

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

[00:00:02] **Jesse Thorn:** Welcome to the *Judge John Hodgman* podcast. I'm Bailiff Jesse Thorn. We're in chambers this week, fearing the shocket.

[00:00:09] **John Hodgman:** Fearing the shocket.

[00:00:10] **Jesse Thorn:** That's what it says in my script, so I'm obliged to read it.

[00:00:14] **John Hodgman:** It's scary. 'Cause why, Jesse?

[00:00:16] **Jesse Thorn:** Because it's our Halloween episode.

[00:00:18] **John Hodgman:** (*Singing and pounding rhythmically on the desk.*) Spooky day, spooky night, Halloween.

[00:00:20] **Jesse Thorn:** (*Through laughter.*) I'm Jesse Thorn and with me is the legendary harvester of souls himself, Judge John Hodgman.

[00:00:31] **John Hodgman:** Good evening, listeners. It is I, Judge John Hodgman!

It's Halloween time! Scary time! Time to dig deep into that big plastic pumpkin head full of Halloween disputes that you submitted. And together we will all take a big bite out of the razorblade-concealing apple of justice. Jesse Thorn, are you ready?

[00:00:50] **Jesse Thorn:** Let's get into the docket. Here is a case from DG in Lincoln, Nebraska. "I recently listened to an episode of the podcast *How Did This Get Made?* with special guest Paul F. Tompkins. Paul and one of the hosts, Jason Mantzoukas, were discussing a well-known Halloween candy. Imagine my horror when they both asserted that the correct pronunciation of the name of this candy is ree-sees pee-sees. I can't even begin to understand this delusion, but I know those two will never back down."

[00:01:25] **John Hodgman:** Alright, I don't like this letter. It's mostly an ad for another podcast. (*Chuckles.*)

[00:01:30] **Jesse Thorn:** Yeah, I don't even see how we could address this without having Paul F. Tompkins actually here.

[00:01:34] **John Hodgman:** Well, you know what? Jesse, hang on just one second. I think I might just have a surprise for you.

(*Pounding and mechanical cranking noises.*)

[00:01:43] **Paul F. Tompkins:** Hello?

[00:01:45] **Jesse Thorn:** Paul F. Tompkins? What are you doing here?!

[00:01:46] **John Hodgman:** Paul F. Tompkins, what are you doing here, Paul?

[00:01:51] **Paul F. Tompkins:** Hi! Well, I received a letter saying that I would inherit \$1,000,000 if I could spend the night in a haunted podcast studio. Did you guys get the same letter?!

[00:01:59] **John Hodgman:** Um... *(unconvincingly)* yes, I got that letter, that's why I'm here too. Exactly.

[00:02:04] **Jesse Thorn:** Now, John, did you trick Paul F. Tompkins into coming onto our podcast?

[00:02:09] **John Hodgman:** Well, yeah I did. *(John's chuckle devolves into maniacal evil laughter.)*

(A door creaks.)

Whoop!

[00:02:18] **Paul F. Tompkins:** You know, you could have just asked me. I mean, is this podcast studio even haunted?

[00:02:22] **Jesse Thorn:** No, Paul, I'm really sorry about all this.

[00:02:25] **Paul F. Tompkins:** Well, then what—I accept your apology. But then what are all those creepy dolls doing on the piano over there?

[00:02:29] **John Hodgman:** Those creepy dolls on the piano? *(Dismissively.)* They're just my friends, Paul. They're just my very good friends.

[00:02:35] **Paul F. Tompkins:** Huh! Okay, can you unlock the door and let me go now?

[00:02:38] **John Hodgman:** Uh, I would, Paul. But unfortunately, as you can see, I can't unlock the door. I can't reach it, because Jesse and I are handcuffed to radiators on the opposite side of the room right now.

[00:02:48] **Paul F. Tompkins:** *(Politely.)* Oh, I didn't notice that!

[00:02:49] **Jesse Thorn:** Yeah. Yeah, we woke up this way.

[00:02:51] **John Hodgman:** Yeah, we don't know how we got here. We were just going about our business, and then we got drugged or something. We woke up here this morning. It's—frankly, it's terrifying.

[00:02:58] **Paul F. Tompkins:** Wait, what, what movie are we in now?

[00:02:59] **John Hodgman:** Don't ask too many questions! It'll only make him angry.

[00:03:02] **Paul F. Tompkins:** Who?

[00:03:03] **Sound Effect:** Phone rings.

[00:03:05] **Jesse Thorn:** *(Meekly.)* Oh no, he's angry.

[00:03:06] **John Hodgman:** Paul, he's angry. *(Phone rings again.)* Would you please answer that scary, black phone on the wall? We can't reach it because of the radiators.

[00:03:12] **Paul F. Tompkins:** Fine. 'Ello!

[00:03:16] **Voice on the Phone:** Ah, Paul F. Tompkins, the famous comedian. I did not intend to make you play my little game, but perhaps it is for the best.

[00:03:17] **Jesse Thorn:** Can you put it on speaker, Paul?

[00:03:29] **Paul F. Tompkins:** I'm on the—okay. *(Sighs.)* I have to put it on speaker. Who is this?!

[00:03:34] **Aidan:** It is I, Aidan! Keeper of the Spirit Halloween fan wiki! I trust you have heard of me?

(They haven't.)

I am the teenager in Pennsylvania who is a huge fan of the Spirit Halloween store. For years, Judge John Hodgman and Jesse Thorn have called me in my basement lair to discuss the latest in Spirit Halloween scares and provide free content for their podcast.

[00:04:00] **Paul F. Tompkins:** I'm going to mute you for just one second. Guys, is this true?

[00:04:03] **John Hodgman:** *(Shamefully.)* Yeah.

[00:04:05] **Jesse Thorn:** It was good exposure.

[00:04:05] **John Hodgman:** He was—he was a teenager, and we called him for free content. But it was good exposure for him.

[00:04:13] **Paul F. Tompkins:** Oof. Not a good look. Oh, hey, and you're back. What's going on? It's time for you to get revenge or something?

[00:04:20] **Aidan:** (*Cackles.*) Correct, Paul F. Tompkins! No longer shall I be the Spirit Halloween animatronic skeleton dancing and barfing and sucking out mannequin's souls for John and Jesse's amusement. Now they must dance for me! (*Echoing, menacing laughter.*)

[00:04:43] **Jesse Thorn:** But I don't want to—! I don't want to suck souls!

[00:04:46] **Aidan:** Shut your pie hole! I charge you with this task, podcasters. Rule on 13 Halloween disputes before the chime strikes midnight, or you shall never leave this room! (*Dial tone.*)

[00:04:58] **John Hodgman:** Okay, okay. Bye-bye! (*Tries to create his own echoing fadeout by repeating the byes more and more softly.*)

[00:05:00] **Jesse Thorn:** 13! I've only got like three good ones!

[00:05:04] **John Hodgman:** Yeah, we barely have any. That's why I tricked Paul F. Tompkins into coming here to waste time.

[00:05:09] **Paul F. Tompkins:** Mission accomplished.

[00:05:10] **Sound Effect:** A child laughing and skipping. It's getting closer.

[00:05:12] **Jesse Thorn:** Wait. What's that noise? Why is it getting louder?!

(*They all scream as the laughter gets louder.*)

[00:05:20] **Jesse Thorn:** What's that thing in the dark?!

[00:05:21] **John Hodgman:** I don't know, but it's getting closer! Paul, quickly! Is it Reese's Pieces or Ree-sees's Pee-sees?

[00:05:29] **Paul F. Tompkins:** (*Strained.*) It's Ree-sees's Pee-sees, and there's no way it's not! (*The sound of laughter and skipping reaches a crescendo that begins to drown them out.*)

[00:05:30] **John Hodgman:** Why?! That doesn't make any sense!

[00:05:35] **Paul F. Tompkins:** I know! But it's just the way that it is! It's Ree-sees Pee-sees!

[00:05:39] **John Hodgman:** You said you would never back down, and you won't! Oh no! And now we're gonna—now we're gonna—that thing is gonna kill us!

[00:05:43] **Paul F. Tompkins:** I can't help it!

[00:05:44] **Jesse Thorn:** We'll be back in just a second with more of the *Judge John Hodgman* podcast!

[00:05:50] **Transition:** Three gavel bangs.

[00:05:51] **Jesse Thorn:** You're listening to *Judge John Hodgman*. I'm Bailiff Jesse Thorn. Of course, the *Judge John Hodgman* podcast, always brought to you by you: the members of MaximumFun.org. Thanks to everybody who's gone to MaximumFun.org/join, and you can join them by going to MaximumFun.org/join.

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[00:10:13] **Transition:** Three gavel bangs.

