

“Hey, guys, there’s one important thing you must remember: it’s only on the track that the winner is the one who goes fastest. At your age, it is more important to know how to brake than to push on the accelerator!” said Bob. As soon as Steve joins his three fellow adventurers, Peter tells him about Bob’s strange phrase. “Ah, but it’s very clear!” comments the reporter. “Bob simply means that you guys want to go fast right away, in other words, to do too many things before the time is right, before you are old enough. While, we must never forget to brake, that is, to think about safety.”

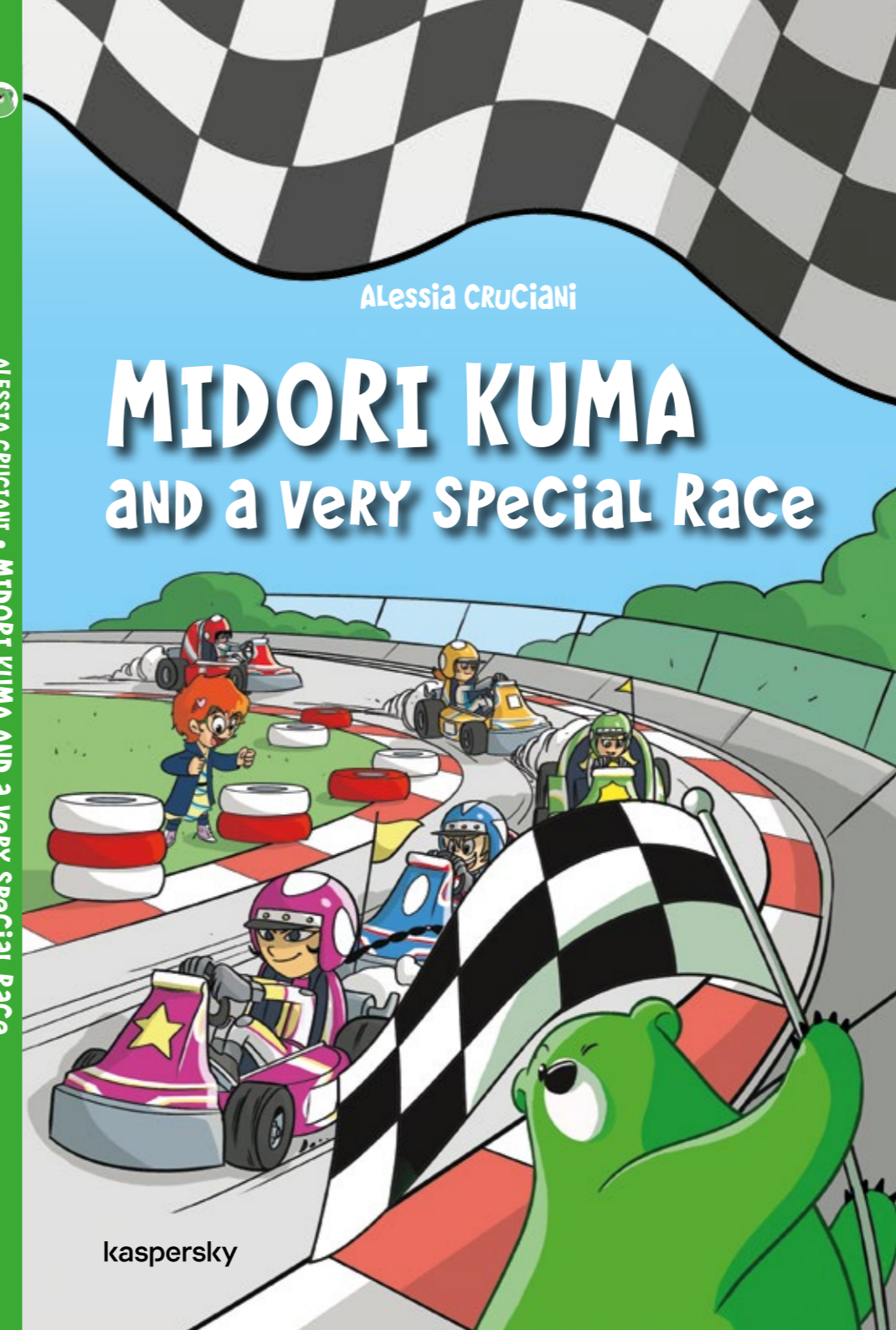
Alessia Cruciani lives in Milan, Italy. As a journalist, she has worked at La Gazzetta dello Sport and now she writes for Il Corriere della Sera. She is also a well known children’s books author.

**MIDORI KUMA is a REALLY SPECIAL BEAR:
He’s CURIOUS, GENTLE AND VERY WISE.
AND TOGETHER WITH HIS FRIENDS LOLA AND PETER, He’s ALWAYS
READY FOR AN ADVENTURE... ARE YOU READY TO GO WITH HIM?**

When her dad comes home from work **Lola**, with her red hair and plenty of energy, immediately understands that something big is going on... in fact **Steve**, who is a journalist, is planning to take her, along with her cousin **Peter** and their faithful companion **MIDORI KUMA**, to discover the secrets of a go-kart circuit. Lola can’t wait to record everything on her cousin’s super-powerful smartphone... But she very soon realizes that on the track, not everything is hunky-dory among the young drivers. In the end, Midori Kuma and the very nice mechanic **BOB** will have to explain to Lola and Peter that not only things on four wheels, but also technology have to be handled with great care!



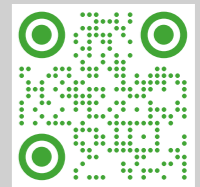
ALESSIA CRUCIANI • MIDORI KUMA AND A VERY SPECIAL RACE



Kaspersky is a world-leading cybersecurity company with over 20 years’ experience and 400 million global users.

Our mission is to build a safer world. We believe in a tomorrow where technology improves all our lives, and that’s precisely why we make it more secure.

We never stop innovating to keep people and businesses safe, and we’re focused on helping everybody use their connected devices safely, starting with the very youngest. That’s why we’ve created this story: to educate kids about online safety in a fun way.



kaspersky

Realized by Grandi & Associati, Milano

Graphic design, layout and editing by Studio Noesis

Illustrated by Gianfranco Florio

Translated from Italian by Michael Cruickshank

© 2021 AO Kaspersky Lab.

kaspersky.com

Printed in Italy by Press Grafica S.R.L. – Gravellona Toce (VB)

Alessia CRUCIANI

MIDORI KUMA

AND a VERY sPeCial RaCe



kaspersky



Midori Kuma

A really special green bear. He's sweet and so nice, it's impossible not to love him.

Lola

Her red hair gives her a cheerful and carefree look. But she's also attentive and never misses a trick...



Peter

He is Lola's cousin. He is never without his latest generation smartphone and he's a real fan of new technology.

Steve

Lola's dad and also a journalist. When he has to go away for work, he takes his daughter and nephew with him.



Olivia

A budding go-kart driver who, thanks to her determination, always reaches first at the finish line.



Max

An outstanding driver who has recently become argumentative with everyone. What's come over him?



Daniel

Kind and generous, he drives his go-kart carefully and is a real ace of the track.



Bob

He is Olivia's mechanic and also the wise and understanding grandfather that everyone would like to have.





A HIGH SPEED ADVENTURE



Something special was about to happen. Lola could tell from her dad's expression when he came home from work.

The little girl tried to guess if maybe he was hiding a gift somewhere: she was sure that a surprise was coming because Steve always gives himself away in the end, even if he doesn't realize it. It's the look on his face that gives the game away: every time he wants to surprise his daughter with something nice, he tries to be serious, but he can't conceal a smile.

"Lola, go and pack your bags! Sports clothes, please," he says, collapsing onto the sofa next to her and grabbing the TV remote control from her. It's not that he wants to spite her, he just wants to be sure that he has her full attention. But it's not necessary, the curiosity is already killing her.





MIDORI KUMA AND A VERY SPECIAL RACE

Seen from behind, father and daughter are almost indistinguishable: both with their curly red hair.

“How long are we going for?” Lola asks, adjusting her green spectacles. She loves them because her mother chose them because they look like the eyes of a cat, with the tips pointing upwards. And on her face, which is full of freckles, they look great.

