

# Make-believe

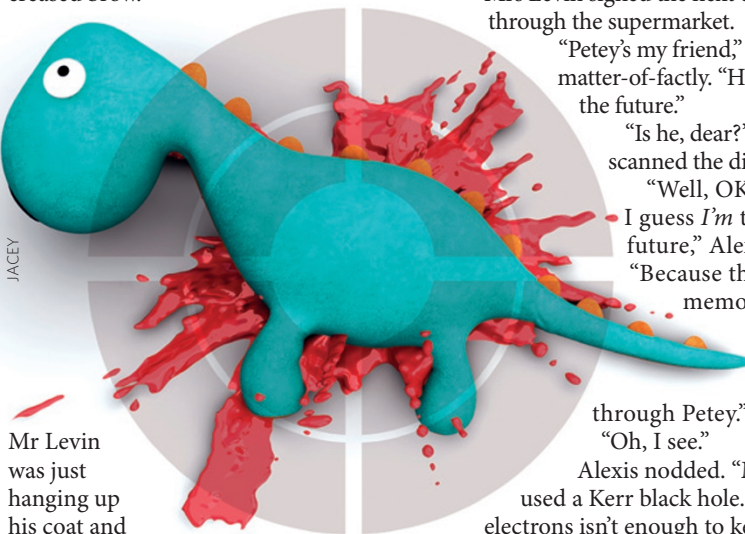
## Interactive lessons.

**M**rs Levin was in the kitchen, stirring the lentils, when little Alexis, his Interactive Learning dinosaur Petey in hand, came up and hugged her knees. “I love you, Mum.”

It was the kind of moment that made all the nappies and late nights worth it, so of course Mrs Levin turned and hugged him back. “I love you too, Alexis.” But it was also a moment that came in the middle of fixing dinner, so of course she added: “Be a dear and set the table, will you?”

Alexis hugged her just a little tighter, and then let go. “Of course, Mum,” he said, smiling up at her with little tears in his eyes.

Alexis trotted off to the dining room, Petey dangling by his side, and for a moment Mrs Levin stood in the kitchen, the soup forgotten, staring after him with a creased brow.



Mr Levin was just hanging up his coat and brushing the snow off his trousers when little Alexis (and Petey) ran into the entryway. “Dad!” He cried, leaping into his astonished father’s arms. “You’re back!”

“Alexis!” cried Mr Levin, hugging his son back. “How’s my little man?”

Alexis ignored the question. “I love you, Dad.”

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Unable to quite repress a start, Mr Levin looked questioningly at his wife, standing in the door of the hallway.

*Do I need to punish him for something?* He mouthed.

She shook her head, studying their son with equal puzzlement.

During supper, the odd questions began.

“How was work, Dad?”

There was a shocked silence before Mr Levin laid down his fork. “Alexis,” he said kindly. “You know I can’t talk about my work.”

“Right. Sorry, Dad.”

But after supper they continued. “Dad, what do you think about your co-workers? Dad, did you ever want to work someplace else? Dad, who are you working for now?” Finally, Mr Levin had to tell his son, sharply, to stop asking questions.

“Why are you still carrying that toy around?” Mrs Levin sighed the next day, as they walked through the supermarket.

“Petey’s my friend,” Alexis answered, matter-of-factly. “He’s telling me the future.”

“Is he, dear?” Mrs Levin scanned the different cake mixes.

“Well, OK, technically, I guess I’m telling me the future,” Alexis continued.

“Because they’re my memories, you see. Coming from the future. They just need to go

through Petey.”

“Oh, I see.”

Alexis nodded. “My future self used a Kerr black hole. The ring of electrons isn’t enough to keep a person from being crushed, but you can still send your memories, mapped as electrostatic impulses, back in time. But of course, you need to have something to send it to. That’s where Petey comes in.” He looked at his robotic dinosaur adoringly. “My future self sent the information to his Internet connection to ensure I would have it.” Glancing up at his mother, Alexis noted: “My future self is really smart, Mummy.”

“I’m sure he is, dear,” Mrs Levin picked a box off the shelf and dropped it in the cart.

“I’m worried about Alexis,” Mr Levin frowned, later that night.

“Did I tell you what he said at the supermarket?” Mrs Levin asked, looking up from her computer.

“Never mind the supermarket, you should have heard him in here 15 minutes ago,” Mr Levin snapped. “Constant questions about what I was doing and if anything weird had happened at work and maybe I shouldn’t be working so hard.”

“You do work awfully hard, dear,”

Mrs Levin ventured to point out.

“That’s not the point!” Mr Levin snapped.

“Why is he asking about my job? He knows I’m not allowed to talk about it! It’s dangerous, especially now when...” He stopped himself just in time. “He shouldn’t be talking, Maria.”

“I’ll speak to him about it tomorrow,”

Mrs Levin promised.

“C’mon, Mum, please? Can’t we go out tonight? To McDonalds or a movie or something?”

Mrs Levin sighed and turned on her son. “Alexis Jacob Levin, for the last time, no! Why don’t you go wait in the hall? Your father called 15 minutes ago; his work’s all finished. He’ll be here any minute.”

“What? No!” Alexis’ eyes were wide and frightened. “He needs to work late tonight, I told him to work late!”

“Alexis, what is wrong with you!? This family has too few dinners together as it is!”

“I know,” Alexis’ eyes were full of tears. “I know, but...”

From the entryway, there was the sound of the door swinging open. “I’m home!” She heard her husband call.

Suddenly, the pop of gunfire cracked the air. Mrs Levin saw, with horrifying clarity, her husband stumbling into the kitchen, red blossoming across his white shirt. She saw the suits behind him. Screaming, she grabbed Alexis and whirled around to protect him...

More shots. A sharp pain in her chest, and a strange wetness in her cough. Her legs turned to jelly, and she collapsed on top of Alexis.

And as her vision wore away to black, she saw Alexis’s anguished eyes. “I love you, Mum.” She heard him whisper. “I’ll save you next time...”

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