

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

[00:00:01] **Jesse Thorn:** Welcome to the *Judge John Hodgman* podcast. I'm Bailiff Jesse Thorn. This week, "No Pun and Shut Case". Mary brings the case against her roommate, Salma. They're both fans of the card game *PUNDERDOME*, but Mary says Salma is a cheater. When they play, Salma doesn't make puns, just jokes. Who's right? Who's wrong? Only one can decide.

(Chairs squeak, followed by heavy footsteps and a door closing.)

Please rise as Judge John Hodgman enters the courtroom and presents an obscure cultural reference.

[00:00:31] **John Hodgman:** "Okay. Let me get this straight. While we were all playing fair, digging these infernal rocks, you were cheating the system just by buying yourself a golden parsnip? Using money you inherited from cancer?!"

[00:00:43] **Jo Firestone:** "Yeah, dummy, that's how generational wealth works."

[00:00:46] **John Hodgman:** Bailiff Jesse Thorn, please swear them in.

[00:00:48] **Jesse Thorn:** Mary and Salma, please rise and raise your right hands.

(Chairs squeak.)

Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God or Whatever?

(They swear.)

Do you swear to abide by Judge John Hodgman's ruling, despite the fact that when it comes to puns, he's no summertime fun time bailiff, Monte Belmonte?

(They swear.)

Judge Hodgman, you may proceed.

[00:01:09] **John Hodgman:** That's absolutely true. No, no one is the pun master like Monte Belmonte. Unless it is our mystery guest, who snuck in on the obscure cultural reference! Let's talk about that, as they say on the internet. Mary, Salma, you may be seated for an immediate summary judgment in one of yours favors.

(Chairs squeak.)

Can either of you name the piece of culture that I referenced as I entered the courtroom?
Well, well, how about—mm, Salma, how about you go first?

[00:01:33] **Salma:** I'm sorry, I have no clue.

[00:01:35] **John Hodgman:** Oooh, but you must have a guess! Wait a minute, wait a minute!

(Mary and Salma laugh.)

I noticed Mary is whispering and trying to pass you a note. You know, this is a summary—if Salma were to get it right, Mary, I would find in her favor, and this would be over.

(Mary concedes.)

You'd never learn the identity of the mystery expert witness. Don't you want to know, Mary?

[00:01:59] **Mary:** I do. I desperately do.

[00:02:00] **John Hodgman:** Alright, then you better not guess correctly. Go ahead. What's your guess?

[00:02:05] **Mary:** My guess is *Murder on Sex Island* by Jo Firestone.

[00:02:09] **John Hodgman:** *Murder on Sex Island* by Jo Firestone. Interesting guess. Is that the note you were trying to pass to Salma?

[00:02:18] **Mary:** Well, I had prepared a couple of options. *(Laughs.)*

[00:02:20] **John Hodgman:** Alright, give Salma an option then.

[00:02:25] **Salma:** *Mad Max: Welcome to Thunderdome.*

[00:02:28] **John Hodgman:** *Mad Max: Welcome to Thunderdome.* Okay, all guesses are wrong.

(They laugh.)

Your best guess... Was, of course, *Murder on Sex Island*—the new novel by Jo Firestone. Go out and get it immediately, everybody. I'll say the title again, Jesse. *Murder on Sex Island* by Jo Firestone, apropos of nothing. Wondering why you brought that up.

As far as *Mad Max: Welcome to Thunderdome*, mmm, it's called *Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome*. Please, please respect my Generation X roots. We don't need another hero.

We only need what's beyond Thunderdome, quoth Tina Turner. Two men enter, one man leaves. Or in your case, two roommates enter, one roommate leaves. Welcome to my Thunderdome. Who seeks justice in my post-apocalyptic court?

[00:03:21] **Mary:** I do, your honor.

[00:03:22] **John Hodgman:** That would be Mary. What is the nature of your dispute?

[00:03:25] **Mary:** So, my roommates and I, we love to play the game *PUNDERDOME* by Jo and Fred Firestone. And when I play with Salma, she submits answers I contend are not, in fact, puns. And I mean, I have to be honest, granted, sometimes my answers aren't exactly the best puns either, but I submit that mine are more relevant and more punny than Salma's puns.

[00:03:58] **John Hodgman:** Closer to pun on the pun spectrum.

(Mary agrees emphatically.)

Mary, let me interrupt you for a moment. You've listened to this podcast before, right?

(Mary confirms.)

You know that I publicly loathe puns. And, indeed, most wordplay. Well, how did you think—why did you think you would find justice here?

[00:04:18] **Mary:** *(Laughs.)* Because this is a space for silliness and honesty. And—

[00:04:27] **John Hodgman:** *(Sighs.)* Jesse, she got me on the silliness/honesty technicality.

[00:04:32] **Jesse Thorn:** Yeah, classic. Classic blunder you made by creating a space for silliness and honesty.

[00:04:37] **John Hodgman:** Yeah. Well, Mary, you're right there. Alright, Salma, you know that I privately actually love wordplay and puns. Why did you think you could get away with not making puns in *PUNDERDOME*?

[00:04:50] **Salma:** Well, my argument is that Mary's argument is moot.

[00:04:55] **John Hodgman:** Mary is moot!

[00:04:57] **Salma:** Her argument is moot, because there is no pun spectrum. Either you submit a pun, or you don't submit a pun. And while hers—while she claims hers are more punny, my argument is that there's no such thing.

[00:05:13] **John Hodgman:** Okay. Okay. Are you making puns or not?

[00:05:15] **Salma:** Am I making puns or—? Okay. So, (*chuckling*) full disclosure, when I first started playing this game, I didn't really know what a pun was. (*Laughs.*)

[00:05:25] **John Hodgman:** Oh, wow. Okay. Fair.

[00:05:26] **Salma:** So, I'm going to be completely honest. So, I was not submitting puns. I was submitting jokes, but so was Mary! Our roommate, Benny, was the only one who was technically submitting puns. So, Mary tried to get me disqualified, but I argued that she should be disqualified too, under those standards.

[00:05:44] **John Hodgman:** And Benny, unfortunately, has passed away. That's why he's not here?

[00:05:47] **Salma:** Yes. We do have an expert witness statement from him. (*Laughs.*)

[00:05:51] **John Hodgman:** Okay, real quick, for the benefit of those in the audience who may not know the game. This is a card game, right, Mary? Give me a very quick rundown.

[00:06:00] **Mary:** Yes. So, this is a card game where there are two stacks of cards. One is situations, and one is like things. And you play with a group, and one person is designated like the judge, the picker, who picks two of those cards and submits them to the group for each person to write down a pun that combines the two things on the cards—the situation and the thing, the object.

[00:06:30] **John Hodgman:** Okay. Alright, alright, I got you. And how long has this been in your life, Salma? *PUNDERDOME?*

[00:06:34] **Salma:** About a year now.

[00:06:35] **John Hodgman:** Okay, about a year now. So, obviously it would be foolish for me to speak further without consulting our expert witness for reasons that shall become obvious. Jesse, would you please welcome the expert witness to the court?

[00:06:48] **Jesse Thorn:** Our expert witness is not only a brilliant comic and comedy writer, one of the two hosts of Maximum Fun's very own *Dr. Gameshow*, Jo Firestone.