“This time it’s a full speed ahead adventure, all three days of this long weekend. And we will not be alone,” Steve says, really enjoying his daughter’s growing curiosity.





“Who else is coming, dad? And what does ‘full speed ahead’ mean?”

“Well, we absolutely must bring your cousin too, he would never forgive me if we didn’t.”

“Wow! I haven’t seen Peter for ages... Who knows how long his hair has grown! He told me he doesn’t want to cut it anymore. Of course, if I had a mobile phone like the one they gave him for his birthday, we could exchange messages and make video calls every day...” Lola added. She may just have turned eight, but she is already really smart!

But Steve doesn’t fall into the trap. For months his daughter has been asking for a mobile phone so that she can chat with her friends and make dancing videos. But her parents have told her that she is still too young and that almost all children use them without even being old enough to set up a social profile. Not even her cousin Peter, who received an amazing smartphone with four cameras for his 10th birthday.

“You can always call him with my phone,” Steve says, handing her his mobile phone. “Come on Lola, tell him we’re coming to pick him up, his mum knows all about it. I’ll explain everything in the car.”

The little girl is so excited at the idea of leaving





for three days with her favorite cousin that this time she decides not to insist with her request for a smartphone of her own. But Steve knows that it is only a truce: Lola never misses an excuse, because almost all her friends have one while she is only allowed to use her parents' tablet (only when they don't need it). Just in the last year she tried asking for her birthday, every time she got good mark at school, and even when a tooth fell out! But nothing, Steve and his wife Anne wouldn't budge.

Of course, the first piece of "luggage" that Lola takes is Midori Kuma, a very special furry green bear from Japan. Satisfied, Midori Kuma immediately begins to scratch his belly, the gesture he makes every time he is happy: obviously he wants to go with her!





When, on the other hand, he is nervous, worried or angry, he scratches the back of his head. For Lola it wasn't difficult to interpret his gestures: in fact, they always come with the incredible expressiveness of the bear's eyes, which seem almost able to speak. And that's not all. Midori Kuma can walk, even if he usually prefers to jump. This green bear turned out to be super nice, sweet but also strong and protective, wise without ever being boring. In short, Lola, and the rest of her family, can no longer live without him! Lola's parents even have the feeling that he can protect her from anything.

Just as he was right then, in the car, as they headed for Peter's house. Lola asks her dad if they can have pizza with fries on for dinner, but Steve isn't convinced, as it could make her stomach ache, just like the week before, after an excessive feast of chocolate and lemon ice cream. A rather risky combination.

"It wasn't chocolate and lemon, Dad! It was licorice and lemon," Lola points out.

Midori Kuma widens his eyes and scratches his head, as if to say that those two flavors together are a bound to lead to a stomach ache, just like fries on pizza. And then he pretends to lift food to Lola's





mouth with his paw: it is his way of comforting her when she asks for something that is a bit too much. He offers her invisible food that will do no harm.

“Thanks chef!” the little girl says, stroking him tenderly. “I really feel like I can taste the fries mixed with tomato and mozzarella!” Pleased with himself, Midori Kuma scratches his belly again.

“Still with this invisible food thing? Are you on a diet?” exclaims Peter getting into the car and giving everyone a high five with his right hand (while in his left he holds on tightly to his new smartphone, which he never lets go of). His dark hair has visibly grown but, above all, it’s a bit untidy.



“At least invisible food doesn’t do anyone any harm. There are other things that seem invisible but can create serious problems,” Steve replies, staring at Peter’s new phone.

“What do you mean?” Lola asks, ruffling her cousin’s hair even more.





“That not everything that seems invisible is actually invisible. Sometimes something can be dangerous even if you don’t know what it looks like. But, with a little attention, we can avoid stomach aches,” her dad replies.

Lola and Peter look puzzled and look at each other to see if at least one of them has understood the meaning of those strange words.

“At the right time I’ll explain what I mean,” Steve teases them.

“What a lot of mysteries today,” says Lola. “Dad, can you tell us what’s happening this weekend? Where are we going... to an invisible place?”

“You’re right Lola, don’t worry, I’ll explain everything.”

Steve is a journalist, and he has been given a new assignment: to go to a kart track, which is smaller than a Formula 1 circuit, where an important children’s race is scheduled. The young champions will drive karts, small vehicles that are a first step for anyone who wants to become a professional driver. Steve will have to interview the protagonists of the competition and find out about their dreams for the future.

The competition is spread out over three days:





Friday is for testing, when the young talents can go to the track to study the circuit and understand how to do the laps in the shortest time possible. The qualifying rounds take place on Saturday, when each driver has to try to be faster than the others in order to start from the front. Sunday is race day.

“Peter, check the Internet for a photo of a *karp*, so I can see what they’re like,” orders Lola, who had no idea that kids could race on a track.

“Not *karp*, but kart!” her father corrects her.

In a few seconds Peter finds a photo online: “Here they are, look at how the drivers are sitting: their bottoms are practically on the tarmac!” he explains, incredibly excited at the idea of going to visit a real circuit. He always watches the car racing on TV.

After answering a number of questions and setting out a long series of things to do and not to do in order not to be a nuisance to the people working at the track, Steve looked in the rear-view mirror and noticed that his passengers had fallen asleep.

No sooner had Steve entered the track area with the car, than Lola, Peter and Midori Kuma opened their eyes, almost as if they had heard an alarm go off. In fact, the noise from the track was very loud.





The three friends kept their faces glued to the car window. They were bursting to get out of the car and rush to find out what the funny little cars could do. But what fascinated them most was the whole environment, the kids dressed like the Formula 1 champions, with helmets that made them look more like aliens: giant heads on small bodies. And then the circuit itself, with all its curves, the tyres along the edges of the track and, above all, the sensation of witnessing something different and extraordinary.





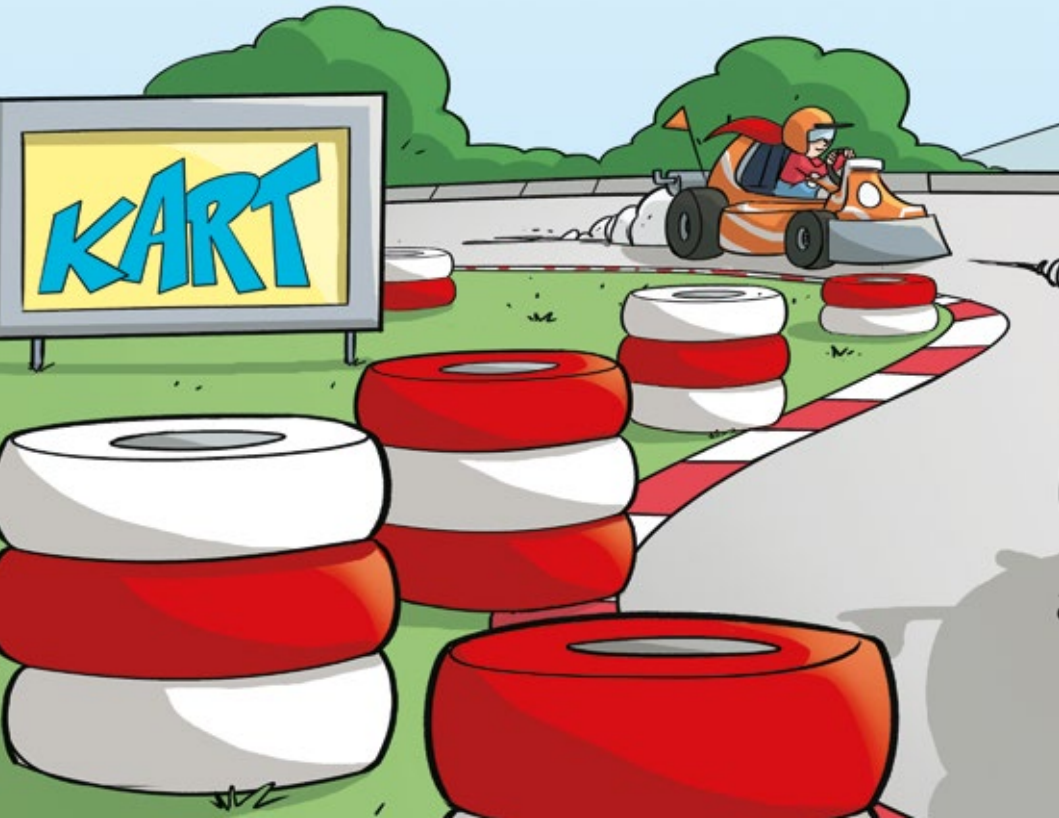
MIDORI KUMA AND A VERY SPECIAL RACE

“Do you have to take an exam to drive the *gart*?” Lola asks.

