

Shmanners 297: Taxidermy

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Travis: Why couldn't the taxidermied lion eat another bite?

Teresa: I don't know. Why?

Travis: Because he was stuffed!

Teresa: [laughs] It's *Shmanners*.

[theme music plays]

Travis: Hello, internet! I'm your husband host, Travis McElroy.

Teresa: And I'm your wife host, Teresa McElroy.

Travis: And you're listening to *Shmanners*.

Teresa: It's extraordinary etiquette...

Travis: For ordinary occasions. You don't have that normal vim and verve.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: And vigor, my love.

Teresa: Well, 'tis the season, my dear, for post nasal drip.

Travis: Indeed, indeed. Man, here in Cincinnati. Man, Ohio, it is no joke. People make the joke but, like, the weather, it fluctuates so frustratingly rapidly. Like, this weekend, right? It is, like, 12 degrees, right? Freezing. Monday it's, like, 58, 60, degrees, right? Tuesday, 60 degrees. And then, like, yesterday it was, like, 40 degrees, and today it's, like, 25 degrees. It's—

Teresa: And it's only gonna drop.

Travis: Where are you at, Ohio? What's your deal? [tearfully] Why are you like this?

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Anyways, it tends to mess with, uh, one's sinuses. Not to mention, we got a child on, like, day six of, like, stomach bug to cough, like, swing, which is fun and great and nice.

Teresa: Yeah, she hasn't been to school all week.

Travis: [unsteadily] It's great!

Teresa: [laughs] But hey, here we are.

Travis: Here we are, making the magic, making the donuts. Making the magic donuts.

Teresa: It's time to make the donuts.

Travis: Yeah!

Teresa: What's— I thought— for a second it was meatball, but that's a spicy meatball, right?

Travis: That's a— no. The meatballs are already made. Now it's time to make the donuts.

Teresa: [laughs] Okay.

Travis: We made the meatballs yesterday and froze 'em in preparation for the winter. [laughs quietly]

Teresa: Alright, let's go.

Travis: You know how settlers always used to make the meatballs ahead of time?

Teresa: I don't know anything about meatball settlers.

Travis: And then they would bury 'em in the cold ground for the winter? You remember.

Teresa: I don't know anything about what you're talking about.

Travis: You would build your log cabin over a natural cold cave that you could keep your meatballs in. You remember! You were there.

Teresa: Then what would you do when it was time to make the donuts?

Travis: Well, the donuts you made in the hot oil spring.

Teresa: Right next to your cabin?

Travis: Not right next to it. It was a bit of a trek. But it was worth it for those donuts.

Teresa: Right, because you didn't want the oil to splash up on your cabin and thaw your meatballs.

Travis: Exactly. You'd have an oi— you'd have an oily cabin. That's gross.

Teresa: [laughs] Alright. For reals, y'all. Today—

Travis: I'm—just to prep, this is probably gonna be a little bit of a short one, if you can—

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: —Teresa's voice is a little messed up, and we got a sick kid. Okay!

Teresa: Today we are talking about... taxidermy.

Travis: I guess this— okay. I know— here's what I will say. I will not play dumb.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: Like I normally was, not play. I— I—

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: I will not be professionally dumb like I normally am. This has worked for me. I take this very seriously, being dumb. Uh, but I know what an impact this

had on specifically, like, the time period of I wanna say, like, Victorian, I wanna say, like, 1880's on, taxidermy was a huge thing because you had people leading, like, all these expeditions to, like, Africa and Asia and, like, countries, and everybody became very, uh, let's say colonialistically fascinated by them, and the idea of, like, "Look at this lion! Check out this tiger!" And, like, zoos weren't quite the thing that they are now. And so it was like, if you wanna see these things, you would, like, see a taxidermied version. And they would always, like, taxidermy them as though they had defeated these animals in great battle and not, like, "Oh no, I had a gun and I was way far away." [laughs quietly]

Teresa: We'll get to that.

Travis: I have strong feelings. Anyways, go on.

Teresa: So—

Travis: Also, I know that they weren't always super good at taxidermy. [laughs]

Teresa: No. No, they definitely weren't. But if you are not familiar, taxidermy is the art of preserving an animal's body via mounting or stuffing for the purpose of study or display. So, any animal you've seen behind a glass case at a museum is taxidermied. Um, unless it is synthetic.

