

Chapter 1

The bell was going to ring soon. It was time to take the unicorn back to the grove of trees near the waterfall. Kiera leaned forward and whispered into its ear. With a surge it turned and leaped over some bushes and ran faster than the wind across the meadow. As she rode she sang a magical song she'd been taught by the pixies. It enabled the unicorn to run even faster so that it was nearly flying. When she saw the rainbow arching over the trees she knew she was almost there. It had been a wonderful ride and she was only a little guilty about having missed math class.

When they got to the enchanted grove Kiera slipped from its back and took an apple out of her backpack. No sooner had it taken the fruit in its mouth than the bell rang.

Twenty eight chairs scraped against the floor as the students got up. "Tommy, Hilary, Wally, and Kiera - I want to see you for a moment. That cut the clatter and chatter down some.

He'd been watching their faces during class. They had hardly been there. Hilary was writing something in her notebook, and he was sure it wasn't notes. Wally and Kiera had been looking out the window and Tommy had been half asleep. Now there was a bit of fear in each face as they stood in front of the desk.

This wasn't why he'd gotten into teaching. He wasn't here to scare kids, but it was going to take something to get them moving.

Tommy was the first to get the nerve to speak. "Yes Mr. Gunderson?"

"Look, you know why I called you here. It's because you haven't been here. I don't know where you are, but it isn't in classroom 403." He paused for a moment, he had their attention, but he could see them starting to get defensive. "I know that I can't expect you to all be interested in everything I say and that math is sometimes not that interesting, so I've decided that you four will have a chance to get extra credit for a little project.

"I don't have time to explain it now, but I've spoken with Ms Rawlins and you are going to do a combined computer and math project."

Tommy started to speak. Mr. Gunderson held his hand up, "I know that you are working on a game in computer class Tommy, but that will have to wait. Anyway I am betting that this project will be more interesting than another version of space invaders. I'll explain more to you in sixth period. Come here instead of going to home room. I've arranged it with Ms Dunlap."

They all started to ask questions. "I've got another class coming in soon. I've got to get ready. See you in sixth period."

As the kids walked towards the lunch room Hilary asked,
"What do you think it's about?"

Wally shrugged. Kiera said, "Don't know, but I could use some extra credit after that last test. I just couldn't get into studying and left it until the night before. My mom was uptight when she found me doing it at eleven."

"What the heck could be more interesting than writing a game program? It took me three months to convince Ms Rawlins to let Jerry and me work on it."

"We'll find out soon enough," said Hilary, "I don't know how he thinks anything can be interesting in Math. It will be more interesting than my lunch - peanut butter again!" The kids laughed and moved into the lunchroom.

"Why are we going to his classroom to work on a computer project? he doesn't have a computer in his room," Wally asked?

Kiera had a theory about why she didn't do well in math. It wasn't something that she could tell anybody because she knew they would laugh at her. When the teacher was talking she understood things. When she did her homework or a test she knew what she was doing, but sometimes this thing she called the MATH MONSTER would get into her head. The math monster made her do funny things, like multiply 6 times 4 and get 42 or when working on triangles measure the outside angles rather than the inside. That was the one that had gotten her last. she had known that if you added the angles of a triangle you got 180 degrees, but on the test she had measured the outside of the angles and had gotten 270 plus 330 plus 300 for a total of 900.

It didn't happen all the time, but it happened often enough that she had gotten used to being called my her math teachers to try and explain her answers. When she tried they sometimes got a slightly funny faraway look in their eyes. She hurried down the hall and looked in through the window in the door. The other kids were already there but it was obvious that he hadn't started yet.

Mr. Gunderson had this extra cheerful way of saying things, sometimes you thought that he should have been the ring master in a circus.

"Hi kids. You don't know it but you are very lucky to be chosen for this project. Together we are going to do some things that will be amazing. As they say in Star Trek, we are going to boldly go where no man has gone before."

He held up a ruler "you all know what this is. Now I want

to give you a demonstration of what is going on. I have a mark on the floor ten feet from the wall. I want to have a race - go stand on the mark. All the kids went over and lined up on the line. "Are you guys ready?"

They all nodded. "Ok all of you are going to be assigned different amounts to move. Wally, I want you to go halfway to the wall. Tommy you go two and a half feet each time. Hilary you go a quarter of the way to the wall each time and Kiera you will move a foot each time.

"What kind of a race is that.?"

"Why do you ask that Hilary?"

"It's not fair."

"You're right, but you will probably be surprised. Tell me what you think will happen."

"Wally will reach the wall in two turns, Tommy will take four turns, Kiera will take ten turns and I'll need four."

Mr. Gunderson smiled that smile he had when he'd trapped you. "Let's try it and see if you are right. Ok each of you move as I told you. "

Tommy used the ruler and moved up two feet. He passed the ruler to Wally who moved five feet. "I'm winning." he said pumping his fist. He passed the ruler to Hilary who moved up alongside Tommy. Kiera moved up a foot, and looked unhappy to be behind all the others.

"Ok let's do it again, but remember, Wally and Hilary you move relative to your new position."

"What?"

"Wally you are five feet from the wall; you go half that distance."

"Oh, I get it. I move two and a half feet. Eat my dust." He moved towards the wall. The other kids moved too with Hilary needing a bit of help to figure out what a quarter of seven and a half feet was.

"It looks like you were wrong Hilary. It's been two turns and Wally hasn't gotten there yet." Hilary nodded.

"Let's do it again." Wally moved a foot and a half closer to the wall. "I'm getting real close." Tommy moved up behind him, "yeah but I'm catching up." Mr. Gunderson used a calculator to figure out how far Hilary should move. Kiera moved another foot.

"Tell me what's going to happen on the next move."

"Tommy is going to win. Wally will move closer, but won't get there. Kiera and I will continue to move up," said Hilary. Then all of a sudden she got it, "And Kiera's going to be the next one to finish."

"Huh," said Kiera.

"You've got it, If you go half the distance each time you'll never get there. It's called Zeno's paradox."

"I get it," said Kiera. "When Wally is an inch away, the next time he'll move only a half inch, the next time a quarter and then an eighth."

"You were right Hilary. This race was rigged. If we had a ruler that measured in small enough units, and we could get Wally to move just that much. It would take him forever to touch the wall."

"What I am trying to show you is that numbers can sometimes be funny. In our project we are going to be exploring a very funny set of numbers - let me show you." He opened a book and showed them a picture.

"Excuse me, but I don't see any numbers," said Hilary.

"Yeah, those look like the pictures I was shown by the shrink when my parents were getting divorced," added Tommy.

"Let me explain. Think of this picture as a piece of graph paper, but one where the lines are so close together that you can't see the spaces between them. Now, where each line crosses another line is a point - a spot. Ok so far?" He got nods from all the kids. "Each spot has a number. Not a number like 1 2 or 3 a number like up 2 right 3.

Can you dig it?"