“They are called karts!” This time it’s Peter who corrects her, laughing.

“You need a license for the races, which is a kind of driving license. Otherwise, all you need is the necessary protection, and you can rent the karts for a few laps,” Steve explained.

Curious as always, Lola starts firing off a series of questions: “What are all those tyres doing on the





edge of the track? Do you have to wear a helmet? How do you go fast? Aren't they afraid? Daddy can you buy me a pilot suit to go to Mars?"

Steve and Peter burst out laughing while Midori Kuma scratches his belly. Lola just can't get the word "kart" right. But they are all convinced of two things: the first is that by Sunday she will have learnt this new term. And the second is that, as well as the mobile phone, she will want to be able to drive a kart too. And she is not the only one.



Oi, NO PUSHING



Peter is fascinated to see kids of his own age behind the wheel. “They look like adults... Firstly because of the way they drive, but also because with their helmets on, it’s impossible to tell who is who!” he says enthusiastically. The karting world has already won him over and he wants to share the excitement with his classmates immediately. With one of the

four cameras on his smartphone,

he starts taking pictures of the kids on the track and even recording some videos. Then, in a flash, he shares everything on social media.

“Wow, your super gear is really powerful.





Are you sure you know how to drive it?” an elderly gentleman asks as he passes by smiling at him under his long white moustache. He doesn’t even wait for Peter’s answer and walks off towards a driver who is slowly leaving the track to park his kart.

“Was he talking to me?” Peter asks aloud.

“It sounded like it,” Lola answered. “He said you have some sort of gear...”

“But what gear! I wish I did have one like those to have a go on the track!” her cousin replied.

Midori Kuma, once again, started scratching his belly.

“Maybe he thought you were a driver, one who drives a very fast *trak*,” Lola tries to guess, and once again makes Peter laugh.

“Lola, it’s kart!” he reminds her.

“For sure he understood that you like to do things quickly, like when you finish your homework in just five minutes,” Lola joked.

“Nooo! I’m much quicker when I have to escape when the bell rings at school,” says Peter, smiling and still holding his new phone in his hand. He never lets anyone touch it but keeps it with him so that he doesn’t forget it somewhere: the smartphone costs an arm and a leg and is an object of great value. He





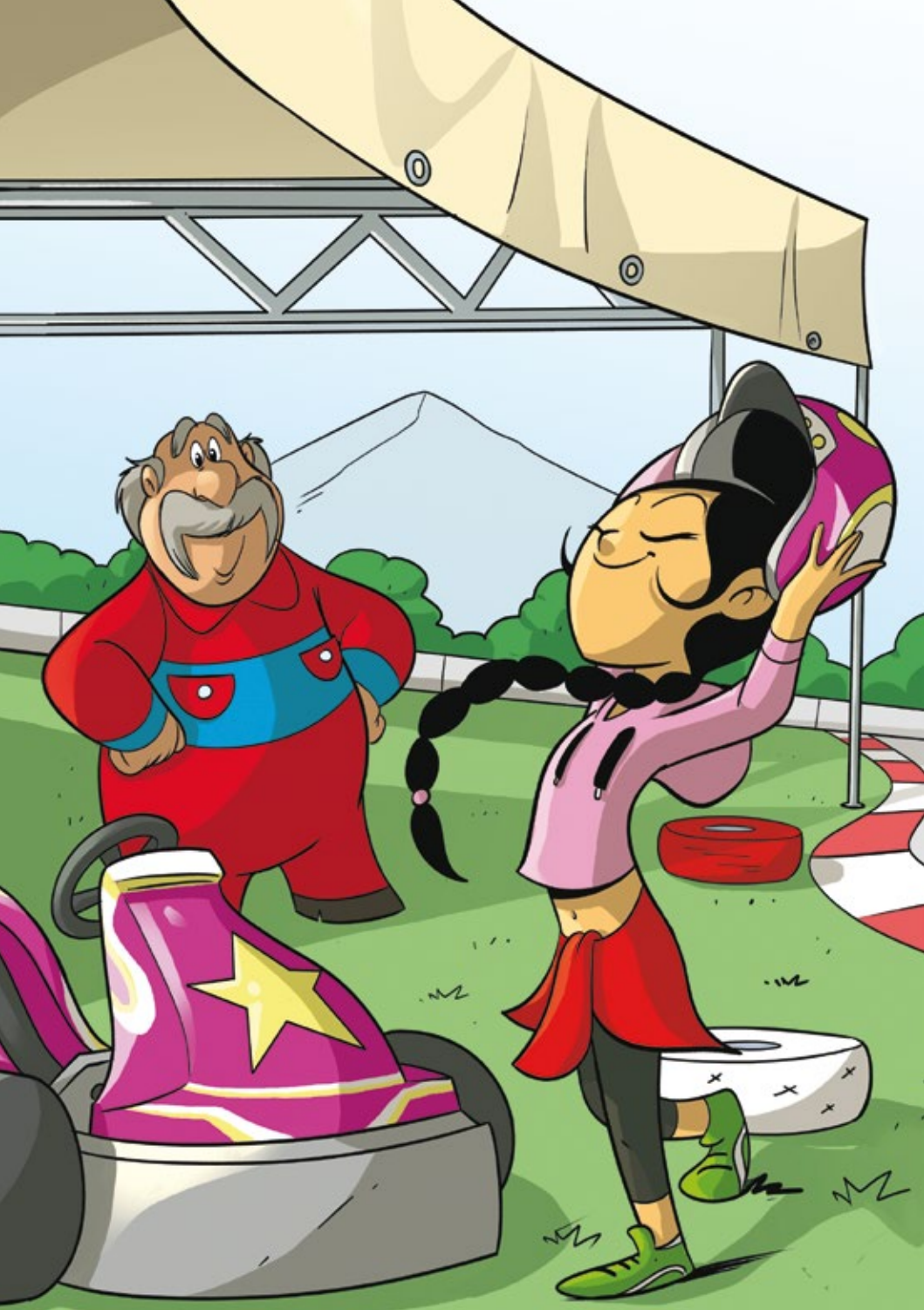
can't afford to lose or damage it. His parents would never buy him another one as good as that again.

"Hey, look there!" Lola exclaims. The driver who just came off the track, and whose kart the moustached guy from before is taking care of, is not a boy... it's a girl! And very pretty too. She has big almond eyes and a long brunette braid that she tucks into her helmet. The moustache just called her "Olivia".

Lola, Peter and Midori Kuma approach eager to find out more and hear her say: "Well done, Bob, you are the best mechanic in the world! Thanks to your tweaks, this kart is even faster. Did you see how I managed to keep the other drivers behind me? On Sunday they will all eat my dust!"

Lola is over the moon: even a girl can become a driver! What super-mega-ultra-fantastic news! She didn't know it was possible, and now she wants to try it for herself even more. She also wants the overalls and helmet. But before putting on a helmet, she wants to customize it with her favorite colors, just like the young champions on the track, each in their own way. And she also wants a... well, she can't remember what they're called, but she's dying to get on those strange little cars and learn how to







drive them. She looks for Steve, but who knows where her father has gone. When he's working, he can be pretty elusive and right now he'll be doing his interviews somewhere or other.

However, her thoughts are suddenly interrupted by a strange commotion. From somewhere she can't quite identify, screams are heard that are so loud they almost match the sound of kart engines. What on earth is going on? There don't seem to have been any accidents on the track, some karts continue going round the circuit as before, while other drivers have come off the track for a break or to make some adjustments to their vehicle.

Lola, Peter and Midori Kuma head in the direction of the screams, as do Olivia and Bob.

