

CAMP KENNY

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Series Bible

Interim Draft – Updated for Summit

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Mainstay Entertainment/Day Zero Productions

“Smashing!”

In collaboration with *Mainstay Entertainment* and Trevor Noah’s *Day Zero Productions*, Nickelodeon is thrilled to bring an updated *WILD THORNBERRYS* back to the screen for a new generation of children *and* their families!

This unique partnership offers an opportunity to explore ideas such as: what it means to be a Family; what it means to belong to a Global Community; and what it means to be Environmentally Responsible – all while delivering laughs, thrills, and heart. These themes were an organic part of the original series, and they continue to be important values for a new generation of children who see and experience the world from an even more global perspective – interconnected via modern technology, as we all are.

Introducing the Next Generation ...

In 1998, the world was introduced to the Thornberrys – an eccentric but endearing family who traveled the globe, filming nature documentaries. While “world’s greatest naturalist” (and eventually knighted!) Sir Nigel Thornberry and his motley co-horts searched for fabulous fauna from the safaris of Kenya to the peaks of the Andes and beyond in their all-terrain *ComVee*, viewers experienced their adventures primarily through the eyes of 11-year-old middle child Eliza Thornberry – an inquisitive girl *who possesses the magical ability to talk to animals*.

The original *Wild Thornberrys* presented a kid’s perspective that was SECRET and separate from that of their parents; we’re interested in modernizing the family dynamic, *by representing a new generation of children who have open relationships with their parents and family members*.

But mostly, our reboot presents an exciting opportunity to check in with the Thornberrys *today*, to see how they have grown, and – yes – *evolved*.

Why now?

As a “legacy sequel” in the vein of *Cobra Kai*, *Top Gun: Maverick*, or *Ghostbusters: Afterlife*, **THE NEW WILD THORNBERRYS** will not only catch up with our original characters in the current day, but will also introduce new *younger* additions to the core cast. The goal is to deliver *all the expectations and tropes of the original series* (Fun animal facts! Quirky characters! Thrilling rescues!), while deepening the ongoing narrative, broadening the scope of the emotional journey, and fine-tuning the tone and the sensibility to appeal to a new generation of 6-11 viewers *and* their parents (the nostalgia crowd). In short, we want to amp up the comedy, the thrills, and the heart, to deliver a hilarious, compelling, and ultimately moving CO-VIEWING EXPERIENCE.

The New WT will continue to be proudly female-forward with the *now-adult* Eliza still at its center, but its wildly entertaining ensemble will appeal to all genders. Though functioning as a sequel for older nostalgia-based viewers, our series will be *perfectly able to stand on its own for our younger new viewers* who might not have seen the original (but will also hopefully steer them to it for further viewing!). Much like *Cobra Kai* does so succinctly, we’ll “lay pipe” whenever necessary to explain key events from the past, with a brief flashback if it can’t be clearly covered in dialogue – and, needless to say, it will be fun to see “recreations” of classic Thornberry moments in our newly updated animation design style!

AS OUR SERIES BEGINS 20 YEARS LATER ...

The Thornberry family has undergone its own natural evolution: the *now-adult* children have pursued their own paths and scattered to the proverbial winds – leaving elder Thornberrys NIGEL and MARIANNE on their own to continue their life’s work of documenting nature, and maintaining the family legacy. But ...

... an inciting incident compels everyone to return to the wild, and the “band will get back together” with a renewed sense of purpose – albeit, only after we shake up the status quo. Worry not, though: as with the greatest legacy sequels, *The New WT* will deliver everything fans of the original want to see – and then some!

Format & Tone

Our Pilot will be a FEATURE LENGTH story, charting the transition between old and new; our Series proper will be comprised of ‘mini-arcs’ within seasons, during which Team Thornberry will explore ONE GLOBAL REGION at a time for deeper dives into the geography, cultures, and wildlife in each. These arcs will last anywhere from a few to several episodes (we will no doubt return to any said region multiple times, but grouping regional episodes will help with both production design and narrative ease; yet not so many episodes that we stay rooted in any one spot too long – providing global/regional variety and cadence). Unlike our Pilot “movie,” think of these mini-arcs more like mini-series: episodes will contain stand-alone adventures dealing with a certain region and its animals; yet there will be ongoing character dynamics and themes specific to these stretches of episodes that get resolved by the end (the closest example from the original series might be the 5-episode “Shane G” arc from Season 5, which was comprised the Thornberrys’ travels through Alaska while featuring the inter-family dynamics involving their guest star). The series as a whole will strike a balance: standalone adventures against a backdrop of “loose” serialization, so that our characters will evolve in continuity.

Think big adventure and high stakes, with comedy and heart stemming from the family dynamics (not unlike, say, *The Mitchells vs. The Machines* – minus sci-fi/fantasy elements, since it’s essential that *Thornberrys* remains grounded in real world cultural, geographical, and biological detail – though with a sprinkling of “magic realism” based in African folklore). The OG series became increasingly epic in scope as it progressed, especially with the longer form *Wild Thornberrys Movie* and *Origin of Donnie* mini-series; we’ll pick up where those left off, leaning into CINEMATIC visuals alongside the fun and comedy.

Themes & Conflict

The new series, like the original, will impart facts about ANIMALS in entertaining ways: but we’ll endeavor to **view our human characters through an anthropological lens**, contrasting THEIR behavior with the wildlife of any given episode – highlighting the similarities, OR the differences. Not unlike the recent documentary MY OCTOPUS TEACHER, which did a great job of imparting fascinating facts about nature while illuminating the emotional journey of the documentarian. Like the environments we’ll visit, **FAMILIES are also eco-systems**: self-contained, but subject to change due to outside influences – sometimes good, sometimes bad. And we’ll explore themes of *passing the torch between generations, from old to new* – and the challenge of honoring tradition while following one’s own nature (core themes of our feature-length Pilot movie).

Heroes in WT don’t wear capes and tights; **heroes are DOCUMENTARIANS**, often taking great risks to chronicle the world and its wildlife in their present state before they vanish (doing it not for fame or glory, but *because they care*). And by extension they are **CONSERVATIONISTS** who raise awareness about our world, which has changed dramatically in 20 years. We will strive to reflect those changes as Team Thornberry encounters them (i.e., the original series covered a LOT of ground vis a vis global locations

and animal species; it's inevitable that Eliza and company will revisit some of the same – but we will compare and contrast any changes since then, be they positive or negative). *It's a complicated, messy world out there, which our series will reflect with pathos as well as hope.*

Villains: As with the OG series, conflict will derive from a mix of the Thornberrys being their own worst enemies; the environment itself; sometimes animals; rival ill-intentioned documentarians; and, of course, the occasional animal poacher. But poaching is such a bleak awful reality that we may get more interesting story fodder from a potential recurring villain: an ominous, faceless, ubiquitous CORPORATION with global presence – equal parts DuPont, Nestle and Exxon: we'll call it EXXOFF. This allows us to both be more grounded in current reality, since corporations are responsible for environmental changes that IMPACT ECO-SYSTEMS, forcing the unnatural migration of wildlife; but also provides the Thornberrys with antagonists *they can win smaller victories against on an ongoing basis* – pompous bureaucrats or misguided project managers seem more palatable to mine comedy from than “animal killers.” All of that said: indigenous hunters are often inaccurately blamed for poaching, when they are providing food for their families as their ancestors have done for generations via tribal tradition; we'll have an opportunity to dramatize this distinction with nuance in a special episode, while exploring a “not everything is as it initially seems” theme.

Representation/Depiction: The Thornberrys will be ALLIES to the locals they team with along their adventures – some of whom will even become lifelong friends with the potential for return visits (such as SHAMAN MNYAMBO from the OG series and movie, but perhaps also a member of an all-female anti-poaching unit of Zimbabwe's Park Rangers, or any number of specialists in various fields of study across *all* of Earth's continents). But it's important to note that we don't want the Thornberrys simply aiding indigenous people in various plights; rather, we just as often want our leads to RELY upon the knowledge and experience of said locals vis a vis any environmental or zoological problems our team might currently be coping with (be the locals experts in their field *or* civilians). We'll highlight the customs and cultures of these unique individuals wherever the Thornberrys travel (and have staff researchers and fact-checkers ensure nuance and accuracy). That said, we'll also endeavor to reduce the perception of “otherness” in our depictions of said cultures, vis a vis “Global Community”; we'll start by updating our Shaman's day-wear to civilian clothes in favor of saving his ceremonial garb for specific occasions. And on the depiction of the aforementioned “magic realism”: though it will figure largely into our Pilot, we're not looking to do Marvel's Dr. Strange here; rather, think *Reservation Dogs* or *My Neighbor Totoro* in the matter-of-fact depiction of humans coexisting with the supernatural in nature.

Narrative: We'll peel back some layers of the original series with the goal of providing our characters with even more dimension than they already have, and even richer inner lives. If Eliza and company are less than perfect, they'll be more human – and thus more relatable (look no further than Tom Cruise's Maverick or William Zabka's Johnny in their respective legacy sequels).

We'll explore proverbial “elephants in the room” such as: what has been the cost, if any, for Eliza having to keep her “secret” from her parents for so many years? Has spending her

entire life talking to animals stunted Eliza's emotional development in any way? (i.e., does she have an easier time "relating" to animals than fellow humans?). Now that Eliza's a mother, will she allow her kids to take the kinds of risks in the wild that her own parents allowed *her* to, or will she find herself being overly protective? Now that Donnie's an adult, will Nigel and Marianne (or one of his sibs) ever reveal the truth to him about the tragic fate of his birth parents – and how will he react and/or act upon it?

Speaking of elephants in the room – did we just say ELIZA'S A MOM!?!?!?

In the spirit of bringing *even more* diverse perspectives to the already ETHNICALLY DIVERSE world of WT: adult Eliza is now a SINGLE MOM with three children – each adopted from the key continents of her former travels (Africa, Asia, and South America): they are our NEW Thornberrys.

We'll meet the kiddoes in a moment, after a quick view from "30,000 feet" ...

Our Series (in snapshot)

As in the OG series, every episode of *The New Wild Thornberrys* (beyond our PILOT) will follow a traveling caravan of SIX individuals – ***two adults, three kids, and a chimpanzee.***

Our feature-length Pilot will detail the “changing of the guard,” as the torch is passed between generations – *in more ways than one*. By its end (and the beginning of our Series proper), NIGEL will semi-retire to Oxford where he accepts a Professorship – [though animals will never be far from his and Marianne’s lives \(as you’ll soon see\)](#). And eldest daughter DEBBIE will also (primarily) operate remotely from her NYC office, as liaison between Team Thornberry and THE FOUNDATION (the Charitable Trust that funds their documentaries). Even though not typically “on location” with the others, these three will continue to have active screen time in our series – via video chats with Eliza and team (that “global connectivity” again), or by simply cross-cutting to them as our stories dictate. Thus leaving ...

... adult Eliza and her three kids, DARWIN, and DONNIE (now early 20’s) to comprise our *newly reconfigured core team of documentarians*. Every episode or mini-series will take our gang to a specific eco-system to explore, with one or more animal species to study – confronting challenges, dangers, and surprises along the way. If Eliza and Donnie are roughly the new Nigel and Marianne ([Eliza the new producer and onscreen host, Donnie the camera-person – see Pilot for details](#)), Eliza’s older kids will be empowered by having functional roles in the actual production of the documentaries – yup, “putting on a show” will be a true family affair this time around, with the kids being an active part of “the family business.” But making docs won’t be the *only* generational torch passed down: circumstances will compel Eliza to sacrifice her magical ability to SPEAK TO ANIMALS ...

... which her KIDS will in turn acquire (though worry not, a loophole will allow Eliza and Darwin to continue to communicate as they always have – [a gift from Shaman Mnyambo, who acknowledges that the chimpanzee has transcended being just another member of the animal kingdom: Darwin’s a Thornberry, he’s family](#)). Now that Eliza’s an adult, her kids having her powers will keep the core trope of the OG series alive by putting our NEW GENERATION at the center of the hijinks; but in the spirit of modernizing the family dynamic, Eliza will be “in the know” on her kids’ secret and assume a mentor/sensei role as she helps them navigate their tricky new abilities. We’ll also mine this reset for “lost in translation” comedy, since Eliza will have to rely on her *at times unreliable* translators to get information from animals.

All of this said, it’s important that we not treat this tectonic shift lightly: we want to get to know Eliza’s kids as ordinary kids before passing the torch; and we want Eliza giving up (most of) her powers to feel meaningful, and EARNED. So we will spend the duration of our feature-length Pilot with Eliza on that journey – the obstacles she encounters, the dilemmas she faces, the decisions she makes – to achieve our new status quo in an impactful way.

More on the passing of proverbial torches in just a bit. First, let’s set the scene ...

Who Are the Thornberrys Today?

OUR SERIES OPENS in the present day, as a series of epic sense-of-wonder shots scored with uplifting regional music reintroduce us to the majestic wildlife of the African plains -- and that adventuresome yet whimsical *Thornberrys* vibe. The animals spy a lone vehicle approach from afar, as we hear a familiar voice marvel at the natural beauty: “Ahhh, it *never gets old* – does it, Marianne!” REVEAL that NIGEL’s ruddy hair and moustache are now flecked with grey, and that his spouse & cinematographer MARIANNE isn’t driving the *ComVee* ... but rather, a JEEP. They have downsized their transportation: all that unused interior space had just become a constant reminder that their signature vehicle had become a “mobile empty nest” (worry not – all in service of an impactful re-introduction later, a la dusting off the *Ecto-1* in the recent *Ghostbusters* reboot). Yes, the now-adult Thornberry children have flown the coop to pursue their own paths, as most young adults eventually do in life – and their parents have been empty nesters for some time now.

Nigel and Marianne have been the same committed documentarians as ever, but each in their own way grapples with the notion that the end of an era is upon them. Marianne is far more ready to embrace the next chapter of their illustrious journey: *semi-retirement*. It would afford them more time to spend time with their grandchildren! Not that Nigel wouldn’t remain busy: the Professorship at Oxford (introduced back in the OG series finale, ‘Sir Nigel’ Parts 1 & 2) remains on permanent offer, and continues to beckon.

Nigel assures Marianne that he WILL be accepting that Professorship “right after we complete this –” (Marianne dryly nods as she chimes along: she’s heard this all before) “— *one last documentary*.” Marianne drolly points out he’s been saying that for years now – she’s *seen* his TO-DO LIST (a list that Nigel sheepishly denies exists). Nigel clearly resists the notion of leaving the Great Outdoors and its alluring flora and fauna behind, but Marianne pitches that teaching is the next natural step in his evolution – he can impart his knowledge and expertise to a whole new generation of young naturalists, who might even become *future* documentarians!

We glean that Nigel carries with him some disappointment that ELIZA chose not to follow in his footsteps and keep the Thornberry legacy alive (not *blaming* her, but simply lamenting what might have been): their little “Poppet” always did seem to have quite the uncanny rapport with animals. Marianne points out that Eliza *is* keeping their legacy alive, she just found her own way of doing it – following her nature.

As if on cue, Eliza pings Nigel on his phone: he sees a crudely animated GIF of himself that Eliza’s eldest has made. With his signature chuckle: “*Smashing!* Short-Wave really has come such a long way!” Despite their *physical separation* from their kids, Nigel and Marianne do remain connected via technology – one key way the world has changed in 20 years. Each and every Thornberry remains in-touch and closer than ever despite their physical locations in the world. They are a modern family.

