

[00:00:00]

Sound Effect: Three gavel bangs.

Jesse Thorn: Welcome to the *Judge John Hodgman* podcast. I'm Bailiff Jesse Thorn. This week, "Motion to Diss-sis". Laura brings the case against her older sister, Liz. Liz a nerd or no? Laura says that not only is Liz a nerd, but she should embrace her nerddom! Liz says she simply doesn't fit the criteria. With deep love and respect for nerds, of course. Who's right? Who's wrong? Only one can decide. Please rise as Judge John Hodgman enters the courtroom and presents an obscure cultural reference.

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

John Hodgman: Hey, hey, hey. A life. A life, Jesse! You know what that is? It's the feces that happens while you're waiting for moments that never come.

Bailiff Jesse Thorn, please swear them in.

Jesse Thorn: Laura and Liz, 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 his long history of bullying nerds at *The Daily Show*? And I specifically am referring to our friend Elliott.

(They swear.)

Judge Hodgman, you may proceed.

John Hodgman: That's absolutely true. I did bully Elliott. I've mentioned it before, but just to clarify, I had the very—what I consider to be—funny idea of doing some performance art backstage at *The Daily Show*. In which I, a nerd, would bully another nerd, namely Elliott Kalan, by walking by his desk and knocking his comics off his desk for no reason, or taking his replica Iron Man helmet and going, "This belongs to me now. See you later, nerd." Culminating in me throwing my sneaker at him. And it was in that moment that I realized this is not meta bullying, this is just bullying.

(They chuckle.)

As the sneaker reached its apex! And then I realized, oh no! I need to take this back, because regardless of how it seems to me, I am an on-camera personality—by mistake, in life—and

Elliott is merely the head writer. And therefore, he has to be like, “Yeah, that's funny, John,” when it's not funny to have someone throw shoes at you! And then I heard the thunk against his shoulder, and I knew that I owed Elliott an apology—one that I give him probably twice a year, because I was just being a bully. Sorry if you've all heard that story before, but I just wanted to let you know. Now we have two sisters here. Is one nerd shaming the other by insisting that they be a nerd? Let's find out.

Laura and Liz, you may be seated for an immediate summary judgment in one of your favors.

(Chairs squeak.)

Can either of you name the piece of culture that I referenced as I entered the courtroom?

Liz: I'm going to guess *Revenge of the Nerds*.

John Hodgman: *Revenge of the Nerds!* Hey, hey, hey, it's called a life, Jesse. It's the feces that happen while you're waiting for moments that never come.

Revenge of the Nerds. I don't know. Maybe. I'll write it down. Look, we're on video now, so I'm really writing it down. Turn the page, and *Revenge of the Nerds*. There we go. Wrote it down. Next. Who's next in my guess works?

Laura: That is Laura guessing *Little Shop of Horrors*.

John Hodgman: The very famous Jesse Thorn musical. I'm writing that down, *Little Shop of Horrors*.

Jesse Thorn: Referring specifically to the 1999 School of the Arts production in San Francisco.

John Hodgman: The 1999 School of the Arts. But essentially considered to be the original cast now. Yeah.

Well, let's see. *Little Shop of Horrors*, *Revenge of the Nerds*. *Little Shop of Horrors* is a great musical. *Revenge of the Nerds* is a movie that I have never seen and which I have heard does not age well at all.

Jesse Thorn: No. *(Chuckling.)* I don't think it was good to begin with, and I think it's particularly troubling now.

John Hodgman: Yeah, so let's never mention it again. Good thing all guesses are wrong. Because I was not quoting from nerdery, but rather a specific other kind of nerdery called *The Wire*. I've quoted from *The Wire*, the TV show—maybe the best TV show ever—on this podcast before. Have you ever seen *The Wire*, Liz or Laura?

Liz: I tried to watch it, because I heard it was excellent and could not enjoy it. I just did not enjoy it.

John Hodgman: It doesn't connect with everybody's brain. Took me a while to get into it. And then when I got into it, I was locked in—particularly to the incredibly controlled performance of Clarke Peters playing Lester Freeman, who is one of the detectives that gets assigned to the unit that is followed, particularly in the first season of *The Wire*, where no one—the police do not want this case to go forward. So, they've only assigned them bad detectives.