The kids smiled at the quaintness of his speech. "I think so," said Kiera. She put her finger on the picture. "if this spot is up 1 right 1 - she moved her finger - "this is up 5 right 10."

"You have got it - except that the people who designed this call them by slightly more complicated names, but we don't have to understand that now." "The next step is tricky each point has a value like 1 2 or 3 We take these numbers and run them through a formula. Any numbers that get bigger than 10 are eliminated. He went to the blackboard. "we draw a line starting with 0 and going to 5."

0 1 2 3 4 5

"And for this we will make the formula easy we will multiply the numbers by 2.

"So we do it and what do we get

Wally jumped in, " zero, two four six eight and ten."

Mr. Gunderson wrote the numbers below the first line

0 1 2 3 4 5

0 2 4 6 8 10

"Right. And we've decided that 10 or above is being naughty." Mr. Gunderson took out a piece of colored chalk and circled the five on the first line. This number was naughty we've sent it to see the principal."

"Now, we run the remaining numbers through the formula again. and what do we get?

Hilary spoke up, "zero, four eight twelve sixteen. Do the three and four on the top line get sent to the office?"

"You bet they do." Mr. Gunderson circled them with a different color.

0	1	2	3	4	5

0	2	4	6	8	10
0	4	8	12	16	

"Now we do it again"

"Why." asked Tommy.

Mr. Gunderson stopped writing and turned. "That's one of the toughest parts of this whole thing. There are a lot of times when you don't worry about why and in a while we're not even going to worry about HOW IT WORKS."

"This is not like any math class I've ever had before," said Tommy.

Mr. Gunderson went over to the desk, turned a few pages in his book and found a formula. "Why will be because we want to see what happens. Any of you have a little sister or brother? Now suppose they are being a pest and you are tired of having them bother you. So you tell them that there is a monster in their room eating their special blanket. Just because you want to do it."

"That is not nice," Said Wally.

"You don't have a little brother," said Hilary.

"As for the how." said Mr. Gunderson. "Look here." He showed them a formula full of x es and i s and funny looking division signs.

"Think of it as the engine in a car. It's there. You turn it on and you go some place."

"Where are we going," Kiera piped up?

"To a place that is really magical - if you'll let me finish," he went back to the board.

"We do it again and we get zero eight and sixteen

he circled the two on the top row with red

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0  1  2  3  4  5
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0  2  4  6  8 10
0  4  8 12 16
0  8 16
0 16
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"Now we have eliminated all except the zero and you can multiply 0 times 2 till the cows graduate from college and you'll always get zero right?"

The kids nodded. "Ok," he turned back to the board, "We leave the 0 black. The five left quickly so we'll color it green. We'll color the three and the four blue because they left in the next round." "The two will be red and the one will be white." He held up the book "and now look at the picture I showed you."

"Each of the colors is when they got sent to the office," said Tommy.

"That's it exactly. Now, the computer gets used because the formula is a bit harder than times two and because we are going to be exploring a lot of numbers. Starting tomorrow we'll be meeting in the computer lab last period every day. Tonight I want you to do some of these charts with simple numbers. I want you to include half and a quarter between zero and one. Multiply the set times one half, times three and times themselves. Then color them in and we'll start the project tomorrow. The kids started to pick up their books.

"Oh, one more thing - I don't want to scare you, but this project we are doing is also being worked on by mathematics professors at places like MIT. See you tomorrow."

CHAPTER 2

The kids did not especially like Mrs. Jones, the computer teacher. She was fussy about their work and especially about the machines. She was patient and did not yell too much, but she wasn't anybody's favorite teacher except maybe for some of the kids who had Mrs. Lattimer who was a real screamer. They could see that she was nervous having Mr. Gunderson fiddling with the best computer in the lab. This was the computer that none

of them had been allowed to use. He was not gentle with the computer like she was. His fingers hit the keyboard hard, and he shoved the diskette into the drive like he was making toast in the morning.

"Now kids, I want you to understand that I think that this whole thing is absolutely amazing. I want you to catch my excitement." He looked at them and saw that there was still a bit of convincing to do.

"Yesterday I told you that we were going to be playing with numbers, but we weren't going to see that many of them. And last night I came up with another way of showing you what we are going to do." He went to the board and drew a circle about two feet across. "This is the earth." He drew a blob, in the circle, "this is the United States." Then he moved to his right. "Ok, Hilary draw a map of the United States over here." Hilary moved to the board wondering what this was all about. She drew a map, not a very good one because she was doing it from memory and Texas was too small and Florida looked funny. She started to correct it, but he stopped her. "Don't worry about it now. He drew a box on her map. "This is New York. Now, Tommy draw a map of the state next to Hilary's map."

The map Tommy drew made Hilary feel better about hers. Mr. Gunderson did not seem to notice. He drew a box in the corner of it and said "This is New York City." Quickly he drew a map of the city. It wasn't that good either, but he did it real fast. he drew a box in it and said, "this is Brooklyn," he drew another little box inside that one. "This is our neighborhood." He made a dot "this is the school. Ok so far?" The kids all nodded. He drew a big square punctuating it with a dot. "If I enlarge the dot I get this map of the school. Another square, and this is this room, Another square is your desk. You get the idea I hope. This is what we are going to be doing with the Mandelbrot set. We are going to be making successive enlargements of parts of the whole map." He led them back to the computer and typed in a few things. On the screen appeared the blob that they had seen yesterday. He pointed to a portion near the top of the picture and said, "now I'll show you a blowup of this." He erased the picture, and called up another. The computer teacher told him that she would be back in a while, but he did not seem to hear her.

He called up another picture. "That's beautiful," said Wally, "I see what you mean about maps, that looks like a river over there."

Mr. Gunderson nodded and called up another picture. There was very little black on this one. It looked like a starfish. "This is the last one I have finished. There are so many of these - that's why I need you to help."

Hilary looked out the window, it had gotten dark. She looked at her watch, they still had half an hour of school. Just as she was going to say that

it didn't make sense, there was an incredible flash and roar of lightning and rain hit the windows like the whole building was in a carwash. She jumped, they all jumped.

The lights flickered and she heard a word come from Mr. Gunderson that she would never expect to have heard. There was another flash and a crash that shook the building. Then it got amazing. The computer screen started moving very fast. It drew the next picture in less than a second, then it started on another, and another.

There was a third crash and blue sparks jumped out of the socket behind the computer. She grabbed Tommy's hand, something that it would take three bolts of lightning to make her do and then everything went dark except for the computer screen which was flashing picture after picture. It drew her eyes, she did not want to see what was going on outside anyway. Then it was quiet. Real quiet. There was no thunder, no rain, no traffic outside the windows, just the hum of the computer.

"Mr. Gunderson. Mr. Gunderson," It was Wally, but his voice sounded strange like he had just swallowed a frog or something. Mr. Gunderson was leaning towards the screen watching it explode into color then go black for a moment then show another incredible picture. He hadn't heard Wally. He probably wouldn't hear a jet plane that landed beside him. Kiera started to turn towards Wally to see what was going on, but her eyes did not get that far.