The scene now set, let’s find out what the former Thornberry children have been up to for these last 20 years, *and* meet the new additions to our ensemble

ELIZA THORNBERRY

Eliza was an evergreen 11 YEARS OLD in the original run ending in 2004, so she's in her early-30's now. This apple hasn't fallen far from the tree: as teased in the OG series, when we are re-introduced to Eliza in the present day, she has fulfilled her lifelong dream of becoming a VETERINARIAN. That's right, say hello to *Doctor* Eliza Thornberry! And not just *any* Vet, mind you: she's a POPULAR Vet with a successful practice – back in her mother Marianne's hometown of Canoga Park, CA. And, a MOBILE Vet who drives a big trailer clinic on wheels (shades of the ComVee) – she comes to you. Quirky and unique as ever, Eliza is also the *only* Vet with the distinction of having an actual CHIMPANZEE for a helper (not to mention roommate at home) – yes, DARWIN. And she of course still possesses her “secret” ability to converse with him: one joke that never gets old between them is Darwin offering “I’ll drive” when they’re off to see the next patient (he doesn’t, naturally).

Eliza's experiences “in the wild” have informed who she is today: her lived-in mobile clinic/office is festooned with totems and memorabilia from her global travels. And needless to say, her Dolittle-like ability to communicate with animals gives her a unique edge in her field. BUT, Eliza has ONE RULE that she strictly abides by: while she does LISTEN to her animal patients to better serve them, she does so CLANDESTINELY and will never, ever *TALK TO* an animal patient. Her reasons are simple and common sense: to avoid arousing suspicion to better keep her “secret” a secret; but mostly not to freak out her poor patients (she learned the hard way, in the early days of her practice; it did not go well. Darwin shakes his head with the memory: “Poor Mr. Whiskers didn't know *what* to think.” Eliza in turn apologizes to Dar for the umpteenth time about Mr. Whiskers taking it out on Darwin by using him as a scratching post). It's Eliza's own personal “Hippocratic Oath” – a term Darwin can't hear without spontaneously BUSTING A GUT: “A hippo wearing a white coat and stethoscope, it's absolutely absurd if you picture it!”

Think of the adult Eliza as our Ted Lasso: a natural team leader, calm amidst chaos, exceptionally creative when it comes to problem-solving, and almost always positive. But, she's human and we will see her seams crack on occasion – mostly because she puts such profound pressure on herself to defend underdogs, protect wildlife, and live up to the Thornberry family legacy. And intuiting that she may have disappointed her father by choosing not to be a career documentarian manifests in ways that even those closest to her can't detect: not her kids, not even Darwin. Namely ...

Eliza grinds her teeth at night. Which means that she may be grown, but she can't shake her most prominent identifying feature besides her pigtails and her eyeglasses: yup, poor Eliza is periodontally cursed and wears ADULT BRACES (Note: she'll initially sport a different hairstyle, but revert to her signature pigtails once she returns to the wild).

Eliza may appear “nerdy,” but she's strictly an *animal* nerd: pop culture, fashion trends, the most bingeable streaming shows are all completely off her radar. Eliza's the real deal, an animal lover through and through – and the only thing that matters more to her than her patients and her field of study are her kids, family, and bestie Darwin.

Eliza's a SINGLE mom: not so much a determined life choice, but rather she just hasn't been *focused* on that area of her life. So, Eliza did things out of traditional order and built a family first, comprised of children in need: Eliza's empathy at work again, putting the needs of others before her own. Plus, she was clearly inspired by her OWN parents, who adopted Donnie: despite a lifetime of secret-keeping vis a vis her animal-related talents, Eliza is closer than ever to Nigel and Marianne when it comes to their now-shared Foster Parenting experience. Whenever Eliza might be feeling overwhelmed, she'll reach out to them for advice – they're her "Foster Parent lifeline." Worry not, though: Eliza *does* "date," she's really just waiting for the right fit – that special someone she totally sparks to, who will in turn accept her for who she is (*braces, kids, chimp and all*). She does have chemistry with a kind-hearted colleague at her practice, but Eliza is hesitant to mix her professional and home life (Darwin excepted). Dar and the kids aren't shy about weighing in, and have varying opinions on whether or not her colleague has "the right one" potential.

But Eliza's journey back in the wild will be PEPPERED with a variety of potential suitors, and we'll play against expectation and mine humor from the unlikely: despite her outward appearances, quirky behavior and social awkwardness, Eliza will on occasion melt hearts – without trying, and often oblivious to the overtures of said suitors (and yes, former teen heartthrob and one-time guest Wild Thornberrys co-host with whom Eliza had her first kiss – "Shane G" – *will* make a return appearance so that we can revisit their dynamic). Eliza's kids will even at times decide they have a vested interest in a potential suitor for Eliza and play matchmaker, leading to hijinks. Yet, they will also be aware that any potential love interest risks upsetting their delicate family eco-system, for better or worse, if that relationship becomes long-term or (gasp) permanent.

All of that said, Eliza clearly leads a more than fulfilling life and has all the family she needs for the moment (and then some!). She and Darwin even joke that having a chimp as her constant companion has somehow impeded her social development (INSERT WHIP PAN to Eliza on a rare past dinner date – to reveal third wheel Darwin along for the ride. Awkward!). The fact is, except for her own kids, *Eliza has an easier time connecting with animals than most adult humans*. Darwin may have always been her best friend in the wild but, living back among humans, he's also her emotional support animal (in this way, he's not unlike Coach Beard to Eliza's Ted Lasso!).

Eliza imparts her sense of adventure not only at the clinic, but to her THREE CHILDREN at home – she's the cool mom who makes an adventure out of ANY mundane activity. In those rare occasions where household tensions might be rising between the kids, Eliza knows just what to do: shout "DRUM CIRCLE!" The kids grab their congas, cowbells and shakers and JAM, letting off steam.

DARWIN

Fun animal fact: *chimpanzees can live up to 60 years old*. Which means in our series, Darwin's technically, well, *OLD*. BUT – aside from a few “distinguished” (Darwin's word, not ours) grey chin whiskers and occasional crick in his gait, Darwin's pretty much the “same as he ever was” in the OG series. As Eliza is quick to remind him, “Dar” was *born* old – a benefit being that if he was “in his prime” back then, Darwin is *still* in his prime!

Think of Dar as C3PO in a monkey suit – constantly fretting over worst case scenarios, the first to complain and the last into the fray, yet ultimately loyal to a fault: he would give his life for Eliza or any of her kids. Dar still loves “Cheese Crunchies” (and now that they live in the US, Eliza doesn't need to have Marianne's mother ship care packages of the snack abroad anymore). Darwin has to “sneak” them at home though so that he's not a bad influence, since Eliza doesn't want her kids eating junk food. Darwin still DIS-likes bananas – the flavor, sure; but mostly because they are an unwelcome reminder of his origins and all that “survival of the fittest” prattle. He rationalizes not eating the healthier snack for fear of slipping on peels, it's a safety concern! (an episode will have Darwin suffer a health scare – which his labs reveal is due to a serious potassium deficiency. Time for Eliza to find inventive ways to add bananas to his diet – survival of the “fittest,” indeed!).

Darwin never really felt at home in the jungle, so he is LOVING suburban living here in this civilized “Park” called Canoga. He's never been happier, which is why he goes into crisis mode when he learns it's time to return to the wild: “The party is over? The dream has ended??” He digs in his heels: he REFUSES to return to the wild! Eliza says good, she really needs him to stay behind and help look after the practice. Darwin freaks even more: “What?! No Eliza, I don't want to be without you!” Eliza knows Dar all too well and has called his bluff: “Chalk up a win for reverse animal psychology” [Needless to say, Eliza is not one to abandon her responsibilities and her colleagues will hold the fort in her absence].

Darwin may be Dr. Thornberry's trusty aide and clinic mascot, but he's also a great companion and “coolest pet ever” to her kids at home [IMPORTANT REMINDER: Eliza's kids *aren't aware* that their mom can LITERALLY “speak” to Darwin, otherwise she would instantly lose her magic ability – more on this later. Not that she hides it around the house: from her kids' perspective, mom is just making “endearing chimp noises” to their pet; and any “uncanny human” attributes on Darwin's part are simply chalked up to chimps being “super-smart” – which they of course are!]. Darwin also helps with the chores – albeit while complaining that drying dishes are “rough on my lumbago!”

Darwin's emotionally attached to Eliza's three children: he's watched them grow up at home, after all (framed photos on the mantle show Darwin with each child, at various ages). And each of the kids' relationships with Dar will develop in heartfelt and possibly surprising ways, once they acquire the ability to speak to him. But until then, with Darwin there's never been a need for other pets at home: it's in part how Eliza keeps home and work life separate (imagine having to hear other animal “voices” at home the end of a long workday! Well, Eliza does check in with the occasional backyard squirrel, possum, or hummingbird who might have something on their minds ...).

ELIZA'S KIDS

Though the *particulars* of their personalities are quite different from the *original* three Thornberry kids, Eliza's children are – each in their own unique way – rough equivalents of the “energy profiles” of the original three Thornberry kids (yet another way we're shaking up the status quo, *while maintaining it*). Eliza adopted each from babyhood, so they've only known *her* as their parent and have grown up relatively “Americanized” – though Eliza is steadfast in her efforts to inspire them to continue learning about their countries of origin and cultural roots, and encourages them to proudly identify with their ethnicities. It's another reason she's thrilled to finally share her travel experiences with them as our Pilot begins [Note: the kids' middle names currently reflect their cultural backgrounds, pending further consultation re: whether it's more appropriate for the adopted children to go by their original birth names – if known – or Eliza's given names. Also, we'll use Writer Room to explore the potential merits of having Eliza's eldest adopted later in life, with memories of their earlier upbringing and culture. It could bring too many complications for our needs, though we also recognize the potential for additional rich story layers].

JANE DIWATA THORNBERRY

Originally adopted from Manila, Eliza's eldest is 13 and about to graduate from middle school. Jane's pronouns are she/they (which we will use interchangeably), and their fashion sense indicates that they currently identify as non-binary. Jane's gender identity is something we will explore down the line when we are prepared to do so with an authentic voice; but we'll initially take a “casual representation” approach rather than make their gender the subject of onscreen discussion. The two primary goals being *to represent*; and to show how the others in Jane's blended family (both kids and adults alike) accept Jane for who they are *without judgment*. That said, Jane exudes a natural confidence and comfort with their identity – befitting someone possessing a dry, sharp, observational wit (though never mean-spirited). Eliza named Jane after her own idol, the primatologist and anthropologist *Jane Goodall*; and Diwata is derived from Filipino folklore, referring to ‘Guardians of our Earth’ who lived in forests and meadows. That said, Eliza will fully support Jane's decision when she eventually opts to drop the “e” in Jane in favor of the gender neutral “Jan.”

Jane is at that juncture in their development where she fluctuates between relating to Eliza as her mother, and relating to Eliza as her bestie. But, Jane's not beyond being embarrassed by mom's eccentricities and which at times inspire freak-out mode (think Mikey Madison's Max in ‘Better Things’ during these rare outbursts: “MOMmmmm!?”). Jane's also at the age where they've forged stronger social bonds with their peers than their younger sibs have, so their life is the one most disrupted by leaving home for safari; she's been on her own personal and social journey that's taken them to the precipice of High School, which has now been upended. As such, Jane has the hardest time adjusting to adventuring in the wild (leading Eliza to fear the worst, “OMG, I've created a Debbie!”). Though Eliza will wryly

point out to Jane that nothing's really changed: even back home, Jane spent more time connecting to friends on her phone and tablet than in person. Touché, Jane can't argue that.

Thankfully, despite finding herself a world away from home, Jane remains connected to their friends through [texting and video chats](#). [At 13, Jane's too young to have her own social media account \(per BS&P\), but she'll still be artistic and intuitively tech-savvy. Once "new generation" Thornberry docs begin airing on online platforms outside of their traditional BBC-like network to broaden their audience, Jane will help](#) give the docs a fresh new look and "voice" with her animated embellishments (a la 'Mitchells vs. The Machines'). Unlike her siblings, Jane's entry point to her interest in becoming a documentarian isn't the *animals*, per se (also, not unlike *Debbie*); rather, it's their innate and burgeoning activism. If anything keeps Jane motivated to stay on safari, it will be their newly discovered sense of purpose – that their creative talents can be put to use and make a difference in the world.

When we first meet Jane, we'll glimpse signs of their fledgling future activism, [via](#) their 13-year-old concerns – railing against unfair school policies and the like, which often threaten to get her suspended (Jane's high GPA and Eliza's parent-teacher efforts being the key things that save her bacon time and again; poor Eliza has to walk a razor-sharp fine line between supporting Jane's outspokenness and being a responsible parent). But Jane's also relatively versed in conservationism and environmental concerns – both due to their online literacy, and the simple fact that Eliza's [their mother](#). Jane's activism will flourish on safari, as she learns to use her voice and her tools to take on increasingly global concerns – bringing a bit of *guerilla* to "gorilla filmmaking" (and, just as the OG series cast real-life naturalists as themselves in guest roles – i.e., Jane Goodall – we'll endeavor to do an episode where Jane gets to meet their real-life idol, Greta Thunberg).

NOAH KUTI THORNBERRY

8 years old and currently completing 3rd grade, Noah was adopted from Johannesburg (his middle name is a nod to the legendary Nigerian musician/activist, Fela Kuti). He's a human teddy bear, super upbeat and sociable: think Manny from 'Modern Family,' or Sam Richardson's Richard Splett from 'Veep' (but trapped in an 8-year-old body) – all buoyant optimism, but easily tripped up by details and prone to disappearing down proverbial “rabbit holes” (animal humor, ha!). Noah's extremely bookish and intelligent, and somewhat neuro-divergent: it's often challenging for him to focus on the task or lesson at hand, in favor of something unrelated that may hold greater interest. As a result, he's having a hard time at school; but this trait makes him a sort of Sherlock Holmes of the wild (or, Watson to Eliza's Holmes when mom is around) – he tends to spot clues in the unlikeliest of places, and is in many ways Team Thornberry's secret weapon. All these things add up to Noah being a perfect candidate for home-schooling – even if “home” winds up being a mobile, traveling home (i.e., the Thornberry *ComVee* – short for “Communications Vehicle” btw).

More than anyone, Noah's a chip off his mother's block: a true “nature nerd” who's binged the entire library of Thornberry documentaries many times over – Grandpa Nigel's his hero! Noah has a virtually photographic memory, so he's a living walking encyclopedia of animal facts. So while it seems like Noah would be more than well-prepared and a natural in the wild, “being there” proves to be initially overwhelming for him – a little too much sensory overload. Which is to say that Noah is most in his “happy place” when he's immersed in his hobby – doing research and learning about animals (i.e., in the abstract, collecting facts); facing a wild animal doesn't come as naturally to him as it did with Eliza (but, as Eliza will point out, it doesn't come naturally to MOST people! It's that generational pressure he puts on himself – like we said, a chip off his mother's block). As such, Noah will go through some growing pains and an adjustment period before embracing his “wild” side and releasing his inner Eliza – talking to an animal can incredibly calming, *or harrowing* depending on the animal needless to say.

But, any initial nerves won't keep Noah from being a valuable member of Team Thornberry in the field after a warm-up period. As with any “indie” film crew, roles are often fluid and crew members can wear many hats. If older sister Jane starts off primarily as Team Thornberry's editor and [one-person graphics team](#) (before eventually growing into a more directorial role), Eliza considers Noah to be her “associate producer”: together, mother and son plan the topic and/or animal subject of any given documentary, as well as each day's shoot based on their knowledge of what fauna they'll encounter in any given region.