It doesn't take long to figure out what the confusion was all about. Off the track, in an area reserved for one of the teams, there were a couple of children with very long faces. One was crying and holding on to his sore wrist, while the other just seemed very annoyed by the reproaches he was getting. As if it were all a waste of his time.

"He pushed me and knocked me to the ground. I slammed my hand on the kart and twisted my wrist. It really hurt," the former explains in a whimper.





“I barely touched you, and it was the third time I asked you to let me pass! I had to go to my mother’s car to get the mobile phone,” the other replied, angrily adjusting a tuft of dark hair that almost covers his eyes.

“Who are those two?” Lola asks Olivia.

“Their names are Daniel and Max, and they are teammates,” the nice brunette girl explains. “But recently Max has become quite nervous and even a bit aggressive. He seems like another person. Until a few months ago he was the nicest and kindest person in the world. As well as being the best on the track, practically unbeatable.”

“And is he not winning anymore?” Peter asks.

“That’s right, in the last few weeks he seems to be driving without using the accelerator, as if pushed by the wind... when there is a wind. You know what he reminds me of: a snail with a helmet!” Then, with a long sigh, Olivia adds: “Maybe he has some problems in his head...”

Midori Kuma probably thinks the same: while scratching the back of his head, his eyes turn sad.

“Obviously Max has a problem, and a big one too,” says Bob, who then runs to have a look at Daniel’s wrist. Lola runs after him because she’d







be really sorry if that young driver couldn't drive anymore... he's so cute that she had decided to cheer him on!

Meanwhile, Steve has also come back, and is now trying to reconstruct what happened by questioning some of the parents.

"We really don't know what is happening with Max. Until recently he would have gone out of his way to help his friends, on the track and off. He would often help out even the youngest drivers with their homeworks. And he was always the one to bring the ball for a kick around after the circuit tests" says one father. While another lady adds: "He dreamed of becoming a Formula 1 driver. And to reach his goal he had also become the best in his class, because his parents always told him that if he got bad marks at school, he would have to give up kart driving. So, he managed to be a champion both at school and on the track. He had a real passion".

"I'll tell you what happened," announces another man approaching disconsolately. It's Daniel's dad and he has just received an apology from Max's mother for her son's behavior. "She was really mortified but also worried, she says that in the





last few weeks she has been having a hard time controlling her son's temper. He only calms down when he is in front of a video game console or when he's using his smartphone to watch videos and chat with friends. But as soon as they tell him he has to stop playing with all these devices and study, or simply join the family at the table for meals, he reacts badly and stops talking to them."

"Goodness, that's really bad," Steve murmurs softly to Lola and Peter. Midori Kuma's eyes also look really worried. The two cousins, however, can't understand why such fun things, like video games or mobile phones, can transform a person in such a way.

"And that's not all," Daniel's dad continues. "Max's mum is also worried because her son says he is no longer interested in being a driver. While until recently, for him, there was nothing but karts and cars. She just can't explain how her son's passion could have died out so quickly... On the rare occasions when he talks about himself, Max has told her that he has new friends, much nicer than the ones he goes to school with or at the kart tracks."

"I really want to see if there are better friends





than us... For me it's impossible," says Olivia, a little offended by this last statement.

Daniel's dad adds: "Poor woman, I was really sorry to see her so anxious about her son who now only seems to talk about virtual friends. None of the family has ever met them and sometimes they even suspect that he's making it all up."

"They should take away the video games and the mobile phone for a while," another parent suggests.

"That only makes things worse," says Daniel's dad. "Whenever they stop him from playing or chatting, Max throws himself on the bed and stares with wide eyes at the ceiling. Almost as if he'd seen a ghost. He even loses his appetite, and at times refuses to eat."

The parents of the young drivers continue on for a while commenting on the transformation of the former champion and together decide to try to find a solution to help him. Everyone is sorry to see such talent thrown away like this.

"New technologies, new problems. Unfortunately, sometimes unfamiliar too," Bob murmurs in a low voice.

Nobody seems to have heard the words of Olivia's wise mechanic, except Midori Kuma, who





MIDORI KUMA AND A VERY SPECIAL RACE

gives him one of his unmistakable winks and then gives him a high five. They understood each other. And they know that there is much more to come. The show has just begun.



A POCKET Gear



In fact, the show is great fun. Lola and Peter are captivated by what they see on the track: it's only the trial runs and the young drivers are just practicing to be able to do a fast lap tomorrow and memorizing the circuit for Sunday's race, but from their first contact with the track you can see how much each of them wants to be the best. They are young but determined, and they are all preparing for a single result: winning. And to reach the goal they all drive with great determination, sometimes even at the limits of the regulations.

Midori Kuma covers his eyes with his green paws whenever two karts seem to be too close.

"Look at those *karfs*, they're going to crash into each other!" Lola exclaims worried, pointing to two vehicles moving at great speed and practically glued to each other.





“Kart! It’s kart and not karf. There are only four letters, how can you not remember them?!” Peter laughs, not realizing that Lola now enjoys twisting the term just to make her cousin laugh! A moment later he wonders in amazement and admiration: “But how can they drive like that without colliding?”

“They scare me a little, but I’d really like to have a go!” Lola repeats, again and again. Before the weekend is over, she absolutely has to convince her dad to let her do a few laps. Meanwhile, she keeps a close eye on the exploits of two drivers in particular: the first is Daniel, and the second Olivia. She had decided to cheer for her too during the race. Not only because is she the only female on the track, but she also seemed very nice. Lola is convinced that she has met a new friend. “Of course, if I had my own smartphone, I could take pictures and show this amazing show to my classmates,” she murmurs. “Plus, they would also see how super-cute Daniel is...”

Peter, meanwhile, does nothing but take pictures of the drivers on the track. Then, using all the different filters that his smartphone’s special camera is equipped with, he arranges the images and immediately sends them to relatives, friends and





schoolmates. The photos are accompanied by funny comments, many in the style of comics. He can do this thanks to a fun app he downloaded just before leaving home. He almost feels like a professional photographer. Now he is even immortalizing Midori Kuma on the track and then has fun showing the bear how he can make him appear in another color: from green he transformed him into yellow and then into blue and finally a fluorescent pink.

The bear's eyes widen in terror and then he checks his body: for a moment he thought he really had changed color. Lola reassures him by giving him a kiss on the head and then, holding him tightly in her arms, asks her cousin if all three of them can take a selfie, so as not to forget this very special day.

As they are admiring how well the photo turned out and discussing which of their relatives they should send it to first, they hear Bob's voice again: "Hey, guys, there's one important thing you must remember: it's only on the track that the winner is the one who goes fastest. At your age, it is more important to know how to brake than to push on the accelerator!"

The three of them just stay there, silent, unable to comment and - to be honest - even to understand







what the moustachioed mechanic is saying, while Midori Kuma lifts up his paw and gives a super high five to Bob, who smiles, satisfied.

“I think I’ve got it: I think he is a Martian.” Lola is convinced of it, otherwise he wouldn’t say such weird things.

But Bob is not a Martian. At the moment he is simply a mechanic who is satisfied with his favorite driver: Olivia! The young girl had been confirmed as the fastest in the qualifying rounds.

As soon as Steve joins his three fellow adventurers, Peter tells him about Bob’s strange phrase. “Ah, but it’s very clear!” comments the reporter. “Bob simply means that you guys want to go fast right away, in other words, to do too many things before the time is right, before you are old enough. While, we must never forget to brake, that is, to think about safety.”

Peter and Lola look at each other, even more confused. But what’s happening, why does everyone in this place make such strange speeches? The two cousins don’t really understand what sort of dangers Steve and Bob are referring to or what they have to keep themselves safe from.

With these thoughts still in their minds, along





with Midori Kuma they follow Steve towards the car. They have to go back to the hotel so Lola's dad can start writing his article for the newspaper.

This time, however, it is Midori Kuma who blocks the group. He looks worried and is also scratching the back of his head. Something bad must have happened again.

So, they turn around, following the bear who is hopping as he leads them back towards the area where Daniel and Max's karts should be parked. Should be, because in reality Max's kart has ended up on top of Daniel's. And the two boys are once again quarrelling.

