

# NICK & KNOBBY GO DIGITAL

By Felix Mayerhofer

## Chapter 1: The Big Boom

With a quivering nose, Nick's dog, Knobby, followed the smell of fresh baked bread straight to the "FRENCHMAN'S DELIGHT BAKERY." As his four legs came to a skidding halt, Nick Kincade exclaimed, "Knobby! You found the new bakery! What luck!"

Behind the counter stood the owner, Mr. Éclair, a small man with a thin mustache. His huge white baker's hat was pulled down to his ears. He filled Nick's order as Knobby and Nick stared hungrily at the mouth-watering pastries in the shiny cases.

When Nick left the bakery, a music store located next door caught his eye. The sign on the window said, MARIO'S DRUM SHOP.

Nick entered the store with Knobby following close behind. Knobby ran straight to a bass drum. He couldn't resist making a big boom by swatting it with his long tail that looked like a drumstick.

The owner, Mario Ronzoni, laughed heartily. “That’s the first time I’ve ever seen a dog play the bass drum. Are you a circus act?” he asked.

“Oh, no!” answered Nick. “I’m the bass drummer in my school band, and my dog Knobby plays the bass drum, too.”

Mario looked at Knobby in open-mouthed amazement and said, “A dog that plays the bass drum? ‘Mama mia!’”

Running home, Nick could hardly wait to tell his parents about Mario and the store. “Mario is a master drum maker from Italy,” said Nick to his mom and dad, “and he’s going to teach me now to build a bass drum! He liked my idea about starting a bass drum band and he’s offered to help.”

Under Mario’s guidance, Nick worked hard constructing his first drum. It was an unforgettable day when they finished. Nick looked at the bass drum with such pride, he almost popped his shirt buttons. It was a work of art.

He and Knobby went to the school football field to practice playing the new bass drum. The boom from Knobby’s tail and Nick’s mallet attracted his friends who marched behind him in a make-believe parade.

“Can we play your bass drum?” begged two of his classmates, Lynn and Kristi.

“Sure,” Nick said. He told the kids about his plans for a bass drum band and they couldn’t wait to join.

## Chapter 2: Swinging Away

As the weeks passed, Nick built six bass drums, each one larger than the next. His father, a carpenter, was a big help. He had a large supply of wood and Mario gave him all the parts he needed plus special drum-making equipment.

Even though Nick's band hadn't had a single rehearsal, he decided to enter them in the town's Christmas Show. The 1st place prize of \$3,000 would inspire the band to work hard.

Nick started building the last two drums. One would be over half the height of a room. The other, the BIG ONE--would barely be able to fit through the outside basement door.

The day they had anxiously been waiting for finally arrived. The band members watched as Nick put the finishing touches on the giant drum.

With the drum head firmly in place, Nick said, "It's ready for the test!" As he raised his mallet, Knobby jumped on a chair next to the drum.

Nick yelled, "Knobby! Wait!" But it was too late. With a tremendous swing of his tail Knobby hit the bass drum. The house shook, teeth rattled, and Kristi covered her ears.

When the vibrations stopped, there was stunned silence. "Wow! What a sound!" they exclaimed, as they looked at Knobby in wonderment.

Everyone was excited the first day of rehearsals. The band had moved to Mario's store where there was more room for all their drums.

During the time he was constructing the drums, Nick had spent hours teaching each kid their parts. Knobby had listened intently to every note taught. No one knew how it was going to sound, not even Nick.

The group stumbled at the beginning. But as the practice continued, the rhythm began to come together and the beat steadied. They played with more energy and began to sound as one.

Just as the band reached their highest peak, Mr. Éclair, the French baker, burst through the door. "What are you doing?" he yelled. "You are ruining my breads!"

A startled Mario asked, "What do you mean?"

The Frenchman screamed, "The boom-booms are causing my breads and cakes to fall! No breads, no cakes, no business! I want you out of my building in 60 days!" He turned around in a huff and stormed out of the store.

## Chapter 3: Digital Dreams

Poor Mario was in a state of shock. What was he going to do? Would he lose his music store? He couldn't afford to rent anywhere else.

"Could you soundproof the walls?" asked Lynn.

"That's a good idea," replied Mario, "but it would be expensive."

Mario was very discouraged. He contacted a soundproof businessman who told him the job would cost around \$3,000. Where would he get that kind of money?

At the next rehearsal Mario explained the situation to the band.

