ACT ONE

PROLOGUE

The lights remain down on a spare stage with a table and a couple of chairs present. In the middle of the stage is a strange, vibrating machine, a Time Machine. Enter, in blackout, ECKELS, TRAVIS, and the MAN BEHIND THE DESK. The man behind the desk is wearing an open-collared button-down shirt. There is a projection of an advertising sign, reading

Time Safari, Inc.

Safaris to any year in the past

You name the animal

We take you there

You shoot it

Still in darkness, we hear a voiceover of a radio commercial for Time Safari, Inc.

VOICEOVER

Have you ever wanted to see a bonfire burn backwards? Wrinkles vanish? See the sun rise in the west and set in the glorious east, all at the touch of a hand? Well, now you can, for the low, low price of three hundred thousand dollars! That’s right, our scientists have unraveled the sands of time, and now they can flow backwards. Limited-time offer, so sign up right now!

(Voiceover speeds up: the "fine print" section)

Must be 21 or over, of sound mental health and fully insured. Time Safari Inc assumes no responsibility for

(MORE)
VOICEOVER (cont'd)

death, maiming, or disfigurement. Your results may vary. You should contact your doctor if you develop rare but potentially serious side effects such as vertigo, vomiting, ennui, or a perpetual sense of deja vu. Time Safari Inc. is incorporated in the State of Delaware and subject to arbitration under applicable laws thereof. Your results may vary. Viewer discretion advised. ASAP, LSMFT, FDA, Equal Housing Lender.

LIGHTS COME UP

SCENE ONE

ECKELS
(waving a check)
Alright, alright, I've heard the ads! I've heard all of them, and you sold me! I've hunted everything from tiger, boar, buffalo, elephant, but I can't wait to track down a dinosaur.

MAN BEHIND DESK
Even after you heard the disclaimer?

ECKELS
What's the worst that can happen? (beat) You do guarantee I'll come back alive, right?

MAN BEHIND DESK
We guarantee nothing.

ECKELS
Ah.

MAN BEHIND DESK
Except the dinosaurs. This is Mr. Travis, your Safari Guide to the Past.

ECKELS
Here to help me bag the dinos, eh Travis?

MAN BEHIND DESK
No. He's here to tell you when to shoot, and more importantly, what to shoot. If he says no shooting, no shooting. Disobey him, and it's a 300,000 dollar fine.

TRAVIS
At least.

MAN BEHIND DESK
Oh, don't remind me about the Feds. They really hate what we're doing here. They're looking for any excuse to shut us (MORE)
MAN BEHIND DESK (cont'd)
down. By the way, Travis, did you take care of that little, uh, campaign contribution?

TRAVIS
Senator Nance was very grateful. Re-election is guaranteed.

ECKELS
I thought the race was still too close to call.

TRAVIS
He'll win. When he spends those 300 million dollars we gave him in campaign contributions, the clerks in Erie, Allegheny, and Northampton counties are going to see things his way.

MAN BEHIND DESK
We need all the help we can get in the Senate. The government keeps strict timelines, especially the past ones. If we were to meddle in the past, somebody might wake up and find out he was never elected Senator all those years ago, and we can't have that.

ECKELS
(Noting the machine)
So that thing really works?

MAN BEHIND DESK
Absolutely. It's a marvelous contraption.

TRAVIS
Marvelous is one word for it.

MAN BEHIND DESK
Oh, don't mind Mr. Travis. He's never liked the device.

ECKELS
You know, I'll bet you would have had a lot more demand had Deutcher won the Presidential election yesterday.

MAN BEHIND DESK
(laughs)
Oh yes, we did. Can you imagine how close we came to electing that anti-intellectual, anti-science, anti-immigrant fuzzy-haired crypto-fascist buffoon?

ECKELS
Just imagine. A candidate like that having a chance in America.

MAN BEHIND DESK
Yeah. Anyhow, we were inundated with calls from people worried about the election. They said if Deutcher won, they wanted to be transported back to a calm and civilized time, (MORE)
like 1492. Well, now that cooler heads have prevailed and Keith is headed for the Oval Office, now all you have to worry about is---

ECKELS
Shooting my dinosaur.

MAN BEHIND DESK
A Tyrannosaurus rex. The tyrant lizard. The most incredible monster in history.

Produce a stack of paper
Sign this release. Anything happens to you, we aren't responsible. Those dinosaurs are hungry.

ECKELS
Now you're just trying to scare me!

MAN BEHIND DESK
Frankly, yes. Six safari leaders killed last year, and about a dozen hunters. We don't want to take anyone who will panic. Well, your check's still in your hand. Go ahead. Tear it up.

Eckels thinks about this for a moment, then hands the check over.

MAN BEHIND DESK
Alright, good luck. Mr Travis, he's all yours. Please make sure you undergo the sterilization protocol before you leave.