[00:10:15] **Jesse Thorn:** Welcome back to the *Judge John Hodgman* podcast. Just to fill you in, Aidan the Spirit Halloween Kid has trapped us in the studio with special guest Paul F. Tompkins. And we have to clear 13 Halloween cases, or else we will starve to death chained to these radiators.

[00:10:31] **Paul F. Tompkins:** Wait, it's just 12 now, right? Doesn't the Ree-sees's Pee-sees thing count?

[00:10:34] **John Hodgman:** No, Reese's Pieces, Paul! And yes, it counts, Jesse. It counts.

[00:10:40] **Jesse Thorn:** Okay, so 12. Anyway, just before the break, a creepy animatronic from Aidan's collection just entered the studio through a crawlspace and scared us, but now it is out of batteries, and it's dead on the floor.

[00:10:51] **John Hodgman:** I'm examining its corpse now. It's a 9.8-foot cord, 4 and a half feet tall, sharp teeth. I believe this particular animatic is named Toothy the Clown! Now on sale for \$212.

[00:11:05] **Paul F. Tompkins:** How much are you getting from Spirit Halloween for this episode again?

[00:11:06] **John Hodgman:** No time for questions, Paul! It looks like there's something between this animatronics' teeth. A piece of paper! (*Paper rustles.*)

[00:11:13] **Jesse Thorn:** Look at this! It's a dispute from Reddit user Spooses!

[00:11:20] **John Hodgman:** Here we go.

[00:11:19] **Jesse Thorn:** "Our neighborhood gets hundreds of trick-or-treaters every Halloween. My spouse believes we should buy the good stuff, even if that means buying less candy. If we run out of candy quickly and turn out the lights early, that's okay. I think we should buy a mix of filler and the good stuff. That way, more kids get to trick-or-treat at our house."

[00:11:43] **John Hodgman:** Mm! Paul F. Tompkins, you grew up in Philadelphia, correct?

(Paul confirms.)

(Laughs.) What did you get mostly for Halloween? Water Ice or no?

[00:11:53] **Paul F. Tompkins:** Yeah, it was a lot of water ice, a lot of hoagies Scrapple.

[00:11:58] **John Hodgman:** What was Halloween like in Philadelphia for you?

[00:12:02] **Paul F. Tompkins:** It was like the—like, in terms of candy, it was the staples, for sure.

[00:12:06] **John Hodgman:** When you say staples, do you mean 9-volt batteries or actual staples?

[00:12:12] **Paul F. Tompkins:** Actual staples. Yeah. It was a big office supply town. That's our number one export.

(They laugh.)

A protractor. I feel like when they make a new candy, it takes a long time for older candies to go away. So, I think like when I was a kid—it's all the same candy that we have now, but it was fewer gummy things. Like, gummy things had not yet come into their own. You had, you know, like your Swedish Fish and stuff like that. But mostly it was about the chocolate. It was about like the fun size you know, Three Musketeers, Snickers, that family of candy bar.

And of course, the Hershey's Miniatures, and the single pack Reese's Cup—Ree-sees's Cup, as we used to call them.

(John makes a noise like he's caught Paul in a mistake.)

No, it's Ree-sees's Pee-sees, for sure. But I can say Reese's Cup.

(They laugh.)

[00:13:06] **John Hodgman:** Got it. There's no internal consistency to this. It's Ree-sees's Pee-sees. That's just what it is.

[00:13:12] **Paul F. Tompkins:** It's just Ree-sees Pee-sees! That's just what it is! *(Singing.)* Some things will never change!

[00:13:18] **Jesse Thorn:** Sometimes there has to be some magic in the world, Judge Hodgman.

(Paul agrees.)

[00:13:21] **John Hodgman:** Speaking of introduction of new candies, Paul, do you remember when Whatchamacallit came out?

[00:13:28] **Paul F. Tompkins:** (*Laughs.*) John, I absolutely do! There was a big push for it on TV commercials. And boy, oh boy, did that ever work on me! A child!

(Laughter.)

New candy bar! How do I get my hands on this?!

[00:13:42] **John Hodgman:** Did you know that they came up with a sequel candy bar? This is not a joke.

[00:13:47] **Paul F. Tompkins:** Thingamajig?

[00:13:48] **John Hodgman:** Whozeewhatzit.

(Paul reacts with utter disbelief.)

Yup. Whozeewhatzit. It was a candy bar.

[00:13:52] **Paul F. Tompkins:** Are you kidding me?!

[00:13:54] **John Hodgman:** You can still get it. I don't know when it came out but fairly recently. And it was a contest for Whatchamacallit-heads to name the sequel, and it was—candy bar—it says right on the package “candy bar named by Lisa M.”, and it's chocolate, chocolatey crisps, and peanut butter candy bar.

(Paul mumbles about the crisps.)

It's more chocolate than the Whatchamacallit. So, when you were growing up, both of you, what counted as the good stuff and what was the filler?

[00:14:22] **Jesse Thorn:** Reese's Peanut Butter Cups is the good stuff.

[00:14:24] **Paul F. Tompkins:** Absolutely. The filler was things like Smarties. Which were like—these are—I will eventually get to these, but they are not high on the agenda.

[00:14:33] **John Hodgman:** And to be clear, we're talking about—there's a British candy called Smarties, which people on the internet seem to think are pretty good. But we're talking about the little cylinder of tiny little pills.

(Paul confirms.)

[00:14:46] **Jesse Thorn:** I think the definition of filler candy to me is that giant bag manufactured by the Tootsie Roll Corporation that has like vanilla Tootsie Rolls in it. No one wants any of that.

[00:15:00] **Paul F. Tompkins:** I will say that I never liked Tootsie Rolls—and still don't!—but I did like the variety of those other flavored ones. The orange ones.

[00:15:10] **Jesse Thorn:** I like the fruity ones. Yeah. (*Laughs.*)

[00:15:11] **John Hodgman:** It will not surprise either of you to learn that when we took it to the internet, Tootsie Rolls was the #1 filler candy reported by people who follow us on social media. And not surprisingly, because they're disgusting, they don't taste good, and they look and are the texture of a bowel blockage.

(*Jesse laughs.*)

But here's something that is surprising. There was lots of black licorice on the list of filler candy. You know, that's a heavy flavor for a child. But two people said Twizzlers were filler candy. Do you agree or disagree?

[00:15:52] **Paul F. Tompkins:** I think any licorice is just filler candy.

[00:15:54] **John Hodgman:** But Jesse Thorn, you like a Twizzler.

[00:15:56] **Jesse Thorn:** I really like Twizzlers. I like their waxy texture and their weird combination of flavorfulness and flavorlessness. But I honestly I think that they—(*sighs*) they're second tier, but they're not filler. I mean, the first tier, obviously—the pinnacle is obviously Reese's Peanut Butter Cups. Below that is your higher quality candy bars, which would be like your Snickers and your Three Musketeers. And certainly, if you got—I mean, it would be an incredible Halloween were you to get like Take Five bars. I mean, what a gift that would be.

[00:16:35] **John Hodgman:** That would be pretty hot, I would say. Or KitKat Dark is good too. Paul, you were going to say something?

[00:16:39] **Paul F. Tompkins:** I would say that the—like, the Hershey's miniatures would be sort of a second tier, because they were so small. But they would still—other than the Special Dark, which as a child was disgusting and as an adult is just not that good—those were like, “Ok, I still got these.”

(*Jesse laughs and agrees.*)

“These are my emergency rations.” But I remember things like Mary Janes. Do you remember Mary Janes?

(*John groans.*)

It's just like such a *Boardwalk Empire* candy.

(They laugh.)

Just weird—what is it? What is the flavor? Just like maple or something? I don't know.

(John agrees.)

[00:17:17] **Jesse Thorn:** I think that Hershey's variety is—you've characterized it perfectly Paul. It is an emergency ration but a sufficient one. I would argue there's a reason that it's not called Mr. Greatbar.

[00:17:35] **John Hodgman:** *(Laughs.)* It's fine. It's Mr. Finebar. It's good. It's just fine.

[00:17:37] **Jesse Thorn:** It's good. It's fine. You would never go to the store to buy it.

[00:17:40] **John Hodgman:** Well, so, alright. Black licorice, Tootsie Rolls, even Twizzlers, they're second rate. Here are some of the other suggestions from the internet. Will any of you stand up for these filler candies and say they're actually first tier? Candy corn.

(Everyone grumbles in agreement.)

Candy corn. Trash. Garbage. Filler. Right?

[00:17:58] **Paul F. Tompkins:** It's the—candy corn is the edible Easter grass.

(They laugh.)

You have to have it there.

(They agree.)