Needless to say, things don't always go as planned and comical chaos often ensues. Mostly due to the unpredictable nature of animals, though the agent of chaos at times comes from within ...

LEA PILAR THORNBERRY (aka, "Leap")

Adopted from Sao Paulo, Brazil, Lea is 4 years old going on 5 and is about to enter kindergarten. She's a feisty and indefatigable ball of energy, so she *EVOKE*s Donnie from the OG series — but without being full-on *literally* feral like he was. Thus, of our three new Thornberrys, Lea's most ready to embrace her wild side and new adventurous life away from home. Eliza tends to call her by both names – "Lea Pilar" – with that firm-but-loving tone that mothers use when attempting to rein in unruly children. But Lea's sibs mostly call her by her nickname "Leap" – a mash-up of **LEA P**(ilar) – because that's how Noah pronounced her name when he was a toddler (and Leap in turn calls Darwin "Dar-Dar").

Needless to say, "leaping" (without looking before she leaps) is what Lea's usually doing: she's the most prone to getting the Thornberrys into scrapes, because she has no filter when confronting bureaucrats or poachers. Leap is also FEARLESS when it comes to wildlife: she sees nearly EVERY animal as potential PET fodder to cuddle, wrassle, or make fetch – no matter their size, OR their disposition. A leopard or lion sighting usually elicits a primal cry of "BIG KITTY!" from her. Leap has always wanted a pet cat at home, but Eliza couldn't allow it because Darwin's allergic to dander; so, Leap will be constantly on the hunt for one in the wild. Leap also instinctively attempts to MIMIC any animal behavior she witnesses first-hand – which can lead to some awkward moments, unnecessary risks, and bad habits. And as for HER contribution to future Thornberry docs, well, umm ... they're Thornberrys, they always have their "Donnie!"

So like Noah, Leap's "entry point" is her love of animals – though more from the heart than the brain. And while there's certainly a parallel to Donnie, Leap really embodies Eliza's adventurous side – that curiosity and fearlessness when it comes to learning more about – and helping – animals. Leap MEANS well, she just doesn't quite have the tools yet to keep situations from spiraling out of control – at least not on her own (mostly due to her age). But, she has her siblings to catch her when she falls ...

The Kids as a family unit, and a team

We want Eliza's kids to represent an aspirational global community for our young viewers: despite their *visible* differences from one another (i.e., their ethnicities), they're a well-oiled hive mind that completes each other's sentences and are always intuitively there for each other. That said, being "on safari" *will* strain their natural harmony and at times threaten to divide them (for example, sharing space in the ComVee and not having their own rooms will put a strain on the OCD and all too organized Noah, with Leap having more immediate access to "touch his stuff" and disrupt his filing systems; and Jane can be resentful at times because she feels like she's been plucked from her journey towards adulthood – in her gloomier moments, she will metaphorically refer to her current station in life as "quicksand," because she feels stuck and being sucked downward rather than climbing upward).

But mostly, as our kid perspective POV/new viewer stand-ins, we want them to be FUN. The kids may complement each other's talents (both as fledgling filmmakers/documentarians, AND proverbial birds of different feathers when it comes to their animal-based magical abilities), but they will just as often spark a chemical-like reaction when together that will lead to comical pandemonium before they get it under control. We'll have a multitude of variations, but the base formula will be something like ...

Leap leaps into the fray, getting the team into a predicament; Jane's the quick problem solver, keeping her cool as she *nearly* gets the situation under control – when Noah optimistically barrels in with enthusiasm before fully comprehending the risk or stakes at hand, and quickly dials back said enthusiasm ("Ohh, you meant *feeding* frenzy"). That said, Noah's usually the team's "secret weapon" by zeroing in on that hidden detail that gets the gang their proverbial get out of jail free cards.

And, all of the above fun is how they behave BEFORE "the big turn" in their lives – yup, when they acquire the magical ability to speak to animals. But, unlike Eliza who originally "wished" for her ability in order to be able to speak to then-new BFF Darwin, Jane, Noah, and Leap will be taken by surprise and have their magical abilities dropped in their proverbial laps (by Shaman Mnyambo, naturally). So, we'll mine comedy from the chaos as the kids navigate the discovery of their new powers – though eventually with Eliza's help and guidance, since she's "been there done that." [*NOTE FOR SUMMIT: we are no longer divvying up different animal talk powers among the kids – will explain].

Even though each of the kids possesses the ability to speak to *all* animals including Darwin (like Eliza did), they're still three different kids with three distinct personalities – which means they may as well be speaking three different languages at various times, and perhaps find themselves aligning with the needs of different animals at cross-purposes with one another. Situations like these will threaten the kids' natural harmony at times; but as their journey develops throughout our series, each of Eliza's kids grow to be something of a "specialist" – e.g., Jane may eventually come to realize that she's developed an affinity for birds; Noah may take a greater interest in the world of reptiles; etc. And despite their "shared" ability to speak to animals, needless to say each of Eliza's kids will each bring their

own unique perspective to the table, as well as rise to any challenge and come out stronger. You know, not unlike Eliza used to do in her relationship with her older sister ...

[*TOPIC FOR SUMMIT DISCUSSION: should the kids and Donnie have an onscreen presence in the new generation Thornberry documentaries? Either as co-hosts (a la the Irwin family), or as subjects in the documentaries? Or just leave it to the clean swap of Eliza for Nigel, with occasional “cameos” from the kids as story chaos dictates?].

DEBBIE THORNBERRY (aka “DEBORAH THORNE”)

Debbie’s now in her late 30’s and currently single: you might say she’s “married to her career” as a high-level Executive at a media conglomerate based in NYC. That’s right: our former slacker has grown up to be totally Type A and highly successful – she just needed to get back to civilization and city living, to forge her path in the *corporate* jungle (i.e., always the outlier of her family, Debbie never really “belonged” on safari because she’s a city girl at heart. So, she’s finally in her element – Debbie hasn’t changed, she’s just being “true to her nature”). We will later learn that Debbie is divorced: she and her ex are still the best of friends, just not the right life partners. He’s a 39-year-old Tony Hawk-like pro skateboarder with a puppy dog Luke Wilson vibe – yup, Debbie married one of her teen heart-throbs! We’ll immediately see where he might have been a perfect match for the younger “slacker” Debbie, but also intuit why she outgrew the relationship.

Post-divorce, Debbie tweaked her name for professional impact: *Deborah Thorne* sounds more sophisticated, and she wanted to forge her career path on her own merits (i.e., unencumbered by any whiff of nepotism or celebrity connection). Yet, try as she might, Debbie just can’t seem to break entirely away from her family legacy: in a WHIP PAN to her first day on the job, we’ll see the look on poor Debbie’s face as she learns that one of her company’s many subsidiaries is THE FOUNDATION – the charitable trust that funds the Thornberry documentaries. She does her best to keep this news a secret (that theme again!) from her family to avoid “complicating” her professional life, but it doesn’t last – “Oh, you’re a Thorne-BERRY?? Why didn’t you say so!” As Debbie feared, the moment her parents find out, Nigel (obviously and good-naturedly, like any older parent who might not comprehend the nature of what it is that we do at our jobs all day) often imposes upon Debbie to “pop” down the hall and “pop in” on their friends at the ol’ Charitable Trust for any variety of requests or favors, big or small. That’s right: Deborah Thorne, Executive ... and unofficial liaison to The Foundation (the proverbial “just when she thought she was out, they pull her back in!”).

As in the OG series, “Aunt Debbie” will at times be a foil to her family, and at others be comically put upon by them. Though she’ll often rise to the occasion to aid “Team Thornberry” from afar – be it risking her job by crossing lines to influence or stand up to The Foundation; or, by seeking outside the box solutions for alternate funding or resources when The Foundation is unable. But Debbie might at times take a hard line and be the one to put the brakes on funding or resources – only because she means well (i.e., those occasions where she feels that Eliza’s mono-focused Captain Ahab-like pursuits of elusive and/or dangerous beasts might be jeopardizing the safety of team Thornberry). All of the above is not to say that Debbie won’t be in the field with everyone else when story needs or entertainment value calls for it: she will definitely be “pulled back in” for the duration of our feature-length Pilot, for instance. But though her home base will be NYC once she returns to civilization *after* our Pilot, Debbie will be an active participant in our stories along with semi-retired Nigel and Marianne (i.e., technology overcoming geographic separation).

We’ve saved arguably the most anticipated introduction for last (drum roll please) ...

DONNIE THORNBERRY

Donnie was the “wild child” in the OG series – raised from babyhood by Orangutans in the jungles of Borneo, before being found there as a toddler and in turn *officially* adopted by the Thornberrys. Donnie’s in his early 20’s: the formerly feral child now behaves perfectly “civilized” but, though he may have had years of speech therapy, he still spontaneously breaks into his signature “chitter” when he’s excited or upset! He’s a perpetually upbeat and energetic big kid at heart who, unlike his sisters, hasn’t yet figured out what he wants to be when he grows up – in part because his heart remains in the wild.

Nigel and Marianne eventually came to worry that continuing to “home school” young Donnie on safari would impede him from acquiring the social skills necessary to get by as an adult. So we are first reintroduced to Donnie as a fish out of water – at Oxford University in England, courtesy of Nigel’s connections. The restless and unfocused Donnie is basically the worst student at the best school (shades of Max Fischer in *Rushmore*). He resides at the ESTATE HOUSE of Nigel’s late parents as if he were the adult Tarzan at Greystoke Mansion – feeling boxed in there, climbing proverbial walls when all he wants to do is climb *trees*. But once Donnie gets back to nature, he’ll kick off his shoes to feel the dirt beneath his feet and immediately start swinging from treetop to treetop (with Lea attempting same, trying to keep up – yup, Donnie’s the FUN, CRAZY, LOVABLE UNCLE!).

The relationship between the original siblings (Eliza, Debbie, Donnie) is close and warm – there’s no denying the bond that developed during their adventurous early years together, even if in-person visits have been few and far between for the last 20 years (in fact, Donnie will have only met Eliza’s kids via video chat until they first meet “in person” in our Pilot). However, with her own kids now impressionable around Donnie, Eliza tends to be a tad protective (especially knowing Lea’s predilection towards, umm, “aping” her uncle’s behavior). Donnie loves to have laughs at uptight Debbie’s expense, such as asking her to “groom” him just to elicit her signature “ewwww.” He also unwittingly provides fodder for Jane, who records his antics on her phone – adding dryly satirical nature documentary voice-over narration to the footage about “the human animal” ([footage which may occasionally find its way onto the new Thornberrys online platforms](#)).

Donnie still loves to hang with his homie Darwin – much to Dar’s chagrin, and even though they can’t “understand” each other like Eliza/Darwin can. We’ll have fun changing up the Eliza/Darwin dynamic, sharing screen-time with Donnie/Darwin: as man-monkey and monkey-man, they should be birds of a feather but are instead an odd couple. In addition to his ape-like physicality, Donnie possesses a *keen sense of smell* which makes him an exceptional TRACKER. Donnie exuberantly sees himself as a friend to all animals and chitters away at them whenever he’s in their presence; but unlike Eliza’s *literal* ability to speak to animals, Donnie only *thinks* he can because of his early upbringing (“Yo, *raised by Orangutans* – I got this!”). His chattering typically only manages to confuse animals, elicit blank stares, or scare them off. Which is a good enough time to add another reminder: unlike Debbie, who learned of Eliza’s ability to speak to animals in the *Wild Thornberrys Movie* and is also sworn to secrecy, Donnie has never been aware of Eliza’s magical power –

at least, *not that we ever knew of*. More on this shortly, but this is a perfectly good prompt to review the ol' rules of the game (no pun intended) ...

THE RULES OF ANIMAL TALK (“Previously on ...”)

Here’s a brief primer of the “magic rules” established in the OG series, regarding Eliza’s ability, how she acquired it, and how it’s portrayed. This all comes into play in the new Pilot, so we want to make sure everyone’s on the same page ...

The Season 2 “origin” episode *The Gift of Gab* dramatized the events of how Eliza first met Darwin, and of how Eliza first acquired her power: by releasing a warthog from an animal trap – a warthog which then magically transformed into a human before her very eyes! Turns out, Eliza’s random act of kindness undid the spell that kept the cursed SHAMAN MNYAMBO trapped in warthog form – a punishment by his fellow Shamans for not respecting animals (the tribal elders believed that “human and animal spirits were joined together,” which suggests that Mnyambo felt that animals weren’t worthy of cohabiting the spirit realm with humans – before becoming enlightened by his life-journey).

The grateful (and now newly-enlightened to the plight of animals) Shaman rewards Eliza’s brave act by granting her wish to speak to animals (primarily so that she can talk to her new best friend, the chimpanzee Darwin!). There’s a catch: if Eliza tells anyone her secret, including her family, she will lose her powers and never be able to talk to or understand Darwin again (Eliza happily accepts the terms which she never seems conflicted about, even though her parents are nature documentarians who clearly might benefit from her insight; we will judiciously retcon here, to suggest that it was more of an ongoing dilemma for Eliza than it may have seemed).

However, there’s a loophole: the Season 2 episode *Dances With Dingoes* had both Debbie AND an Aboriginal Shaman suspecting/gleaning that Eliza possessed the ability to talk to animals, which didn’t cause Eliza to lose her powers (i.e., because Eliza didn’t actually TELL them her secret; someone guessing her secret didn’t cause her to lose her powers).

The Wild Thornberrys Movie establishes that Shaman Mnyambo possesses the ability to visit Eliza in her dreams, where he now reveals to Eliza (in a bit of a “retcon”) that he provided her with her gift “for a reason” and steers her towards helping an animal in need. Later in the movie, Eliza is forced to disclose her secret in order to save sister Debbie’s life – and true to the Shaman’s warning, she loses her magic ability to talk to animals (INSTANTLY, in a big magical SFX swirl of dark storm clouds). With her power already lost, so with nothing left to lose, Eliza confesses her secret to Debbie. But Shaman Mnyambo, moved by the bravery and heart Eliza displays during the climactic heroic animal rescue, and seeing what she’s capable of even *without* powers, returns Eliza’s powers to her with the understanding that she – *and* Debbie – will promise to keep her secret henceforth. As extra incentive, Eliza tells Debbie that if she ever spills her secret, Debbie will *turn into a baboon*. Debbie, though wary, fearfully believes her (as evidenced by Debbie’s baboon-related nightmares).

That’s how it all came down. Here’s how it plays out ...

Eliza and animals “speaking English” to each other is a visual conceit: it’s what we see and hear when the camera is on Eliza, communicating with an animal. But an observer would

see what's *actually* happening: Eliza howling like a monkey, tweeting like a bird, or snorting like a hog. Not always a pretty sight, but it's how her "gift of gab" works (i.e., SHE'S speaking "animal," rather than the animal speaking English).

As with the OG series, while we WILL mine comedy and quirky personalities from our "talking animals," they do need to be *true to their nature* – i.e., these aren't anthropomorph "funny animal" characters with *human* traits who speak with pop culture references. Every animal we give voice to will speak from their limited experience and worldview AS a member of its species, and be limited by that animal's typical behavior and abilities; it's imperative that we be accurate in the facts we impart (and worry not, dear writers – we'll have researchers and fact-checkers to aid in our task). But within those parameters, the goal is to entertain and be laugh-out-loud funny as we graft voices and personalities suited to the attributes of these wonderful and diverse creatures. This honed depiction of animal nature is what makes *The Wild Thornberrys* stand apart from "funny animals" in other family media (Chimpanzee DARWIN, Eliza's best friend and constant companion, doesn't break that rule in our view, as "human" as he is portrayed, because chimps are closer to man than, say, lizards; i.e., he's higher up the "evolutionary ladder"). One good example from the OG series leaps to mind: a hungry VULTURE laments that he can't eat Eliza because he only eats carcasses; however, he gives her a little shove off a tall tree to see if the "accident" might hasten his next meal (the bit stays true to the vulture's nature, but exaggerates it cleverly enough to be hilarious. The classic Aardman short, "Creature Comforts," is another good reference of animals speaking "in character").