ECKELS
What are we waiting for?

TRAVIS
Well for one thing, your rifle.

ECKELS
Oh.

TRAVIS
(hand him a rifle)
And our companions, of course.

Enter LESPERANCE, BILLINGS, and KRAMER, armed.

TRAVIS
My assistant, Mr. Lesperance, and thrill-seekers such as yourself, Mr. Billings, and Mr. Kramer. Alright, let's go.
They assemble around the Time Machine, and Travis flips a switch.

WE SEE A SERIES OF FLASHING LIGHTS, AND A WHIRRING SOUND TO INDICATE THE ACTION OF THE TIME MACHINE. WE HEAR SOME MUSIC OF THE PAST, IN REVERSE ORDER (E.G. LADY GAGA FOLLOWED BY THE BACKSTREET BOYS, FOLLOWED BY MICHAEL JACKSON, FOLLOWED BY THE BEATLES, ETC., GRADUALLY TRANSITIONING TO SHAKESPEARE, THEN CHAUCER, THEN VIRGIL, THEN SILENCE. THE MAN BEHIND THE DESK EXITS, AND THE STAGE IS RE-SET WITH JUNGLE FOLIAGE AND A METAL FOOTPATH. DURING THE TRANSITION, THIS DIALOGUE:

Billings points his gun playfully.

TRAVIS
Don't do that! These aren't popguns we're fooling with.

ECKELS
(to Travis, indicating rifles)
Humm, bolt-action, chambered in thirty-aught-six. I remember my elephant guns being a little heavier. Can these things really kill a T. rex?

TRAVIS
Yes. If you hit 'em just right.

ECKELS
And if not?

TRAVIS
You'd better be ready to run like hell.

ECKELS
Gosh. All this makes safari in Africa sound like hunting deer in Illinois.

SCENE TWO

THE WHIRRING OF THE TIME MACHINE COMES TO A STOP. THE TIME MACHINE PROP IS STRUCK OFFSTAGE. WE HEAR SOUNDS OF A JUNGLE THROUGHOUT. LIGHTS COME UP, AND WE SEE A PROJECTION OF AN ANCIENT JUNGLE SCENE.

LESPERANCE
Welcome. I do so love the smell of forest, a little sea salt, a hint of road tar. Nothing in the world smells like that. Smells like adventure, doesn't it? They don't make forests like they used to, sixty-six million years before yesterday. But you will only set foot in a part of it. This metal part, right here.
What is it?

Looks like a path.

It is the path. The anti-gravity metal keeps it six inches off the ground.

And ensures that we keep you six inches off the ground. Stay on it, or else there's a fine, among other things. Stay on the path at all costs, and all hazards, no matter what happens.

Why?

To leave no trace. Duh. I mean, just look at how lush and unspoiled by human hands this place is! Be a shame to lose it.

We'd lose more than just the forest.

Let's say you and your big feet step on a mouse. Now, every descendant of that mouse is wiped out. That's billions of possible mice!

So it's a mouse. So what?

(snorts)

So what? Well, it's uh, it's, uh. It's not good.

No, it's not good, as Mr. Billings so eloquently put it. For want of ten of those billions of mice, a fox dies. For want of ten foxes, a lion starves. For want of that lion, insects, vultures, billions of life-forms are thrown into chaos.

But what does that have to do with us?
LESPERANCE
(with strained patience)
Well, 64 million years from now, some caveman is going to go out to hunt, right? Say he's hunting for wild boar, or tiger--

BILLINGS
Tiger?

LESPERANCE
It doesn't matter. Anyway, step on that mouse, and millions of years later, you've stepped on his dinner. So he starves. But cavemen aren't expendable, oh no! He could have given birth to an entire nation. Destroy him, and you destroy a race, a people, an entire history of life.

KRAMER
So, it's like a whole circle-of-life thing, right? I mean, without that caveman, like, the whole history of everything could change. No Roman Empire, no Pyramids, no George Washington, no Waterloo, no Watergate, no Timothy Leary---

BILLINGS
No Monday Night Football.

KRAMER
Man, that's some heavy shit.

ECKELS
So we should stay off the grass, as it were?

TRAVIS
Correct. Crush the wrong plant, and in sixty million years, it might add up to trouble.

LESPERANCE
Of course, it might not add up to trouble. Maybe our theory is wrong, and time can't be changed by us. Or only changed in subtle ways: crush a mouse now, and it has something to do with the price of tea in China in 1900, but that's about it. It could be even more subtle than that: a change in pollen size, a slight decrease in the tensile strength of the hairs of Lincoln's beard. But who knows?

TRAVIS
We sure don't.

LESPERANCE
We're guessing. But until we know for certain, we're taking no chances. That's why we sterilized you and your clothing before we left, and why you can't stray from the path.
BILLINGS
Wait, time out, if we're so worried about screwing up the past, why do you let people go shooting things?

