

Self-Driving Nightmare



Evan Jacobs

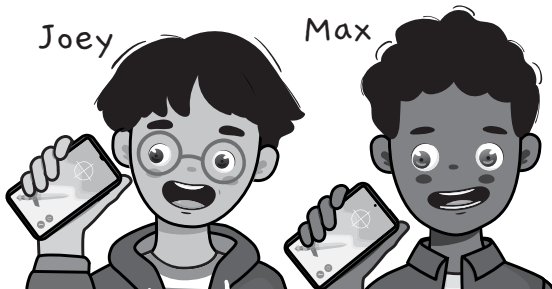
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TECH FUN

Joey Tran stared at his phone. “I just need to find Dark Warrior. Then I can start again.”

“He’ll be out next week,” Max reminded his best friend. “Too bad you have to wait.”

Both boys walked around in front of Joey’s house. They were playing an augmented reality game on their phones.



Dark Warrior was the name of the game. He was the main character too. Finding him was how to win. Then the game would start again.



Joey lived with his dad. Anne was Joey's aunt. She often came over to help out. Mr. Tran and Joey loved having her there.

Anne came outside. "You two never go anywhere. All you do is walk around here. Maybe you would run laps in P.E. if it was for a video game."

Anne knew the boys hated P.E. class. But she wished they exercised more.

Joey replied to her joke. “Of course we would run for a video game. Then there would be a reason.”

“Yeah,” Max agreed. “I’d run for a game like this.”



Anne laughed. “Okay. If you say so. I’d love to see that.” She went back into the house.

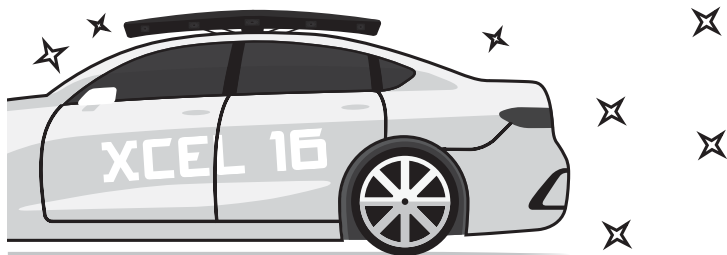
“Should we walk up the sidewalk?” Max asked. “I need more characters.”

“Up the sidewalk?” Joey whined. “That’s so far. Let’s just stay in front of my house. My legs hurt. We did too much in P.E. today.”

“Yeah.” Max rubbed his thighs. “Mine hurt too.”

Soon Joey’s dad pulled up. He was home from work. But his car was different. Instead of his black BMW, it was a white sedan.

Joey and Max thought the car was cool. A black circle covered the roof. Around it were small panels. They looked like cameras. “XCEL 16” was on the side of the car. It was printed in silver.



Something else was very odd. Joey’s dad sat in the passenger’s seat. No one was in the driver’s seat.



Mr. Tran rolled down his window. “What’s up, boys?”

Joey’s friends thought his dad was cool. Technology was fun to Mr. Tran. He always had something new. Joey loved that.

“Dad! Is that a driverless car?” Joey couldn’t believe it. “How’d you get it?”

Wow! There’s no driver!



Mr. Tran smiled. “Newton let me borrow this one. No one has to be in the driver’s seat. The car lets me ride safely as a passenger.”

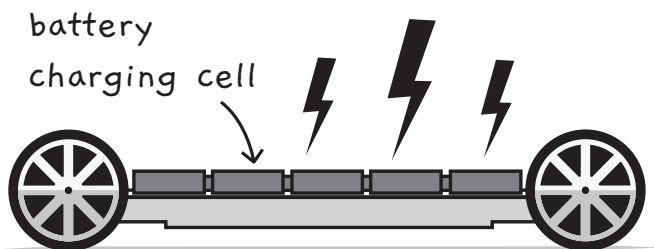
Joey’s dad worked at Newton. It was a popular tech company.

“I’m testing out the software. You boys want a ride?” Joey’s dad opened the doors from inside.

The two friends shouted at the same time. “Yeah!”

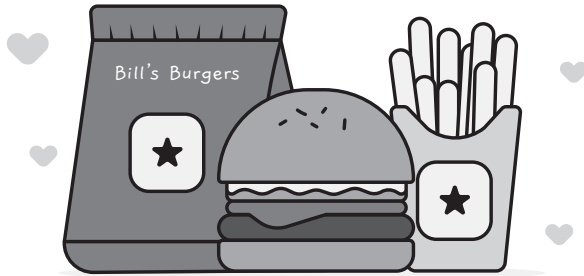
Mr. Tran moved behind the wheel. Joey was the front passenger. Max got in the backseat.

“XCEL 16 has a special charging cell. It’s powered by the sun,” Mr. Tran said.



He spoke their destination next. A voice came from the car. It repeated the location. Then XCEL 16 started driving. They were headed to Ford Plaza.

“Are we going to Bill’s Burgers?” Joey asked. It was at the plaza. He and Max loved that place.



“Sure,” Mr. Tran said. He liked it too.

“Can we talk to the car more?” Max asked. “Like have a whole conversation?”

Mr. Tran laughed. “No. Not yet. It’s not smart enough to chat with us. But it will be one day.”

XCEL 16 passed cars smoothly. It was not too slow or fast. That made Joey curious. “Does it know the speed limit? How is it not too close to other cars?”



His dad seemed excited. “This car has special cameras and sensors. They read traffic signs and speed limits. XCEL 16 even senses traffic light colors. It knows safe distances between itself and other objects too. I can’t wait to present this car in Japan.”



“Oh yeah,” Joey said. “You’re going there tomorrow.”

Mr. Tran traveled a lot for business. Sometimes Joey went with him. But he had to stay home this time. He couldn’t miss that much school.

At first, Joey had been sad about not going. But now he was just happy for his dad. XCEL 16 was amazing.

