

## Chapter One

Hey!

I'm James, or Jay to my friends. I'm 10 years old and in Miss Germain's Year 5 class at Polar Primary School. To look at me, I'm a pretty normal kid. I play games at playtime, I do my homework, and I have a few close friends. Oh, and I'm also a monster hunter.

Yep! You read that right!

I - James Lee Johnson - am a heroic hunter of

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the monsters who plague schools and shops and offices, and even whole cities! I hear you asking me, *"What monsters? I've never seen any at my school."* Well then, aren't you lucky that your school's monster hunters are good at their job? To tell the truth, if all is going to plan, then the average person should never see a math monster in their whole life. If things don't go to plan though, well, let's just say you'll never want to see a number ever again!

Or a fraction! Fraction monsters can be the absolute worst!

Thankfully though, math monsters can rarely cause any real chaos. In fact, most math monsters barely have enough power to exist or even be seen without some top-secret, ultra-high-tech equipment hidden in my glasses. You see, math monsters aren't like people. They don't eat food,

drink water, or even stand on their feet. They kind of look like small, weird blobs that float around unsuspecting people, looking for ways to feed on the misery that maths can cause. They have to feed almost constantly for it's the only way that they can stay in our universe. Oh yes, given half the chance, they'd love nothing more than to grow to the size of an elephant and eat as many children as they can. Or perhaps they'd take a human-form and use that body to create more and more misery from maths. For now though, they have to focus on just trying to survive in our universe since, if they run out of math-induced misery, then... POP! It's back to their universe forever! Bye bye, math monster! See ya never!

Anyway, you might not have ever seen a math monster, but you've almost certainly felt the

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effects of one! Have you ever been sat in a maths class and suddenly felt like you can't do it? Have you ever sat and watched everyone else seem to understand a lesson, but to you, it's all just an alien language? Have you ever tried to sit a maths test and felt a flutter of horrible butterflies in the pit of your stomach? That's a math monster! It might be floating about your head or perching itself on your shoulder, but whatever it's doing, it's L-O-V-I-N-G your misery and suffering. They thrive on it!

The funny thing is that it doesn't actually matter if you're any good at maths. Everyone has moments where they don't get it, or they feel dumb. Deep down, we know that we can do it if we try hard and ask for help. The monsters are the ones who stop us though. They plant thoughts in our minds like, *"I'm so rubbish at maths,"* and *"I'll never*

*be able to do it,"* and *"Everyone else is better than me."* They do it deliberately because the worse you feel, the stronger and stronger they get.

Oh! Wait! I just remembered! I totally have to tell you this! There's a girl in my class called Charlene. She's nice enough, but I guess I don't really know her. Anyway, even though it isn't school uniform, she always wears these giant, golden, hoop earrings. So, one day, the other James in the class - who was sitting next to her - was really struggling with his work. I think we were doing equivalent fractions or something really tough, and all the class were finding it difficult. James was getting really upset though and all the math monsters were floating towards him to try and feed on his sorrow.

I spotted one of them floating up from under the table and I swear that it looked identical to

Charlene! Okay, it was orange and blobby and was only a head, but it had a mouth and two eyes in roughly the right place and had two giant, golden rings coming out of the sides of its head. I swear down that the monster actually did a double take when it saw her, like it was thinking, "*A human version of me?*" I nearly burst out laughing in the middle of class!

Anyway, what was I saying? Oh yeah, so I'm a monster-hunter and so is my best friend, Erin. We're tasked with watching the monsters in our school and making sure they don't get too big. If they do, we each have a special device nicknamed a S.U.C.K.E.R (which stands for single-use-something-something... I don't remember). The cool bit is that if we activate it next to a monster, even a powerful one, it gets sucked in and transported

back to its own world. I imagine it would look so so so cool!

Yes, okay, you're right - I said, "*Imagine.*"

I haven't actually seen it happen yet. Neither me nor Erin have ever got to catch a math monster or even seen one get too big. I guess we're lucky because it's dangerous work. An older boy called Tom, who was at the Math Monster Hunter Academy with us, apparently had his arm bitten off a year ago at his school. I also heard that once, they had to shut down a school across town because a math monster kept reflecting and rotating classrooms and corridors so that no one could get out. I don't know if that's true though or just a myth.

Even with the danger, I'd absolutely love it if I

got to catch a real math monster. Erin would too. We often joke about it and practise shooting each other with the S.U.C.K.E.R. Sometimes we chase each other, and sometimes we chase my dog, Molly. She runs around like lightning until we finally catch her and cover her in cuddles and kisses until she "surrenders".

Of course, had I known how dangerous some monsters could really be, I might not have been so keen to meet such a powerful one...

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