

“Are we there yet?” Young Orien asked, shouting out to his peripheral darkness. His world had gone completely blind as a big pair of calloused hands blocked his vision while simultaneously guiding him through this strange location.

“Almost.” His father Mateo teased, carefully holding his hands in front of his now 7-year-old son’s eyes. He was walking at a snail’s pace, almost as if his feet were aiming for every blade of artificial grass that coated their feet. After a while, he stopped. Little Orien stepped forward a bit too far and bumped his head into his father’s cupped hands. “Okay, now you can look.”

A blinding light came in and flashed Orien’s tiny pupils. They were in the go-kart racing park. This is nothing special, he’s been here at least a couple of times before, including his 6th birthday last year. But one thing was different about this place. It was completely empty. Orien looked left. No one. He looked right. Not a soul.

“There’s no one here.” Orien commented, looking up at the skylight, where some sunlight trickled into the place.

“Yep. Just the two of us.” Mateo announced proudly, jingling a key on his finger. “I pulled some strings, and now we have the place to ourselves. Happy birthday, champ.”

“Awesome! You’re going down!” Orien shouted, running across to the track. Two go-karts were already behind the starting line. One was a bright scarlet and was decorated with a fiery decal. The other was a cool cerulean with waves patterns hidden near the bottom and surrounding the tires. Orien hopped in the fire red car. Using his stubby little arms, he put on the seatbelt, making a loud CLACK as it fastened. Mateo walked behind the car and pulled the cord. The engine sputtered for a second before stopping.

“Me choca.” Mateo coughed out under his breath before giving the cord one more forceful yank. The engine roars, causing the whole go-kart to vibrate. Orien could feel his whole body being massaged by the soft leather of the car seat. Mateo walked over to the blue waves car, started the engine and eased his way into the small vehicle. He had to sit criss-cross in the go-kart for the small car to fit his large adult body. It felt like being jammed into a clown car. His back felt like his spine was going to burst out at any moment.

“Okay, let’s go already!” Orien shouted. It was like the fire from the car had possessed him. He pressed his little foot down on the square green pedal. Mateo cupped his hand over his mouth.

“Ladies and gentleman! Welcome to the second annual Father-son Grand Prix in Colorado Springs! Last year, Mateo Santiago beat his son Orien fair and square last year, no matter how much he cried about it! But can Orien finally step out of his papa’s shadow and come out on top as his own racer?! Let’s find out! One lap around the oval track!”

Orien faced forward, gripping the steering wheel and focusing on the road ahead. He looked over to Mateo, who was also in position.

“One... Two... Three!” Mateo calls out. At the sound of “One”, the stadium smelled of burning rubber as the two jetted off. The echoic roars of the engines bounced off the walls of the enclosed arena. Orien saw his dad was at least ahead of him by a whole oval corner of the track. Mateo looked back.

“Hurry up if you wanna catch up with me!” Mateo teased. Orien had to get serious. Slamming down harder, Orien felt the wind caressing his skin, enveloping him in air like saran wrap. His hair flutters in the wind. Right when Orien gets parallel to him, Mateo edges up just a slight bit closer. They’re about to turn to the second corner of the oval, right before the finish

line. He and his dad were completely parallel to each other, only gaining inches in distance. They zipped past the finish line, slamming on breaks. Orien looked behind. Mateo stopped right before the finish line

“I won! I won!” Orien cheered, pumping his fist in the air. “Papa! I did it! I did it!”

“You sure did. You’re my little champ.” Mateo laughs. He unbuckled Orien and picked him up, swinging him around in his arms.

“The champion of the 1994 Father-son Grand Prix is Orien Santiago! And for winning first place, he gets... this!” He announced, rubbing his hand all over Orien’s head. Orien was laughing like a banshee, giggling in a rapid fire manner. His tan face turned red and tears began staining his eyes from laughter. Watching the joy on his son’s face, Mateo is content with himself. Of course a 7-year-old couldn’t beat a professional racer, he was holding himself way back. But seeing the confidence and pride on his son’s face, we would risk all the back and join pain again just to see it once again.