For appearances.

[00:18:03] **John Hodgman:** It's a visual signifier.

(Paul agrees.)

Yeah. Yeah. Halloween is happening, and it's gross.

Circus Peanuts.

(Paul "ugh!"s.)

[00:18:14] **Jesse Thorn:** No one gives that out. It's banana flavored. Why is it banana flavored?

[00:18:18] **John Hodgman:** It doesn't even count as food. Alright. Fair. Circus peanuts is out. Good & Plenty?

(Jesse and Paul immediately agree it's garbage.)

Garbage, right? 'Cause licorice flavored. Is it not? Anise. That anise flavor. No kid wants it. Here's another adult one. Skor bar. Skor bar.

[00:18:32] **Paul F. Tompkins:** Oh, I love—! Filler?! No, I think Skor bar is top tier.

[00:18:36] **John Hodgman:** @The_MoonWorm, I think on Instagram, says Milk Duds are filler.

(Paul disagrees.)

No, you disagree? I don't know.

[00:18:43] **Paul F. Tompkins:** No, they're not. I feel like nothing that is, you know, good, old, American processed chocolate is filler.

[00:18:53] **John Hodgman:** Milk Duds are gross, though.

[00:18:55] **Paul F. Tompkins:** They're great. They're great!

[00:18:57] **Jesse Thorn:** I'd gladly trade my Milk Duds. I'd go two-for-one for something good.

[00:19:00] **John Hodgman:** Yeah. You'll be happy to hear, Paul, that @The_MoonWorm doesn't hate Milk Duds for Milk Duds, simply the fact that the Milk Duds fun size box contains, quote, "Just like four Duds."

(Paul concedes.)

[00:19:14] **Jesse Thorn:** Yeah. That is a good point.

[00:19:16] **John Hodgman:** Step it up to eight duds.

[00:19:18] **Paul F. Tompkins:** I gotta say though, I think they were trying to help us out. You don't need more than four milk duds.

(They laugh.)

They take a long time to eat!

[00:19:24] **John Hodgman:** What about York Peppermint Patties?

[00:19:29] **Paul F. Tompkins:** (*With true excitement.*) OH! I loooove York Peppermint Patties!

(*Jesse agrees.*)

Because they were like an off the beaten track kind of thing. You know. They seemed kind of grown up, because there were only grownups in the ads. You know, it was like they would bite into it, and then they would be, you know, buried in a snowbank. (*Laughs.*) That's a commercial.

[00:19:49] **John Hodgman:** Yeah, that's McDiddyPop's—McDiddyPop on the internet said that the problem with these that made them filler is that they're for adults. They were advertised to adults. It's a strong flavor. In the ads, you would take a bite of a York Peppermint Patty, and you'd be like hit in the face with a blizzard and smile or whatever.

(*Paul confirms.*)

[00:20:02] **Jesse Thorn:** But a York Peppermint Patty is a classic refrigerator or freezer candy.

(*They agree.*)

Which is the kind of experimentation that you can get involved in when you have a whole bag of candy.

[00:20:16] **John Hodgman:** But let's settle this now for Reddit user Spooses. Should you put only the good stuff out and end Halloween early, if necessary? Or do you mix in some filler, if only to get some kids some—a breadth of knowledge of what all kinds of gross candy bars are out there?

[00:20:35] **Paul F. Tompkins:** Here's my question. Are they saying that in addition to the normal amount of the good stuff they would buy, they would also purchase extra bags of filler, so that the candy supply overall lasts longer?

(*They confirm.*)

Okay, just buy more of the good stuff. (*Laughs.*)

[00:20:57] **Jesse Thorn:** I'm with Paul on this one.

[00:20:59] **Paul F. Tompkins:** If you're buying additional candy to make it last longer, just buy more of the stuff you're already buying!

[00:21:06] **Jesse Thorn:** I feel really strongly that if you live in a Halloween neighborhood—if you're lucky enough, as far as I'm concerned, to live in a Halloween neighborhood, to get to—

[00:21:15] **Paul F. Tompkins:** And God, I hope you are.

[00:21:18] **Jesse Thorn:** —enjoy the experience of only one time a year getting to see all those adorable children in their adorable costumes. I think you can make the room in your budget for the \$35 it will cost to buy the good stuff.

(Paul agrees.)

[00:21:33] **John Hodgman:** And this one goes out to all the people who wrote in saying, “My spouse or partner or friend or whatever feels I should buy more candy, but I don't want to waste the money.” It's garbage. It's all garbage. Like, even if you have to buy—nowadays, they put the filler into big combo bags with the good stuff.

(Paul confirms.)

So, it's almost unavoidable to buy the filler. Buy extra bags of that, and then throw the filler away. I understand that it's wasteful, but it's all garbage. It was garbage when it was born. It is garbage when it goes to the garbage. Just throw that stuff away and put in the good stuff. I agree. Treat those kids. Don't trick them. And by the way, we're just presuming that those kids are going to have adorable costumes. Some of them might not be adorable at all. And that's why you want to take pictures of all of them. Because one day, one day that kid may be a senator that you want to cancel. So, just hang on to the photos.

(Paul cackles.)

[00:22:26] **Jesse Thorn:** You can use Charleston Chew to insulate your walls like old blue jeans.

[00:22:31] **Sound Effect:** Ominous growling and wet footsteps approaching.

[00:22:33] **John Hodgman:** Oh, I hear something. It sounds like creepy, mushy footsteps and moans!

[00:22:39] **Jesse Thorn:** Oh, whoops! Here comes a bog zombie!

[00:22:40] **John Hodgman:** Ugh! Another one of Aidan's cursed animatronics. And it looks like he has a dispute sticking out of the muck around his neck.

(The sounds retreat into the distance.)

[00:22:47] **Jesse Thorn:** This one, it says, is from Chad in Edmonds, Washington. “I request a cease and desist on any kind of wearing a uniform as a costume on Halloween. Starbucks

worker, cheerleader, any sports uniform. I say it's lazy. I answer the door in a full ape costume and throw banana Laffy Taffy at the kids. I expect some effort if I'm giving up free candy.”

[00:23:12] **Paul F. Tompkins:** Paul? I do not like when a person assumes or presumes that the children have to do something to earn the candy.

(John agrees.)

Here's what they did. They got born. The end.

(John laughs and Jesse agrees.)

This is—it's hard to be a kid! You gotta just give them candy! This is their thing. If you want to go the extra mile inside your own home and, you know, open the door in a costume and all that— You know, we could debate banana Laffy Taffy as something that kids have to earn all day. But—

[00:23:51] **John Hodgman:** Yeah, really. Talk about filler.

[00:23:53] **Paul F. Tompkins:** Yeah, but I mean, you just—if the kid makes it there, you give them something. That's what it is. You don't like, “Well, where's my trick? You have to do a trick!”

Which I hate when people—first of all, adults. No, they don't have to do a trick. Secondly, that's on you! It's either you give me a treat, or I will do a trick on you! I don't do the—! You don't make me do a trick for you! The trick happens to you if you don't fork over that treat.

[00:24:22] **John Hodgman:** Yeah, exactly. If the kid comes, and they're dressed as—I don't know what; someone working at Subway or whatever, truly one of the most terrifying costumes, if you think about it—and Chad is there in his ape costume going like, “Hmm, pretty lazy, kid.” Well, that's when you TP him. That's when you do the trick.

[00:24:41] **Paul F. Tompkins:** Yeah! That's the trick! Also, if a little kid is in a Starbucks uniform, that's a costume! That little child doesn't work at Starbucks.

[00:24:49] **Jesse Thorn:** This touches a really deep nerve for me, guys.

[00:24:52] **John Hodgman:** Why?

[00:24:53] **Jesse Thorn:** I don't know if I've shared this on this program, but when I was about 10 years old, I spent the entire month of October—with the help of my mother and her friend, Mark Farmer—building a costume that was Guy with a Shark Biting His Head Off. It involved a chicken wire armature and spray-painted foam and a shoulder mount.

So, it was essentially on—it rested on top of my shoulders with its tail up in the air, if you can imagine.

[00:25:23] **John Hodgman:** It was like a giant, full shark-shaped helmet that went over your whole head and shoulders.

[00:25:30] **Jesse Thorn:** Exactly. And then I wore an aloha shirt and shorts and so forth and some blood in the Columbia Park Boys Club Costume Contest, the stakes of which were very high. First prize, I think, was a bunch of passes to Marine World Africa USA.

[00:25:46] **Paul F. Tompkins:** Second prize, a set of steak knives.

[00:25:48] **Jesse Thorn:** I finished second.

[00:25:49] **John Hodgman:** Third prize? You're fired.

