

The

Acronis

CHRONICLES

Alexey Kavokin

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The Acronis Chronicles is an engaging fiction story about adventures of a young girl named Acronis and her brother, a pilot in racing sports. In the book, Acronis encounters a mystery related to the misfortunes of her brother's racing teams. Her ambitious sleuthing helps authorities capture an international criminal.

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Chapter 1

“Eleven-year-old girls don’t wear such silly pigtails,” said Mum firmly.

“Well, first of all, I’m not eleven yet,” answered Acronis, “and secondly, what’s silly about them? If you mean I look silly with pigtails, so what? I like them, so let people think I’m silly.”

She walked out of Mum’s study and went looking for Dad. She found him in the kitchen.

“When are we setting off?” asked Acronis.

“Very soon, sunshine,” replied Dad, who had just taken a package of French cheese out of the fridge and was about to make a sandwich.

“Do we really have to go to this awful race?” sighed Acronis. “Why don’t we go to the waterpark or catch some Pokemon instead?”

“You know it is a big day today,” he reminded her. “Your brother starts third. I wouldn’t be surprised if Balena Azzurra scores a podium finish today.”

“Then let’s go, Dad! Stop eating,” said Acronis, snatching the sandwich away from him and heading for the door. He broke off a corner of a chocolate bar left on the table and followed her outside.

An hour later they found themselves stuck in traffic on the 56th exit along the A6 motorway to Côte d’Azur. Cars were crawling under the roof of the tollbooth while drivers dropped coins into baskets, shoved their cards into the machines and sighed with relief when the toll barrier was finally lifted, opening the way ahead to the Principality of Monaco.

“Do you know where to go?” she asked Dad, when they were finally on the streets of Monte Carlo.

“Sure, but it is all closed off today,” he complained.

“No wonder,” nodded Acronis. “It’s because of the race. Well, stop at any car park and let’s walk!”

He pulled into a nearby parking area, slightly scraping the rear bumper against a concrete pole.

“We have an hour and a half to spare,” he said, looking at his watch. “Are you hungry, sunshine?”

“Not even a little bit,” Acronis said. “Let’s get to our suite... at least it won’t be so hot there!”

The day was warm as they moved along the pebbled pavement of the old city: Acronis first, Dad behind. The Garage Club suite for VIP guests, as luck would have it, was on the opposite side of the city from the car park. On the way, he gazed longingly at restaurants with terraces, while Acronis examined her own reflection in shop windows: a slim freckled girl with red pigtails – what a lovely sight! When they were only half a block from the suite, someone pulled both of her pigtails from behind, holding them tight. Acronis tried to turn around, but the stranger’s grasp did not let her turn her head. Then she kicked him with her left foot and called out to Dad:

“Is it Aeneas, Dad?”

“Yes, sunshine, it is. , Aeneas, dear,” Dad said smiling, “Why aren’t you in the box?”

“I popped out to get an ice cream!” explained Aeneas cheerfully. He was a handsome redheaded young man dressed in a black fire-resistant race suit with an emblem on the chest: a beautiful blue whale with a yellow sun in the background. “Have you seen Johnny? He said he’d meet me at the ice cream shop.”

Aeneas was Acronis’s brother and a famous Balena Azzurra racing driver. Johnny was his best friend. He also drove for Balena Azzurra.

“Who would ever eat ice cream before a race?” asked Dad in surprise. “What if you get a stomach ache?”

“Will you let me go, Aeneas?! You are a real pain in the neck!” cried Acronis. “I want an ice cream, too!”

“All right,” Dad said. “Let’s all go and get some ice cream. I will have a pistachio cone.”

“Excellent,” said Aeneas. “But I have to find Johnny. He wanted to tell me a terrible secret.”



BOX

A team's garage. A place where racing cars are kept during a race, as well as a storage room for the team's equipment.

At that moment Johnny appeared in the crowd: just as handsome and athletic as Aeneas, and wearing the same black racing suit with a blue whale on the chest. He was holding two waffle cones, each with two scoops of ice cream: one watermelon and one chocolate.

“Hey guys!” he greeted everyone. “Sorry, I didn’t know there’d be four of us: I only got two cones.”

“Not to worry, I’ll get two more!” exclaimed Dad as he hurried off to join the ice cream queue.

“I will have your watermelon scoop,” said Acronis to Aeneas. “And leave you the chocolate one.”

Aeneas shrugged. They sat down on a stone bench by a fountain.

“So...What was the secret you wanted to share with Aeneas, Johnny?” Acronis asked excitedly.

Johnny looked around to make sure no one was listening and whispered:

“A spy was caught in the parc fermé last night. He had a bottle of strawberry syrup.”

“No way!” exclaimed Aeneas. “How do you know that?”

