

00:00:01	Sound Effect	Transition	<i>[Three gavel bangs.]</i>
00:00:03	Jesse Thorn	Host	Welcome to the <i>Judge John Hodgman</i> podcast. I'm Bailiff Jesse Thorn. We're in chambers this week! Clearing the docket. And joining me from the great city of Brooklyn, New York, is... the man they call the—the King of Brooklyn.
			<i>[John laughs.]</i>
			<i>[Laughing]</i> Judge John Hodgman.
00:00:20	John Hodgman	Host	Brooklyn has no king! Brooklyn needs no king.
			<i>[Jesse laughs.]</i>
			We are in Kings County, though, for those county nerds out there, for you. Kings County! Need to know. You need to know! You need to know what county you're in when you are registering to vote, and when you are voting! So...
00:00:36	Jesse	Host	There are definitely types of nerds who still know every state capital.
00:00:42	John	Host	Yeah! That's me.
00:00:43	Jesse	Host	Do you think that there are county seat nerds? Do you think that some state capital nerds, who learn their state capitals in fifth grade or whatever—
00:00:47	John	Host	Yeah. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes.
00:00:50	Jesse	Host	—then move on to learn all the county seats? Like, does Ken Jennings know all the county seats?
00:00:55	John	Host	I don't know that Ken Jennings could name all of the county seats of every county in the United States. Not even Ken Jennings, necessarily, could do that. And that's why I'm gonna devote what is left of my brain to knowing it.
			However, I am going to—I'm gonna retain a piece of my brain. The piece that is <u>always</u> firing, uh, on—on all cylinder. For the recording of the <i>Judge John Hodgman</i> podcast. <u>And</u> I'm not gonna use the part of my brain that is devoted to my love for the actor Alan Ruck. We were having some great—I'm sure our guest is gonna get this reference. We were having some great bants. Some great <u>bants</u> before the—
			<i>[Someone laughs quietly.]</i>
			—some great banter before the, uh—
00:01:34	Crosstalk	Crosstalk	Jesse: Yeah, we were Ruckin' it up. There's no doubt about it.
			John: We were just bouncing off each other, <i>Love Island UK</i> –style.
			<i>[Someone laughs.]</i>
00:01:39	John	Host	And I can—and one of the things that came up is Alan Ruck, and what an incredible actor he is. Going back to—you know, whether it's <i>Ferris Bueller's Day Off</i> , America's greatest mythologizing of a high school sociopath, or <i>Spin City</i> , or as that one guy in the <i>Star Trek</i> movie, or <i>Succession</i> . Incredibly talented actor. Criminally

underused. But maybe he's doing—maybe he's living his best life. Anyway, here's to Ruck.

00:02:08	Jesse	Host	I'll introduce our guest on the program, John. We <u>do</u> have, uh, a charming, delightful, august guest. A <u>major</u> podcasting celebrity. <u>Internationally</u> .
00:02:18	John	Host	Yes. Internationally? Oh.
00:02:20	Jesse	Host	Yes, that's right, internationally. She's one of the hosts of <i>Answer Me This!</i> , perhaps the UK's most legendary comedy podcast. Probably its most legendary comedy and question-answering podcast.
00:02:31	John	Host	Mm-hm!
00:02:32	Jesse	Host	She's the host of <i>The Allusionist!</i> A podcast about the English language, <u>and</u> she is the host of <i>Veronica Mars Investigations</i> , which is about <i>Veronica Mars</i> , which is a television show, uh, that's fun. It's a fun show, John.
00:02:49	John	Host	Yeah.
00:02:50	Jesse	Host	I don't know if you ever watched <i>Veronica Mars</i> . It's a very fun show. Uh, Helen Zaltzman!
00:02:54	Helen Zaltzman	Guest	Hello!
00:02:55	John	Host	Does it have Alan Ruck in it?
00:02:56	Jesse	Host	No, but it does have Steve Guttenberg. And he does a great job.
00:02:59	Helen	Guest	It has a lot of Steve Guttenberg. It has a lot of people in it who then became very famous. Like, there's a one-episode Jessica Chastain appearance.
00:03:06	John	Host	Mm-hm.
00:03:07	Helen	Guest	There's one episode of Aaron Paul.
00:03:08	John	Host	Mm!
00:03:09	Helen	Guest	One Paul Rudd episode.
00:03:10	John	Host	<i>[Laughs quietly.]</i> Finally, Paul Rudd got famous.
			<i>[Helen laughs.]</i>
			Look—
00:03:15	Helen	Guest	Got his big break.
00:03:16	John	Host	Yeah. I love Rudd. Everyone knows I love Rudd. But of the R-U actors—last names starting with R-U—I'm gonna go with Ruck every time. Sorry, Paul.
00:03:25	Jesse	Host	Let's shine a light on Ruck.
00:03:26	John	Host	That's right.
00:03:27	Jesse	Host	It's Ruck's time now.
00:03:28	John	Host	Hey, wait, did we introduce our guest?!
00:03:31	Jesse	Host	Yeah, Helen Zaltzman.
00:03:32	John	Host	Helen Zaltzman!
00:03:33	Jesse	Host	Helen Zaltzman is our guest.

00:03:34 Helen Guest Here I am! Hi!

00:03:35 Jesse Host What a pleasure to have Helen here.

00:03:36 John Host It's great to see you! And by "see you" I mean see you, because, you know, now we are recording this using a—a little technology I invented, called Zoom. ...Um, I didn't—

00:03:48 Helen Guest Congratulations.

00:03:49 John Host Yeah, I know, right?

00:03:50 Helen Guest Mm.

00:03:51 John Host No, some foreign government did it. I don't know. Anyway, it's a—

[Jesse laughs.]

It's a little facial, uh, data-capturing device called Zoom. And even though I'm giving my face away to this foreign government, I get to see you, Helen, over there in Brighton, England. Which is where you are now. And Jesse over there in Los Angeles. And both of you are wearing incredible tops! Incredible shirts.

Helen, you have birds? Or—are those birds or grasshoppers on your shirt?

00:04:18 Helen Guest I—I'd never thought of them as grasshoppers before, but... now my mind is open to a whole different possibility. I think they're meant to be parakeets.

[John makes an appreciative "pshoo" sound.]

On little branches. And Jesse's looks like when you stick your fingers in your eyeballs, and then it starts coming up with all these psychedelic shapes.

[John and Jesse laugh quietly.]

00:04:37 John Host Yeah!

00:04:38 Helen Guest That's a compliment, by the way.

00:04:39 Jesse Host I'm doing eighties Banana Republic over here. I'm all about safari vests.

00:04:42 John Host *[Laughs.]* You know, you mentioned in our pre-show bants, Jesse, that that was an early vintage Banana Republic shirt, and I felt you very keenly. That was my—my store to go to. When I dreamed, as a young man, of buying a pith helmet. I would go over—

00:04:58 Jesse Host Yeah, colonialism is bad. I think we can stipulate that colonialism is bad. However, uh, one thing which it wrought, the colonialism clothing theme park known as 1980s Banana Republic...

00:05:10 John Host Yeah. They had a Jeep going through the window! Come on!

00:05:13 Jesse Host Yeah.

00:05:15 John Host But that shirt I never would have pegged for a vintage B-Rep, because it's—as Helen points out, it's got a psychedelic air to it. It—you look like a member of The Lovin' Spoonful.

00:05:23 Jesse Host Thank you, thank you.

[Helen laughs.]

Uh, Helen, on your podcast *Answer Me This!*, you answer a lot of questions, along with your co-host Olly Mann.

00:05:28 Helen Guest

Mm-hm. So many.

00:05:31 Jesse Host

And I listen to every episode. It has been my quarantine comfort show.

00:05:35 Helen Guest

King.

00:05:36 Jesse Host

I have been listening to both new and old episodes of *Answer Me This!* as I drive my youngest son around, hoping that he'll fall asleep in the back of the minivan. And I wonder, are you prepared to deliver not just answers, but now, on the *Judge John Hodgman* podcast, justice?

00:05:53 Helen Guest

Oh, I feel like I've been training for this for the 13 and a half years of *Answer Me This!*

[John and Jesse laugh.]

Finally my legal duties are coming upon me. Thrilled! I've got my scythe. My, uh, hat, my wig, judge's wig.

00:06:08 Jesse Host

Yes! *[Stifles laughter.]* Wait. I knew that judges in the UK wore wigs. They—they hold scythes? Do they do fieldwork in between—*[laughs]*—do—threshing?

00:06:18 Helen Guest

I just thought—*[laughs]*—I just thought to add to the atmosphere, I should also bring a scythe.

