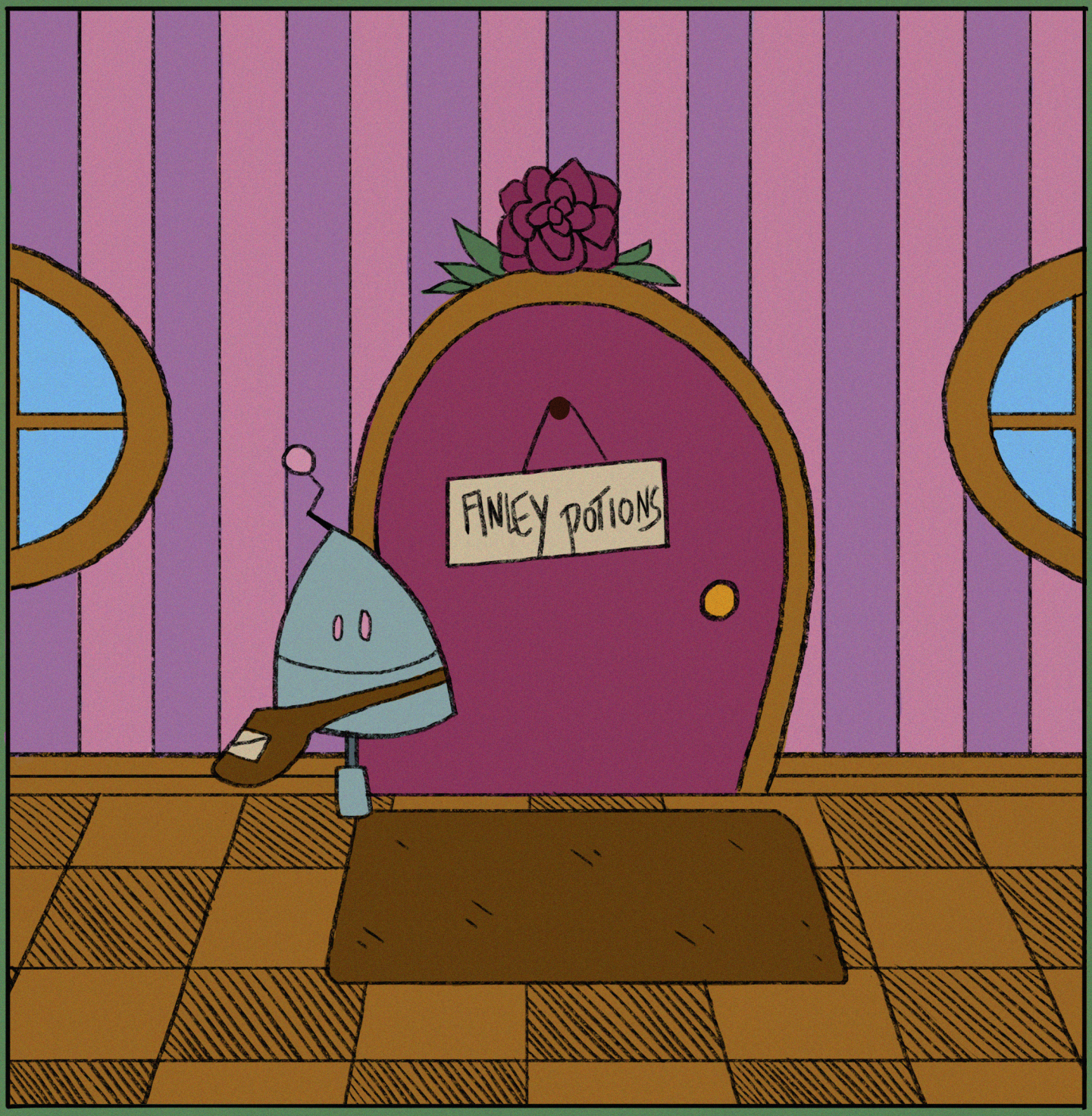
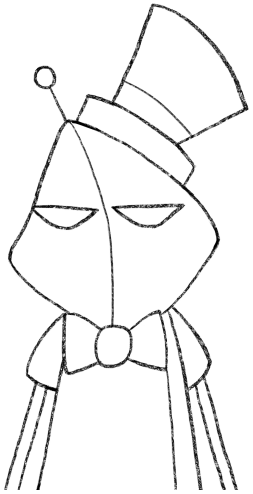
Roboville

A DAY AT THE POTION SHOP



An exhausted Francis L. Lovelace fell asleep at his own potion shop. The robot, who had been running a small but respected potion shop for three years, stood at four feet tall (and sometimes shorter, depending on what part of the floor he was on).