[00:05:00]

Or what they think are bad detectives. And Lester Freeman is one of the detectives who gets assigned. He served 13 years in the pawn crime division or something as punishment for getting out of line. But he's actually a really good detective. But he's very quiet, and he's very controlled. And the first time you see him, he is working on his side hustle, which is making miniature dollhouse furniture. Does that appeal to either one of you?

Liz: That greatly appeals to me. He's a smart man!

John Hodgman: That would be Liz. He's a very smart man. "He is natural police," says Bunk to McNulty in that episode, whichever one it was. I'm not that much of a nerd for this show. Can't name the chapter and verse.

(They laugh.)

Clarke Peters, also in *Da 5 Bloods* and many other things. Really, really great actor. Really incredible performance. My favorite. One of my favorites of the show.

Jesse Thorn: By all accounts, he had an epic party house on location.

John Hodgman: Is that true? In Baltimore?

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, he rented the big place. A lot of the other actors would stay there, and that was where they would get their cool actor guy on.

John Hodgman: Oh, man. I mean, to me it would just be a party to listen to him speak.

Jesse Thorn: I know!

John Hodgman: It's just such an incredible speaking voice. I'm gonna have to watch *That Wire* all over again. That's only gotten better with age. Anyway! Lester Freeman, the character, is a nerd for little, handmade dollhouse furniture. Just like you are, Liz—or so Laura would claim. Who seeks justice in this court? Is it you, Laura?

Laura: Yes, I am bringing the case against my sister.

John Hodgman: Right. And your older sister, Liz. Nerd or no?

Laura: To me, she is an absolute nerd.

John Hodgman: Absolute nerd! And yet, Liz, you say, no. How do you respond to this claim?

Liz: I say I am not a nerd. It's that simple, Judge.

John Hodgman: You have interests.

Liz: I have interests, I have hobbies, I have passions.

John Hodgman: Laura, what are these passions that Liz has? Making dollhouse furniture.

Laura: The aforementioned miniatures. She's also quite—

John Hodgman: Whew. That's a hot band name. The Aforementioned Miniatures. Feels like a Wes Anderson themed band. Alright. Anyway, you were saying. I apologize.

Laura: Yeah, no, so the miniatures. Her pets have all been named for literary characters, some of them quite obscure. And she is also—

John Hodgman: Woah, woah, woah, woah, woah. Wait a minute.

Liz: I promise you, if I say the name, the judge will know the book.

John Hodgman: Well, yeah, but I'm scrolling through this evidence that was submitted, and I do not see one pet—one photo of any pets.

Liz: There are no photos of pets, because it's not evidence!

John Hodgman: That's never stopped anyone before!

(They chuckle.)

Liz: Judge, would you like a name of a pet to see if you can have an obscure cultural reference or—?

Jesse Thorn: I'll tell you what nerds don't do, test other nerds on knowledge of Arcana.

John Hodgman: Yeah, absolutely. Nerds in no way are—they are no way gatekeepers in any way of their precious cultural references. But I shall take the bait. Go ahead. I am ready to be tested.

Liz: One of our dogs is named Ignatius J. Riley.

John Hodgman: Is that from *Confederacy of Dunces*?

Liz: It is! One of the best books ever written. Yep.

John Hodgman: Ooh. You know, I've never read that book. Honestly.

Jesse Thorn: I've read half of it twice.

Laura: I got three pages in and gave up.

John Hodgman: Why wasn't it for you, Laura? Too deeply ensconced in the Baltimore drug trade?

Laura: Yeah, I mean, always. But it just did not hold me. A little—maybe a little too literary. I will admit, Liz is far more of an academic than I am.

John Hodgman: You know who loves that book is Nick Offerman, and he starred in a play of it in the Huntington Theater in Boston once.

Laura: That tracks.

John Hodgman: That tracks. Laura, what are you nerdy for? Are you a nerd, Laura?

Laura: Oh, absolutely. Yes.

