

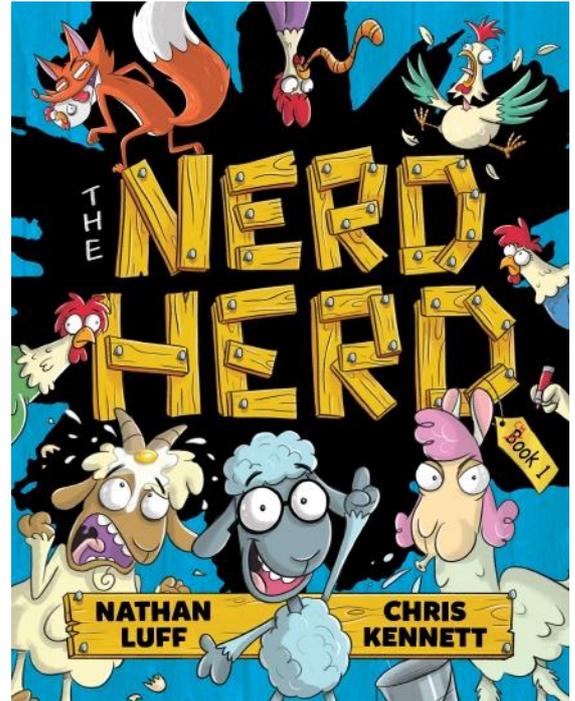
Nerd Herd

Author

Nathan Luff

Illustrator

Chris Kennett



Synopsis

Barny the lamb and his friends Shaama the llama and Billy the angora goat are sick of being picked on by the other farm animals. So Barny convinces the other two that they to form a gang, called the Woolly Bullies, and act tough in the hope that the other animals will leave them alone. Sadly, this doesn't work. They are sat upon, bitten, chased, and scratched, and finally they retreat in defeat. Shaama loudly declares that they are not the Woolly Bullies but the Nerd Herd—a gang feared by no one. Despite this, Barny remains inventive and determined, and when a fox starts stealing chooks from the chook house at night, he convinces his friends that if they can save the day (and the chooks) then they will be heroes and the other animals will leave them alone. But chasing off a determined fox is not a simple task, and in spite of Shaama's ingenious inventiveness, the chooks are still being taken, and the three friends are still looked down upon by all the other animals. Barny then stumbles upon the electric fence surrounding the bull enclosure and has a most electrifying idea. How the three finally defeat the fox, and their realisation that even heroes still shouldn't mess with bulls, makes an entertaining and action-packed ending to a farmyard saga filled with puns, bad behaviour, and a cheeky lamb who just won't quit.

About the Author

Nathan Luff is a writer and playwright, who grew up on a farm just outside of Yass, NSW. His first children's novel *Chicken Stu* (published by Scholastic in April 2010), was based loosely on his antics with his four brothers on the home farm. Nathan was the recipient of a 2011 May Gibbs Children's Literature Trust Fellowship, and two of his plays have been nominated for Australian Writers Guild awards. Nathan worked for the Wakakirri National Story Festival for 7 years, and was Festival Director in 2010 and 2011. Currently Nathan lives in Sydney, NSW.

About the Author/Illustrator

Chris Kennett was born in Canterbury, England. He grew up in a very busy house and was the youngest of five kids. Chris would take every opportunity for quiet time, which came in the form of drawing—and he drew a LOT! In 1998, Chris moved to Australia with his girlfriend (now wife) and in

2000, officially decided to make art a career. Since then Chris has worked as a freelance animator, designed and animated e-cards, as a Design Supervisor and Character Designer on *The Day My Butt Went Psycho*, and illustrated over 15 books, including the *Pixel Raiders* series. Chris lives in Bendigo, Victoria, with his wife, two kids and two cats.

Themes

Key Themes include: Friendship, humour, puns, bullying, farm animals, unexpected consequences, determination, resilience, and optimism.

Writing Style

Written in the first person from the point of view of Barny, the story follows his viewpoint throughout. Barny delights in making up puns and annoying his friends, and Luff's language choices and narrative construction utilise both situational and linguistic humour. The narrative structure is chronologically straightforward, and the action of the story is presented from Barny's perspective both in direct address to the audience, and through consistent use of dialogue between the main characters. The language chosen is modern and colloquial, and the action incorporates a certain degree of scatological humour that is guaranteed to both appall and delight the youthful readership.

