

**UNSTOPPABLE**

**BREAKAWAY**



**JEFF HIRSCH**

SCHOLASTIC INC.

For 39 Clues fans everywhere.  
Thanks for making the new guy feel so welcome!



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# CHAPTER 1

## *London*

J. Rutherford Pierce smiled as the six mercenaries filed into his London office. Each one had been handpicked. The best of the best. Hardened soldiers who moved through their lives free of the fears and uncertainties of lesser men. And yet right now, each and every one of them was terrified. Pierce savored it. Some people liked wine. Some people liked fine food. Pierce liked fear.

Once the mercenaries were seated, Pierce pressed a button beneath his vast desk and the double doors behind them slammed shut.

“Sir,” their leader began. “We—”

“Candy?”

Pierce pushed a large crystal bowl toward the edge of his desk. It was full to the top with small red, white, and blue spheres. Americandy. His newest creation and currently the fastest-selling sweet in the United States. The men looked back at him, uncertain, off balance, just as he wanted. Pierce smiled as he plucked out a red one and devoured it.

"The red is my favorite," he said. "Cherry pie. The blue is blueberry pie and the white is apple pie. Had to fudge the color on that one a bit, of course. Go on."

He pushed the bowl forward again and each man took one. Of course they did. The world was a symphony and Pierce was a conductor.

Pierce opened their action report.

"Why Turkey?" he asked.

"Sir, the guides they hired indicated that the children were looking for leopards."

"Anatolian leopards," Pierce corrected.

"Y-yes, sir," the mercenary stammered. "Anatolian leopards. Which are extinct."

"And where are they headed now?"

"They're taking a private plane, sir, but we were able to access their flight plans. Rome first and then Tunis, Tunisia."

"Why?"

"We, uh, we don't know, sir."

Pierce turned the page to a simple black-and-white map. Turkey and then Tunisia. Turkey was the site of ancient Troy while Tunis was once Carthage, one of the greatest empires the world had ever known. Coincidence? Pierce thought not. But what did it mean? Extinct animals. Vanished empires.

*What are they after?*

"So, can you tell me any way in which you and your men did *not* fail in your mission?"

The leader hesitated. Pierce slammed the report onto the desktop and the fearless men before him leaped back in their seats.

“Children!” Pierce thundered. “A group of children who should be home playing video games and avoiding their math homework took you on and they won. They *beat* you. Now, I’m sure you all came here expecting punishment, severe punishment, but I’m not going to punish you. In fact, I’m going to give you each two gifts.”

The men, who had been staring down at the plush carpeting at their feet, looked up at him, tentative, but all breathing a little bit easier.

“The first gift,” Pierce said, “is the opportunity to redeem yourselves. Would anyone like to know what the second one is?”

The men nodded dumbly. Honestly, sometimes it was like the entire world was moving in slow motion except for him. Pierce smiled.

“The second gift is motivation.”

“Sir?” their leader said.

Pierce pulled a white pill out of a drawer in his desk and held it up to them.

“The candy you ate was filled with a slow-acting poison. Complete your assignment and return here to receive the antidote. If you are unable to complete your assignment, well, I imagine most of you would welcome a death of writhing agony after being

bested twice by a group of children, wouldn't you?"

The double doors behind the men swung open as if by the force of Pierce's will.

"There," he said. "Consider yourself motivated. Now go!"

Once they were gone, Pierce popped the antidote into his mouth and went back to his report. *The Cahills*.

Individually, none of them would be of concern, but together . . .

Pierce smiled as the answer came to him.

He reached for his phone.

"Contact the heads of all our European media units," he ordered his assistant. "Anyone who isn't standing in front of me in one hour is fired."

Pierce hung up and sat back in his chair. He watched London race about below.

It was a city with a rich and expansive history. Shakespeare. Churchill. Isaac Newton.

*And I'll be the one to wipe it all away.*