00:06:23 John Host

Sure.

00:06:24 Helen Guest

'Cause I couldn't get a guillotine into the Airbnb I live in.

[John laughs.]

00:06:26 Jesse Host

Right.

00:06:27 Helen Guest

But it's not just judges that wear the wigs! It's everyone in a criminal case. Like, the people that go and fetch the jury from the deliberation room have to wear, like, the full wig and bat cape. All of the lawyers. It's amazing. I think if you're in the jury, you're not supposed to come in wearing that style of wig. But I—I would be interested to try, just to see what happens.

00:06:48 Jesse Host

Like, you're wondering if possibly some jurors might just, on a day-to-day basis in their regular life, wear those curly, white, powdered—*[laughs]*—long, uh, 18th century—style wigs. And they walk in—

00:06:59 Helen Guest

Yeah! Yeah. Like a mullet of very tight curls.

00:07:07 Jesse Host

Like, maybe the juror is like, Grace Jones or something. Someone who has the—*[laughs]*—has the self-possession to pull off such a thing in their day-to-day attire.

[Helen laughs. John makes another appreciative "pshoo" sound.]

And they—

00:07:18 Helen Guest

Well, what if that was just your regular hair? Then what are you supposed to do?

[Jesse and John laugh.]

00:07:20 John Host Yeah! Yeah, what if you have powdery, white, tightly curled hair naturally?

00:07:26 Jesse Host Yeah, talk about setting it and forgetting it.

[John and Helen laugh.]

You'd have to do some serious setting to lock that down. *[Stifles laughter.]*

[Another appreciative exhale from John.]

Well, let's get into the justice. Here's something from Serj. He says:

"A contractor recently did some work on our house, and left a huge mess. Including destroying a large part of our front flower bed. We cleaned it up ourselves, but I sent an email to the contractor saying I was really unhappy with how they left things.

My wife thinks this was inappropriate, because there's nothing they can actually do about it. I think they should know I'm angry with how things were left, so that they can try and do better in the future. Who's right?"

00:08:01 John Host Helen, let me ask you, first of all, is the term "contractor" familiar to you in, uh, in England? Builder, basically.

00:08:08 Helen Guest Well, I've educated myself in the vocabularies of other nations, John, to prepare for this moment.

00:08:15 John Host Oh, that's right. You're the host of a major language podcast. I apologize.

[Everyone laughs.]

I do apologize.

00:08:22 Helen Guest And, you know, as a child I loved to read about American building regulations and so forth.

00:08:26 John Host *[Laughing]* Yeah.

00:08:27 Jesse Host *[Laughing]* I mean, who didn't?

00:08:29 John Host You're famous for it.

[Helen laughs.]

You're code-crazy. *Up to Code!* That's gonna be your new podcast about American building.

00:08:36 Helen Guest Ah!

00:08:37 Jesse Host Yeah, you spent time memorizing building codes that normal kids would have spent memorizing county seats.

00:08:41 John Host Yeah, that's right.

00:08:42 Helen Guest But that's just a bit mainstream, isn't it? County seats.

00:08:43 John Host Yeah.

00:08:44 Jesse Host Yeah. Yeah.

00:08:45 John Host Yeah. Little bit too on-the-nose. Helen, have you ever written a letter of complaint?

00:08:49 Helen Guest It takes a lot for me to do that, because I'm essentially a coward.

00:08:52 John Host Mm-hm.

00:08:53 Helen Guest So I may have thought some pretty strong thoughts of complaint, without transmitting them to the world. But I think in Serj's case, he's not unjustified! I think both he and his wife are kind of right, in that the damage is irreversible, but if there is... you know, monetary damage to the flower bed that the contractors could recompense them for, or to come and fix it, or would you not trust them to fix it after the damage they've already done?

[Pause.]

It depends on his motivation. Did he want something, uh, palpable, or did he just need his feelings to be vented?

00:09:28 John Host I'm gonna treat this guy as a hostile witness. 'Cause I think you put your finger on something there, Helen. What is the intent?

Now, I'm going to give Serj credit for not writing to Yelp. Which is my—as I've mentioned many times, Yelp is my favorite collection of short stories narrated by highly unreliable narrators.

[Jesse or Helen laughs quietly.]

I could just go down that hole for—and just marvel at people's self-deception.

00:09:56 Jesse Host And as I've often added: "racist, parking-obsessed" unreliable narrators.

00:09:59 John Host *[Laughs.]* Yes, that's right. Exactly. Yeah.

Uh, he's—he did not—Serj did not try to go into a public forum to try to hurt this person's business. And yet I do feel that he is somewhat of an unreliable narrator, because when he says, "I think they should know that I'm angry with how things were left so that they can try and do better in the future," I do not believe that for a second. I do not believe that he wants them to improve.

00:10:25 Helen Guest Mm.

00:10:26 John Host I think that he—he should have just said, "I want them to know that I'm angry!" Period. Don't you think? Do you believe him, Helen, when he says that he genuinely wants them to improve?

00:10:36 Helen Guest Ummm... I mean, that's really out of Serj's hands.

00:10:41 John Host Yeah!

00:10:42 Helen Guest I certainly don't think that was the primary motivation.

00:10:45 John Host Well, and also I think that it is highly—*[laughs]*—highly doubtful that it will promote improvement! Jesse Thorn, have you ever received a letter of complaint?

00:10:53 Jesse Host *[Bursts out laughing.]* I'm a podcaster, John!

[John and Helen laugh.]

00:10:58 John Host And when someone writes a letter of complaint, how does it make you feel?

00:11:02 Jesse Host Sad. Bad! Mad.

[John and Helen laugh.]

00:11:07 John Host "Desire to improve" come into the—into the constellation of your feelings?

00:11:11 Jesse Host Desire to quit the business!

[John and Helen laugh.]

00:11:15 Helen Guest If the complaint is phrased as constructive criticism, where they are educating me, then I do tend to take it on board. But if it's just them trying to prove they're better than me, then... I think, "You know what? I'm gonna get worse, just out of spite."

[John laughs.]

00:11:28 Jesse Host Yeah. I think there is a way to frame a letter of complaint, uh, that is respectful, that maybe, as Helen so quaintly and Englishly said...

[Helen laughs.]

They take it on board. But it is a tough thing. That said, you know, I don't think it's unreasonable for Serj to write to them and say, "Hey, listen. Uh, you made a giant mess in my yard. Please don't do that in the future, if we work together."

00:12:03 John Host Yeah!

00:12:04 Jesse Host I also think it's possible that, you know, depending on the size of the team that was working on this project, what kind of work it was, whether it was just an individual person, um, it may be that the person that they hired, who's in charge of, you know, sales and customer service, uh, in the outfit, might not know that someone who's in charge of something else—

00:12:29 John Host Yeah.

00:12:30 Jesse Host —is doing something counter to those goals.

00:12:32 John Host Absolutely!

00:12:33 Jesse Host So there is the possibility that they might—he might actually be letting somebody know, "Hey, listen. This guy you sent really made a giant mess."

00:12:42 John Host Yeah!

00:12:43 Jesse Host In all those contexts, including directly contracting the person who did it, I—I don't feel uncomfortable with him saying, "Hey, please don't make a mess in the future." And I don't think that the only reason that you would do that would be to seek recompense. I think it's... worth saying to somebody, *[stifling laughter]* "Please don't make a mess at my house."

00:13:04 John Host Yes.

00:13:05 Helen Guest Just think of future flowerbeds. Spare them this fate.

00:13:08 John Host Yeah. You may not know, but a flowerbed in the United States is, um, a place where we plant flowers.

00:13:14 Jesse Host Yeah.

00:13:15 John Host I think you would call it a flower trolley.

00:13:16 Helen Guest Thank you.

00:13:17 John Host Or a... lorry?

00:13:18 Jesse Host A lorry.

00:13:19 John Host Yeah.

00:13:20 Helen Guest Flower sofa?

00:13:21 John Host Yeah. There you go.

00:13:22 Jesse Host Mm-hm.

00:13:23 Helen Guest Mm-hm.

00:13:24 John Host Sofa or couch? What do you say?

00:13:25 Jesse Host In England they're called pants.

[John snorts, Helen stifles laughter.]

00:13:27 John Host But sincerely, Helen, sofa or couch?

00:13:30 Helen Guest I'd say sofa, John.

00:13:31 John Host Sofa. Yeah, me too.

00:13:32 Helen Guest I'm so sorry.

00:13:33 John Host Thank you for settling something. In my own marriage. Alright, anyway.

