

The Nerd Herd #2

Raging Wool

Author

Nathan Luff

Illustrator

Chris Kennett

Synopsis

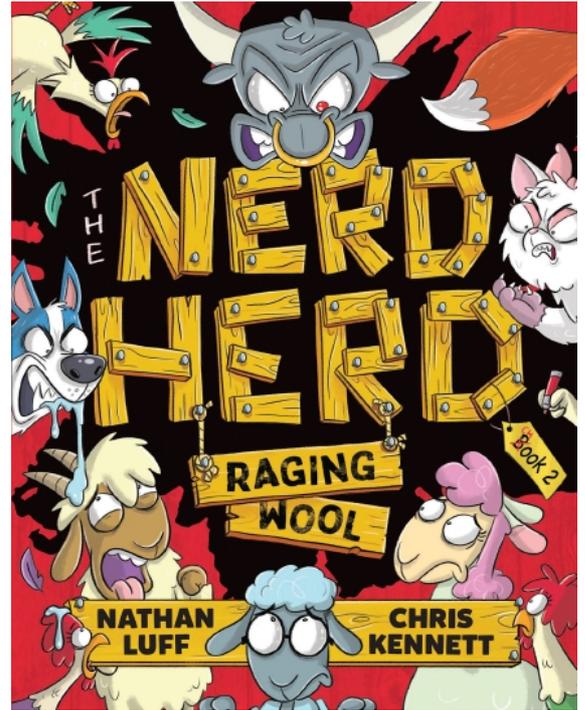
Shaama the llama, Billy the angora goat kid, and Barny the lamb have managed to get themselves, and the farmyard chooks, into quite a bit of trouble. Sick of being overlooked and picked on in the farmyard, in their previous book Barny has cajoled and manoeuvred his two friends into trying to win themselves fame and admiration. Unfortunately all of their plans backfired, and now, in *Raging Wool*, the three friends have to deal with the disastrous consequences of their bid for notoriety. In this latest instalment of *The Nerd Herd* series, the three friends ricochet from one hilariously disastrous attempt at a solution to another, propelled by Barny's unfailing optimism and tendency towards puns for all occasions, while Shaama proves herself the actual brains of the outfit and Billy the Angora goat is dragged along for the ride. How they attempt to put things right, and how all their plans end in yet another new and unexpected disaster makes for a hilarious and optimistic romp through a world filled with talking animals, quirky characters, all with an undeniable frisson of danger.

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 the antics that he and his four brothers got up to as children 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; danger; farmyard animals; planning; problem solving; puns; humour; accepting failure.

Writing Style

Written in the first person from the point of view of Barney, the story follows his viewpoint throughout. Luff's language choices and narrative construction utilise both situational and linguistic humour, and the main character spends an inordinate amount of time making puns in spite of - or possibly because of - his friends' dislike for the practice. The narrative structure is chronologically straightforward, and the action of the story is presented in Barney's voice in the form of both direct address, and through dialogue between characters. The language chosen is modern and colloquial, and the action incorporates the type of scatological humour that youthful readers tend to find enjoyably disgusting.

Illustration Style

Created using a limited palette of greyscale combined with shades of red, the artwork includes full page spreads, multi-panel half and full spreads, vignettes, and illustrated thought bubbles. Figures, landscapes, and foreground features and details are predominantly in greyscale, while the red shades throughout are used as both backgrounds and occasional foreground highlights emphasising details within the illustrations, and lending something of an ominous tone to the story overall. The visual narrative parallels and expands upon the textual narrative in the manner typical of the graphic novel genre, and the comic book style presentation and the inclusion of speech bubbles make *Raging Wool* a highly accessible read. Characters are drawn in a semi-realistic style, with anthropomorphic behaviour and posture and occasional items of clothing, combined with more realistic features and proportions. Background features are generally realistically portrayed, and faithfully adhere to the textual descriptions throughout.