Travis: What's the one— the Natural History Museum in New York that's, like, right—

Teresa: Yeah. That's what— that's what it is.

Travis: That one's full of taxidermied animals.

Teresa: Absolutely. And there are some very famous specimens there that we will talk about.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: So, like, if you've ever seen a deer head mounted above a fireplace, um, and—

Travis: Sure. Or a fireplace head mounted above a deer.

Teresa: Sure. So usually when an animal is stuffed, it is meant to be portrayed in a lifelike state, although... some would argue...

Travis: Hmm?

Teresa: ... that the tanning and wearing of pelts instead of— so, I would say that once a pelt gets completely removed of fur and any identifying markings, and turns into a cloth, that becomes leather, right?

Travis: Sure.

Teresa: So there is that line between— pelts could be considered taxidermy—

Travis: Sure, okay.

Teresa: —'cause you are trying to preserve the fur on the pelt.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Whereas leather wouldn't be considered it, because that's just more using the— the parts as cloth.

Travis: Sure.

Teresa: Right.

Travis: Okay. I guess I— yeah, I get that.

Teresa: So the phrase "taxidermy" can be used to refer to the actual animal, but also the process of preserving the animal.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: It's derived from Greek, two words, "taxis" and "derma". That makes sense, right?

Travis: Well, okay, can I get— yeah. So I know derma is skin.

Teresa: Mm-hmm.

Travis: Taxes is what you pay every April 15th?

Teresa: Ehhhh.

Travis: Ehhhh.

Teresa: Arrangement of skin.

Travis: Oh, okay.

Teresa: Or arranging skin.

Travis: Can I just say, like, this is a weird side note that maybe, maybe a portion of our audience will get. But there's, like, a big throughline in the Magnus Archives, which is, like, a really great, like, horror anthology story podcast about, like, taxidermy, and it, uh, let's just say impacted the way I will think about taxidermy for the rest of my life in a spooky, scary way. [laughs]

Teresa: Oh boy.

Travis: And so, like, as you were talking about it, there was a part of my brain in the back that's just screaming. Go on!

Teresa: Um—

Travis: Also, here's my question. When you were a kid, or even now as an adult, how do you feel when you see, like, taxidermied... things?

Teresa: Uh, I just was never around it really as a kid. It wasn't part of my parents' aesthetic, and my grandparents were way too poor to have anything like that. Um, and really the closest thing that I can think of having, like, an actual dead thing in my home is that [laughs] my parents— my parents had this lamp that is supposed to be, like, a terrarium, but it's not alive.

Travis: Uh-huh. Oh, I know exactly what you're talking about, yeah.

Teresa: It's all dried reeds and grasses and flowers arranged to look like they're an actual terrarium, but it's not. It's all dried.

Travis: It has a bit of the impact of, "This is a terrarium that we've taken very bad care of."

Teresa: I mean, I guess, but it—

Travis: It's pretty, though. Don't get me wrong. It's pretty, though.

Teresa: It's very pretty, but it's— it's very autumnal looking.

Travis: Yeah, this is true.

Teresa: That's nice. And, I mean, nothing looks rotted, so it's not like it hasn't been taken care of. It's just not actually a terrarium.

Travis: Yes. And I— what I am about to say, I do not want to open up a big discussion about, like, the merits versus the bad of hunting or whatever. But growing up in West Virginia...

Teresa: Hmm.

Travis: Uh, seeing, like, trophy antlers and deer heads and whatnot was very common, to the point where sometimes you would just be at an antique store and out of nowhere, boom! Deer. And, like, that, I—

Teresa: Like a whole deer?

Travis: Not like a whole deer, but just, like, there would be a deer head, not positioned in such a way that it looked like it was looking out, but more, like, staring up at the ceiling. [laughs quietly] Um, and I don't care for it.

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: And also, for some reason— and I think that this is— a lot of this has to do with Disneyland and Disney World's fault, but there's a big— it was a big thing in my childhood that I remember clearly of, like, this push for, like, "Hey. Our restaurant has talking taxidermy animals in it." And maybe that still happens a lot, but that idea of, like, I'm sitting here eating, and right next to me it's, like, a buffalo head that all of a sudden's gonna be like, "How's your wings?" Or whatever. I *don't* care for it.

Teresa: I think that the odds that those were actual remains are probably very slim.

