

The Pop Ups. Stay seated. Three, two, one, ignition. Get ready for an adventure of magnificent proportion.

The Pop Ups. (Singing.) I don't know what you've been told, but we're in a golden age - so many discoveries that are jumping off the page. Wow in the world. Wow in the world. Wow in the world. Wow in the world. Wow in the world. Wow in the world. Wow in the world. Wow in the world. Wow in the world.

The Pop Ups. With Guy and Mindy. We're on our way, Houston.

News Anchor. Welcome to Bad Habit News, your source for animal news and specifically, their bad habits. I'm Norman Newman. Tonight, we bring you a story out of central China's Foping National Nature Reserve where wild pandas are reportedly covering themselves in poop.

Mindy. Wait...what?! Guy Raz! Come over here!

Guy. Coming!

Mindy. Get a load of this!

News Anchor. We now go live to the Foping National Nature Reserve where our brand new spy witness reporter is standing by with the latest. Mr. Spy Witness, are you there? Hello?

Dennis. Hey cameraman, what's that red light? What?! What are you looking at me like that for?

News Anchor. Dennis! You're live!

Dennis. I am? I'm on TV!?

News Anchor. (Sighs.)

Mindy and Guy. Dennis?!

Dennis. I'm on TV! Mother! mother, look! I'm on TV! I'm on TV! Clap clap

News Anchor. (Ahem.) Mr. Spy Witness? Your report please.

Dennis. Oh right right right... ahem! Thank you Norman! I'm here on the scene, snooping for the scoop. The scoop...on poop.

Mindy. Haha scoop on poop. Are you hearing this, Guy Raz? He's a natural.

Guy. (Sighs.)

Dennis. And at the center of today's poop scoop is the giant panda.

News Anchor. Oh, I love pandas, they're super cute.

Dennis. Oh no, Norman. Oh no no no! These pandas...roll around...in poop.

Mindy. Ugh!

News Anchor. Oh my. Am I hearing you correctly? Did you say poop?

Dennis. Yes, Norman, poop. And no one seems to be asking any questions, so I, Dennis, Spy Witness Reporter, will get some answers.

News Anchor. Wonderful, Dennis. Just be tactful, polite, and when you approach-

Dennis. Hey! Panda!

News Anchor. Ugh...

Dennis. Yeah, you! Why are you covered in poop?!

(Soundbite of panda noises.)

Mindy. Oh, good question, Dennis.

(Soundbite of panda noises.)

Dennis. Woah, is that what a panda sounds like?

(Soundbite of panda noises.)

News Anchor. Fascinating.

Dennis. Welp, there you have it. Straight from the panda's mouth.

(Soundbite of panda noises.)

Dennis. I don't know what you're saying!

(Soundbite of panda noises.)

Dennis. Back to you Norman!

Mindy. What!?! No, Dennis! I need answers!

(Soundbite of TV shutting off.)

Guy. Actually Mindy, I just read about this strange phenomenon in the journal, Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences!

Mindy. Wait! There was a scientific study about Dennis' report on pandas smothering themselves in poop!?

Guy. Yes! It was conducted by a team of researchers at the Chinese Academy of Sciences, and led by a biologist named Fuwen Wei!

Mindy. Well, a biologist is a scientist who studies the natural world and the things living in it. And both pandas and poop fit the bill so...

Guy. Exactly! Dr. Wei and his team were studying giant pandas. Specifically wild giant pandas in the Qinling mountains of Central China.

(Soundbite of Mindy's phone ringing.)

Mindy. Oh! hold that thought Guy Raz...it's Dennis!

Guy. Dennis!?

Mindy. Jello?

Dennis. (On the phone.) Mindy! Did you see me? On the TV?!

Guy. What's he saying??

Dennis. (On the phone.) Who's that, Mindy? Is that Guy?! Guy! Did you see me!? I was on TV!

Guy. (Sigh.)

Mindy. We did, Dennis! You were great! The way you interviewed that panda...Dennis, where are you now?

Dennis. Well that's why I'm calling. I'm just a tiny bit stranded in China... with a bunch of poop covered pandas...

Mindy. Sorry, sorry.

Dennis. Can you come get me?

Mindy. Ok, Dennis, stay calm. We will be right there to rescue you.

Guy. We will?!

Mindy. Just tell us exactly where you are!

Dennis. Okay...let's see, uhh, I am somewhere cold, and there are too many trees, and the ground is covered in snow...oh and there's dirt under that...

Guy. (Groans.)

Dennis. Oh, and there are giant pandas everywhere.

(Soundbite of panda noises.)

