

*Nic Nelson*  
and the  
**Diamonds  
of Denmark**

by  
**Derrik Richard**

# **Nic Nelson and the Diamonds of Denmark**

Derrik Richard

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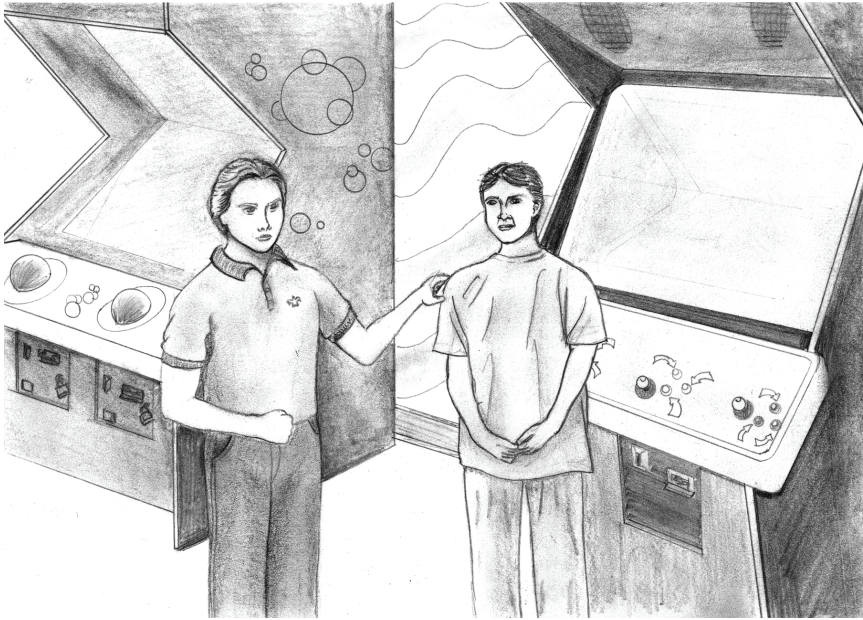
—Derrik

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## CHAPTER ONE



### The Gang

As Nic Nelson was about to place a quarter into the arcade game, he felt a hard shove in his back. Almost losing his balance, he would have hit his head on the screen if he hadn't caught himself. Spinning around, he found himself face-to-face with six boys who looked to be about his age of ten. Judging by their initial "welcome," they weren't there to chat.

He recognized the boy standing in front of him as Johnny Parks. Unlike Nic, who was lanky and dark haired, Johnny was heavier, taller, and blonde. Nic was struck with how green Johnny's eyes were. It was

a shame they were above a thin-lipped mouth that seemed to be in a permanent sneer.

"Gee, I'm sorry for bumping into you," Johnny said. "It's Mick, right?"

"Nic," he growled.

"Oh, Nic, Mick, it doesn't matter. All I know is you're the new geek in town," said Johnny as the boys moved in closer, surrounding Nic.

"You see, *Geek*, this is my turf; and these are my boys, Jimmy, Joey, Jerry, Jeff, and Mark. We're the *J Gang*. If you want to play any video games here, you have to pay me first and get my permission."

Nic knew he was outnumbered. He gulped and then remembered something his dad once said: "*Nic, you have to stand up for yourself, and do what's right. You can't count on anyone else doing it for you.*"

Nic stood a little taller as he stared Johnny down. "I guess I'd be in a bad mood, too, if my breath smelled as bad as yours."

Just then, Jimmy and Joey grabbed Nic's arms. Nic watched helplessly as Johnny began winding back his right fist. Suddenly a deep voice rang out, "Six on one doesn't seem very fair to me, Johnny."

Nic tore his eyes away from the looming fist and glanced toward the voice. He didn't recognize the muscular man approaching, or his sidekick, a freckle-faced, blonde haired boy about Nic's age. Jimmy and Joey let go of Nic's arms as Johnny spun around to size up his new opponents. After a few tense seconds, with a wave of his hand and a last menacing look at Nic, Johnny and his *J Gang* disappeared into the crowd.

Certain Johnny and his gang were gone, Nic turned to thank his rescuer. Before he could speak, the man raised his hand to shake Nic's and smiled, "I figured you could take them all on by yourself, so I was really saving Johnny from getting hurt. By the way, I'm Jason Hornsby; and this here is my young friend, Kevin Becker."

