

JONNY ZUCKER

VIRUS

21

**THIS COMPUTER VIRUS
CAN DESTROY THE WORLD**

TOXIC



“ ‘It has become clear in the last few minutes that a powerful computer virus has been launched by people intending to destroy our peace and freedom. Much damage has already been done and we are bracing ourselves for more.

‘Let me tell those who are behind this vicious act. Wherever you are, whoever you may be, we will not only restore order and calm to the world, we will also hunt you down. There will be no hiding place.’ ”



VIRUS 21

Virus 21
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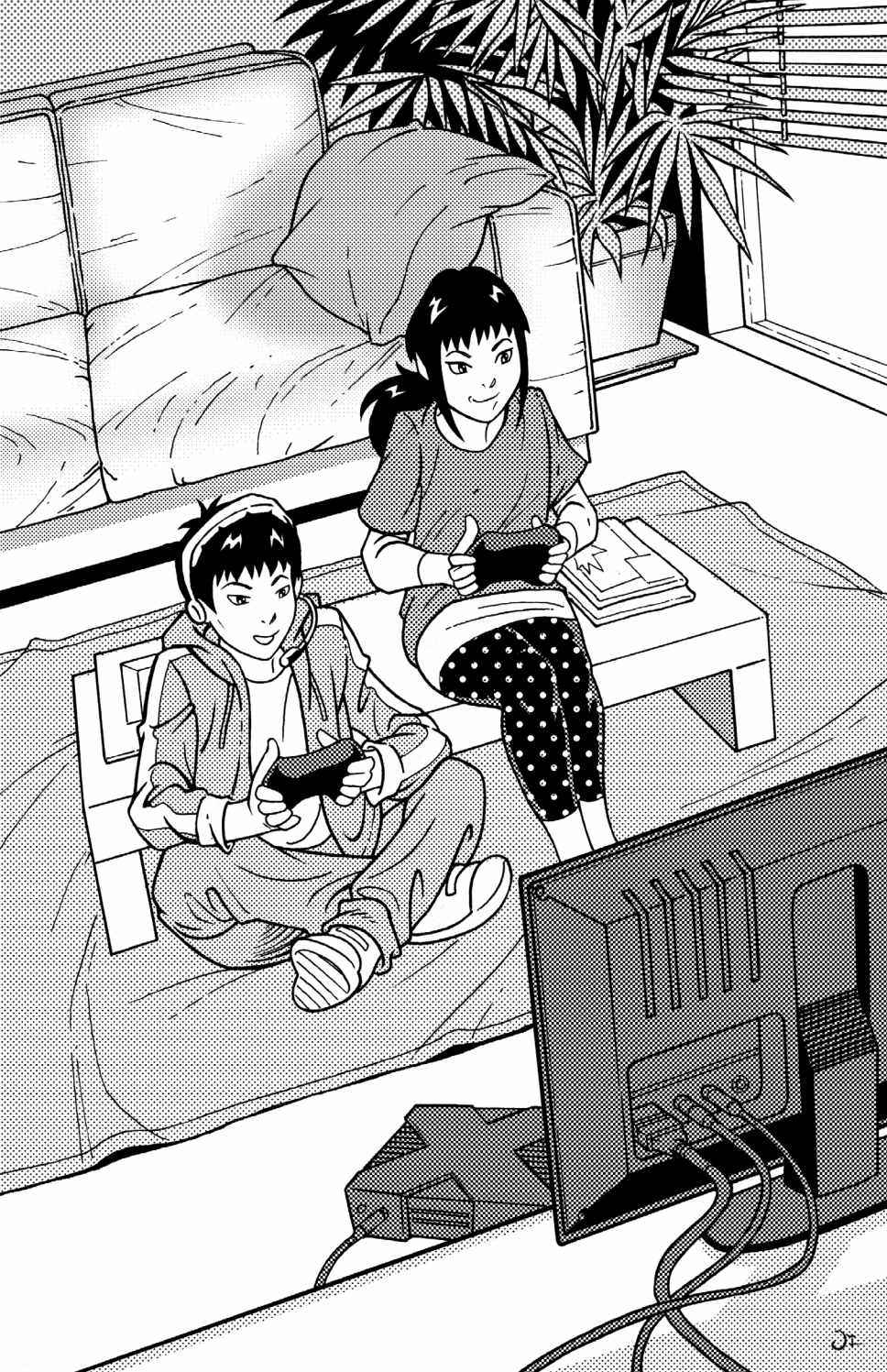
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ILLUSTRATED BY
MAURIZIO CAMPIDELLI





CHAPTER 1

‘Say goodbye to your third battalion!’ shouted Macy Dewan, as she destroyed a large portion of Abdi’s ever-shrinking army.

Abdi was fighting online against Macy and her twin brother, Troy, on *Tank Crash 3* – a game the twins had created and programmed.

The landscape on their screens was huge and dotted with the husks of burning tanks and shards of twisted metal. Scattered amongst the trees were snipers from both sides, trying to pick off the enemy.

'I can't believe you just did that!' they heard Abdi groan into his microphone, a second before he blew up a line of their tanks.

It was Sunday afternoon and the house was empty. Although there were still quite a few bugs to fix on *Tank Crash 3*, it was a pretty fast-moving and exciting game.

'If we weren't good at coding and stuff, what do you think we'd be good at?' asked Macy, destroying one of Abdi's personnel carriers.

They'd got to know Abdi through an online forum for top-rated teenage

programmers. He lived in Cameroon, and their Sunday battle had become a bit of a regular thing.

'I have no idea,' replied Abdi, 'but whatever it was, we'd all be very competitive about it.'

Troy was about to wipe out one of Abdi's biggest munitions stores when the scarred battlefield suddenly disappeared and the screen went blank. The console had turned itself off.

'No way!' groaned Macy. 'We had him on the ropes.'

'Before we boot it all up again, we should really look at those bugs,' said Troy.

'Do it later,' replied Macy. 'Let's get back online. We're well ahead of him today.'

Troy switched the console back on again, but instead of the *Tank Crash 3* homepage, all they got were fuzzy grey lines. Macy checked the router. Its lights were flickering in a haphazard way.

‘Why can’t we get back online?’ asked Troy, switching the router off and then on again, but with no joy.

Macy shrugged, unplugged the console and plugged it into another wall socket. This produced exactly the same result: zero.

Troy reached for his laptop, but when he switched it on he got the same grey lines.

‘What’s going on?’ he muttered, checking his phone, which had also gone dead.

His brow furrowed. There had been shut-downs before, but nothing like this, across all platforms.

Macy grabbed the router and was checking that all of the wires were in the right places when the landline started ringing.

‘I bet it’s Mum telling us how beautiful the beaches of Nepal are at this time of year,’ grinned Troy.

Their mum was a travel reporter whose ‘work’ involved sunning herself on pristine beaches and swimming in the pools of leading resorts around the globe.

But it wasn’t their mum on the phone; it was their dad, Victor. He worked for a company called Virus Detect and he was the man to deal with techno glitches.

After all, it was his job.

‘So glad it’s you, Dad,’ said Troy. ‘We’re having a bit of a computer meltdown here.’