

What's Slower than Slow?

By Thomas van Kalken

Guy Raz. Okay, let's see... gluten-free pretzels; check ... sparkling-free water; check ... yogurt garlic dip; check ... okay, I think everything is ready for the big race! Now I just need to tune into BTN here...

<<A tv blares static>>

<<The static is suddenly cut off>>

A bored tv presenter. And that concludes our weekend long marathon of classic television static ... coming up next on the boring television network ...boring sports featuring the world 100m not-a-dash ... but first ... a word from our sponsor ...

Commercial. <<With the energy of a monster truck rally ad>> do you like fireworks? <<Fireworks sfx>>

<<The doorbell>>

Guy Raz. Oooh, that must be Mindy

<<More ringing of the doorbell>>

Guy Raz. I'm coming!

<<Door opens>>

Guy Raz. Mindy!

Mindy. Guy Razzzy!

Guy Raz. You made it! And you're just in time too ... the big race is about to start!

Mindy. Uh aren't you going to say anything about my shirt?

Guy Raz. Your shirt?

Mindy. Yeah ... check it out!

Guy Raz. <<Reading>> Happy Un-birthday ... Guy ... Raz ... <<not reading>> Mindy ... is this for me?

Mindy. You know it is! You didn't think I'd forget your un-birthday did you?

Guy Raz. Uh ...

Mindy. Check it out, I've got everything here! An un-birthday cake with your name on it, an un-birthday t-shirt, also with your name on it. Also an un-birthday t-shirt cannon with my name on it...

Guy Raz. What?

<<Puff of air from t-shirt cannon>>

Guy Raz. Oof!

Mindy. Nice catch!

Guy Raz. <<Out of breath>> yup ...

Mindy. Why don't you check the pocket!

Guy Raz. The pocket?

Mindy. Yeah, the pocket on the shirt ...

Guy Raz. Alright ... <<unfurling shirt>> let's see here ... <<paper flick sfx>>
<<gasp>> Mindy ... are these what I think they are?

Mindy. <<Barely containing excitement>> eeeek ... yes!

Guy Raz. Three tickets to the 100m not-a-dash at the snooze-fest arena!?

Mindy. <<Party horn>> Happy un-birthday Guy Razzzy!

Guy Raz. Mindy! This is amazing ... I can't believe you got us tickets to see the slowest of the slowest animals competition.

Mindy. I know, i'm the best

Guy Raz. I wonder who's gonna win the title of world's sloooooooooowest animal!

Mindy. I know! And I heard it's a really competitive and diverse field this year ...we've got marsupials, mammals, reptiles, molluscs ... Anyhoo, we've gotta get a move on ... this race is about to start!

Guy Raz. Yeah, I know I was just about to settle down in front of the tv to watch it.

Mindy. I know, but lucky for you Guy Raz, Reggie just got his flying license renewed and is waiting for us out in the yard ...hi Reg! We'll be right there!

Reggie. Coo

Guy Raz. Okay ... let's get out of here Mindy.

<<Door opens sfx>>

Reggie. Coo!

Guy Raz. Hey Reggie!

Reggie. Coo!

Mindy. Aww he says happy not your birthday Guy Razzy!

Guy Raz. Aw thanks Reg ...

Reggie. Coo!

Mindy. Oh man look at the time ... you're right Reg ... We've got to bust a move. Come on Guy Raz ... hop on! I'm right behind ya

<<Exertion from Guy Raz>>

Mindy. Okay ... here I come ... <<Mindy hoists herself up>>

Mindy. ... Here we goooooo!

<<Guy, Mindy, and Reggie fly to the arena>>

<<A flutter of wings>>

Mindy. ... And that's another Reggie flight arriving safe and sound and on time ... nice job Reg ...

Reggie. Coo!

<<Mindy and Guy hop down>>

Guy Raz. Um ... are you sure we're at the right place Mindy? ... It looks super quiet here ...

Mindy. Well it is the snooze-fest arena ... maybe everyone's asleep?

Guy Raz. Mindy ... I highly doubt that everyone here is ...

<<Snoring>>

Guy Raz. ... <<Defeated>> asleep.

Mindy. Well that seems to be the case with this ticket taker.

Mindy. <<Coughs>>

<<Snoring intensifies>>

Mindy. <<Mindy coughs more forcefully and louder>>

<<The Guy wakes up in a huff>>

Ticket taker. Wuh! Huh! What's going on?