[00:06:57] **John Hodgman:** Jo Firestone, welcome to the program. Hello!

(*Jo thanks him.*)

Now, you are the co-host of *Dr. Gameshow*, a wonderful podcast here on the network that I've been a part of, and I enjoy very much as a listener.

[00:07:11] **Jo Firestone:** Thank you. Mutual.

[00:07:12] **John Hodgman:** You play games—thank you! You play games with—you play games with people live on telephone. All different kinds of fun, interesting games. And apart from being the author of *Murder on Sex Island*, the new novel, the breakout hit *Murder on Sex Island* by Jo Firestone—which we're going to talk about little bit later in the program—you are also the co-creator of a particular card game involving puns called...?

[00:07:42] **Jo Firestone:** Do you want me to say it?

(John confirms.)

Oh, okay. *PUNDERDOME*. It's called *PUNDERDOME*. This is the card—yeah.

[00:07:46] **John Hodgman:** *PUNDERDOME!* This is it. You are the co-creator of this game!

[00:07:49] **Jo Firestone:** That's true. Yeah. I'm the reason these two people are feuding.

[00:07:54] **John Hodgman:** Yeah, and you're—arguably, you're the reason that Benny is no longer with us!

(They laugh.)

Jo, what is the genesis of the game *PUNDERDOME*?

[00:08:04] **Jo Firestone:** Well, it started as a live show in Brooklyn. And I did it with my dad, and then we—you know, everyone's always screaming, “Merch, merch, merch!” And you know, you're always saying, “Calm down, I can't! I can't.” But then, you know—then, you know, you get an opportunity to make a card game. Right?

(John confirms.)

And you take it. And so, we made this card game.

[00:08:31] **John Hodgman:** It's called the American dream.

[00:08:32] **Jo Firestone:** That's exactly what I'm getting at. And basically, it's like, you know, we're trying to—so, then people could play at home the game that, you know, only some people could play in Brooklyn, because it's a live show.

[00:08:47] **John Hodgman:** Got it. And it is—and somehow it found its way into Salma and Mary's lives along with Benny.

[00:08:55] **Jo Firestone:** Yeah. I always wonder who's actually playing it and turns out it's a source of conflict among people that live together. That's what I found out today.

[00:09:04] **John Hodgman:** Jo Firestone, before we proceed to the case, I just realized that I didn't reveal the obscure cultural reference! Now that you have joined us, Mystery Expert Witness, of course, the other voice in the obscure cultural reference was Jo Firestone replaying—here, live for your ears—the role originated by Jo Firestone of Miriam Sather on the television program *Dicktown* on Hulu, co-created by me and David Rees. Thank you for joining us, Jo.

[00:09:32] **Jo Firestone:** Oh, thank you for having me. Congrats on contributing to culture in such a profound way.

[00:09:39] **John Hodgman:** And to you as well! Because not only did we make this cartoon, but you co-created a game that is now causing conflict in the lives of these two women.

[00:09:48] **Jo Firestone:** Thanks. Appreciate it. Thank you. Thank you.

[00:09:50] **John Hodgman:** Yeah. So, alright. Mary, give me an example of some puns, some responses that you've played in the game of *PUNDERDOME* that you think are good puns. And also, some examples of the crimes of Salma.

[00:10:08] **Mary:** Okay. So, I'm gonna go from bad to worse. Or from—(*laughing*) no, from good to worse. Good to bad. Okay. This one I think is a really good one.

Our teacher, Mr. Goodbar, gave us a lollipop quiz.

[00:10:22] **John Hodgman:** Our teacher—and this is a response to what things? What were the cards? Roughly speaking.

[00:10:28] **Mary:** It was, I think, candy and teaching. Or candy and testing, maybe? I don't really remember.

[00:10:35] **John Hodgman:** Alright, alright, candy and testing. Do you remember these particular cards, Jo? You have them memorized, of course. I presume.

[00:10:41] **Jo Firestone:** Of course, I definitely memorized—yeah, those are cards, for sure!

[00:10:46] **John Hodgman:** Those are cards, for sure, says Jo Firestone! So, “Our teacher, Mr. Goodbar—” What was the rest?

[00:10:53] **Mary:** Gave us a lollipop quiz.

[00:10:55] **John Hodgman:** A lollipop quiz. That's—alright! I got you. What do you think about that one, Jo Firestone? Pun?

[00:11:04] **Jo Firestone:** I think it's a pun!

(*John agrees.*)

Lollipop, Mr. Goodbar. That's a teacher and a candy bar. Lollipop, that's a candy. Pop quiz, that's a quiz.

[00:11:14] **John Hodgman:** You run them both together, what you got right there is a pun.

(Jo agrees.)

PUNDERDOME! Alright.

(Dramatically.) PUNDER... DOME.

Alright, Mary, give me an example of something that Salma offered instead. Do you have an example of one of the things that made you so mad?

[00:11:32] **Mary:** Yes. This one made me mad, actually. *(Laughs.)* It made me laugh, but I was mad. This one is—

[00:11:38] **Salma:** Objection.

[00:11:40] **John Hodgman:** Overruled.

(They laugh.)

[00:11:43] **Mary:** Thank you, your honor. “Knock, knock. Who is there? Deez Nuts.”

[00:11:52] **John Hodgman:** *(John snorts out a laugh.)* What would the bit—Salma, in—

[00:11:56] **Jesse Thorn:** Sorry, I just want to make sure I heard that correctly. So, what I heard was: “Knock, knock. Who's there. Deez Nuts.”

[00:12:06] **Mary:** That is correct.

[00:12:07] **John Hodgman:** Jo, did you catch that one? It was, “Knock, knock. Who's there? Deez Nuts.”

[00:12:13] **Jo Firestone:** Oh, what was the topic for this one?

[00:12:17] **John Hodgman:** Good question.

[00:12:17] **Mary:** This one—I remember this one. This one was nuts and berries and cheating!

[00:12:23] **John Hodgman:** Well, it was on topic insofar as that's not how you play the game.

(They laugh.)

Salma, explain that answer. Explain that response. Do you remember what it was? It's "Knock, knock." Jesse, I can't remember now. What was it, Jesse?

[00:12:37] **Jesse Thorn:** It went, "Knock, knock." The response to that was, "Who's there?" Then, in return, the response "Deez Nuts".

[00:12:48] **John Hodgman:** Deez Nuts. And the prompt that it was a response to was—what?—nuts and cheating? Is that right?

[00:12:52] **Mary:** Nuts and berries. And cheating.

[00:12:54] **John Hodgman:** Nuts and berries, plus cheating. Okay. Alright. Salma, we've bought you enough time to craft a response.

[00:13:03] **Salma:** *(Laughs.)* Look, your honor, I don't claim to be good at this game. I think it's definitely a joke. It's not a pun. But I think my argument is that Mary was also not submitting puns. So, we either play by the rules or we make new rules.

[00:13:19] **John Hodgman:** Uh, how was Mary not playing by the rules?

[00:13:22] **Salma:** So, I have an example of something she submitted.

[00:13:24] **John Hodgman:** Here we go. Can I hear what the prompt is first? Do you remember?

[00:13:29] **Salma:** It was the same one. It was nuts and berries and cheating.

[00:13:30] **John Hodgman:** Nuts and berries and cheating. Okay. This is a one-to-one comparison. This is an *Apples-to-Apples* comparison. Sorry, Jo Firestone, to mention another card game.