TRAVIS
That's where I come in.

LESPERANCE
Before we set off on our journey, we sent Mr. Travis back to this particular area to follow certain animals.

BILLINGS
Following them?

TRAVIS
I follow them through their entire existence, noting which of them lives longest. Very few. How many times they mate. Not often. Life's short. When I find one that's going to die when a tree falls on him, or one that drowns in a tar pit, I note the hour, minute, second, then mark the animal with a paint bomb. We then coordinate our arrival time so that we meet the beast no more than two minutes before it would have died anyway. We kill animals with no future.

BILLINGS
But what if we try hunting the animals, miss, then get eaten? Won't that cause some kind of time disrupt---

ECKELS
(interrupting)
So if you went back in time this morning, you must have overlapped with us! Did you see how it went? Did our hunt succeed?

BILLINGS
Yeah, did I look cool?

Travis and Lesperance look at each other.

LESPERANCE
That would be a paradox. You can't see yourself in time. When two travelers intersect each other, time moves aside, like a plane hitting an air pocket. Did you notice the bump as we approached our destination? That was us passing ourselves. I love the mechanics of time, there's nothing like it.

TRAVIS
So I have no idea if any of us make it out alive. Whether you get the T-rex, or the T-rex gets you.
KRAMER
Whoa. So maybe we came back in time to be hunted, rather than to be the hunter.

ECKELS
(puts on a brave face)
I didn't come to get eaten. I came to bag me a dinosaur. Now where is it?

TRAVIS
(checks wristwatch)
Up ahead. We've got sixty seconds. Stay on the path, look for the red paint, and fire only when I say so! First shot, Eckels, second shot, Billings, third shot, Kramer.

ECKELS
I'm shaking like a kid!

TRAVIS
(raising his hand to show "halt" and looking somewhere offstage, then whispers)
Shhh! Ahead, in the mist. 100 meters. That's him.

END JUNGLE SOUNDS. SILENCE. THEN A LOW RUMBLE.

ECKELS
It...it.....

SOUNDS OF AN ENORMOUS MONSTER AWAKING. A SOUND OF THUNDER.

ECKELS
It could reach up and grab the moon!

TRAVIS
(whispers)
Will you be quiet! It hasn't seen us yet.

ECKELS
It can't be killed. We'd need a cannon! We were fools to come.

Will you---

BILLINGS
---shut up!

KRAMER
It sees us. And there's the red paint.
DINOSAUR IS NOW INCENSED. ROAR. LIGHTING AND PROJECTION EFFECTS AS T-REX APPROACHES

ECKELS
Get me out of here! This is one beast I don't think I can kill.

LESPERANCE
Don't run. Turn around, and get back to the machine.

ECKELS
Yes.

Eckels wanders as though in a trance, blinking and shuffling. He stumbles off the path, which only Travis sees.

TRAVIS
Eckels! Not that way!

Eckels exits


WE SEE THE HUNTERS HAVE HAD THEIR HELMETS SMEARED WITH BLOOD, AND ARE QUITE CLOSE TO THE DYING DINOSAUR.

Travis is swearing under his breath. Lesperance is rather enjoying himself. Kramer and Billings sit on the path, trembling. Billings produces a hip flask and shares it with Kramer. Other actions ad lib. Re-enter Eckels.

ECKELS
Did we get him?

Travis storms at Eckels in a fury, produces napkins, hands them to the hunters, and says:
TRAVIS
(To Kramer and Billings) Clean up! Both your heads and your pants. (To Eckels) As for you, shithead, who can't keep his feet where they belong---

LOUD SOUND OF A BRANCH BREAKING

LESPERANCE
(with some satisfaction)
Right on schedule. That's the branch that killed this guy originally. You want the trophy picture?

KRAMER AND BILLINGS
What?

LESPERANCE
What do you mean, what? You didn't think you could mount a stuffed Tyrannosaur head over your mantelpiece, did you? Imagine what the taxidermist would say! And anyway, we have to leave the corpse here, so it decays in its proper place. Ecological balance and all. Now, I'd like to be in the picture, so if you'll just join me?

Lesperance produces a selfie-stick.
There is no interest on the part of anybody in joining him.

LESPERANCE
OK, suit yourselves!

He takes a selfie in front of the corpse.

TRAVIS
The corpse isn't the only thing we're going to be leaving. Or the only thing we should have left alone.

I'm sorry.

ECKELS

TRAVIS
(levels his rifle at Eckels)
Go back out onto that path. We're leaving you here.

LESPERANCE
Now, hold on a minute--

BILLINGS
What did he do?
TRAVIS
This fool nearly killed us all. And will you just look at his shoes? There's dirt on them! He strayed from The Path.

LESPERANCE
(gravely)
We'll have to report it. That might cost us a fine, or our license.

