

ONE

Breaking glass and wailing alarm bells shattered the midnight quiet just before Henry Thorn's baby sister was born.

Dressed in black and cloaked in shadows, thieves rappelled up a wall of the Tokyo National Museum, burst through a high window, and ripped Hasegawa Tōhaku's ghostly painting of pine trees from the wall.

When midnight came to Shanghai an hour later, a man in a museum security guard uniform raised a hammer to the glass case before him, swung hard, and snatched the polished jade dragon sculpture that rested inside. The jagged glass caught his sleeve, and he left a trail of blood all through the antiquities wing as alarms echoed off the walls.

Five hours later, the people of Saint Petersburg, Russia, woke to sirens, but it was already too late. No



one knows how the thieves entered, but museum cameras caught them racing off with a bouquet of flowers made entirely from precious metals and gemstones.

Masterpieces fell like dominoes as midnight raced around the globe.

In Oslo, someone stole *The Scream*. Edvard Munch's haunting image of a melting face stared aghast from its canvas as it was carried out the museum's back door into the night.

In Florence, a man dressed as a janitor put down his mop, pulled a razor blade from his pocket, and sliced *The Birth of Venus* from its frame.

In Amsterdam, the target was *The Night Watch*, Rembrandt's famous painting of a militia preparing to go out on patrol. Thieves carefully cut the canvas from its frame, rolled it up, and ran off with it, right under the painted militiamen's own watchful noses.

In Paris, a dozen thugs swarmed the Louvre, plucking paintings from the walls with practiced hands.

Rembrandt. Monet. Da Vinci.

Gone.

In Madrid, five enormous men wrenched *The Garden of Earthly Delights* from the wall, folded up its three panels, and walked it out the door as if it weighed no more than a gift shop poster. They roared off in a dark blue van before police cars even arrived on the block.

But the authorities did show up eventually, at all those museums in all those cities. When they saw the smashed cases and vacant frames, when they realized the scope of the crimes, how they'd spread around the world like a pandemic, phones began to ring. Phones at police stations and investigators' homes. Phones in international agency headquarters and museum executive offices.

A phone rang at Henry's house, too.

It was past midnight. He'd given up on sleep but was in bed playing his SuperGamePrism-5000 when he heard Aunt Lucinda answer.

"Hello?" A pause. "What's happening?" Her voice was full of worry.

Henry's stomach tightened. He climbed out of bed and hurried to the kitchen. "Is it Dad?"

Aunt Lucinda held up a finger.

Henry's dad and stepmom, Bethany, had rushed to the hospital during dinner when it looked like Bethany might be ready to have her baby. Aunt Lucinda had hurried over from her apartment down the block to stay with Henry. The baby wasn't due for another month and a half, so they'd been waiting all night for the phone to ring, hoping everything was okay.

"So who's there now?" Aunt Lucinda asked the person on the other end. She looked up at the clock.