[00:13:41] **Salma:** So, it's "The grizzly bear cheated on his hibernation diet of nuts and berries by raiding the dumpster."

[00:13:46] **Jo Firestone:** Okay, so you did just write a sentence.

(They laugh.)

[00:13:51] **Mary:** I like—I told a story that found a meeting point, an intersection of two random, disparate thoughts. I crafted an entire world and logic with them.

(John and Jo concede.)

And I think that that is, on its face, more relevant and good-er than “Knock, knock. Who's there? Deez Nuts.”

(Salma and Mary giggle.)

[00:14:29] **John Hodgman:** May I remind you, Mary, the name of the game is *PUNDERDOME*, not *Worldbuilding-er-Dome*?

(Mary concedes.)

[00:14:35] **Jo Firestone:** Hey, that's a really good idea for a game!

[00:14:36] **John Hodgman:** Yeah, you know, George R. R. Martin would only win. Worldbuilding. Famous for his worldbuilding.

[00:14:43] **Transition:** Three gavel bangs.

[00:14:47] **Transition:** Three gavel bangs.

[00:14:00] **John Hodgman:** Jo Firestone, you heard this worldbuilding argument. What do you think about this?

[00:14:55] **Jo Firestone:** Okay, so in this round, I'm just trying to paint a picture. These people are sitting around a table. A table, right? You're playing in the living room, or in the kitchen?

[00:15:04] **Mary:** An ottoman.

[00:15:06] **Jo Firestone:** You're playing on an ottoman?! Okay. Okay.

[00:15:08] **Mary:** Around an ottoman, woah.

[00:15:10] **Jo Firestone:** Okay. So, already, they're—

[00:15:12] **Jesse Thorn:** Again, world building.

[00:15:14] **Jo Firestone:** Tough, though. Already—they're all sitting around. It's daytime, or it's night?

[00:15:19] **Mary:** Night. Yeah, definitely night.

[00:15:21] **Jo Firestone:** Week-a-day or a weekend?

[00:15:25] **Salma:** Weekends, typically.

[00:15:23] **Mary:** It's gotta be. It's gotta be weekend.

[00:15:26] **Jo Firestone:** So, this is Saturday night, maybe New Year's Eve, right?

[00:15:31] **Mary:** Oh, this was—Yeah, Sunday. This was Sunday night. This was after a family dinner.

[00:15:35] **Jo Firestone:** Okay, so you're both full.

(They confirm with laughter.)

And I just, you know, one person suggests “Knock, knock, who's there?” And then who was it at the door?

[00:15:49] **Salma:** Deez Nuts. *(Giggles.)*

[00:15:51] **John Hodgman:** It was either Deez Nuts or doze nuts. Deez Nuts, I think it was.

[00:15:55] **Jo Firestone:** Deez Nuts, right. And then—

[00:15:56] **Jesse Thorn:** So, Deez Nuts answered the door. No, Deez Nuts was knocking at the door.

[00:16:01] **John Hodgman:** the door. They were knocking. We don't even know if the door was open, honestly.

[00:16:04] **Jo Firestone:** It's hard to know who was at the door. I mean, who was opening the door may be the bear. But—and the other person's suggestion is that a bear kind of goes on a story, kind of like *Blueberries for Sal*, almost, kind of. And I guess I'm just wondering if this third roommate, whoever they are—

[00:16:26] **John Hodgman:** Yeah, was Benny dead by then?

(Mary laughs.)

Or was he still playing?

[00:16:31] **Mary:** He was alive. He was alive. Was. *(Laughs.)*

[00:16:32] **Jo Firestone:** If Benny—Okay, well, do you remember what Benny submitted?

(Mary confirms.)

What did Benny submit?

[00:16:38] **Mary:** It was really good. He said, “I do nut like to play this game with Salma, because she does not know how to play.”

(They laugh.)

[00:16:47] **John Hodgman:** She does not know how to play or does nut know how to play?

[00:16:49] **Mary:** *(Chuckling.)* Does nut, sorry. Two nuts, there.

[00:16:52] **John Hodgman:** Two—Deez Nuts! Wow. And so, in the game, there's someone making a judgment as to which is the best response. So, who was the judger in this case? Is that the term, Jo Firestone? Judger?

[00:17:11] **Jo Firestone:** Oh, I think it's maybe called doctor. Whoever's the doctor. Mary, you got it? Who was it?

[00:17:16] **Mary:** It's first prompter.

(Jo confirms confidently.)

It's also the host, it says here.

[00:17:22] **John Hodgman:** Got it. First prompter. But the first prompter makes the judgment.

[00:17:26] **Mary:** Yes. According to the rules, yes.

[00:17:29] **John Hodgman:** Okay. So, who won that round on the day?

[00:17:33] **Mary:** Well, Benny. *(Chuckles.)*

[00:17:37] **Jesse Thorn:** May he rest in peace.

[00:17:40] **John Hodgman:** Let's not—let's suppose for the moment, Jo Firestone, that not only is Benny dead, but Benny actually never existed. And this game, this round was played entirely and exclusively between Salma and Mary.

[00:17:52] **Jo Firestone:** *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind!*

(John agrees.)

Excuse me, the game cannot be played with less than three players.

[00:18:01] **John Hodgman:** Oh, boy. Okay. I've got one. I'll play.

(Jo tags him in.)

What is it? What is it? Nuts? Nuts and berries and cheating?

(They confirm.)

It's not even worth my time to cheat at this game. I hate it so much, I pecan't (*pecan/can't*) even with it.

[00:18:23] **Salma:** That was good!

[00:18:25] **John Hodgman:** But I don't hate the game. I like the game. I was just—I just had to come up with something. You understand, Jo Firestone.

[00:18:30] **Jo Firestone:** That was good, that was good.

[00:18:31] **John Hodgman:** Love the game. Okay, so obviously I would win that round, but!

(Jo concedes with surprise and the others laugh.)

Alright, no, no, no, look. You're the—you are the first prompter in my life, Jo Firestone. Of those three, which wins? And which comes in second?

[00:18:45] **Jo Firestone:** That's really an uncomfortable position you're putting me in. Okay. I'll just say this. Okay? I think that if you just had—listen, if you had everybody operating on all cylinders, which clearly that's just not the case, you know what I mean? Sunday evening, everyone is so full. Okay? So, say—let's just say we had knockout, then another knockout, and then we had Deez Nuts at the door. Okay? I would say, “Deez Nuts, you gotta go back out that door. You're not coming in, okay?”

(John “woah”s.)

If we had knockout—we had knockout, and then we had bear going to eat, right? That's the summary of your story?

(Mary confirms.)

Bear going to eat. I'd say, “Bear, you better go out that door. Go meet those nuts.”

So, I would suggest what you've created is an ecosystem where both of you cannot play this game with anyone else. You would have to play together.

(Everyone laughs.)

[00:19:52] **John Hodgman:** Jo, when you were hosting the live show, did you often receive submissions that were not actually puns?

[00:20:01] **Jo Firestone:** The live show has a kind of a vibe of frenzied mob, so if they don't deliver puns, the contestants—the mob gets so angry with them. There's lots of shouting and screaming and accusations. It's like a very wild event, so I wouldn't really have to be the judge on that.

