

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.

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

Guy Raz. (Grunting).

Mindy Thomas. Guy Raz?

Guy. (Grunting).

Mindy. Guy Raz? You OK in there, buddy? Whoa, whoa, whoa, what is going on in here?

Guy. I'm just trying to get crack open this coconut.

Mindy. With a hammer? Give me that thing. You're not even using it correctly.

Guy. Ugh.

Mindy. Man, you really have gone cuckoo for coconuts, haven't you?

Guy. Mindy, coconuts are packed with nutrients. They're good for our immune system so we don't get sick as easily. They're good for our hearts. They help to keep our skin healthy.

Mindy. Yeah, and they also really stress you out when you can't bust them open.

Guy. Ugh.

Mindy. Careful, Guy Raz, you're going to hurt yourself.

(Soundbite of chainsaw motor starting.)

Mindy. What in the...

Guy. Well, how else am I going to get this thing open if I want to get the nutrients out of it?

Mindy. A chainsaw - are you kidding me, man? Stop. Stop it. Stop it right now. That's it, I'm pulling the plug on this operation.

(Soundbite of chainsaw motor winding down.)

Guy. Ugh.

Mindy. Guy Raz, there is a better way.

Guy. Wait, did you say there's a better way?

Mindy. OK, to be clear, there are a million better ways of busting open a coconut, but we're going to try the most newly discovered way.

Guy. Oh, great. Is this, like, a new kind of invention we can just, you know, pick up from the store, maybe, you know, order online - same-day delivery - something like that?

Mindy. Well, not exactly. You see, we sort of need to - well, we need to bring your coconut to the coconut cracker itself.

Guy. That sounds like too much work. Here, here, just hand me that hammer.

Mindy. Nope. Don't you come near this hammer.

Guy. Ugh.

Mindy. Guy Raz, do you trust me?

Guy. No.

Mindy. (Yelling.) Reggie!

Guy. Oh, boy.

(Soundbite of bird cooing.)

Guy. You know, Mindy, on second thought, I can just run to the store and grab, you know, a jar of organic, unfiltered coconut oil and, you know, kind of go on with my day.

Mindy. Get on the bird, Guy Raz.

Guy. Mindy, I have a very busy day ahead of me and...

Mindy. Saddle up. This might be a wild ride.

Guy. Ugh.

Mindy. Here, put these on.

Guy. OK, but this better only take a minute.

Mindy. Guy Raz, Reggie, hold on to your coconuts.

(Soundbite of bird cooing.)

Mindy. Next stop - Solomon Islands, South Pacific.

Guy. Mindy, I just don't...

Mindy. Here we go!

(Soundbite of music.)

Mindy. (Grunting).

Guy. (Grunting).

Mindy. Ah, you OK, Guy Raz?

Guy. Well, I'm a little banged up, but not even that crash landing could crack this coconut, Mindy.

Mindy. Well, don't you worry your funny little head about that because we have come to the right place for coconut cracking.

Guy. Where are we? This looks like the middle of nowhere. Are we in a rainforest?

Mindy. Guy Raz, welcome to the island of Vangunu, part of the Solomon Islands. Here, you can see it right here on this map.

Guy. Let me see that. Solomon Islands - so we're on one of these islands in the South Pacific. It looks like we're just a little tiny bit northeast of Australia.

Mindy. Yup, and we're on that one right there.

Guy. That giant red island that's covering up the others?

Mindy. No, that's ketchup. I use this map as a place mat for my lunch sometimes. Here.

(Soundbite of the lick.)

Guy. Ugh.

Mindy. There, all better.

Guy. So do you want to tell me why I'm standing here in the middle of a remote island in the South Pacific, holding a coconut?

Mindy. Oh, yeah, well, that's because we're here to see that coconut cracker I was telling you about.

Guy. The coconut cracker?

Mindy. Well, also known as the *Uromys vika* or the Vangunu giant rat.

Guy. Rat?

Mindy. Did I just say rat?

Guy. You said rat.

Mindy. Here's the deal. For the last twenty years...hang on a second. Hey, Jed.

Jed. Yello.

Mindy. Can get some mysterious, legendary-sounding music up in here?

(Soundbite of record scratch.)

Jed. Oh, sure.

(Soundbite of legendary-sounding music.)

Mindy. Thanks, man. For the past two decades, the people of this very island have been telling scientists about the elusive Vangunu giant rat, who, as legend would have it, has lived amongst them in the trees but never before been spotted by an outsider.

Guy. In the trees - like, high up in the branches, like, in the canopy?

Mindy. And the scientists were all, nah, we can't see it, we don't believe it, for it had been eighty years since a new rodent species was discovered on this island.

Guy. But eventually, they did discover that it exists, right?

Mindy. So there were some scientists, like Tyrone Lavery from the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago. That guy spent years searching for this legendary creature.

Guy. And did he ever find it?

Mindy. Nope. Bummer alert - he did not.

Guy. Oh, that's too bad.

Mindy. But he did find some poop.

Guy. Mindy!

Mindy. And after digging around in that poop for a while, he discovered the fur of an unidentified species of rodent.

Guy. The Vangunu giant rat.

Mindy. And then in the year 2015...

Guy. Uh, that was, like, two years ago.

Mindy. A ranger from the island named Hikuna Judge was just out, minding his own beeswax, taking a walk through the island's thick rain forest when a giant rat fell from the sky.

Guy. What?

Mindy. Well, I mean, technically, it jumped out of the tree it had been living in, but anywho, it was in that moment that the Vangunu giant rat went from being a legend to a scientific fact.

Guy. The first new rodent species found on the island in eighty years.

Mindy. Exactoritos, Guy Raz. Pretty cool, huh?

Guy. So do we need to be worried about, you know, giant tree-dwelling rats falling from the sky?