“An assistant mechanic told me,” Johnny lowered his voice. “He thinks that the spy was going to pour the syrup into the fuel tanks of our racing cars. Very clever – there is nothing you can prove. Carrying a bottle of syrup isn’t an offence, is it? One can always say it’s for a fruit salad. There was really no reason to call the police, so they had to let him go.”

“Sugar water causes engine failure,” explained Aeneas to his sister.

“So someone wanted you to crash?” Acronis gasped. “If the spy is at large, he might try to cause you trouble again! Do you know what he looks like?”

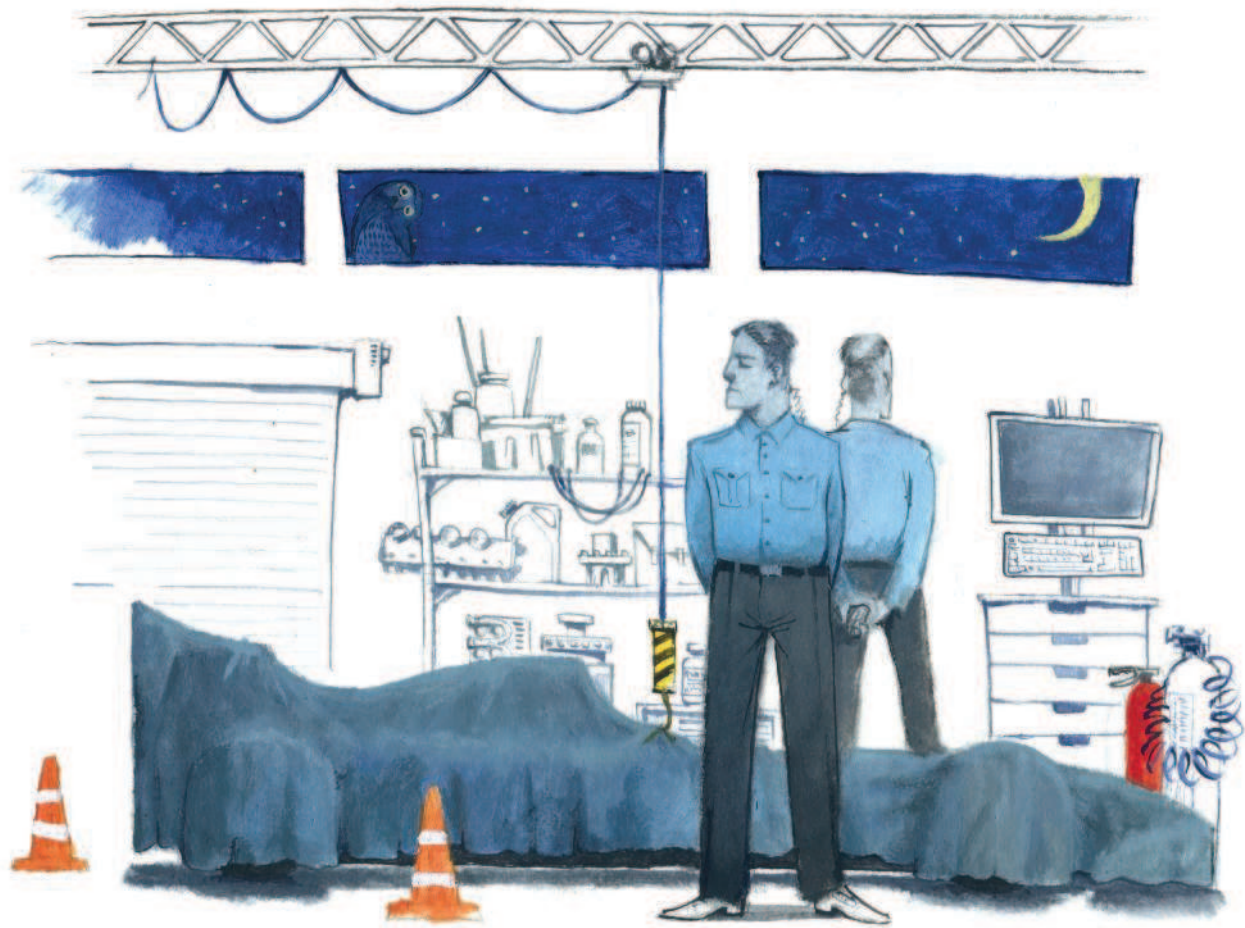
“No, but the mechanics swear they’d recognise him,” said Johnny.

“I see,” nodded Acronis. “You should be very careful today. If you notice anything strange, call security, the mechanics, the stewards – anyone. And I will take a walk around the Corvo Nero area as soon as we get to the suite. We’ll see who’s in there!”

“Do you think the spy works for Corvo Nero?” asked Aeneas. “But why?”