Typically, Francis wore a magenta bowtie with a blue-gray top hat and loved dearly only two things in this world: fudge and puns. As such, it was relatively easy to manipulate him if you also liked one or both of these things.



The potion shop building, named Finley, sat on top of a hill by the Vitamin Sea. Finley was a bubble-shaped, light blue building that was very much alive and communicated by playing music through speakers or by dropping various objects from the ceiling.

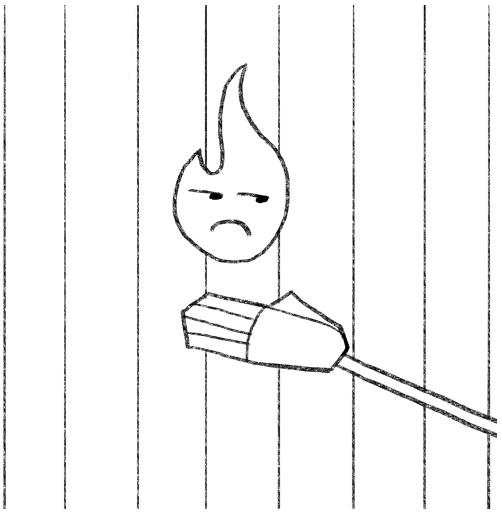
During the first year anniversary of Finley Potions, Francis had said that Finley was “the closest thing he had to a best friend.” Despite the language barrier, Francis and Finley communicated on a regular basis and the potion shop owner was responsible for feeding coins to the building.

Finley had initially started out as a snow globe and eventually grew to become a much larger dome, the host of many businesses over time. And for the past three years, said business belonged to Francis L. Lovelace.

Normally, Finley wouldn’t allow anyone to stay overnight, but he’d noticed how tired Francis was from the night before. The robot had been wasting his life away by watching late night soap operas at the shop.

As the sun started to rise and illuminate the checkered floor inside the building, Finley decided it was time to wake Francis up with the one thing he despised: dubstep. And so the genre was blasted at full volume through the shop speakers for a solid fifteen seconds.

Francis's golden eyes shot open. "Damn it, Finley!" he said. The robot was about to say more, but stopped as he noticed a small glowing presence in his right palm. It was staring at him with an expression of disgust.



"You," it said. The voice was coming from a small fire floating above the potion shop owner's left palm. The look of disgust remained as Francis sat up and stored his pillow under the counter. "It is I, the great fire god Blaze, here in a flash, here to do my duties, here to-"

"Wait," Francis said. "You weren't here last night."

"No, I was not," Blaze replied. "Mere mortal, I have been here since two in the morning because you uttered my name in your sleep!"

Francis looked at the fire god, confused. "I dunno about that…"

"Don't waste my time!" Blaze said. "How *dare* you summon the great fire god Blaze without reason? How *dare* you act so thoughtless, with your pretentious bowtie and pathetic little shop? Summoning a fire god like myself means you must give me something to do. And if you do not act on this soon, you may very well end up as breakfast for tomorrow morning."

“I just remembered there’s a fire extinguisher in the back closet,” Francis said.

“N-no, wait!” Blaze shouted, sweating. “Destroy my host form and you will be met with a curse. Surely… surely you must not be *that* cruel, right?” he said quietly.