Illustration Style

Created using a limited palette of greyscale combined with shades of blue, Kennett's artwork consists of the full comic-book style range of artwork. Figures, landscapes, and foreground features and details are predominantly in greyscale, while the blue shades throughout are used as both backgrounds and occasional foreground highlights emphasising details within the illustrations. The artwork includes full page spreads, multi-panel half and full spreads, vignettes, and illustrated thought bubbles. The comic-book style presentation and the inclusion of speech bubbles make *The Nerd Herd* a highly accessible read that will entertain both older readers as well as young and beginner readers. Characters are drawn in a semi-realistic style, with anthropomorphic behaviour and posture, combined with more realistic features and proportions. The visual narrative follows the graphic novel convention of faithfully paralleling the textual narrative throughout, and the two narratives are seamlessly integrated with each other to provide an engaging and amusing reading experience overall.

TEACHER NOTES

- 1) Before reading the story, as a class look closely at the cover and title, and discuss what you can learn about the story. Some things that you could include in your discussion might be:
 - What does the image on the cover show?
 - What is a herd?
 - What is a nerd?
 - What do you think might be a *Nerd Herd*?
 - Who do you think might be the members of *The Nerd Herd*?
 - What do you think could happen in this book?
 - Who might the book be about?
 - Where do you think this story is set?
 - What is happening in the cover artwork?
 - Based on the cover, what genre do you think this story could be?

- 2) Barney thinks that he and his friends have been given ridiculous names by the farm owners. What names do you think he would prefer? Why do you think he might prefer them? What names would you choose to give a lamb, a llama, or a goat if you had one as a pet? Create an illustrated poster of one of these three animals, and write the name you would like to give it underneath. Your name can be cute, or funny, or just a name that you like for no particular reason at all!
- 3) Barney loves making puns, and annoys his friends on the farm by making them all the time. How many puns can you find in the story? Which one is your favourite, and which do you think is the funniest? Are they the same one, and if not why?
- 4) Visit a farm or petting zoo in your local area. What animals do they have?
- 5) Shaama is a llama and hates it when people mistake her for an alpaca. In pairs or small groups, research alpacas and llamas, and make a list of the similarities and differences between them.
- 6) What do you think is the funniest scene in the story and why? Draw a picture of the scene, and caption it with a brief description of what is happening.
- 7) On page 50 when Shaama tells Barney that foxes like to eat lambs, Barney winks at her while agreeing. What does it mean when someone winks at you while saying something? Why do you think Shaama gets frustrated at Barney's winking? What are some other ways people can indicate that the words they are saying are not what they actually mean? As a class discuss how body language, facial expression, and tone of voice can all change the meaning of what someone says.
- 8) When Barney and his friends are being bullied, they decide to act tough and stick together to try stop the other animals from picking on them. Taking things into your own hands like this isn't always the best plan though, and it definitely backfires for The Nerd Herd. As a class discuss bullying, and what we can do if we are being bullied, or if we see someone else being bullied. Some things to include in your discussion might be:
 - What are some things that you can say to a bully if they are picking on you?
 - What is the difference between an argument or disagreement and bullying?
 - What are some things that you can say to defuse a situation when you are a bystander and witness bullying?
 - Who are some appropriate people to talk to if you experience bullying?
- 9) When Billy gets a mulberry squished into his fringe it dyes his hair purple. Lots of plants, seeds, fruits, and berries can be used to make paints or dyes. Experiment with making some edible plant-based coloured paints of your own. You might like to squash up some berries and use their juice, or you could cook up onion skins, red cabbage, or even avocado skins and seeds to see what colours you can make. Think about what types of plants have made stains on your clothes in the past, and see if you can make a coloured ink from any of them. Be very careful not to pick or use any leaves, berries, or fruits that might be toxic—if you are not sure, leave them alone and try something else! Draw a farmyard picture and use your home-made paints to colour it in.
- 10) Look carefully at Shaama's design on pages 86 and 87. Do you think that something like this would be easy to make? Using icy-pole sticks, straws, string, and sticky-tape, try to construct a similar (but much smaller!) device that uses an eraser as a counterweight to fling a dried pea or other very small object across the classroom. Have a class competition to see whose construction can fling a pea the furthest!

11) How would you plan to trap a fox if you were small and in danger from it yourself? In pairs or small groups brainstorm a fox-trap (that doesn't hurt the fox!) which Barny and his friends could use if the fox returns. Create a labelled design illustration showcasing your invention, and mount it with a brief description of what you have designed and how you envision it working.