

A Boy called BAT – Chapters 1 and 2

Welcome to the Marine science station. Hi everyone, my name is Charlene Mauro, and I'm the director of the Navarre Beach marine science station. Our station is located on Navarre Beach and our classroom by the sea, has the sound on one side and the Gulf of Mexico on the other side. So it's a very special place. The Navarre Beach Marine Science Station has been here for 10 years. Area high school students from Pace High School, Navarre High School, Gulf Breeze and even Milton High School travel out here, every day for dual enrollment marine biology and Oceanography. Three days a week, I teach them and then two days a week they teach Santa Rosa County students that have the opportunity to come out here and experience hands-on learning at the science station and also down at the Sound.

Today I'm joined by Casey Fearon. Hi, I'm Casey Fearon, I teach 8th grade science at Gulf Breeze Middle School and Katie Whitmire. Hi, I'm Katie. I'm a former student of the Navarre Beach Marine Science Station and I volunteer up here. And this is Nurdle, our African sulcata tortoise. We are super excited to read the first 2 chapters to you and thanks for joining us.

Bat absolutely loves animals and loves all sorts of creatures and I think he'd really like nerd over here. But something you guys may not know about Nurdle and that probably doesn't know is that Nurdle is actually named after these tiny plastic pellets. These little pellets are actually called Nurdles. And these are what is used to make all sorts of plastic items like water bottles, and maybe a pair of flip flops. But sometimes these are a real big problem for the ocean out here, and because of that, people actually go up on beaches and collect these little tiny pellets, these little nurdles, and while they may look like sand when they are embedded in the Sandy substrate of our beaches, they're not. They're tiny bits of plastic that we have to make sure we clean up and pick up when they wash up on our shores.

So Katie, tell us a little bit more about what type of tortoise Nurdle is. So he is an African Sulcata, he is a boy, and he's actually three years old. So all of you are probably a lot older than Nurdle right now. He loves to eat strawberries. They're one of his favorites. He also eats a lot of spinach and green leaves. So if you guys haven't been eating your vegetables, Nurdle would have a few words to say to you because he absolutely loves eating his vegetables. They're his favorite. And as you notice that may be on the front of his arms right here. It almost looks like he has these big spikes and they're not super sharp or anything like that, but Nurdle loves to dig tunnels, so who uses those little spikes to help push away sand and dirt and rocks and burrows into the ground? So where did he come from? So nurdle is actually rescued from a pet shop that wasn't so nice, and his owner who rescued him was moving away to Hawaii in sadly couldn't take him, so we were lucky enough to be chosen to take care of Nurdle, and what you might not know about Nurdle is he loves to read. Doctor Seuss is one of his favorites, but actually his all-time favorite book is *A Boy Called Bat*, which I heard that you're all lucky enough to have a copy of at home. So I hope you'll join us as we read along with the first two chapters of *A Boy Called Bat* and Nurdle sits in and listens along with all of you.

Today we're going to be reading *A Boy Called Bat*, written by Elana K. Arnold, with pictures by Charles Santoso.

Chapter One: After School.

Bixby Alexander Tam stared in the refrigerator trying to decide what to eat. He knew that the longer he took, the more energy he was wasting, and Bixby Alexander Tam did not like to waste energy. But also he didn't like

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to eat leftovers or cheese that had to be sliced or any of the yogurt flavors in the fridge. “BAT, close the refrigerator door,” yelled his sister Janie from the kitchen table, where she sat cutting out pictures from a pile of old magazines. Janie, he was sure, had eaten all the lemon and vanilla yogurts, and she knew he only liked the creamy ones, not the fruit on the bottom kind.

BAT was what almost everyone called Bixby Alexander Tam for a couple of reasons. First, because the initials of his name B A and T spelled BAT. But there may be other reasons. BAT’s sensitive hearing, for one. He didn’t like loud sounds. What was so unusual about that? And if Janie’s old earmuffs happened to make an outstanding muffling device, wasn’t that funny if he liked to wear them? There was also the way he sometimes flapped his hands when he was nervous or excited, or thinking about something interesting. Some of the kids at school seem to think that this was hilarious. And of course bats have wings, which they flap.

So between the initials and the earmuffs and the hand flapping, the nickname had stuck. And truthfully, that didn’t mind. Animals were his very favorite thing. Better even than vanilla yogurt. “Janie, did you eat all the vanillas?” “Not all of them,” Janie answered. She curved scissors around the bent arm of the boy she was cutting out. I saw you eat at least two or three of them. Did you eat the last vanilla? “Yes,” said Janie, and with the final snip she freed the shiny paper boy, “it was delicious.”