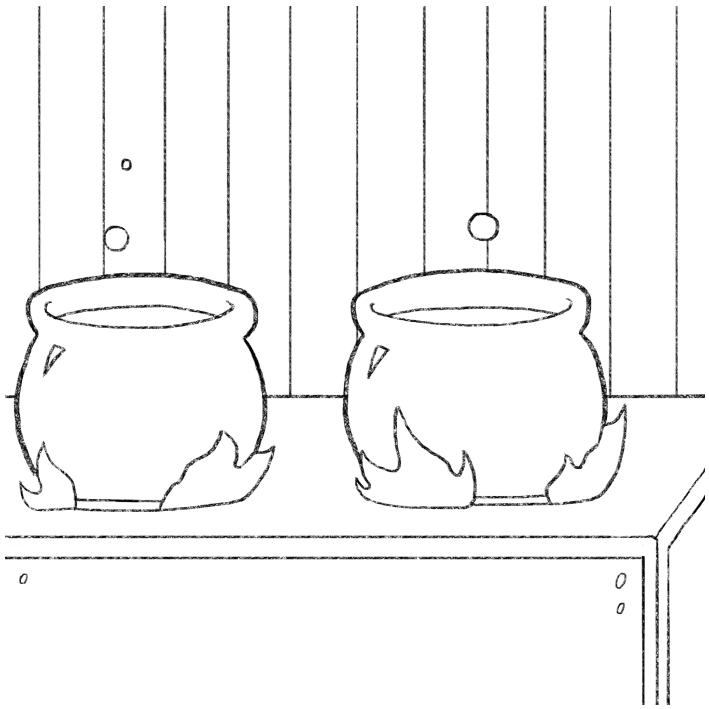
“What kind of curse are we talking here?”

“Don’t question my authority!” Blaze replied. “I’ve lived through thunderstorms, snow, power outages,” the small flame said.

“Fine,” Francis said. “Speed up the heating of the next batch of apple snider. I’ll take the cauldrons out of the fridge in a bit.”

The potion shop owner walked across the checkered floor of the building and to the fridge. He set Blaze onto the stove and lugged a giant gray cauldron out of the fridge.

The fire god then split into three parts in order to heat all cauldrons simultaneously. Francis placed the first cauldron onto the stove and then brought out the other two, each one heavier than the last.



“Curses,” the fire god said. “This will take eight hours to complete; you robots have no shame when it comes to making demands.”

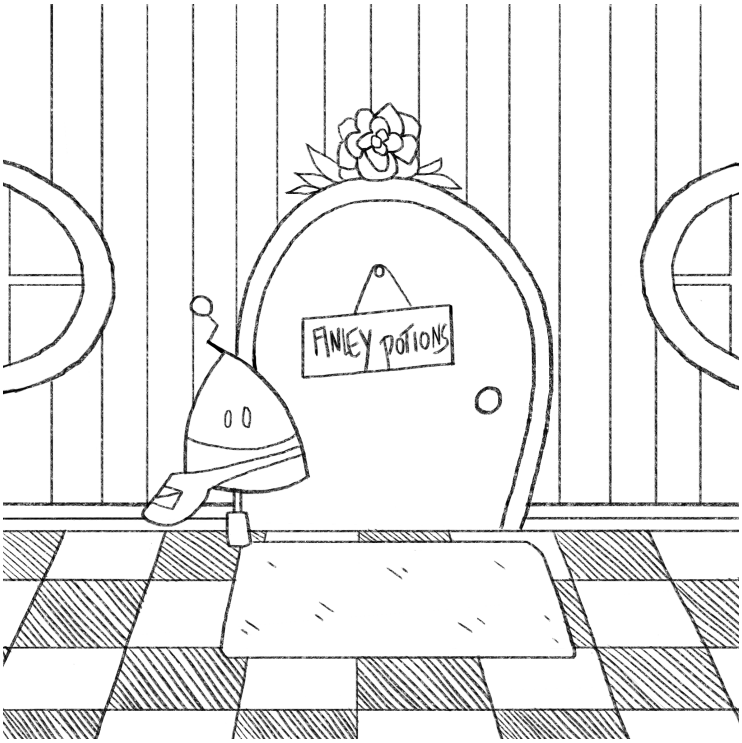
“Oh, and if you don’t mind, it’d be nice if you don’t talk while customers come in for the day,” Francis said.