00:13:37 Helen Guest *[Laughs.]* What, were you arguing over whether Helen Zaltzman says sofa or couch?

00:13:42 John Host Yes.

[Jesse laughs.]

Yes, that's why we asked you to be on. *[Laughs.]* That's precisely right.

[Helen chuckles.]

[Calling off-mic] Honey! I won!

00:13:49 Helen Guest I'm really sorry to come between you in this matter. It's very important.

00:13:51 John Host That's okay. That's alright. We've got a lot more things to settle, too.

So here's what I'm gonna say about this guy. Serj? Write your letter. Consumers? Write your letter. Sometimes you do—you need to express anger. Because you're just upset. And sometimes you need to give feedback to a company or a service provider, so that they don't make the mistake again in the future. Rarely do these two moods intersect effectively.

That is to say, if you are sincere, Serj, that you want to help them try

to do better in the future, as you say, then you must express that without anger! If you are sincere that you want them to know that you are angry, then do not try to fool us with your, uh, pat on the back saying you just want them to do better. You just want to vent your anger.

Because when you vent your anger to another person—I mean, and you express yourself angrily—which is the only reason I could imagine you used the word "angry" in this letter, Serj—it, uh, people tend to go, "Uh, no thank you." *[Laughs.]* People tend to, say, close a window shade, tear up a letter, turn around, walk away, lock the door.

If you really want them to do better in the future and alert them to some problems that maybe the company wants to know about for all the reasons that Jesse articulated, then you have to really just take a deep breath and, you know, do what I did when I had to let the waiter know that this is not an acceptable Cobb salad. *[Laughs.]*

And I—*[laughs]*—and I hated it. I hated complaining to the waiter. But a Cobb salad is important. And if you had seen the gross green ring around this withered, half hardboiled egg's yolk... you, too, would be angry. And I had to explain to my family members, "I need to talk to the waiter, not because I'm angry, but because all people do in restaurants is take pictures of the food and post it! And this is going to hurt their business. If you serve this Cobb salad to somebody else again."

00:16:03 John Host And I—as you do when you need to express, "Something went wrong with your business," you have to say, "I'm not angry. And I don't know who's to blame. But you might want to know that this was not really acceptable." And... then tip your waiter 1000% at that point. 'Cause it's not the waiter's fault. You know what I'm saying?

Anyway. Don't just post stuff on Yelp, 'cause that's just hurtful. Write your letters. Express your anger, or express your constructive criticism in a de-angrified way.

00:16:35 Sound Effect Sound Effect *[Three gavel bangs.]*

00:16:37 John Host And also, the other thing you need to do—when you hard-boil an egg, you need to immediately plunge it into ice water after you take it out of the hot water, or else it's gonna form that gross green ring around the yolk! Did you know that, Helen?

00:16:49 Helen Guest I did. I've spent my entire life trying to eliminate the green ring, John, and I will never stop trying.

00:16:53 John Host Yeah. Now what I do is I just—I've had that printed on a calling card. And I just leave it behind in every restaurant I go to. They love me.

00:17:01 Jesse Host *[Laughs quietly.]* And it also explains why you give that one-cent tip.

00:17:06 John Host *[Laughs quietly.]* Here—"You want a tip? Here's a tip! Plunge your hard-boiled eggs into ice water, dummies!"

[Jesse laughs.]

"Hodgman out!" *[Stifles laughter.]* "Come on, Alan Ruck, we're taking our custom elsewhere." *[Sighs.]* What a dream that would be, to be eating a Cobb salad with Alan Ruck! Alright.

00:17:22 Helen Guest What if Alan Ruck likes a very, very hardboiled egg with the green ring?

00:17:25 John Host It's—it's not—

00:17:26 Helen Guest What if that's his style of egg?

00:17:27 John Host It's not about the hard—it's not about the hard—Alan—you know what? Alan Ruck would understand. Helen, it's not about the hardness. It's about the oxidization that is stopped when you put it into the ice water bath. You can cook that egg for as long as you want. Just plunge it in a ice water bath! And keep that yolk un-green!

Alan Ruck would know. *Cobb Salad with Alan Ruck*. A new podcast by me, John Hodgman. Let's move on.

[Someone laughs quietly.]

00:17:51 Jesse Host Sarah says:

"Every year, a good friend and I set a fiction-reading challenge organized around a different set of parameters. He has started listening to audiobooks while working on other projects. This goes against the spirit of our competition, and the goal of re-investing in reading. I don't have any problem with audiobooks, generally."

00:18:10 Helen Guest Sounds like you do.

00:18:11 Jesse Host "And if he wants to listen to them beyond the scope of our arrangement, that's his business. But him listening to a book while he solders electronics, mows the lawn, or cooks dinner, doesn't compare to the single-minded focus and unique pleasures of reading.

He doesn't wanna give up our tradition or the competition. So I am asking Judge Hodgman to adhere to the original terms of our arrangement."

00:18:35 John Host Helen, you should know that these people write us all the time. These people have been coming at the *Judge John Hodgman* podcast for a decade, trying to say that listening to an audiobook is not the same thing as reading a book.

00:18:50 Helen Guest That is... very... harsh of the people that read via audio for all sorts of good reasons.

00:18:57 John Host Yeah. Oh, it's—I mean—

00:18:58 Helen Guest Don't wanna discredit their audio reading experiences!

00:19:01 John Host Right! It's not merely snobby, it is also ableist.

00:19:05 Helen Guest Yeah!

00:19:06 John Host And it is a longstanding precedent of this podcast that they are absolutely equivalent experiences. And not—one is not better than the other. Remember, everybody! All fiction began as spoken word! *[Exasperated sigh.]* Helen—

00:19:25 Helen Guest Whoooa.

00:19:26 John Host I don't like to listen to audiobooks. You know why? I get distracted.

00:19:29 Helen Guest Yeah, same.

00:19:30 John Host But that doesn't mean they're bad!

00:19:31 Helen Guest No. If anything, Sarah should admire her friend for returning to the Homeric tradition of books in this way. But also, as adulthood advances, I find my time to read a book becomes more and more reduced. And so perhaps Sarah's friend cannot devote all the hours singly to reading.

00:19:52 John Host Yeah!

00:19:53 Helen Guest And if he doesn't multitask whilst listening to the books, then that's it for this rather charming tradition!

00:19:58 John Host How are his electronics gonna get soldered...

00:20:02 Helen Guest Right!

00:20:03 John Host ...if he's doing everything Sarah's way?

00:20:05 Helen Guest Is he supposed to not eat dinner?

00:20:08 John Host Is he supposed to have an un-mown lawn? No.

00:20:11 Jesse Host Is he supposed to be alone with his thoughts?

[John laughs quietly.]

00:20:14 Helen Guest Ugh!

00:20:16 John Host I just—you know, this is the newest and most novel way of getting—of expressing this snobbery. 'Cause Sarah right now is listening to this, going, "But I wrote right here! 'I don't have any problem with audiobooks generally!'" And what did you say, Helen?

00:20:33 Helen Guest Stop lying to yourself, Sarah!

00:20:35 John Host That's right! You're trying to make it all about the spirit of the competition. When reading books should never be competition! *[Stifles laughter.]* I mean, who needs that in their lives?

00:20:52 Jesse Host Kids at the library in summer who are trying to get free baseball tickets!

00:20:55 John Host Alright, that's fair.

[Helen laughs.]

That's fair. If you're trying to shock-train an army of young people into a love of lifelong reading, bribery with baseball tickets is one way to do it. But if you're actually—

00:21:06 Jesse Host It worked for me, John! I have a lifelong love of baseball tickets! Is that what you said?

00:21:10 John Host Lifelong love of reading baseball tickets. *[Stifles laughter.]*

00:21:13 Jesse Host Yeah. *[Laughs.]*

00:21:16 John Host Maybe let's say... this time last year? When we all had a lot more mental capacity for paying attention to... book-reading competitions, this would have been an acceptable debate. But in a year where all we're trying to do is—*[laughs]*—all we're trying to do is solder our electronics and listen to our, you know, N.K. Jemisin or whatever, and just not think about everything for a moment, yeesh. Maybe not have a book competition this year. Maybe just console yourself with books however you want.