"He came in out of nowhere, without braking," a furious Daniel explains to Bob. "Luckily, I had already got off, otherwise I could have been injured. Look at what he's done: it looks like a double-decker kart!"

"Calm down Daniel, we'll give you a hand to get it off from there and check if the cars are OK," the mechanic tries to reassure him.

"I'm not calm at all! He hasn't even apologized; he doesn't care if it ruins my race. I don't want a teammate like that anymore," Daniel shouts,





holding back the tears. He is furious about the battered kart, but he is even more angry about Max's attitude, Max, who until a few weeks ago was one of his best friends.

Max's mum is trying to get him to apologize to Daniel, but her son has an absent, distracted look on his face. As if the fact that his kart was now parked on top of that of his teammate had nothing to do with him. Then, instead of apologizing, Max even starts shouting in a voice so full of anger that all off his friends just can't believe. "I don't care where my kart is, I don't care if Daniel can't race, I don't care about these circuits. Can't you understand? I'm sick of all this, sick of it!"

Max's mother no longer knows what to do or what to say. Forget Bob, it's now her son who seems to be the Martian! And he has still not finished letting out all his frustrations: "I'm not interested in becoming a driver anymore! I don't like kart racing anymore. I just want to stay in my room and play with my new friends. I want to be a good gamer like them". Then he bursts into tears and runs away, away from everyone, pursued by his mother.

"This is a sport where we are used to do everything in the name of speed and, just as







quickly, we can also exaggerate the competition. It's unbelievable to think this is Max, but it really is him," comments Olivia bitterly.

"In fact, he went too fast with the Internet and video games and didn't understand when it was time to slow down," Bob replies.

"But if you also always tell us to go fast!" the little champion says.





“No, Olivia, you know very well that the first thing I always say is to be careful.”

Peter and Lola listen thoughtfully. While Steve really has to take them away from the circuit now. He has to write his article, even if, unfortunately, it's not quite the good story he had imagined.



A sPeCial LiCense



“Hurry up, sleepy bones! We need to get a move on if we want to arrive in time for the qualifying rounds!”

The next morning Steve prods the kids, who move like snails still half asleep despite the alarm having gone off several times.





“But yesterday, didn’t you tell us to slow down, because we young people run too much and that’s dangerous?!” Lola answers rather cheekily.

The truth is that the previous night it was very late she and Peter fell asleep for two reasons: to start with they were over the moon to find themselves in neighboring beds and to be able to chat and be able to calmly look at all the photos taken at the circuit on Peter’s mobile phone and reflect on the excitement of their first day at a kart track. In front of the illuminated screen, the two cousins couldn’t stop making comments, which woke up poor Midori Kuma, who, unlike them, had immediately fallen into a deep sleep. The green bear then got up, came over to the kids and placed his front paws on their mouths, inviting them to be quiet and turn off the screen. Then he fell asleep peacefully. But only for a few minutes: for as soon as Lola and Peter let go another round of shrieking laughter, he jumped up again. But then the great thing about Midori Kuma is that he never gets angry.

After a hearty breakfast, during which Peter and Lola scoffed muffins, a jam tart, cereal with milk, croissants and even a ham sandwich, the group was ready to leave for the track again.





“Who do you think will do the fastest lap on the *trak* today?” asks Lola, who had decided to use the right letters but in the wrong order.

“Not Max, that’s for sure,” said Peter. An answer that puts everyone in a bad mood.

“So many strange things happened yesterday, who knows if today will be quieter?” Steve wondered.

“And who knows if that mechanic will mention my... super gear,” Peter comments thoughtfully.

“I think you should ask him what he meant,” Lola tells him, while Midori Kuma claps his hands, in approval of her proposal.

“I’m a little ashamed,” Peter admits timidly.

“Come on, in the end he seems a kind and caring man. You saw how nice he was with Olivia. I really hope she takes the pole position today and that tomorrow she and Daniel will win.”

“And who taught you the expression ‘pole position?’” joked Peter. “Your favorite driver, by any chance? Anyway, you do know that only one driver wins?” Cheerful again, Peter was also pleased that Lola had changed the subject. Because the idea of asking Bob for an explanation frightened him a little.

Once they were back at the track, however,





Midori Kuma forced him to ask the fateful question, as soon as they met the mechanic. Then again, kart tracks are small circuits and avoiding people is practically impossible. So, just as Bob was about to pass by him, the green bear gives a slight push to Peter, who, unable to keep his balance, almost bumps into the man.

“Hey, do you think it’s time for dances?” Bob jokes. And immediately adds: “Be careful not to trip, you could drop your super gear”.

At that point Peter has no choice:

“Excuse me, but what makes you think I have some sort of gear? I’m not a driver!”



“Oh no? And what do you call that?” Bob asks, pointing at Peter’s smartphone.

“But this is just a mobile phone,” the boy replies, amazed.

“Just a mobile phone! Is that what you think? With these





smartphones you have an incredibly powerful machine in your hand.”

“But why?” Lola then asks, surprised. The idea of having something powerful makes her want to have a smartphone of her own even more.

“Would you like to try driving a kart, little girl?” Bob asks.

“You bet!” Lola enthuses.

“Well, the mobile phone is a bit like karting: it allows you to have fun and excitement. It’s nice to receive a pleasant message from a friend, it’s useful to always be able to let your parents know where you are, it’s great to spend time with games you have downloaded. But there is more to it than that. For example, if you crash a kart, at most you hit the protective tyres that line the track. While if you ‘crash’ into something with a smartphone you risk not having any protection at all. With these phones you can post messages, share photos and videos, all at the speed of light. Very young people like you go online and can find anything, but there are many things you shouldn’t even be doing. Did you know that social media are prohibited until you are at least 13 years old? Instead, almost everyone chats and posts what they want, you





make new chums without ever having really met these ‘digital friends’. You don’t realize that there are so many people who can control what you do and write, without you even knowing it. Some say they are children and pretend to be your friends, but, in reality, they are not, and they could even harm you.”

Peter and Lola are amazed, this wasn’t what they were expecting to hear. It had never occurred to them that a mobile phone could be something dangerous.

“Look at Olivia, over there,” Bob resumes, pointing to the young girl he is tuning the kart for. “She is making a video next to her car and then posting it on her profile. But she’s only ten, she’s not supposed to have a social media profile. This, dear children, is above all the responsibility of parents who should pay the same attention as they would when giving a child a car for the first time. In that case they would make sure that he has a driver’s license and that he knows the rules of the road, so as to avoid getting into trouble. Do you know what I always tell kids?”

Peter and Lola shake their heads.

“I say that a driving license should also be required





for a mobile phone. Every boy or girl should pass a ‘driving’ test before they can use a smartphone. That way they would be obliged to learn all the most important rules long before facing this new road full of tricky intersections.”

“What a great idea!” exclaims Steve, who heard everything. “Indeed, perhaps it is the best thing I’ve heard since I arrived at this kart track. It could be the title of my article: ‘A special driving license’. How about that?”

“It looks as if Midori Kuma is convinced: your green bear is very smart,” comments Bob, pointing to the green friend who is clapping his paws to applaud both the mechanic and the journalist.





“And maybe then, parents would understand that they need to follow their kids even more when they are online,” adds Bob.

“So, let’s organize this ‘mobile driving exam’ then,” enthuses Lola. Who immediately thought that if she passes the test, maybe they’ll buy her a smartphone right away. Her parents, in fact, have several times said that she will not have one of her own until she is at least ten years old. But she’ll never be able to wait for other two years, that’s for sure!

“In fact, it could be a way to involve Max too, and make him want to have fun with real friends again, forgetting his virtual ones for a while,” reflects Bob.

“Of course, we should give it a try!” Steve insists.

Lola, Peter and Midori Kuma run to propose their test idea to Olivia, who gladly accepts. Whenever it comes to a challenge, that young girl is completely unable to contain her competitive spirit. She always wants to win, even when there is no need. She, after all, already has a smartphone and can use it as she wants. But anyway, she immediately goes to talk about it with Daniel who, in turn, talks to the other drivers. Only Max is missing.





“Don’t even think about it,” he replies, as soon as Olivia presents him with the idea. But this time he didn’t get angry. The boy seems rather tired, listless, almost asleep.