“No shame!” Blaze coughed.

-

It was 10:30am and there had been no customers at the potion shop so far. Francis sighed and picked up a deck of cards from underneath the counter. He began shuffling the cards when suddenly, there was a loud knock at the front door.

Startled, the robot dropped the cards onto the wooden counter. The front door slowly opened and a pale blue, bullet-shaped robot entered the shop on one wheel. He was carrying a dark brown bag with a small envelope symbol on the front.

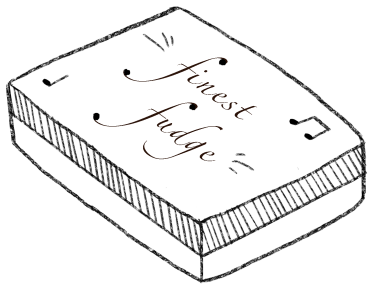


“Francis!” the guest said. “It’s been a while since I’ve actually come inside this place.”

It was Dexter, one of Roboville's delivery bots. He smiled and looked around the shop with his small pink eyes. "Oh," he said. "And here's some mail for you."

Francis took the mail and scratched his head. "Thanks," he said.

"I also have this." Dexter added. He removed a yellow box from the bag labeled "Finest Fudge" and before he could hand it over to Francis, the robot was already on the other side of the counter.

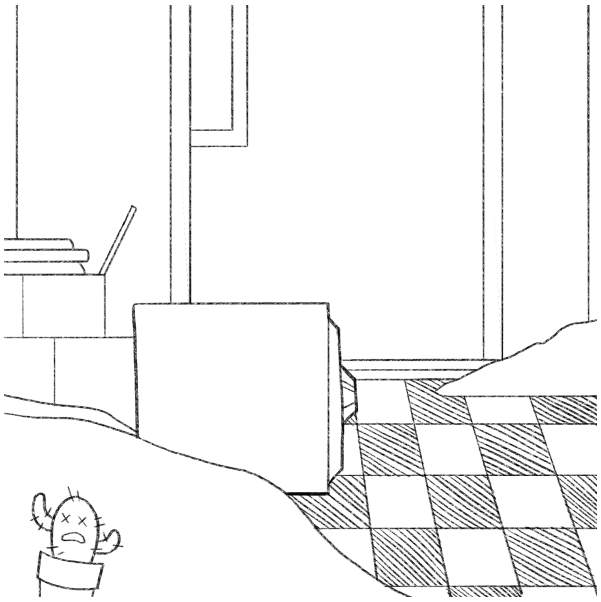


"I'll take that, thank you very much," the potion shop owner said, his eyes wide. He set the box down on the counter and tore it open. "Finer than gold."

Dexter looked over to the bookshelf behind the counter, his mouth agape. "There's so much more in here since the shop opened a few years ago," he said. "I really want to see what else I've missed."

A distracted Francis hopped over the counter, fudge box in hand again. "Yeah, yeah, go ahead," he said. "I'll be back in a moment."

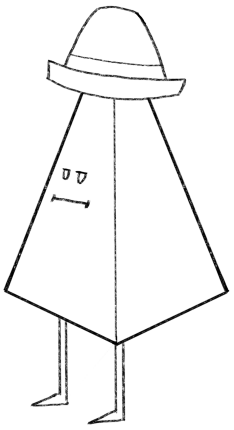
The potion shop owner walked over to the storage closet and opened it. After stepping in, he removed fifteen tablecloths and a dead cactus before getting to what he was looking for: a small silver safe. He kicked the storage closet door shut, unlocked the safe, and carefully place the fudge box inside.



Just then, a loud knocking sound came from the shop's front door. Francis quickly closed the safe, threw the cactus and tablecloths over it, and stepped outside of the storage closet.

After a cursory glance of the shop he noticed that Dexter was just staring out one of the side windows, perhaps taking photos of the view directly with his eyes. The shop was right next to the scenic Vitamin Sea, after all.