Furthermore, the original series was a bit inconsistent with how it handled communication between species: there were times Darwin could overhear or chat with warthogs or stray cats but, in another scenario, he couldn't understand gorillas. We prefer being consistent with the latter – though in the case of "related" species, treating language like a different *dialect* ("Hmm, I can make out every third word – I think what he's trying to say is ..."). In other words: Darwin can freely speak with another chimp, but a gorilla would have a different dialect; and Darwin can't understand lions or zebras or snakes or birds, etc. We feel that this is truer to how communication works in the animal kingdom, but also a more universal depiction of how language works among humans (i.e., celebrating the diversity of global languages). It also puts greater importance on our "gifted" animal-lingual humans like Eliza, to be translator and intermediary in situations both comical and urgent (and sometimes both!). We will also be attentive to appropriate regional casting for said animals.

A finer point worth making about the updated status quo re: Eliza losing her powers; in the OG series, Eliza – due to her gift of animal speech – was arguably "learning" things about animals that her own parents, as nature documentarians, were already versed in. But adult Eliza now possesses vast knowledge of wildlife via her various life experiences (both as the child of nature documentarians, as well as her lifelong adventures which allowed her to learn from animals first-hand). All this to say, because animals are typically *true to their nature* (with the exception perhaps being when they are acting out of character in reaction to environmental anomalies), the ADULT Eliza no longer NEEDS to "speak" to animals to understand them: she already possesses a deep understanding of how they behave, both

from her earlier formative years as well as her medical training. So when it suits the story, we'll have any one of the kids wander off-piste and figure things out on their own; and, when we want to move things along or intervene when any of the kids might falter, Eliza will often be there to "fill in the blanks" with her animal knowledge.

Thanks for taking our refresher course! Now, for the lay of the land ...

Pilot Premise

The Thornberrys meet up in Africa for a FAMILY REUNION, where we will get to know Eliza's kids as "ordinary" kids (i.e., a. before they become involved in the "family business" at its conclusion, and b. acquire their powers). They'll provide "kid POV"/audience stand-ins as they react to their first safari with awe and wonder, as well as display smarts, moxie, and bravery when tense situations arise.

But a series of circumstances will make Eliza realize that keeping her secret is going to be a bit more challenging than it used to be: now that she's an adult, it's not so easy to spirit off on her own to convene with animals without the others taking notice. Our Pilot will conclude with Eliza making a great sacrifice (to save Nigel), revealing her secret, and losing her powers. But Shaman Mnyambo, once again moved by Eliza's heart and courage – as well as her enduring relationships with Darwin and her kids – will bestow her former ability to speak to animals *to her kids*, while restoring her ability to speak to Darwin. Our feature-length event thus makes way for the kick-off of our ...

New Main Title Sequence

The V.O. narration of the original is classic, and our updated take will crystalize the series' focus as the voice-over of adult Eliza is interrupted by those of her kids (as we see their onscreen visual intros). *Pending visuals*, the new V.O. might go something like ...

Eliza: "This is me, Eliza Thornberry—part of your average family. I have three kids—"

Jane: "Mom, since when does *average* involve growing up talking to animals?"

Eliza (dryly): "Meet my eldest, Jane."

Noah: "It's all good, cuz now *we* can talk to animals too!"

Eliza: "And my son, Noah."

Leap: "I want a kitty!!"

Eliza: "That would be my youngest, we call her Leap."

Jane: "Own it already, mom. We make talking to animals work for us ..."

Noah (enthused): "... cuz we travel the world, making nature documentaries!"

Leap: "With Unca Donnie, he's like a big monkey. And Mom's best friend Dar-Dar, who IS a big monkey."

Eliza (admits): "Okay, not only are we *not* average – we're kind of *wild*. But you know what?"

Everyone/chorus: "We wouldn't have it *any other way*."

Series Overview

As mentioned, we'll lean more into the "putting on the show" aspect of the OG series since Jane and Noah will both assume direct production roles (Lea's too young to serve in any *formal* capacity, though she WILL occasionally surprise with an unexpected meaningful contribution. But like young Donnie in the OG series, she will mostly be the wild card – umm, pun intended this time). Because we're focusing on the family as a team, however, doesn't mean we won't replicate the "kid perspective" of the OG series: the kids may not be operating clandestinely as Eliza did, but they'll still often be on their own *without* parental guidance – interacting with various animals as story needs suit, whether because the task at hand requires "divide and conquer"-style pairing off, or whether they separate accidentally or with their own agendas of any given moment.

Episode to Episode ...

We'll have any number of line-up permutations to play with, for maximum VARIETY (i.e., any given episode might focus on all three kids as a unit as they explore an eco-system and species; or, juggle any number of pair-off variations as each kid trades partners with Darwin, or their mom, or Donnie, or only one of their siblings – more variety and keeps things fresh!). And each of Eliza's kids will experience *their own various voyages of personal discovery* as our series goes on: in one episode, Noah and Leap may split off and find themselves at odds with each other as they "take sides" with two different wildlife species in an eco-system (e.g., Noah finds himself uncharacteristically sympathizing with the plight of a PREDATOR as he experiences Darwinism first hand – the naturalist, not the monkey; while Leap is busy pulling out all the stops to protect its PREY). Talking to animals isn't a gift that Jane necessarily wants, but it's one she's going to have to learn how to live with; but she may find herself taking solace with a flight of flamingos (for example) – providing us with a window into her soul as she uses them as a sounding board for her own personal struggles, revealing that she's less confident than she may seem on the surface (ultimately she gets back to reality as she realizes the birds can't really offer her useable advice outside of the best worms to eat – but she feels great to have let down her armor and open up, if even for a moment).

Story Engines

Most episodes will feature one or more of the subsets below, and many will feature all:

The Superhero Family: there's a big problem to solve (e.g. an environmental issue, poachers, an injured animal) and the family works together to make things right. Eliza's veterinary experience will often factor in: doing "checkups" on animals the team encounters as part of their new protocol, underlining our conservationism theme – i.e., as a medical expert, Eliza will use the documentaries to speak to how environmental changes might be impacting the health and well-being of creatures great and small. We'll of course do triage/rescue scenarios for adventure and "medical drama" story needs.

The Family Business: not only the hijinks that the kids get into in the course of filming their documentaries, but the character-building emotional journeys of each as they learn to be responsible – not just to nature and the environment, but to their enterprise: the satisfaction of not only doing a job, but doing it well. As well as contributing to and growing their legacy.

Slice-of-Life Family Dynamics: how is everyone coping with living together in such close proximity? How are they adjusting to life on the road? How are they dealing with the universal growing pains that all families face? After all, this uniquely blended family may be getting along harmoniously when we first meet them; but Eliza pulling them from their comfort zones and bringing them to the wild will challenge their stability from episode to episode (even though she does so with the best of intentions – i.e., to share her formative experiences with her kids, but also wanting to connect them with their roots/cultures). After all, their family "eco-system" has been upset with the location change! Especially because the family vacation winds up becoming more extended than they had planned (and *threatens to be permanent*, as you will see).

Meanwhile, though Nigel/Marianne will be semi-retired in Oxford, they'll continue to have recurring roles (and even make occasional appearances on location when the situation merits – e.g., Nigel shows up unannounced on one of Eliza's safaris, with a group of his students: "Field trip!"). We'll also have the fun of seeing "younger Nigel" on film, as Noah does compare-and-contrast research by watching vintage Thornberry documentaries from the late 90's. And, we can have flashbacks to past Nigel and Marianne classic moments (and perhaps even an entire flashback episode – how Nigel and Marianne first met, anyone?).

Nigel might initially have a "hard time letting go" and nearly irk Eliza by attempting to micro-manage one of the shoots from afar – or, so it seems (as we've learned from so many OG WT episodes, Nigel almost always has the best of intentions – and most of their inner-family conflict is often based on a misunderstanding. Still, we can update those sources of conflict and make them more relevant for our new generations of viewers and/or their parents). Case in point, as mentioned earlier: Eliza puts great pressure on herself to manage the family legacy ... the pressure that comes with filling the shoes of "the world's greatest naturalist!" The burden may seem to come from without, but it really comes from within. Which is to say, the push/pull of compelling character dynamics shouldn't stop with

our event Pilot: Eliza will at times question whether her increasingly Captain Ahab-like obsession with continuing her father's work might be selfish and/or unsafe for her family – and may even wrestle with abandoning her quest from time to time.

Alas, irony of ironies, Nigel will settle right in to his post-retirement routines like a champ – but it will be MARIANNE who grows listless! She will initially keep herself occupied doing free-lance film shoots that DON'T involve wildlife, such as domestic pet videos or weddings (i.e., goofy work-for-hire jobs that we'll use as sitcom fodder); but she will eventually find new purpose by directing an award-worthy documentary short film strong on social activism (continuing to give Marianne her own agency outside of Nigel, but also to eventually have her wind up being the single greatest influence on JANE's activism).

But Nigel and Marianne will be in sync on one key matter: the THORNBERRY ESTATE HOUSE at Oxford may be part of Nigel's family legacy, but it's simply TOO much space for two of them. Yup, the ironies escalate: the elder Thornberrys find themselves facing yet another “empty nest” – their biggest one ever! But, Nigel has a signature proverbial lightbulb ... and before long, Nigel and Marianne's new ongoing project will involve turning the estate house and grounds into the THORNBERRY WILD ANIMAL SANCTUARY (!). This will provide us not only with ongoing B-stories to mine, but potential A-stories as well when we decide to flip the script – not to mention a regular running gag (i.e., every time Eliza face-times her parents to check in, we'll wonder what new addition to the sanctuary we might glimpse this time – will it be a pair of Zebra [seen](#) grazing [through the window of](#) the study, or a family of Macaques who have claimed Nigel's favorite armchair as their own?). With this additional ongoing thread, our new series (let alone any given episode) will boast plenty of variety; and, rest assured that Nigel and Marianne will be having a VERY “active” retirement from which we'll have no shortage of hijinks to mine. [Furthermore, “Team Eliza” will take the Thornberry docs into the modern era by launching a new official social media account, and their social media presence will expand to include Nigel & Marianne's Wild Animal Sanctuary in addition to their ongoing documentaries – it may be a family business, but it's a global venture!](#)

As for Donnie, the Pilot will have him discover that he has a natural talent for operating the camera – bringing a new-found sense of dynamism to the “Thornberry look” (whether crawling through brush, perched atop a tree, or swinging *from* that tree, Donnie has a way of putting the audience in the center of the action!). So, he will take over for Marianne (though each of the kids will shoot footage with their phones to some degree at any given time, which will provide Jane with “B-roll” to creatively edit together). But, a later season twist will have [Eliza](#) getting laryngitis or [the like so that she is unable to host in time for their deadline](#), so the team [finds themselves in need of a](#) replacement host. But while wild-man Donnie may be ostentatious among family, they'll learn that he's absolutely petrified before the camera! Before you can say Pygmalion (there's an animal pun in there somewhere!), Donnie gets a crash course in public speaking – and he cultivates a Continental accent drawn from his Oxford days, hoping to do Dad proud (but hosting will only truly click for Donnie once he drops the pretense and makes it his own).

That's the broad view; now for a deeper dive on how it all begins ...

Pilot Treatment
“THE SEARCH FOR NIGEL”
(Feature Length)

ACT ONE

We open with Nigel and Marianne on safari in UGANDA, as detailed earlier (driving their jeep, discussing retirement to Oxford, etc). The “one final documentary” Nigel wishes to complete concerns the endangered status of the GREY-CROWNED CRANE here in Eastern Africa: the gorgeous creature is the national bird of Uganda, and one of Nigel’s personal favorite species! However, the birds are not currently foraging where they usually do, which Nigel finds curious because they are a non-migratory species. He’s concerned that environmental changes are forcing their migration [*Note: details subject to fact-check, as with any episodic “species du jour”*]. Marianne reminds him that their “swan song” documentary will need to take a pause for the Thornberry FAMILY REUNION in a few days. Nigel tells her “Pish posh, we’re all Thornberrys – built to roam the world and seek out adventure!” (quote from OG series). *Everyone* will join the odyssey, just like old times!

They are interrupted by the ping from Eliza: it may be late afternoon in Uganda, but it’s early a.m. in Canoga Park. The segue allows us to meet Eliza’s THREE KIDS for the first time as she (and Darwin) get them ready for their LAST DAY OF SCHOOL for the year: it’s the beginning of summer, and Eliza can’t wait to take them to Africa for their reunion and finally share her experiences with *her* family! (we’ll learn that Eliza hasn’t been abroad since entering veterinary school – and never with her kids, it’s their first trip). Jane says hi to her grandparents, then Noah – but Leap is nowhere to be found, until they realize it’s because ...

... she’s OUTSIDE trying to corral a “KITTY CAT” she spied trot past their window, causing it to retreat up a tree ... where it’s now stuck! We get our first taste of signature *New Wild* Thornberry “barely-controlled pandemonium” as Eliza’s kids use moxie, smarts, and bravery to keep the situation from (mostly) spinning out of control. Jane coolly tries to coax the cat down with a cleverly-improvised treat, while Noah feverishly googles for intel on why cats don’t come down once they go up (especially since they always land on their feet – “or wait, maybe that’s a myth?”). But the situation escalates when Leap manages to get *herself* up the tree – compelling the cat to further retreat to a neighboring tree branch, where it discovers a *nest of freshly-hatched baby robins* (yum!), waiting for mama to return with breakfast. Uh oh! The chaos fast-becomes a lesson of nature’s eco-systems (yes, even in suburbia!). The kids get some late-breaking assist from Eliza and Darwin, and we’ll use the scenario to illustrate that Eliza’s kids admire their mom for being “awesome with animals” – without fully understanding *why*. The cavalry frees up Jane to step back and capture the remaining hijinks on her phone to post on social later. Eliza relies on her “special ability” to talk to the cat, coaxing it to leap into an improvised fireman’s tarp – which it overshoots, to have its fall broken by Darwin (who loses a comical swath of back-fur in the process, in addition to suffering an allergic sneezing fit!). Double-disaster averted: both the cat and baby birds are safe, yay! But we are left with a double punch-line:

Lea is now stuck high in the tree unable to come down, while Jane “takes one for the team” when the upset returning mama robin poops on her, *splat* (“Ugh, *birds*”).

We’ll go on to see highlights from a typical day at the veterinary clinic with Eliza in full swing (i.e., the various details mentioned earlier) – as well as Eliza squeezing in a dental appointment (final adjustment on her new braces). We’ll also segue to our first re-introductions to DEBBIE in NYC and DONNIE at OXFORD (also per earlier pages) as Eliza phones each of them – showing their locations in geographic relation to Canoga Park via GLOBAL MAP VIEW (per the OG series). Donnie is introduced as a typical “buttoned up” British student as he wraps his last day of class and leaves campus via his awaiting chauffeured limo. But once at Thornberry Mansion, he lets loose his wild side as he climbs the tapestries and swings from chandeliers until interrupted by Eliza’s phone call.