"Hi, and thanks for...whatever," Nic stammered. "It's nice to meet you. My name is Nic Nelson."

"Great to meet you, Nic," Jason said, while bringing his hand down on Nic's shoulder as a welcome. Nic winced slightly — clearly, Jason



didn't understand how strong he was. Jason continued talking, "So did I hear right that you're new to the area?"

"Yeah, me and my mom moved to New Bonn only a couple of months ago," replied Nic as he rubbed his shoulder.

"Hey, I thought you looked familiar. You're the kid that's been sitting all by himself in the cafeteria!" said Kevin.

"Yeah, that's me," Nic answered.

"Well, that's going to change. Can't get to know people if you don't meet them, right?" Kevin asked.

"Right," replied Nic.

After a few awkward seconds of silence, Nic piped up, "I was just about to play this video game. Would you guys like to join me?"

"Sure," Kevin and Jason said at the same time. But when Nic turned around, he saw that the quarters he had so carefully stacked on the video game were gone. His heart sank. Where did they go? Then it hit him. Johnny and his gang must have swiped them. "Oh man," he said in frustration. He glanced at Kevin who, seeing Nic upset, asked,

"Nic, what's wrong? You look bummed. What's going on?"

"My money -- it's gone," replied Nic. "I had laid it out to play this video game; and now, it's gone."

"Let me guess," interrupted Jason. "You had it until Johnny and his gang appeared. Sorry you had to learn this lesson the hard way, but never have anything of value out when Johnny's around. Tell ya what," offered Jason as he reached into his pockets. "Why don't you let this round be on me, and you can get the next one some other time." He pulled out a crisp twenty-dollar bill. "This should do it," he stated as he walked to the coin machine.

Nic looked dumbfounded as he began to mutter, "But I..."

Kevin elbowed him gently and whispered, "It's cool. I sucker him all the time for video games by pretending to forget to bring my money."

That afternoon was one of the happiest Nic could remember in a long time. Going from one video game to the next, he learned that Jason was a first year college student at nearby Midwestern University where Nic's mom worked. Jason had an older brother, a dentist, which

made Jason feel like he had to do well at something so he could prove himself to his parents. And while he wished he didn't live at home, he still did to save money. Jason had known Kevin since he was a baby and was something like a big brother to him. Kevin was the youngest in his family, surviving the pain of having three older sisters who, according to Kevin, got along as well as cats and dogs.

After what seemed like only minutes, Nic realized it was time to go home. As he thanked his new friends for all the fun, Kevin said, "I'll look out for you at lunch and introduce you to my group of friends in the cafeteria on Monday!"

"Cool!" replied Nic as he turned to leave.

Still smiling about the good luck he'd experienced in the arcade, Nic made his way toward the bike rack. He shook his head as he remembered how Johnny and his *J Gang* had surrounded him. He wondered why it was called the *J Gang* if one member's name didn't start with the letter J.

Nic groaned aloud as he walked up to the bike rack. The back tire had been slashed. "Johnny," he stated flatly. Breathing a heavy sigh, he pulled his bike out and began the long walk home. "This is going to take forever," he mumbled. After only a few minutes, sweat began streaming down his face, and his arms began to ache from pushing his bike. Why couldn't this have happened on a cool and cloudy day?

As he stopped to wipe the sweat from his face with his shirt, Nic heard a loud thunder-like rumble behind him. He turned to see a shiny red car with the letters *GTO* written in the grill, which hid what must have been a huge engine, given the noise. Nic didn't move as the car came closer. He figured the way things were going it was probably Johnny's brother, if he had one, coming to slash his other tire or worse. Nic gripped his bike as the car came to a stop next to him. As the door opened, he steeled himself for the worst, only to heave a sigh of relief as he recognized the people getting out of the car. It was Jason and Kevin.

"Hey, big guy, what's up?" asked Jason, while eyeing Nic's flat tire.

"My tire's flat," replied Nic.

“Well, I figured it had to be something major. Most people ride their bikes, except for Kevin. I don’t think he knows how to ride a bike if it doesn’t have training wheels attached to it,” laughed Jason.

“Ha, ha,” laughed Kevin. “I’ll bet Nic here could beat you home with two flat tires versus that old bucket of bolts you call a car.”

