



Imagine *Romeo and Juliet* with dinosaurs. But instead of 14th century Verona, the timeless story of “star-crossed lovers” has been backdated 65 million years to the plains and forests of a prehistoric realm known as The Headlands, during the twilight of the Cretaceous Era.

SLOMO is a young raptor (species: *Deinonychus*) who belongs to the meat-eating **Chompers** clan. Unlike his two hyper siblings **Grodo** and **Vump**, Slomo was never much of a hunter. If not for his brother and sister’s leftovers he’d never have survived. Everyone else figures he’s always been “predatorily challenged” because he was born with a broken tail and a missing claw. But Slomo suspects it’s more than that. Since the day he hatched he’s always sensed he was *different* from his fellow Chompers. And once a certain female duckbill dinosaur enters his life, there’s no longer any doubt.

TULIA (species: *Hadrosaurus*) is a member of the rival plant-eating **Munchers** clan. Any other Chomper would see her as a potential meal... but not Slomo. The first time he lays eyes on her, it’s not his stomach that is stirred, but his *heart*. And it only proves what he’s always known, deep down: he’s a **Muncher**. A Muncher trapped in a Chomper’s body.

Slomo decides if he’s going to have any chance with Tulia, first he needs to *own* what he is. Or to put in the immortal words of Lady Gaga, he was just “born this way”. So from now on, he tells himself, he’s going vegan. No more leftovers — he’s giving up all meat. But for this smitten raptor,

true love's path will be anything but easy. Like all Munchers, Tulia's been brought up to be very wary of Chompers. No surprise she steers clear of Slomo and shuns his first awkward advances. It takes time, but his dogged persistence and awkward charm eventually pay off. When he finally convinces Tulia he doesn't see her as "lunch", that's a huge first step... but his carnivore teeth and talons seem to belie his story about being a Muncher at heart. It's only after she sees how eagerly Slomo gorges himself on trees and shrubs that she becomes a believer. One thing leads to another, and before long love is in the air. Only it's also under a dark cloud. Because their respective clans have been feuding for eons, Slomo and Tulia know their relationship is not only scandalous, but flat-out forbidden.

But unlike the *Montagues* and *Capulets*, what sets the Chompers against the Munchers is basic biology. Ever since life on earth first sprang forth from the primordial muck, carnivores have evolved to prey on herbivores. But in the Headlands, evolution has been tweaked a bit—by a unique "work-around" the Saurheads call **The Law**. It enables their clans to live side-by-side in peace and harmony *six days* a week. During these periods ("*Off-Time*"), Chompers abstain from hunting and eating. But every seventh day ("*Game Day*") Chompers are free to hunt down prey from dawn till dusk. During such periods most Munchers either hide or rely on the safety in numbers offered by their vast herds, while the plant-eaters blessed with their own formidable armor are fully capable of defending themselves.

Most of the Valley looks on the Law as a win-win. Off-Time allows Munchers to go about their business without worrying about ending up someone's dinner. And Chompers like kicking back without always having to compete for the next meal, so the weekly fasts are a trade-off worth the peace of mind. When Game Day does arrive, most Chompers venture outside the community to hunt in the vast Outland, since eating friends and neighbors is frowned upon and considered bad form. Such is the unique way of life for the denizens of the Headlands.

Still, even with The Law, détente is tenuous at best. As the Bard said, these "two households, both alike in dignity" were always aware their "ancient grudge could break to new mutiny." Which brings us back to our young lovers, who remain on the down-low for that very reason. To prevent Grodo, Vump and the other Chompers from catching on to his new diet, Slomo buries the carrion hand-outs he's given, while secretly scarfing down power-snacks of ferns and cones. And Tulia flirts with her Muncher suitors so no one will suspect her heart belongs to a Chomper.

But inevitably, the romance is discovered. Word spreads, not only with the Saurheads but the other tribes too: the Wingdings (flying reptiles) the Humpbacks (marine reptiles) and the Hairballs (little mammals). Of course, there's outrage and indignation... especially from older creatures, many of whom believe members of opposite clans shouldn't even be speaking, let alone rubbing snouts. And yet there are more progressive creatures who don't see what all the fuss is about. But even as the gossip over Slomo and Tulia rages on, the denizens of the Headlands don't yet realize their way of life is facing a threat far more insidious than naughty young love. There is a conspiracy afoot to overthrow The Law, led by a faction of carnivores from the Outland. Should it succeed, the result would be permanent feeding frenzies. Chaos! All Chompers would be free to hunt and kill prey 24/7 throughout the Valley.

Once the Munchers get wind of the plan, battle-lines are drawn. Naturally, the carnivores are confident the docile herbivores have little chance of winning a war against them... but what they've failed to take into account is **Slomo**. The newest member of the Muncher clan will prove to be the secret weapon who is able to lead his fellow planet-eaters to victory — saving The Law and preserving the Saurheads' cherished way of life.

And unlike that *other pair* of star-crossed lovers, at our story's end Slomo and Tulia will live to stride off into the sunset together.