

## **Save Our Parasites**

by Thomas van Kalken

**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.

**The pop ups.** With Guy and Mindy. We're on our way, Houston.

<<Guy walks over to Mindy's house>> <<knocks on door>> <<a beat>>

**Guy.** Hello? <<Knock knock knock>> Anyone home?

**Mindy.** <<In distance>> Guy Raz?! Is that you?

**Guy.** <<Yelling>> Yeah, I've got some freshly picked micro-tomatoes. Do you wanna try 'em?

**Mindy.** <<In distance>> Oooooooh, yeah I do. Uh let yourself in, kinda got my hands full back here

**Guy.** Uh, okay ... <<door creaks open>> what in the?

**Mindy.** Wooahahahahhhh ... <<pots and pans>> aww man! **Had** my hands full. Oh boy

**Guy.** What in the..

**Mindy.** <<Other room>> Guy Razy! I'm back here!

**Guy.** Mindy, what in the world is going on in here?

**Mindy.** <<Other room>> What do you mean?

**Guy.** What do I mean? There's paint and markers and sheets of cardboard all over the place.

**Mindy.** <<Entering the room>> Yeah! It's for the climate march ... hugs!

**Guy.** Mindy! No! You're all covered in ... <<squelch>> paint.

**Mindy.** Ooop sorry. Got a little paint on your...

**Guy.** <<Wimper>> My new tweed jacket ...

**Mindy.** Hey, on the bright side, I won't lose you in the crowd this time! I think neon green might be your color.

**Guy.** Huh, I don't think so

**Mindy.** So now that you're here, you wanna help reggie and make some signs?

**Guy.** For the climate march?

**Mindy.** Yeah! Reggie and I are flexing our creative muscles in the other room. Come on! walk walk walk walk ...

**Guy.** Well i'm always down for anything climate related

<<Guy and Mindy walk into the other room>> <<squelch from a paint tube>>

**Reggie.** Cooo!

**Guy.** Reggie? You're covered in paint too?

**Reggie.** Coo!

**Mindy.** Hey, look! We all match!

**Guy.** Ughhhh!

**Mindy.** Anyhoo Guy Raz grab a paint brush and get started!

**Guy.** Ok, anything for climate science.

<<Guy and Mindy grab brushes and start painting>>

**Guy.** So what is this climate march we're going to anyway Mindy?

**Mindy.** Oh it's huge, everyone's gonna be there; mr Fingerling, Dennis, even Gramma G-Force is going to make an appearance!

**Guy.** Wow

**Reggie.** Cool!

**Mindy.** I know.

**Guy.** So is this like the climate march we went to last month Mindy?

**Mindy.** Uh well not exactly Guy Raz. See this one is focused on a very specific climate issue.

**Guy.** Huh? Well what is it? Climate justice? Habitat destruction? Climate migration?

**Mindy.** All great guess' Guy Raz but no, no and no.

**Guy.** Well then what is it?

**Mindy.** Parasites!

**Guy.** Parasites?! You mean the very creature's i've been trying to keep off micro-tomatoes.

**Mindy.** Oh, but Guy Raz, the parasites love your micro tomatoes

**Guy.** That's the problem!

**Mindy.** Anyhoo, check out all the signs reggie and I have made ...

**Guy.** Interesting <<reading>> this one says...save our parasites ... climate change is bugging me out ... parasites have para-rights?

**Mindy.** Yeah that last one's a bit of a stretch.

**Guy.** Mindy what is all this?

**Mindy.** Well it all started with this study I was reading the other day from the journal the proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences that said that parasites are in trouble Guy Raz.

**Guy.** In trouble? Mindy, wouldn't a warmer planet mean more parasites than ever before?

**Mindy.** What do you mean?

**Guy.** Well, all the parasites that I know **prefer** a warmer climate! It seems to me like climate change would be a good thing for them.

**Mindy.** Well some parasites might be getting a boost from climate change - ya know, the sort of parasites that us humans are familiar with - this study says that they might be the exception to the rule.