The class room was gone. The school was gone. New York seemed to be gone. The desks were sitting on a dark blue something that looked like carpet. Off to the left there was a patch of what looked like bushes except that they were a light purple color. She turned further and saw that Wally was looking at what appeared to be a yellow and white striped cliff with bright red vines growing all over it.

It had to be a dream she decided. Once she realized that she wasn't as afraid. She wanted to go over and check out the cliff, but she wasn't that unafraid yet.

She said to Wally. "It has to be a dream, so there is nothing to be afraid of."

He just looked at her. And he said, "Mr. Gunderson" again in that strange, just swallowed a frog, voice again.

"This is incredible," said Mr. Gunderson "Fantastic". Kiera reached over and tapped his shoulder.

"If you think that is fantastic; take a look over here."

"Just a minute." he said.

"No. Now." she said, He turned towards her, his expression was weird, obviously not pleased at the interruption. She pointed off to the side and watched as his chin fell about two inches and his mouth popped open. His eyes bugged.

"I've decided it is just a dream so I wouldn't be so scared," she said.

He nodded. He had to work to say something, "I..." but he stopped. "I... ", he tried again.

By this time Hilary and Tommy had noticed it too. They stood there like they were playing freeze tag. Kiera saw that Hilary was holding Tommy's hand. She made a note of it because it was worth a couple of razzes later. Kiera got up. Trying to figure out what to say. She walked a couple of feet on the blue carpet. It felt like moss or something, soft and lightly springy.

She turned towards the others, it was like the desks were sitting out in the middle of a meadow somewhere. She had been thinking of what to say for long enough that she wanted it to be something really good. The only thing she could think of was "I don't think we're in Brooklyn anymore, Toto."

Mr. Gunderson slowly stood up. He looked back at the computer and hit a key and then he looked around again as if he expected the whole thing to go away.

"This is Weird," said Tommy, who always said obvious things. Hilary pulled her hand away from him and got up and walked over towards Kiera. "It's like walking on a gym mat."

"Ok kids, there is nothing to be afraid of." Said Mr. Gunderson, but he did not sound convinced.

"I think it's neat," said Kiera. Maybe we got knocked out by the storm and this is a dream. If so it's the most beautiful dream I've ever had. And I'm not going to spoil it by being scared and crying."

"That's good Kiera," said Mr. Gunderson. And if it's not a dream it is an adventure and that too would be spoiled by being scared."

"I want it to be a dream right now Mr. Gunderson. I'm not ready for an adventure yet."

"I am," said Hilary as she moved off towards the cliff. "Wait up." said Wally.

"Yeah," said Mr. Gunderson. "Whatever it is let's stick pretty close together. We're just going to the cliff. It looks like we can climb up over there where the blue tree is growing. Let's all go then," he said and hurried to catch up to the two kids.

Tommy and Kiera hurried to keep up with him. The cliff was only about ten feet high and it was pretty easy to climb if you pulled on the red vines. They were a bit strange, they had leaves every foot or so, but they weren't quite like leaves. They were like bunches of grapes except that the grapes weren't round they were sort of shaped like fancy little butterfly wings, but not flat, sort of puffed up with air or something. They weren't all red either, there was a band of green and a band of gold at the edge and in the center a bull's-eye that was three shades of red that got darker towards the center.

From the top of the cliff they could see that the orange bushes curved around the desks and that beyond them was more blue carpet and then there was something that looked like a stream. Behind them there were some more hills that seemed to lead to some low mountains off in the distance. The sky was a light purple and there were two suns. One was too bright to look at and was redder than the sun they were used to and the other was a light turquoise blue. It was smaller and dimmer. The suns were well apart in the sky.

Off on the far horizon there were some dark green clouds unless they were mountains.

"Mr. Gunderson, this looks a lot like those things on the screen. do you think we could have fallen into the computer or something," asked Wally?

Mr. Gunderson looked down at Wally, "Two hours ago I would have laughed if you asked if you could fall into a computer. but right now I'll accept any explanation until another one came along."

"Hey wait a minute, I've got a camera in my bag, I was going to take pictures of the play, "said Hilary. "Wait a minute I'll go get it." Before anyone could object she slid down the cliff and ran across the carpet to the desks. She had to dig to the bottom of her bag and doing so she found the part of her lunch she had not finished. For a moment she was scared what would happen if they were trapped here and they got hungry. She forced that thought from her head with the thought of how were they going to go to the bathroom?. It didn't matter now because she did not have to go yet.

She stopped and looked at the computer. The blinking cursor was off near the side of the screen. about two inches to the left was a yellow band. Her dad had a computer at home like this one and he'd taught her not to be afraid of it.

She touched the left arrow key once and she and the computer and the desks were twenty feet closer to the cliff. She pushed it again and she was right below them. The cursor now was next to the yellow line. She pushed it

again and popped up ten feet behind them. It had taken less time than she could imagine. They hadn't noticed her, they were kneeling down looking at something. She took a picture first of them and then of the distant view. She got out of the chair and walked over to them. "Hey I've got something to show you."

"Wait a minute, said Tommy, "look at this first." They were looking at a little thing that looked like a bush, but the leaves were little copies of the bush itself.

"That's neat," said Hilary really wanting to tell them the news.

Mr. Gunderson looked up. "You got back very quickly Hilary"

"I took a shortcut sort of," she pointed over to the desks. Mr. Gunderson looked at them and then spun his head around looking down to where they had originally landed. "How did you do that?" He turned back to her.

" I used the cursor keys"

"What?" He shook his head. "Show me." He walked over to the desks. The other kids followed.

Hilary sat in the chair and then said "we all had probably better be sitting. They all scrambled into seats. Hilary looked around, the hills to the left looked interesting she pushed the left arrow key five times fast. For a part of a second there was a blur and then they were sitting on a patch of ugly yellow sand. She pushed the cursor again and they were on a gentle slope covered with grass. The grass came up to their ankles and she reached down and picked some. One leaf was pale green and the other was bright orange with a thin band of dark blue down the middle of the leaf. She started to throw it away, but instead stuck it in her backpack which was next to the keyboard.

"This is an incredible discovery Hilary," said Mr. Gunderson

"What does it tell us.?"

" Tommy spoke up, "I think we are in this place of numbers and that we aren't exactly in the computer, it is connected to it somehow."

"What are we going to do now," asked Wally?

CHAPTER 3

"Don't touch anything until we've had a chance to think about it. But while we are doing that let's see if we can enjoy ourselves. It may just be that we are having the greatest adventure of our lives, and it would be a shame to spoil it by being scared to death for the whole time."

"What we do know," he continued, "is that we can move around using the computer, so we might as well explore." He took the keyboard and moved them ahead to a patch of purple ferns. They were about 8 inches high and ran in a curving path about twenty feet wide for as far as they could see.

"Let's follow the purple fern road," said Kiera.

"Anybody got a better idea," he asked as he pushed some keys? He discovered that by pushing the keys slowly, about once a second, they moved at a speed that allowed them to see what they were passing.