(They chuckle.)

[00:25:52] **Jesse Thorn:** I finished second to a guy who just wore his dad's cop outfit.

(John “wow”s.)

[00:25:57] **Paul F. Tompkins:** *(Laughing.)* Cop outfit!

[00:26:00] **Jesse Thorn:** I ended up getting a case of Diet Cherry 7Up and a case of Carnation Instant Breakfast as second prize.

(Paul chortles.)

[00:26:10] **John Hodgman:** That's the absolute filler right there. Oh my gosh.

[00:26:15] **Paul F. Tompkins:** Was this a costume contest for adults, and you shouldn't have been there?

[00:26:19] **Jesse Thorn:** *(Laughing.)* It was.

[00:26:21] **Paul F. Tompkins:** Yeah. Diet soda and Carnation Instant Breakfast! *(Laughs.)*

[00:26:26] **Jesse Thorn:** I really think there was just a dusty old storeroom at the Columbia Park Boys Club. They went in there, and they found a case of Carnation Instant Breakfast from 1978, blew the dust off—

[00:26:39] **John Hodgman:** You win this pound of sugar free Brock's Candy Balls.

(Paul laughs.)

[00:26:45] **Jesse Thorn:** It was a really dark time in my childhood.

[00:26:47] **John Hodgman:** I have a question. So, wait a minute. How old were you when you did this costume, Jesse?

[00:26:51] **Jesse Thorn:** About ten.

[00:26:52] **John Hodgman:** So, the person who won wore his own father's policeman's uniform?

[00:26:59] **Jesse Thorn:** Yeah, and he was about my age—9, 10.

[00:27:00] **John Hodgman:** Was he very tall, or was his dad a child cop?

(Paul giggles.)

[00:27:06] **Jesse Thorn:** No, he looked like a police officer slash 1920s clown. With like—

[00:27:13] **John Hodgman:** Super long sleeves.

(Jesse confirms.)

[00:27:15] **Paul F. Tompkins:** Like, a cop who was *Benjamin Buttoning*.

(John laughs.)

[00:27:18] **Jesse Thorn:** Exactly. I don't think he had the, you know, gun or nightstick or anything.

[00:27:23] **John Hodgman:** Well, I'll put it that way—he really did earn those Ensure Dietary Supplements.

(Paul laughs.)

[00:27:30] **Jesse Thorn:** Man, he was probably getting splashed by orcas and just thinking about how pathetic I was for trying to make a costume instead of just wearing my dad's outfit from work. Imagine if I had showed up at the Columbia Park Boys Club dressed in my father's nonprofit fundraising consultant outfit.

[00:27:47] **John Hodgman:** Frankly, that should be your Halloween costume this year.

[00:27:51] **Jesse Thorn:** “What are you dressed as?” Veteran’s Peace Activist.

[00:27:56] **John Hodgman:** I'm gonna dress as my dad, former head of the Department of Employment Security under Mike Dukakis in Massachusetts, 1978.

(They chuckle.)

Hey, Chad, good for you for dressing up fancy and throwing Laffy Taffy at kids. But Paul F. Tompkins is exactly right.

[00:28:12] **Paul F. Tompkins:** On Halloween, you work for the kids. The kids don't work for you.

[00:28:15] **John Hodgman:** Exactly so. You never know what's going on in someone else's life, so don't call them lazy just because they're wearing a uniform.

[00:28:21] **Jesse Thorn:** Judge Hodgman, it just so happens that I was rooting around in the bog zombie's empty eye socket—the sickeningly terrifying empty eye socket—and I found a dispute from Chrissy in Los Angeles.

[00:28:33] **John Hodgman:** Let's hear it.

[00:28:34] **Jesse Thorn:** “My friends are having an alien themed Halloween party. Not the movie franchise, just anything extraterrestrial. The problem is this: I had my heart set on going as Endora from *Bewitched*. I think fantasy witches like Endora should count as aliens. They have supernatural powers and tend to be otherworldly. My friends disagree. Would it be weird to show up as my favorite TV mother-in-law?”

[00:29:00] **John Hodgman:** Since aggressively shaking your head in disgust is a perfectly valid answer to this and yet does not show up on our audio feed, Paul F. Tompkins, will you take it from a facial expression all the way to words for us?

[00:29:16] **Paul F. Tompkins:** *(Sighs.)* Chrissy, I'm very sorry. But you must not do this. When somebody wants to have a theme for a party, it only works if everybody adheres to the theme. That's the fun of it is that you look around, and there's all variations on this theme. And if you're stretching it that far, it's not as much fun. It's not—you know, the idea is that you're all doing the same thing. And that might seem like a pain in the ass a lot of the time where you're like, “I don't want to—I don't want to do that! I don't want to have to—” People have parties, and it's like “everyone has to wear a hat”. And you might not be a hat person. You might not want to wear a hat, but you got to wear that hat! You know what I mean? Or don't go. But you can't—you either go, and you support the theme, or you don't go. You can't find loopholes or stretch it or whatever. Witches are not aliens.

[00:30:10] **Jesse Thorn:** They tend to be otherworldly though, Paul!

(John chuckles.)

[00:30:14] **Paul F. Tompkins:** That can mean so many things.

[00:30:16] **Jesse Thorn:** That could be Mikhail Baryshnikov.

[00:30:18] **Paul F. Tompkins:** Exactly! So, I feel like a witch is just not an alien. That's not—they're from this world.

[00:30:25] **John Hodgman:** I absolutely promise you that, without too much Googling, I could find someone who has called in to *Coast to Coast AM* to claim that, indeed, the Salem Witch Trials was an alien invasion.

[00:30:38] **Paul F. Tompkins:** I have no doubt of that.

[00:30:39] **John Hodgman:** But that is—but I fully support what you're saying, Paul.

[00:30:41] **Paul F. Tompkins:** Is that the kind of reasoning you want to use as a person? (*Chuckles.*) Do you know what I mean?

[00:30:46] **John Hodgman:** Witches are not aliens. You know what the theme is. And Paul, I venture to ask you, person who remembers and got a lot of old television into their head, because you grew up during the UHF era.

(*Paul confirms.*)

In this year 2023, when we have streaming, when we have so much competing for our time, would an Endora costume even work at a Halloween party?

[00:31:13] **Paul F. Tompkins:** I feel like Endora—if you were to wear that costume today, it wouldn't look that much like a costume, actually. It would just look like somebody kind of dressed up for an event. Because you know, the fashion was very sort of flowy, not quite moo-moos, but more fashionable than that. But like very flowy, silken, satiny garments and stuff like that. And she had this red sort of bouffant, and she had very elaborate eye makeup. And if you saw somebody—if you didn't know that show and you saw somebody dressed like that, you'd think, “Oh, are they going to an event of some kind? Are they going to—you know, are they going to be on some red carpet somewhere?”

[00:31:49] **Jesse Thorn:** If I saw someone dressed in this costume, I think I would think that they were doing like a drag Julie Klausner.

[00:31:59] **John Hodgman:** (*Laughs.*) I didn't realize that she was played by—Endora was played by legendary actor Agnes Moorehead.

(*Paul confirms.*)

And she did have that very striking blue eyeshadow. I bet if you went to this party, people would just say, “I don't know, what are you? Kooky Instagram fashion influencer?” Something like that.

[00:32:15] **Paul F. Tompkins:** Yeah. Are you on your way to another party?

[00:32:16] **Jesse Thorn:** They'd say to themselves, "Gosh, I don't know what character you are. You're some kind of alien!"

(Paul laughs.)

[00:32:24] **John Hodgman:** I would say to Chrissy that if you dressed as Agnes Moorehead dressed as Endora, and then you just put on a couple of like antennae—you know what I mean? Like, you put a little—some moon man antennae on top of your head—that you could just say, "I'm the queen of Venus," and everyone would be happy.

Paul and Jesse, if we were to host a theme party—which is UHF television shows shown in the '80s but dating back to the '60s, '50s, '40s, or whatever it was—who would you go as? I'm going to go—I'll give you a hint. I'm going to go as Frank Nelson from the *Jack Benny Show*. Yyyees!

[00:33:04] **Paul F. Tompkins:** *(Laughs.)* I mean, if you're looking for ease and comfort, you can't beat the professor from *Gilligan's Island*. *(Laughs.)*

[00:33:11] **John Hodgman:** That's good!

[00:33:11] **Paul F. Tompkins:** Shirt, pants, sneakers. You're done.

[00:33:15] **John Hodgman:** Yeah. You'd probably have to bring a radio made out of a coconut just so people would get it.

[00:33:20] **Paul F. Tompkins:** Mm. If you want to go that far. I mean, if you're doing that costume—

[00:33:22] **John Hodgman:** But if the theme is old TV shows, I suppose it's fine. Yeah.

