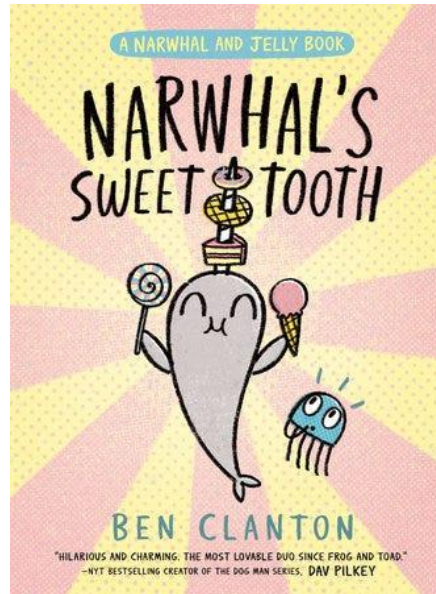


Narwhal & Jelly Book #9 exclusive preview and Q&A with cartoonist Ben Clanton (Popverse)



Popverse: Where did you get the idea for Narwhal and Jelly?

Ben Clanton: I was inspired by a book by Paul Nicklen! His photographs of narwhals captivated me and I kind of became obsessed with them. Narwhals are one of those creatures that, to me, seem too fantastic for this world and yet they are real . . . and a really good reminder of how incredible this world of ours can be.

I tried putting the sense of awe I feel for the creature into the character that I started to doodle. But Narwhal wouldn't fully click for me until one day, back in 2012, I was waiting in line for ice cream. I already had narwhals on my brain when the smell of waffle cones came wafting into my nose and started to mix with those narwhal thoughts. I found myself connecting the shape of the waffle cone with Narwhal's tusk, and next thing I knew I was basing Narwhal's personality on ice cream and waffle cones. Soon Narwhal was swimming about in my mind and was followed by a flood of story ideas. As for Jelly? Jelly was much like me . . . getting caught in Narwhal's tidal-wave and trying to make sense of it all.

What's your favorite animal who lives in the sea?

As tempted as I am to say nudibranch or sea cucumber, my very favorite is the humpback whale. I find it fascinating how they create essentially bubble nets to capture fish. And I love that they have been known to come to the rescue of other creatures.

Who your favorite animal who lives on land?

I feel a particular affinity for pandas.

How did you learn so much about different animals?

I wish my answer were something exciting like a background in zoology or marine biology (another life!), but I'm simply someone who loves animals. I'm especially fascinated by the sea and all the creatures in this world's waters.

How did you become an author?

I first became interested in writing and publishing a book when I was a freshman in college. I was volunteering at a nearby elementary school library and reading books with students there. I found myself enjoying the books just as much if not more than the students I was reading them with. I found myself wondering . . . would I like making books as much as I enjoyed reading them? I decided to give it a go! And then another go and another and another.

How did you learn to draw?

I carry a sketchbook with me EVERYWHERE and draw as much as possible. I fill sketchbook after sketchbook with all sorts of random doodles (unicorns, robots, potatoes) . . . often I'll play drawing games or give myself different challenges. I might not have a formal art background, but I try to make up for it with my enthusiasm.

What's your favorite holiday?

I feel like I should be saying Halloween as my most recent Narwhal and Jelly book is called A Super Scary Narwhalloween. And I do absolutely love the month of October! I'm all about the pumpkin patches, changing colors, and brisk days perfect for bundling up with a warm beverage and a book. But when it comes to a showdown between Halloween and Christmas . . . there is something so magical about Christmas, especially when you have small kids in your life as I do!

What's your favorite food (is it waffles)?

Like Narwhal I have quite the sweet tooth, but not nearly as long as Narwhal's! I do wafflely enjoy a waffle, but I have a particularly soft spot for cinnamon rolls.

[Narwhal's Sweet Tooth](#) will hit shelves on July 2, 2024. You can pre-order it now.

Popverse celebrates TV, movies, and comics. Read more at ThePopverse.com