00:21:54	Sound Effect	Sound Effect	<i>[Three gavel bangs.]</i>
00:21:55	Jesse	Host	I have a good book recommendation that I found very consoling. Consolatory? (<i>Cun-SOL-a-tor-ee.</i>) Consolatory. (<i>KAHN-sol-a-tor-ee.</i>)
00:22:01	John	Host	<i>[Stammering]</i> Conciliatory.
00:22:04	Jesse	Host	Constabulary.
00:22:05	John	Host	Constellation-ary. Consta—
00:22:06	Jesse	Host	Constabulary.
00:22:07	John	Host	Look. I don't have a language podcast, so I don't know.
00:22:10	Helen	Guest	Constant sofa.
00:22:11	Jesse	Host	Our friend— <i>[laughs]</i> . Our friend Elliott Kalan from <i>The Flop House</i> , I—I showed up at his front door, just in a terrible emotional state, begging for him to loan me a book that would distract me purely and not upset me at all, and be delightful the entire time I read it. And, uh, he loaned me a movie book called <i>The Studio</i> by John Gregory Dunne.
00:22:34	John	Host	Mmm!
00:22:35	Jesse	Host	It is a narrative. It is a narrative nonfiction about a year at 20th Century Fox in Hollywood. 1967-1968.
00:22:46	John	Host	Yeah.
00:22:47	Jesse	Host	As they make the ultimately—uh, the—what ultimately became the semi-boondoggle <i>Doctor Dolittle</i> , along with the monstrous surprise success <i>Planet of the Apes</i> , and a number of other films. And it's full of, like, Gene Kelly trying to make a <i>Tom Swift</i> movie, and, uh—you know, <i>Tom Swift and His Flying Lab</i> ?
00:23:08	John	Host	Mm-hm!
00:23:10	Jesse	Host	<i>[Stifling laughter]</i> The movie that you <u>most</u> associate with legendary screen dancer Gene Kelly?
00:23:13	John	Host	<i>[Stifling laughter]</i> That's right.
00:23:15	Jesse	Host	Um—
00:23:16	John	Host	Obscure turn-of-the-century children's adventure fiction.
00:23:20	Jesse	Host	Exactly. And it is a—it is a hoot, this book. It's called <i>The Studio</i> . John Gregory Dunne. If you're looking for a distraction, you could hardly read a more pleasant book, and amusing, and it is also like, genuinely fascinating and insightful about the ways that movie studios operated in the very last crumbling days of big studios.
			Anyway! Book rec!
00:23:42	John	Host	Helen—Helen, what's your book rec for consolation book? What—concili—cons—consta—
00:23:49	Jesse	Host	Constabulary.
00:23:50	John	Host	Ca...
00:23:51	Helen	Guest	<i>[Laughs.]</i> Um—
00:23:53	Jesse	Host	In England they call it a lift.
00:23:54	Helen	Guest	<i>[Laughs.]</i> We call them bobbies.

[John snorts.]

00:23:57 Jesse Host Yeah. [Laughs.]

00:23:58 Helen Guest I don't know how cheering it would be, but I recently read the novel *Silver Sparrow*, by Tayari Jones, which I thought was amazing.

00:24:05 John Host Oh, yeah!

00:24:06 Helen Guest It's a strong recommend. It's beautiful.

00:24:10 John Host And did you read it Sarah-style? That is to say, uh, with your nose in a book? Or did you listen to it while soldering electronics?

00:24:20 Helen Guest Uh, well, I've tried reading while soldering, and created many fires.

00:24:25 John Host Ah.

00:24:26 Helen Guest And many highly flammable electronics. So I just did it book-wise. But that's because I'm listening to stuff all the time for work.

00:24:32 John Host Right.

00:24:33 Helen Guest And so listening to things for fun is not really a thing I do. Not—not to be a traitor to Sarah's friend!

00:24:38 John Host No. No, everyone has their own way of learning! Some people get it through the ears, some people get it through the eyes.

00:24:47 Helen Guest Yes.

00:24:48 John Host You don't need to have a book fight to be friends.

00:24:49 Helen Guest Some people through the nose! Just—

00:24:50 John Host Yeah!

00:24:51 Helen Guest Just the smell.

00:24:52 John Host Oh, yeah. [Laughs.] You ever—

00:24:53 Jesse Host Yeah.

00:24:54 John Host Do you—[laughs]—do you ever enjoy an olfactory book? [Laughs.]

00:24:55 Jesse Host Mm-hm.

00:24:56 John Host It's the same experience.

00:24:57 Helen Guest Dogs do.

00:24:58 Jesse Host I love wafted learning.

00:24:59 John Host Yeah, you smell the words, rather than see them. You can only do it if you have synesthesia, but it's worth it.

[Helen laughs.]

Thank you for that recommendation, Helen. I—say the name of the—I know Tayari Jones. Say the name of the book again?

00:25:10 Helen Guest It's called *Silver Sparrow*.

00:25:12 John Host *Silver Sparrow*. I will put it down.

00:25:14 Jesse Host Let's take a quick break. More items on the docket coming up in just a minute on the *Judge John Hodgman* podcast.

00:25:20 Sound Effect Transition [Three gavel bangs.]

00:25:22 Promo Clip **Music:** Gentle, upbeat piano music.

Helen Hong: Hey, J. Keith.

J. Keith van Straaten: Hey, Helen! Hey, you've got another true/false quiz for me?

Helen: Yep! Our trivia podcast *Go Fact Yourself* used to be in front of a live audience.

J. Keith: True! Turns out that's not so safe anymore.

Helen: Correct! Next. Unfortunately this means we can no longer record the show.

J. Keith: False! The show still comes out every first and third Friday of the month.

Helen: Correct! Finally, we still have great celebrity guests answering trivia about things they love on every episode of *Go Fact Yourself*.

J. Keith: Definitely true.

Helen: And for bonus points, name some of them.

00:25:52 Promo Clip

J. Keith: Recently we've had, uh, Ophira Eisenberg, plus tons of surprise experts like Yeardley Smith and Suzanne Somers.

Helen: Perfect score!

J. Keith: Woohoo!

Helen: You can hear *Go Fact Yourself* every first and third Friday of the month, with all the great guests and trivia that we've always had. And if you don't listen, well then, you can go fact yourself!

J. Keith: That's the name of our podcast!

Helen: Correct!

J. Keith: Woohoo!

[Music finishes.]

00:26:12 Sound Effect Transition

[Three gavel bangs.]

00:26:14 Promo Clip

Music: Cheerful banjo music plays in the background.

Biz Ellis: Hi! I'm Biz.

Theresa Thorn: And I'm Theresa.

Biz: And we host *One Bad Mother*, a comedy podcast about parenting.

Theresa: Whether you are a parent or just know kids exist in the world, join us each week as we honestly share what it's like to be a parent.

Biz: These are really hard questions!

Theresa: They are really hard questions!

Biz: *[Voice getting louder and more agitated]* I don't have any answers for that!

Theresa: I don't either!

Biz: *[Yelling]* Sack of garbage!

Theresa: I know!

Biz: *[Yelling in frustration]* Ahhhh! Ughhhh! *[Laughs wildly.]* Ahhhh! The end of the show will just be five minutes of Biz—

[Theresa giggles.]

Biz: —and Theresa crying and screaming until the outro is played. So join us each week as we judge less, laugh more, and remind you that you are doing a great job.

Theresa: Find us on MaximumFun.org, on Apple Podcasts, or wherever you get your podcasts!

[Music stops.]

00:26:58 Sound Effect Transition

[Three gavel bangs.]

00:27:01 Jesse Host

Welcome back to the *Judge John Hodgman* podcast. We're clearing the docket with our friend Helen Zaltzman, from *Answer Me This!*, *The Allusionist*, and of course *Veronica Mars Investigations*. Here's a letter from TC. He says:

"During the pandemic, I've been sitting down to urinate, which I feel minimizes the necessity to wash my hands. I make zero contact with anything, and use my elbow to flush. I do this out of a not-so-irrational fear that as the second wave of COVID is mounting, supplies like soap may become dangerously scarce again. If I only have to wash on a one-to-three ratio, that will conserve our soap.

Naturally, my wife thinks this is counterproductive, as we've been taught since childhood to wash your hands every time. Typically, I agree, but these are drastic times, and I earnestly feel I'm on to something here. To be clear, this only applies to going number one. I'm simply trying to figure out the most efficient method—"

[Stifles laughter.] Well, there you go.

00:27:55 John Host

Yep. *[Laughs.]*

00:27:56 Jesse Host

"—the most efficient method to maximize our yield in case, you know, the world starts to really fall apart. I guess if that should happen, this is all a moot point."

00:28:05 Helen Guest

Has he considered stockpiling soap?

00:28:08 Jesse Host

Has he considered... no longer urinating?

[John laughs.]

00:28:11 Helen Guest Ingenious. He's just perpetuating his own problem.