[00:33:25] **Paul F. Tompkins:** If you're doing that costume in the first place, you're obviously trying to cheat. So—but it's an acceptable—I feel like it's an acceptable cheat on that theme.

(John agrees.)

I think I might—my version of that cheat would of course be Gomez Addams from *The Addams Family*.

[00:33:40] **John Hodgman:** Oh, you would be such a good Gomez.

[00:33:43] **Paul F. Tompkins:** Already got a mustache, put on a suit.

[00:33:45] **John Hodgman:** Jesse Thorn, do you have any '50s, '60s TV show characters that you would go as?

[00:33:50] **Jesse Thorn:** Well, I'm a Millennial, so UHF television was mostly from the '70s and '80s when I was a kid. And I think I might go with maybe Reverend Jim?

[00:34:01] **John Hodgman:** Wow, there we go. That's perfect. Reverend Jim.

[00:34:03] **Jesse Thorn:** Distinctive outfit.

[00:34:06] **John Hodgman:** We actually have a story from another friend of the court, Elizabeth Gilbert, who—I had forgotten the details, and I probably told this story before, about someone who showed up at a costume party in entirely the wrong costume. And I asked Liz if she could remind me of the details, and she did us the favor of simply recording it into a voice memo, which we'll play now.

[00:34:29] **Clip:**

Elizabeth Gilbert: So, I met a guy at a party, like 30 years ago, around a keg of beer, and he told me that his little brother was an artist. And he came from this like blue collar family where nobody was an artist, but his brother wanted to be an artist. And he had gone to—instead of going to like trade school, he'd gone to Paris to learn how to be a painter and to live on the left bank and enjoy all of that. And while he was in Paris, he met this group of young, friendly French aristocrats—which seems like a contradiction in terms, but they were all of those things. They were young, they were friendly, they were French, and they were aristocrats.

And he met them in some bar, and they loved him and thought he was very charming and interesting—this blue-collar kid from somewhere outside of Boston trying to be an artist. So, one of the aristocrats had an Uncle who was a count or a duke or a lord of some sort with a castle in the Loire River Valley. And they invited—they said every year he has this masquerade ball. You can't miss it. If you're gonna see one amazing thing in Europe, you have to see this. There's going to be actual, crowned heads of Europe there. Everybody is in costume. It's amazing.”

And so, he rented a car, and he spent the whole week scavenging around Paris for ingredients to construct this incredible costume that he was going to wear to this ball. He found the castle; he got there a little late. He parked Near the woods, changed into his costume, went and knocked on the door. The butler opened, and he said his name was on the list, and indeed it was. And the butler took him to the ballroom, and opened up the big doors of the ballroom, and there he was standing at the top of the stairs looking down at this incredible event. And that was the point at which he realized there had been some mistranslation. It was indeed a costume party. But it was a themed costume party, and the theme was a medieval fort. And everybody was dressed in incredible brocade and silk and doublets and actual crowns with actual jewels, and it was one of the most beautiful things he'd ever seen. And our friend was dressed as a lobster. (*Laughs.*)

He was also 6'6" and very skinny, and he had huge antennae and these massive, foam, articulated claws. And he had a moment of do you just run? What do you do? Do you just run? But everybody had already spotted him. And then he had this realization,

which was like, “Well, this is what I have to offer, right? Like, this is what I did. This is what I made. This is the only thing I have. I love my costume. I’m just going to go. I love it.” And so, he crossed the threshold and entered the ball. And the music stopped, and people gathered around him.

And as I remember it, the Queen of Belgium said to him, “What are you?”

And he bowed from the waist and said, “I am the court lobster.” Thank you.

[00:37:35] **John Hodgman:** That’s a great story from Liz Gilbert that starts out sounding like a horror movie, frankly. Someone should write the horror movie about a guy who gets taken in by a bunch of friendly, beautiful, young French aristocrats and tempted to a party, and then gets eaten. Boiled alive and eaten. But in any case—

(The phone rings.)

Oh no, that phone is ringing again.

[00:37:54] **Jesse Thorn:** Hello?

[00:37:55] **Aidan:** It’s 11:45! Only 15 minutes left! And you’ve only ruled on three cases.

[00:38:02] **John Hodgman:** Damn you, Aidan! The Reese’s Pieces thing counts!

[00:38:05] **Paul F. Tompkins:** Ree-sees Pee-sees!

[00:38:06] **Jesse Thorn:** And we have to plug the shows that we’re about to do!

[00:38:09] **Aidan:** Now it’s 14 minutes! *(Aidan’s laughter echoes menacingly.)*

[00:38:15] **Jesse Thorn:** We’ll be right back with Paul F. Tompkins on the *Judge John Hodgman* podcast.

[00:38:19] **Transition:** Three gavel bangs.

[00:38:24] **Promo:**

Music: Gentle, quiet acoustic guitar.

John Moe: *(Softly.)* Hello, sleepy heads. *Sleeping with Celebrities* is your podcast pillow pal. We talk to remarkable people about unremarkable topics, all to help you slow down your brain and drift off to sleep. For instance, we have the remarkable Neil Gaiman.

Neil Gaiman: I’d always had a vague interest in life, culture, food preparation.

John Moe: *Sleeping With Celebrities*, hosted by me—John Moe—on MaximumFun.org or wherever you get your podcasts. Night, night.

(Music fades out.)

[00:38:57] **Promo:**

(Fantastical tinkling and sparkle sounds.)

Narrator: *(Echoing.)* Somewhere, in an alternate universe where Hollywood is smarter.

(Harp chords fade into applause.)

Presenter: And the Emmy nominees for Outstanding Comedy Series are *Jetpackula*. *Airport Marriott*. *Throuple*. *Dear America*, *We've Seen You Naked*. And *Allah in the Family*.

(Applause fades into harp chords.)

Narrator: *(Echoing.)* In our stupid universe, you can't see any of these shows. But you can listen to them on *Dead Pilots Society*.

(Rock music fades in.)

The podcast that brings you hilarious comedy pilots that the networks and streamers bought but never made. Journey to the alternate television universe of *Dead Pilots Society* on MaximumFun.org.

(Music fades out.)

[00:39:44] **Transition:** Three gavel bangs.

[00:39:46] **Jesse Thorn:** Judge Hodgman, we're taking a quick break from the docket. Paul F. Tompkins, you of course, are perhaps America's most legendary comedy podcaster, the host and cohost of numerous brilliant comedy podcasts—including, what are we looking at?

[00:40:02] **Paul F. Tompkins:** *Stay F*. *Homekins*, *Threedom*, *The Neighborhood Listen*, to name but a few that are current.

[00:40:07] **Jesse Thorn:** What else have you got going on? Are you going to be live in person anywhere?

[00:40:11] **Paul F. Tompkins:** Well, let me tell you, you can find me on the World Wide Web Sunday, the 29th of October, when I'll be joining the hosts of *Too Scary, Didn't Watch*—a wonderful podcast that I'm a huge fan of. And we will be recapping (*spookily*) *The Pope's Exorcist* live online! Then November—Friday, the 17th, I'll be in Charleston, South Carolina, bringing my variety show, *Varietopia*, there for the very first time. I believe tickets

are just about sold out, if not completely sold out for the early show. So, get tickets for the late show. And that's about it. Go to PaulFTompkins.com/live for all of my ticket-y links.

[00:40:49] **John Hodgman:** Now, listen, if you're a listener in Brooklyn and you went to go see *Varietopia* in the Bell House, you know that the Bell House is now moldering ruins, because that show just brought the house down.

[00:41:02] **Paul F. Tompkins:** Also, because it rained.

[00:41:04] **John Hodgman:** (*Chuckling.*) Also, it rained. No, the Bell House still stands, and it is inspected every year for safety. It's a good structure. It does not collapse in the rain. But the shows were incredible! And so, I charge you, the listeners, with this: if you were at this show, you know how good it was. You need to get on social media. You need to get on email. You need to get on the phone and tell your friends who can reach Charleston, "Get to the shows in Charleston." It's a big mistake if you do not go. It's always better when you're there.

Paul F. Tompkins, you're the best.

(*Paul gasps.*)

Thank you for being here.

[00:41:34] **Paul F. Tompkins:** Thank you for having me!

[00:41:36] **John Hodgman:** We're going on tour. We've been on tour, and we're going back out on the road starting October 29th!

[00:41:44] **Jesse Thorn:** We're looking at Atlanta, Georgia, Durham, North Carolina, Charlottesville, Virginia, Washington DC, Portland, Maine, Boston, Massachusetts. And of course, the grand finale in Brooklyn, New York City. All of those dates and ticket links online at VanFreaksRoadshow.com. VanFreaksRoadshow.com.