[00:20:24] **John Hodgman:** It is a *PUNDERDOME*, after all.

(Jo agrees.)

Yeah. Okay. So, in this case, if an answer is funnier but not punnier, Jo, which should win?

[00:20:35] **Jo Firestone:** Funnier but not punnier.

[00:20:35] **John Hodgman:** Well, I mean, Deez Nuts is funnier than a bear comes out of hibernation—? Whatever it was. It wasn't funny, Mary. Right?

(Mary agrees.)

Will you agree it wasn't funny? It was more of a sentence.

(Mary agrees.)

[00:20:48] **Jesse Thorn:** I sometimes wonder if I should abandon my career in comedy and just go back to being 17 and saying Deez Nuts a lot. Because I really can't think of anything funnier. *(Chuckles.)*

[00:21:03] **John Hodgman:** It's pretty funny.

[00:21:05] **Jesse Thorn:** It's always a surprise. *(Titters.)* It's a little vulgar.

[00:21:08] **John Hodgman:** Should funny triumph over punny? Jo Firestone, do you have an opinion?

[00:21:14] **Jo Firestone:** So, I'm just gonna say this is that I have not, to be fully honest, looked at this game in about, I'd say—let's go ahead and say five to six years. Okay? I mean, maybe I glanced at it when I moved, put them in boxes. But here's what it says on the box, okay? And I'm pretty sure I wrote this copy; I don't know for sure. But it says, "The most terrible punster wins."

[00:21:42] **John Hodgman:** Woooh! Jo, that's a looot of ambiguity there. Because if you presume from the point of view that all puns are groan-worthy and terrible, then the one who makes the pun that is the most weird, dad-ish, and awful is the one who wins. But if you presume that what you mean is the person who is least capable of making a pun, then the

most terrible punster would be—well, in this case it's both of you, Mary and Salma, but overall, it sounds like Salma.

So, who wins? Interesting.

[00:22:21] **Jo Firestone:** It's just a little cornstarch to thicken the pot.

[00:22:24] **John Hodgman:** I appreciate that!

(Jesse laughs.)

We are now in a thick gravy of a case, that's for sure! Salma, you asked that if I were to rule in your favor, that I would prohibit Mary from making you the, quote, “butt of jokes”. Explain.

[00:22:42] **Salma:** So, as you've seen, I'm not very good at this game. *(Chuckles.)*

[00:22:48] **John Hodgman:** Well, hang on! You didn't write that thing about the bear.

(They laugh.)

[00:22:53] **Salma:** I did not. *(Laughs.)* But I think that I tend to be the butt of the joke amongst Mary and Benny, rest his soul. *(Laughs.)* And they both make fun of me because of the jokes that I submit. And they tell me that I don't know what a pun is. And maybe I did not at the time! But I submit, your honor, that neither did Mary. So, that is what I need from you, please.

[00:23:24] **John Hodgman:** Mary, do you make some of the “butt of” jokes?

[00:23:28] **Mary:** I don't think that I make her the butt of jokes. I honestly think I make fun of Benny way more. But I will admit that Benny and I—

[00:23:37] **John Hodgman:** *(Interrupting with playful disgust.)* That's really cruel. That's really cruel.

(Salma and Mary laugh.)

What, do you dance on his grave? Wow.

[00:23:46] **Mary:** *(Through laughter.)* When he was still alive. I would never—I would never besmirch the dead.

[00:23:49] **John Hodgman:** Benny is alive, everybody. Don't worry. Benny is alive.

(They laugh.)

Just a little humor.

[00:23:56] **Jesse Thorn:** He's alive and well and living in Paris.

[00:23:58] **Mary:** But I do admit that Benny and I have a tendency, when we are playing games—this one included—to gang up a little bit on Salma. I'm not proud of it, but I find that—I don't know. Sometimes our brains—and I like this; like I like that our brains don't work the same way, but sometimes I'm just like, “What?!” And I feel that acutely with this example.

[00:24:28] **John Hodgman:** How would you describe—I'm just freestyling a new card game that I'm coming up with. Describe your friend's brain as though it were some kind of vehicle. What kind of car, plane, train, or funicular is your brain, Mary? And what is Salma's brain like?

[00:24:47] **Mary:** Hot air balloon.

[00:24:48] **John Hodgman:** Who's that?

[00:24:49] **Mary:** Me.

[00:24:50] **John Hodgman:** Yeah! Hot air balloon. Okay. And Salma is what, Mary?

[00:24:56] **Mary:** Salma is Amtrak.

[00:24:58] **John Hodgman:** Woah! Alright!

[00:25:01] **Mary:** I don't know why! That's the first thing that came to mind!

[00:25:02] **John Hodgman:** No, I love that it came to mind!

(Salma and Mary laugh and talk over each other.)

[00:25:06] **Jesse Thorn:** Because she constantly has to defer to freight trains.

[00:25:07] **John Hodgman:** Why hot air balloon?

[00:25:13] **Mary:** Yeah, there's lots of going up and down. It requires a lot of hot air, bluster, perhaps a bit of creative thinking to get from one place to the other, but also going with the breeze and kind of slow.

[00:25:29] **John Hodgman:** Untethered. Untethered and nonlinear.

[00:25:34] **Mary:** Couldn't have put it better myself, Judge.

[00:25:35] **John Hodgman:** Alright. Interesting. Whereas Amtrak Salma over there, you got a one-track mind? Deez Nuts?

[00:25:44] **Mary:** Well, no! Many, many tracks! Amtrak has many tracks. Sometimes—

[00:25:48] **John Hodgman:** Uh-huh. Yeah, I've seen it.

(They laugh.)

I mean, I think honestly, when you—the first thing that comes to mind is Amtrak—you're trying to disparage your friend by calling her an Amtrak train, but I'd point out that Amtrak gets where it's going most of the time. And if you were trying to take a hot air balloon up the Northeast Corridor to Boston, you'd probably never get there!

[00:26:11] **Mary:** I agree. And in fact, I have an Amtrak Guest Rewards card. I use Amtrak all the time. *(Laughs.)*

[00:26:19] **John Hodgman:** Wow. But if I may, you were suggesting—and maybe this is where it came from, this word suggestion—that Salma's non-puns stop the game in its tracks?!

(Mary gasps.)

Yeah, I got there.

(Mary agrees with excitement.)

Jo Firestone, I got there.

(Jo cheers.)

I got a gasp.

[00:26:37] **Jo Firestone:** That was really—you got it really fast, like an Acela!

(They laugh.)

[00:26:42] **John Hodgman:** Relatively fast. Nothing like those European gasps. So, Salma says that she feels like she's the butt of jokes, Mary. How does that make you feel?

[00:26:53] **Mary:** Well, that doesn't make me feel good.

[00:26:55] **John Hodgman:** Yeah, that's why I asked!

(Mary laughs.)

That's why I put it that way. It's time for reflection.

[00:27:01] **Mary:** Hmm. Don't care for that. But okay. (*Beat.*) Yeah. No, that doesn't make me feel good. And I have heard this from other people in my life, namely Benny—who also doesn't appreciate it when I make fun of him. I come from a family where we express love through making fun of each other.

[00:27:27] **John Hodgman:** Oh no, not one of those families!