Travis: Okay, but that's not the point!

Teresa: I'm certain that they were synthetic, made to look like an animal.

Travis: But still.

Teresa: Anyway.

Travis: Still!

Teresa: Who would you guess were the first people to taxidermy?

Travis: The Egyptians.

Teresa: Yeah!

Travis: Yeah! I mean, they were already doing it with humans!

Teresa: [laughs] Okay, not quite. So—

Travis: Oh, hey. You can't tell me mummies aren't taxidermy! We're gonna pull out the insides, stuff 'em with stuff, preserve 'em. Taxidermy.

Teresa: [doubtful] Mmm...

Travis: Mummies equal taxidermy.

Teresa: Well, okay. Here's the distinction. So, mummification relies on a very specific set of, like...

Travis: Skills? Like Liam Neeson?

Teresa: [laughs] A preparation and such like that. Whereas when they, the Egyptians, were taxidermying things, they didn't really put that kind of, like... care and... expertise in it.

Travis: So they were better at it with people. [wheezes] But that doesn't— I'm— I'm gonna die on this hill!

Teresa: Alright.

Travis: Hello, my name is Travis McElroy. This hill is where I'll die.

Teresa: Whatever.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: So, a lot of the specimens that were taxidermied instead of mummified did not survive. We know that they were there because of the writings.

Travis: Oh, they didn't survive through time. I was gonna say—

Teresa: [laughs loudly]

Travis: —of course they didn't survive, Teresa!

Teresa: No, through time.

Travis: Okay. Alright. That makes way more sense. Like, I was like, "That can't be what she means."

Teresa: Um, so, you know, you would be, as a pharaoh, would be buried with all of their accoutrements, right?

Travis: Of course, yes.

Teresa: So that they could—

Travis: To take to the afterlife, yes.

Teresa: —take to the afterlife. Um—

Travis: Get their heart weighed by Anubis, yes.

Teresa: Their cats, dogs, monkeys, birds, or whatever. Uh, even at one point—

Travis: Their pogs. Their Game Boy games.

Teresa: —they managed to preserve an entire hippopotamus.

Travis: Oh, nice.

Teresa: To send with a pharaoh. I mean, preserve it for a little while.

Travis: Yeah. Probably against the hippopotamus's will, if we're being honest. I doubt the hippo was like, "Yeah, I love that pharaoh. I wanna be with him too. Let's do this."

Teresa: Uh, so basically they just preserved it enough so they could get it from— not— from death of the animal to the actual tomb. Like I said, the specimens are no longer around, but there are writings saying that these things were in there.

Travis: And, of course, picture— we have photographs. From Egyptian times.

Teresa: Oh, we do, do we?

Travis: Well, they're different. [pause] I don't know where I'm going with this! [wheeze-laugh]

Teresa: Are you talking about pict— pictograms?

Travis: I don't— hey, can I tell you?

Teresa: Like, hieroglyphics?

Travis: I don't know what I'm talking about.

Teresa: Yeah, nobody does.

Travis: It's been a long week.

Teresa: Nobody does. Alright. Um, so... some of the first taxidermy accounts mentioned outside of Egypt come from the 5th century BCE, and it's mentioned in the record of Hanno of Carthaginian's explorations of coastal Africa. He came to

Carthage, which is located on the modern-day Tunisia, excuse me. He described preserving gorilla skins that were hung in the temple of Astarte.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Um, you know, this was— it was something that was happening a lot in Europe. Um, also, you can think about how, uh, many Native American tribes, such as the Sioux, the Cherokee, Cheyenne, they also did the same, right? They would preserve the skins of foxes, and raccoons, and bears, and buffaloes, and porcupines, and eagles. Uh, not only to use as furs for warmth, but also to use to decorate their clothing, and tools, and equipment, and homes, and things like that. Um, and there are lots of indigenous people today who continue this practice of— of early taxidermy. They tan and preserve the animal for traditional and cultural purposes.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: So you were either a tribe-based hunter in Europe or the Americas who wanted to tan and preserve their kill for warmth and decoration. Uh, maybe a little bit of bragging rights, right?

Travis: Sure.

Teresa: Uh, or you were an Egyptian pharaoh who wanted to take his cat to the afterlife.

Travis: Sure.

Teresa: Up until this point, though, taxidermy wasn't really considered, like, an art form. You kind of did what you had to do to try and keep the thing you wanted to keep together.