[00:42:03] **John Hodgman:** And we're going to have all kinds of fun and surprises. Chuck Bryant is going to be—from *Stuff You Should Know*—will join us in Atlanta. He's going to be playing some tunes and chatting with us. All kinds of—Jamelle Bouie is going to be joining us on Halloween in Charlottesville, Virginia. Linda Holmes will be joining us in DC, plus other special guests. And of course, that big show in Brooklyn. It's at the Murmrr Opera House, and we're going to have a grand old time. And you don't even know what's coming.

[00:42:31] **Paul F. Tompkins:** Can I ask you a question? Did you intentionally book someone that has "boo" in their name for Halloween?

[00:42:34] **John Hodgman:** Yes, Paul. I guess we did. (*Laughs.*)

[00:42:39] **Paul F. Tompkins:** I mean, my hat's off to you.

[00:42:40] **John Hodgman:** Jamelle Bouie's a brilliant writer, contributes incredible essays to the op ed section of the *New York Times*. Also, an incredible photographer, also an incredible film maven and podcaster himself, but also a renowned expert and tester of different cereals. And I don't know when the last time he did a taste test of Count Chocula was.

(Paul gasps.)

But I think we're going to have to do that at Halloween on our show in Charlottesville, Virginia. Don't you think, Jesse?

[00:43:08] **Jesse Thorn:** This is like—you know how when you're in the entertainment industry and you have children, you're just desperate that one thing that you do, one person you meet, one show you get to make a guest appearance on, one thing that you write, a person you write a joke for, whatever it is—just one of those things is going to impress your children.

(John confirms.)

The only thing that I could ever do that would impress any of my children is have Jamelle Bouie do a breakfast cereal review on *Judge John Hodgman*, which will absolutely floor my daughter, Grace.

[00:43:45] **John Hodgman:** Hey, make sure you floor Jesse's children and have a good time yourself. Go to VanFreaksRoadshow.com. Submit your cases, particularly for Atlanta and Brooklyn right now. We still are looking for cases. We've got some. We need more at VanFreaksRoadshow.com. There's a link there to MaximumFun.org/jjho for cases. And I charge you, the listener: if you were in any of our shows in Lexington or Madison or St. Paul or Chicago or Austin and you had a good time, tell your friends! Go to VanFreaksRoadshow.com, have them join us in the cities we got coming up. It's going to be a really good time.

I'm just getting this word in my ear right now. Joel Mann and the Night & Day Trio will be joining us in Portland, Maine to provide musical accompaniment and a dispute with Joel's own human wife, who's a whole human being in her own right. VanFreaksRoadshow.com. It's a good time. And we hope to see you there. It's better when you're there.

[00:44:39] **Jesse Thorn:** Let's get back to the docket.

[00:44:41] **Transition:** Three gavel bangs.

[00:44:42] **Jesse Thorn:** Welcome back to the *Judge John Hodgman* podcast. We are handcuffed to radiators here at MaxFun HQ and clearing out the Halloween docket with friend of the court, Paul F. Tompkins.

[00:44:53] **John Hodgman:** So, we now have like about 12 minutes to rule on 10 more Halloween disputes, or else we will starve to death in Aidan's death trap.

[00:45:02] **Paul F. Tompkins:** Oh, well—I mean, not me. ‘Cause I’m not handcuffed. So, I could eat either one of you. Or both!

[00:45:08] **Jesse Thorn:** Okay, well, I’m going to say let’s hope it doesn’t come to that! It doesn’t look like Aidan is sending any more animatronics in here with cases. So, I’m going to go to the mailbox. Here’s something from reddit user JustaHominid. “My wife and I devote the month of October to watching scary movies. We have a cute name for it. We call it Scary Movie Month. But now my wife is starting to suggest we watch scary movies any time of year. I think this makes Scary Movie Month less special. Who’s right?”

[00:45:38] **John Hodgman:** Paul, do you have a top scary movie this Halloween season?

[00:45:43] **Paul F. Tompkins:** I am a fan of Mike Flanagan’s horror series. I’m halfway through the latest one and enjoying it very much. But we also do a Scary Movie Month. We don’t necessarily watch one every day, but that’s all we—that’s kind of all we watch during October. So, I feel like you can watch them any time of year if, come October, you’re exclusively watching scary movies. Because sometimes a horror movie comes out in March. And as strange as that is, it’s like, “What are you going to wait that long to watch a movie you might be interested in watching?” I think you should watch it. I think you should watch them when you want to watch them.

[00:46:22] **John Hodgman:** What is your favorite one that you always watch, every Halloween time? An old classic, a new classic? I’ll tell you for me—and obviously, the person who directed this movie is a literal monster—but I still watch *Rosemary’s Baby* every Halloween.

[00:46:42] **Paul F. Tompkins:** Another movie directed by that same monster and starring that monster is *The Tenant*, which is—

[00:46:47] **John Hodgman:** Oh, I’ve never seen that.

[00:46:48] **Paul F. Tompkins:** Oh, it is—I’ll tell you what, I have blocked out everything about it, because it is one of the most unsettling movies I’ve ever seen.

[00:46:54] **John Hodgman:** Yeah. One of my favorite Halloween seasons—I may have discussed it before—is when our daughter was just old enough to start watching scary movies, maybe 10 or 11, I feel like. And I’m like, you definitely want to check out David Cronenberg’s *The Brood*.

(Paul makes a strangled sound and they laugh.)

Truly one of the scariest movies I’ve ever seen. Truly disturbing movie largely about parenting and bad parenting. And I was embodying it. It was one of those moments where I think it was just the right amount above her pay grade. She was very scared, but she was also very intrigued. Because she was like, “Why would my father think I would like this?” That was the question in her mind.

[00:47:36] **Paul F. Tompkins:** (*Cackles.*) That's the real horror.

[00:47:39] **John Hodgman:** Yeah, that's the real horror.

[00:47:40] **Paul F. Tompkins:** That's a movie that I started to watch, and then it was so of its time that I was like, "I don't know if I can concentrate on this."

(*John reacts with surprise.*)

Yeah. I've always felt like I have to go back and try again with that.

[00:47:50] **John Hodgman:** Well, because I feel like it's—you come for the murderous little troglodyte children in pastel-colored jumpers. But you stay—

[00:48:00] **Paul F. Tompkins:** Didn't even get to them.

(*John stops mid-sentence in disbelief.*)

I swear to God, I got like ten minutes into that movie.

[00:48:02] **John Hodgman:** To me, you come back for the wild '70s fashions—and not just '70s fashions, but Ontarian.

(*Paul laughs.*)

Canadian '70s interior designs and incredibly shaggy carpets. It was great. I love it. Jesse, how do you feel about the idea of Scary Movie Month vs. Scary Movie Year?

[00:48:22] **Jesse Thorn:** Because of my daughter's special interests, roughly 18 months ago, I've seen a lot of scary movies. *Scary Movie*, *Scary Movie 2*, *Scary Movie 3*, *Epic Movie*.

(*John laughs and affirms.*)

The films, they are not strong. They're not the best of us.

[00:48:37] **John Hodgman:** No. But you don't like horror movies in general.

[00:48:43] **Jesse Thorn:** No, I was—somebody asked me the day before yesterday—I think we might have been together, John—what scary movies I'd like. And I mentioned that I had really loved the movie *The Lighthouse*. And they said, "That's not a horror movie," for some reason.

[00:49:01] **John Hodgman:** Well, who's the person who asked you if you liked scary movies? Was it the killer from *Scream*?

[00:49:07] **Jesse Thorn:** No, it was our tour producer, Laura. (*Laughs.*)

[00:49:10] **John Hodgman:** Oh, right. Dressed as the killer from *Scream*.

[00:49:12] **Paul F. Tompkins:** Laura's the killer from *Scream*?!

(*Jesse confirms casually.*)

[00:49:14] **John Hodgman:** Sorry. Maybe not in the reboot. I'm not sure.

[00:49:18] **Jesse Thorn:** You thought she was the lead singer of the band Skout with a K, but she's actually—

[00:49:21] **John Hodgman:** She's actually the killer from *Scream*. Yeah, I gotta say, JustaHominid, it's fine to watch a scary movie sometime or another outside of Scary Movie Month. As long as you're curating the best Scary Movie Month you can, watch whatever movie you want.

[00:49:37] **Jesse Thorn:** Here's a case about decorations from Caitlin in Linfield, Massachusetts. “Is it okay to put out realistic horror decorations in kid-heavy neighborhoods? Today I drove by a house that had on display a life size Michael Myers with a bloody chainsaw. People like what they like, but are these people going to pay for my children's therapy bills?”