[00:27:31] **Mary:** (*Laughs.*) So, like that's how you know when you're like in. When you're here, you're family. When I'm making fun of you, you're family.

[00:27:40] **John Hodgman:** (*Chuckling.*) Right. When you're here and you feel like garbage, you're family.

(*They laugh.*)

Hm.

[00:27:46] **Mary:** And I have—I'm a perennial big sister too. Like, I do it to my brother. I do it to my cousins.

[00:27:57] **John Hodgman:** And to your roommates. Salma, is Mary a teaser in other aspects or just in the *PUNDERDOME*?

[00:28:03] **Salma:** I think primarily in the *PUNDERDOME*. I do think Benny sometimes deserves it, I must say. (*Laughs.*)

[00:28:09] **John Hodgman:** Oh-ho-ho-ho! Easy to beat up on Benny!

[00:28:17] **Salma:** Rest in peace. (*Laughs.*)

[00:28:18] **John Hodgman:** Rest in peace, Benny. Boy, oh boy. This guy's just getting roasted to death again and again! Mary, if I were to find in your favor, what would you have me rule?

[00:28:30] **Mary:** I would like—I had initially wrote down that I would like you to rule that all answers in the game must be relevant wordplay. So, that's how I envision—

[00:28:45] **John Hodgman:** Mm-hm. Gotta be a pun. Gotta be a pun.

[00:28:47] **Mary:** Right. And relevant! Also.

[00:28:50] **John Hodgman:** What, to current events?

[00:28:52] **Mary:** To the prompts! To the prompts.

[00:28:53] **Jesse Thorn:** To our times today.

[00:28:55] **Mary:** (*Laughs.*) Right. In these unprecedented times. And I would like it on fake internet record that my puns are more relevant and more punny than Salma's. And that's what I wrote down. But after talking, I also would like a ruling that would result in us—like, kind of minimizing this chaos that happens when we play of not really knowing like what counts and what doesn't count, and also— So, like, yeah—and to keep the proverbial train going. Like, idea train. Train of thought? Oh, there it is! I got there. Train of thought rolling.

[00:29:46] **John Hodgman:** Yeah, sure. The Salma Amtrak Express. Okay. Well, obviously, I have my own thoughts on this matter. But unfortunately, the law on this is very clear. Two roommates enter, one roommate leaves. You understand what I'm saying, right, Jo?

(Jo agrees sadly.)

Yeah. So, please take some time to prepare yourselves, because when we come back we'll settle this the old-fashioned way: trial by *PUNDERDOME*.

[00:30:08] **Clip:**

Sound Effect: Thunderous booming.

Voices: (*Echoing ominously.*) *PUNDERDOME!*

(The sounds fade to quiet.)

Jo Firestone: Welcome.

[00:30:14] **Jesse Thorn:** Please rise as Judge John Hodgman exits the courtroom.

(Chairs squeak, followed by heavy footsteps and a door closing.)

Mary, how do you feel about this shocking revelation?

[00:30:23] **Mary:** I feel pumped. I feel... a little scared to be put on the spot, but I feel confident in my abilities.

[00:30:39] **Jesse Thorn:** How are you feeling, Salma?

[00:30:39] **Salma:** I'm feeling okay. I'm still thinking about being compared to Amtrak, and I don't know how I feel about it! (*Laughs.*)

[00:30:46] **Mary:** Oh, God. I feel bad now. (*Laughs.*)

[00:30:49] **Salma:** But I'm excited to hear the judge's ruling.

[00:30:53] **Jesse Thorn:** If Benny were alive today, how do you think he would feel?

[00:30:56] **Mary:** Well, he actually wrote (*laughs.*) a statement. So, I think he would feel justified hearing from Jo and Judge Hodgman that neither of our answers are in fact puns, because he maintains that he feels very strongly that neither of us are making puns in this case. So, I think—yeah, I think he would feel pretty justified and pretty happy with himself!

[00:31:22] **Jesse Thorn:** We'll see what Judge Hodgman has to say about all this when we come back in just a moment.

[00:31:27] **Transition:** Three gavel bangs.

[00:31:32] **Transition:** Three gavel bangs.

[00:31:34] **Jesse Thorn:** Judge Hodgman, we just premiered the stream of the grand finale—the end of the road special of our Van Freaks Roadshow Tour. And it was great to see it; it was great to enjoy it with everybody. My only disappointment is that if people didn't watch that stream, they'll never have the chance to watch it!

[00:31:53] **John Hodgman:** Bailiff Jesse Thorn, you are a liar! I say respectfully. A liar, sir. For indeed, yes, if you missed the stream premiere, you can still watch it! Go over to VanFreaksRoadshow.com, get tickets, and you can watch that stream all the way until December the 3rd! And you don't want to miss this show. If you wait for the podcast version, you're going to miss a bunch of stuff that's exclusive to the web stream. A lot of behind-the-scenes antics, a lot of fun B-roll, a lot of songs and delights and surprises. And frankly, an incredible visual tableau of standup foamcore Richard Kind that you're not going to be able to get just using your ears. You want to use your eyes. And unfortunately, you can't smell this thing. So, it's just your eyes and ears.

[00:32:39] **Jesse Thorn:** VanFreaksRoadshow.com is where you can go to get your ticket to watch our grand finale. It is a fully produced extravaganza that you're really going to enjoy sitting at home with your family! Have a nice quiet night in with Jesse, John, Jonathan Coulton, our friends from the *Antiques Roadshow*. And of course, two giant Richard Kinds.

[00:33:01] **John Hodgman:** VanFreaksRoadShow.com.

[00:33:04] **Jesse Thorn:** Let's get back to the case!

[00:33:06] **Transition:** Three gavel bangs.

[00:33:05] **Jesse Thorn:** Please rise as Judge John Hodgman reenters the courtroom and presents his verdict.

(*Chairs squeak, followed by heavy footsteps and a door closing.*)

[00:33:14] **John Hodgman:** (*Voice echoing as flame sounds erupt around him.*) GATHER AROUND MY *PUNDERDOME*!

(*Returning to his usual pleasant tone.*) It's not my *PUNDERDOME*, of course. It's all of ours *PUNDERDOMES*, co-created by Jo Firestone, who's here. And in fact, I am not going to lead this play. I am also going to play along. That's right! I will also enter the *PUNDERDOME*. Because as I have learned, at least three people must play. Right, Jo?

[00:33:33] **Jo Firestone:** Yeah, that's the rule. That's what it says.

[00:33:35] **John Hodgman:** Now, Jo, you have the most tenuous grasp of all of us on the purported rules of this game.

[00:33:41] **Jo Firestone:** Tenuous meaning thin?

(*John confirms.*)

Got it.

[00:33:42] **John Hodgman:** (*Chuckling.*) Wouldn't you agree?

(*Jo agrees.*)

But you are the one who has the box there.

(*Jo confirms.*)

And you are also the co-creator, so I'm going to let you be the judge of who wins. And this is going to serve a couple of purposes. One, simple listener bloodthirst. They love it. Two, we're actually going to get some real-time examples of the kinds of answers that Salma gives versus the kind that Mary gives. And three, we're going to determine who is the winner—not only of this game, but of this case. And I'm going to just let—Jo, I'm just going to let you judge based on whatever criteria suits you. Whether it's the best pun, the funniest thing, the most interesting thing, whatever you feel in the moment. And you should obviously feel free to comment.