TEACHER NOTES

- 1) Before reading the story, as a class look closely at the cover and title, and discuss what you can learn about it from them. Some things you might want to include in your discussion could be:
 - What is the picture on the front cover showing?
 - What do you think might happen in this story?
 - Who do you think this book could be about?
 - Who has read the first book in *The Nerd Herd* series, and who can remember what happened in it?
 - What genre do you think this book might be and why?
- 2) Shaama and Barney help Billy fix his coat by brushing it with an old rat ribcage. How well do you think a rat's ribcage would work as a hairbrush or comb? In small groups research what people used to comb and brush their hair (and their pets' hair!) before we had modern combs and brushes. What are any brushes and combs that you have at home made of? What would you do if suddenly all the brushes and combs in the world disappeared? Do you think you could make an old-fashioned brush or comb of your own? Draw a labelled design document showing a design of your own for an old-fashioned hand crafted brush or comb. Be sure to include information on what materials it is made from and how it is manufactured. For a challenge try actually making your haircare tool, and share with the class how well it does or doesn't work.
- 3) Barney just loves making puns, and thinks he is very funny, but his friends don't think his puns are amusing at all. Choose one chapter of the story, and see how many puns you can find Barney making. Do you think any of them are funny? Why/why not? Which is your favourite of Barney's puns. Try to come up with some puns of your own that Barney could use in the future.

- 4) Shaama, Billy, and Barny come up with four not-good plans for luring T-bone back into his pen. They choose what they consider to be the less not-good plan.
 - What do you think of all their plans?
 - If you were one of the Nerd Herd, which of the plans would you have wanted to choose and why?
 - In pairs or small groups, brainstorm and come up with at least two more plans that the Nerd Herd could have tried out. Remember, your plan doesn't have to be good, it is perfectly alright to think up a couple of not-very-good plans as long as they are interesting, inventive, and have at least a tiny chance of working if everything goes perfectly.
 - Draw a four panel illustration of your plan being put into place.
 - You might like to include diagrams, labels, and instructions, or you can focus on drawing the characters acting out the plan.
 - Caption each panel with a clear description of what is happening and why.
 - Colour your illustrations and present your finished plan to the class.
 - As a class discuss which plans are the most feasible, which are the funniest, and which are the most inventive.
- 5) When T-bone finally spots the trail of hay, he follows it all the way back to the barn instead of to his paddock. Can you think of something the friends could have done differently to get him to follow it to where they wanted him to go instead? Write a brief explanation of what they could have done differently and why you think it might have worked.
- 6) How do you think that T-bone feels about the whole situation? Choose one of the scenes in the book where he plays a role, and write about what happens from his point of view. Illustrate your retelling with images showing his thoughts and ideas about the events that happened.
- 7) When talking about the leeches that live in the dam, Barny describes a leech as being *basically a vampire slug*. Is this an accurate description of a leech? Research slugs and leeches, what they look like, where they live, what they eat, how to get rid of them in the garden (slugs) or from your skin (leeches), and how they behave. Use your research findings to create a mini-information sheet with the title Leeches; are they really vampire slugs? In your information sheet you should describe the features, habitat, diet, and behaviour of both leeches and slugs, and discuss all the ways in which leeches are like vampire slugs, and the ways in which they aren't. You should also include a brief definition of what a vampire is.
- 8) Make a farmyard diorama based on the illustrations and descriptions of the farm in the story. Draw characters from the story on stiff card, and use them to populate your farmyard. Try to make your farmyard match one of the scenes from the book. Write a brief reflection piece describing the process of making the diorama, your choices of materials and scene, and sharing what you felt about the creation process.
- 9) When Shaama pulls out a beanie, Barny says that she is what beanies are made of. Barny, Billy, and Shaama are all animals whose fleece is shorn and used by humans. What types of items are commonly made from sheep's wool, llama wool, or angora goat hair? What might be the differences between the different fleeces, and how might yarn made from them differ?
- 10) At the end of the story, Barny is carried off by Mrs Fox. What do you think might happen to him next? Write a description of the final scene where he is carried away, from the point of view of Mrs Fox. You can what you imagine her plans for revenge might be, or you can leave them a mystery.

- 11) Create a moonlit scene inspired by the illustrations in the book. Look carefully at the final illustrations in the story, where Barny is being taken by Mrs Fox, and create your own scene where black trees and buildings are silhouetted against the night sky and the moon. You might want to paint your scene with acrylic or poster paint, or you could make a collage with cut out shapes of coloured paper to create the silhouettes, or even use a combination of both techniques.