The desks seemed to hover about three feet above the tops of the ferns. "It's like flying in an airplane," said Hilary as they whizzed across the landscape. In a moment the purple fern road was joined by a band of dark red sea horses. Kiera wanted to stop, but Mr. G. said "not yet, let's go a little further." On and on they sped passing groves of towering yellow trees and beaches of orange pebbles.

"Look," shouted Hilary! "There is something over there. Mr. G. took his hands off the keyboard and turned to see where she was pointing.

There, on the orange beach, with the black sea in the background was another orange object, it was moving, 'It's a man,' Tommy said. Mr. G pressed the right arrow key and they moved towards it. The desks settled on the beach with a soft crunch about thirty feet away from the man who had not seen them approach. The sound startled him for he spun around quickly and then stood there blinking his eyes.

"Hi," said Tommy. The man took a couple of steps towards them.

"Hello"

"Who are you," asked Tommy?

"Who are you," the man repeated.

"We're from junior high school 51 and we seem to have gotten lost."

"Or found, perhaps," said the man. Tommy thought the man was dressed strangely, in an orange sheet.

Hilary recognized it from National Geographic. "Are you a

monk," she asked?

"I am not sure of too many things any more," the man said as he came towards them. In his hand he had something that looked like a big tin can on a broomstick. "I was placing this prayer wheel in a stream near the monastery, in what I had judged to be the perfect spot and before I could let go of it, I was brought here. If I spin it slowly it moves me across the land here."

"We came here by this computer," said Mr. G. "How long have you been here?"

"It is difficult to know, there is no day or night here, but it has been for, I would guess, many days. Are you by any chance hungry?"

This had been the one thing that Kiera had been trying not to think about. It was hard, because she often thought about food. She said, "Yes".

The man nodded and said, "I have found there are many things to eat." he walked out into the black water until it was up to his ankles, looked for a minute, and then he reached in and pulled out something that looked like a starfish except that it was a dark blue with green sparkles along its arms. He broke off one of the arms and sucked on it. Then he handed it to Kiera who had taken off her shoes and was wading in the water near him. A funny look came across her face, but she looked into his eyes, and saw that they were smiling. "Do you think food will look like anything you know in a world where nothing looks like anything you have ever seen before. Have faith, suck on it, it tastes like fruit to me." Kiera closed her eyes and sucked gently. It had the consistency of the most perfectly ripe pear she'd ever eaten, it tasted something like a banana, but there was something else in it too. It was good. She opened her eyes and sucked harder until the last bit slid into her mouth. "It is good," she said, "Thank you." She looked down and at her feet she saw another of these things. she reached in and picked it up. It did not wiggle or squirm as she had been afraid it would. "What do you call it?"

"I have not yet had to call it anything."

"How about the blue star banana melon?"

"I just call it good."

Yes, "hey you guys, try it, it is a good."

"A good? That's a silly name."

"Call it a monk fruit."

The man laughed, "You can eat or you can talk," and he handed pieces to each of them.

Mr. G. looked like he wanted to object, but he saw that Kiera was half way through her second one, and he remembered what he had said about

spoiling the adventure by being scared all the time so he too took a piece and ate it. When he had finished he asked, "Are there other things to eat."

"Yes, the purple ferns have red berries at their base, and there are a number of other things. But I have not explored very far."

"Would you like to come with us?"

The man thought for a moment, "Yes, I think that I would like that. I am called Lao See."

"You speak English very well"

"I was educated in America, but then I returned home to visit my parents and found a way of truth for me and decided to stay. Where shall we go?"

Mr. G pulled out from a drawer of the desk and turned to a picture of the Mandelbrot set. "We came in here I think," he said pointing with his finger. "And I guess we are over here now." He moved his finger about half an inch. "I thought that maybe we would follow the coastline, if that is what it can be called, eventually reaching the point at the end. From there I do not know. I think that we could maybe return if we turned off the computer, but for now I do not wish to do try that."

Chapter 4

Hilary decided that she really liked the monk, even if he was wearing strange clothes and said things that either seemed very obvious, or didn't make any sense at all, sometimes in the same sentence. He had a sparkle in his eyes, he saw this trip as an adventure and wasn't worried about being able to get home. He knew a lot more about the place where they were than they did, but unlike Mr. G. he wasn't particularly interested in why it was there or why they were there. He said that it was a great honor to be allowed to visit this side of the universe.

He directed them to a place on the other side of the Purple Fern Road where there was a jumble of hills that resembled big sand dunes. Some of them were circular and when you stood on the top it was like being on the edge of a giant teacup. He directed Mr. G. into the bottom of one where there was a patch of bushes about three feet high with brilliant red leaves and light blue stems. Hanging off of the branches were fuzzy orange fruits the size of golf balls.

On the ground under the branches were what first appeared to be larger fruit that had fallen to the ground. But then one of them moved. "Watch this," the monk said. The orange ball on the ground moved until it was just under the fruit on the branch, then it jumped up in the air about six inches and fell down. When it came down it bounced and rose a few inches higher. The next bounce took it higher still, and on the fourth bounce it reached the fruit. It opened in the middle and surrounded the fruit, sort of like one of those Russian dolls. then both it and the fruit fell to the ground. It bounced a couple of times then they heard it burp. In a moment they were all laughing as hard as they ever had.

All fears of not being able to go home were gone as they looked around hoping to see another of the beasts pick a fruit. After a while they got tired of waiting for the balls to bounce and moved on. As they headed back towards the shoreline they crossed an area that looked weird even in this place where the weird was to be expected. The ground couldn't, it appeared, decide which way to go so it went up and down in a jumbled mess There had been some plants here but they were shriveled and turned a funny sort of grey. There was something spooky about the place and Mr Gunderson's finger hit the keyboard faster and they got out of there pretty fast.

When they got back to the shore The monk and Mr. Gunderson studied the book and decided that they could save some time if they headed across a narrow neck of the sea rather than sticking to the shore. Hilary hadn't been nervous about flying over the ground even though she wasn't all that fond of heights in general, but she found that flying over the water made her feel scared. This feeling didn't last for long because Tommy spotted something below them, "look, a fish," he shouted. They slowed down and saw that the only thing that was like a fish about it was that it lived in the water. It was about three feet long and as big around as a can of Ajax powder. It was covered with green fur about three inches long. It swam by pulling the fur up until it was bunched around its head then sticking it straight out and sliding it down its body until it was all bunched at the bottom. Then it folded the fur and pulled it back up its body and repeated the process again. There were a bunch of them swimming just under the surface. Hilary took a picture of them and wondered how it would come out. It was pure luck that she had brought her camera. She had intended to use it in drama class, but had forgotten it then and she was sure that pictures of these things would be more interesting than pictures of Maureen

pretending to be a something or other. She was sure that the picture of the orange bouncers would be incredible.