Acronis answered, “Because Corvo Nero will take the lead if you lose this race”

Dad came back with two ice creams, a watermelon cone for Acronis and a pistachio one for himself.



PARC FERMÉ

A secured area at a race circuit where racing cars are stored at night between qualifying runs and the race.

“Give my ice cream to Aeneas, Dad” said Acronis, “I had his scoop of watermelon, and it's time we get to the suite and Johnny and Aeneas head for the box. We'll talk after the race.”

The two drivers nodded, left the bench and headed for the police cordon that marked the restricted area where only the lucky few were allowed to entrance – race of Monaco participants. Acronis and Dad went in the opposite direction toward a sign that said “Garage Club”, where a crowd of onlookers and journalists had already gathered. Several sturdy ticket collectors guarded the entrance to the terrace, but Dad flashed the invitation cards, and he and Acronis entered the VIP suite. Acronis glanced at the signs: “Maranello”, “McGregor”, “Black Dog”, “Williamin”, “Ancor”, “Dolores”, “Balena Azzurra”, “Corvo Nero” – each stable had its own suite on the terrace. The Corvo Nero suite was on the right side, next to where cars are released from at the start of the race.

Acronis made sure that Dad got them two seats in the front row, before she went off to the Corvo Nero suite. She pretended to wander about to get a glimpse of the boxes out of curiosity. In reality, she was closely studying the guests. There were around twelve of them already: some elegantly dressed ladies, a couple of Japanese visitors, two journalists and some wealthy men who looked boring. Finally, a man in a white suit and sunglasses caught Acronis's attention. He was reading a newspaper and seemed oblivious to what was going on around him.

“He looks like a spy,” thought Acronis. She decided to keep an eye on him. In the meantime, a waiter approached the suspected spy, bowed and placed a glass with pink liquid in front of him.

“Your Campari and soda, Mr. Pellegrini,” Acronis heard him say.

Her observation was interrupted by another waiter, who bluntly asked her to take her seat in the Balena Azzurra suite. Acronis sniffed and went to join Dad.

“Dad, you have told me about the most famous criminal in the world once. What was his name again?” she asked.

He was happy to show off his knowledge:

“Don Corrado-Luigi Novarro, sunshine!” he answered. “He has been on the run for twenty five years. He has the blood of at least five dozen innocent people on his hands. In 1996 he placed a bomb in the Uffizi gallery and almost destroyed Botticelli's ‘Venus’...”

Seeing the pit-lane was opening, Acronis interrupted her father saying, “Look, Dad!”



A RACING CAR

A racing car is an open single-seat car. Its design and characteristics are subject to strict regulations. Each racing team builds its own cars, so that every year every team builds 7-8 new cars. A car of such type costs several million dollars.

as racing cars emerged from the boxes.

The drivers were heating their engines and leaving the pit-lane one by one to cover a lap before taking their starting positions. A crowd had already poured from the boxes: mechanics, technicians, team managers, photographers and good-looking girls holding signs that marked the position of each car. The audience roared with delight as the famous racing cars, created by the best car designers on the planet, took to the track. Five big double signal lights were flashing red. Silver cars with black ravens happened to be standing on the starting grid very close to the dark blue cars driven by Aeneas and Johnny.

“What are the names of the Corvo Nero drivers?” Acronis asked Dad.

“Gaetano and Bruno Campomorto, of course,” he replied. “Don’t you remember?”

“To be honest,” said Acronis, “I’m not that interested in car races. I just don’t want anyone to pour syrup into our Aeneas’s fuel tank!”

Meanwhile, the Prince of Monaco, Albert II, and his wife, Princess Charlene, greeted the drivers. Acronis glanced at Charlene’s white suit, which had a pretty pink stripe down her leg, before focusing again on the Corvo Nero drivers.

“What an ugly surname – Campomorto,” she said. “What does it mean in Italian?”

“It does sound a little gloomy,” agreed Dad. “Literally it means ‘cemetery’. But in Sicily it is a famous and very respectable family name. Just two hundred years ago, the Campomortos were running the show in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies.

At that moment two of the five signal lights flashed green. Engines roared, and the cars began the formation lap. But one car remained on the grid, and several marshals ran up to it immediately.

“It is a Balena Azzurra car!” exclaimed Acronis.

Dad focused his binoculars on the car.

“Yes, it’s Johnny’s car. We should wait for an announcement.”

The marshals were taking Johnny’s car to the pit-lane. He took off his helmet and shouted something to the mechanics that were running to meet him.

“Balena Azzurra driver Johnny Macintosh has been unable to enter the race due to ignition problems,” announced the commentator.

Acronis cast a side glance at the man in the white suit in the Corvo Nero suite and saw him lower his newspaper for a second and nod in satisfaction. Acronis snatched