00:28:14 John Host Yeah, I—I'm not sure that this guy has really exhausted the full potential list of crackpot schemes to avoid doing a simple thing that we not only know from common sense works, that we are actually asked to do by all of humanity. To help stop the spread of this disease. Dude. Knock it off with the scheme.

[Sighs.] You know, you're not gonna save soap—I don't think he would stockpile soap, Helen. 'Cause I think—I think what he thinks he's doing is reducing his soap consumption so that in some post-apocalyptic wasteland future, there will be a little soap left over that he didn't use for humanity. But it's like—I think you're more of a hero by keeping your hands clean, rather than using less soap and describing, in public, how you sit down to pee. Like, that doesn't make you a hero! Just wash your hands.

00:29:13 Sound Effect Sound Effect *[Three gavel bangs.]*

00:29:14 Helen Guest How true do we think the zero contact is? Because... if he is sitting down on an open toilet, not touching the seat, and flushing with his elbow, the toilet is still open. And therefore the vapors of his urine...

[John exhales thoughtfully.]

...are transmitted six feet! It's a—

00:29:31 John Host Yes.

00:29:32 Helen Guest It's a droplet-transmitting contraption. But if he's—

00:29:34 John Host Yes!

00:29:35 Jesse Host He might be moving the toilet seat with his knee.

00:29:37 Helen Guest Could be.

00:29:39 Jesse Host Like a—like a soccer player warming up.

00:29:42 John Host I don't know what that looks like.

00:29:44 Jesse Host Like Hacky Sack—style. I imagine this whole thing being Hacky Sack—style.

00:29:49 John Host *[Snorts.]* I think Helen points out—the—I mean, the urine vapor argument is very compelling! Not merely 'cause—

00:29:55 Helen Guest He's either touching the toilet, or he's got the urine vapors!

[John laughs.]

Either way, I would suggest a hand wash! It's fairly straightforward.

00:30:02 John Host You're absolutely right! As you pointed out, Helen, it is a droplet-spread disease. You are putting yourself in closer con—like, the urine is connecting with the surface of the water. It is being agitated, and you're closer to it than ever, sir!

00:30:22 Jesse Host I have to say this, John, though.

00:30:23 John Host Go ahead.

00:30:24 Jesse Host One thing that I'm with this guy on is during the pandemic, sitting down to pee. I don't do it for scheme reasons. I don't have an

efficiency scheme here.

00:30:33 John Host Right.

00:30:34 Jesse Host I just don't have the emotional strength to stand and urinate at the same time.

00:30:37 John Host *[Laughs.]* Yeah! Exactly. I mean, look—

00:30:39 Jesse Host *[Stifling laughter]* That's where I'm at. I just go in the bathroom and collapse.

00:30:43 John Host It's a great opportunity—I'm not against the method. Although I agree with Helen that I think that its sanitary benefits are arguable at best. But take any opportunity to sit in a closed room to stare into the middle distance for a while. Absolutely.

00:31:03 Jesse Host Yeah. That's the key here.

00:31:04 John Host Maybe pop in your earbuds and listen to an audiobook. Maybe an audiobook called, uh, *The King of Dragons*, by Carol Fenner.

[Helen laughs quietly.]

Narrated by Alan Ruck.

[Jesse laughs quietly.]

00:31:18 Helen Guest What about if he's showering, he soaps less then? That's a far bigger area of his body. You know, people get very over-excited on Twitter about whether you wash your legs or not. Has he considered washing less of his legs, perhaps, for conservation reasons?

00:31:32 John Host Oh! People are getting over-excited on Twitter about something? Hm!

00:31:38 Helen Guest I hesitate to raise it. Because I know that it's very important for some.

00:31:43 John Host This topic about washing your legs, though, I have to say, is one that I've not—*[stifles laughter]*. The—it's the one Twitter fight I've not encountered.

00:31:50 Helen Guest *[Stifling laughter]* Please, spare yourself.

00:31:53 John Host People are arguing that you shouldn't bother washing your legs?

00:31:56 Helen Guest Or that you definitely should. You could get around it by just washing one leg, I suppose, and pleasing everybody.

[John and Jesse laugh.]

00:32:03 John Host Compromise position. Wash one leg. Avoid the urine vapors.

00:32:10 Jesse Host Mike says:

"Every morning, I take my dog Bella out on a walk through our neighborhood. At the end of my street is a cemetery. Sometimes I'll walk through it with her. But I've recently been wondering, is it disrespectful to those people there to take my dog walking through? I always have poop bags and clean up after her if she goes to the bathroom while there. We always walk along the road, not through the gravestones. Attached are cute photos of our dog."

It's a beautiful dog. Looks like a great friend dog.

00:32:40 John Host Yeah. A—what's—a great friend dog?

00:32:43 Jesse Host Yeah.

[John and Jesse stifle laughter.]

Great friend dog. Friend dog is a type of dog. That's like a dog that's big enough to give, uh, like a—like a real hug to.

00:32:51 John Host Mm-hm. Mm-hm.

00:32:53 Jesse Host And maybe it's not, like—it's not, like, distinctively adorable, in a—you know what I mean? It's not—it, like—it's—all dogs are cute.

00:33:03 John Host Mm-hm.

00:33:04 Jesse Host But it's not—cuteness is not its top quality.

00:33:06 John Host Mm-hm.

00:33:07 Jesse Host Its top quality is that it looks like it would be a great and loyal friend. Like, a lot of golden retrievers are really great friend dogs.

00:33:14 John Host That's right.

00:33:15 Jesse Host 'Cause you'd think—you—you see it and you think, "Aw. I could really hug that."

[Helen chuckles.]

00:33:18 John Host I could hug—I could hug that, and get all of the stuff that is caught in that dog's fur on my body. For sure.

00:33:25 Jesse Host Yeah. Yeah. Exactly.

00:33:26 John Host Helen, do you have a pet?

00:33:28 Helen Guest I don't, John, because I live an itinerant lifestyle, and it feels unfair not to provide a stable background. But I used to have—I grew up with dogs. I'm just trying to remember our cemetery policy.

00:33:39 John Host Well, first of all, all dogs go to Heaven. That's established.

00:33:42 Jesse Host Yeah.

[Jesse and Helen laugh.]

00:33:44 Helen Guest I think, though, because it was the eighties and nineties, in Britain, people just left all the poop on the ground.

00:33:50 John Host Yeah. Yeah.

00:33:51 Helen Guest You can see that as a metaphor if you want. But it was also a literal truth. But I think, uh, if I were to be dead in a graveyard, I would be quite happy that a dog was using it for whatever ends they had in mind.

00:34:04 John Host Alright. So... Mike? First of all, just mark this down. Helen is in the prime of her life, a happy, healthy individual. This is not gonna help, probably, your dog Bella. Uhhh, but in the future, um, when the three of us are all dead, you have Helen's permission to poop on her grave.

00:34:28 Helen Guest Yep!

00:34:29 John Host Your dog. Your dog. You don't want Mike to poop on your grave, right?

00:34:33 Helen Guest I think that would... create further questions that would derail the immediate concern.

00:34:40 John Host Right. Bella, or your future dog, may poop on Helen Zaltzman's grave. Make a pilgrimage. Jesse?

00:34:50 Jesse Host Yeah.

00:34:51 John Host Can Mike's dog poop on your grave? Yea or nay.

00:34:54 Jesse Host Yeah, no, that's fine with me. I don't even know if I'll have a grave.

00:34:57 John Host Right.

00:34:59 Jesse Host Burial at sea. That's what I say. Once a sailor, always a sailor.

00:35:02 John Host Yep. Good point. In which case, Mike, bring Bella to the ocean.

00:35:07 Jesse Host Yeah.

00:35:08 John Host And have her poop—take her poop and throw it in the ocean, in honor of Jesse Thorn. That's—

00:35:12 Jesse Host You know what I'd love to see? Someone Tweeted me yesterday that their pandemic hobby is imagining themselves building mini-electric boats.

00:35:22 John Host Oh!

00:35:23 Jesse Host Which, he sent me a picture of this beautiful boat. And I thought this was like a—like a pond boat, like you would sail in Central Park.

00:35:29 John Host Yeah.

00:35:30 Jesse Host In—in an E.B. White novel.

00:35:32 John Host Yeah.

00:35:33 Jesse Host But it wasn't. It's a boat a person sits in. They're like, six or eight feet long.

00:35:39 John Host Uh-huh? Tiny.

00:35:41 Jesse Host Which is like, just the size—it's like a, uh, Shriner car.

00:35:44 John Host Yeah.

00:35:45 Jesse Host But it's a boat.