On the sister-to-sister call, Eliza tells Debbie that it sounds like Mom may have finally talked Dad into retiring – channeling Nigel as *she also* laments the “end of an era.” Debbie instantly tenses: she knows Eliza all-too-well and doesn’t want Eliza getting any crazy notions about keeping the family enterprise going – at least, in ways that would involve Debbie! Her worst fear is “getting roped into running the Thornberry field office out of some remote Tanzanian outpost!”

Through conversation with Darwin afterwards, we’ll also learn that Eliza’s nervous: they allude to the “incident” that caused Eliza to leave her family during the last 20 years (the “blind spot” in the timeline between the end of the OG series and now), and we’ll wonder whether she had some sort of falling out with them.

Back in UGANDA: Nigel and Marianne pass through a town where they happen upon a town hall-like symposium hosted by EXXOFF CORP – its keynote speaker is its smooth-talking but smug and snarky PR Chief, STAN LIKELY (South African, Caucasian). Exxoff has taken root in the region, and Likely expounds upon all the ways Exxoff is “giving back to local communities” by creating jobs and infrastructure here in Uganda via their cutting-edge water treatment facilities. Likely also speaks about connecting with local culture and celebrating their customs: to demonstrate, he brings out a young (late teens/early 20’s) Shaman named ADE, hyping that he is loving working with “local talent.”

Marianne sniffs cultural appropriation and isn’t buying the corporate “spin.” She tells Nigel she’s read these companies pump local water, only to bottle it and export out of the country for huge profits – and it’s the local communities who lose. Marianne grabs a microphone and grills Likely on stage, making a scene; Likely smoothly denies her accusations, and continues to spin Exxoff in a positive light. Afterwards, Likely’s GOON (privatized military type/Dave Bautista build) reports that while he couldn’t i.d. the irate lady speaker, he *did* i.d. her companion: *celebrity documentary host Nigel Thornberry*! Likely seems concerned by this finding.

Back in the USA: Eliza tosses and turns in the middle of the night: she’s having a dream (and grinding her teeth!). We enter her dream to see: a visitation from SHAMAN MNYAMBO – but the details are cryptic, absurd even – Eliza can’t piece together the meaning.

Suddenly, <RING!> – Eliza’s cellphone rouses her from her dream. Who would call at 3am? It’s SHAMAN MNYAMBO, face-timing her – awkward!. He thought it might be easier: he was getting “heavy dream realm interference,” though he proves to not be very tech-savvy (hitting wrong buttons, etc). They haven’t spoken in 20 years; he found Eliza’s info online and is pleased to learn she’s still helping animals!

Mnyambo is reaching out to alert her that he’s been having powerful premonitions – of Eliza, back in Africa. Eliza says that’s amazing: she’s coming for the family reunion. Mnyambo’s self-impressed: he hasn’t lost it! After they wrap, Mnyambo pocket-dials her by accident: “Oops, user error.”

UGANDA CAMP SITE, days later: Nigel and Marianne are camping out – it’s the night before they rendezvous with their arriving family. Nigel can’t sleep from the anticipation, so he goes for a midnight stroll under the full moon. He accidentally disturbs a pack of sleeping WARTHOGS and has a sudden fright as they irately snort at him: “Lord Nelson’s trousers!” Nigel has a grand old chuckle about their little encounter as he leaves them be.

THE NEXT DAY: Eliza, Darwin and the kids arrive at the rendezvous and reunite with Aunt Debbie and Uncle Donnie (for all the fun and hijinks detailed in their earlier Bios, as everyone gets reacquainted and/or meets in person for the first time – including Donnie’s tongue-in-cheek greeting of “Me Donnie, you Jane”). Sense of wonder beats as Eliza’s kids marvel at various wildlife – though Noah’s more comfortable seeing the wildlife from behind his tablet. Donnie embraces his wild side and starts swinging from the nearest trees, and older sister/default babysitter Jane is tasked with keeping Leap from joining him. As Eliza begins to note their parents’ tardiness, Marianne phones to report: when she woke in the morning, Nigel wasn’t beside her. SMASH TO ...

UGANDA CAMP SITE: The family now gathers with Marianne, along with LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT and a PARK RANGER. Nigel’s cellphone was left in the tent, so they can’t track him – and his footprints end abruptly with the pack of warthog tracks. Is he lost? Hurt in a fall? Abducted? Has he dropped off the grid because he’s having a late-life crisis and needs some “think time?” *Has he been eaten by wildlife?* All these are theories floated by concerned family/would-be sleuths. Eliza can’t help but wonder whether there was something to Shaman Mnyambo’s premonition, as she does her best to keep an upbeat face in front of her kids so they don’t panic. The group is naturally concerned, yet still in “there’s surely a perfectly reasonable explanation” mode – especially Marianne, who notes the number of past times Nigel has been seized by spontaneity and gone “off-piste.” Marianne believes there’s a perfectly good chance Nigel went for a midnight stroll, stumbled upon some clue to the whereabouts of the Cranes, and wandered off to follow the lead without realizing he didn’t have his phone. “There’s no one alive who disappears into their work like your father does.” The family can’t argue.

But the Ranger fears that Nigel may have become supper: he’s received reports of a LION aggressively approaching nearby camp sites at night. Eliza is wary: she and (junior animal authority) Noah both know that lions don’t prey on humans unless provoked, and Nigel of all people would know better than to provoke one; PLUS, lions are typically diurnal and

don't roam after dark. Eliza is as concerned about undue harm coming to the lion as she is about her dad ...

... and decides to do some investigating of her own. She excuses herself with Darwin by her side – how quickly she falls back into old patterns! (NOTE: Eliza easily slips away here because she has “backup” – Marianne and the others watch the kids). Eliza plays detective, “interrogating” various animals in the vicinity (e.g., asking a GIRAFFE if it saw anything last night, from its high vantage point). All the while, Darwin is already homesick for the suburbs: he had a bad feeling about returning to the jungle.

Meanwhile, it turns out the Lion mentioned is a *Lioness* and a mother – and she's been aggressive because she's searching for her lost BABY LION CUB. It's Leap who wanders off and finds it: “KITTY CAT!!” Cuddle time is short-lived as Mama Lion appears and sniffs out her baby – cradled in Leap's arms. Leap is reluctant to give up her new kitty, and is clearly in grave danger. The Ranger arrives, and ELIZA has no choice but to intervene – putting herself between the Lion and the Ranger's loaded weapon. Everyone watches with trepidation as Eliza faces off with the Lioness in a tense negotiation, “explaining” the misunderstandings (mom to mom). Eliza is rational and calming, as always, and we are sucked into her masterful time-stopping performance ...

... but from the onlooker POV, Eliza is acting like a crazy person – down on all fours, purring and growling and BEHAVING EXTREMELY RECKLESSLY. YET, her strategy – whatever it was – totally works! The situation blows over as the Lioness is reunited with her cub (much to Leap's disappointment). Eliza asks about her dad, describing Nigel: the Lioness tells her she did come across a pitched tent and some warthogs, but hasn't seen him.

In the aftermath and inevitable questioning, Eliza shrugs away the incident (e.g., clearly her intuitive Vet training at work, “heh”). But it's the first step of her kids, Marianne and Donnie becoming gradually suspicious of Eliza's increasingly odd and erratic behavior around the wildlife here (i.e., unlike the original series, *now that Eliza's an adult, it's harder for her to keep secrets; she can't just spirit off on solo adventures and leave her kids behind*; nor can she tell them the truth about her secret without losing her power – and with Nigel still M.I.A., connecting with the animal world may be Eliza's only hope of finding him if he's in trouble. So, this key dynamic changes as Eliza finds herself in predicaments that her kids witness – and needs to find increasingly comically baroque ways to explain her way out of them).

Eliza and Darwin sneak off again to continue their investigation (on a parallel path to local law enforcement, since they have a certain “edge”). Eliza tracks down the warthog pack – and hears Nigel's voice! But, he's nowhere to be seen – is she hearing voices in her head? It soon becomes very clear ... that Nigel is ONE OF THE WARTHOGS. “No ... way.”

ACT TWO

An astonished Eliza “converses” with Nigel, asking how he, umm, got this way. But Nigel/warthog doesn’t remember: one moment he stumbled upon this pack of fine *Phacochoerus*’s – the next thing he knows, he’s one of their own! Nigel’s taking it all in stride in his Nigel-like way, and even seems to be enjoying foraging with his new compatriots! (i.e., the first indication that Nigel’s in the process of “crossing over” – leaving his human attributes and memories behind, as he becomes more beast than man. This is our “ticking clock” – e.g. if Nigel isn’t transformed back to human within 24 hours, he’ll remain a warthog forever; and worse yet, lose all memory of having ever been human – memories of his all his animal research, and of his family). Darwin (who can’t communicate directly with “Nigel” and relies upon Eliza to translate) does his best to take this bizarre predicament in stride.

Eliza hits re-dial to phone Shaman Mnyambo, who agrees there’s no possible explanation for Nigel’s current state other than a Shaman’s spell. However, he can’t be of much help: a Shaman can’t undo another Shaman’s spell with magic; only the caster of the original spell can – or, *a human willing to make a GREAT SACRIFICE* (i.e., much like Eliza’s act of bravery when she unknowingly released Mnyambo from his warthog spell, when they first met). They both puzzle over possible motivations: *why would any Shaman want to do this to Nigel?* The Elders turned Mnyambo into a warthog as punishment for disrespecting animals; Nigel is incapable of disrespecting *any* animal, even if he tried. Mnyambo agrees they have quite a mystery to solve, and offers to check in with his other tribe members to see if he can’t find some answers.

Thus, our SET UP. In short order, Eliza needs to keep Nigel close until she or Mnyambo can figure out what’s what (lest she lose track of Nigel or – worse yet – risk having him fall victim to a predator). This means having to bring Nigel back to basecamp ... which means she’s *going to have even more explaining to do* (e.g., devising a cover story that she’s nursing the sick warthog back to health – more “secrets!”).

Meanwhile, the rest of the Thornberrys have pulled the *ComVee* out of storage for lodging (no worries about the carbon footprint, btw – the signature Thornberry vehicle has always run on BIO-FUEL per design, naturally). Full house! Donnie ribs Debbie, telling her they should take it for a spin – reminding her (AND our viewers) how many times Debbie’s crashed it in the past (WHIP PAN to quick mini-montage of past vignettes of the ComVee crashed, rolling away, or getting stuck in mud). Debbie has to admit, she’s surprised it’s still in one piece. Debbie becomes noticeably uncomfortable though, as she realizes her bunk will be crammed in between Donnie’s and Darwin’s to make room for Eliza’s kids: “Oh joy.” But Noah’s THRILLED to be inhabiting the “command center” that he’s always heard so much about and even more thrilled to discover Grandpa Nigel’s library! Jane provides wry commentary on the “caged humans” as if they’re wildlife (a la spoofing nature documentary narration) – when she’s not trying to keep Leap from making her next quick getaway to go find another “kitty cat.” Noah discovers a stash of old family photos, and the kids bond as they have a giggle over their young mom’s wild pigtailed!

Eliza arrives with Nigel/warthog, who's happy to see the rest of the family and attempts to greet them; but all THEY hear is the "snorting" of an animal. Nigel finds it curious that only Eliza seems to be able to "understand" him, and she awkwardly changes the subject to avoid giving up her secret. She does take Debbie aside to confide the bizarre truth to her (i.e., the only one besides Darwin who knows Eliza's secret); an astonished Debbie freaks that there WAS truth to this whole "turn into a baboon" thing?! But Eliza can't tell the others that the warthog's Dad because A. they'll REALLY think she's a loon! B. it would force her to reveal *how* she knows – that she can talk to animals – and she'd lose her power, thus her essential ability *to communicate with Nigel* during this important time.

Farcical awkward moments ensue, and the general perception is that Eliza is behaving remarkably strangely by being so glued to this stray animal. Marianne, Donnie, and Eliza's own kids fear she's losing it (a la Richard Dreyfuss in 'Close Encounters'). Jane goes into "friend to mom" mode as she coaxes Eliza to take a break from hog-sitting and relax: she'll do her hair. When Jane's done with her, Eliza looks in the mirror to see that she's now sporting her old pigtails: she has made her (symbolic) transformation back to her old self!

When Nigel/warthog tells Eliza he has reason to believe that the Grey-Crowned Cranes may be foraging at a certain watering hole, she tries to honor his wish of getting the team to finish the documentary – not only will it keep them occupied, but it may *truly* be Nigel's last if Mnyambo doesn't find a way to turn him back human. Debbie hates to be the bearer of bad news, but The Foundation sent her an email: they suspended the shoot due to insurance regulations. As an agent of the company, Debbie can't allow them to resume filming until Nigel is found safe.

Eliza and Nigel (as warthog) sneak off, HITCHING A RIDE in the general direction of the watering hole – not with the intention of filming (per Debbie's instruction), but as a private pilgrimage for Nigel (i.e., as we know from OG series episodes like personal favorite 'Born to be Wild,' sometimes "seeing" and experiencing is enough for the naturalist in Nigel). Marianne is wise to Eliza's exit; she slips her CAMERA into Donnie's backpack (digital/updated version, more compact than her OG camera) and tasks him with following Eliza out of concern for her mental health. Marianne will use the jeep to take the kids into town to distract them with local sights – she's going to spend some quality time with her grandkids on this trip if it kills her.

Debbie chooses to stay with the ComVee at base camp – she's surprised and delighted to see that her parents equipped it with Wi-Fi at some point, and wants to catch up on work emails. She realizes Darwin is the odd man out, and doesn't want the chimp hanging around with her. Donnie is more than happy to take his "bro" along with him, much to Darwin's relief (Eliza!) and dismay (Donnie!).

In classic Thornberry "divide and conquer" fashion, we follow the separate factions: due to the terrain and/or where their ride stops, Eliza and Nigel (warthog) HIKE the rest of the distance. THE HEART OF OUR SECOND ACT is an offbeat but moving FATHER/DAUGHTER BONDING JOURNEY – Eliza has rarely spent this kind of one-on-one time with Nigel before.

As they take a rest so that Wart-Nigel can snack (on some juicy bugs!), Eliza begins to open up – admitting that she’s missed being away from her parents, and adventuring, for all of these years; and she hopes that Nigel doesn’t feel there’s been a wedge between them. We learn of the “incident” referred to earlier, and see it in brief dramatic flashback IN ELIZA’S MIND’S EYE ...

AFRICA, FLASHBACK: When Eliza was in her late teens, she was caught amidst a sudden RHINO STAMPEDE. A horrified Nigel saw the whole thing unfold in tragic slo-mo: Eliza was *dead-to-rights*, there was no possible escape. But at the last moment, he watched as Eliza warbled like a rhino – and the stampede seemed to listen and parted around her, leaving Eliza completely unharmed with not one hair out of place. Nigel feels like he witnessed a supernatural act, and gently confronts his daughter: “Poppet, is there ... something you wish to tell me?”

Eliza of course *can’t* tell him without losing her power, and sheepishly evades the question: “Umm, *I really want to go to veterinary school?*” That was the day Eliza decided she could no longer remain on never-ending safari with her parents: no longer a child, it was becoming more difficult to keep secrets. And, she didn’t have a choice since she wasn’t willing to give up her magical ability – for her friendship with Darwin, if nothing else.

COMVEE: Debbie, alone, has settled in and surprises herself: being here in the ComVee is making her feel ... *nostalgic*. Rolling with the warm-and-fuzzies, Debbie investigates her old sock drawer to find her WALKMAN, plastered with 90’s metal band stickers: “Raaad.”