Dennis. And some of them are rolling around in poop...and it smells really bad...and...

Mindy. Okay thanks, Dennis! you just sit tight and we'll be right there!

Dennis. Thanks Mindy! You're one of the good ones!

(Soundbite of ding.)

Mindy. Ok, Guy...where exactly did you say that that poo poo panda party study took place?

Guy. Well, to be clear, they were giant pandas not poop pandas, and they were first discovered by Dr. Wei back in the year 2007 in the Qinling Mountains of central China.

Mindy. Okay, great...now let me look this up.

(Soundbite of Mindy typing on the phone.)

Mindy. Qinling Mountains...also known as the Szechuan Alps...located in southern Shaanxi, China. Wow, that's a pretty big and vast mountain range, Guy.

Guy. Oh wait, I remember the news anchor mentioned something about a national nature reserve...

Mindy. Yes, yes! That's it! The Foping National Nature Reserve! Great! Now we just need to get dressed for the rescue mission.

Guy. Rescue mission?

Mindy. Yes! We promised Dennis that we would go rescue him. Ah! One panda suit for you, Guy Raz....and one panda suit for me!

Guy. (Groans.)

(Soundbite of zipper.)

Mindy. Thank you!

Guy. Okay so how are we planning to get to China to rescue Dennis?

Mindy. Well...follow me right outside here.

(Soundbite of footsteps and door opening.)

Mindy. Reggie!

Reggie. Cool!

Guy. Reggie. Of course.

(Soundbite of wings flapping.)

Reggie. Coo.

Mindy. Service with a smile!

Reggie. Coo. Okay, hop on Guy Raz! Here...I'll pull you up. There we go. Operation rescue Dennis from the poo poo panda party. Here we go!

(Soundbite of music and wings flapping.)

Mindy. Oof! Nice landing, Reg!

Guy. Mindy...this nature reserve is huge! From the sky it looked like it spanned over a hundred miles at least!

Mindy. One hundred and thirty-five square miles or three hundred and fifty square kilometers to be exact!

Guy. Well, how are we supposed to find Dennis among all these trees?

Mindy. You know, Dennis' voice does tend to uh...travel.

Reggie. Coo.

Guy. Alright.

(Soundbite of nature.)

Dennis. Ahh! Quit sniffing at me like that! What? I gave you all my food already! Well, how would you like it if I sniffed in your face!?

(Soundbite of panda sounds.)

Guy. I'd recognize that voice anywhere!

Dennis. Alright! You're asking for it! Sniff sniff sniff sniff--awww, yuk...what is that smell?

(Soundbite of panda noises.)

Dennis. Oh yeah, it's poop...

Guy and Mindy. Dennis!

Reggie. Cool!

Mindy. It's coming from this way, Guy Raz! Come on! Run run run run...

Guy. Slow down Mindy! It's hard to run in this panda suit!

(Soundbite of panda noises.)

Dennis. Listen, you all look very cute and cuddly but I don't want to be near you!

Guy. We're getting closer! Dennis! We'll save you!

Dennis. Did you hear that?! It's humans! They must be here to rescue me! Help help! Save me save me save-

(Soundbite of rustling through trees.)

Mindy. Look, there he is, Guy Raz! I see him! Dennis!

Reggie. Cool!

Mindy. And Reggie! Dennis, we're here on a rescue mission to bring you back home and also we wanted to see the poop smothered pandas!

Guy. Wait...that's why we're here?!

Dennis. Well I got plenty of those! Feast your eyes! And nose...

Guy and Mindy. Eww!

Dennis. Yeah, they've been rolling around in horse poop all day.

Mindy. Uh, did you say...horse poop?!

Dennis. That's right...horse poop.

Mindy. Yeah, but, horse poop?

Dennis. Mindy! Yes! Horse poop! Why do you keep saying it!?

Mindy. Well it's just that, the habitats of horses and giant pandas don't exactly overlap naturally in the wild...and on top of that, giant pandas are solitary animals, meaning that they often live alone and don't tend to socialize the way other animals do.

(Soundbite of pandas continues in the background.)

Guy. Well that's true, but over thousands of years, humans have been bringing horses through the Qinling mountains as they deliver supplies and such to farmers who live up here.

Dennis. Oooh like the pony express! They deliver supplies by horse?!

Mindy. Look! Here comes a horse now!

(Soundbite of horse neigh.)

Dennis. What a coincidence.

(Soundbite of horse noises, farting, and pooping.)

Guy / Mindy / Reggie. Eww!

(Soundbite of horses nickering.)

Dennis. Yikes.

