

## Champions League Challengers – Day 6

*'Hey what does this do?'*

*'NO!, Whatever you do, don't touch THAT!'* replied Alex, jumping over the sofa to where Freddy was picking up the object.

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Freddy pulled his hand away from the device and took a quick step backwards.

*'Sorry, shouldn't have left it there'*, said Alex hastily, *'actually there are a few things in here that you shouldn't touch'*. He picked up the device and it emitted a short beep. But it was what he did with it next that caused Freddy's mouth to drop wide open in disbelief.

Alex placed the device on the corner of a glass shelf which ran along the length of one wall. He held it there for a second or two.

Gradually, the wall started to glow. Freddy stepped a couple more paces backwards, as an enormous screen filled the wall space. The glow gave way to a brighter light as the screen warmed up.

*What is this? A computer? Some kind of huge TV? The latest in computer games consoles?* thought Freddy to himself.

*'I know what you're thinking'*, said Alex casually, and it crossed Freddy's mind for a moment that perhaps he actually did.

*'It's just a big TV really, but it has a few useful features'*. Alex looked down at the handset. It looked like a remote control, but didn't appear to have any buttons. Alex seemed to be prodding it, stroking it, pushing it.

*'Doh!'* went the TV with a loud booming bass sound. Homer Simpson's yellow face filled the entire wall.

*'So, you can watch TV, then?'* said Freddy staring at what was the most amazingly massive TV he had ever seen.

Alex fiddled some more with the remote.

*'Yes, but that's not really what we use it for'*, said Alex, turning to look at Jan, who was standing, her arms folded, in the doorway. She looked concerned.

*'He's OK, he's one of us'*, said Alex, looking at Jan and motioning his hand towards Freddy.

*'So, you've got the latest satellite technology built in, look...'*

The screen filled with green and the markings of a football pitch could be clearly seen. Their football pitch!

*'So, you've got a picture of our training ground on your TV? So?'* said Freddy, trying to sound casual.

*'No, not a picture...video...in real time...look'.*

Alex pressed something and a faint circle appeared on the screen, with two lines crossing through the middle. Alex pressed again and the image zoomed in closer. About half the pitch now filled the screen. A small figure was kicking a ball around. Alex zoomed again. Michael's features were clearly visible as he practiced. He flipped the ball up and caught it.

*'Michael? You've got video of us on your TV?'*

*'Real-time. Look he's heading across the pitch. Coming our way'.*

*'But...why?'*

*'Look at this. I just put in the coordinates of Springhurst, New York, USA. More kids playing football...or soccer as they call it over there'.*

The image changed and a group of children playing football could be clearly seen. On the edge of the image were various numbers and words, apparently indicating that they were looking at a match three thousand miles away. Freddy just stared.

*'Look at this'*, said Alex, warming to the task of showing Freddy around. He rolled up his sleeve.

*'What?'* said Freddy, seeing nothing unusual on Alex's arm.

*'Minimicronanochip'*, said Alex, pointing at a small square shaped lump on his arm, *'implanted. Watch!'*

Alex pressed his arm. The TV went off.

Alex pressed his arm again. Homer Simpson appeared.

Alex ran into the wall, arm first. Homer said *'Doh!'*

Alex came over and shook hands with Freddy. Immediately, Homer faded away, and Michael could be seen trudging across the park.

Alex gripped his forearm with his other hand and held it there.

The lights in the room went off.

Alex shouted at his arm, *'Arm, ON!'*

The lights came on.

Freddy sat down on the sofa.

A dog barked.

Freddy got up.

A cat went *'miaow'*.

The two animals strolled casually into the room.

*'Meet Pinky and Perky'* said Alex.

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Freddy's head was bursting with questions. He knew friends with video games, he knew friends with computer games, but stuff like this? It was like something out of a science fiction book.

*'But...but...why do you have all this stuff?'*

*'OK, let me explain...can you keep a secret?'*

*'Well, yes...of course I can'.*

*'No, I mean really keep a secret, not just a 'well yes maybe' kind of secret. I mean a matter of life, and perhaps... of death'.*

Freddy gulped. He thought he'd just gone round for tea to cheer up his mate. This had turned into something quite different.

*'Erm...yes....definitely...no problem'.*

*'OK, sit down'.*

Freddy sat down as he was told.

*'You see, it's like this',* began Alex, *'you've probably heard that my father was...'*

The doorbell rang.

Freddy's nervousness at hearing the story he was about to be told contrasted with a certain relief that the story was going to be interrupted. Alex went to the door.

*'Oh hi, Michael, I was expecting you. How's things?'*

*'Hi, just wondered if you guys wanted to go up the park for a kickaround?'*

*'I won't thanks, got a few things to do, but I bet Freddy will come with you'.*

*'Er, yes',* said Freddy, looking at Alex, half-thinking that the story may now never be told. He picked up his bag and headed for the door with Michael.

They walked out of the house, Freddy's head buzzing with the new information about his friend.

*'OK, see you tomorrow for the Derby game!'*, he turned and called out to Alex.

But the door had already shut.

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