TRAVIS
Reports and fines and licenses my ass. Who knows what he's done to history? By the time we get back, there might not be a government to revoke our license, or a currency to pay them in.

BILLINGS
All he did was kick up some dirt.

KRAMER
Yeah, it's not like he clubbed a baby seal or anything. He did leave only footprints and take only memories.

TRAVIS
How do we know? How can we know?

LESPERANCE
All the same, it is rather bad form to leave a paying client sixty-six million years before the present. And, uh, Mr. Travis, don't you think it's a bit more disruptive to the course of history to leave a human behind in it?

Travis removes a knife and drops it at Eckels' feet.

TRAVIS
Get out there, Eckels.

ECKELS
(fumbles with a checkbook)
I'll pay anything! Fifty million dollars!

TRAVIS
I don't want your money. Go dig out the bullets.

ECKELS
That's unreasonable!

TRAVIS
The monster's dead, you idiot. The bullets can't be left behind in the past, they don't belong here!
Warily, Eckels takes the knife, heads over to the body, and complies. As he does so, (and in a way not noticeable to the audience) he puts blood on his arms.

LESPERANCE
(aside to Travis)
You don't really have to make him do that.

TRAVIS
Don't I? It's too early to tell.

LESPERANCE
Do you really think that some rodent or dinosaur is going to reverse-engineer a rifle from the bullets, develop a space program, and prevent an asteroid impact afterwards? Me and the boys in the front office thought about this, and we think the risk is pretty slim.

TRAVIS
Whatever. Even if it isn't really necessary, we'll gross him out. It'll put him off hunting game like this again. Do you really want him on another safari with us?

LESPERANCE
Well, he did pay in full, up front. More than I can say for some customers.

TRAVIS
You used to be cautious. Now you're just a bean-counting cowboy.

LESPERANCE
You used to enjoy your work. Now you're a nervous wreck.

Eckels approaches them with the bullets, and with blood on his arms.

ECKELS
Here-Here they are.

TRAVIS
You missed one of them. We fired six bullets, not only five.

LESPERANCE
Well, in all of the excitement, I lost track myself. I feel lucky. I think we fired only five. That's good enough, let's go.
TRAVIS
(wearily)
OK. Everybody back in the machine, let's go home.

Glares at Eckels

ECKELS
Don't look at me like that! I haven't done anything.

TRAVIS
You'd better pray you didn't.

ECKELS
I'm innocent! I've done nothing.

TRAVIS
Eckels, I might kill you yet. Now get moving.

All exit.

THE WHIRRING OF THE TIME MACHINE COVERS THIS SET TRANSITION, ALONG WITH THE MUSIC AND SOUND EFFECTS PREVIOUSLY USED TO SHOW THE PASSAGE OF TIME. BUT SOMETHING IS VERY SLIGHTLY WRONG: THE MUSIC APPEARS IN SLIGHTLY THE WRONG ORDER, OR SLIGHTLY SLOWER OR SLIGHTLY FASTER THAN THE LAST TIME WE HEARD IT.

SCENE THREE

We return to the office where we started the play, with the man behind the desk in the office. But something isn't quite right. The projection comes up, but what it reads is:

TYME SEFARI INC.
SEFARIS TU ANY YEER EN THE PAST.
YU NAIM THE ANIMALL.
WEE TAEK YU THAIR.
YU SHOOT ITT.
The man behind the desk is now wearing a tie. He wasn't before.

Enter Travis and Eckels. Eckels sees the projection, and starts having a feeling of dread. Travis is so angry, he doesn't seem to notice anything.

TRAVIS
(almost a bark)
Everything fine here?

MAN BEHIND DESK
Very fine indeed!

TRAVIS
Alright. Now Eckels, get out, and don't ever come back again.

ECKELS
(with a sense that all is not right)
Did we really come back?

TRAVIS
What do you mean?

ECKELS
Did we really come back to the place we left?

TRAVIS
The time machine says it is the same day we left. Wednesday, November 8, 2056.

MAN BEHIND DESK
Yes. The year of our lord 2056.

Eckels looks around, in puzzlement and alarm. He sees the projection, and sits in a chair. He feels a strange bump on his boot, removes it, then sees a blue butterfly on the sole of the boot.

TRAVIS
It's a butterfly!
ECKELS
No, not a little thing like that?! How could it possibly make a difference?

(To the Man behind the Desk, dreading the response)
Who won the presidential election yesterday?

MAN BEHIND DESK
Are you kidding? Where have you been? Of course Deutcher won the election yesterday. It was YUGE! We won't have to deal with that weakling, that old geezer Keith, who's in bed with the Ukrainians. We made the right choice. We're going to Keep America Moving!

Wordlessly, Travis undoes the safety catch on his rifle.

BLACKOUT. A SOUND OF THUNDER.

END OF PLAY