Mindy. OH, um ... sorry to wake you sir ...but we're here for the 100 meter not-a-dash ... I've got my tickets. Are we at the right place?

Ticket taker. <<In low monotone voice>> Yes... You've arrived at the right place ... yawn. Please can I see your tickets?

Mindy. Here you go!

Guy Raz. It's my un-birthday!

Reggie. Cool!

Ticket taker. <<Absolutely no enthusiasm>> that's great, sir. I'm so bored for you.

<<Tickets torn>>

Mindy. Come on Guy **Raz**, we gotta go...

<<soundbite of whoosh, scene change>>

Mindy. Ahh, made it!

Reggie. Cool!

Guy Raz. And just in time too Mindy ... I think it's about to start.

<<Pa system squeals to life>>

Pa announcer. Testing, testing. Hello everybody and welcome to the annual 100 meter not-a-dash world championship ...

<<A few scattered claps>>

Pa announcer.: Please ... there's no need for that ... <<clears throat>> Thank you. Every year ... slow pokes from all over the planet come to the snooze-fest arena to compete for the title of, world's slowest ... animal.

<<Scattered applause>>

Mindy. The world's slowest animal?

Pa announcer. And now, introducing this year's contestants!

Guy Raz. Oooh, ooh, here we go Mindy!

Pa announcer. Hailing from the treetops of eastern Australia ... sleeping for more than 19 hours a day and eating for most of the other 5 ... it's the motionless marsupial ... Gary the koala!

<<Scattered applause>> <<yawn>>

Guy Raz. I have all his trading cards!

Mindy. What?

Guy Raz. Hey Gary! Hey Gary! It's me!

Pa announcer. Next up ... and last year's reigning champion ... the slowest mammal on the planet ... the South American who's always down to hang ... it's Barney the sloth!

Mindy. Yes ... I love sloths!

Guy Raz. I know you do! I know

Mindy. But i've got a question

Guy Raz. Well, well. What's that Mindy?

Mindy. Why are all these animals so slow?

Guy Raz. Well there are a bunch of different reasons why one animal might be slower or faster than another ... but the reason why most of the animals out here today are slow is because of their diet!

Mindy. Their diet? You mean like what they eat?

Guy Raz. Yeah! Take Gary the koala for example ... Koalas are actually super fussy eaters and they only eat one specific kind of food!

Mindy. Yeah ... koalas only eat eucalyptus leaves right?

Guy Raz. Yeah, but the problem with eucalyptus leaves ... is that they're full of tiny fibers.

Mindy. Ah which probably means it takes the koalas a long time to digest them ... you know to turn all those delicious, delicious eucalyptus leaves into poop!

Guy Raz. That's right. And the best way for these koalas to digest these leaves ... is to sleep it off!

Mindy. That's what Gramma G-Force always says after Thanksgiving dinner ...

Guy Raz. ... And in addition to this Mindy... eucalyptus leaves aren't very nutritious either ...

Mindy. So you're saying that the koala's don't get a lot of energy from eating the leaves?

Guy Raz. Exactly! So the few hours that koalas are awake they only have a small supply of energy to do everything else they need to do ... so in order to conserve energy they tend to move very ... very Slowly ...

Mindy. Like when we got lost on that road trip and we had to conserve gas to get us to the hotel!

Guy Raz. Exactly!

Mindy. And so what about the sloth? Same deal?

Guy Raz. Pretty much Mindy ... you are what you eat!

Pa announcer. And finally arriving to the starting line ... the reptile you've all been waiting for ... from the caves of Bosnia and Herzegovina [hurt-zig-oh-vee-nah]... the amphibian that can't be moved ... please welcome ... Deborah ... the salamander! Thank you.

<<Slightly larger applause>>

Mindy. Deborah the salamander?

Guy Raz. Yup! Deborah was part of a group of European salamanders that were studied by scientists from Eötvös Loránd University in Hungary ... and if you thought those other animals were slow ... oh boy ... just wait till you hear about this salamander ...

Mindy. Why ... How slow is she?

Guy Raz. Ooh, one second Mindy ... I think the race is about to start.

Pa announcer. On your marks ... get set ... slow!

<<Gun marker>>

Pa announcer. And they're off... Sort of.