[00:49:58] **John Hodgman:** First of all, this house is terrible and should take this down, because Michael Myers doesn't use a chainsaw.

(*Paul agrees with a laugh.*)

Did I take what you were gonna say, Paul?

[00:50:08] **Paul F. Tompkins:** No, you did not, but you're right! Exactly.

[00:50:13] **John Hodgman:** Like, get it together.

[00:50:14] **Paul F. Tompkins:** He never used a chainsaw!

[00:50:15] **John Hodgman:** Not once did he use a chainsaw.

[00:50:17] **Paul F. Tompkins:** Not once!

[00:50:18] **John Hodgman:** Not even to chop wood.

[00:50:19] **Paul F. Tompkins:** Yeah, I don't even know if a chainsaw appears in the *Halloween* franchise!

[00:50:21] **John Hodgman:** I know, Paul and Jesse, the people in Los Angeles—and by people I mean Dana Gould and Patton Oswalt and some others—really love decorating for Halloween. What's the scariest house or the most elaborately decorated house you ever saw at Halloween time?

[00:50:42] **Paul F. Tompkins:** Oh man, you know what? We were in New Orleans a few years ago in October, and there was like a street—I can't remember which street it was, but these people like went for it. There was this very elaborate *Beetlejuice*-themed house that had everything you could want. It had the couple with the stretched-out faces. It had Beetlejuice himself. It had a big, striped worm. Like they really—it was great. They really went for it.

[00:51:15] **John Hodgman:** Let me ask you this question. Were they handing out Zagnut bars? Yes or no?

[00:51:21] **Paul F. Tompkins:** It was not Halloween exactly. And we were not trick-or-treating. (*Chuckles.*) So, I do not know the answer to that question.

[00:51:27] **John Hodgman:** Forget it. They're dead to me.

[00:51:30] **Paul F. Tompkins:** (*Laughs.*) But if I may, I feel like I have seen so many videos from friends of mine of their little kids seeing scary Halloween stuff and loving it! Like, you know, to them, it's like—they know that these things aren't real and that they're—especially when you're seeing them during the day, you know? You know that these things are not real, you know that they're decorations. And I see little kids like really enjoying them. And just so you know, the person that's going to be responsible for your kids needing therapy is you. That's just the way it goes.

(*John laughs.*)

That's parents and children. There's no way around that.

[00:52:11] **John Hodgman:** It's not going to be the inflatable Oogie Boogie from *A Nightmare Before Christmas* that you see in some yard somewhere?

[00:52:17] **Paul F. Tompkins:** (*Laughing.*) No, no! It's gonna be because of a thing you said that you don't even remember that you said.

[00:52:19] **John Hodgman:** 100% it's going to be you, parents. Yeah, I don't know. Jesse, do you remember—was it last year or the year before that we had a question for Halloween, and my memory is that the dad liked to dress as the rabbit from *Donnie Darko* and sit in the middle of a garage. Like an open garage, and he had the candy on the table in front of him, and he just sat there motionlessly, and the kids had to come in and get the candy. That, to me, is a little bit more terrifying than—

[00:52:50] **Paul F. Tompkins:** Yeah, I don't really like that. There are some people that are very fond of doing that. And you know, I think that you do have to make a decision whether your house is going to be spooky or spooey. You're either gonna go kind of a cute—

[00:53:06] **John Hodgman:** (*Interrupting.*) I'm sorry. You used a word that I'm not familiar with.

[00:53:08] **Paul F. Tompkins:** Spooky?

[00:53:09] **John Hodgman:** Spooky?!

[00:53:10] **Paul F. Tompkins:** Yeah. You don't know spooky?

[00:53:12] **John Hodgman:** No, what does that mean?

[00:53:15] **Paul F. Tompkins:** It's like spooky but cute kind of, you know?

(*John affirms.*)

Yeah, and if you're gonna lean more on jack-o-lanterns and more cartoony kind of things, then sort of more *Nightmare Before Christmas* as opposed to, you know, *Hell House*. You know, but you want to have a uniformity of design.

[00:53:36] **John Hodgman:** Yeah. What you want is spooky or very spooky. You can even, I think, err gently on the side of scary. But horrifying? That's the line.

[00:53:50] **Paul F. Tompkins:** You know what? I'll offer this. If you're, let's say—because I know people are fond of doing this—if you're going to lay in wait for children in a costume or in a barrel or whatever it is you have set up where the kids have to come to you to get the candy, you do have to go—you have to make a judgment on how old are these kids? Can they handle this? If they're like tweens or whatever? Yeah, jump out at them. If they're little kids, you just sit there like you actually are a statue, and you don't move. And make that a fun challenge for you rather than challenging these small children. (*Chuckles.*)

[00:54:24] **John Hodgman:** Yeah, don't move, and shut up for once. That's a good challenge for most adults, especially dads.

(*Paul cackles.*)

I would say that Paul is exactly right, and I think that that's what we determined with regard to—and people will write me letters, but with regard to *Donnie Darko* and the garage, that the dad had to make a determination as to whether the kids could handle it or not. But I'm going to say: here's a rule of thumb. It's not a law. But it's a rule of severed thumb for Halloween.

(*Paul chuckles.*)

And that is everyone understands that the front of your house during trick-or-treat times is a theater. It is a show place. The porch, the yard, the steps up to your door—

(*Paul offers "the stoop!"*.)

The stoop. Like, what if you want to make it stoopy? That's all theater, right? And I think that you can probably convey, even to small kids, “This is all just part of the show.” And you can probably go pretty hard-scary in the theatrical realm, which is the public space in front of your home. But luring kids into a garage—I don't care what day of the year it is; that's not a good look, ever.

(Paul laughs.)

I would say jumping out of a secret place or luring them into a private space as part of your game is probably something you should set aside. I don't know. Maybe it's a tradition in your neighborhood. I don't want to get your letters, but that's my good rule of severed thumb.

[00:55:59] **Sound Effect:** *(A wrestling announcer voice echoes while air horns honk.)* Judge John Hodgman, th-th-th-th-th-thumb rule!

[00:56:03] **Paul F. Tompkins:** You can use that if you want.

[00:56:04] **John Hodgman:** Thank you. I will.

[00:56:06] **Jesse Thorn:** I don't know if this counts as a whole case. We're running out of time. Stephen in Minneapolis writes, “Is shooting fog from a fog machine at kids as they walk up to the house too spooky or rude?”

[00:56:14] **John Hodgman:** Shooting a fog machine at kids?

[00:56:17] **Paul F. Tompkins:** Shooting it at them?

[00:56:18] **Jesse Thorn:** That's cool, to me.

[00:56:19] **John Hodgman:** Yeah, don't shoot anything at kids.

[00:56:20] **Paul F. Tompkins:** Is it like a jet of fog?! *(Laughs.)*

[00:56:24] **Jesse Thorn:** It's like a surprise. It's a pooft.

[00:56:27] **Paul F. Tompkins:** Oh, one of those kind of things. *(Unimpressed.)* Eh.

[00:56:30] **John Hodgman:** Is it a single poof? Jesse, you've seen this in action?

[00:56:33] **Jesse Thorn:** No, but I'm imagining what it is, and I think I support it. I think it is not too scary, mostly just fun.

[00:56:41] **Paul F. Tompkins:** I don't think it's too scary. I think it's fun. I would—, if it were me, I would opt for a nice layer of fog on the ground, and I would shoot air at them much in the way the poison darts are simulated in the *Indiana Jones* ride.

[00:57:00] **John Hodgman:** I think that sounds good. I would take a baseline of fog, shoot air at them like in the *Indiana Jones* ride, and then drip a bunch of water on them—like every ride at Universal Studios, for some reason.

(Paul laughs.)

Like, why am I getting dripped on in *The Mummy*? There's a lot of dripping. But yes. But I would also say, Stephen in Minneapolis, read the ingredients in your fog juice before you start shooting fog jets into kids' faces, for example. I'm not an expert, but it seems to me like you might want to keep that stuff down, Paul F. Tompkins style, around ankle level. I'm not sure whether you're suggesting about poofing it in their faces, but if you poof anything in anyone's face, read the ingredients, make sure it's safe.

[00:57:46] **Paul F. Tompkins:** I say you never want to obscure anyone's vision with any of the things that you do.

[00:57:49] **John Hodgman:** Oh, really? Oh, because we have a tradition in my neighborhood where I dress up as Slenderman, and I wait until the kids are at my door, then I come from my neighbor's house, and I put my hands in front of their eyes. And then I drag them into a different apartment.