Of course it was delicious. All the vanillas were delicious. Well, said BAT, closing the refrigerator door a little harder than he needed to, now there is nothing to eat. I wouldn’t say there’s nothing to eat, teased Janie. She knew she wasn’t supposed to tease him. Well I would, said BAT. Nothing I want to eat. Then you must not be very hungry. On Tuesdays and Thursdays after mom drove BAT home from school, she had to go back to work for a couple more hours. It was Janie’s job to watch BAT. Thursdays were the hardest and today was a Thursday. Make me a snack BAT demanded.

Make me a snack, *what?*

Make me a snack *now*. No, said Janie, make me a snack, *please*.

I don’t have to say please, said BAT, making me an after school snack is part of your job. You don’t have to say please to get someone to do their job. You do if you want them to do it well, said Janie. But she pushed back the magazines and stood up. BAT felt his elbows beginning to bend. He felt his hands getting ready to flap. I’m hungry, he said again. His voice sounded higher.

OK, OK, said Janie, don’t fly away. I’ll fix your peanut butter and jelly. Without the crust, BAT said. He felt better already.

Chapter Two: BAT’s Cave.

After finishing his snack, BAT went into his room. BAT’s room was his favorite place in the whole world. In his room BAT felt completely comfortable. Here, he knew where everything was. If something was in the wrong place, it was his own fault, because no one messed with his room but him.

In the rest of their small house, BAT’s mom and sister knew to put anything that needed to go to BAT’s room in one of the three baskets, his clean laundry basket, his book basket, and his miscellaneous stuff basket.

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Miscellaneous was a great word. and one of bats favorites. It meant all the extra stuff, so the miscellaneous stuff basket could have almost anything except clean laundry and books in it.

When the baskets were full, mom placed them in the hallway outside BAT's door. He took them into his room and unloaded them, himself. Once mom tried to reorganize his dresser drawers, because she thought he could use some help. After when he was so upset he couldn't even speak, she said, I'm sorry BAT, but your drawers were just a mess. Your hats mixed in with your pants and sweaters. I don't know how you find anything.

But the drawers weren't a mess. Not at all. If Mom had looked more closely, she could have seen his knit caps were in with his long pants and his sweaters, because he always wore those things together on cold days. Shorts and t-shirts were in another drawer, because he wore those things together on warm days.

But what about this drawer? Mom had asked, pulling open the bottom right drawer, which help a pair of pants, a wool sweater, and two T shirts. Those are all the things I never wear BAT told her, when he finally calm down, because they're itchy and uncomfortable. Then mom cut the tags out of the t-shirts, and BAT moved them to his warm days drawers.

After that mom left him to his own devices, as she liked to say. Once in his room, BAT closed the door. There was a sign on the outside that said, "Please Knock." Janie had written it for him, because her writing was much neater than his. Janie could do all the hand things better than BAT, write things, cut things out, smooth peanut butter on bread. The clock told BAT that mom would be home in 46 minutes. Mom was a veterinarian, which was what bat intended to be too, one day. Mostly, she treated cats and dogs, but sometimes she had unusual patients. Once she had taken a BB pellet out of a wing of a hawk. The pellet had broken one of the bones, and mom had done surgery to mend it. She brought home x-rays to show BAT. Why would anyone shoot a Hawk, BAT had asked? Do you think they were going to eat it? No, said mom, sometimes people do stupid things. She had been very angry about the Hawk. Angrier even when BAT and Janie got into loud screaming fights. Seeing the x-ray of the hawk's broken wing made BAT angry, too. But his room always made him feel better.

It had a roll down bamboo window shade, and a fine closet full of shelves, and a pull-out trundle, in case someday a friend came to spend the night. It had a ceiling fan, and a reading lamp, and a rug with a picture of a train track printed on it. BAT felt like looking through his animal encyclopedia, which he often did after school, so he pulled it down from his bookshelf and dropped comfortably into his beanbag. His stomach was full of sandwich, and Mr. Grayson hadn't assigned any homework. For this moment at least, BAT felt perfectly content.

So this summer, come visit the Navarre Beach Marine Science Station and understand that if you want to work with animals, it takes a lot of hard work. It's not always glamorous. And volunteer, whenever you can. See you soon.