John Hodgman: Younger sister Laura, you own it. You say it loud and proud.

(Laura confirms.)

What are your nerderies?

Laura: I mean, not to like try and sway things in my favor, but Maximum Fun podcasts. I am like an OG for your podcast and *MBMBAM*—have been listening the entirety—you know, for all of those years.

John Hodgman: Wow. Since before you were born, it sounds like.

Laura: And I'm a nerd for theater, especially musical theatre.

John Hodgman: Musical theatre nerdery is strong nerdery!

Laura: It very much is, as I thoroughly enjoyed listening to the *Matilda* case.

John Hodgman: Yes! Speaking of dollhouse miniatures—Doug, the former high school musical teacher/coach never got to mount his production of *Matilda* because of the things that happened in 2020. And then he retired to complete his miniatures for his dollhouse that he gave to his wife, Martha.

Laura: And also, books. I am a big book nerd. I actually invited one of my favorite authors to come see the show I'm stage managing a couple weekends ago. So, like all my nerddoms are overlapping.

John Hodgman: That all sounds like some—as they say on the *Blank Check* podcast—some real nerdy feces, but not traditional nerdy.

[00:10:00]

Not, high elven nerdery insofar as it's not about com-pute-ors or *Lord of the Rings*. Those are the two poles, I might say. (*Stammering.*) I'm hearing my e my inbox fill up as I say this, but you know. The term nerd originated in roughly 19—in the 1950s, but really hit it in the 1960s, describing socially awkward dudes who wore glasses who were more into intellectual weirdo pursuits than they were into normalism, which was sports at the time and arguably still is. And were marginalized and yet, you know, there's now a more of big-vehicle nerdism that encompasses—as Will Wheaton would say, “It's not what you love, it's how you love it.” And you're very passionate about these hobbies.

Laura, even though your passions are kind of more big-vehicle nerdism—not that hyper-traditional, awkward dude in maths nerdism or Newt Lovers of England or whatever. How would you define nerd?

Laura: I think it is if you are into something—a fandom, a thing, whatever it may be—where you are putting an extra time and energy and effort into it, particularly, for example, attending a convention about that thing. That kind of goes beyond just being a fan and being more of a nerd. Also, how often does it come up in your daily life? If you are constantly posting about something, sharing something that you're doing nearly every day or close to every day, I feel like that starts to get into the nerd territory. And I do agree it can be a little bit more traditional, like you were mentioning with the computers and math and all that kind of stuff. But I do think it extends—

John Hodgman: I'm not a gatekeeping nerd. I'm not trying to keep you away from nerdism. I just wanted to get a sense of—yeah. But I mean, by—Laura, by your definition, right? I mean, we're recording this several days before what some people call the big game, which is a very big sports convention.

Jesse Thorn: John, when you say some people, you're referring to some people in television commercials?

(*They laugh.*)

John Hodgman: Yeah, that's right.

Jesse Thorn: Who haven't licensed the word Super Bowl?

John Hodgman: You know what? I'm going to take this heat. We're coming up on the Super Bowl. That's probably the biggest sports fan convention United Statesian sports for sure. And those people are very passionate. So, here's the paradox, Laura. Can you be a nerd for sports?

Laura: I think so.

John Hodgman: (*Disappointedly.*) Now, nothing has any definition anymore.

Jesse Thorn: Judge Hodgman, I've been to three Society for American Baseball Research conventions, so—

John Hodgman: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, I'm looking right at you. I understand where you're coming from. Shut up, nerd.

Laura: I do think there is a difference between a fan and a nerd. And I do think it is the amount of time you've dedicated to it, if you're doing research or actively seeking things out beyond sort of what is there. So, if you're a baseball fan, and you watch it, and you might enjoy watching the Super Bowl, that's one thing. But if you're like getting into each player's background, and you know what college they went to, and you know everybody's stats, and you're like going so deep into it that you're kind of a walking dictionary on that topic, then you become a sports nerd in that specific instance.