But before we go into the *PUNDERDOME*, Mary and Salma, you say that Benny has prepared an affidavit?

[00:34:31] **Mary:** Indeed. “It is my humble and non-biased opinion that neither Mary nor Salma have a clear or comprehensive understanding of what a pun is.”

[00:34:40] **John Hodgman:** Alright, so. Thank you, Benny. It's easy for you to say from the grave.

Just to make it perfectly clear what a pun is, let's turn to Summertime Funtime Guest Bailiff Monte Belmonte with a pun-filled definition of pun.

[00:34:54] **Clip:**

Monte Belmonte: Thank you for this opportunity, your honor. Merriam-Webster, whose headquarters is a mere five minutes from where I speak to you now—Springfield, Massachusetts—defines pun as “the usually humorous use of a word in such a way as to suggest two or more of its meanings or the meaning of another word similar in sound”. Usually humorous. Hm.

While I appreciate the pun-ctilious pun-ditry pun-cited by our friends at Merriam-Webster, let me pun-cture this pun-gent pun-tification that by my computation is disren-pun-able, pun-gnacious, re-pun-hensible, pun-nicious, pun-principled and could very well pun-ishable by this or any pun-ther court of law. Puns are not usually humorous. Puns are always humorous!

This case is not pun (*fun*), like the recent case and pun-t (*point*), of Kraft Foods, who tried to convince Merriam-Webster to make moist their word of the year by placing an 8-foot jar of mayonnaise on their Springfield lawn to pun-tition Webster to accept that the only reason people dislike the word moist is because the internet told them they should.

The only reason people dislike puns is because the internet told them they should. And I say that mentality is 2/3rds of a pun. P-U! Puns are always humorous, el pun-to. However, so as to remain pun-ctual. I will not pun-ctuate this talking pun-t any further. Adieu. Adieu. Punning is such sweet sorrow. Yours truly, Summertime Funtime Guest Bailiff, Monte Bel-pun-te.

[00:36:45] **John Hodgman:** Alright, now that we're all clear, I'm gonna warm up. Because I just thought of one. I'm gonna just warm—I'm gonna warm up. Do you mind if I warm up?

(They affirm.)

The prompt is seafood and Creative Writing MFA programs. You don't have to come up with one. I'm warming myself up here. Mary, you're wracking your brain. You don't have to launch the hot air balloon, because all I just want to say—I just—I thought of this one. I'm just warming us up. You ready for this, Jesse? Seafood and MFA Creative Writing programs. And here's my response. Specificity is the sole of narrative.

(They groan and cackle.)

S-O-L-E, sole, the fish.

(Jo cheers.)

Alright. Do I get a point?

[00:37:29] **Jo Firestone:** Uh, no, but—okay, so here's how the game works. You ready?

(John confirms.)

So, I give you a question, and then whoever answers it first gets a little extra time to write theirs. So, there's a little answer—there's a rapid fire around. Okay?

(John confirms.)

Here we go. What time should you go to the dentist?

(Both say “tooth hurty (two thirty)”, but John’s slightly faster.)

John, I'll give it to you. You get extra time. Okay. So, the two categories will be... Here we go. Okay. Let's see this. Okay. I know. Okay.

[00:38:01] **Jesse Thorn:** Do you need extra time, Jo?

[00:38:03] **Jo Firestone:** No. I'm good. I'm ready. *(Laughs.)* Ready? Colors. and dating. Colors and dating. The time starts now.

(Ticking noise.)

I'm gonna just stop you arbitrarily when it's time, but John, you'll get more time than when I stop the other two.

[00:38:21] **John Hodgman:** It's perfectly clear.

(A long pause.)

[00:38:39] **Jo Firestone:** Ookay, that's time for two of you. John, keep writing for as long as you want.

[00:38:47] **John Hodgman:** As long as I want?! Wow, okay. Alright.

[00:38:56] **Jo Firestone:** Ookay.

(Kitchen timer sound.)

And that's time for John. There we go! We've done it. Alright, who would like to share first?

[00:39:05] **John Hodgman:** You can pick someone.

[00:39:07] **Jo Firestone:** Okay, I'll pick someone. John, please go first.

[00:39:14] **John Hodgman:** *(Beat.)* I really blew it on this one, even with the extra time.

[00:39:17] **Jo Firestone:** You blue it?

(Jesse “eey”s playfully.)

[00:39:20] **John Hodgman:** Yeah, that's my—yeah, that's it. I went out on a first date, but I really blue it.

[00:39:25] **Salma:** That's what I have!

(They laugh.)

[00:39:32] **Jo Firestone:** Salma, please share the exact wording of your very similar entry.

[00:39:36] **Salma:** I blue this dinner date.

[00:39:40] **Jo Firestone:** *(Giggles.)* And Mary?

[00:39:42] **Mary:** Mine is: Benjamin Moore is offering a new website, ColorMatch.com.

[00:39:48] **Jesse Thorn:** Oh, that's fun.

(John hums uncertainly.)

Yeah, instead of Match.com, it's ColorMatch.com. It's a dating website. For painting.

[00:39:55] **John Hodgman:** ColorMatch.com. Dating website.

[00:39:56] **Jo Firestone:** Benjamin Moore makes paint.

[00:40:59] **Mary:** I was working very hard to create something from Tinder into tincture.

[00:40:02] **Jo Firestone:** You could blow a dinner date.

[00:40:03] **John Hodgman:** Well, Jo Firestone, who takes that round?

[00:40:08] **Jo Firestone:** I'm passing it over to Jesse. Jesse's gonna decide.

[00:40:12] **Jesse Thorn:** I'm gonna go with Benjamin Moore.

(Several “wow”s from the group.)

[00:40:15] **Mary:** Wow, I actually didn't expect to win that one.

[00:40:20] **Jesse Thorn:** It was—they all contained groan-worthy puns. Only one took the form of a full, clear sentence to which the person speaking had committed. So, that was ultimately the tiebreaker.

[00:40:36] **John Hodgman:** Okay. Also, I didn't know that I was making a pun until Jo pointed it out. That just happened to coincide.

(They laugh.)

[00:40:43] **Salma:** That's how good you are at the game.

[00:40:45] **Jo Firestone:** I just have—I know you're obviously, you know—Jesse, John, I know you're obviously gonna make a decision that's fair and right, but I just wanted to make a couple suggestions.

(John agrees.)

I think maybe that you two need to get more people to play. Because I think that when forced with the pressure of other people's judgments, I do think that you'll both tend to improve significantly—as seen in just now. The other thing that I would recommend is my other card game, which involves no wordplay at all. It's called *Fruits*, and it has not sold very well, but I'd really love for it to—for you all to really get on that train. It doesn't involve almost any talking at all, which I think could be good for you all as well.

So, you know, I just kind of think—I think this is a pretty good time to either promote my own products or—and instruct you all to just expand your social circle even wider. And those are my two suggestions, and I'll let you decide what you need to do, John and Jesse.

[00:41:53] **John Hodgman:** I think that that's wonderful advice, although dangerous to anyone who might play with Mary and Salma. If they expand their friend circle, that's all the more people who wander into that black widow's den and die. So, I don't know. Let's do another and see if Salma can get a point here. Can you give us another couple of prompts?