Travis: It was practical. It was practical more than it was, uh... artistic.

Teresa: Right.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Once we get past the Dark Ages into the scientific revolution, things, they change.

Travis: And I can't wait to hear about it, but first! How about a word from some other Max Fun shows?

[theme music plays]

Jesse: Hi, I'm Jesse Thorn, America's radio sweetheart.

Jordan: And I'm Jordan Morris, boy detective.

Jesse: Our comedy podcast, *Jordan, Jesse, Go!* just celebrated its 15th anniversary.

Jordan: It was a couple months ago, but we forgot.

Jesse: Uh, yeah, completely. Our silly show is 15 years old. That makes it old enough to get its learner's permit.

Jordan: And almost old enough to get the talk.

Jesse: Wow, I hope you got the talk before then. A lot of things have changed in 15 years. Our show's not one of them.

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[ad ends]

[audience cheers]

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[ad ends]

Travis: So, tell me about this new artsy-fartsy taxidermy.

Teresa: [laughs] Um, so, uh, this scientific revolution marked the emergence of modern science. So, from about the 1400's to the 1700's, there were lots of developments made in mathematics, and physics, and biology, and anatomy, and chemistry, and, you know, I mean, think about, like, Copernicus and Galileo and all of those things, right?

Travis: I think about them all the time.

Teresa: I know you do. The scientific revolution was taking place concurrently to the artistic Renaissance. Um, so not only was it important to be learning, it was important to create artistic representations, right? Um, so one could argue that taxidermy was the perfect blend between the science and the art of this colorful time in history.

Travis: Mm-hmm?

Teresa: Um, I mean, in the Renaissance, like, paintings and such, we often talk about, you know, Europe, but there was a— it was happening pretty much all over the world. Um, and everybody had this kind of, you know, their own style about it. Um, museums, early museums started to create displays featuring these wild animals, kind of arranged thoughtfully in their exhibits. But not, like, interacting like you would think about, like—

Travis: So not like a diorama kind of deal.

Teresa: Exactly. Exactly. Um, and each country had its own style to it. If you were checking out taxidermy in the Netherlands, you would run into a lot of stuffed birds. It was very important to the culture.

Travis: Sure, sure.

Teresa: Um—

Travis: I don't know why I said "Sure, sure" like I knew that.

Teresa: I don't know.

Travis: Is Audubon from the Netherlands? I don't think so, but okay.

Teresa: [laughs] Legend has it that a wealthy Dutch trader obtained an aviary of gorgeous exotic birds from the West Indies, but wasn't very good at keeping 'em alive.

Travis: Hmm.

Teresa: Um, and so he, uh, had them all taxidermied and preserved, and they were then wired and stuffed with cotton, and now they were posed in natural positions instead of just kind of, like, seated, right? And put on display.

Travis: Instead of just, like, playing poker or something, you know?

Teresa: Right, mm-hmm.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Yeah, 'cause that's what they did a lot of.

Travis: Do you ever think about, like, what a weird and messed-up concept "exotic" is? I mean, like, on a— in a lot of ways.

Teresa: I mean, absolutely.

Travis: Right? But imagine, like, a Dutch trader in, like, 1650 seeing a pigeon and being like, "[gasps] Ooh! [wheezes] What is that?!"

Teresa: Exotic just means 'unfamiliar to me'.

Travis: Yeah. I don't know it.

Teresa: Um, so...

Travis: Can I talk about one of my favorite— no, you keep going, and then I'll talk about my favorite example of taxidermy from around this time period.

Teresa: Okay. Uh, we've gotten to the Victorian period, so if you're gonna talk about this one—

Travis: Okay, so let's move back.

Teresa: Talk this— talk this.

Travis: So, uh, if you are near a computer and it's safe to do so—

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: —google "King Frederick taxidermied lion," and you will find this lion. So basically, uh, the story goes in 1731, King Frederick I of Sweden, he got a lion, uh, as a pet. A live one. He loved the thing. And then when it died he was really sad, and so he gave it to, like, his royal... taxidermist? Yes. But the thing is is, like, this taxidermist had no idea, supposedly, what a lion was supposed to look like. He just had, like, the bones and the skin. And so he tried to make a lion.

And it has this face... uh, that is clearly not right, and it— it has a bit of a... hmm, Hanna-Barbera-esque quality to it.