Jesse Thorn: Let me ask you this. Baseball teams, for example—this is the season when baseball teams have their fan fests. So, at the stadium or sometimes at another venue, in colder places, they will have players come, sign autographs. They'll have a few panels. You know, the general manager of the team or the owner of the team will take questions from the audience, the manager will take questions from the audience, and fans of all ages will come and get autographs and revel in their passion for their local sports team. Is that nerd behavior?

Laura: I think the key word you said there is local. So, say that was happening in New York City for aforementioned New York team. I don't want to divide baseball loyalties. And you live in California, and you fly out to attend that, because you love whatever New York team so much, then yes. I would say you are a nerd.

John Hodgman: What if you live in Los Angeles, and you're a fan of the San Francisco giants? What if you're a fan of the San Francisco giants, and you go to Mexico City to see them play the San Diego Padres? And they hit a lot of home runs, because the air is so thin.

Jesse Thorn: But you also go with your mom, and you go to a lot of museums and flea markets as well.

John Hodgman: Yeah, what if you go with your mommy to a baseball game in Mexico City, because you love the San Francisco Giants so much?

Jesse Thorn: And because your mom has a master's degree in Latin American studies.

John Hodgman: And because your mom is the coolest and your best friend?

Laura: Then you're son of the year.

[00:15:00]

John Hodgman: Son of the year.

Jesse Thorn: Thank you. Podcast Hall of Famer, Son of the Year, Jesse Thorn.

Laura: Exactly. 100%.

John Hodgman: Hey Liz, you're still here.

(They laugh.)

Tell me about the hobbies again. We got the making of miniatures.

Liz: That is—yes, that is a hobby that—

John Hodgman: You're naming your dogs after book characters.

Liz: I wouldn't call that a hobby, but yes. My husband and I have named all but one of our many dogs and cats after—

John Hodgman: Oh! Why are you so reticent with the animals? Tell me about all the names of your animals. Let's go.

Liz: Okay, are you ready? *(Clears throat.)* Do we have time for this?

John Hodgman: Yeah. We basically have time for nothing else.

Liz: My first two cats were Walt and Waldo after Walt Whitman and Ralph Waldo Emerson. I did not know that Walt was a girl, so Walt and Waldo. And then we had a cat my husband named Tux. He did not conform to the method.

John Hodgman: He did not follow the template.

Liz: No, no. *(Playfully.)* It's amazing 26 years later, we're still together after that. I mean, it was devastating. So, the cats, we had Tess for Tess of the D'Urbervilles. We still have Susie named after Susanna from *The Dark Tower* series by Stephen King. We had a Roland, named, of course, after—

John Hodgman: Also from *Dark Tower*.

Liz: Yes, the great Roland. Our very first dog was Queequeg, which is, of course, from—?

Jesse Thorn: *Moby Dick*?

Liz: And we had a Melville as well. And then we have Iggy, and then our newest, absolutely insane—

John Hodgman: Ignatius J. Reily. Say his name.

Liz: —newest addition that Laura helped us adopt and had no idea he was coming into our lives when she came to visit in November is, Hieronymus Bosch.

John Hodgman: (*Laughs.*) Scary.

Liz: And we call him Bosch. Named after—he's named after the character, not the artist. But of course, the character's named after the artist, so.

John Hodgman: Oh, named after Bosch from the Amazon show? And the Michael Connelly series?

Liz: From the Michael Connelly books, yes. (*Laughs.*)

John Hodgman: Oh, sorry.

Liz: It's okay.

John Hodgman: Oh, I apologize. Oh, now you're really splitting hairs. That's some nerdery right there!

(*Liz laughs.*)

Jesse Thorn: Can you imagine, John—

John Hodgman: Could be an artist. Could be Titus Welliver in the role of a lifetime, Harry Bosch. But you're like no, no, no it's from the book. It's from the books. And also you got two pets named after characters from *The Dark Tower* series, which is the alternate universe Stephen King. Oh, Stephen King, very popular author. You know who reads *The Dark Tower* series? Stephen King nerds.

Liz: *Dark Tower* series is fantastic.