**Reggie.** Cool!

**Guy.** Huh ...

**Dennis.** <<Through bullhorn>> <<from outside>> Mindy! Miiiiiindy!

**Mindy.** Ughhhhh <<yelling>> yes Dennis!

**Dennis.** <<From outside>> are you almost ready to go? I want to get a good seat.

**Mindy.** A good seat? <<Yelling>> Dennis it's a march! There are no seats!

**Dennis.** <<From outside>> oh, really? <<A beat>> are you sure?

**Mindy.** Ughhh ...

**Reggie.** Cool!

**Dennis.** <<From outside>> Well whatever, i'm ready to go. Are we leaving soon?

**Mindy.** Alright. You ready to go Guy Raz? Reggie?

**Reggie.** Cool!

**Guy.** Almost Mindy ... just one last stroke <<brush stroke>> tada! How's this?

**Mindy.** <<Reading>> We are the tick support

**Guy.** Get it? Like tech support.

**Mindy.** Oh...

**Dennis.** <<Bullhorn>> Mindy! Hurry uuuuuup, it's hot outside and I already drank all my water.

**Mindy.** Okay, reggie you got your sign?

**Reggie.** Cool!

**Mindy.** Great, come on everyone, let's get out of here.

**Reggie.** Cool!

**Guy.** Alright

**Mindy.** Walk, walk, walk

<<Door open and close>> <<outside atmosphere>>

**Dennis.** <<Still through bullhorn>> yay! Mindy and Guy Raz are here!

**Fingerling.** Pretty cool!

**Gramma G-Force.** Big whoop! I'm here too and you don't see me braggin about it.

**Mindy.** Grandma G-Force! Thomas Fingerling! You've got matching costumes.

**Gramma G-Force.** Yup.

**Fingerling.** I'm a parma-site!

**Gramma G-Force.** No you're not Fingerling! You're a parasite.

**Fingerling.** Oh, what did I say?

**Dennis.** Guy Raz! Why are you dressed like a neon tennis ball?

**Guy.** I'm not dressed up like a tennis ball Dennis i'm ...

**Mindy.** We had a little painting mishap earlier.

**Guy. We** had a painting mishap?

**Mindy.** Anywho ... who's ready to save some parasites?

**Reggie.** Cool!

**Gramma G-Force.** I suppose, I got nothing else to do today.

**Dennis.** <<Through bullhorn>> i'm ready!

**Guy.** Gah! Dennis, we can hear you! You don't need to keep using that bullhorn.

**Dennis.** <<Through bullhorn> ope! ... <<Catching himself>> <<bullhorn turns off>> sorry sorry sorry

**Mindy.** Ugh Dennis!

**Dennis.** Sorry Mindy

**Guy.** Which way Mindy?

**Mindy.** Right this way! Come on everyone, follow me!

**Fingerling.** Okee-doke!

**Mindy.** Walk, walk, walk

**Gramma G-Force.** Don't tell me what to do.

<<The gang starts to walk off>>

**Guy.** So Mindy, why are we marching to save the parasites? I always thought that parasites were bad?

**Mindy.** Well, it is true that parasites transmit diseases and infect other species

**Guy.** Yeah...

**Mindy.** And it's also true that they live in or on other animals uninvited.

**Dennis.** Ewww

**Guy.** Uh huh

**Mindy.** And yeah, parasites basically suck the life out of the animals that uh..host...them...

**Guy.** Ew..

**Mindy.** But since parasites make up almost half of all animal species on the planet...

**Guy.** They do?

**Mindy.** It's very very important that we save them.

**Guy.** Mindy, that doesn't make any sense! Parasites sound awful!

**Mindy.** You mean awfully important for keeping our ecosystems in check!

**Guy.** Huh?

**Mindy.** Guy Raz, if parasites wind up disappearing because of climate change, our ecosystems as we know them could go bonkerballs! Everything would be thrown out of whack!

**Guy.** I'm not sure I follow...

**Mindy.** Okay, so think about parasites as predators.

**Guy.** Well that's easy.

**Mindy.** It's a predators uh... job... in an ecosystem to make sure that there aren't too many of any one species.

**Dennis.** Oh right, predators kill and eat other animals to keep them from taking over!

**Guy.** Yes, I know what predators do, Dennis.

**Dennis.** And also, Guy Raz, parasites can sometimes affect an animal's behavior, which in turn can move food up the food chain! Right Mindy?

