawl through them?” Jordan asked skeptically.

“No-”

“Huxley isn’t even the analyst on this mission,” Logan pointed out.

“We didn’t get an in-ear analyst for the mission, so I can technically call whichever one I want,” Sadie countered. Logan shrugged. “Ok, we call Hux, have him guide us to a vent connected to the one we found. I’ll send a current through the passage. Ideally it dies. If not, hopefully we at least draw it out of hiding.”

”What if it’s not in there when you do it?” Logan asked.

”Then we come up with a plan b.”

When neither of them objected Sadie made the call. On the third ring he still hadn’t answered, and just before she could end it, the call connected. Huxley’s voice came through her in-ear, crackly and annoyed.

“What do you want?”

”I could be dying.”

”I’m trying to finish this project, so if you don’t need anything-“

”Wait, Hux, I need you to find the layout for the ventilation system in the building we’re in.

”Why?”

Sadie groaned, “Just do it.”

There was a brief period of shuffling and clicking before he spoke again, “What now?”

”Pull up my tracker, then figure out how the vents are connected on this floor.”

”It looks like they’re all connected.”

”Then guide me to the closest one.”

Another second of silence, “If you go up a level, there’s a bathroom right by the exit with a vent in the ceiling.”

Sadie gestured for Jordan and Logan to follow her, ascending to the next floor.

“Wait, something just went through a vent on the 15th floor. What is that?”

”What does it look like?”

He didn’t answer her at first, though his confusion was palpable in the silence. ”I don’t even... that’s terrifying.”

”Helpful.”

The group climbed up a few more levels, faint traces of smoke finally intruding into the stairwell.

“Hold up Cap, where are we going?” Jordan asked as she caught up.

”Hux can see it on the 15th floor. We’ll stop it there.”

By the time they came out of the stairwell all three kids were out of breath. Huxley was still in her ear, a faint click sounding every so often.

“Give me a vent Hux.” She commanded.

”Go forward, three doors to the left.”

She followed the directions and found a large meeting room, a singular vent sitting above the split table. The wood shifted when she tried to place her foot on it, nearly sending her backward.

“Give me a lift,” she instructed Logan, who immediately stepped forward. She climbed onto his back and reached upwards towards the grate. It didn’t take much force to pull it off the frame and reveal the smooth metal shaft above. Sadie braced her palms on opposite sides of the tunnel and closed her eyes. All her focus went into channeling energy into her hands and, after a few moments, sending it through the duct. Once, twice, after the third time she felt herself sweating and could tell she was being lowered from the vent.

“Did it work?” she asked.

“I don’t know,” Jordan responded, “you ok?”

Sadie nodded, “yeah, yeah I’m good.”

“Want me to check the vent?” Logan suggested.

“I don’t think that’s a great idea Love. You can’t shoot to save your life,” Jordan said.

“You feel that way about everyone,” he grumbled.

“Jordan can check,” Sadie decided, giving Jordan the go ahead. Logan helped her step up, and she pulled herself into the duct. Coughing echoed from the tube.

“Anything?” Sadie called.

“No.”

A few more minutes passed before Jordan fell back down from the ceiling with a not so graceful landing. Sadie had just moved to help her up when Jordan fired two shots straight past her ear, causing Sadie to immediately fall to the ground.

“What the hell?” Logan gasped.

“Found it,” Jordan panted, looking at something on the ground. Sadie lifted her head and slowly turned, faced with a mutilated, centipede-looking device a little over a foot long. It’s body

writhed on the ground as it attempted to move. With a final beep and flash of red light it died, its battery fried.

“That thing did all of this?” Logan asked, stunned. Jordan stood and picked it up, spinning it around in her hands.

“Look, it’s got a screen,” she said. Sadie stood up to look at the thing. It had cameras for eyes, the entire body seemed to be made of wheels, and hinges around the metal made it appear as though it could contort into any shape it was programmed to. Instead of antennae it bolstered two large lighters, and its tail appeared to be sharp enough to slice through muscle.

“It’s not a touch screen. The bug must be controlled remotely,” Sadie pointed out, “no way it did all of this without instruction.”

“Who, though?” Jordan asked.

“It was probably a glitch,” Logan told them, ushering them towards the door, “Now let’s not burn alive trying to solve the mystery of the creature right now.”

“We can’t get out genius,” Jordan snapped, pulling away from him.

“She’s right, we have to wait for retrieval.”

Logan laughed, “You’re telling me we’re going to just hang out in a burning building and patiently wait for someone to figure out how to get us out?” When both girls just looked at him he groaned

“I’ll call in and tell Lanham we’re done. He’ll send a copter and bring in his team to stabilize the building.” Sadie assured him.

Satisfied and apparently eager to leave, Logan left the room, walking towards the stairwell. The two girls followed after a moment, after Sadie had zipped the device’s dead body into Jordan’s backpack.

“This building is such a strange target. I mean, It isn’t a particularly tall building, the CEO isn’t well known, it’s not by anything important, they don’t provide a necessary service to the city, nothing ever happened here. It doesn’t make sense,” Jordan said over her shoulder.

“Maybe it was personal. Or maybe it was just a test. Or maybe Logan’s right, and it is just a glitch,” Sadie said, listing all the possibilities swimming in her head.

“Maybe,” Jordan replied simply. They climbed the stairs all the way to the helicopter pad on the 57th floor. It was faded and cracked from disuse but thankfully still in one piece. Looking over the edge, Sadie saw the news crews and first responders still swarming the building. They

morphed and moved, and when they saw her in the distance the flow changed again, cameras flashing. She moved back off the edge and waited for their retrieval to come. When the helicopter finally did arrive they boarded in the standard order, least to highest rank. As soon as Sadies feet hit the rung the ladder rose, bringing her closer to the door. Jordan pulled her in just as she saw Lanham's crew arrive on the ground. Falling back onto the bench, she accepted one of the air masks from the assistant ahead of her. The building faded from her view and she leaned her head back. Mission complete.