Nick spoke up. "The award for winning 1st place in the Christmas Show is \$3,000. If we make a supreme effort and I mean supreme, I think we can win!"

"We'll do whatever it takes!" answered the kids excitedly.

The band members loved to play their bass drums. The better they got the harder they worked. Knobby listened to every beat and rhythm. He went from drummer to drummer and sat at their sides as they played their parts.

Nick could hear the progress, but he knew if they were to win 1st place, they'd have to do something different, something new--but what? He thought and thought.

He knew that digital drums were not new, but having a band made up entirely of different size digital bass drums would be different. The

kids in the band thought it was a great idea, and Nick was sure this was the answer to his prayers.

After getting his parent's permission, Nick ordered the electronic equipment over the Internet. He was told there'd be a delay in delivery. Nick emailed, asking that the instruction booklet be sent to him so he could learn to use the equipment before it arrived. The booklet came in a few days.

The following rehearsal, Nick told the band what he planned to do. "I'm going to teach you how to play 'O Come, All Ye Faithful' by numbers." He wrote the melody on the chalkboard with a number over each note. Each drummer got his or her number, and after a couple of play-throughs, the group knew they could do it!

Kristi said, "All we need now is the electronic equipment."

The band continued practicing both the regular bass drum piece and the electronic song. The selections were worked to perfection. They rehearsed them over and over until they could be played with their eyes closed. Knobby was always present and he never stopped listening.

It was two days before the contest and still no electronic equipment. Nick and the band's nerves were on edge. Mario suggested telephoning the company.

Nick returned from the call grinning from ear to ear. He gave the band a "thumbs up." "The parts are in," he said. The band cheered. "But they can't deliver them till the morning of the Christmas Show. That means we won't be able to test the equipment. The first chance we'll get to hear it will be during the performance." Everyone groaned.

## Chapter 4: Icing On The Cake

Nick decided to call one last rehearsal at a time when Mr. Éclair wouldn't be baking.

Mr. Éclair, not knowing about this extra rehearsal, was preparing his entry for the Food Division Competition. Following Nick's example, his goal was to bake the largest cake ever made. He had ordered a giant oven with a huge pan for the occasion. After placing the cake in the oven and telling his staff they could go home, he waited to see his masterpiece.

Meanwhile, next door, Nick said to his band, "Since this is our last and final rehearsal, let's play all of our songs at full volume." The rehearsal went well and everyone felt good.

As the band left Mario's store, Nick was surprised to see Mr. Éclair sitting on the curb, head in hand, moaning.

"Mr. Éclair, what's wrong? Are you ill?" asked Nick.

"No," answered Mr. Éclair. "My beautiful cake fell when your drums boomed. I sent my employees home so I can't bake another. I won't be able to enter the baking contest. I'm ruined!"

"Maybe our band can help you bake another one," suggested Nick. Before Mr. Éclair had a chance to answer, Nick rounded up his crew and they raced into the bakery. They came to a screeching halt and stared in amazement at the size of the mixing vat. Mr. Éclair prepared the ingredients while the band cracked dozens of eggs into the large vat that seemed to be a bottomless pit.

The group took turns mixing with paddles the size of oars. Mr. Éclair kept feeding them delicious pastries to give them strength. The kids loved this part of the job the best.

When the mixing was completed the ingredients were poured into the giant pan, and they rolled it into the enormous oven. Their job finished, a tired but happy band left for home.

The next morning Nick had his fingers crossed as he ran to the music store. When he rounded the corner, there was the express truck making the delivery. He and Knobby dashed into the store and ripped open the packages. He took a fast count of the parts and found that everything was there.

As the band members arrived, Nick had them attach the electronic pickup sensors to their bass drums.

Mario connected the control panel to the speakers and said to Nick, "Turn the toggle switch to 'On.'" The lights turned red. Everything worked. The band wanted to play, but it wasn't possible because the bakery's breads were rising.

Nick said, "Play quietly, and I'll listen on my headphones to each bass drum for the notes." He jumped for joy after making a few tune-up adjustments. "The system works perfectly!" he exclaimed. They were ready to compete.

## Chapter 5: Tail To Rescue

When the band arrived at the stadium, the George Washington Fife And Drum Band, their main rival, had just started to play. They gave an outstanding performance.

“I’d feel a lot better if I knew how we were going to sound when the electronics are turned on,” said a worried Lynn.