**Guy.** Dennis!

**Reggie.** Cool!

**Mindy.** It's true though! Some parasites make animals act in strange ways which makes it easier for predators to target and eat them! And this affects the food chain

**Guy.** Wow, really?

**Mindy.** Yeah, for example, in this study they found that there's a type of worm called a trematode flatworm that when it infects a fish it burrows into its brain, <<creepy music rises>> whispering into it's ear, convincing it to swim closer to the surface when bam! <<Creepy music peaks>>

**Guy and Dennis.** Aghhhh!

**Mindy.** A bird of prey swoops in, snaps it up and turns it into it's next meal!

**Guy.** That sounds kind of scary Mindy!

**Dennis.** I'll say!

**Mindy.** Scary cool Guy Raz! This study found that fish that were infected with this parasite made them 10 to 30 times more likely to become a meal for a bird!

**Dennis.** Hooray! Meals for birds!! <<On megaphone>> meals for birds! Meals for birds! Meals for birds!

**Guy.** Mindy, can you take that thing away from him?

**Mindy.** Dennis, give me that megaphone!

**Dennis.** <<On megaphone>> noooo! Nononono! I'll be good! <<Off megaphone>> i'll be good...

**Guy.** Ok so what you're saying is that without that parasite, those fish wouldn't swim close to the surface and without that some of those birds of prey would go hungry.

**Mindy.** Yeah, parasites sort of help a lot of predators.

**Guy.** Okay, I think i'm starting to get it. But how do these researchers know that these parasites are disappearing?



**Mindy.** Well, in that study I was telling you about, they analyzed almost 18,000 parasites that were members of 85 different species.

**Guy.** Woah, that's a lot

**Mindy.** Yeah ... they were able to track these species over the last 140 years and they found that as the earth warmed up, the amount of parasites decreased

**Guy.** That's incredible Mindy

<<We start to hear a building crowd somewhere around here??>>

**Mindy.** Incredibly bad! Just 2 degrees hotter and we'll have only half the parasites we have right now!

**Guy.** And nobody wants that?

**Mindy.** Nope! Especially not the parasites....

<<We hear the crowd fully now>>

**Fingerling.** Oo-da-lolly! What have we got here?!

**Mindy.** Look, we made it to the march!

**Reggie.** Coo

**Gramma G-Force.** It's about time.

**Dennis.** Look at all the people!

<<Off in the distance we hear chanting>>

**Leader.** <<On bullhorn>> what do we want!

**Crowd.** For parasitic organisms to get the same level of attention as other organisms within the climate debate!

**Leader.** When do we want it?

**Crowd.** Within the next 5 to 6 years in order to prevent cascading effects!

**Leader.** What do we want?

<<Chanting fades out>>

**Dennis.** Ooo, nice megaphone.

**Dennis.** <<Through bullhorn>> ahem, hey! I got a megaphone too!

**Mindy.** Dennis!

**Dennis.** <<Through bullhorn>> megaphone twins! <<Bullhorn squeaks>>

**Fingerling.** Quiet!

**Reggie.** Coo

**Guy.** Do you think all these people are here because of that study you read Mindy?

**Mindy.** Maybe? I mean parasites aren't usually this popular.

**Guy.** Right. We don't usually tend to research them as much as we do other organisms.

**Mindy.** Yeah, and the ones we do decide to study are usually the ones that are harmful to us or the animals we eat or keep as pets.

**Guy.** So the whole point of this march is to make people realize that parasites are just as important to save from climate change as the birds and the bees?