Olivia, who does not accept defeat of any kind, leaves him alone for the moment but promises to try again later, because now it’s time to get back on the track: the qualifying trials are about to begin.

Each driver will try to do a lap in the shortest time possible. This is how the starting order of the race is decided: in front of everyone, in pole position, the fastest driver will start, followed by all the others, up to the slowest, who obviously starts last. It’s called the starting grid and until a few weeks ago they all had to start from at least second place, because Max, as always, was first: much too fast for all the other competitors. Today, however, no one is surprised to find his name at the bottom of the timesheet and with a huge gap from the second to last.

After watching the kids drive for half an hour at most, Lola and Midori Kuma run to ask about the result and are delighted to discover that Olivia will start in pole position, while Daniel is in fourth place.

As they go back to tell Peter, who remained to take more photos, the bear stops Lola and starts







scratching his head, worried. Max and his mum are approaching, chatting animatedly. They both listen carefully, hoping that she will convince him to take the test.

“Why can’t we go now? I’m fed up being here,” the boy asks.

“Because you too have to take the test for your mobile phone license, it’s a great idea and you’ll see that it will be useful for you,” explains his mother sweetly.

“But I can’t, and I don’t care: I have an online appointment to play with my new friends and if I don’t top up my phone, I won’t be able to!”

“Darling, your dad and I think it would be better if you stay without your mobile phone and video games for a while. You seem to have had an indigestion.”

“What?!” Max asks, astonished. Then, after looking seriously at his mum’s face and realizing she’s not joking, he throws his helmet on the ground in anger and runs away.

Midori Kuma continues to scratch his head as his eyes turn sad.

“Come on, let’s go and tell the others that Max won’t take the test,” Lola murmurs in a low voice.



TAKING THE TEST



“When did you start *tark* racing?” asked Lola, happy to be able to spend some time with the nice Olivia.

“What are *tarks*?” asks the brunette driver, laughing. Lola explains the joke: that she had decided to invent as many kart-like words as possible. Peter and Midori Kuma look at each other in disbelief.

“I started when I was five,” Olivia begins. “My father is a huge car racing fan, but when he was young, he didn’t have the chance to try it and so he suggested that I could give it a try. I accepted immediately, no one should dare to think that there are things that girls cannot do! Anyway, it’s awesome; and I don’t want to stop at karts. On the contrary - what did you call them? - tarks! My dream is one day to race in Formula 1.”

“You are so cool!” Lola exclaims admiringly.

“You’re not bad yourself, shall we take a picture





together? Then I can post it on my social media and introduce you as my special new friend. Then, if you give me your number, I'll send it to you so you can have it too and put it on your profile."

"Wow, Olivia, that would be great. Only I don't have a smartphone yet."

"Really? What are you waiting for?" asks Olivia, amazed.

"My parents think it's too soon and I have to wait until I'm at least ten," Lola complains.

"What a pity!" comments Olivia. "Look at all the likes I get when I post a photo of a race. Even if I say so myself, my shots are really special, there are not many other girls in my school who can dance in a racing suit and with their own car. Watch this video: it looks like a boy is coming off the kart until I suddenly take my helmet off and you can see my long brunette hair. It's like a special effect!"

"How lucky you are..." sighs Lola, completely enchanted.

Midori Kuma shakes his head, worried, he'd like to distract his friend from these thoughts. But she seems hypnotized by Olivia who now has also had an idea about how to help her new friend.





“Lola, I’m a genius! Here’s what you could do: ask Peter to give you the password he uses, so you can use social media through his profile.”

Meanwhile, Steve, called back by the green bear, arrives just in time to hear the advice being given to his daughter. “Olivia, would you ever lend your toothbrush to a friend?” the reporter asks.

“Ugh, yuck! Of course not!”

“Right answer! Remember that you should treat your password like a toothbrush. It is strictly personal and should never be shared with anyone. If someone wants to play a trick on you, they could post strange or embarrassing words or photos on your profile. Then, proving that it wasn’t you could be very difficult.”

“Goodness, I hadn’t thought about that,” reflects Olivia.





But now, it's time for a snack. As per tradition, the drivers' parents bring drinks, sandwiches and sweets to offer to the kids at the end of the qualifying rounds. Off the track, in fact, the rivalry is over, and everyone can go back to being just children. This time, however, Bob announces that when they have finished the snack, he will do the test for the special license. The kids are all a bit restless: Daniel is worried because he thinks he'll also have to answer maths questions, so he immediately starts practising his times tables. He can never remember the 8th.

“Relax,” Bob reassures him laughing. “All you need to know to use a smartphone are the numbers from zero to nine.” Then he goes to the office of the kart track manager who, in the meantime, has found some little cards that he will transform into special licenses.

When the kids have gathered on the short straight of the track, Bob explains that





they will all start from the same row and whoever answers the questions in the best way will go up a position, until they form a new starting grid.

“Everyone ready?” asks the mechanic.

“Nooo!” the children answer, making fun of him.

“Right, let’s go! Here is the first question: when you play an online game and challenge an opponent you don’t know, can you tell him your name, where do you live, what school you go to?”



“No!” Daniel answers first.

“Because maybe it’s not a child and then whoever it is might come looking for me. And that could be dangerous.”

“Well, good boy!

The perfect answer!

Move up one position,” the mechanic tells him. Then he resumes: “Can you post photos or videos of other people without their permission?”

Silence. This time the





children don't know what to answer. So, Midori Kuma jumps around shaking his head.

“One point for the green bear, come forward!” Bob says, giving him a wink.

Midori Kuma looks around puzzled, he didn't realize he was also taking part in the test for the license but now that he has made such a good impression, he's got a taste for it and wants to continue.

Bob explains: “Posting photos or videos of other people without their consent is absolutely forbidden!” Then he continues: “Can you meet someone you know through a chat?”

“Yeah,” Lola replies, without even having listened properly to the question. But then, looking at her father's disappointed expression and Midori Kuma scratching his head, she realizes that she has “gone too fast” and “crashed” into a giant NO. The smartphone of her dreams moves away faster than a kart.

“Sorry Lola, you need to take a step back,” Bob tells her. He then adds: “It's always nice to have the opportunity to make friends, and a smartphone makes it easy to make new acquaintances, but you need to be very careful: there are bad people who hide behind false identities. So, don't forget”. Then





he immediately resumes: “How much time in a day can you spend playing video games or on a smartphone?”

“Three hours,” Olivia exaggerates.

“Two hours?” tries Peter.

“All day,” someone shouts, optimistically.

“Don’t exaggerate kids, at your age I’d say that one hour a day is more than enough,” says Bob. And he’s ready with a new question: “When you chat, can you write anything you want?”

“No, you have to pay attention to the words you use. Otherwise, you risk offending or hurting someone,” Daniel replies again.

“You really are a champion,” Bob tells him.

As Daniel advances to yet another position, the moustache restarts with the test: “Can I insult someone using social media knowing that I can remain anonymous?”

“It is not right, but I have heard that it is impossible to be discovered,” ventures Lola, not totally convinced.

“Only the first part of your answer is correct, so I won’t send you back a place yet,” Bob tells her. “There is no such thing as online anonymity: there are computer security experts who can track





down the author of insults and threats. So, if you get bad messages, don't worry. The culprit can be identified and stopped."

After a few more questions, and more or less correct answers, Daniel is the absolute winner, but Bob decides to give the license to everyone. Even to Midori Kuma, who assisted him during this special test.

"Kids, I hope you've learned to be more cautious. But there is another thing I want to ask you, given that we are here at a circuit: would you ever let people you don't know into your car?"

"Nooo!" Lola, Peter and all the others respond in unison.

"Very good, just as we wouldn't let strangers into our car, we shouldn't allow them into our lives and, above all, we shouldn't spend too much time in front of these screens. We all know that they are fantastic tools, they can even allow us to study and find out more about lots of things. But sometimes they can become dangerous and isolate us from the rest of the world. Look what happened to Max? If he had spent less time with his smartphone and video games, he wouldn't have lost his enthusiasm for things he has always loved."







Returning to the hotel, Lola, Peter and Midori Kuma proudly exchange their licenses, read the names on the card and comment on the most difficult questions. Until Peter asks: “Is it really because of too much time in front of a screen that Max has become so strange?”