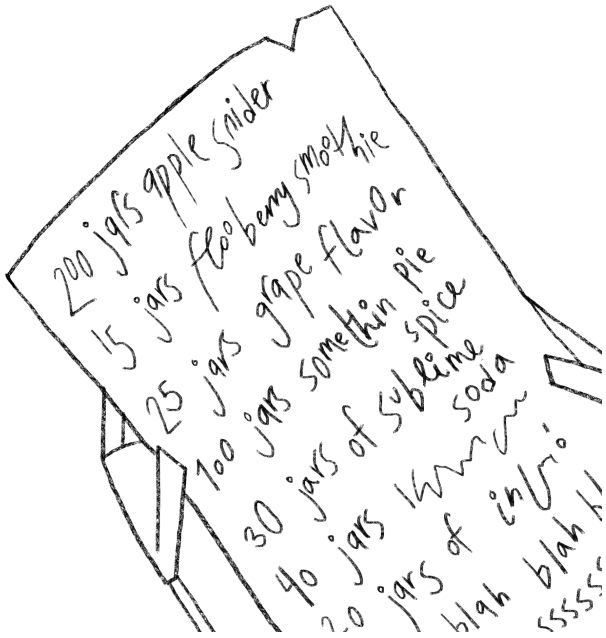
In came a pyramid-shaped customer with a bowler hat and a small suitcase. "Excuse me," the robot said. "I have a rather large order that needs to be taken care of." He paused and looked at Dexter. "May I go ahead?"



“Absolutely!” Dexter replied, still staring outside the window. “I’m just looking around.”

“Thank you,” the robot said as he reached into his suitcase and and unfolded a large piece of paper. “Now I assume this can be done in three to four days,” he said, handing the paper over to the potion shop owner.

Francis looked at the order and droplets of oil began to run down the side of his face. Written in green ink, spanning at least fifty rows, was a list of items in messy handwriting.



“Two hundred jars of apple snider? What in bot’s name do you need that much for?” Francis’s eyes widened as he looked down the rest of the list: at least one of everything in the shop.

“I’m not supposed to disclose this information, but for context,” he said, looking around to see where Dexter was, “there’s a new cooking show coming soon, and we need to provide ingredients to the contestants.”

“Two *hundred* jars?” Francis repeated. “You really have that many contestants?”

The customer leaned in. “Listen,” he said. “You and I both know these potions last a long time. We’ll need these to last through a few seasons of the show.” He paused. “I pay up front, you get the order out in four days, and everyone’s happy.”

The robot reached into his suitcase again and dropped a large bag of coins onto the wooden counter. “If you cannot accept the order,” he said, “these coins are going elsewhere. To a potion shop out of town.”

Francis looked at the bag of coins and back at the customer. Then back at the bag again, then down at the floor.

“Five, four, three, two…” The customer started counting. He paused and looked at the potion shop owner, who was nervously tapping the counter. “Let’s start from the top again, shall we? *Five, four, three, two…*”

Francis slammed his fist on the table. “Okay, I’ll do it,” he said. “Just… stop it with the counting.”

The customer smirked. “Good,” he said. “Now before I forget, here’s another.” He pulled another bag of cash out of the suitcase and set it on the table while the potion shop owner started to shake. “And another.”

He set the third bag down on the counter. “Surely a little extra payment will be of some motivation,” the customer said, a blank expression on his face. “I expect nothing less than quality from Roboville’s only potion shop.”

“Now, given that my work here is done, I’ll be leaving,” the customer said. “And don’t forget, the shipping address is at the bottom of the list.” Francis looked back briefly as the customer adjusted his bowler hat and headed towards the front door.

“Have a good rest of the day!” Dexter said and the customer tipped his hat and stepped outside. “Hey Francis, when did you buy this?” The delivery bot pointed to a graphic of a giant playing card next to the fridge. It was four of hearts card that sat inside a polished wooden frame.

The potion shop owner was still looking through the list, his hands shaking. Knowing that time was limited, he rushed over to some storage boxes behind the counter and shifted them around to read the labels. “Where is Flooberry?” Francis asked himself.

“Is everything okay over there?” Dexter said.