**Mindy.** Exactly and the first step in that is doing more research into these important but misunderstood creatures.

**Random person.** <<Hippie vibes>> heeeeyyyy, cool costumes you two ...

**Fingerling.** Uh what costumes?

**Random person.** : Aren't you two dressed up as parasites?

**Gramma G-Force.** And what's it to ya?

**Random person.** Nothing, just dig the costumes man.

**Mindy.** Grandma G-Force! Just say thank you.

**Gramma G-Force.** <<Begrudgingly>> well thank you.

**Random person.** Hey! No worries. Save the parasites! <<he walks off>> peace

**Fingerling.** Huh strange fella.

**Reggie.** Coo

**Leader.** <<On pa>> uhhh, hello. Is this thing on?

**Mindy.** Ooooh Guy Raz! I think they're about to give the speeches!

**Guy.** Speeches?

**Leader.** <<On p.a.>> ok, good... ahem, thank you all for coming today! The awareness that we're raising for our parasite friends will have rippling effects through-out the whole ecosystem!

<<Crowd cheers>>

**Leader.** Because ...

**Crowd.**parasites ... deserve ... saving ... too!

**Leader.** That's right! Now, is there anyone out there that would like to come up to the microphone and say a few words to help inspire and motivate and influence the...

**Dennis.** Ohh! Mememe! Pick me!!

**Mindy.** <<Under breath>> Dennis!

**Dennis.** <<Megaphone>> ahem! Pick me! Pick me! Pick me!

**Leader.** You there! The gentleman with the megaphone! Come on up!

**Dennis.** <<Megaphone>> yesssss!

<<Dennis runs off>>

**Dennis.** Excuse me, pardon me, gentleman with a megaphone coming through!

<<Crowd complaints>>

**Dennis.** <<Megaphone>> I said excuse me!

**Leader.** Oh my...

<<In the distance we hear Dennis run up a small wooden staircase and bound onto the stage>>

**Leader.** Uhhhh...

**Dennis.** <<Slightly out of breath getting up to the pa>> whew! Ok... is this thing on? Testing testing! <<Pats mic>>

**Leader.** yes, it's on...

**Dennis.** <<On pa>> alright, good. Ahem! Hello everyone! My name is Dennis, and I don't mind telling you, I don't much care for parasites!

<<Crowd starts boo-ing>>

**Guy.** Oh no ...

**Gramma G-Force.** Someone ought to stop him before he makes a fool outta himself. Oh wait, it's too late.

**Dennis.** <<On pa>> quit boo-ing! Parasites are too bitey and we alllll know it!

<<Crowd continues boo-ing>>

**Guy.** Uhhh

**Mindy.** Well, looks like it's Mindy to the rescue again ... <<making her way through the crowd>> excuse me, coming through, sorry, gotta stop my friend, thank you ...

**Dennis.** <<On pa>> also, what's the deal with leeches?! Even their name sounds disgusting! Leeches.... Leeeeeechess.

**Mindy.** Just hoist myself up onto stage here ... ughhhh!

**Dennis.** <<On pa>> it's like, ew, you know? ... You know what I mean?!

**Mindy.** <<Bursting in front of Dennis and stealing the mic>> haha, thanks Dennis. You can go now.

**Dennis.** <<On pa>> but I was just getting to the good part!

**Mindy.** <<On pa>> no you weren't ...

**Dennis.** Aww man <<Dennis skulks off>>

**Leader.** <<On pa>> what's the meaning of this!? Do you have something to say about parasites?

**Mindy.** <<On pa>> oh me? Well ... <<thinking about it>> I suppose I do ...yes

**Leader.** <<On pa>> well, ok then...

<<Rousing music starts to build>>

**Mindy.** <<Clears throat>> for far too long we've seen parasites as nothing but an annoying pest ... a creature that only wishes to do us harm ... but now we realize how important parasites are, not only to us ... but to the entire ecosystem ...

<<Everyone waits on baited breath>>

**Mindy.** Sure ... they may be different from us ... and sure they may be all take and no give ... but that doesn't mean that parasites don't deserve to be saved! And with that I say, save our parasites!

<<The crowd cheers>>

**Guy.** Yay Mindy!

**Mindy.** When I say para, you say site! Para!

**Crowd.** Site!

**Dennis.** <<Through bullhorn>> site!

**Mindy.** Para!

**Crowd.** Site!

**Dennis.** <<Through bullhorn>> site!

**Guy and Mindy.** Dennis!

**Dennis.** Whaaaaat?!

End