00:35:46 John Host Yeah.

00:35:47 Jesse Host That really works.

00:35:48 John Host Yeah. *[Stifles laughter.]*

00:35:50 Jesse Host Now it's all I want in the world.

00:35:51 John Host Jesse, I happen to know a place where you can get four of them. But you can—

00:35:56 Jesse Host Oh?!

00:35:57 John Host You can only buy them as a group.

[Jesse laughs.]

They're for sale at Dream Boat Harbor. Google "Dream Boat Harbor." It's run by our friends up their in Brooklin, Maine, Off Center Harbor. Great organization promoting the love and craft of building and going in wooden boats.

00:36:15	Jesse	Host	<i>[Whispering]</i> Wow.
00:36:16	John	Host	Not going—not pooping in. Get—take it easy, Bella the dog. Don't poop in this boat.
			<i>[Helen laughs.]</i>
			Getting into it and using it. Sailing and/or motoring it.
00:36:24	Jesse	Host	But they <u>only</u> come in a multipack?
00:36:26	John	Host	The seller will only sell them all together, and I think that there are four of them, and they—they're about as long as Bella the dog. Like...
			<i>[Jesse sighs.]</i>
			You would have such fun. We would have such fun together! All three of—look. There are four of us here right now! Helen, Jesse, me, and producer Jennifer Marmor. We're all getting little boats!
00:36:45	Jesse	Host	[Sighs.] Thank god.
00:36:46	Helen	Guest	I love this outcome.
00:36:47	John	Host	Yeah. That's good. Now, as for me, I don't—I don't know how I will be buried. But if I were interred in the ground, keep your dog away from my gravesite. I don't want your dog's poop.
00:37:00	Jesse	Host	Yeah.
00:37:01	John	Host	People have different preferences! And since they do, I think it's better to err on the side of "Don't poop on graves." Now you say, Mike, that you only walk through the roads in the cemetery, not over the graves, which I think is appropriate. I've done—I don't know if you guys have done, but I've done quite a bit of cemetery walking during the pandemic, as a way to get outside. Particularly Green-Wood Cemetery, which is going to be less crowded than a lot of the parks, where young people just love to run and breathe on each other.
			The Green-Wood Cemetery is a beautiful, old, historic cemetery in Brooklyn that is absolutely gorgeous to walk through, and wildly depopulated. But in the early part of the pandemic, there was a real problem. Because people were <u>flocking</u> to it with their dogs, and their Frisbees, and playing Frisbees and having their dogs poop! And dogs are not <u>allowed</u> in that cemetery!
			Mike, call the cemetery. Find out. Is it Green-Wood Cemetery? 'Cause I'm gonna tell you, dogs are not allowed there. Is it a different cemetery? I mean, if it's a historic cemetery and there's no office, then I would err on the side of, "It's okay to bring your dog through, but try to keep the poop to a minimum." But if it's a cemetery that is active and has an office, you call them and find out what their policy is.
00:38:17	Sound Effect	Sound Effect	<i>[Three gavel bangs.]</i>
00:38:19	John	Host	Bella's pretty cute.
00:38:20	Jesse	Host	Let's take a break. When we come back, we'll hear a case about anonymous notes.

00:38:24 Sound Effect Transition *[Three gavel bangs.]*

00:38:27 Jesse Promo Judge Hodgman, we're taking a break from clearing the docket. Let's talk about what we've got going on. John, what have you got going on, outside of our program?

00:38:34 John Promo Well, Jesse, as this podcast is released, it is September the 2nd, 2020. And that means September the 3rd is tomorrow, and that means... the final episode, the season finale, of my show with David Rees that shall forever go unnamed on this podcast due to family standards and practices, premieres tomorrow night, Thursday night, ten PM, on the TV show *Cake* on the FXX network. And if you miss it, check it and all of the previous episodes of this unnamed TV show over on Hulu. Very easy way to get to it. Just go to [Bit.ly/dicktown](https://bit.ly/dicktown). Don't know why they used that particular phrase.

[Jesse laughs quietly.]

To link to our show. Strange. All small letters.

00:39:22 Jesse Promo Yeah.

00:39:23 John Promo All one word. [Bit.ly/dicktown](https://bit.ly/dicktown). Jesse, it's been such a thrill to share the show with all the *Judge John Hodgman* listeners. The feedback that we've gotten has really been fantastic. We really, really, really hope to be able to make more of them. And the only way that that's ever in a million years gonna happen is if people, you know, check it out and like it and talk about it! Maybe Tweet to @FXX. But mostly just, you know, watch it on TV, watch it on Hulu. I think you'll enjoy it!

If you get up on Saturday morning and watch it like a Saturday morning cartoon, you can eat some sugar cereal. Be—done, the whole thing, the whole season, this Saturday. Uh, within an hour and a half.

This episode is called—it's the finale. After the very sad ending of the episode that preceded it, "The Mystery of the Impossible Car," now we have at last, triumph. John Hunchman and David Purefoy, co-creator David Rees, go have dinner with my fictional dad, Stephen Tobolowsky, in Richardsville's most famous, new, subway-tile-walled, Edison-bulbed-lit restaurant, The President's Physician, and stumble across a mystery involving the great Heather Lawless and the equally sublime and great pair of Paul F Tompkins and Janie Haddad Tompkins.

It's called "The Mystery of the President's Physician." It's our season finale, tomorrow night at ten PM on *Cake*, which is a TV show on FXX. Thereafter on Hulu, at [Bit.ly/dicktown](https://bit.ly/dicktown). Thanks for visiting Richardsville with us. Jesse, what's going on with you?

00:41:08 Jesse Promo This is the final week of the Put This On Shop summer sale. So if you wanna get something special for yourself—I know as I have been sitting in quarantine and becoming more and more anxious, I got obsessed with the possibility of buying this giant ceramic peanut from the estate of Penny Marshal.

[John makes an appreciative "shoooo" sound.]

If you're looking for your own giant ceramic peanut, um, or—I don't

think I have any giant ceramic peanuts. I do have—do you know what a vesta case is, John?

00:41:34	John	Promo	No!
00:41:35	Jesse	Promo	It's like a—in—before there were waterproof matches, you had to keep your matches dry. And so you would put them in a little box, called a vesta case. And I have a silver vesta case in the shape of a peanut, <i>[stifles laughter]</i> in the Put This On Shop. That and many other items, you can buy for 40% off with the code "Summer Sale." And all our fine jewelry is also on sale for 25% off, all the gold and stuff, with the code "Fine Summer." So you can find it online at PutThisOnShop.com . Lots of beautiful things for your home, for your person, and to cover your, uh, naked shame. All online at PutThisOnShop.com .
00:42:17	John	Promo	No one bid against Jesse on this giant ceramic peanut, y'all! It's an amazing work of art.
00:42:22	Jesse	Promo	<i>[Laughing]</i> No, focus on the peanut-related material in the Put This On Shop, at PutThisOnShop.com .
00:42:27	John	Promo	Yeah, that's how you help Jesse Thorn. Alright.
00:42:29	Jesse	Promo	Those will bring you comfort in these dark times.
00:42:33	John	Promo	Let's get back to the docket.
00:42:34	Sound Effect	Transition	<i>[Three gavel bangs.]</i>
00:42:36	Jesse	Host	Welcome back to the <i>Judge John Hodgman</i> podcast. We're clearing the docket this week. Here's something from a listener about anonymous notes. He says: "My wife and I received an anonymous note in our mailbox complaining about our fireworks. The writer also claims one of us rolled through a stop sign. Admittedly, we set off a single firework at nine PM, Monday, July 13th, and it would not be out of the realm of possibility that we could have rolled through a stop sign. So I plead no contest. In our defense, the firework I chose on the aforementioned date was the quite modest fountain style. I've been greatly harmed by anonymous complaints in the past, as a minister in a small town. We were effectively run out of this town because of a small group of disgruntled anonymous parishioners. The pain of that experience brings up a lot of fear and anxiety when it happens now in a new context." <i>[John whistles.]</i> "I'm exceedingly kind and compassionate." Not to mention modest. I added the last sentence. <i>[John laughs.]</i>
00:43:38	Jesse	Host	"If I were approached in person, I would apologize and change my behavior. But when receiving an anonymous note, I become irate and irrational. How should I respond? I've attached photos of the note, and of the firework we set off for evidence.

Sincerely,
Embarrassed and Annoyed in New Hampshire."