The potion shop owner looked over his shoulders briefly. “Yes,” Francis said as he hauled the Flooberry smoothie box from out of the corner. “Fifteen of these and we’re making progress.”

Finley started playing elevator music as Francis shuffled through boxes and Dexter continued to wander around the potion shop. The delivery bot had extra time to look around given that he’d completed his first delivery over thirty minutes early.

Dexter traveled over to the stove where the apple snider was boiling. “Oh?” he said, observing the orange liquid. “That’s a lot of snider.”

He looked closely at the cauldrons. “How long has this been left unattended?” Dexter examined the front for a button to turn the stove off, but found nothing. He then rolled to the side of the stove, where he found a giant green button labeled “off.”

“Aha!” He carefully pressed the button and, seconds later, the fire was gone.

Click, click, click. The stove began making noise and Dexter looked at it, confused.

Francis’s head shot up from beneath the counter on the other side of the room as soon as he heard the stove. “Wait,” he said. “Did you just… turn it off?” The potion shop owner’s eyes widened in horror.

The clicking noises increased in frequency as Dexter inched away from it. “I-is there something wrong?” he asked as a frozen Francis’s eyes were fixed on the stove.

Finley began to shake and the checkered tiles of the potion shop started to shift. The building lights began to flicker and then *boom*! A mini explosion immediately consumed the stove and cauldrons, leaving nothing but a pitiful pile of ashes behind.

Francis flinched as he remembered the tiny fire god’s warning: *Destroy my host form, and you will be met with a curse.*

The potion shop interior was still moving and Dexter fell backwards, hitting one of the walls and leaving a large dent near the storage closet.

Finally, Finley stopped moving as a deep voice echoed through the building. “Did I not warn you about tampering with my host form?” the voice asked. “Francis L. Lovelace, short owner of Finley Potions, you have chosen to disregard my rules!” the voice said. “As such, you shall be cursed!”

Dexter shook his head and looked up to the ceiling. “It was my fault,” he said. “I’m sorry for upsetting you, ambiguous power from the skies.”

“*Ambiguous*?” the voice boomed. “I am none other than Blaze, the great fire god who has granted *all* of you selfish robots the power to use and manipulate fire! And now… Francis, you shall forever suffer the consequences of your careless actions. I shall deem this the curse of apple snider; no longer will you be allowed to touch apple snider without it becoming a pile of ash!”

“Then why can’t I just get someone else to do it for-“

“SILENCE!” Blaze shouted. “Hear me now, mortals; any attempts to bring apple snider onto the premises will immediately turn into ash, and I shall extend this to your home as well.”

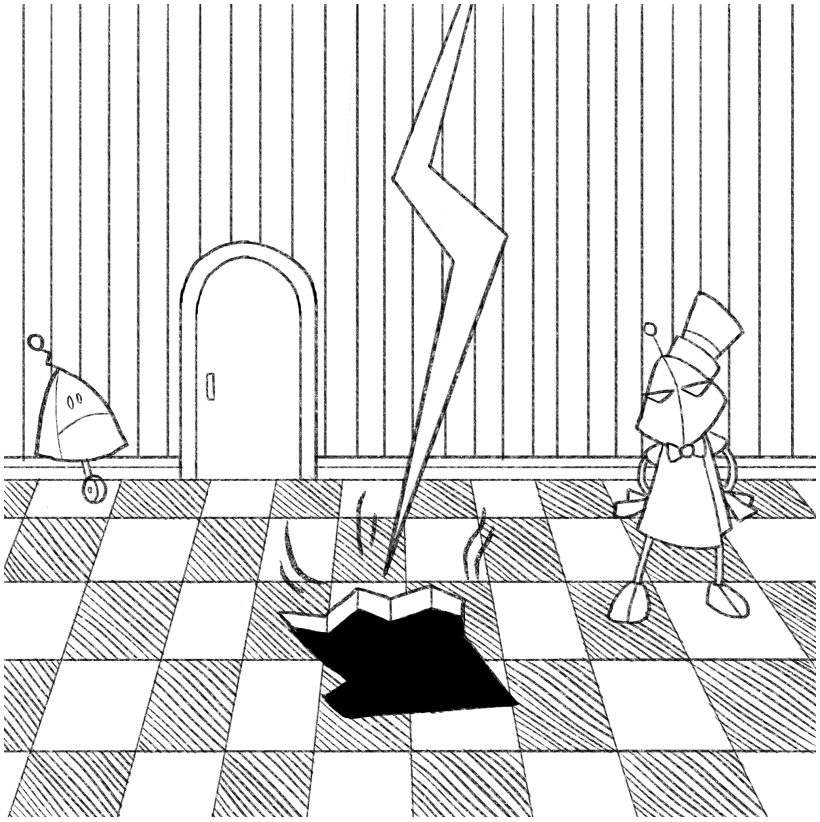
“So why *can’t* I get someone else to do all that?” Francis paused. “And then sell it online for a small prof-“