Teresa: Ohh, yeah it does.

Travis: Doesn't it? Like it's going, "Hexit [wheezes] stage right!" a little bit to him. The eyes are, like, clearly wrong, too close together, looking to the side. The tongue is weird and it's kind of smiling and the teeth are outta this world. You gotta check it out, folks. It's...

Teresa: Almost like it had a person smile.

Travis: It does look like it has a person smile. Now, the interesting thing is if you look at it from the side, it— it reminds me a lot of, like, a Chinese lion statue, right?

Teresa: Oh, okay.

Travis: The way that the face is constructed, which maybe is, like, what they were going for. But from the front... it's just all wrong.

Teresa: Yeah.

Travis: It's— like, it— it's great. Okay.

Teresa: Alright. So, we would be remiss if we did not mention the British Museum and the Great Exposition, curated by... Prince Albert.

Travis: Oh, sure. That guy, yes.

Teresa: Um, so the British Museum contained— in 1759, contained the world— excuse me. I think that the, uh— the—

Travis: The cough drops are getting to your brain?

Teresa: In 1759. [laughs]

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: 1759? Where'd that come from?

Travis: I don't know, man.

Teresa: Uh, contained the world's largest collection of animal skins, displaying a total of 1,886 mammals, 1,172 birds, 521 reptiles, and 1,555 fish.

Travis: That's a lot. That's a lot of animals.

Teresa: Now, not all— these weren't all, like, completely stuffed and posed displays. Some were prepared skin and bones.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: Um, but it still attracted enormous interest and attention from the public.

Travis: Sure, sure.

Teresa: Um, and then—so...

Travis: You know, this is interesting. By the way, this is a weird tangent, but you just made me think about it because of the interest that people had in this. Uh, I've been listening to this podcast called *Red Web*. It's all about, like, you know, strange mysteries and everything, and one of the things they talk about a lot is, like, cryptids, right?

Teresa: Sure.

Travis: So, for those unfamiliar think, like, Loch Ness monster, or Bigfoot. Uh, Mothman, these kinds of— Jersey Devil, right?

Teresa: Uh-huh.

Travis: And it's so interesting because we now take for granted all of these animals that are not native to whatever area you live in, but you can identify. Like, you know, we live in Ohio, but I know what a lion looks like. I know what a tiger looks like.

Teresa: Right.

Travis: Right? Because I've seen 'em in zoos. I've seen 'em online. I've seen 'em in movies. I've seen 'em...

Teresa: Books.

Travis: In books! Right? And— but there was a time period where, you know, if some rich king had imported a gorilla for— you know, because he wanted to have a pet gorilla and the gorilla got out, and you'd be like, "That's a Bigfoot."

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Right?

Teresa: Sure.

Travis: Like, that idea of, like, you wouldn't know what a gorilla looks like if you saw it.

Teresa: Okay.

Travis: And I think it's just really interesting to think, like, how many cryptid sightings were just, like, animals. Like, "I don't know *what* that thing is!"

And it's like, "That's a bat!"

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: "That's a b— hey, man. That's a bat!"

And it's like, "I don't know what a bat is. It's 1652! What are you talking about?"

Teresa: So, the Great Exposition... man. It is rough doing this right now. The Great Exposition— exi—

Travis: I think that's what you said.

Teresa: —exhibition.

Travis: Exhibition.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: [through laughter] Oh no.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Exhibition.

Travis: Okay.

Teresa: Of 8—

Travis: The Great Exposition is what— is at the beginning of every *Game of Thrones* novel.

Teresa: [laughs] Help me. Help me.

Travis: Oh no. What— y— are you asking me, or the heavens? [pause] Oh no. We've lost her.

Teresa: [laughs] Oh, god. The Great Exhibition of 1851, held by Prince Albert, uh, at the Crystal Palace in London, uh, pulled a whopping six million people, which was a third of the entire population of Britain at the time.

Travis: Wow!

Teresa: It was, uh— it's often credited as the world's first World's Fair.

Travis: Yeah. Wow!

Teresa: Um, and it was the first time in history where taxidermists from all across the world gathered together to discuss and display their unique art form. Um—

Travis: And probably to get an idea of what some animals were supposed to look like, right?

Teresa: Yes.