“Old bucket of...I’ll have you know that my car -- a 1970 *GTO* -- is very well known by muscle-car connoisseurs. It is extremely fast, tough, and beautiful. Three things you can’t say about yourself,” Jason retorted, as he playfully punched Kevin’s arm.

“Con-a-what?” Kevin asked.

“Connoisseur...it means an expert,” explained Jason.

“It doesn’t matter what it means. Your car was built in the cave man days. It doesn’t even have a CD player in it. And you have to roll up the windows! Where are the buttons to do that?” Kevin asked.

“It’s good exercise for you,” replied Jason. “Besides, you’re just jealous of my good looks and muscles.”

“Muscles? What muscles? I could take you on anytime,” Kevin said smiling as if he knew what Jason’s next move would be.

“Is that so?” Jason asked as he lunged for Kevin.

In an instant, Nic found himself watching a wrestling match between Jason and Kevin. Man, thought Nic, these guys really do act like brothers. After a minute or so, Nic figured he’d better save what was left of Kevin in this mismatch. He asked loudly, “Excuse me, Jason, but weren’t you saying something to me?”

Jason stopped and looked at Nic as if he had suddenly appeared out of nowhere. Holding Kevin upside down, he nodded his head and responded with a quiet, “Oh, yeah.” He dropped Kevin gently to the ground, head first. “As I was saying, would you like a ride home?”

“That’d be great,” Nic exclaimed. “I just live about two more miles down the road at 1815 Waterloo Street.”

“That’s not far from where I live,” remarked Kevin, as he got up scratching his head and brushing himself off.

Jason carefully lifted Nic’s bike and placed it into the trunk, while Kevin opened the huge, heavy passenger door. Pushing the front seat forward, both boys scampered into the back seat.

Jason slid in behind the wheel. He looked at them over his shoulder and asked, "So no one is brave enough to sit up front with me?"

Kevin replied, "I know how you drive; and I would like to live to see my 11th birthday, thank you."

"I grew up watching Speed Racer reruns, so I know how to drive. Plus, you've never let that stop you before, Kevin."

"Well, today I don't feel like committing suicide," said Kevin.

"Suit yourself," smiled Jason, while he starting his car. As it roared to life, Nic felt the car vibrating slightly. Jason asked, "Do ya feel that, Nic? That's power, baby. Real power!"

"Yeah, right," whispered Kevin in Nic's ear. "What it really means is that this old piece of junk is two speed bumps away from falling apart."

"Okay, boys, I'm not going anywhere until you buckle up," Jason ordered.

Nic went to pull the seat belt across his chest, but stared dumbly at the back of the seat instead. "Where's the seatbelt?" he asked.

"Oh, these cars are lucky to have them. They're only lap belts, but they do the job," said Jason.

Nic looked down and clicked his belt into place. He'd never worn a seatbelt like this before. It felt weird.

"Now, what were you saying, Kevin?" Jason asked as he stepped on the accelerator.

"Nothinnngggggg," yelped Kevin, as the car took off with a loud 'Vvvrroooooomm'!

Wow, thought Nic, pinned to the back seat. This must be like what astronauts go through when they launch into outer space.

Suddenly, Jason yelled, "Hold on!"

In the next instant, Nic found himself almost lying down staring at Kevin's shoes, as Jason swerved sharply to the left. A moment later, the side of his face was glued to the window with Kevin's head almost in his lap, as the car swerved to the right. After what seemed like an eternity on an amusement park ride gone wrong, Jason finally stopped his car.

“Sorry about that, guys; but here we are,” said Jason, pulling Nic’s bike from the trunk. Nic moaned slightly as he and Kevin staggered out of the car. Passing the window, Nic saw his reflection. His dark hair was messy, and his clothes were twisted, looking like he had just survived being stuck in the middle of a tornado. Kevin looked to be in worse shape than he was.

Jason rolled Nic’s bike to him. “Here ya go, Stud. Again, sorry about the driving; but I couldn’t help it,” Jason said, smiling slyly. “Stupid cat ran out in front of the car, and those darn potholes on this street are such a danger. They really need to be fixed. You guys are soooo lucky that I’m such an awesome driver who can maneuver around them.”

His thought, as Nic shook Jason’s hand to thank him for the ride home, was if that was good driving by Jason, then he definitely didn’t want to see his bad driving.