00:43:57	Helen	Guest	Hmmm.
00:43:58	Jesse	Host	Do you like the irony that this is an anonymous note?
00:44:00	Helen	Guest	<i>[Laughs quietly.]</i> Maybe they don't wanna make themselves even more of a target.
00:44:04	John	Host	There are many levels of cowardice here. Uhhh, Helen, do you have the note, the anonymous note that was left for them right here in front of you?
00:44:12	Helen	Guest	Yes. I'm just trying to read. The handwriting leans backwards, which I think some graphologists would see as a danger sign. Depending on contraindications. The note says: "Neighbor, Is it the 4th of July? No, it's the <u>13th</u> —" Triple underlined. "—of July. <u>FIREWORKS ARE DONE.</u> " Capitals, underlined. Brackets: "(And illegal.)" Fireworks, ya burnt. "I was walking by your house with my dog when you let off your lame fireworks." I wouldn't use the word "lame." "My dog freaked out and jerked forward to run away, and effectively threw out my back! I probably won't be able to pick up my daughter for the next two weeks. THANKS. Given you're new to the neighborhood, maybe try and be courteous! Particularly if you want the same from your fellow neighbors. While you're at it, stop rolling through stop signs, too! You clearly didn't see the kids on their bikes last week. <u>RESPECT YOUR NEIGHBORS!</u> " Capitals, underlined, exclamation point.
00:45:10	John	Host	Thank you very much! That was a wonderful performance, by the way.
00:45:13	Helen	Guest	Thank you. I trained.
00:45:15	John	Host	And I'm glad we were able to re-traumatize our anonymous listener together in this way. While also—!
00:45:22	Helen	Guest	Mm.
00:45:23	John	Host	—revealing the awfulness of this letter, which is designed to hurt, not to help. Speaking of complaints that are designed to hurt, vs. trying to help.
00:45:34	Helen	Guest	Yeah. You can't un-throw this back by writing this letter.
00:45:37	John	Host	No.
00:45:38	Jesse	Host	Effectively.

00:45:39 John Host Yeah. But I mean—and as wonderfully as you read it, I hope you will not be offended. If we are able to get Alan Ruck to read it, we're gonna put that in. Instead.

00:45:48 Helen Guest I concede to Ruck. It's fine.

00:45:49 John Host Alright. Thank you.

00:45:51 Helen Guest As I did for Ferris Bueller. I was right to be recast.

00:45:54 John Host *[Cracks up.]*

00:46:02 Jesse Host Leave all of this in. Uh, yeah. Have either of you ever received an anonymous note from a neighbor?

00:46:08 John Host I never have, but, uh, to be honest, I'm known for being exceedingly kind and compassionate.

00:46:10 Helen Guest *[Laughs.]* That's true. Fair enough.

00:46:16 John Host When I lived in a building with 21 other apartments, we received a note about a loud party we hadn't had.

00:46:18 Helen Guest Mm-hm?

00:46:23 John Host That they—which I felt offended by, 'cause I also didn't know who had had it, so I couldn't forward the note.

00:46:23 Helen Guest Right. Right.

00:46:26 John Host *[Jesse laughs quietly.]*

00:46:36 Helen Guest We'd had zero parties.

00:46:37 John Host You know, if you're writing a letter to your contractor, or builder, or flower bed lorry designer, you are at least signing your name. Even if you are venting anger.

00:47:00 Helen Guest Yeah. It feels like with this note, it must be by somebody who lives very close by, and so the recipient—how would they feel comfortable in their home? Being watched all the time by these people, none of whom they can trust.

00:47:14 John Host Yeah! And—

00:47:15 Helen Guest Just in case.

00:47:16 John Host And by the way, anonymous letter-writer. We're onto you. Helen Zaltzman's already identified you have a—a backward-leaning handwriting. Let's just—

00:47:26 Helen Guest It's some very strange kerning, as well.

00:47:27 John Host Yeah! Strange kerning! Thank you! Finally, someone notices the kerning.

00:47:32 Jesse Host *[Helen laughs quietly.]*

00:47:32 Jesse Host Yeah.

00:47:33 John Host But I mean, it's just a matter of time. And we know you live nearby. We know you have a dog and a daughter.

00:47:39 Jesse Host Yeah, we know you can't pick up your daughter, effectively.

00:47:42 John Host Yeah, you effectively can't pick up your daughter.

00:47:44 Helen Guest What if the daughter's in her twenties?

[John laughs.]

They don't offer that information.

00:47:48 John Host That's true!

00:47:49 Helen Guest What if they already couldn't pick her up anymore?

00:47:50 Jesse Host Comfortably my favorite part of this anonymous note, by a wide margin, is that they thought, "What were the consequences of the dog jumping forward? *[Sighs.]* Well, it was uncomfortable for me. I could say I threw out my back, but that wouldn't be true. Um... And I'm nothing if not honest."

00:48:11 John Host It's true.

00:48:12 Jesse Host "So, um... I'm gonna say it effectively threw out my back."

[Jesse and John laugh.]

00:48:18 John Host And the other thing that we know—we know that they live in New Hampshire, and we know that the anonymous letter-writer, the anonymous neighbor with the dog, has a limited knowledge of New Hampshire state or county law. 'Cause fireworks are totally legal in New Hampshire! It's like, "Light fireworks or die!" is on their—is on their license plate!

[Jesse laughs quietly.]

00:48:38 Helen Guest Everything's legal in New Hampshire.

00:48:39 John Host That's right!

00:48:40 Helen Guest They don't even have to wear seatbelts, do they?

00:48:41 John Host I don't know. I don't know anymore. All I know is that—*[laughs]*—when you drive across the border from Vermont into New Hampshire, you know it's happening. Because in Vermont, you're on these wonderful, beautifully even, luxuriously funded state roads. And then you cross into New Hampshire, and it's just like you fall off a cliff into a canyon of potholes.

00:49:03 Jesse Host There's just a sign that says, "Residents must know karate."

[John cracks up.]

00:49:09 Helen Guest The sad thing is, if this person had made this non-anonymous, then they might have received an apology for their... back.

00:49:16 John Host Yeah!

00:49:17 Helen Guest And other injuries, physical and emotional. But the way they've done it, they're not gonna be fulfilled by this, either. It's a very bitter act.

00:49:27 John Host If you're writing a letter of complaint, as we have established, you can either express anger, or you can express constructive criticism. This is a letter that expresses anger, and because it is unsigned, it is

intimidating and scary.

Now, I could see a situation where you would want to express even constructive criticism to a neighbor, uhhh, where you might fear reprisal of some kind. And if that were... case—that's an extenuating circumstance, in which a letter might be unsigned. But don't give all these clues about who you are, and who your dog is!

That said, I have some critique for the other anonymous letter-writer, as well. One, fireworks drive dogs up a tree. We know that better—now better than ever, because there was just this rash of nightly fireworks in most urban cities for mysterious reasons, and people with dogs—their dogs really suffer. You know?

Two, if you live part-time in a state where fireworks are legal, such as, let's say, Maine... Augusta is the state capital. Particularly if you're in Hancock County, noise travels, and fireworks get shot off... uh, you should let your neighbors know that you're gonna do it. If you're gonna fire off more than one.

00:50:53 John

Host

In this case, a fountain firework, pro—one fountain firework, I think you probably could get away with on your own property, without getting pre-approval from your neighbors. But that just leads to my other critique of you, anonymous listener! Whom I love in my heart, but still. Fountain fireworks are the worst. Why would you waste a—time, money, and neighborly good will on a fountain firework to begin with?

Now, I am deeply sorry that you were run out of town by anonymous accusations. That—that was a turn in this letter that I did not expect. *[Stifles laughter.]* That was a big, dramatic, novelistic turn. And I am—and I'm very sorry that happened, and I can appreciate why an anonymous letter would traumatize you. But all the more reason that you should know that writing an anonymous letter itself is bad! Stand behind your words! Whether you're writing to a podcast, or whether you're talking to your neighbors. Especially if you're talking to your neighbors! You have to live near each other.

I think that there's nothing you can do. This letter succeeded in its purpose of making you feel awful. You have to tear it up, put it behind you. Please stop at stop signs! That's probably a good idea. Even in New Hampshire, that's highly recommended. But try to put this past you, and keep an eye out on your neighbors. See if you can figure out who it is.

00:52:23

Sound Effect

Sound Effect

[Three gavel bangs.]

00:52:25

Jesse

Host

Finally, we have heard from a listener named Amelia, who has a dispute with her parents. Here's what she says:

"Dear Judge Hodgman,

My name is Amelia. I am nine years old. We listen to your show a lot, and congratulations on your Webby Award."

00:52:40

John

Host

Thank you!

00:52:41

Jesse

Host

Thank you, Amelia. That's very kind of you.