Travis: Because then if you think about, like— if you picture a taxidermy bear, I guarantee we all picture the same pose. Right? That like, "Argh!" The— the hands are up.

Teresa: Arms up, mouths open.

Travis: Mouth are open. Rarely do you see a taxidermy bear that looks like it's looking over it's shoulder like, "What?" Right? It's almost always arms up.

Teresa: Just chillin'. Um, so earlier when you were talking about the Natural History Museum in New York—

Travis: Uh-huh.

Teresa: Uh, some of the specimens that are notable in there are made by Abraham Bartlett. He was the superintendent of the London Zoo at the time, and he was in expert in captive animals, and he wowed visitors with his complete, life-size reconstruction of the dodo bird.

Travis: Ohh. Okay, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Teresa: Um, and so after this event—

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: —those Victorians, they could not get enough of taxidermied specimens.

Travis: Well, this fits with our— I don't know if this is right term for this period, but maximalism, right?

Teresa: Yep.

Travis: Where Victorians were like, "I want something in every open space of my home. I want a thin walkway to move from room to room, and otherwise, I want globes."

Teresa: Exactly.

Travis: "I want... tusks. I want—" they didn't have a problem with ivory back then. They really should've.

Teresa: And the part that really, I think, spoke to Victorians, is that with taxidermy, you could have this— this, like, ornate, beautiful piece that is from the other side of the world, and not have to go there. [laughs quietly]

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: You could sit in your not-so-comfy chair in your very stuffy living room, surrounded by—

Travis: Just breathing in soot from the fireplace.

Teresa: [laughs] Surrounded by these beautiful birds from the other side of the world, and never have to lift a finger about it.

Travis: And plus, with that big taxidermy bear, it's gonna create a really dynamic scene when there's a big stormy night outside and then there's a parlor room mystery and a locked door. Someone's been murdered. There's a big lightning strike. What's that? Oh, it's a bear. [shudders]

Right? You don't get that with a lamp, right? You need a bear for that.

Teresa: You need a bear for that. But the other thing was it also fed into the, um— the very strict gender roles that the Victorians had.

Travis: Oh, yeah.

Teresa: If you actually went out and did get an animal and have it stuffed... that was even more bragging rights to add to your— you know, your masculinity, right?

Travis: [groans]

Teresa: All of this kind of stuff. And it really fed into these preconceived, very extreme gender roles that the Victorians held very dear.

Travis: Gross.

Teresa: Um, scientists and the public of this time were enjoying a newfound fascination with the natural world. They were finding fossils, and minerals, and animals, and—

Travis: Oh yeah. We've talked about the— the bone wars, right?

Teresa: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Travis: Bone wars. Look it up.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: It's a— it's a really cool name for a really silly thing. Well, I— it was the biggest boom of discoveries in, like, paleontology and, like, discovering dinosaur bones, but it also was, like, a really petty rivalry between these two dudes called the bone wars. It sounds like a Transformers thing? Anyways.

Teresa: So at this point in history, you know, people are loving exploring and finding new things. Well, new to them.

Travis: Right.

Teresa: And there are several—

Travis: Like one might find— like, discover a restaurant.

Teresa: Mm-hmm. Uh, so there are several different societies of taxidermists. One of them was created in the 1880's, was the Ward Society of American Taxidermists, and one of the members worthy of mention is Carl Akeley. Taxidermy for him was about getting closer to the natural world, wanting to know how the body worked, the texture of the skin, and understanding the movement. And, uh, Carl Akeley is actually specifically very responsible for devising today's standard taxidermy method. He was a biologist, conservationist, and nature photographer. Um, and he agreed to work for the Natural History Museum in New York if they would finance his trips to Africa to collect specimens.

Travis: Just— I will also work for people if they pay for my vacations, too. I mean, they weren't vacations for him, but...

Teresa: Yeah, well.

Travis: Yeah.

Teresa: I mean, he got attacked by elephants.

Travis: Oh.

Teresa: Twice.

Travis: I don't want that.

Teresa: He discovered a new species of gorilla and felt such regret after shooting one to preserve it that he actually convinced the King of Belgium at the time to create a wildlife sanctuary for the apes.

Travis: Oh, wait. I kinda like this dude. Okay.

Teresa: Uh, he survived a leopard attack by literally punching the cat in the throat.

Travis: Uh-huh.

Teresa: And, uh, he did most of this while recovering from his most recent bout of malaria.