They moved on passing the fish, if that is what they were and after a few minutes came over a beach that looked a lot like the one they had just left. Mr. G. explained that there were areas of the set that were mirror images of each other. That proved to be mostly true, but with a difference. Tommy really wanted to check out the bouncers again and so Mr. G. headed towards where he thought they would be. Everything was the same except this time the fruit were growing out of the ground like mushrooms and the things that ate the fruit were hanging from the branches like Christmas ornaments. When they wanted to eat they would move along the branch until they were over the fruit and would drop down grab the fruit and then bounce their way back up to the branch. Tommy noticed that some of the fruit were growing a little ways away from the bushes and said, "those fruit are probably smarter, the balls can't get to them." Then one of the bouncers proved him wrong. As they watched it started to spin until it was going quite fast. It let go and then turned in mid air so that the side that was spinning hit the ground. It did not bounce straight up, but instead it bounced forward and in two hops it landed on one of the fruit that was in the patch Tommy had called safe. It then bounced its way over to another bush and grabbed onto a branch. If ever an orange fuzzy ball could look pleased with itself this one did. Hilary looked at her watch and noticed that it said 2:20. That was what it had said when she looked at it when they got there.

"Mr. Gunderson, do you know my watch has stopped."

"Yes," he said, mine too. It's just one more thing I don't understand. Maybe I won't have to miss dinner tonight thought Kiera who knew they were supposed to have ravioli. Mr. Gunderson started them going again and soon they were making their way through a chain of small mountains. The mountains were no more than forty feet high, but they looked just like real mountains that were thousands of feet high. Suddenly the monk shouted, in his own language, but everyone understood his pointed arm and they turn and saw another person down below them. He had seen them too and was waving his arms and screaming like a teenager. Beside him was a shiny wooden desk and a big black leather chair. On the desk was a computer and a pile of papers about a foot high.

CHAPTER 5

The man was glad to see them. He was laughing, crying and talking at about a million words a minute. "I'm Ben Applegate and I'm an accountant and I was doing the taxes for this man who had more deductions than I had ever seen, and I was putting them all into the computer and I asked it to give me a subtotal and when I looked up I wasn't in my office on Lexington avenue any more, I was in the middle of these miniature mountains and the computer told me that there was an error."

Kiera had never heard anyone talk so fast," I tell you I've been a confused accountant for quite a while now. At first I thought it was the Chinese food I ordered for lunch that did this to me. Then I asked myself could Chinese food do this to me? And I decided that it couldn't, so I decided it was the man's taxes and I looked at them again, but I decided not to change anything in them, because when I get back I want to put them in just like they are. Can you imagine if they could make the entire IRS go off and lands in the middle of some mountains?" He paused for breath.

Mr. G said," We're glad to meet you. We're a group of students from JHS 51 and we came across Lao, he's a Buddhist monk, a while back. We have an idea about where we are and are going exploring. Would you like to join us.?"

"How do you get the desks to fly," asked the man? "I just noticed how strange that is."

"I don't really know, it has something to do with the program we are running. Have you ever heard of the Mandelbrot Set?"

"No I haven't."

"We can explain later, but it is a place in Mathematics, and I can sort of understand how a set of taxes might get you there."

He moved the flying desks over towards where the man was standing. Go sit in your chair and let's see if our computer can pick you up too. The man sat and Mr. G. hit a key and the kids and the monk moved off a few feet, but the man stayed where he was.

"Wait, don't leave me here," he yelled.

Mr. G. brought the desks back to where the man was. "Is your computer still on?."

"Yes, It's stuck. It just keeps saying error error error."

"Have you thought about turning it off?"

"I thought about it and got scared. I don't know what to do," the man sounded real scared. Mr. Gunderson moved the desks about fifty feet away and set them down next to a babbling brook that had waterfalls and rapids and everything except it was only

three inches wide. He walked over to the man's desk and looked at the computer.

"You can ride on the desk with the monk if you like, but I think it's really important to see what happens if you turn off the machine." The man did not look too happy at the Idea. "It's my guess that one of two things will happen. Either you will stay here, or you will get carried back to where you came from. For all I know we haven't ever really left the classroom in Brooklyn. Have you noticed that your watch has stopped?"

"Yes I noticed that. I don't know what that means."

"Neither do I."

"Ok I'll do it." Mr. Gunderson stepped back and the man reached out and flipped the switch on the front of the computer. And Nothing happened. He opened his eyes, "I'm still here?" Then something really strange happened, The phone rang. They all stared at it as though it was stranger than anything they had ever seen. Mr. Applegate blinked and reached for it. "Hello?" "Oh hi, Harry. Yeah, listen, I don't know why the phone has been busy for the last two hours, but I've found something really strange. No it isn't on the Ritter taxes exactly, but then it maybe is. Could you do me a favor? Leave the phone line open and walk down the hall and take a look in my office. I know it sounds strange and I swear I didn't have anything to drink, just do it then come back and tell me what you see there." He looked up at the others, "I'll switch the phone to its speaker."

In a couple of minutes they heard footsteps from the phone.

"Hey Ben, are you there?"

"Yes I'm here. Somewhere."

"You're not going to believe this, your door was stuck and I got this weird feeling from what you were telling me so I had the Janitor, you know the big guy, George? I had him force the door and when we opened it there was nothing inside your office."

"What do you mean nothing no desk no chair no me?"

"More than that. No office. It's like nothing I've ever seen before. It's like a snowstorm or a washing machine that has overflowed with bubbles, it's white but you can't touch it. You reach in and your hand disappears. What the hell is going on."

"I don't know Harry. It's even stranger here wherever I am. Look, you've got to call some people for and cancel my appointments. Also call my wife and tell her I'll probably be late for dinner."

"Ok, are you all right."

"Yes I'm fine, there are some other people here and I guess you had better make some calls for them too. I'm not sure that the phone will call out from here and I don't want to hang up and try."

"Where are you," asked the voice on the phone?

Mr. Gunderson spoke up. "Please take this down Harry. " and he proceeded to give Harry a list of the children's names and the phone number for the school. Tell them that we are ok for now, that no one should go into the computer lab. Have them call the parents if we are not back by four."

"It's too late for that it's four thirty now."

"Well then call the principal and tell him what we've told you. Have him call the parents and tell them," he paused, "Tell them that we're all ok, and that something strange is going on. Also call IBM and tell them to get Benoit Mandelbrot in on this. He may not be able to do anything, but he'll be interested."

"If I make these calls and say the things you tell me to say they will think I am crazy."

"You are not crazy. Call the police if you have to, but the important thing is that we are alright." Suddenly, a voice broke in on the phone "Please deposit 25 cents for the next five minutes or your phone call will be disconnected."

Harry yelled, "there's no place to put it on this phone."

Mr. G said, "call us back if we get disconnected."

"Please deposit 25 cents or your call will be disconnected" click.

CHAPTER 6

Ben stared at the phone and tried to dial. There was a clicking sound and then "I'm sorry but you are calling from an unknown area code."

"Hello Hello Hello is there some one there?"