[00:58:01] **Paul F. Tompkins:** That's different. Yeah, that's—*(Laughs.)*

[00:58:06] **John Hodgman:** That's fun, right? It's all in good fun.

[00:58:12] **Paul F. Tompkins:** That's the Slenderman motto!

(They laugh.)

It's all in good fun, gang.

[00:58:14] **Jesse Thorn:** Here's one from Reddit user PatrickMorgan08. “I find Halloween decorations to be extraordinarily tacky. Apologies to the nice young man who has the Spirit Halloween wiki. My wife loves Halloween decorations. How do we decide on how to decorate? I don't want anything more than a tasteful harvest season display. If it were up to her, we'd have a 12-foot skeleton.”

[00:58:39] **John Hodgman:** Oh no. Well, first of all, I just want to say—the nice young man who has the Spirit Halloween wiki is really nice! And Halloween decorations are great, especially all the great animatronics from Spirit Halloween!

(Paul laughs.)

Whether it's Harvester of Souls, or Dangerous Dolly, or Murderous Clown. Whatever it is, it's terrific, and no one should ever slander them. And frankly, PatrickMorgan08, you go into the cornfield. You're bad. Aidan is good.

But are there any—just hypothetically, are there any compromise positions between scary and simply seasonal?

[00:59:22] **Jesse Thorn:** Like a haunted cornucopia?

[00:59:23] **John Hodgman:** Yeah, like a haunted cornucopia.

[00:59:25] **Paul F. Tompkins:** It's filled with little skulls.

(John chuckles in utter delight.)

[00:59:29] **Jesse Thorn:** We just got rich, Paul!

[00:59:28] **Paul F. Tompkins:** It's actually not a bad idea. I would say if where you are is tasteful harvest season display and your wife is at 12-foot skeleton, I would go gothic. I would have little—there's little—you can have like, you know, like your sort of harvest colors and everything, but you can also have like a fake raven or something like that. You know what I mean?

(John agrees.)

Like, there's things you can do. Like, you could have a skull as a candle holder. You know, like there are things that are not—that look a little more grown up.

(John offers “Edgar Allan Poe-y”.)

Yeah, exactly. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Which still look—they can still look kind of tasteful without being you know, as obvious as some of the other stuff.

[01:00:15] **Sound Effect:** A distant clock chimes midnight.

[01:00:16] **John Hodgman:** Oh no. No, no, no, no! It can't be. It can't be midnight already. Jesse Thorn, check your watch. What time is it?

[01:00:22] **Jesse Thorn:** *(Hurriedly.)* Here's one from Marie Bardi-Salinas. “Are those giant skeletons from Home Depot cool, or are people just showing off?”

(John and Paul immediately agree “both”.)

[01:00:29] **John Hodgman:** Do we have any more—? Oh no! We're out of time!

[01:00:33] **Jesse Thorn:** We've only done seven! We've only done seven!

[01:00:0035] **John Hodgman:** With the Reese's Pee-sees? Yes or no?

[01:00:37] **Jesse Thorn:** Yeah, with the Ree-sees Pee-sees!

[01:00:39] **John Hodgman:** Oh. And I said it the wrong way too. Ugh.

(The phone rings.)

Paul. Hand me the phone.

[01:00:44] **Aidan:** Time's up, John and Jesse! But don't worry. I will let Paul F. Tompkins go—once he has feasted on your bones!

[01:00:50] **Paul F. Tompkins:** Great!

[01:00:52] **John Hodgman:** No, not great, Paul! Aidan, Aidan, I'm so sorry! We didn't mean to exploit your content. We like you a lot. What can we do to get out of this? We'll plug your YouTube channel! <http://www.youtube.com/@aidandank2004>. YouTube.com/@ A-I-D-A-N-K 2004, pleeeeeease!

[01:01:13] **Aidan:** YouTube channel?! Do you think I handcuffed you to a radiator just to plug my YouTube channel?! I'm not a monster! But I will say this: every year I host a haunted house to raise money for our local food pantry. Food insecurity is at an all-time high in this country right now. If you encourage your listeners to find their local food pantry and make a donation and then go to my YouTube channel? Then I will set you free.

(Sound of a large latch turning.)

[01:01:42] **Jesse Thorn:** Ah, the door is unlocked, and my handcuffs just opened. We are free!

[01:01:46] **John Hodgman:** Oh, mine too! Oh, thank God or Whatever.

(A menacing, childish giggle interrupts their celebration, followed by a thud.)

[01:01:52] **Paul F. Tompkins:** Oooh, John, looks like Toothy the Clown came to life and locked the door again.

[01:01:57] **Jesse Thorn:** Doh! And now there are dozens of Spirit Halloween animatronics coming in through the air ducts!

(A cacophony of toy noises.)

There's Menacing Molly! Ooh, the Deathstalker! Mr. Punchy!

[01:02:07] **John & Jesse:** *(In unison.)* Lil' Skellybones!?

[01:02:10] **Aidan:** My toys! I can't control them anymore! They've come to life, and they're going on a murderous rampage! I'm sorry, Judge John Hodgman. Good luck!

[01:02:20] **Jesse Thorn:** Dammit, you clowns! Shut your pie holes!

[01:02:22] **John Hodgman:** Ow! Ow! Mr. Punchy's punching me! Paul, I'm sorry I lured you to your death!

[01:02:27] **Paul F. Tompkins:** John, wait. Those creepy dolls from before—are they singing?

(Off-kilter circus music fades in.)

[01:02:31] **John Hodgman:** Dolls! Abby's creepy dolls from Dolly Parton, they're coming to life! Prudence, Delilah, Ruth, Debbie, they're picking up weapons! They're fighting the clowns! I told you they were my friends!

(Cartoon punching sounds.)

The creepy dolls are fighting the Spirit Halloween animatronics! And it looks exactly like what you would imagine it in your head if you were hearing it.

(The music stops.)

The dolls have won, you guys. They have set the murderous animatronics on fire, and it was very easy to set them on fire because of their cheap cloaks and clown costumes.

[01:02:57] **Jesse Thorn:** Now I don't think Spirit Halloween is ever going to sponsor us.

[01:03:01] **Paul F. Tompkins:** Well, that's over! Gotta go!

(Jesse says bye to him.)

[01:03:03] **John Hodgman:** Paul, thank you very much for joining us on the *Judge John Hodgman* podcast this Halloween. I hope that you have a safe and healthy scary season.

[01:03:13] **Paul F. Tompkins:** I can't hear you!

[01:03:14] **John Hodgman:** Sorry, he already left. Jesse, are we okay?

[01:03:17] **Jesse Thorn:** Yeah, I think we are. And I'm prepared to pronounce: *(in a haunted doll voice)* this docket is clean.

[01:03:23] **John Hodgman:** *(Shuddering.)* Ugh, scary.

[01:03:26] **Jesse Thorn:** That's it for another episode of *Judge John Hodgman*. *Judge John Hodgman* was created by Jesse Thorn and John Hodgman. Marie Bardi-Salinas runs our social media. Our producer is Jennifer Marmor. We're on Instagram, [@JudgeJohnHodgman](#). Follow us there for evidence and for other photos from the show. We just posted some fun pictures of us with some meat that Aaron Franklin gave us at Franklin's Barbecue in Austin, Texas.

[01:03:49] **John Hodgman:** We have a lot of fun on social media. Well, you know what? Our social media is still fun. It's just not debilitatingly sad like some other social media. It's fun!

[01:03:59] **Jesse Thorn:** Check out the Maximum Fun subreddit, [MaximumFun.Reddit.com](#), where you can discuss all the decisions in this episode. And we're headed to the East Coast!

[01:04:09] **John Hodgman:** That's right! As mentioned, we're just about to start our second and final leg of the Van Freaks Roadshow! It's not too late to send us your cases, especially if you live in New York City—any of the boroughs there. So, send in your disputes to [MaximumFun.org/jjho](#). Get your tickets and other show details at [bit.ly/VanFreaks](#) or [VanFreaksRoadshow.com](#).

[01:04:31] **Jesse Thorn:** And of course, we're eager to hear about all your disputes on any subject. No case too small. That URL, [MaximumFun.org/jjho](#). We'll talk to you next time on the *Judge John Hodgman* podcast.

[01:04:42] **Sound Effect:** Three gavel bangs.

[01:04:44] **Sound Effect:** Cheerful ukulele chord.

[01:04:46] **Speaker 1:** Maximum Fun.

[01:04:47] **Speaker 2:** A worker-owned network.

[01:04:48] **Speaker 3:** Of artist owned shows.

[01:04:50] **Speaker 4:** Supported—

[01:04:51] **Speaker 5:** —directly—

[01:04:52] **Speaker 6:** —by you!