Mindy. Well, I mean, if it's your thing, then, yeah, I guess.

Guy. (Yelling.) Reggie, take me back home, please!

Mindy. I'm just joking, Guy Raz. You don't have to worry about giant rats falling out of trees and bonking you on the head. In fact, the Vangunu giant rat, or the *Uromys vika*, as scientists call it, is super-duper rare.

Guy. Well, I'm looking up into the trees of this rainforest, and there's a super thick canopy of leaves and branches. It's hard to even see the sky. And maybe it makes it easier for the Vangunu giant rat to hide?

Mindy. Yup, that's one reason, but the other reason is that timber companies have been coming to the island and cutting down the trees - like, most of the trees.

(Soundbite of saw.)

Guy. And to lots of creatures in the wild, trees are their homes and their habitats.

Mindy. Yeah, I mean, can you imagine if nearly all the homes in your town were destroyed?

Guy. That would be awful.

Mindy. Yeah, so that's kind of what it's like to be a Vangunu giant rat on the island of Vangunu. And without a home and everything that comes with it, it's really difficult to survive there. And now there's even talk of the Vangunu giant rat becoming an official endangered species.

Guy. ...Meaning they're at risk of extinction.

Mindy. You know it - pretty sad, huh?

Guy. Yeah, sure is. So I don't know if now is the right time to bring this up, Mindy, but didn't you bring me here so that the Vangunu giant rat could, you know, crack open my coconut?

Mindy. Oh, yeah. So while we've been talking down here, Reggie's actually been up in the treetops making some new friends. Hey, Reg.

(Soundbite of bird cooing.)

Mindy. And it looks like he actually found you one of those elusive coconut crackers.

(Soundbite of bird cooing.)

Guy. Whoa, is that a - is that a Vangunu giant rat riding on his back, holding a lasso?

Mindy. Nope, that's something in your eye. Here he comes. Look at that giant rat.

Guy. Man, if only scientists could get a load of this.

Mindy. Oh, man. OK, so walk up to him slowly so you can get a closer look. Here, take your coconut.

Guy. Whoa, he's way bigger than I thought he would be.

Mindy. I know, right? He weighs in at about two pounds and is one and a half feet long from nose to tail.

Guy. Whoa.

Mindy. In fact, he's about four times bigger than the average city-dumpster rat.

Guy. Whoa.

Mindy. Isn't he a cutie?

Guy. Well, I guess you could say he has cute little ears - you know, comparatively speaking. And he's got pretty wide feet with big pads and curved paws and...

Mindy. Oh, yeah. Those big, wide feet help him to move around on those skinny forest branches high up in the trees where he lives.

Guy. And his long hairless tail - it looks like it's covered in tiny scales with big patches of skin, kind of like an opossum.

Mindy. Yup. And now I'm going to try to make him laugh so you can check out his teeth, OK?

Guy. Uh, yeah, I think I'm good.

Mindy. No, really. You know that some baby rats laugh when you tickle them, right?

Guy. I've heard that somewhere before.

Mindy. Yeah, it's so crazy. So these researchers at Germany's Humboldt University did a whole study on it about a year ago. Some baby rats laugh when they're tickled, but at a frequency that's too high to hear with our own human ears.

Guy. It's just incredible to think about laughing rats.

Mindy. So I'm just going to tell this giant rat a joke and see if we can at least get a smile out of him.

Guy. Oh, no.

(Soundbite of mic feedback.)

Mindy. Ahem. Hey, buddy, so what's a rat's favorite game? Eh?

Guy. I don't think he's going to respond to you, Mindy.

Mindy. Hide-and-squeak - get it?

(Soundbite of bird cooing.)

Mindy. Reggie gets it.

Guy. Wait, wait, wait, oh, I got one. Why was the rat afraid of the river?

Mindy. I don't think he speaks English, Guy Raz.

Guy. Catfish - get it? - cat fish.

(Soundbite of rat squeaking.)

Mindy. Wait, look, I think he's smiling. Oh, man, get a good look at those teeth.

Guy. Whoa, those are some long, sharp teeth.

Mindy. ...Which brings me to the reason we're here, Guy Raz.

Guy. Oh no, you're not going to feed me to that giant rat, are you, Mindy?

Mindy. What? No. Why would I feed you to the giant rat?

Guy. Whew.

Mindy. You probably taste like kale and kombucha, and that just wouldn't be fair to this giant little Guy.

Guy. What? I don't taste like kombucha, do I?

(Soundbite of sniffing.)

Mindy. Guy Raz, stop sniffing your own armpits and bust out your coconut.

Guy. Oh, wait a minute. You mean to tell me that this guy really is the coconut cracker?

Mindy. In the flesh and in the fur.

Guy. Wow. OK, well, should I put the coconut on a plate first, maybe, you know, with a little garnish?

Mindy. What? No, just put it on the ground and watch him work his magic.

Guy. OK, well, I'm just going to gently place this coconut on the ground here, and I'm going to slowly back away a little bit.

Mindy. He's moving towards it.

Guy. His teeth are starting to look all powered up.

Mindy. Ooh, there he goes. He's using his sharp teeth to crack the shell of the coconut.

Guy. And now he's running away with it.

Mindy. Aw, rats.

Guy. Hey, that rat stole my coconut. You know what, Mindy? Maybe I should just let him have it. I mean, you know, with all of his trees getting chopped down, they're probably getting harder and harder to come by anyway.

Mindy. Yeah, that's probably for the best. Hey, do you want this Mounds bar that's been melting in my pocket for two weeks? It's got chocolate and coconut.

Guy. I think I'll pass. Why don't we just go back to the lab? (Yelling.) Hey, Reggie, you ready?

(Soundbite of bird cooing.)