“Remember when we talked about invisible food, and I told you that there are things that seem invisible but can really hurt?” Steve asks.

“Yes, uncle. You said it yesterday, while we were on our way here to the circuit.”

“Well, Peter, that’s what I meant. In Max’s head all those hours have become like an enormous cake, but it has made him fat to the point of becoming heavy, lazy, without the strength and energy to do anything else.”

“It’s as if he put the wrong fuel in his car and broke the engine,” Peter says.

At that moment, however, the boy’s mobile phone rings. It is a number he doesn’t recognise and immediately he’s not sure whether to answer. After all these warnings about dangerous strangers, he’s worried.

“Don’t worry, I’m here,” Steve reassures him.

“Hi, it’s Olivia! Can you put me on speakerphone





MIDORI KUMA AND A VERY SPECIAL RACE

so Lola can hear too?” the squeaky voice of the cheerful brunette made everyone smile again.

“What do you want to tell us?”

“I just wanted to confirm that I am a genius. I had a great idea and I’m planning an incredible surprise for tomorrow’s race. Prepare yourselves!” she announces, immediately hanging up so as not to reveal too much.

“Who knows what she has in mind?” Lola is already excited. Meanwhile, Midori Kuma is scratching his belly satisfied. He’s sure that something special is going to happen.



AN INCREDIBLE RACE



There had already been a first win. At dinner Lola had managed to eat the pizza and fries she wanted so much. And she didn't even have a stomach ache! But she had to give up on the dessert: that was the condition her dad established. Peter, on the other hand, after a plate of pasta, devoured a big bowl of ice cream: chocolate, hazelnut and a mountain of whipped cream, his favorite flavors. Midori Kuma, as usual, offered Lola an invisible dessert, so that her last dinner away from home would end on a sweet note.

Of course, at the table, there was only one topic of the evening: what will that little genius Olivia have invented for the race?

"In my opinion Bob has put a rocket in the engine of her *karl*, so she can start at full throttle, leaving the other drivers behind and winning the race," Lola said.





“But of course, in fact I’m certain that tomorrow we will see a *skrat* race, the famous space-propelled karts!” said her father, laughing.

“But no, what are you saying? Tomorrow there will be a large number of *kars* on the track,” added Peter.

There followed a number of other surprising hypotheses that might be organized by the genius Olivia. For Peter, for example, the little girl might have invited a great Formula 1 champion to the kart track. And immediately Lola chipped in with other fantasies: “The world champion will arrive and choose a driver to take away with him”.

“A kidnapping?” Steve joked.

But there was also talk of a new, unbeatable kart built in the night. It would be super powerful because it was actually two: the karts of Daniel and Max, which had ended up on top of each other and become one kart.

The truth was, however, that none of these imaginative hypotheses convinced them completely. In the meantime, Midori Kuma had listened to them all and in the end had made a gesture with his paws of someone inviting everyone to stay calm. In fact, whenever fantasy-



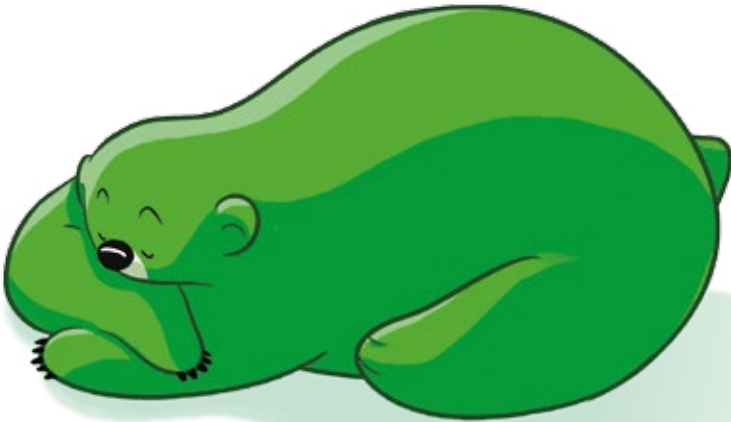


technological solutions were brought up, he just shook his head.

“Midori dear, do you know what we’re talking about?” Lola had asked him before falling asleep. And he had nodded yes, before making the gesture of touching first his heart, then that of Lola and Peter.

“What does that mean?” the girl asked yawning, absolutely exhausted.

“I think he wants to tell you that it’s a gesture of affection,” explained Steve, giving the kids a kiss on the forehead and Midori Kuma a caress. That latter, as usual, was already asleep!





MIDORI KUMA AND a vERY sPeCial RaCe

The next morning, however, when they arrived at the circuit, they didn't notice anything strange. It was a beautiful sunny Sunday, and the parents were chatting quietly among themselves, every now and then checking their children's karts. In short, the atmosphere was one of great calm. Not exactly the mood that Steve had been led to expect when interviewing the children's parents. In fact, the adults had admitted that they got much more nervous than the children who, being so young, did not get so





anxious about the competition. Despite constantly reminding the kids to face the race in the spirit of just having fun and trying to do their best, in reality all of the parents hope to see their child win and raise the cup on the top step of the podium.

The only ones who were actually quite tense were Max and his mum. From where Lola, Peter and Midori Kuma have chosen to watch the race, they could hear the former champion warning: “This is the last time I’m taking part. As I explained





last night to my dad on the phone, my career on four wheels is over.”

“Okay, as you very well know, no one wants to force you to do what you don’t want. Except studying. So just try to have fun and be nice to your friends.”

Max didn’t reply, put on his helmet and dragged his kart towards the track, without even returning Daniel’s greeting, who had again tried to patch things up with his teammate.

Steve sat next to the kids and was writing the last notes for his article when Midori Kuma suddenly closed his notebook, indicating for him to wait.

“Do you think the story I have to tell will be completely different?” the journalist asks him. And, in response, the bear scratches his belly with a relaxed expression.

In that instant, Olivia’s radiant smile appeared in front of them.

“Hi, are you ready to see a unique show this morning?” she asks them, with the mischievous expression of someone who is about to pull off a whopper.

“I’ve got it. You had a rocket put in your kart,” Lola says.





“What was that you said, have you finally learned to say the word ‘kart’? Obviously, you are now ready to drive one!” exclaimed Bob, who is helping Olivia to position her kart on the starting grid.

“Of course, I’m ready. I also have a license!” the girl replies, showing the card she had received the day before after the test.

All the drivers are lined up on the starting grid when a very tall and thin man stands at the side of the track next to the first kart and raises a flag. He is the race director and when he drops his arm, the cars can start. The noise of the engines is really loud right now, as everyone is getting ready to start as fast as possible.

Lola, Peter and Midori Kuma instinctively hold each other by the hand: they are very tense and excited, after all, it is their first race.

However, as soon as the man lowers the flag, the three first-time spectators are deeply disappointed. They all started very slowly. During rehearsals they had been much faster. What is going on?

“I know. Yesterday you told us not to go too fast with our smartphones and now they have decided







to adopt the same caution in the cars too,” Peter suggests.

Midori Kuma shakes his head and continues happily scratching his belly.

“Have you also noticed that those in the front are slower than those behind?” observes Lola.

In fact, Olivia and the other competitors who were fastest in the qualifying rounds now seem to have adopted a Sunday trip pace. In the rear, however, there is a little more movement. Taking advantage of the slow speed of his opponents is Max who, despite no longer being interested in the competition, can't do anything but overtake drivers who are going even slower than him. Some seem to be trying, with little conviction, to resist his attacks, but then move over to let him pass.

Steve opens his reporter's notebook and starts writing something. He has a suspicion and the behavior of the drivers' parents in the stands confirms it: instead of cheering on their children, they are all supporting Max, encouraging him to overtake the others.

“Did you see that?” Steve asks Midori Kuma, who this time nods his head, also with a very satisfied expression.





