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Topic: Jurassic Safari!
by: Kilted Jackalope

The alarm had barely sounded before Chip bolted out of bed. His tail was wagging so much it made putting on his cargo shorts a real challenge. “Mom? Dad? Suzie? Are you guys up? C’mon! We don’t wanna be late!” he called out while digging in his closet for his explorer’s hat and vest. He bounded down the stairs to claim the best seat in the back of the minivan before his sister could.

At last! After months of waiting and waiting, they were finally getting to go to a real wildlife preserve! And not one of those lame zoo-like places where they put halfway domesticated specimens in tiny cells and all you ever saw were a bunch of animals sleeping from boredom. It was a genuine natural habitat where you could see them like they really are!

Chip and his sister raced around underfoot, arguing over who would get the window seat while their parents loaded up the coolers and snacks. “Hey, now! Watch out you two or we’ll feed you to the critters when get there!” his father chuckled.

The road trip was filled non-stop with excited chatter. “Will we be close enough to touch them? Will we be able to pet them? Oh, I bet the babies are so cute! Can we take one home? Are we allowed to feed them? Are any of them poisonous? My friend at school says they’ll eat you if you get to close. We won’t have to stay in the car the whole time will we?”

“Well, here we are kids!” Chip’s father exclaimed, bringing the flood of conversation to a halt as everyone stared out the windows and strained for their first glimpse of some new and amazing creatures they’d only read about in books.

After the minivan was parked and everyone got out, Chip’s dad read from the online guidebook, “It says here that this is basically a ‘colony’ of different species that coexist together. All those structures you see over there? That’s where they live and store food and raise their young. It, um, doesn’t really say if they hunt and eat each other, Chip – so I don’t know. Maybe? I guess we’ll find out, won’t we, sport?”

Once inside, it was clear this would not be a wasted trip. Chip could barely contain himself. “Oh, dad! Look over there at that one! The one with the striped tail – LOOK! Oh! Another one over there! Hey, there’s a family of ‘em by that tree! Mom! Get a picture of those multicolored ones over there! Hey, Suzie – I think that one looks like you!”

Once everyone had calmed down a bit, Chip’s father herded them over where a number of the creatures were hunched over together and seemed to be socializing with each other. He made

a motion for the kids to talk softly so they wouldn't spook them. He knelt down by the kids and whispered, "See? Look in there! See them all in there together? Hmm? I don't know exactly what they're doing – looks like they're drinking something. Maybe it's some sort of bonding thing. Let me check what the guidebook says." Chip and Suzie stared, wide-eyed and squealed with delight when some of the creatures made eye contact with them.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the glass wall inside the coffee shop, one of the foxes trying to enjoy her low-fat soy chai latte looked out the window in disbelief. "Don't look now, Shelia, but there's a family of lizards or something out there taking our picture. And one of them is wearing - is that a pith helmet?" The other vixen looked over her shoulder and quirked an eyebrow. "Should we, um, wave or something?"

"Dad! Dad! They see us! Look! They're looking right at us!" Chip bounced and pointed. "Okay, okay, son. I see. Oh – it says here in the Mammopedia that these are 'Caffeinated Vulpines'. They spend most of their day socializing near sources of low-fat Arabica plant extracts and tend to be easily excitable and promiscuous. Huh! How interesting. Well, c'mon everyone. We don't wanna spend our whole day here do we? Lots to see!"

"Hey, dad? How come their scales look so weird? Like they were all puffed out or something. They look so silly like that," Chip giggled. "Well, son, the guide here says those aren't scales. It's called a fur coat. It's kind of like hair that covers their entire body and keeps them insulated in the winter but can be taken off at night for dry cleaning. Oh, look! Kids, do you see that? There are some being fed! Let's try and get a little closer. Careful – we don't want to scare them."

"More wine, sir?" the ferret waiter asked the clearly distracted wolf at the table who was staring across the sidewalk. He nodded, keeping his eyes on the group of four rather large reptiles that were pointing and inching forward. The wolf took a sip of his pinot noir and wondered if he'd made a mistake in deciding to eat outside today.

"Dad, he looks a lot like those other, um, things we saw before. What is he? Or she? I can't tell." Chip's dad paged through the online guide while the family tip-toed closer to the wolf's table. "Oh, here we go – this is a 'Hipster Lupus'. I'm not sure if it's a boy or a girl, though." Chip tried looking under the tablecloth to see if he could tell for sure.

"But it says here that they prefer open displays of culture and knowledge of obscure trends in the hopes of securing a higher – Chip! Don't touch his food! How would you like it if someone stuck their claws in your food, huh? We'll find some baby animals for you to feed later, okay?"

An elk sat down across from the wolf as the family of velociraptors trotted away. "Honey? Is something wrong?" The wolf huffed and snapped his paws for another refill of wine. "Some giant lizard thing just looked at my crotch and ran off with my breadstick."

While Chip's dad enthusiastically pointed out other interesting critters to look at - "Ooh! Dear, look over there! A 'Broad-Chested Tigress'! They're supposed to bring good luck if you rub them." - Chip became fascinated with the sounds coming from a nearby open park. Sneaking into the brush, he peered out and saw the strangest sight. A circle of females, he guessed, were pushing and shoving each other and trying to carry an oblong shaped egg before the rest pounced on whoever had the egg last. He crept in closer to get a better look.

Meanwhile, Chip's family had spotted a kangaroo exiting an office building with his ear glued to a cell phone. He chatted away, oblivious to the family of raptors creeping up beside him and snapping pictures. The kangaroo paused and slowly turned his head, quirking his eyebrow. "Uh, Darren? C-can you hold on for a sec?" he asked, staring at them sideways.

Chip's dad consulted the guide book. "Wow, what a treat! It's an actual 'Jumbo Pocket Bunny'. These creatures come with built-in pockets conveniently sewn right in for easy storage of everyday items such as meatloaf and carry-on luggage. They are harbingers of good fortune and can play the banjo. Suzie, it says here that if you place a gift in the Pocket Bunny's pouch it will grant you a wish! Isn't that just amazing?"

Suddenly, Chip burst forth from the foliage on the edge of the park area and came running towards them with a group of angry dingoes hot on his tail. "Mom! Dad! Run! It's a stampede!" cried the young raptor as he sprinted past. The rest of his family quickly followed suit and ran off.

As the raptors sped off down the street, the kangaroo - still in a bit of shock - looked down and spoke into his cell phone, "Darren? You're never gonna believe what this weird looking, monster gecko just stuffed down the front of my jeans."

Meanwhile, the two foxes exited the coffee shop in time to see the family of raptors tearing down the sidewalk. "Look, Shelia. It's the same bunch from earlier - being chased by those rugby players." The other vixen nodded. "I'm telling you, stuff like this never happens in Brisbane."

The car ride home was quiet. Everyone was thoroughly exhausted from their outing. Mother and Suzie slept quietly, dreaming of strange and wonderful creatures they'd seen at the nature preserve. But Chip was much too excited to sleep. He cradled the oblong egg he'd managed to snatch earlier, running his claws lightly over the rough yet firm exterior. His mind was full of wonder at what would hatch out it. He was hoping for one of the 'Caffeinated Vulpines'. Slowly he succumbed to sleep, smiling and cradling his new pet.