Travis: Okay! We might have to do a bit of a bio on this fellow.

Teresa: So, you can see some of his work in the Field Museum of Chicago— in Chicago, or at the Akeley Hall of the African Mammals in the Natural History Museum in New York. So, uh, between the Victorian era up until, like, the modern age, there really weren't any taxidermy schools until about, like, the 1970's. And that's when you start to see the— the care and concern really show in the art for the actual animals. There are a lot of, um, people who love taxidermy, but they also love the ethically sourced taxidermy that they find. So if you're gonna collect taxidermy, I would suggest that you either go for vintage pieces, or that you source ethically sourced taxidermy. So, these are animals that were not hunted for their pelts, but they either died of natural causes or they are, like— like, revamped older specimens and things like that. Um, you can love taxidermy, but it's also okay if you feel a little icky about this topic. That's alright.

Travis: I do, yes.

Teresa: Um, it can be seen as odd, and some people think it's creepy. Um, and it might— you know, it might be strange to you to taxidermy a beloved pet, whereas to another person it might not be. Uh, but, you know, your feelings are valid for either end of this spectrum, here. So, uh, Victorians may not have really cared about shooting a gorilla for science, but modern taxidermists rarely ever advocate for killing something for the sake of the art. Um, there's a really great book, Divya Anantharaman— I really— I— that was bad.

Travis: Hey, you did your best, and I really appreciate you.

Teresa: He's a professional taxidermist, a self-confessed cheerful goth, and co-author of a book called *Stuffed Animals*. [laughs] Who has a great quote about it, saying:

"Ethics are individual, and I have yet to meet a taxidermist that enjoys cruelty or harming animals. Today, taxidermists rarely advocate for killing something for the sole sake of art. For those that do, all I can say is, live and let live. Personally, I prefer working with animals that died of unavoidable circumstances like old age or untreatable illness. Thoughtful sourcing is the opposite of cruelty."

Travis: I agree with that. Alright! That's gonna do it for us, but we got some brand new, really exciting merch over in the McElroy merch store. Go to mcelroymerch.com, check out the pin of the month. Sawbones Number Two Books, having to do with an episode they did about the impact that books have on people's digestion. Let's just say that. Uh, the proceeds—

Teresa: Book stores.

Travis: Book stores, thank you.

Teresa: Have on people's digestion.

Travis: Yeah, don't eat books.

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: The benefits— the sale of those pins benefits the National Black Women's Justice Institute. They research, elevate, and educate the public about innovative, community-led solutions to address the criminalization of Black women and girls. We've got our 20 rendezvous pins for the new year, 20 rendezvous. Uh, two pins. One is prom style of me, Justin, and Griffin, and one is the three of us on a floating tandem bicycle.

Uh, they're available individually or as a pair, and they're designed by Lucas Hesperheide. So go check those out, and inspired by I believe Justin and Sydnee is a "I'm not ashamed of my clown husband" sticker. That also applies to you, honey!

Teresa: [laughs]

Travis: Aw, that's great! It's designed by Jacob Bailey and it benefits the Huntington Children's Museum, which is creating child-centered spaces that promote exploration and a love for learning through play, so go check those out.

Teresa: I gotta get one of those.

Travis: Okay. It's funny when I say it. Um, go check out all the other amazing shows on Maximumfun.org. If you wanna see all the other McElroy projects, you can go to mcelroy.family. What else, Teresa?

Teresa: We always thank Brent "brentalfloss" Black for writing our theme music, which is available as a ringtone where those are found. Thank you to Kayla M. Wasil for our Twitter thumbnail art. That's @shmannerstcast, and that's where we get listener-submitted questions when we call for that. Um, so give us a follow. Also, thank you to Bruja Betty Pinup Photography for the cover picture of our fan-run Facebook group, *Shmanners* Fanners. If you love to give and get excellent advice from other fans, please join that group today. Also, thank you so much to Rachel, our editor. Thank you to Alex, our researcher and writer, and we would not be able to do the show without you folks.

Um, if you would like to submit a topic or an idiom or just say hi to Alex, you can email us, shmannerstcast@gmail.com.

Travis: That's gonna do it for us, so join us again next week!

Teresa: No RSVP required!

Travis: You've been listening to *Shmanners*...

Teresa: Manners, *Shmanners*. Get it.

[theme music plays]

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