IN TOWN: Marianne and the kids get in some quality Grandma time, and we/they get to take in some local sights. But the mood is interrupted as Marianne spots STAN LIKELY emerge from a vehicle. Ever-perceptive Noah asks Marianne why she’s suddenly grinding her teeth like mom does; at Jane’s further prodding, Marianne tells her she saw “someone she knew” who works for Exxoff. This activates Jane like a lightning rod: she’s read all about their environmental crimes. Noah’s already googling on his phone to corroborate: “It’s the first thing about them that comes up!” Leap also gets her dander up, gleaned that the company is not a friend to animals. It’s one of those “chemical-like reactions” we spoke of earlier, and before Marianne can stop them, Jane’s leading the charge to follow Likely – if only to give him a hard time. But they watch as Likely enters the local EXXOFF office building ...

EXXOFF MAIN LOBBY: ... where he passes through a manned security station via his keycard. The kids enter a beat later, Marianne still trying to corral them. Too late, they missed him – oh well! But Noah spots a spare keycard at the Security Guard station and Jane’s wheels start turning ...

LIKELY’S OFFICE: Likely is surprised to find someone there waiting for him: the young SHAMAN ADE (whom we were briefly introduced to earlier at the symposium). Likely asks, in sinister coded lingo, if Nigel Thornberry has been “dealt with.” Ade nods. A relieved Likely assures Ade that Thornberry was looking for trouble ... and left unchecked, might have sullied what Exxoff has gone to so much trouble to build for their community. Likely

asks for confirmation that Thornberry wasn't harmed – just a little “hypnosis” to make him forget what he was onto, right? Ade, matter-of-fact: “I turned him into a warthog.” Likely stares for a beat – then bursts into laughter (i.e., it's too far-fetched and he thinks it's “Shaman humor”). And “Mrs. Thornberry??” Ade responds that's what he came to report: he encountered an obstacle [INSERT BRIEF FLASHBACK: we see Ade cast the spell, turning Nigel into a warthog; but when he approaches their tent to do the same to Marianne, the prowling Lioness appears – scaring off Ade]. Likely bristles: Thornberry's wife is the bigger troublemaker of the two – she's the one with the camera! He instructs Ade to do whatever it takes to track her down ... and “finish the job.”

ACT THREE

EXXOFF MAIN LOBBY: With shades of their earlier moxie and teamwork, we get a mini “spy caper” sequence as Leap creates a distraction for the SECURITY GUARD, leading him away from his station as Noah keeps a nervous lookout and Jane “borrows” the spare keycard from guard desk. Leap circles back and the kids (and Marianne, hesitantly taking up the rear if only to protect them) share the keycard to pass through the security station – entering one elevator while Shaman Ade emerges from another, never seeing them. Phew!

LIKELY'S OFFICE: Likely holds a shadowy meeting with his Goon for an “Operations Review,” as Marianne and the kids sneak in and eavesdrop. They hear Likely discuss TBD incriminating behavior on the part of Exxoff (e.g., manipulating data or the like, to siphon off more water than they're allowed to pump for export, which is in turn contributing to the wetland drought which impacted the Cranes). Marianne's upset she doesn't have her camera with her – but Jane has her phone out and has been filming the whole thing. Marianne is now clearly getting an adrenaline rush; but when Leap or Noah almost blows their cover, the responsible grandmother in her takes over. She makes the kids wrap it up and leads them out ...

EXXOFF MAIN LOBBY: ... but they bump into the SECURITY GUARD. Seeing Leap again, he realizes he's been had and attempts to detain them. The kids manage to trip up the guard long enough to make their escape into the street ...

... where Ade lingers, trying to figure out the unenviable task of finding Marianne Thornberry. But as fate would have it, he spots her emerging from the building with the kids. Out of the frying pan and into the fire? Ade closes in on the unwitting Marianne ... when a figure steps between them, blocking Ade's path (i.e., so that Marianne never knows she was in danger). It's Shaman Mnyambo: “You are Ade? The Elders told me I might find you here.”

LIKELY'S OFFICE: But just when it seems Marianne and the kids are in the clear, the Security Guard interrupts Likely's meeting to report the breach – sharing the SECURITY CAM FOOTAGE on his phone ... of Marianne and the kids IN THIS VERY ROOM MOMENTS AGO, filming Likely's meeting right under their noses!

IN STREET, MOMENTS LATER: Likely and his Goon race outside: Marianne is nowhere to be seen, but they spot Ade across the street with Mnyambo ... moments before a PASSING BUS obscures them from view, and they seem to vanish from thin air a la Jason Bourne. An irate Likely snarls to his Goon: *“Fetch the drone.”*

COMVEE: Debbie now listens to her Walkman while painting her toenails – she’s her teen self all over again, just like old times! The happy vibe doesn’t last, though: a SNAKE slinks its way into the trailer and spoils her fun – “EEK! Just like old times ...”

When Marianne and the kids return in the jeep moments later, they find a freaked Debbie OUTSIDE the ComVee – waiting for a sign that it’s safe to go back inside. Ugh, Marianne’s on a mission: they need to upload the video they shot to [the internet](#), to show the world the true face of Exxoff. But they need WiFi access to accomplish the task – *the WiFi inside the ComVee* that the snake is currently holding hostage.

ON TRAIL TO WATERING HOLE: Donnie displays his tracking abilities, following Eliza and Nigel’s trail. However, due to Darwin’s slow pace, they’ve (comically) fallen way behind/out of eyesight. A passing predatory PACK OF HYENAS forces them to lay low and further slows their pace.

SHAMAN MNYAMBO: During his conversation with Ade, it comes out that the young Shaman had gone rogue – despite his precocious mastery over spells, the elders expelled him from their tribe for not respecting animals (reminding Mnyambo of his younger self!). Ade justifies what he did to Nigel to protect Exxoff’s efforts: he believes the corporation is doing good for the community, and that their technology is the way of the future.

Mnyambo cuts to the quick and sets him straight: Ade believed nonsense, the corporation just wants to profit off their land. The opposite of what Ade was told is true – he has been taken for a fool [Note: we’ll be sure to play Ade’s flaw as YOUTHFUL ARROGANCE, rather than cultural naivety – once again resonating with our generational theme].

Ade has his “what have I done?” moment. Mnyambo tells Ade he needs to undo his spell on Nigel Thornberry before it’s too late.

WATERING HOLE: Eliza and Nigel (warthog) reach the foraging site and witness the glorious sight of the Grey Crowned-Cranes: “It never gets old.” Nigel marvels at how adaptive animals are: these Cranes have relocated to adjust to life changes, and they are adapting just fine. This observation makes Nigel self-reflective, and he tells Eliza that if he ever becomes human again, he’s ready to embrace the next step of life’s journey and welcome retirement; he’s just sorry he had to learn that from animals, rather than his own loved ones. But, that’s what makes animals wonderful, isn’t it?! “They show us who we are.” Despite the irony of being spoken by a warthog, Eliza is clearly moved by his words.

Most importantly, Nigel doesn’t want his “Poppet” to feel a single pang of pressure or regret in continuing the family legacy: she’s following her nature, and applying the Thornberry touch by helping animals in her very own way – and that’s more than he ever could have

wished for. He's so proud of her. But Eliza replies that she feels her place IS in traveling the world, she knows that now: she just had to go "off-piste" for a while, like Nigel often does! It was a necessary part of her journey. Nigel points out that Eliza has a family now – what about Jane, and Noah, and Lea? Her place is with them. Eliza considers a beat, then with conviction: *"They're Thornberrys: they're built to roam and seek out adventure."*

REVEAL that Donnie and Darwin have been watching from nearby: Donnie's climbed a tall tree and is FILMING the Cranes with mom's camera. He wants to capture the moment "for Dad" who can't be here right now, knowing how much Nigel will want to see this when they find him.

Eliza spots them and takes a sidebar with Darwin while Donnie's still in the tree: she's glad Darwin's here, she's had a revelation of what might be a "great enough sacrifice" to turn Nigel human again – but she needs Darwin's okay. With a sad but knowing look, Dar's already ahead of her: she's going to reveal her secret, which means she may lose her power and they'll never be able to speak again. Eliza begins to tell Darwin not to freak, but he cuts her off and surprises her (and us!) by calmly telling her to *do it*. Keeping secrets isn't sustainable – not for her relationship with her father, *or* her kids. He and Eliza will get through this: they've spent so much time together, they virtually complete each other's thoughts anyway. Eliza's blown away by Darwin's selfless and wizened tone – he really does care about her. They exchange their tender "last spoken words" – which don't involve "goodbye," because neither of them is going anywhere.

CAMPSITE: Noah peers through a window of the ComVee and smiles; before Marianne or Jane can stop him, Noah casually enters the vehicle and emerges a moment later ... proudly brandishing the errant snake in hand! He identified it as a gentle, non-poisonous variety that some folks even keep as pets – all good! Then he cringes, as the reality seems to hit that he's holding a real live snake (this moment is his gateway to getting over his "in person" animal jitters though, as we see him getting comfortable with the outdoors). Debbie is the first to get back inside their vehicle, if only to get as far as possible from the snake. But before Marianne and the others can follow, a <humming> DRONE alights down before them – blocking their path. As they wonder who the intruding tech might belong to, their question is answered ...

... as an ominous souped-up jet-black RANGE ROVER with tinted windows <SCREECHES> up, blinding them in its headlights: STAN LIKELY and his Goon emerge. Likely treads a fine line of villainy – as a representative of a known corporation, he can't physically accost anyone; but he uses all his mastery of sinister innuendo and veiled threat to attempt to scare the Thornberrys into compliance: he knows what they did, and demands they "hand over of the phone." He promises to return it once he deletes the compromising video – he even promises to not press charges for *illegal trespassing*, which would most certainly land them in a Ugandan jail cell. Or, worse yet (as he deviously sizes up Marianne and the kids) – "who knows, perhaps even get *child protective services* involved."

Debbie eavesdrops from inside the driver-side window, playing catch up and astonished at what she's hearing. Before she knows it, the kids create a momentary-enough distraction

for everyone to get back inside the ComVee; the kids resemble a trio of diminutive Gladiators as they brandish the only defensive weapons they can find – a set of BARBECUE UTENSILS (Jane, spatula; Noah, tongs; Leap, fork). Marianne locks the door behind them and dryly gives the kids an A for creativity, but this is a case where “flight” may be more helpful than “fight” as she shouts for Debbie to *step on the gas*. A wary Debbie begins to say she’s not so sure she’s the best candidate for the job, but Marianne barks “NOW.” The ComVee <REVS> up and screeches away as Likely and his Goon (driver side) jump back in their Range Rover to pursue. THE CHASE IS ON.

X-CUT FOR SUSPENSE: Ade can’t quite get it together to reverse his own spell in time, even with Mnyambo’s help (e.g. he’s unable to zero in on Nigel’s current location from their distance). And Nigel is clearly becoming “less Nigel” and *more warthog* by the moment – leaving Eliza no choice, it’s now or never: Eliza needs to reveal her secret to her Dad, in the hopes that her sacrifice will transform Nigel back to human. But, because we like our stories *twisty* ...

... that PACK OF HYENAS Donnie and Darwin dodged earlier suddenly appear and get the drop on Eliza and Nigel (warthog) – they see the warthog as potential dinner! The other half circle Donnie and Darwin (licking their chops at the sight of the chimp), forcing them to retreat out of Eliza’s view. Donnie remains protective of Darwin and won’t let anything happen to him. As the hyenas close in on both parties, readying their attack ...

RESUME COMVEE CHASE: Jane’s attempts to upload the phone footage keep stalling out: now that the ComVee is on the move, they fall in and out of WiFi signal. With the sleeker Range Rover already hot on the bulky ComVee’s tail AND the Drone flying alongside the driver window for distraction/intimidation, Debbie’s (comically) tense at the wheel. Leap scores points as she intuitively throws a dashboard switch that LAUNCHES THE INFLATABLE RAFT like a rear projectile – it inflates mid-air before catching onto the top of the pursuing vehicle and obstructing the windshield, momentarily slowing it while they shake it off. Inspired, Debbie grows cocky as she manages an additional slick maneuver or two – outmaneuvering Likely’s driver, and outmaneuvering their Drone to cause it to fly into a tree, <WHAM>! Cheers from Marianne and the kids – she’s got this! Debbie’s feeling confident with her driving skills now, until she sees the SNAKE crawl past on the dashboard: whoa, Noah brought THE SNAKE?? *Back inside the ComVee????* Noah shrugs: what, it’s his new non-poisonous friend.

This momentary freak-out is of course the very thing that causes Debbie to lose control of the wheel! The ComVee spins off the road and into a ditch where it remains stuck. “Oh Joy.” Jane tenses: they were so close, but the upload has stalled out again. Likely and his Goon emerge from their vehicle, smarmily feigning concern as they approach to see if everyone’s okay in there: “If someone has a *phone*, we can call for help.” What to do? Leap points out that the rear window opens: if the kids can climb out, they can make a break for it and hide the phone somewhere.

WATERING HOLE: The hyena packs attack! After some tense moments trying to keep them at bay, Eliza risks her life to keep them from attacking Nigel-warthog (i.e., a different kind

of sacrifice than what she had in mind – more akin to how she first broke the spell over the Shaman) – transforming Nigel *back to human!* “Smashing!” Together, father and daughter manage to shoo their attackers away (without harming them, naturally) ...

... while beyond some brambles out of Eliza’s view, Donnie and Darwin manage to do the same: painful though it may be, Darwin placates the predators with his very own “great sacrifice” ... of tossing them his travel stash of beloved Cheese Crunchies to devour.

COMVEE CRASH SITE: As Likely and his Goon approach, the Comvee door opens to reveal Marianne – casually feigning ignorance a la “What kids? What phone?” The villains see kid-sized footprints in the mud, leading away from the rear of the ComVee. They split up to pursue, but as Likely rounds one side of the vehicle ...

... he SHRIEKS in sudden pain: ouch! Rubbing his butt, he turns to see Noah and Leap nearby – and NOAH’S SNAKE, slithering away. Noah matter-of-factly reports that he just witnessed Likely get bitten by a (TBD) poisonous snake, and presents all salient details ... including the fact that he has 30 minutes to find an anti-toxin before paralysis sets in. Likely, freaking, orders his driver to get him to hospital, stat!

As the villains make their hasty retreat, Leap brandishes the ComVee’s BARBECUE FORK (from the utensil set seen earlier): she snuck up behind Likely and pricked his rear with its dual-tines, feigning the snake bite. Jane, phone safely in hand, smirks that the jerks fell for their trick; Noah matter-of-factly quips that it pays to know your snake varieties.

WATERING HOLE: Eliza is off the hook: she no longer has any pressing reason to surrender her powers. But she already made her choice, and follows it through: *no more secrets* (besides, imagine allowing Nigel to go through life with no explanation of how or why he spent 24 hours as a warthog!). As she begins to tell Nigel what we already know ...

... CUT TO Darwin and Donnie hiking back into view, when they’re distracted by the sight of the STORM CLOUD that suddenly appears overhead with big THUNDER/LIGHTNING FX. They think they’re witnessing a typical African monsoon, but we see ...

... Eliza finish telling her story to her dad, bittersweetly knowing that her powers are no more. A gobsmacked Nigel can only muster a long, slow “*By the bespoke stitches of Lord Nelson’s britches ...*” as he attempts to process it all.