"It's a computer Ben It can't hear you." Mr. G. went back to his desk and moved them closer to Ben's desk. Then he pushed some keys and all the desks rose and moved off slowly over the mountains.

As they left the mountains they passed some more of the shriveled grey areas. "What do you think is doing that," asked Hilary?

Kiera looked at it and knew, "It's the Math Monster."

"Don't be silly Kiera." said Tommy.

Kiera was sure of herself. She said, "you'll see."

Things were different now. They knew that they could not get back by turning off the computer, they also knew that they had gotten word to their parents that they were ok, if a little lost. In a while they came to another purple Fern road, or was it the same one?. Mr. G decided to follow it for a while and increased their speed.

In a few minutes up ahead there was bright yellow circle with a smaller blue circle inside it. They slowed and circled it slowly. "I think I see something", said Mr. G as he set the parade of desks down in the blue circle. There, in the middle, was a piece of paper held down by a rock.

"To anyone who finds this. You are not alone! It is important that you meet me at the point where the set comes together." There was a crudely drawn map with an X at the point. "I will tell you more when you get there." it's signed Julie."

"Let's go." shouted Ben Applegate.

"Let's stop for some food," said Kiera.

"A good Idea," said the monk.

Mr. G. nodded and took them over to the nearest Shore. As they went wading looking for the blue starfruit he stayed at the desk trying to figure how to get to the point shown on the map as quickly as possible.

"Hurry up, lets go," he said and as soon as everyone was in their seats he hit the keys quickly and the landscape became a blur. In what seemed like only a couple of minutes, he took his hand off the keyboard and they found them selves in a giant valley. On either side there were mountains , real ones this time, that stretched up very high, below them there was something that looked like a river that split the mountains like a comb parts hair. Below them and off to the right was another of the double circles. Slowly, he guided them towards it. As they got closer they saw that there was someone there waiting for them. It was a woman dressed in blue jeans and a sweatshirt that said 'M.I.T.'.

As soon as they landed she hurried across the circle towards them. "Are you Julie?" We got your note."

"Yes I'm Julie, I'm a student at M.I.T. and I am really glad to see you. Are you all ok?"

"Tell you the truth we're a lot confused and sometimes a little bit scared, can you tell us what is going on?"

"Come with me," she said and led them to the edge of the circles to where she had a desk with a large computer sitting on it. "Do you know about the Mandelbrot set," she asked?

"Yes we were running a program to explore it and..."

"Well that's where you are, I don't have any idea how, but I think I may know why. Did you see any areas that were all grey and shriveled on your way there?"

"Yes we did."

"There aren't any areas like that in the real set and they seem to be growing."

"What causes them?"

"I don't really know."

"I know," said Kiera. Everyone turned to look at her. "Do you remember my last test Mr. G. when I multiplied instead of dividing, and when I added the wrong angles?"

He nodded.

"Well I don't tell people this much," she continued, "because they laugh at me a lot, but I am sure it was the Math Monster that made me do it."

She held up her hand to keep them quiet. "Listen to me for a minute please. I know the right answer, but something comes into my head and I do the problem a little wrong. Now, from what I know about this Mandelbrot set, it is a jillion little math problems and what if something came along and made a few of them wrong. Wouldn't you get something like what we've seen?"

"You may not believe me, but I've lived with this Math Monster ever since kindergarten, and I know what it feels like, and I got that feeling when we were passing over those areas."

Before anyone else could answer, Julie said, "I am afraid that she's right. There is something that is throwing the calculations off. I have landed next to a couple of those areas and have run a program to see what the values should be and I've found that in the grey areas there is something wrong."

"Is it a something that is doing this," asked the monk?

Julie answered, "Yes I think there is something. You've seen some strange things, I'll bet. So you won't think I am crazy when I tell you that what I saw looks like a backwards rabbit."

"A backwards rabbit," shouted Tommy.

She gave him a look that quieted him right down. "Yes, He's about four feet tall, and has his back legs where his front legs would be and in the back he's got regular rabbit front legs. when he jumps he goes backwards. It's just like this girl was saying, The idea is right, but the answer is wrong."

Nobody had much to say after that, except Kiera, who knew enough to keep her mouth shut. She wasn't sure that she liked the idea of the Math

Monster looking like a backwards rabbit that was four feet tall. She'd always

thought it would look like a worm or something slimy and creepy.

"What can we do about the Math Monster," asked Tommy?

"To tell you the truth, I have no idea. In fact, I am not even positive that this funny rabbit is the problem, but I have a hunch that it is," said Julie.

"Maybe we can talk to it and teach it not to make mistakes," said Wally.

Julie took them to her computer and showed them an updated map of the set that detailed where the Math Monster had done its damage. "It seems to be active in an area not too far from here and I would suggest that we go over there as soon as possible to try and figure out what to do next.

"What does this have to do with getting us home," asked Ben.

Julie stopped and looked at him for a minute.

The monk stepped forward "Please allow me to try and answer that. We have no idea how we got here, but once we came here we learned of an imbalance in the world of mathematics. This world is important to each of us for different reasons. We have no choice but to face this challenge, and I suspect once this imbalance is corrected we will be restored to the world that we call home."

"Besides," added Julie, "When was the last time you had a full fledged adventure?"

CHAPTER 7

The Monk took Tommy, Wally and the accountant off to gather food while Mr. Gunderson and Julie got into a discussion about the Mandelbrot set that had Hilary and Kiera thinking they were speaking a foreign language.

When they returned they had enough food for a feast. The things they ate looked strange, and they tasted different from what the kids were used to, but most of them were, they all agreed, very good.

During dinner Mr. G. told them of his ideas for taking on the Math Monster. They ranged from having the backwards rabbit eating a small calculator he had in his wallet, to catching it in a net made up of vines. The monk changed all of their plans by saying, "We must go and see this creature and see what it can tell us." They decided to travel using the

student's computer so that Julie's computer would not be in any danger if the Math monster turned out to be more than they bargained for.

Julie had not been able to tell them exactly where they would find the math monster, but she had been able to narrow the area down some. But, the first of the grey areas they checked had no backwards rabbits in it.

As they cruised towards the next area Hilary thought she saw something far off in the distance, "Look, off to the left, I think I see something." Mr. G. had gotten pretty good with the keyboard and they quickly turned and headed towards the spot she'd pointed to. As they got closer they all saw it, but they had trouble believing what they were seeing.

"It's a, no it really can't be," said Julie.

"Trust your eyes," said the monk.

"This place is so weird, I believe them," said Tommy.

It was a complete checkout lane from a supermarket. A young woman stood at the register pounding on the keys. Another woman was unsuccessfully trying to keep a three year old child in the grocery cart with one hand and to sort through a thick sheaf of coupons with the other. Every ten seconds or so the cashier would reach up and ring the bell to call the manager and then without taking her eyes off of the machine start punching some more keys. The area immediately around the checkout counter was starting to turn the grey color they had seen elsewhere. The kid was having a great time putting things on to the counter then piling them back into the cart.