“ENOUGH!”

“Not a very good curse if you ask me. If I were in your position, I’d probably be fired by now.”

Just then, a lightning bolt blasted through the roof of the potion shop, leaving a gaping hole through the ceiling and through the center of the checkered floor. “Now, you minuscule robot, is there anything else you would like to add?” Blaze asked.

Francis breathed and Blaze sent another lightning bolt through the ceiling.



“Hey!” the potion shop owner said. “That wasn’t even a comment.”

“Aren’t you a god of fire?” Dexter started. “Since when was lightning also a power of yours?”

And, surely enough, one more lightning bolt struck the potion shop. It was now a half-baked building with three holes right through the center of the floor.

Francis signaled for Dexter to stop before he opened his mouth for another question.

“And now,” Blaze said, “my work here is complete.” With a poof of noise through the speakers, the potion shop was now enveloped in silence and the smell of burnt wood.

“Damn it,” Francis muttered. “Now that my last batch of apple snider is gone, guess I have no other option at this point.”

Dexter picked up his delivery bag from the floor and headed towards the front counter. “What do you mean?” he asked.

“I’m about to fill two hundred jars with water and dye it the color of apple snider,” Francis said. “Four day delivery guaranteed.” He smirked.

Dexter tilted his head. “But Francis, don’t you think someone will notice eventually?”

Francis stared at the spot where the stove once was. “Who cares? It’s for reality TV,” he said.

“You could get sued!” Dexter replied. “Why don’t you just order apple snider from that potion shop five miles out of town? I can deliver it!”

“If that isn’t peak deception,” Francis scoffed. He scratched his head and looked at the bags of cash he’d been given earlier. “On second thought, maybe I will take up that offer.”

Dexter nodded. “Well, let me know what you decide. I should have some time tomorrow to go out of town and then deliver it the next day.”

“Hold on,” said Francis. “How about this? If you can get the jars tomorrow, deliver it the next day and show me proof of delivery, I’ll pay you back in front of Bee’s Bakery this weekend.”

“Of course!” Dexter said. “And one more thing… I’m really sorry for ruining the order,” he said, looking down at the ground. “I’ll make sure to get the delivery out as soon as possible; it’s the only way I can make up for all the damage.” He frowned.

“All right then… now that that’s settled and my floor and ceiling have giant holes, I’ll be closing up shop early today.”

“Okay,” Dexter said. “Once again, I’m very sorry for causing trouble and I hope that Finley will be okay.”

The building lights shut off in response.

“Finley’s in a bad mood,” the potion shop owner said. “You’d better leave before he kicks you out.” The floor tiles started to rattle again.