00:52:42 John Host Thank you very much.

00:52:44 Jesse Host "During COVID-19, my parents are bickering a lot over meaningless things, because we're cooped up together. Here's one example of a meaningless thing:

My dad wants sliced pickles for putting on hamburgers, but my mom says the sliced pickles taste different. Also, she says buying whole pickles is better, because you can slice them or spear them. My dad says—"

This is my favorite part of this whole thing.

"My dad says he 'just wants normal pickles that normal people eat.'" *[Laughs.]*

00:53:12 John Host Ugh! Ughhh.

00:53:14 Jesse Host Thank you for providing the direct quote there, Amelia.

00:53:17 Helen Guest They've got such different life goals, her mum and dad.

00:53:19 Jesse Host *[Laughing]* I know.

"They also bicker about my dad's water schemes." *[Laughs.]* In case you were wondering if Dad was the practical one. "He freezes water and puts it in insulated cups."

00:53:33 John Host I'm not sure what that means.

00:53:34 Jesse Host "Also, Mom uses the word 'task' instead of 'chore.'"

[John laughs.]

"Please tell—" *[Laughs.]* You know, that's when it becomes an omnibus complaint here.

00:53:43 John Host Right.

[John and Jesse laugh.]

00:53:46 Jesse Host "Please tell my parents to stop bickering about meaningless things."

00:53:50 John Host Helen, do you say task or chore?

00:53:54 Helen Guest Sometimes both!

[John makes a sound of disgust.]

I feel like they're words that can both belong in the lexicon. I don't understand the grievance there. But—

00:54:02 John Host Hang on. Hang on—hang on a second, Helen. Hang on a second. I have to talk to my wife. *[Calling off-mic]* Kath? She says both task and chore!

[Helen laughs.]

[Calling off-mic] Neither of us win!

[Back on-mic] Damn it, Helen...

00:54:12 Helen Guest Ah!

[Helen and Jesse laugh.]

00:54:14 Crosstalk Crosstalk

Helen: I'm sorry to come between you.

John: Darn it, Helen, I thought—I thought I was gonna get a twofer today. Alright...

00:54:18 Helen Guest

[Laughs quietly.] We could, uh—if there's a third one, then that could be the important tie-breaker.

00:54:25 John Host

Alright! What does Helen Zaltzman feel about sliced pickles vs. whole pickles?

00:54:30 Helen Guest

Well, I feel a lot of things. One is, "Can this household not keep two jars of pickles?"

[John laughs quietly.]

One for the normal people, and one for the whole pickle people.

[John gasps.]

Who want the variety, rather than just single-use pickle. Also...

[Sighs.] Some advice from my mother about marriage is to choose your battles.

00:54:52 John Host

Mm.

00:54:53 Helen Guest

You know. If you're gonna kill each other, make it about something really worthwhile, not the pickle slices. And she has tolerated, uh, an unhappy marriage for 50 years!

[John and Jesse laugh.]

00:55:08 John Host

Sage advice from Helen Zaltzman. I'm gonna say this! I do not normalize one form of pickle over another. A sliced pickle vs. a whole pickle is like an audiobook vs. a book. Equivalent experiences. But there is reason to have preference. Because you can't buy a whole pickle and slice it in the way those sliced pickles come, with the ridges! Sliced pickles sometimes have little ridges in them! That's a difference.

00:55:39 Jesse Host

What, are you talking about pickle chips?

00:55:41 John Host

Yeah.

00:55:42 Jesse Host

I think we're talking about sandwich slices. But you would have to have extraordinary knife skills to generate at-home sandwich sliced pickles. That's cut flat the long way.

00:55:53 John Host

Mm-hm. Oh, I see what you're saying. Yeah.

00:55:56 Jesse Host

That would either generate a huge amount of waste, or just be extraordinary difficult to do at home, even with a very sharp chef knife. *[Stiffling laughter]* Uh, or a mandolin or whatever.

00:56:08 John Host

[Laughs.] I think Helen Zaltzman is right. Pick your battles. Pickles, not worth it. Keep two jars. Freezing ice in insulated cu—I'm not sure even what's going on there. It sounds like they're just making ice cubes.

Don't normalize pickles. They're equivalent pickle experiences that

are different, and you need to honor them. And be like Helen, use "task" or "chore" interchangeably. Doesn't matter!

But the point is, Mom and Dad... you're hurting your daughter! Amelia's nine years old. She doesn't wanna listen to you bicker. Knock it off! Sit all—sit down together, the three of you, and enjoy an Alan Ruck movie.

00:56:47 Sound Effect Sound Effect *[Three gavel bangs.]*

00:56:50 John Host I didn't even know that Alan Ruck was on ten episodes of a reboot of *The Exorcist* in 2016. That's—that's my evening sorted out.

Helen, thank you so much for being here!

00:57:00 Helen Guest Oh, it's my pleasure. Thank you for letting me help you save lives.

[John laughs quietly.]

00:57:05 Jesse Host I'm gonna repeat my recommendation of Helen's work. *Answer Me This!*, which I was introduced to many years ago when I had dinner with Helen in London, England, in a very nice Indian restaurant. And I—she said, "Oh, I have a podcast, too," and I said to myself, "Oh, no..."

00:57:26 Helen Guest "Ugh."

00:57:27 Jesse Host "Oh, God."

[Helen laughs.]

Uh, I have been a loyal listener of *Answer Me This!* for many years. It's a wonderful show. Helen's co-host Olly does a great job as well. I think we can all agree, not as good as Helen.

[John gasps, Helen laughs.]

But a great job nonetheless. *[Laughs.]* Olly's really great. I've had lunch with him as well. And it's a show where they answer all kinds of questions, from general knowledge, interesting information, to etiquette, to advice. And it's always a hoot, and I always learn something when I listen.

00:58:00 Helen Guest Oh, thank you!

00:58:01 Jesse Host And *The Allusionist* is her show about the unusual contours of language, especially the English language, and that is also a hoot. If you wanna learn the history of bras through a lexicographical—

[Helen laughs quietly.]

—uh, lens, then I recommend *The Allusionist*.

[Helen laughs.]

And *Veronica Mars Investigations*. What can I say? *Veronica Mars*, it's a fun show created by a guy named Rob Thomas, who's not that Rob Thomas. A different Rob Thomas.

[Helen chuckles.]

00:58:30	John	Host	There's room for more than one Rob Thomas in this life. Two jars of pickles is fine.
00:58:35	Helen	Guest	Sliced and whole.
00:58:36	Jesse	Host	There's the light rock Rob Thomas, and then there is the super nice Rob Thomas who one time was on a live <i>Sound of Young America</i> in Los Angeles. I'm talking about ten— <i>Veronica Mars</i> was still on TV when it happened. It was 10, 12 years ago. And he said, "Hey, listen. I can't make the early call. I'm gonna be just on time. I've been in the Little Brother—the Big Brothers Big Sisters program for the last 15 years, and I'm going to my little brother's high school graduation."
			<i>[Stifles laughter.]</i>
00:59:07	John	Host	Awww!
00:59:08	Jesse	Host	"He's going to college next year." <i>[Laughs.]</i>
			And I said, "Yes. That is a <u>great</u> reason for you to be <u>just</u> on time for my live show you're doing out of the kindness of your heart at a 40-seat theater in Santa Monica." <i>[Laughs.]</i>
00:59:20	John	Host	Um—
00:59:21	Jesse	Host	So Rob Thomas, nice man.
00:59:22	John	Host	Rob Thomas, nice man. Sliced or whole. You gotta love a Rob.
00:59:25	Jesse	Host	Our docket is now clear. That's it for another episode of <i>Judge John Hodgman</i> . Our producer is Jennifer Marmor. You can follow us on Twitter at @JesseThorn and @hodgman . We're on Instagram at @judgejohnhodgman . Make sure to hashtag your <i>Judge John Hodgman</i> Tweets #JJHo , and check out the Maximum Fun subreddit at MaximumFun.Reddit.com to discuss this episode .
			Submit your cases at MaximumFun.org/ijho , or email hodgman@maximumfun.org . We'll talk to you next time on the <i>Judge John Hodgman</i> podcast.
00:59:55	Sound Effect	Transition	<i>[Three gavel bangs.]</i>
00:59:58	Music	Host	A cheerful guitar chord.
00:59:59	Speaker 1	Host	MaximumFun.org .
01:00:01	Speaker 2	Host	Comedy and culture.
01:00:02	Speaker 3	Host	Artist owned—
01:00:03	Speaker 4	Host	—audience supported.