



Chapter 1

Henry awoke from another dream about his friends, the numbers, but this dream was different from all the others. In the past, his dreams about the numbers were happy ones and they were helping him with his understanding of math, but in this one, the numbers were concerned about something happening in Gum Swamp. Every time they tried to tell him, a dark cloud would form and hide them. They were just emerging from the cloud and trying to tell him what was going on in the swamp, when he woke up.

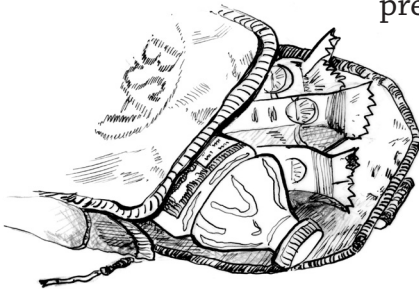
Henry had never had a dream like that before. What did it mean? He had dreamed of numbers ever since he could remember learning what they were. For him they weren't just shapes on a page that stood for *amounts* or *quantities*. They were characters with personalities who could talk. But when he tried to explain that to other people he got such funny looks he quit talking about it.

Still, one of the reasons he was good at math in school was because the numbers came to him in dreams and helped him with his understanding of math. They'd been especially helpful when he was learning the multiplication tables in the third grade. When his teachers praised his math skills, he knew better than to tell them where those skills came from. His number friends had helped him so many times, maybe it was time for him to return the favor ... if he could.

Ironically, Henry had always been fascinated by Gum Swamp, a not-very-large forest surrounded by acres and acres of farm land. He could see the forest in the distance from his own front porch. It actually looked kind of strange, like a crop that had suddenly shot up, growing taller and denser but never harvested. He wasn't even sure who owned the woods, but he was sure he needed to explore Gum Swamp ... especially now that it had appeared in this last dream. The old people in the community said the woods were haunted, and lately he'd heard the farmers at the general store, just down the road

from his house, talk about hearing strange sounds coming from there at night. He figured they just said stuff like that to scare boys like him. He wasn't scared ... just curious.

He thought about his dream all during breakfast and decided he'd walk up to Gum Swamp and check things out. It was Saturday and a pretty day for a hike. After



breakfast he put some bottled water and a few snacks in his Boy Scout backpack, put on his favorite camouflage hunter's cap,

told his mother and father he was going hiking and headed across the fields toward Gum Swamp.

He'd been up to the edges of it several times before, even walked a short distance into it along the remnant of an old logging trail that seemed to head straight into the heart of the woods. But up until now something about the feeling of the place had kept him from going deeper. As he entered the woods and walked farther along the old logging path, he could see the sun overhead through the tree tops. At the pace he was going, he felt he had plenty of time to explore where the trail might lead him.

After awhile, he decided to stop and rest. He reached into his backpack for the bottle of water and

one of his snacks, then sat down on a root of a large oak tree with three massive trunks. Birds sang and squirrels rustled among the leaves. Feeling pleased with himself for finally doing what he'd wanted to do for such a long time, Henry leaned back against the tree and closed his eyes for a moment. All was well.

Suddenly, the tree opened up and swallowed him! The next thing he knew he was sliding down a tunnel as smooth as a water slide, swirling round and round until it seemed to him he must be heading deep into the earth.



Chapter 2

Henry finally stopped sliding and popped out onto a soft cushion of straw. As he brushed back his hair, he could see he wasn't below ground after all ... he could still see the sky overhead. He sat up and saw his cap beside him. Even more confusing, he found he was surrounded by nine characters that looked just like the same numbers he had often seen in his dreams ... and they were his size! Not only that, but some of them were armed with spears, bows and arrows, and swords!

The number One stepped forward. He was tall