[00:42:13] **Jo Firestone:** Okay, here we go. You ready?

(John confirms.)

Exercise and holidays.

[00:42:20] **John Hodgman:** Exercise and holidays.

(Timer ticking.)

(Beat.) I'm really not built for this, Jesse Thorn, I gotta tell you.

[00:42:34] **Jo Firestone:** Here's what I would suggest, and obviously it's not—you know, kind of cheating right now, but what I would suggest you do—right?—is you just start listing the holidays, right? You're like—you start listing them. You know, and then you're like, Thanksgiving? More like Absgiving.

[00:42:53] **John Hodgman:** Okay, I'll do that one. Yeah, yeah. Alright, I got mine locked in.

[00:43:00] **Jo Firestone:** Oh, okay! (*Quietly.*) Spanksgiving.

[00:43:02] **John Hodgman:** Oh, okay! Yeah, exercise. Alright, okay. It's good. You can get the—you can get your heart rate up that way. Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Okay. Uhh, mm. Hm.

[00:43:11] **Jo Firestone:** What are you going to get for Christmas, an elliptical-me-Elmo?

Elliptic-Elmo? Elliptical—? Ellip-Tickle-Me-Elmo?

[00:43:26] **John Hodgman:** I think I'm going to stay with “Thanksgiving, why not Absgiving?” (*Laughs.*)

[00:43:31] **Jo Firestone:** Okay!

(*Timer rings.*)

Time's up. John, please share your pun.

[00:43:35] **John Hodgman:** Here's mine. “Canadian Thanksgiving? Why not Canadian Absgiving?” See, I put a riff on it there to make it my own.

[00:43:43] **Jo Firestone:** Yeah, you really did make it your own. I didn't even recognize it.

[00:43:45] **Jesse Thorn:** Yeah, I didn't recognize it.

[00:43:46] **John Hodgman:** Yeah, 'cause Canadian Thanksgiving's in October. And they get a lot of exercise up there. They get outside a lot.

[00:43:56] **Jo Firestone:** Oh, it seems pretty... Okay, who's next? Salma?

[00:44:01] **Salma:** This isn't great, but “I really need a spooky Halloween bench.”

[00:44:07] **Jesse Thorn:** I really need a spooky Halloween... bench?

[00:44:11] **Salma:** As in bench press.

[00:44:15] **Jo Firestone:** As in a Halloween bench! (*Laughs.*) The classic thing that holds jack-o-lanterns!

[00:44:23] **Salma:** (*Laughing.*) Exactly. You see, we're on the same page.

[00:44:27] **John Hodgman:** Uh-huh. Halloween bench. I need a spooky Halloween—alright, interesting. Uh-huh.

[00:44:34] **Jesse Thorn:** A Halloween bench.

[00:44:37] **Jo Firestone:** Yeah, please approach the Halloween bench, Judge John Hodgman!

(They laugh.)

[00:44:41] **John Hodgman:** Yeah, we need to save that for next year at Halloween. But Salma, I gotta really feel for you here, because like I'm all embarrassed, I'm flustered, I'm red in the face, because I can't think of a pun. And I know what a pun is, and you don't! But I even know, so I should have an advantage! But like my brain is racing like the Acela Express from New Haven to Boston. It's hard! I feel really embarrassed. I couldn't come up with even one so far. Oh, I know. "I need a Christmas Day-pass at the gym."

(Jo cheers.)

Ugh, terrible! Go ahead, Mary.

[00:45:19] **Mary:** Okay, "Mariah Carey's new hit song is 'All I Want for Christmas is Sick Gains'."

[00:45:26] **Jesse Thorn:** "All I Want for Christmas is Sick Gains".

[00:45:30] **John Hodgman:** Once again, another considered and full and complete sentence.

[00:45:34] **Jo Firestone:** You two are meant for each other. I've never met a more compatible pair in my life.

(Salma and Mary cackle.)

It's beautiful!

[00:45:43] **Jesse Thorn:** A spooky Halloween bench...

[00:45:48] **John Hodgman:** Is there something I'm missing to the spooky Halloween bench, Salma?

[00:45:53] **Salma:** No. (*Laughs.*)

[00:45:55] **Jesse Thorn:** Well, it's because the Mariah Carey song is called “All I Want for Christmas Is You”. And of course—

[00:46:01] **John Hodgman:** Right. And the pun is there—

[00:46:04] **Jesse Thorn:** The pun here is “sick gains” in the place of “you”.

[00:46:07] **Jo Firestone:** I can't—how'd y'all meet? Craigslist? Heaven? How'd you meet?

[00:46:13] **Mary:** Really? Through my platonic life partner and former roommate, Paul.

[00:46:19] **Jo Firestone:** Paul knows what's going on. Paul knew something was... Paul put you together. That's really good.

[00:46:23] **Jesse Thorn:** Paul's got the touch.

[00:46:27] **John Hodgman:** Yeah, and Paul's dead too, just like Paul McCartney?

(Salma confirms.)

[00:46:30] **Mary:** He's on our doormat, though, so.

[00:46:32] **John Hodgman:** Well, that's two points for Mary. I think that we, maybe—Jo, do you think we have to call it?

[00:46:37] **Jo Firestone:** Yeah, we gotta call it. But honestly, these two are—I really don't know how you're gonna do that, because I think both of these people really, really are at the level of each other, yeah.

(They laugh.)

[00:46:52] **John Hodgman:** In terms of winning the game, Jesse Thorn, would you agree with me that the game that we just played—whatever it was—that Mary won the game, right?

[00:47:03] **Jesse Thorn:** You know who I think won?

[00:47:05] **John Hodgman:** No?

[00:47:04] **Jesse Thorn:** Deez Nuts.

[00:47:10] **Salma:** *(Cackling helplessly.)* Every time!

[00:47:14] **John Hodgman:** What's ironic here is that Mary won the game doing exactly what she accuses Salma of doing, which is responding with non sequiturs that have nothing to do with wordplay whatsoever. Mariah Carey's “All I Want for Christmas is Sick Gains” is not

a pun. The ColorMatch one was arguable, but of the four examples that you've given so far, the two that you brought to the courtroom and the two that you just generated, even you, Mary, are batting 50/50.

And so, I think that you need to go easy on the T's. You need to make sure that Salma is not feeling the butt of any jokes, show your affection through—I don't know, affection? It's a weird thing. And do whatever dark magic you must do to revive Benny and bring him back from the land of shadows. You win this particular game, but in this case—since you are not a particularly good player either—I think Jo Firestone is correct. You're evenly matched. I am very grateful to you both for actually playing the game, because I know, more than I've ever known anything, it's embarrassing to be put on the spot! Oh, it's my own medicine.

[00:48:33] **Jo Firestone:** I will say this: when the game first came out, a group of ladies—I'd say they were all in their 50s—they left a review on Amazon where they all held the box. Five of them held the box with one hand. And then with their other hands, they put a thumbs down. Okay? This is a tough game. Okay? It's tough, and it does require both embarrassment and commitment. I would say, if two people are willing to live together and play this and continue to live together, that says a lot.

[00:49:11] **John Hodgman:** Yeah, absolutely. Minimize embarrassment, though. Give—yeah, they're holding hands. Let the record show that they have shaken hands.

(Mary and Salma giggle.)

