

The Magical Kingdom Of Mathematica, And Twins Who Got Stuck In It

Connor Mackyntire was zoning out in math class again. His math teacher, Mrs. Grunheld, was droning on about fractions. He was getting so sleepy... A few seats away, his twin sister Riley stuck her hand straight up into the air. Mrs. Grunheld must have asked a question. Riley was the biggest teacher's pet in Green Valley Middle School, and Connor's exact opposite. She had dirty blond hair, just like Connor, but hers was neatly combed, in a ponytail, and smelling like strawberry shampoo. She wore nice clothes to school - a sweater, headband, and freshly pressed jeans while Connor wore a hoodie and baggy pants. Uh oh... He thought Mrs. Grunheld was announcing a test. He sat straight up. She asked, "Who wants to pass these out?" Riley's hand bounced into the air like a rubber ball. Even though nobody else volunteered (and never would), Mrs. Grunheld looked around the room and murmured, "Hmm. All right, Miss Riley, come on up." The test was completed, with lots of complaining on the side. Mrs. Grunheld passed out the textbooks for the next unit, reminding the students that they *must study* chapters one to three for tomorrow's lesson or they would be *very, very sorry*. Once everyone sat back down, there was a faint noise penetrating the classroom. It sounded like a soundtrack from one of Connor's video games, with trumpets playing a fanfare, and the gentle clink of glasses in a pub, and little boys selling fruit at an old-fashioned market, yelling "Apples! Pears! Get your apples and pears right here!" The classroom was in disarray, searching for the mysterious noise. Through the midst of all the confusion, Connor realized where the noise was coming from- Riley's textbook. He strode over to her desk and practically yelled, "Your book is-it's- it's". But he never got to finish his sentence, because his hand was sinking down toward a page, and Riley screamed, "Don't touch it! It's probably radioactive or something!" But it was too late, as she grabbed Connor's wrist just as his index finger touched the page. The book glowed a neon green and sucked the twins in.

When the light died down, Connor and Riley were sitting in the strangest car they had ever seen. It was driving itself along a country road. It had a vermillion body and a figurehead of a cat smiling smugly on the hood, whose eyes seemed to follow you wherever you went. But the strangest part by far were the sea green wheels, that changed shape with every turn. Riley was transfixed with them, watching them change first to a square, then a decagon, then a parallelogram. Connor was banging on the windows yelling, "Get us out! Get us out! We're too young to die! This isn't even possible! What's up with the wheels, anyway?" By this time he had

pretty much exhausted himself, just as their car came up to a long bridge that crossed over to a shining, beautiful kingdom on the other side. On the bridge was a sign saying, Welcome to Mathematica! In the middle of the bridge there was a toll booth, with four separate lanes. The car drove itself to the one on the far left. It then stopped and rolled the window down. To Connor and Riley's shock, the person at the booth was a human-sized multiplication sign wearing an orange vest and a name tag reading *Hello, my name is Monica*. She clasped her hands together and said with delight, "Oh! It's been such a long time since a human came to visit! Do you have a license for your Geometruck?" She snatched Riley's math worksheets that she still had clutched in her hand. "Wonderful. I see you have all your papers in order. Enjoy your trip!" Connor asked, "Wait a second- ALL of you people are multiplication signs?" Monica looked extremely offended. Riley whispered in his ear, "Of course she's offended! That's like calling all humans women. Obviously the boys are subtraction, and the girls are division because the children are smaller. The men are addition signs, and the women are multiplication!" The toll booth monitor, Monica, had probably overheard them, because she said, "That's right, young lady! Have some apple pi to take on your way!" Connor made a mental note that the people of Mathematica had ears that were perhaps too good. And that Riley was a huge show-off. Who got to eat pie shaped like a weird house with a curve on top, like that poster in Mrs. Grunheld's classroom. The Geometruck drove across the bridge, into a marketplace on the other side. The noise sounded vaguely familiar. They drove past a candy store called *Math is Sweet*, promising "The best Calculus Cookies and Algebra Pops you've ever tasted!" Connor and Riley were practically drooling and silently willing the car to stop, because with or without math, candy is candy. Unfortunately, the car refused stubbornly to stop, and the twins heard a velvety voice tell them, "You know, it does rot your teeth." The twins jumped in surprise. Riley grabbed a bit of plastic pipe that was left in the backseat and warned whatever it was, "Show yourself! Who are you!" The voice replied, "My name is Sir Augustus Antony Amerly Alfredo Abercrombie Abenhizer. And if you cannot see me, as the young ones say, that is so your problem." Riley understood immediately. She wondered "Oh! But how?" Connor asked, "Um... Where is this thing anyway?" Riley had to reprimand him. "Look, dummy. Right in front of you." Connor looked. "I see nothing but the marketplace, the hood, and that stupid cat- OH CARROTS! That stupid cat is TALKING!" He sat back hard on the seat. There must have been hallucination powder in that pi he stole from Riley. The voice continued. "I'm not stupid, you know. Not me, Sir Augustus-" Riley interrupted, "I'm sure you aren't. What were we sent here for, and how do we get out? The cat replied, "You were probably sent here by your textbook. Is that correct? Close your mouth, Connor, you look like a dead fish. All else I know is that we are headed toward the

castle to meet the royal couple, that I am being forced to babysit you along your quest, and Riley, that your brother is *exceedingly* annoying. Well look at that, we are here already. Any questions?" Connor blurted out, "Can we call you Gus?" As the twins got out of their Geometruck and it drove away to park, he thought he heard Gus chuckle.