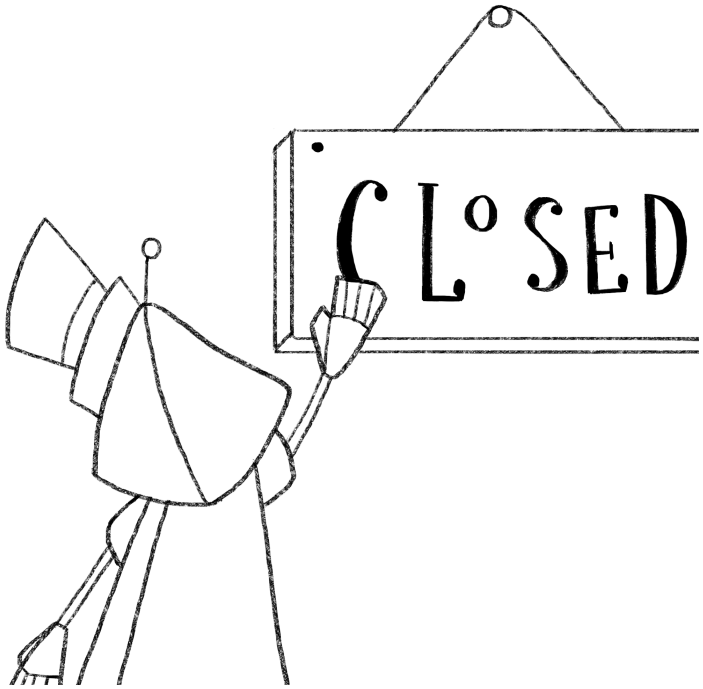
Dexter nodded and left the store to be greeted by the grassy hill on top of which Finley Potions sat. The sun was still shining brightly outside as the Vitamin Sea shimmered near Francis’s potion shop. Dexter looked back at the building with a smile and then traveled down the hill, back into the main part of town.

Finley shut front door quickly and the lights slowly came back on.

“It’s been a rough day for you, Finley,” said Francis, looking up at the ceiling. “Let’s take care of this mess now.”

He grabbed a ladder from the storage closet along with six giant purple bandages. Each bandage had a repairing potion formula specifically tailored to care for any damage done to Finley’s interior.

Francis set down all six bandages within five minutes, three on the ceiling and three on the floor. He then shoved the ladder back into the storage closet, and walked outside to change the opening sign to “closed.”



It wouldn't be long before Finley was back to normal and potion shop operations would resume as usual.

Francis then opened the front windows halfway and grabbed a pillow from under the counter. He put his head down on the pillow and fell asleep as Finley played jazz through the building speakers.

-

It was two days after Blaze had paid the potion shop a visit. The pyramid-shaped robot who had ordered from Finley potions opened the front door to his house and noticed a large cardboard box sitting outside. "What the…" he said, looking at the box's label. "What's this doing here?"

He double checked the label to confirm that it was meant for him. "Huh," he said, and carried the box inside. The robot set it down on the floor and opened it carefully.

Inside the box was a large beige poster covering the other contents of the package. In dark, bold letters was the name of a store from which the delivery had come. "Autumn Tree Potions," the robot said, his eyes widening. He removed the poster and found rows. Rows and rows of apple snider in small jars.

"I didn't order apple snider from Autumn Tree… unless…" The robot slowly closed the box and blinked twice. He then picked up his phone, dialing for Francis's potion shop.

"Yes, excuse me," he said. "Is this Francis?"

"Indeed it is," the voice said. "How may I help you today?"

"You may help me get a refund," the robot replied. "I want my money back for the order from two days ago."

"Oho?" Francis said. "Is there something wrong? I'm working on packaging the grape flavored potions right now."

"You think you're subtle, huh? Nice job sending over a box of apple snider specifically from Autumn Tree Potions."

"Eh?"

“Listen, you,” the robot said. “Don’t make me come back there.”

“O-okay,” said Francis. “No worries, my friend! There seems to have been a bit of a misunderstanding and I’ll have Dexter send it over-“

The customer hung up.

-

Francis immediately picked up his phone and dialed for the delivery bot. “Dexter!” he said. “I need help delivering a small sum of money,”

“Where to?” Dexter asked. Francis told him the address and for a few seconds, there was nothing but silence. “It’s a refund, isn’t it?”

“Maybe.”

-

After a net loss and the curse of a fire god, Francis spent the following week working extra hours. Finley, stressed from recent events, played nothing but sad violin music through shop speakers while customers were ordering.

And so business was back to normal… with one exception: apple snider was no longer for sale.