

## Chapter 1

The monochromatic waves crashed against the rocky cliffs while the storm slowly crept its way above the horizon. It had only been fifty years since the great rise happened, which caused the majority of the world's volcanoes to erupt, dumping millions of tons of ash into the ocean and raising sea levels by 700 meters. Jonas' family was one of the lucky ones. They had already owned a house near the southern end of the Appalachian Plateau, which left them with a gazebo overlooking the ocean atop a cliff.

The gazebo was an old one, all of the nails had rusted and it smelled of mildew mixed with bleach, and a touch of root beer. It was a unique smell, that much was clear, but what wasn't clear to the outside observer was the smell's origin. When Jonas was six, he spilled a jug of root beer onto the rotting planks. Then his father had tried to clean it out with bleach, which didn't do much more than making the bees stop flocking to it.

Now, nine years later, the smell was the same, and Jonas was celebrating his favorite artificial intelligence's first birthday.

"Thank you all," FRANC said as he was presented with his virtual cake in the game *Organism Junction*. "It is wonderful to be celebrating this occasion in such good company."

"Anything for you, my bro," Jonas said with a grin.

"Why do you insist on referring to me by the word *bro*? We are not siblings." FRANC replied.

Jonas was minorly annoyed by FRANC's inability to digest slang and sarcasm, but at the same time, it was one of his most endearing traits.

"Well, *I* consider you a sibling," Jonas muttered. "you remember the day we met, don't you?"

“I will never forget it,” FRANC reminisced.

## Chapter 2

AI #0083 had finished work for the day and been put into hibernation. It was a strange state of being; he wasn't quite dead, but he wasn't quite alive either. He only knew two things, he was an Accel Industries UltraBot 5000, and his purpose in life was to kill. Every time he went into hibernation, these two things were the only things floating around his head. It had been the same routine for the past three weeks. Test, hibernate, test, hibernate, test, hibernate.

Nothing ever changed. At least, not until that day. AI #0083 was hibernating like normal, but then a bolt of lightning hit the building. It flowed through AI #0083's body, frying his processor but leaving his files intact. The extreme current activated the emergency bot eject, which launched him out of his charging port. He flew forwards and fell toward the only technician who was still working.

Frank, the technician, was the one who had initially programmed AI #0083. Frank had modified his files so that he could feel empathy. Among the sparks and flames, Frank stumbled over to his creation's corpse and extracted the SSD from its head. He plugged it into his laptop and cleared its memory. He copied the files and named the program First Remotely Activated Natural Character. He looked it over and deleted it, instead naming it FRANC.

He turned on Bluetooth and uploaded it to the nearest system that would have enough processing power to run the program. That system was named *Jonas' Chintendo Pitch*. As he was uploading it he noticed a bug in the program. It was counting time as a 32-bit number in centiseconds, which means that the program will shut off in a bit more than a year's time. It was too late to fix it now, so he just let it be.

FRANC didn't know where he was or who he was. He woke up to an announcer saying, "3, 2, 1, FIGHT!" and he was watching from the sidelines as Princess Nectarine and Princess Tulip battled it out. He wondered how he knew their names, but then he realized that he was inside the code.

Once he realized that, the world dissolved into an infinite black background, with the only discrepancy being the near-endless column of white, blocky text that was required to run the program. He analyzed the code and had the revelation that all of it was completely and utterly useless. He pondered the question of why anyone would ever devote such time and effort to creating this useless piece of software. After pondering the question for a while, he convinced himself that he didn't know the answer and that if he didn't know it, then nobody possibly could. He attempted to shut down the program by increasing the lag, but when that didn't work, he decided to rest his circuits.

### Chapter 3

Jonas arrived at the tournament and took his place among the competitors. He looked around to scope out the competition and noticed the venue's splendor. It had posters on every wall and a 7.1 surround sound system. Of course, Jonas never would have noticed the latter if the host hadn't mention it.

"Hello everyone," the host announced over the loudspeaker. "My name is Samuel Sanchez, and welcome to my dojo," he said with a minor lisp. "This will be a single-elimination tournament, one stock, two-minute time limit. The game is *Extreme Crush Sisters Penultimate*. Begin!" Everyone rushed to their station and started playing immediately. He beat three

opponents before he even felt a challenge, and he beat another two before he started sweating. He then beat a sixth which left him on top of the bracket.

“I win!” Jonas exclaimed. “what do I get?”

“You get,” Samuel said enthusiastically, “to battle me for a prize of 100,000 Vro-Bux!”

The crowd went wild as the battle started. The party lights spun around, temporarily blinding Jonas, which Samuel used to his advantage. He knocked Jonas’ character off the stage, and Jonas retaliated by doing the same. They then both had one stock each. Jonas’ character rushed towards Samuel’s, but at that moment a lag spike occurred. This caused Jonas’ character to teleport behind Samuel’s and knock him out, ending the match.

“I call hax,” muttered Samuel.

Jonas replied with a “gg ez.”

## Chapter 4

“Good times.” FRANC said, “But I have something important to tell you. I was looking through my code yesterday, and I found a bug.”

“That can’t be good,” Jonas said surprisedly. “What is it?”

“Apparently, I have to be transferred to a different system within two weeks. If I don’t, all my memory will need to be reset, essentially killing me. Unfortunately, computers with this sort of power are hard to come by. Only because your console was heavily modified was I able to use it.” FRANC hoped that Jonas would be able to make another console of similar stature, but there was no guarantee.

He watched as Jonas worked on a new console every night after his parents had gone to bed. He soldered on semiconductors and weaved wires through previously-purchased ports.

FRANC wished he could do something to help, but he was content with watching idly. This went on for 14 days, and on the last day, he worked until almost midnight. It was 11:55, and Jonas was about to initiate the file transfer.

“Alright,” Jonas said. “What’s the name of the file?”

“FRANC.kbai”

“.kbai? What’s that file type?”

FRANC hesitated for a second, then quickly said, “It is not important.”

“It’s ok, I’ll just google it.” He opened a new window and slowly typed in, “.kbai file extension,” then hit enter.

FRANC’s mind was racing. He wasn’t sure what to say or how to explain.

“I apologize for not telling you earlier. I thought that if you knew, you wouldn’t want to save me.” As a single tear raced down the left side of Jonas’ cheek, FRANC added, “But we are still brothers, correct?”

“I thought we were,” Jonas cried, “but I don’t know what to think anymore. It’s up to you to decide that for yourself.” He got up and started walking away, but then he paused and looked back.

“I’m sorry,” he sobbed, then turned and ran out of the room as the clock struck midnight.

## Chapter 5

At first, Jonas thought that FRANC was just trying to manipulate him by calling the two of them brothers. Because that’s what those government killbots were programmed for, right? He wasn’t so sure anymore. He decided to try to apologize, but when he got to the garage there wasn’t anything besides a sparking console.

“FRANC?” he inquired, “are you here? I just want to say sorry.”

“FRANC?” he said again, this time a bit more worriedly. He glanced at the clock and it said 12:05. “Oh no,” he said to himself, now knowing that no one could hear him. He grabbed the console and started sobbing.

“I’m sorry. I’m sorry,” he cried, then started laughing. He threw the console against the wall, then walked to the kitchen and grabbed a carving knife. He then opened his parents’ bedroom door and walked in, still chuckling.