At the palace, there was a addition sign royal guard there to meet them. He told them, "My name is Chad. Please come in to sign the guestbook, then you may meet the king and queen." The guestbook was a massive, leather-bound book in a glass case. On each page there was a signature. Riley gasped, "Look! Here's Einstein's, and here's Thomas Edison's, and here's Paul Erdos, and Ronald Fisher! They all came here? I could actually touch something Einstein touched!" Connor made a face at her. Sisters. Chad explained, "Many of them stayed here for years, looking at the scenery and painting our people. Then they all went back. That's why Gus is so sour. He feels responsible." They signed the book, then came into the grand hall, which was shaped like an infinity sign. Chad ushered them into their seats, which were scarlet plush armchairs near the head of the long table, which Chad explained were the seats of honor. A little subtraction sign page tooted a horn and announced, "Presenting our king, Sir Cumference, and Lady Diana of Ameter! Sir Cumference looked just like a king should look: strong, brave, proud, and grand. His wife was a matronly woman, who looked like a first grade teacher: kind and encouraging, but strict if anyone stepped out of line. Both king and queen were, strangely, human. She told the little subtraction sign, "Sebastian, for the umpteenth time, please just call me Lady Di. It sounds quite royal, and I'm not really that fancy." Sir Cumference looked around and said, "Welcome, esteemed royal guests and human visitors! Let the feast begin!" Plates and plates of food literally floated down from the sky onto the table. When Connor and Riley saw the first ten plates, they exclaimed in unison, "But it's all numbers on the plates!" Chad explained, "Yes, humans are always a little confused at our food. These are One Buns, Two Thai Chicken, Three leaf Tea, petit Fours, Five Falafel, Six roast Chicks, Seven Soda, Eight Grated cheese and pasta, Nine Nuggets, and some meat pi. But don't fill up your stomach more than halfway, or you might have to miss out on dessert. Riley ate exactly half her fill (Connor filled himself up two-thirds of the way, but considered his stomach a bottomless pit anyway and so didn't care) and loved every bit of it. The king announced dessert and once again, mysterious dishes floated down from the ceiling. This time they were even stranger- they were cakes, but each one was only a fraction of a circular cake. The king walked by and asked, "Enjoying your Fraction Cakes? Oh yes, humans are always confused with these. I assume you are all half full?" Riley nodded. Connor looked ashamed. The king continued, "If you are, then

pick the half a cake. There are also smaller fractions.” He added that after seeing Connor’s face. The fraction cakes were absolutely amazing! With every bite, the flavor changed. First from apricot, then to chocolate chip, then to pumpkin, then to vanilla spice and a million other flavors. When they finished their cakes, Chad told them, “I have just been informed that the king and queen want to talk to you. Please follow me to the living room.” Chad could do an excellent imitation of a stoic royal pillar when he was delivering instructions.

The living room was a comfortable space, despite its size, which was probably meant for entertaining. The couches, pillows, curtains, and rug were a warm orange. All of them were shaped in circles, probably in honor of the royal couple. Sir Cumference announced, “We shall now give you your quest, which-“ Lady Di interrupted, “The poor children must be so tired. What are your names again?” Connor and Riley told her. “Okay then, we had better let Connor and Riley here sleep in the royal chambers tonight. You can give them their quest in the morning. Now, now, dear,” she said when the king tried to object. “Chad, honey, please take the twins to their bedrooms. The bedrooms in the guest wing were furnished much the same way as the living room, but they had a few extra “necessities” in addition. Connor, after meeting Riley in the corridor and bathroom that connected their rooms, yelled, “Oh my gosh! My room has a video game system, flat screen TV, and a fridge full of chips, soda, and candy!” Riley gasped back, “Mine has a huge bookcase, a purple bed, a fridge with chocolate, fruit, and sparkling water, laptop on the desk, and a hot tub!” They then looked at each other and agreed that the other’s room was stupid. Their night was the best they had ever had, especially away from home.

The next day, after a breakfast of One Buns and chocolate hazelnut Two-Tella, they were once again called to the living room, which had somehow changed colors to blue. The king announced, “Now you shall receive your quest. Bring in the quest scroll!” A page that the twins remembered as Sebastian struggled in with a huge papyrus scroll that had to be at least twice his weight. The king stood on a chair and unrolled the scroll, which ran down to his feet and across the floor. While he was reading the scroll, he murmured, “Hmm... I would give them a dragon to slay, but that irritating Einstein boy burned them all. No, that’s too hard... Too easy... Darn it.” He stood up and told Connor and Riley, “Well, it seems I have no quests left for you. I suppose you may leave now.” Riley asked, “But how do we get back?” “I guess you will have to find out yours...” said Sir Cumference, but Lady Di saved them by interrupting, “Just go to the place you heard when you came in and whistle. Gus and your Geometruck will come to take you back.” Riley and Connor left the palace. Riley mused, “I wish I had been paying attention.

The one time I don't pay attention in class, it leaves me stuck. Connor, I'm not sure I trust you with this, but can you remember? Connor tried. "I think it may have been at the- at the- that's it! The marketplace! I heard a little boy yelling for us to buy his apples and pears! And we're right there now!" He whistled. Nothing happened. "Maybe we have to whistle together. But I don't know how!" Riley started to get disheartened. "Now we'll never get home to our parents!" she said and started crying. Connor always felt weird when girls cried, especially his sister. He tried to teach her to whistle. "Just put two fingers in your mouth and blow!" She tried just as he demonstrated. Suddenly, the Geometruck came screeching around the corner. "But I didn't make any sound!" Riley marveled. Gus explained, "You whistled a cat whistle. I could hear it. Now get in. I presume you want to go home. Yes, I thought so. Don't mind me. I'm used to it." They got in the car and drove off across the bridge. In a while, they came up to a neon green swirling portal where they came in. Before they went through, Connor wanted to do one last thing: "Gus, I just want you to know..." Gus snapped, "What?" As the neon green swallowed them up, Connor told him, "We're definitely coming back."