But equally stunned is Donnie, at the sight of his Dad’s sudden appearance in the distance! Eliza calls out with a sheepish “Look who I found,” before preparing to come clean with Donnie too. But Nigel cuts her off, instead shouting across the expanse to Donnie that he came running when he heard the hyena yelps: he had wandered off to follow the Cranes before realizing he didn’t have his phone with him.

Eliza double-takes: that’s exactly what *Mom* said probably happened to him! Nigel preens: Marianne knows him all too well, they HAVE been married a long time. With Donnie and Darwin still out of earshot, Eliza asks: but why the cover story to Donnie? In a heartfelt

exchange, Nigel tells Eliza that it pains him to know that his “poppet” held the burden of her secret for all those years, and wishes he could have told her that if she needed to keep a secret, he trusts that it was for a very good reason.

Eliza takes this in, then dryly realizes: “You’re not telling Mom about this, are you.” Nigel says absolutely not: they’re naturalists, not *supernaturalists*; and had he not *personally* just tromped a mile in a warthog’s hooves, he’s not certain that he could ever have believed this story himself. Off Eliza’s wary look, DISSOLVE TO ...

EPILOGUE, a few days later ...

CAMP SITE, UGANDA: Marianne has launched the secret footage calling out Exxoff’s duplicity online (embellished with Jane’s GIF’s/Snapchat-style animated highlights – e.g., animated arrows pointing at culprits/evidence; squiggly exclamation marks that “react” to info). The footage has gone VIRAL, which has forced the corporation to make public amends AND reparations to the local community. But Likely is already in full PR counter-spin mode that suggests that Exxoff will barely feel the sting of this “leak” – and clearly employ even more sophisticated “greenwashing” strategies in the future. Still, *it’s enough of a “win” for the Thornberrys to share a group high-five.*

Marianne adds that the kids aren’t the only ones who “got the shot”: she’s still marveling at Donnie’s footage of the Cranes. It’s so *beautifully and dramatically filmed* – high or low, he can really get the camera angles. She’s been thinking that Donnie may have found his calling: he’s a chip off Marianne’s block! Donnie loves the idea of taking over Thornberry camera duties for Mom – he’ll do her proud. But who would take over for Dad? Nigel isn’t just the “face” of the Thornberry docs – he’s the heart, and the brain. Nigel, fresh from his “letting go” epiphany, has something to say about this: *there’s only one person who could fill his shoes. Eliza.*

Eliza is of course moved by Dad’s vote of confidence and excited by the prospect, but what about her kids, and school, and her practice? But the group is already pumped and brainstorming the next chapter of the Thornberry documentaries: Jane’s updated stylistic touches will give any upcoming WT documentaries a fresh look, and maybe even gain new viewers! Noah can help with the research, he’s already a living animal encyclopedia! Marianne hands over Nigel’s TO-DO LIST (the one he denied existed): they can cross off “Grey-Crowned Cranes,” but the list is still long – they have at least a whole SEASON’S worth of episodes lined up right here! Lea wants to know what part she’ll play? Ummm ... they wouldn’t be Thornberrys without their wild child, would they? “Yay!!” Debbie can’t deny that it all seems algorithm-friendly – she’s willing to, umm, “walk it down the hall” to the powers that be when she gets back to NYC. *With Eliza’s okay, that is.*

Eliza considers, and decides they’ll give it a try – just for summer break. Then they will decide together – *as a family* – whether to stay or go back home in time for the start of school. The kids agree they’re up for it! Darwin looks distraught by the prospect of their return to being *wild Thornberrys*, but Nigel’s relieved by how things have turned out: despite the hundreds of Thornberry documentaries they’ve made to date, their planet

continues to evolve, for better or worse, so the need to document it and its living creatures continues.

Mnyambo arrives to say hello to Eliza in person, and introduces his new “apprentice” – Ade. The youth was misguided and naïve, but shows great promise ... and has already helped him get more out of his smart-phone! In fact, they saw their viral post about Exxoff – which helped to persuade Ade of the truth. Eliza points to her kids: they owe it all to them. But Marianne is quick to proudly add, “They take after their mother.” **DISSOLVE TO ...**

A SHORT WHILE LATER: Eliza and Mnyambo take a stroll alone, away from the campsite, as Eliza finishes catching him up on events. The Shaman tells Eliza yet once again how impressed he is with her heart and bravery – as well as that of her *children*. He offers to return her powers to her as he did once before (in *The Wild Thornberrys Movie*). Eliza declines: it was the most wonderful gift she could ever imagine having, and it helped inform who she is today. But she feels she’s gained everything she possibly could from it ... and, it wasn’t without its complications.

Mnyambo seems disappointed and reminds Eliza that he gave her the gift for a reason: to help animals. *Eliza* has been the true gift to all wildlife she’s encountered along the way, not the other way around; she was always so “evolved,” *even as a child*. Eliza assures Mnyambo that she’ll continue to help wherever she can: now that the Thornberrys have passed the torch between generations, she hopes to travel the world’s animal kingdoms all over again so that she can share her life experiences with her *own* children. She wished that she could have been more open with her own parents, but owns her decision as a sacrifice that she wasn’t willing to make at the time. They both suddenly notice prying/protective Darwin has been following from a short distance away – he attempts to hide behind some bushes but, realizing he’s been spotted, comes clean and approaches them. This provides Eliza with the cue to tell Mnyambo that her friendship with Darwin was the reason she wasn’t willing to give up her power.

Mnyambo muses slyly as he listens to Eliza’s heartfelt words, and intones something cryptic about the passing of the torch, and adapting to change. Eliza’s like, wait – what did he mean by that? But a FLOCK OF GREY-CROWNED CRANES seem to supernaturally appear out of nowhere and pass between them – Mnyambo having vanished from thin air in their wake. Darwin joins Eliza and makes a wry quip about the Shaman’s vanishing act – in his usual voice, *which Eliza hears*. They both double-take and hug as they realize that they can understand each other again! She tells Darwin about the Shaman’s cryptic “passing the torch” comment, and as they puzzle over what it might mean ...

NEARBY: Donnie plays catch with LEAP, who misses the ball and chases it deep into some nearby tall grass. There, she comes face to face with the same BABY LION CUB. In perfect English, it says: “I’ve lost my Mommy again, have you seen her?” Off Leap’s look of stunned excitement, WHIP PAN TO ...

NOAH, releasing the SNAKE he caught, back into the wild. Noah reacts with wide eyes as it thanks him for setting him free – *in perfect English*. WHIP PAN to ...

JANE, who sidesteps as a CRANE alights on a branch directly overhead. Jane mutters that it had better not poop on her, and her eyes slowly bug out in shock as the bird responds in a droll tone in perfect English: “*As if I have any control over when nature calls.*”

SCREEN SPLITS THREE WAYS to LEA/NOAH/JANE as their stunned faces call out “MOMMMMMMM!!!!!!” **SMASH TO BLACK.**

END OF PILOT.

[*TOPIC FOR SUMMIT DISCUSSION: Is it too weird that Nigel (and by extension Eliza) are now keeping her ex-secret from Marianne? Even considering that a. Eliza no longer possesses her power, and b. the “Marianne would never believe in magic because she’s an empiricist” rationale? There’s probably a world in which, after the dissolve to epilogue, we learn that Eliza has now also confessed her secret to Marianne, Donnie, and even Eliza’s kids, now that she’s sacrificed her powers. With the “fun twist” of course being that the shenanigans begin all over again moments later, when the kids get the powers (i.e., the “magic rule” of the OG series dictates that they can’t tell their secret without giving up their power). If we have the Shaman “include” ALL the Thornberrys in their family bubble so that the kids come out of the gate not having to keep secrets, that certainly simplifies things — but does it seem too *easy* that we’re tossing the entire gimmick of the OG series? Are we losing *some* of the fun of secret-keeping?

One key thing to consider: with Nigel, Marianne and Debbie *not physically on location* with our core field unit team after episode 2, they won’t be an ongoing “stage-weight” vis a vis the kids having to keep secrets from them — it will be easy enough to sustain until we choose to do the “kids visit grandparents at Oxford” episode and resolve it then. Ditto a summer internship with Debbie story. This “unfinished business” could arguably give us something fun to resolve later in our narrative. So, if we choose to have Eliza tell her secret to all by Pilot’s epilogue, once Eliza’s kids get their powers it seems our options are ...

- A. any secret-keeping outside of Eliza begins all over again (farce & fun);
- B. Mnyambo simply includes ALL of the Thornberrys in their secrecy bubble (too easy?);
- C. back to option A, but Nigel et al “figure it out on their own” by the end of episode #2 (since Nigel and Marianne would in theory still be around for the kids’ “Miles Morales/Spiderman” beats, if we pick up the end of Pilot action a moment later in real time – see next page); even if Marianne was never told, Nigel can choose to tell her as they fly home (i.e., cut to exterior of airplane flying off as we hear Marianne: “WHAT???”)
- D. Or, option A again: but we resolve it in a later episode when the kids visit Oxford, with Nigel “figuring out” their secret without them having to confess.

The crux being: we’re looking for that ideal balance of modernizing the family dynamic by losing the secret-keeping – while making sure it feels earned and not like we’re throwing out the entire trope of the OG series willy-nilly. Keep this in mind as you read the bits that touch on “Episode 2” in the coming pages.

The New Status Quo (in episodes to come ...)

The assumption is that we will tell another 3 to 5 Africa-based episodes for our first mini-arc beyond our Feature-Length PILOT (66-75 minutes – aka, “**Episode #1**”). Our “new generation” Team Thornberry (Eliza, Donnie, Darwin, Jane, Noah, Leap) will then travel to Asia for the second of their three summer vacation months, before ending Season 1 in South America. Arc durations can adjust once we know the actual number of episodes in our first season order, but *for the purpose of CONTEXT & CONTINUITY ...*

... **EPISODE #2** will pick up right where our Pilot left off, as Eliza’s three kids discover that they *each* suddenly possess the magical ability to talk to *all* animals (i.e., Miles Morales/Spiderman beats). Hijinks ensue as JANE, NOAH, and LEAP quickly learn from their mother Eliza that they must keep their powers secret from *anyone besides Eliza and Darwin*, so that they don’t *lose* their new powers (potentially including grandparents Nigel & Marianne, and aunt Debbie and Uncle Donnie, depending on our discussion). But the kids also have to process that their mom not only up until recently possessed the *same* powers, but had to keep it a secret from *them* for all these years (IF Eliza didn’t already tell them at end of Pilot – this could be an example of our “families are complicated” theme at play).

Eliza sits her kids down for a serious mom-talk: she explains that they each now have a gift, a very WONDERFUL gift, IF used properly – never for selfish reasons, *only for the animals*. BUT, Eliza also needs them to know that they can *give it up if they so choose* – no one is pressuring them to keep it. They each have one “get out of jail free” card – all they need to do is *tell* someone their secret, and they’ll never hear another animal speak again (Eliza then walks it back slightly as she quickly realizes the potential implications of this, and requests that they please *check with her first* before telling any strangers OR family members their secret. Out of respect for their siblings who might wish to keep their magic ability intact, naturally – but mostly so that Eliza can do damage control. Complications!).

Naturally, the kids each have different reactions: Leap’s, like, why would I EVER give this up!? Noah’s already studiously thinking through how he might apply this ability to his research. And Jane’s, like: *mind officially blown*, let’s give this a whirl and see where it takes us (Jane is the one who will consider bailing time and again – imagine if DEBBIE ever had Eliza’s powers, after all! But in their ensuing maiden voyages using their powers, each of Eliza’s kids will see the positive impact they can have – though not without comical complications along the way). And Eliza will come to encourage them to use their gift (under supervision, wherever possible!); so much has changed in the natural world in 20 years, Eliza sees value in hearing directly from the animal kingdom all over again, *in their own words* (straight from the proverbial horse’s mouth) – albeit through the “mediums” of her kids. And with the kids being able to now understand Darwin, their relationship with the family chimp will deepen as time goes on (much as it once did with Eliza).

While epic, the events of our Pilot took course over only the first 2-3 days of their family reunion; so, it follows that the Thornberrys will take a beat to enjoy the rest of their vacation together – granted, not without the above complications. Central plot TBD (e.g., against the backdrop of the Wildebeest Migration), but aside from Nigel, Marianne and

Debbie leaving Africa for home by Episode #2's end (and if NOT all family members wind up in on the kids' secret), two key things will be accomplished:

1. Donnie will admit to Eliza that he always knew she had a "gift" for communicating with animals, a talent she's clearly shared with her kids (i.e., having spent his childhood watching Eliza from his "feral kid's eye" POV without knowing the specifics, origins or extent of said gift, he just casually accepts it – so that the kids can chirp, howl or bleat freely with other animals in Donnie's presence moving forward); and ...
2. The final tag will depict Nigel and Marianne arriving at their Estate at Oxford to begin this new chapter of their lives ... and realize that they are staring at an even bigger "empty nest" than they bargained for. Whatever are they going to do with all this space? Nigel gets a sly look, and Marianne knows his wheels are already turning: *he has an idea*. Which of course marks the beginnings of the THORNBERRY WILD ANIMAL SANCTUARY.

ONGOING VILLAINS: Team Eliza will continue to discover and "document" evidence of Exxoff's wrongdoing from episode to episode, earning minor victories against the corporate giant. Exxoff agent and fixer STAN LIKELY will continue to find ways to thwart their progress, and already has a team collecting data on all the Thornberrys, including Eliza's kids – knowledge is power, and he seeks to know his enemy intimately. We'll keep Exxoff relatively grounded but amp up the villainy through the machinations of their face-man: for example, Team Eliza will learn that the ever-despicable Likely allows POACHERS free reign on Exxoff-owned land, in return for a cut of their profits to "wet his beak." Yup, Likely is as corrupt as he is smarmy: he's running a side hustle, and his corporate higher-ups in turn look the other way as long as he's valuable to them. Likely and Exxoff are complicit cogs in the transactional "eco-system" of poaching.

Later season development: Exxoff is a GLOBAL presence, with any number of subsidiaries that Eliza and company will continue to encounter. It follows that Exxoff will eventually acquire Debbie's company in a corporate merger – *and dissolve The Foundation*. It's the moment of truth for Debbie: she quits her job rather than "sell out" to Exxoff, and uses her connections, fundraising skills (and even her own paycheck!) to keep the Thornberry documentaries going – "for the animals." When the chips are down, the Thornberry siblings are there for each other – yes, even Debbie. Stan Likely will continue to be a "thorn" in the Thornberrys' side – *and vice versa*. But who knows: our team may wind up enlightening him and putting him on a redemption path, while paving the way for an even bigger bad in Exxoff's ranks.

[*PRIMARY SUMMIT AGENDA: Our main goal will be to break 3 or 4 story springboards for a “stand-alone” script that takes place early in the Africa arc, that primarily features our three kids operating together as a unit, while exploring the fun of their similarities and differences in how they talk to animals. Below is a long-form premise I wrote that remains valid for series, but isn’t right for the task at hand because the kids are split up for most of our screen time (in OG series fashion). We can spend a few minutes seeing if we can easily restructure this to fit the assignment, but it might be more efficient to start from scratch and keep this intact. I’ll bring some “starter” areas to the summit for us to spring off from, but welcome anything you might be inspired to bring as well].

LEAP OF THE LEMURS
(extended premise)

We find Team Thornberry on the island of MADAGASCAR off Africa’s coast: ELIZA and DONNIE are currently shooting footage for their next documentary subject, while JANE and NOAH hole up in the ComVee to edit the footage from their *previous* shoot. That’s right: divide and conquer is the Thornberry way, as everyone learns to wear different hats to keep the work flow going to meet their launch deadlines.