Mindy. That's a lotta horse poop.

Dennis. Sure is. Now watch what that giant panda does.

Guy. It spies the fresh pile horse poop.

(Soundbite of panda noises.)

Mindy. Takes a big ol' whiff of it.

Guy. Gently rubs it cheek in it.

(Soundbite of panda noises continues in background.)

Dennis. And!

(Soundbite of panda noises.)

Guy & Mindy. (Gasps.)

Dennis. There it is!

Mindy. It's rolling around in it!! It's rolling in the horse poop!

Guy. Ugh. I can't watch anymore.

Mindy. That's okay Guy. I'll narrate for you. And now, it's using it's little giant panda paws to smother horse poop over every inch of its big furry body and face.

(Soundbite of panda noises.)

Dennis. Oh you're right, Reggie. The poop is exceptionally fresh. Why would these pandas smear themselves with another species' feces?!

Reggie. Coo.

Guy. Well that's exactly what Dr. Wei and his fellow researchers wanted to find out! Especially since this behavior of stealing another species' feces is so unusual!

(Soundbite of panda noises.)

Mindy. Well, did they have a hypothesis, or an educated guess as to why these pandas would do this?

Guy. Actually, they did! Dr. Wei and his team had the hypothesis that maybe by coating themselves in horse poop, these giant pandas were helping to keep themselves warm during the cold winter months! To test their hypothesis, they set up an experiment.

Reggie. Coo.

Guy. An experiment that lasted for a whole year.

Mindy. A whole year? Sounds like they were testing their patience to me!

Guy. Dr. Wei and his team set out camera traps in this very nature reserve.

Reggie. Coo.

Mindy. Camera traps?

Dennis. Ooh, camera traps. Snooping one-oh-one.

Guy. That's right.

(Soundbite of cameras beeping, trees rustling.)

Guy. These camera traps were cameras hidden among the trees, rocks, and ground covering...and they contained sensors that detected movement.

(Soundbite of cameras beeping.)

Mindy. Oh, so cameras that only took pictures when there was action happening.

(Soundbite of panda noises.)

Guy. Exactly.

Mindy. Huh, so what did they do after setting the camera traps, Guy Raz?

Guy. Well, they waited!

(Soundbite of ticking.)

Guy. From June 2016 until July 2017,

(Soundbite of cameras beeping.)

Guy. The cameras would wait for any movement from the giant pandas,

(Soundbite of panda noise.)

Guy. And horses,

(Soundbite of horse neigh.)

Guy. And when the cameras detected a panda or a horse in action,

(Soundbite of passing gas.)

Guy. They'd start recording...

(Soundbite of camera.)

Mindy. Ooh, candid cameras!

Reggie. Coo.

(Soundbite of horse.)

Guy. Over the course of that year, the cameras captured thirty-eight instances of giant pandas rolling around in horse poop. And every single time, they followed the same detailed steps that we just saw a minute ago!

Dennis. Yes, but why, Guy!? Why?

Guy. Well, it appears that the pandas were drawn to the uh...smell...of the poop.

Dennis. Oh...ew.

Guy. And the freshest poop, newer than ten days old...

(Soundbite of passing gas.)

Guy Raz....seemed to attract the pandas more than older poop. And when they examined this poop back in their lab...

(Soundbite of lab noises.)

Guy. The scientists discovered that it contained two chemical compounds called sesquiterpenes that are commonly found in plants.

Dennis. Huh...

Mindy. Well that makes sense since horses are herbivores meaning they only eat plants like hay and grass!

Dennis. Well I don't get it. This doesn't connect to the hypothesis that smearing horse poop all over their bodies keeps pandas warm in the winter!

Guy. Ah, but it does, Dennis! So for the next part of the experiment, Dr. Wei and his team smeared some of these sesquiterpene chemicals onto the fur and paws of some mice (SOUNDBITE OF MICE) in their lab.

Dennis. Ok.

Guy. And what they found was that these chemicals essentially numbed or stopped the mice's bodies from feeling the chill of freezing air!

Dennis. Woah.

Mindy. And since horse poop is packed with sesquiterpenes, Dr. Wei and his team believe that the giant pandas really could be smothering themselves in horse poop in an attempt to stay warm!?

Reggie. Coo.

Guy. It's possible! and just like any good experiment, sometimes the answers just lead to more questions!

Dennis. Like maybe does it just feel good?

Reggie. Coo.

(Soundbite of running.)

Mindy & Guy. (Gasp.) No! Dennis! You're not wearing any-

Dennis. Cannonball!

(Soundbite of poop splattering.)

Reggie. Coo.