So, my final verdict is this. Mary, you won the game that we were just playing. I hope that you enjoy your victory. Congratulations. Thanks for being so game. *(Chuckles smugly.)* It was a little wordplay. But Salma, I have to find in your favor. Go easy on the Ts, Mary. Salma, you win this time. And Benny? Here's to you wherever you are.

Here's a pun based on the prompt “judgment and driveways”. “This is the sound of a gravel.”

[00:49:48] **Clip:**

Sound Effect: Thunderous booming.

Voices: *(Echoing ominously.) PUNDERDOME!*

(The sounds fade to quiet.)

Jo Firestone: Welcome.

[00:49:54] **Jesse Thorn:** Judge John Hodgman rules, that is all. Jo, before you go, tell us a little bit about the novel *Murder on Sex Island*.

[00:50:02] **Jo Firestone:** Well, it's a self-published sexual murder mystery. And, um, it's—

[00:50:09] **John Hodgman:** By the way, you can stop there. It's already hit the bestsellers.

[00:50:13] **Jo Firestone:** Yep, and it's—don't look for it in bookstores! It's not there, because it's self-published. So, you have to seek it out online, but you could probably order it online from an independent bookstore if you wanted to, but it will take a long time—but not in a bad way, just in a way that teaches you patience. And yeah, I guess it's about a reality show called *Sex Island*, where they have sex with each other, and the people who are best at sex win \$100k. But then one of them goes missing. So, they gotta bring in private detective Luella Van Horn to solve the case. But it gets really scary.

[00:50:50] **John Hodgman:** And is there an audio version of the book?

[00:50:53] **Jo Firestone:** Yeah, I did this pretty bad. So, I did an audio book version for free, so there's really no incentive to buy the book at all. You could just listen to it.

(John “oh no”s.)

Listen to it as a podcast, for sure. So yeah, I guess. Mm-hm!

[00:51:06] **John Hodgman:** No, forget about the audio version then.

[00:51:09] **Jo Firestone:** No, do listen to it. I'd love for you to listen to it. You know, it's—listen to it, please.

[00:51:14] **John Hodgman:** Listen to it and then buy it. It's called *Murder on Sex Island*. Jo Firestone, thank you for joining us.

[00:51:20] **Jo Firestone:** Thank you for the opportunity to plug.

[00:51:23] **Jesse Thorn:** Please rise as Judge John Hodgman exits the courtroom.

(Chairs squeak, followed by heavy footsteps and a door closing.)

Mary, how do you feel?

[00:51:28] **Mary:** As always, Judge John Hodgman is a truly wise and just judge, and I feel super vindicated that I won this round in front of two amazing comedians. And of course, I will ease up on the teasing. There's only love.

[00:51:51] **Jesse Thorn:** Salma, how do you feel?

[00:51:52] **Salma:** I feel great. I suck at this game, and I still won the ruling. So. I still got the ruling in my favor.

[00:52:01] **Jesse Thorn:** Salma, how many amazing comedians would you say you're in front of right now?

[00:52:05] **Salma:** Three.

[00:52:07] **Jesse Thorn:** Thanks. (*Chuckling.*) We'll talk to you next time on the *Judge John Hodgman* podcast.

[00:52:12] **Sound Effect:** Three gavel bangs.

[00:52:14] **Jesse Thorn:** Another *Judge John Hodgman* case is in the books. We'll have Swift Justice in just a second. First our thanks to BanjoSolo, over there on the Maximum Fun Reddit, for naming this week's episode, "No Pun and Shut Case". We talk about the episodes, and we ask for those title suggestions on that Reddit—[MaximumFun.Reddit.com](https://www.reddit.com/r/MaximumFun). You can find evidence and photos from the show on our Instagram account, at [Instagram.com/judgejohnhodgman](https://www.instagram.com/judgejohnhodgman). Make sure to follow us there.

Judge John Hodgman was created by Jesse Thorn and John Hodgman. This episode was engineered by Will Salwen at Digital Island Studios in New York City. Our editor this week is AJ McKeon, Marie Bardi-Salinas runs our social media. Our producer is Jennifer Marmor.

Now, Swift Justice, where we answer small disputes with quick judgment. KnightReader17 on the MaxFun subreddit says, "My spouse and I need a new car. I want to test drive the one I think I'll like the most. Then if I like it, we can buy it. But he wants to test drive several cars before making a decision."

[00:53:25] **John Hodgman:** Mm. Classic—what is it?—maximizer vs. minimizer? I learned this term from someone I love. Some people just like to make decisions like this: "Uuuh, it's that one!" And some people are like, "I'm gonna take seven years to figure out what the correct decision is by trying everything." I guess you can tell that, in truth, I'm a maximizer who's learned the value of minimizing. Might not be minimizing, but you know what I'm saying, right, Jesse?

(Jesse confirms.)

Yeah, you follow. I think that being decisive is really important, and I've learned that from—it's been taught to me by someone I love very much. Because maximizing can be a way of just procrastinating on a hard decision forever. That said, I do believe KnightReader17's spouse should have some input into the car that they're presumably buying with their shared funds. And therefore, it can't just be one test drive of the one car that KnightReader17 likes the best. I think you're going to do three. You're going to do three test drives. You pick one, he picks one, and then pick another one at random. Let's turn it into a game! And then you can make a decision, but definitely limit the number of cars you test drive. What do you think the three cars should be, Jesse?

[00:54:37] **Jesse Thorn:** I really like my Hyundai Ioniq 5.

[00:54:40] **John Hodgman:** Okay, I'm going to say, make one a Mazda Bongo. Japanese market only adventure van that's sort of like the Delica, but I got to lie down in one of those on the tour. And then the third one is, um—it's gonna be like a Civic or something, I bet. Subaru.

(Jesse agrees.)

Sorry, Subaru or something. Right. Yep. Have fun, get something that's not gonna destroy the planet, if you can. Hey, we just heard a case between two roommates. We need more roomies on the show, Jesse Thorn, don't you agree?

[00:55:12] **Jesse Thorn:** I like roomies.

[00:55:14] **John Hodgman:** Right, we need more roomie disputes. If you've got a dispute with your roommate, hey, let us know. You know your roommate's doing something wrong. Maybe they take showers that are too long. Maybe they leave the freezer door open a little bit and the ice melts or whatever. Maybe they took the room that you think you're entitled to. Why don't you make an argument for it? Whatever it is, put "send roommate disputes to *Judge John Hodgman*" on your chore wheel, and then go to MaximumFun.org/jjho.

[00:55:40] **Jesse Thorn:** And of course, any dispute is welcome at MaximumFun.org/jjho. Our show runs on your problems, so send them to us. Really! This is not a goof! We really need your battles and disputes and fights and disagreements to make this show great. So, go to MaximumFun.org/jjho and submit them if you got them. We'll talk to you next time on the *Judge John Hodgman* podcast.

[00:56:05] **Sound Effect:** Three gavel bangs.

[00:56:07] **Sound Effect:** Cheerful ukulele chord.

[00:56:08] **Speaker 1:** Maximum Fun.

[00:56:09] **Speaker 2:** A worker-owned network.

[00:56:11] **Speaker 3:** Of artist owned shows.

[00:56:12] **Speaker 4:** Supported—

[00:56:13] **Speaker 5:** —directly—

[00:56:14] **Speaker 6:** —by you!