Finally Julie got up the nerve to walk over to them. "Can I help you."

"Can you get this machine to accept a void," asked the cashier?

"I don't think that you really have to worry about that right now," said Julie softly. The woman looked up and then screamed, the child screamed and jumped towards its mother who threw up her hands and scattered the coupons everywhere.

"Look what you made me do," she bent down to pick up the papers and realized that she wasn't at Shop Rite any more. She Stood up, grabbed the kid and started looking around wildly. "Where are we?"

"It's ok, you are safe," said Mr. G.

A few minutes later they still did not have either of the women understanding what was going on, but they had convinced them to come with them. The woman insisted on bringing her groceries and had grabbed copies of News of the World and The Star from a rack next to the register.

It was starting to get crowded around the computer now with all the additional people, and the groceries, but there was nothing to do but go on.

The monk borrowed one of the papers and began to read an article about how an alien spaceship had made a dog have a litter of kittens.

They hadn't gone very far when they came to another grey area. "That's funny," said Julie, "This shouldn't be here. It must be growing faster than I thought."

Kiera was getting very scared very fast. She was getting the Math Monster feeling stronger than it had ever been. It was worse than the worst test she'd ever had. "I feel it," she said, "it is very strong. She pointed off to her left towards an area that looked like a great big pile of dented garbage cans except that they were fifteen feet high each.

Mr. G. headed them slowly towards the pile when suddenly the computer screen started behaving strangely. Frantically, he started punching keys, but the screen started developing what looked like snow. Then blue sparks flew out of the disk drive door, and the screen went dark. They fell two feet and landed hard on the ground. The little kid screamed, and it was all that Kiera could do to keep from joining in. Mr Gunderson got very upset and started saying some very strong words. Hilary though she could see that he was scared under the anger he was showing.

She moved over towards the monk who was climbing out from under the desk, still clutching his prayer wheel. He did not seem to be scared, instead he seemed to be very serious. He moved off towards the pile of giant cans and she walked along beside him. He looked over at her and for a moment she was afraid that he would tell her to wait. Instead he reached out and touched her cheek with a finger. "There is nothing to fear. Come."

The closer they got to the towering pile of giant dented garbage cans the stranger things got. They heard voices from behind them and turned to see Wally, Tommy, and Kiera running after them. They slowed and in a minute the others caught up. When they were about fifty feet away from the pile there was a sudden banging from inside one of the cans and then it shook and shuddered and then they saw the backwards rabbit. It wasn't four feet high, it was closer to eight, bigger than a horse. "Julie said it was four feet high!"

"It must be growing."

"Hello math monster," said Kiera.

"Why do you think he will understand English," asked Tommy.

"I don't know that he does, but it would be stupid not to try," she replied.

"I know you Math Monster, you know me too. I'm Kiera from JHS 51 in Brooklyn."

The creature stopped and turned to look at her. She had trouble keeping from laughing because she realized that it's eyes were crossed. It was about

the silliest looking thing she'd ever seen, still there was something cute about it. "Is it ok if I call you the Math Monster, it's not a very nice name, I know, but it's all I can think of."

For a creature so big it had the smallest voice. It sounded like a cross between Elmer Fudd and a chatty Cathy doll. "My name is Dufus, but I think I like Math Monster better. It makes me seem more powerful."

No one spoke for a minute, then Kiera, spoke again. "Well, it is nice to meet you at last. I don't suppose you'd write a note to my teachers explaining all those funny answers I always seem to be getting."

For a minute she thought she'd insulted him for he puffed himself real big. "I'm not to blame for all of them. If you get the times tables wrong, that's your fault, what I do is solve problems in different ways than people expect. The answers I cause aren't wrong they are just looking at the problem from a different angle." He paused, "of course it isn't always an angle that anyone else can see things from."

"Did you bring us here," asked Tommy?

"That was an accident," replied the Math Monster. "I was playing in this bunch of numbers, doing things the way I want to do them, and you must have stumbled across some of the same numbers while I was using them."

"Can you send us back," asked Wally?

"Back? Where? No I don't think you want me to try. I have no idea where you would end up. That's one problem you are going to have to figure out for yourself."

"Why are you doing this to the Mandelbrot Set?" it was Julie, who must have come up while they were talking.

"Because I'm the math monster," said Dufus, "and I was looking for some place I could play without messing up children's math tests." He looked at Kiera again, "you know I really don't like doing that."

"It's ok," said Kiera, "I don't mind that much, especially when I know where it's coming from."

"Really? I was feeling bad about it sometimes."

"Really - It must be a lonely job being a Math Monster."

"You don't know the improper fraction of it. It is terrible. About the only friends I've got are the letter mixer who handles spelling and the grammar garbager who makes simple sentences difficult. And they are so boring, they don't know nothing about math and think that numbers are only for nerds."

"Why are you making everything grey and ugly? I would think that you would be able to do things that are more fun than that."

"Of course I can," said the Monster, and there in the middle of the trash cans was a lake with swans and geese flying overhead. An island popped up in the center of the lake and on it rose a large stone castle complete with red and gold banners flying from its towers. "But I've been depressed, and angry, and in a generally lousy mood, so I've been concentrating on building garbage dumps and other such things."

"How come you are so depressed?"

"Do you have any idea what computers have done to my job. They've made it impossible I tell you."

"Listen," said Kiera, "I've got an idea. What if we could find a way to have you make a place like this place and sort of turn it into a Disneyland of Numbers? People could go there and you could show them all the different ways of looking at things. Then you would have something to do."

"No. A big part of my job is messing things up. I once messed up all the traffic lights for Boston and it took them days to break up the traffic jams. I loved it."

"We could have something like that there too. Besides you still have places like the accountant was talking about the, the," she paused trying to remember.

"The IRS, that's one of my favorite places along with the computers in the pentagon how else could they order toilet seats for \$600?"

"I don't care what you do to the military or the IRS, but could you please stop messing up the Mandelbrot set," asked Julie?

"Did you say please? Nobody has ever said please to me before."

For a minute Kiera thought she was going to see the math monster break down and cry, but he regained his composure quickly. "Well maybe," he continued, "but it won't be easy, I really like this place."

"So do we," said Julie.

Chapter 8

"So you want to go home. Well, I think I can arrange that, but I want to get something out of too," said the Math Monster.

"We think that we can arrange some sort of numbers playground for you," Said Mr. Gunderson.

"I think that I can assure you of employment at MIT," said Julie. She looked at Mr. Gunderson and smiled. He smiled back and Hilary began to

wonder if they weren't getting sweet on each other. "I can see it now, walking into the Chairman's office with you."

"What would I wear?" asked Dufus.

"How about a Moebus Strip like a necklace," said Kiera.

"That's a good Idea, Moebus strips are one of my favorite things. You kids might consider them for your next project." He turned to the rest of the group, "When would you like to go back?"

"Right now", said the woman from Shop Rite. "If I get back before the store closes I can get double coupons."