<<Scattered applause>>

Mindy. Okay ... so how slow are these salamanders Guy Raz?

Guy Raz. Well Mindy ... Deborah belongs to a group of salamanders called olms ...

Mindy. Oh I know olm ... I used to have one as my old neighbor ... they're almost completely blind and typically live in damp caves in Europe ...

Guy Raz. That's right ... and this group of researchers from Hungary ... tagged and monitored a total of 26 of these olms living in a small section of a cave in Northern Bosnia and Herzegovina ...

Mindy. Yeah and what did they find?

Guy Raz. Well ... they basically found this ...

Pa announcer. And it looks like the snail has moved 1 inch down the track ... such incredible speed... coming up close behind is Humphrey the turtle who has... Just managed to open his eyes ... Barney the sloth and Gary the koala ... are both still fast asleep at the starting line ... must have been a big lunch ... ha ha ha and Deborah ... true to form... has yet to move a muscle ...

Mindy. Well it doesn't look like that salamander Deborah's is going anywhere in a hurry! Is that what the researchers found Guy Raz?

Guy Raz. That's right Mindy. Between the years 2010 and 2018 the researchers returned to the cave 4 times to check up on the olm's progress and see how far they'd moved ...

Mindy. Oh yeah and what did they find?

Guy Raz. These researchers found that these salamanders only moved about 5 meters, or 16 feet, every year!

Guy Raz. There was one even stand out olm ... one olm that refused to move at all... for seven years!

Mindy. Seven years! What? That's bonker balls!

Guy Raz. And guess what Mindy?

Mindy. What?

Guy Raz. That salamander, that olm ... was Deborah!

Mindy. <<Gasp>>And she's down there right now ... doing her thing ... or not doing her thing

Guy Raz. That's right ... this one salamander sat in that exact same spot in that damp cave for 2,569 days in a row!

Mindy. Man I know I can be slow to get out of bed in the morning, but seven years slow? That's crazy salad.

Pa Announcer. ... It looks like Humphrey the turtle has finally begun shuffling forward ever so slowly... Barney the sloth seems to have woken up now at least... and the down and out favorite, Deborah, is still to make a move!

Mindy. So why is it that these salamanders move at such a glacial pace? Does it have something to do with their diet maybe? Are they eating something super-super non-nutritious? Like my sugar blasted tart-pops for example?

Guy Raz. Well ... not only do these salamanders have no natural predator in the wild ... But they also seem to live their whole lives in slow-motion. These salamanders can live for up to a hundred years ... so they have plenty of time to have a good old rest ...

Mindy. Ahhh... I get it.

Guy Raz. But on top of that Mindy ... they also only mate once every 12 and a half years.

Mindy. Huh ... and mating is one of the main reasons that animals stay mobile or move around a lot ... to try and find a partner to have babies and continue with their family tree!

Pa announcer. And it looks like Deborah the salamander is ... made of stone or some such, she is still not moving. Although, Gary the koala, it appears, has woken up and is scanning his surroundings for something to eat ...

Mindy. Okay ... so I get that these salamanders don't have to move around to avoid getting eaten by predators ... But don't they have to move in order to grab a bite to eat themselves?

Guy Raz. Well actually ... these olms don't even have to move to get their food! These olms use a technique known as 'sit-and-wait' to hunt ...

Mindy. And let me guess ... they sit ... and they wait?

Reggie. Coo

Guy Raz. Yup... with this sort of technique the olm can sometimes wait 1 or 2 years between meals!

Mindy. Years! Are you kidding me? I just had a caviar burrito before we left the house and already I'm starving! So what was the whole point of this research Guy Raz?

Guy Raz. Well, because these little guys move at a slower pace than the rest of us ... they're also more susceptible to things like climate change and habitat destruction.

Mindy. And so the researchers are hoping that this insight into these super slow movers will help to keep them safe in the future?

Guy Raz. Exactly ... and it'll help draft laws to keep them in their habitats safe and sound!

Mindy. Well if some of them are still going to be around and kickin in 100 years we want to make sure that they have a place to live.

Reggie. Coo

Guy Raz. You got it ...

Pa announcer. <<Yawn>> still not much movement here at Snooze-Fest Arena ... <<yawn>> still anybody's race ... Wait, is this a race? Or is it like golf? Oh it is a race? Well, whatever, it's still super boring.

End