“Me too,” said Nick, “but we just have to win that \$3,000 for Mario.”

A field guide came up and instructed the Kincade Band to please proceed to the playing field. Mario went to set up the electronic equipment for the second song.

Nick’s group moved on to the field, and he gave the command, “Line up in formation!” The band stood at attention, ready to begin.

Their first song started off fast and furious with a solid bass drum beat. That was Nick’s plan. By playing at this pace, the group wouldn’t have a chance to get nervous.

They began to relax and play with great rhythm. It was working perfectly, when suddenly, Lynn’s hand froze right in the middle of the song! She had stopped playing! It was a bad case of stage fright!

Luckily, Knobby was lying right there. He jumped up and immediately began playing where Lynn had left off. The band was stunned! They realized that Knobby had learned everyone’s part at the rehearsals.

The people couldn’t believe what they saw and heard. They cheered for Knobby as he played. Their small band was exciting, as

good as the George Washington Band. As the judges tallied their scores, Nick said to Mario, "Let's test the control panel for the electronic song." It worked. He set the dial to the drum pickup sensors on Medium.

"This is as easy as turning the knobs to balance my home stereo," whispered Nick. He crossed his fingers again for good luck. Everything depended on his having understood the instructions. By this time Lynn had made a complete recovery and was ready to play.

The band waited for the judges to give them the signal.

"The Kincade Band may begin," came the judge's voice over the loudspeaker.

Nick was at the electronic control panel ready to start--it wouldn't work--no red lights! Nick said to himself, don't panic! The judges, the band and the audience were waiting. They were all staring at him. What seemed like an eternity was only a split second.

He looked for a loose connection on his panel. None! He ran to the amplifiers. The cables were connected. Mario checked the main plug. There it was lying on the ground! It had accidentally been jerked out of the outlet. Mario quickly pushed it back in. The red lights came on!

Nick breathed a sigh of relief and started the band. From the first note of, "O Come, All Ye Faithful," the noisy audience turned quiet.

## Chapter 6: Great Sounds and Tastes

A mysterious but beautiful digital sound spread through the stadium. It was like the resonance of a cathedral bell wrapped in a soft cloth. Subdued and mellow tones filled the air as if enclosed in a velvet shroud. Music flowed from the small drums like ringing chimes, as deep cavernous sounds burst forth from the big bass drum.

The song ended. The audience sat spellbound by the beauty of the music. The roar of the crowd suddenly broke the silence. They were thrilled by what they had heard.

The night air was chilly and a light snow had dusted the ground. The judges were ready with their decisions. Mr. Éclair was all smiles. The crowd had oohed and aahed all day over the size of his cake. The contestants surrounded the judges.

The mayor came forward to announce the winners: “The 1st place award in the Food Division--goes to Mr. Éclair!”

Mr. Éclair took off his chef’s hat and in the French grand manner took a long, low bow. The mayor handed him his award.

Next, the mayor presented trophies to the 3rd and 2nd place band winners. Second place went to the George Washington Fife And Drum Band.

Nick’s band knew the only remaining award was for 1st place. Besides the George Washington Band, other outstanding bands had

performed that day. Poor Mario was shaking so hard from the suspense he could hardly stand.

As the judges handed the mayor their final decision, Mr. Éclair made an announcement. “I would like to invite everyone to sample my cake after the main award.”

The mayor cleared his throat and said in a loud clear voice. “I’m pleased to announce, the 1<sup>st</sup> place winner of this year’s Christmas Show--is--Nick Kincade and his Bass Drum Band.”

The screaming band members jumped all over Mario as they fell to the ground. Knobby leaped into Nick’s arms, “Unbelievable band, unbelievable day!” said Nick.

The audience swarmed onto the field for a piece of cake. The pan was scraped clean. Not a crumb was left. The number of orders the merchants and townspeople had placed for his cakes and pastries overwhelmed Mr. Éclair.

Mario was overjoyed. Mr. Éclair had offered to share the expense of installing the soundproofing.

With tears in his eyes, Mr. Éclair said to Mario, “Nick and the band have saved my bakery.”

The Candlelight Ceremony was ready to begin. The audience began singing “Silent Night” with joy and fervor, as candles sparkled in the dark of night. It was a beautiful ending to a perfect day--except for the moaning. There was Knobby, lying on his back, stomach up. Too much cake, too little tummy.

**COMING SOON: NICK & KNOBBY IN THE DARING ESCAPE**