As Jason backed out of the driveway, Kevin shouted from his window, “Look forward to seeing you at school on Monday.”

Next time, I’m going to have to ask Jason what the letters *GTO* stand for, thought Nic, pushing his bike toward the garage.

The screen door slammed as he entered the kitchen. “Nic?” his mom called from the family room.

“Yeah, Mom, it’s me.”

Grabbing a glass from the dishwasher, he busied himself filling it with water. His mom, now in the kitchen, folded her arms and leaned against the counter. Uh-oh, he thought. I’m probably going to be in big trouble for getting a ride with strangers. He quickly came up with reasons for her not to be mad: Jason and Kevin had been so nice to him; he had desperately longed for friends since first moving here...

Prepared for the worst, Nic was stunned when his mom quietly said, “So, I see you’ve made some new friends today. What happened to ‘I don’t like it here, and I won’t ever like anybody here?’”

Nic smiled and answered, “Yeah, I guess so,” while not admitting that she was right *again*. She smiled and tousled his hair saying, “I told you just to have faith and things would work out.”

Nic was excited to return to school on Monday, although not because of his teacher, Mr. Smithton. He was nice enough, but had the unusual habit of calling everybody in his class by nicknames instead of their first names. Nic's nickname was Chief. He was sure he wasn't related to any Native American Indians, even though he thought it would have been cool. Other classmates had nicknames like Flash, Dudley Do-Right, and Whiz.

Mr. Smithton didn't explain why he gave a particular nickname to a student, but Nic figured he'd manage just fine with Chief.

The morning seemed to drag as Nic waited for lunchtime. Standing in line for his food, he nervously scanned the lunchroom for his new friend, Kevin. But Kevin was nowhere to be seen. All around him kids laughed and talked about their weekend fun. As Nic approached the lunch lady to pay, his heart began to sink; and a lump formed in his throat. What if Kevin had forgotten his promise? What if Kevin had just been pretending to be his friend?

There was still no sign of Kevin as Nic stepped away from the lunch line. He began walking toward a familiar spot in the corner where he would be by himself again.

"Have faith, indeed," Nic muttered. Who was he kidding? No one wanted to be friends with him. Maybe Johnny had been right after all, and he really was a geek.

Lost in thought, Nic realized someone was tapping him on the shoulder. He turned around to find Kevin looking at him with a big, goofy smile.

"What's up, buddy?"

Nic was so relieved he couldn't speak.

"We're back there," Kevin said pointing to the center of the cafeteria. "Follow me."

Nic happily followed, amazed at how the center of the lunchroom sounded like a beehive from all the chatter.

Kevin spoke loudly over the noise, "Sorry about not being here sooner; but my teacher, Mrs. Payne, was in her usual mood. She let us out late, because someone threw a spitball at the blackboard."

"Do you know who did it?"

“Not a clue,” Kevin said, while delivering a smile every ten-year-old boy knows means guilty as charged. They stopped at a table.

“This,” stated Kevin opening his arms wide, “is my group of friends. Guys, this is Nic. He’s the one I was telling you about.”

Nic slowly scanned the table as Kevin made the introductions. The first two kids Nic knew from his homeroom: Herbert Howell III, who wore thick glasses and looked almost as wide as he was tall; and Cindy Lin, a thin girl with shiny, black hair and high pale cheekbones. Then there was Dante Brown, an African-American boy built a lot like Kevin, but with brown eyes and short, dark, curly hair. Last was Philip Browning, the tallest and most athletic of the group, who was as thin as a pencil.

After settling down with his new group of friends, Nic felt as if he had known them all of his life. Dante Brown seemed like a do-the-right-thing type of guy. He did Boy Scouts once a week and volunteered at Shady Valley, the local retirement center, entertaining senior citizens. Cindy Lin seemed very opinionated to Nic and not afraid to ask or answer any questions. Herbert Howell III loved to talk and eat at the same time. Philip Browning loved all kinds of sports, especially in-line hockey. He was captain of his team, the Blue Devils, in the town league for ten- to eleven-year-olds.

As lunchtime was ending, Kevin blurted out, “Nic, the YMCA is having a lock-in next Friday night. Why don’t you come and join us in the fun?”

Nic thought about it for a few seconds and replied, “Sure. I’ll have to ask my mom first.”