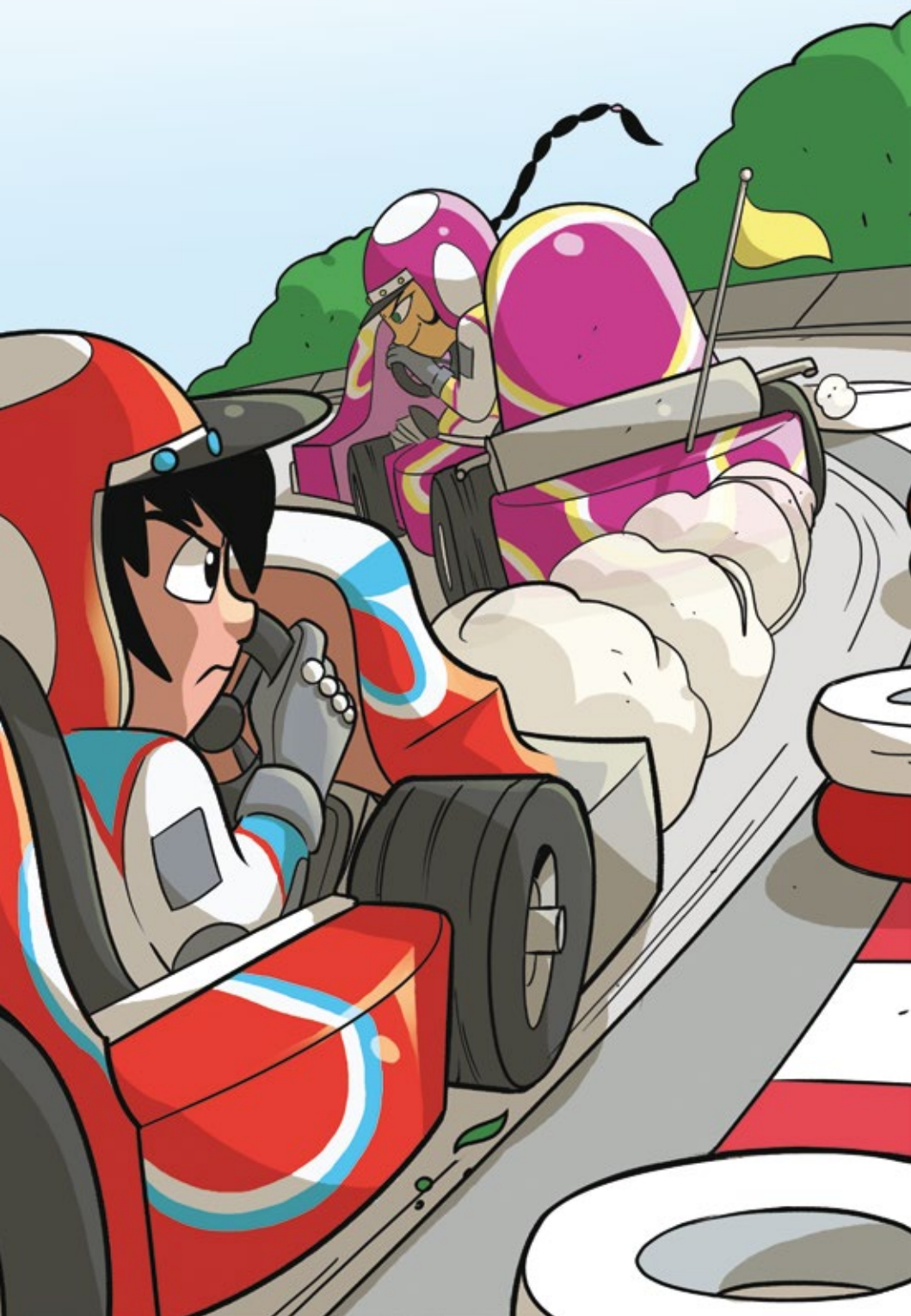
“See what?” Lola and Peter want to know.

“Just wait and see...”

After four laps of the track Max had gone from last to 10th: now he is in the middle of the group and the thought of being able to catch up with the others awakens in him emotions that were gone, but which are now giving him a lot of pleasure again. Max tries to drive as he used to, pushing the accelerator pedal to the maximum. The drivers immediately ahead of him notice what’s happening and this time, instead of going slowly on purpose, try to increase the speed of the race and create real duels. Except that Max has rediscovered the sensation of when he was an unbeatable champion and manages a series of spectacular and, at times, very close overtakings. Like one with Daniel, who tried to resist the attacks as long as possible, but then he is overtaken on the straight. After eight laps, Max is in third place and Olivia too can now see him in her mirror. The brunette understands that her plan has worked and, speaking inside the helmet, she congratulates herself. “You really are a genius, but now don’t give in without a fight!”

After another two laps Max is behind her and







tries in every way to overtake her. She resists doing a little zigzag with her kart to confuse him.

Lola's heart is beating very fast, and she's getting very excited. Especially seeing her friend engaged in such a gripping duel. "Come on Olivia, hold on!" she shouts, with all the breath she can muster.

Unfortunately, however, the encouragement is of little use because it was exactly at the fastest corner of the circuit that Max managed to overtake Olivia and take the lead. At the end of the last lap, along the straight where the race director waves a chequered flag, Max celebrates as he did in the old days. He is happy to have won again, this time he really enjoyed himself and suddenly rediscovered the pleasure of racing karts. In fact, after getting out of the car, he no longer wants to go home to play video games but wants to stay and enjoy the podium ceremony with the award, the applause and the cup.

As Max is receiving congratulations from the other drivers, visibly moved, his mother thanks everyone. Of course, she too understood what had happened. As Olivia explains to Lola and Peter. "My brilliant plan was this: I suggest to everyone else to go slowly on purpose and let Max overtake us, so as to make him gain position, and encourage





him to want to win again. Knowing his passion for driving, I had no doubt that he would remember how great it can feel to be in a good position. In fact, in the second part of the race nobody pretended anymore, and Max really won thanks to his skill!”

Max also suspected that the other drivers had set a trap for him. But what a beautiful trap! He is delighted to see that, despite his appalling behavior, his real friends did not give up on him. And he also realizes that it’s hard to feel such intense emotions in the virtual world.

“I preferred you when you were going slowly,” Olivia tells him with a wink. “That way, once in a while, I could win too!”

“Put your medal away, you deserve the cup today. You’re the champion of friends,” Max replies, handing her his trophy.

“How come these two kids got a license yesterday but are still without a kart?” Bob asks, pointing to Lola and Peter.

“It’s actually a serious oversight that needs to be put right immediately,” Steve replies.

“Then follow me everyone,” orders Bob, walking towards the track where three karts are parked.





“Can we really have a go?” Lola shouts excitedly.

“Wow, this is really something,” exclaims Peter incredulously.

“When you’ve put on your helmet and suit, however, leave me your super-fast smartphone. Otherwise, who will take your pictures while you drive like a champion?” says Bob.

“Give you my smartphone?! But we’ve only known each other for three days, I’m not sure that’s long enough to trust you with my phone!” Peter answers, pretending to be serious and worried.





“Good boy, I see you’ve learned your lesson!” Bob exclaims, bursting out laughing. But then he is immediately interrupted by Lola. “I don’t understand; why are there three karts on the track?”

“Did you want to leave him on foot? He wouldn’t want to miss all the fun,” Steve replies.

“Who?” the children insist, looking towards the track.

On the kart, with his helmet already fastened, it’s him: Midori Kuma, ready to set off, full speed ahead!



SPECIAL LICENSE

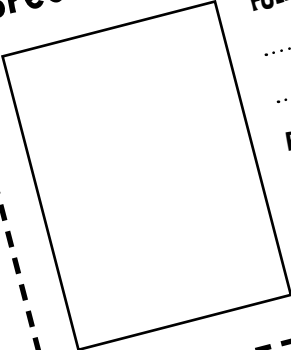
**HAVE YOU ANSWERED ALL OF BOB'S QUESTIONS?
MIDORI KUMA IS READY TO GIVE A SPECIAL LICENSE
TO YOU TOO!**

**MAKE A PHOTOCOPY OF THE LICENSE ON THE OPPOSITE
PAGE AND FILL IT IN.**



ADD YOUR DETAILS HERE!

SPeCial LiCense



FULL NAME

.....
.....

PLaCe AND DATE OF BIRTH

.....
.....

NATIONALITY

.....
.....

**ADD YOUR PHOTO OR
MAKE A PORTRAIT!**