This leaves youngest LEAP feeling bored/listless/left out, especially since DARWIN is not the most attentive baby-sitter: despite now being able to communicate directly with Eliza’s kids, ol’ Dar-Dar’s easily worn out by Leap’s constant energy. Jane and Noah are having a hard enough time finding their own work rhythm together with their task at hand; but when Leap gets a little too into Noah’s workspace – his “territory” – he stresses out. Though Noah is as gentle as can be in admonishing his little sister, Leap is just self-aware enough to know she’s only going to continue to be in everyone’s way with all this play energy to burn. So, unbeknownst to her otherwise pre-occupied ComVee-mates ...

... Leap wanders off in search of finding NEW ANIMALS TO TALK TO! She soon encounters a young RING-TAILED LEMUR out foraging: hey, maybe she can have her very *own* “Darwin!” But the Lemur is wary of Leap’s gregarious overtures and beats a quick retreat into the forest. Not one to easily surrender, Leap follows her new acquaintance back to his TROOP ... who are currently nesting in a grove in the forest. The Lemurs remain guarded and suspicious as the high-energy Leap blasts into their safe-space, ready to play!

It doesn’t take long for Darwin to notice that Leap has gone missing. Cursing their return to the wild as he steps in mud, trips on brambles and picks bugs out of his fur, Darwin braves the forbidding forest and soon catches up with Leap to plead with her to return to the ComVee before things get out of hand. But Leap’s having too much fun – she’s even painted dark circles around her eyes so she can sport the same rad “bandit” look her new play-dates do! Darwin knows enough to read the proverbial room: Leap is “projecting” good times onto the wary primates and, in her thirst for adventure, remains oblivious to the tension brewing between her and the MAMA LEMUR – Lemur troops are MATRIARCHAL, and Leap’s fast becoming a threat to Mama’s authority here.

Darwin's arrival only serves to ratchet up the comic tension, since his presence here is viewed by the lemurs as yet another territorial threat (as docile as Darwin obviously is). Furthermore, Darwin's ability to communicate with the Lemurs is limited since he has difficulty understanding their dialect, missing what seems like every other word; though he and we and Leap will hear the Lemurs speak English, they speak *super-quickly* in an intense chitter which causes Dar to constantly respond with the likes of "What was the middle part?" (i.e., though distantly related as primates, the lemurs may as well be an alien species as far as Dar is concerned). Darwin's of course been down similar paths before with young *Eliza*, but Leap – despite her ability to talk to animals – has a disposition closer to Donnie than Darwin's closest friend. Leap's nearly too wild for the lemurs!

Meanwhile, we'll cross-cut throughout our story to Producer/Host ELIZA and Cameraman DONNIE – whom we first see utilizing his "tracking" abilities to follow the trail of an as-yet-unseen troop of brown-furred BAMBOO LEMURS (there are a multitude of different Lemur species on Madagascar, and all are endemic to the island – i.e., found *only* here). Eliza's subject for this week's shoot is the impact the aggressive DEFORESTATION on the island is having on the bamboo lemurs, forcing them to become more aggressively territorial. Eliza and Donnie are also finding their own rhythm, newly working together as adults and partners – though Eliza finds herself falling back on a "protective older sister" dynamic to urge caution on Donnie's wilder antics (whether he's pulling a "look what I can do" stunt for laughs, or taking unnecessary risks to get "the perfect shot").

But Eliza and Donnie are not the only ones following a trail: they are in turn being followed ... by STAN LIKELY, agent of EXXOFF CORP. He's been spying on his new nemeses The Thornberrys, who seem to possess an uncanny ability to uncover Exxoff's dirty deeds wherever the corporation has a presence – and the island of Madagascar is no exception. In fact, Likely's concerned that the Thornberrys are getting ever-so-close to tripping over evidence that Exxoff has been quietly *exceeding* the legal deforestation restrictions here on the island, through devious means.

Donnie notices that they're being followed, and in a spectacular series of rock-hopping, tree-swinging moves, quickly crosses a great distance to land in Likely's path and force their first face-to-face confrontation. Likely lamely tries to pretend he's a lost tourist, before realizing that Eliza recognizes him from the candid footage that Marianne and her kids shot of his secret meeting (in our Pilot) – you know, ahem, the *footage that went viral*? Awkward! Our natural enemies "size each other up" for the first time, like animals marking their "territory" (emphasized by x-cutting to the Mama Lemur sizing up Leap and Darwin in similar fashion).

Likely sneers as he tells Donnie he knows all about him – he's read Donnie's dossier: "The missing link – shouldn't you be on display in a cage somewhere?" An agitated Donnie begins to "chitter" uncontrollably at the insult, resorting to his "feral kid" speak (as he does whenever he's excited ... *or anxious*, as is the case here). Protective Eliza smugly points out to Likely that Donnie is a student at Oxford University. Likely says he's well aware – "C minus grade point average, isn't it?" Before Donnie can do something Eliza will regret, the tense face-off is interrupted by the sound of an animal's cry from nearby forest – an animal

in need! Eliza and Donnie attend to following the sound, with Likely making veiled threats that he'll be watching them.

The sound leads Eliza and Donnie to a baby brown-furred BAMBOO LEMUR. No longer possessing her powers, Eliza is unable to "understand" anything it might be trying to say; but she knows enough from experience to know that it's hungry and lost. They need to find the troop and reunite the baby with its mother.

We'll also cross-cut to JANE and NOAH throughout our story, as they put their heads up from their deadline to suddenly realize that Leap and Darwin are missing. They consider calling mom but decide they can handle it – mostly because if there IS a problem, they don't want Darwin to get in trouble (since babysitting Leap was HIS responsibility). They're no trackers like Donnie, so Jane and Noah use their new animal-talk abilities to "ask around." Their mission soon reminds them that TALKING to the local fauna isn't necessarily the same as COMMUNICATING with them – and it's a challenge for them to get desired information or results. They start with a passing HERON, who comprehends their request to search for their sister and flies off; but once it spots Leap in the forest it keeps flying undeterred to its destination, rather than report back (i.e., animals following their nature). Jane and Noah quickly figure out that they aren't going to hear back from it any time soon, and continue on to see if they can't find a more reliable source of information.

Back to Lemur Grove: Leap continues to make herself a little *too* much at home among the ring-tails, though there's some social learning on the part of both parties (i.e., lemurs mimicking aspects of Leap's behavior and vice versa). But the social dynamics of the group are definitely in disarray as the push/pull continues – and the matriarchal "alpha" is in turns annoyed and threatened by Leap's own alpha-like behavior. Other agitated males start engaging in a "stink fight" and Darwin takes that as THE cue to convince Leap to leave: "Trust me, we really do not want to be around when they start throwing their poop!" – before realizing, "No, wait – that's chimpanzees. Well, not ALL chimpanzees – I would never engage in such vulgarity." But Leap's LOVING the "stink fight" – totally hilarious, it's the highlight of her day so far! And Darwin's unfortunately piqued Mama Lemur's interest: she's curious to know more about this "poop throwing" concept. Darwin is aghast: "Oh dear, what have I wrought."

Meanwhile with the baby lemur in tow, Donnie wants to know how a mother could just lose its own baby? Eliza explains that deforestation can provoke stress and confusion to the animals living here. They are interrupted by the ring of Eliza's cellphone, which she answers to see the face of ...

... a PLATYPUS, seeming to speak with Nigel's voice (again??). No Shaman's spell this time: it's just NIGEL and MARIANNE, showing off their latest "tenant" from Australia. The problem is, their inaugural tenants are a pair of local RED FOXES (seen in previous episode) – and foxes are a natural predator to *all* platypodes. Which has presented them with a quandary, since all involved require access to the POND on the estate grounds – the Platypus to swim, and the Foxes to drink. And, *on the same schedule* since both are nocturnal! Nigel knew that this challenge to running a Wild Animal Sanctuary would rear

its head – he just didn’t expect it to be this soon. The foxes have even taken to *spraying* to mark their territory, which – Lord Nelson’s trousers! – has already ruined a pair of *Nigel’s* trousers. Donnie chitters with excitement and volunteers his old room there to either the foxes or platypus, whoever wants it! Nigel reminds Donnie that they must be mindful to recreate the natural temperature-controlled environments of any species to a tee – “animals first!” Eliza suggests that the Sanctuary might have another potential tenant if they don’t reunite their baby lemur with its mother.

Back to JANE and NOAH, who decides to question a GECKO and gets sucked into an absurdly protracted conversation about the flavor profiles of different bugs. Jane loses patience, convinced that Noah’s wasting valuable time because the reptile clearly has a one-track mind for bug food and can’t empathize with *their* needs enough to be of help: “What’s the point of ‘speaking animal’ anyway, if they don’t *listen* to us?” But lo and behold, Noah’s instinct pays off: the gecko saw the direction Darwin went, if only because there was a big juicy bug nestled in the chimp’s fur that it was jonesing to make a meal of (WHIP PAN to earlier, reminding us of Darwin trying to flick the gross bug off his back as he stumbles through the forest in search of Leap). Noah points out to Jane that it’s clearly *they* who need to listen to *the animals*.” Jane admits that she can’t disagree: point taken.

In short order, JANE and NOAH are the first to catch up to DARWIN and LEAP in the ring-tail lemur grove (Darwin: “Thank goodness!” Leap, knowing time’s up: “Awww”). The Ring-Tails are put on alert at the sudden appearance of these new intruders in their midst; but as if tensions aren’t high enough, a troop of brown BAMBOO LEMURS arrives a moment later. The Ring-Tails, following Mama Lemur’s lead, go full-on territorial and aggressive to defend their turf – snarling, gnashing and howling. The brown Bamboo Lemurs follow suit – its own MATRIARCH particularly aggressive (in part due to missing her baby, of course). Our poor humans and Darwin are caught in the middle of what seems to be an imminent rumble. Leap, rings still painted around her eyes, assumes a defiant pose: “I stand with my people!” Jane’s, like, “No you don’t” as she tries to pull her little sister away from there – but the grove is completely surrounded by the brown-furred intruding troops, and they don’t have a clear path out. The HOWLING on both sides intensifies and reaches an insane crescendo; Leap joins in the howling too, with remarkable mimicry (a fun thing she can carry with her beyond this episode – “social learning”).

WHIP TO ELIZA (with baby lemur in tow) and Donnie, as they hear the cacophony and follow the sound. WHIP TO ELSEWHERE IN THE FOREST: unfortunately, Likely also hears the howling. He hops into the passenger side of his JEEP and tells his DRIVER to follow the sound.

Eliza and Donnie arrive first and delay just long enough for Donnie to capture the scene on film – a scene which supports their premise that deforestation is forcing species who might not otherwise interact into being territorial. Donnie’s a little *too* excited, since from experience he seems to know what’s coming next: “Stink fight!” But Eliza decides it’s time to defuse the situation and steps into the grove with the baby bamboo lemur – reuniting it with its brown-furred mother. Even the ring-tails soften at the sight of the tender reunion,

and the tension immediately dissipates as Mama Bamboo Lemur calls off her troop who retreat into the woods.

Darwin is ELATED AND RELIEVED to reunite with Eliza, his hero – as he proclaims how proud HE is to be part of a matriarchal family! Eliza's of course puzzled by the sight of her kids and Darwin here – yet, somehow *not* puzzled. She may not yet know the particulars, but she knows the behavior – chips off the old block. Donnie gets it too – looks like Eliza may not have been the only mother missing her kids today. They all agree it's best to leave the ring-tails be and make their exit asap; tensions have been high all day – if these lemurs have yet another unexpected visitor, the fur's not the only thing that's gonna fly.

Back at the Animal Sanctuary: a quick resolution to see how Nigel and Marianne have solved their local territory problem (e.g., turning the indoor decorative Fountain into a platypus habitat).

LEMUR GROVE: As Team Eliza emerges to make their way back to the ComVee, they have a lot to unpack: while Leap may have gone “off-piste,” it did lead to footage that will help make a compelling argument about the impact of deforestation on lemur species here on Madagascar (i.e., another brick in their ongoing exposé against Exxoff, through their documentaries). REVEAL Stan Likely watching the team's exit from his parked jeep in the distance, voicing suspicion to his driver: let's see if he can't find out what The Thornberrys were up to in that grove.

A moment later: Likely enters the grove, to see the Lemurs react and snap to total “aggro” mode in a flash: snarling, howling, and – yes – reaching behind them (tastefully off-screen). As Likely's eyes widen, CUT TO ...

... HIS DRIVER in the jeep, hearing a fearsome wail – Likely's in trouble?! But before he can run to assist, a humiliated Likely stiffly emerges from the brush – plastered with what looks like mud, dripping from head to toe with it. The Driver asks what happened and Likely snaps: “Never mind that, just fetch me a towel!”

END.

Teaser of things to come: NOAH'S ARC (Africa arc finale)

[Pending consultation with PACT vis a vis transracial adoptions ...] Eliza comes to discover more specifics about Noah's birth parents than previously known: there were of the MAASAI TRIBE, which means her sweet, bookish son is from "warrior stock." Despite the expected emotional jitters, Team Eliza decides as a family to learn more; and their journey soon becomes an uplifting rite of passage for self-professed "animal nerd" Noah as he connects with his roots – as well as the wildlife that lives in harmony with the Maasai tribe in their shared reserve, most notably the emotionally-evolved ELEPHANTS. But tragic details begin to emerge: baby Noah was orphaned when his parents were killed – though not by elephant poachers, as we'll come to suspect (a la Donnie's back story from the OG series). The truth proves to be far more devastating: Noah's parents were killed in a freak accident, by an ANIMAL – specifically, *an elephant in musth* (a hormone surge in male elephants that can make them unpredictable, aggressive, and violent).

Needless to say, this revelation shatters Eliza, Noah, and the entire Thornberry family on multiple levels. For Noah, he struggles to process waves of complex emotions – his intense passion for animals, the whole trajectory of his entire life, has been upended. In an instant, animals have become something not only to be feared ... but perhaps even *hated*? And for Eliza: how can she possibly carry on with the family legacy with Noah coping with his ongoing trauma? But the entire Thornberry family is able to come together to stay the course AS a family – following Noah's lead as, against expectation, he proves to possess the warrior spirit of his forebears. Our story's emotional peak will come as Noah uses his gift of animal speech to confront his doubts and fears – by having an intimate heart-to-heart with an elephant who remembers the events of the fateful evening his parents were killed (in a scene that evokes Eliza's conversation with the dying elephant in the OG series' classic "Forget Me Knot"). We vow not to leave a dry eye in the house with this one.

NEW CONFLICTS: As our Africa arc concludes, Stan Likely decides he needs to up his game to battle the ongoing Thornberry exposés – by producing a series of high-budget GREENWASHING documentaries, to wrest back narrative control from Team Eliza. The directors? A brother/sister team of directorial wunderkinds from the world of extreme fashion commercials and music video: LIESEL & DIETER FENSTERKOPF (from OG series episode, "Clash of the Teutons"). The Fensterkopfs were essentially "anti-Thornberrys" – a family of four who had better funding and higher-end equipment; and who "rigged" their nature documentaries to be thrilling like bloodsport, with no concern for animal safety. *Their entire modus operandi hinged on presenting false narratives.* With the adult Fensterkopfs retired, their grown kids will now continue the family business of spinning false narratives; but in a twist, they'll change up their legacy brand of WWE-style nature documentaries with sugar-coated "happy" animal movies that mischaracterize environmental threats ... while portraying the vile Exxoff Corp as "the leading edge in conservation." Needless to say, Eliza is outraged: *game on.*

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