"Wait a minute said Hilary, "I've got a couple of pictures left on my roll, can someone take a picture of us standing with the Math Monster?"

"I would be glad to," said the monk. After he had taken the pictures he turned to the Math Monster and said, "I am in no hurry to get back. Do you suppose I can stay on for a while?"

Julie spoke up, "Yes, now that I know I can get back I don't want to leave until I've seen some more things. Can you send the others back now, and make a way for us to go back later."

"No problem", said the Math monster, "I've got some questions about what I should ask for when we get back. Do you think I'll need an agent? And should I hold out for tenure track.?"

Julie smiled, "We'll be breaking new ground. I'll have to think about that."

When he heard that Julie was staying Mr. Gunderson looked unhappy. "Julie," he asked, "do you suppose I can get your phone number so that we can get together when you get back.

Julie smiled, "I'd like that." she wrote her number on a slip of paper and handed it to him."

Ben Applegate cleared his throat and said. "Excuse me folks, but they have a saying in my business, 'time is money'."

The Math Monster looked at him, "If time equals money then what happens if you subtract 3 minutes from twenty five cents?"

Chapter 9

The math monster stood a few feet away on top of a little hill of purple paisley ferns and started to recite the time table. "one times two is one, one times three is one, one times four is one, one times five is one," and

slowly the desks were lifted off the ground. "One times six is one , one times seven, is one, one times eight is one."

It will be interesting to see what he comes up with when he gets to the threes," said Mr. Gunderson. As the math monster swung into the twos table the land around them started to move. It was like being on a merry go round except there was no feeling of movement for the kids. It took a while , half way through the threes, for them to build up speed. The landscape became a blurr, Kiera said," I sure hope he knows what he's doing." Hilary nodded, "somehow it makes sense, but there's no way I could explain it to anybody else."

Then it seemed as though a fog came over them and for what seemed to be a long time they were in the middle of a cloud. "This is what my partner described my office as being like," said the accountant. Suddenly there was a blue flash and a bump like the chairs had been dropped an inch onto the floor.

It took a couple of minutes for the fog to disappear and as it did they heard a terrible banging off to the right. They all turned and as the fog lifted they saw the door to the classroom fall in and a couple of firemen come tumbling in after it.

"We're home," said Tommy in keeping with his tendency to say the obvious. This time Hilary did not mind so much. In a moment the room was crowded with other people. There were policemen wearing helmets, the school custodian who was complaining about the door, the principal, parents, and a television news team which tried to push its way through all the others.

Slowly Mr Gunderson got up, he counted the kids to make sure they all were there. He noticed that the accountant, and the people from the supermarket were there too. This surprised him a little as he'd thought that they would probably end up where they had started. But then he realized it was good, because it meant that the people here would have to believe some part of the story. He wasn't sure how much of it he believed himself. The parents rushed over to the kids and everyone tried to talk at once.

The news team finally pushed its way through. The reporter pushed a microphone at Hilary. "Where have you been?" Hilary said "We've been in the Mandlebrot Set and it was wonderful. We met the math Monster and Kiera helped tame him and he sent us back." The reporter got a very strange look on her face. Hilary remembered her camera and pulled it out of her bookbag. She opened it up and pulled out the roll of film. "I took pictures."

The reporter reached for it. "I can get it developed for you."

"Just remember they are my pictures. They are probably worth something."

"You bet they are," said Mr. Gunderson. I want them developed by a really good place, not one of these one hour places."

From the back came a voice. "I'm with TIME magazine, we can do it for you, and if they come out we'll pay for the rights to use them."

"That sounds right," said Mr. Gunderson, "TIME can do a better job with them than a television station." Hilary handed to film to the man who turned and pushed his way back through the crowd. "I'll bring them to your house as soon as they are done," he shouted.

The customer from the supermarket asked, "Where are we - this isn't Shop-Rite?"

The tv team turned towards her, perhaps seeing her for the first time. "Were you there too," Asked the reporter?

"Wherever we were it was very strange. I've got to get home, how do I get to mall from here."

"Which mall."

"The Mall on the east side of Knoxville of course."

"Knoxville Tennessee?"

"That's the only one I know." She paused for a minute, "Wait, are you telling me that we're back where those kids came from? They were from New York or some place like that. My sister is going to be so worried."

The principal spoke, "you can call her from my office, but if she's watching television she'll probably know you're ok. This is going out live isn't it."

The reported nodded.

Hilary, who had been feeling crowded in her seat, had moved over to the windows with her parents. Looking out she saw that it was night and that the street was filled with police cars, fire trucks, news vans, and people - lots and lots of people. She waved and some people yelled up.

"Can we go home now," she asked?

Her father smiled, "Sure, but it's going to take some doing."

The principal was trying to make a speech about how wonderful the school was, but nobody was paying any attention. Mr. Gunderson spoke to a couple of cops who helped the kids get out of the classroom and down one of the side stairs.

Hilary knew it wasn't going to be an ordinary day when the door bell rang at six in the morning. In a minute her father called her name. She pulled on a sweat-suit and went out into the living room. "Your photos are here."

She jumped forward and tore the envelope open. The first one showed the group standing on a small hill until you looked at it closely and realized that things were not what they seemed. Some of the photos were close-ups of the purple ferns and the star fruit. The photos were pretty good, but she was disappointed, it wasn't the same as being there, still she was pretty proud of herself. The man who brought the pictures had another surprise for her. He pulled a newspaper out of the bag and one of her photos was on the front page. Underneath it in small print were the words "photo by Hilary Downes-Vogel." It was about a minute later when the door bell rang again. She went to open it and found a camera crew on the front steps.

"Are you Hilary," the man asked?

"Yes."

"We're from Good Morning America, we'll be going live in ten minutes." Dumbfounded, Hilary took a step back and the three of them followed her into the room. She looked at her rumpled sweat-suit and said "I've got to change", and ran into her room.

As she was crossing the living room she nearly ran over her mother who was not a morning type of person. She had the still asleep look in her eyes and was wearing her ratty pink robe. When she realized that their living room was filled with strangers she gave a shriek and went back into her room to get dressed.

In about five minutes there was a knock on her door. It was her dad. "Listen Hilary, you are going to have a hectic couple of days then things are going to calm down. Enjoy it while it lasts and just be yourself and you won't do or say anything that will be embarrassing." He smiled at her "Glad to have you home."

She learned something. Reporters are pushy. But she got a ride to school in a news van, and all it cost her was an interview she was going to give anyway. Her first class was a real letdown after all the excitement, but it didn't last long because the office called asking her to go to the auditorium. On her way there she met up with Tommy and Kiera whose mornings had been something like hers.

The principal was as happy as a duck in a puddle. He kept giving his "what a wonderful school" speech to the reporters while he waited for everyone to get there for the news conference. It was mostly boring. The reporters kept asking the same questions and not seeming to listen to the answers. At the end they asked Hilary what she was going to do next. "Well, The Math Monster gave me an idea for another Math project."

FINIS