John Hodgman: Read everything else. Never read a word. The thing about Stephen King is he's like, yeah, I guess I'm going to write 2000-page novels a year. And you think you've

heard all of them. And then it turns out he was secretly writing five others under different pen names, and then he's also got this other series of 19,000-page novels set in an alternate universe called *The Dork Tower*.

(Liz laughs.)

Jesse Thorn: Judge Hodgman, you know, I have a newt named Bosch. I actually have a few newts. One's named Bosch. One's named Jack Reacher. One's named Kevin Costner's character from Yellowstone.

John Hodgman: *Dork Tower*, of course, is actually a very funny comic strip. I can't take credit for that. It's by our friend John Kowalik in Madison, Wisconsin. Thanks, John.

Sound Effect: Three gavel bangs.

Sound Effect: Three gavel bangs.

John Hodgman: Anywaaay, why are you not a nerd after you've named all your animals after books? I mean, bookishness is one of the early signs of high nerdery, high elven nerdery.

Liz: I am not a nerd because, as I said in the introduction, I am passionate, I'm intelligent, I'm educated, and I like to know everything I can know about what I'm doing. But that, I don't feel, makes me a nerd. Because my definition of nerd is a lot like yours, Judge.

John Hodgman: I haven't said I've got a definition! I'm going to decide what nerdism is in this very episode. I have spoken that there is a traditional definition or stereotype, and now there is a more expansive stereotype. Obviously.

Liz: I liken it more to things like when my sister was younger, and she was writing fanfiction for shows like *House* and *General Hospital*. She was a very early AOL adopter and fortunately went in a positive direction with those chat rooms and met some friends that have remained lifelong friends in her Secret Society of Cool People club that she created, called the SSCP. Which, see—

John Hodgman: Oh, I thought that was your terminology.

Liz: Nope! That is—my sister named it. So, those are the types of things I don't do. I was an English major, and then eventually got a second—a master's degree. My second master's degree is in English. So.

John Hodgman: Master nerd.

Jesse Thorn: You said your second master's degree?

Liz: Yes, sir. Yes. I—

Jesse Thorn: What was your first master's degree in?

Liz: My first master's degree is in education and teaching English to speakers of other languages from the University of Pennsylvania.

John Hodgman: That's amazing. And your second master's degree?

[00:20:00]

Liz: It's in English with a focus on world and multicultural literatures. I wrote about a Native American author, Louise Erdrich, and Māori author Patricia Grace. She wrote *Potiki and Their use of Indigenous Language in their Anglophone Texts*. That's not nerdy at all, what I just said. That's education.

John Hodgman: Also—I mean, condescending a little, Liz. And educated, not nerdy, condescending. Patronizing!

Laura: Ivy League school.

Liz: I am highfalutin.

John Hodgman: Laura, is Liz a member of the Secret Society of Cool People? Yes or no.

Laura: Yes, and actually I have to give credit where credit is due. That is Erika originally named the SSCP. And in the nerddom, I met Erika when we were about 14 years old through America Online in a *General Hospital* chat room, and we are friends to this day. So, I—

John Hodgman: So, Erika is one of your online friends.

Laura: She is, although we have met multiple times in person.

John Hodgman: No, I understand. But Liz is a member of the Secret Society of Cool People, even though she is holding you in contempt for your fanfic and think she's better than you because she's older?

Laura: It's an ironic Secret Society of Cool People name, and I love my sister. She's my friend, so of course I want her to be a part of my group with my friends.

John Hodgman: Liz, do you accept membership in the secret society of cool people? Yes or no?

Liz: I do, and I thoroughly enjoyed it. And I just want to say, I don't think I'm better than Laura. I don't think I'm a nerd, but certainly there is no better—

John Hodgman: Just better than all nerds.

Liz: There is no better person than my sister. I just wanna have that on the record.

John Hodgman: Oh, she's one of the good ones. I got it.

Liz: There's truly no better person than my sister. That's why I'm here. (*Chuckles.*)

John Hodgman: Liz, you sent in some evidence in your own support, here. Which includes photographs of these incredibly beautiful and detailed dollhouse miniatures that you have made with your own hands, is that correct?

Liz: No, sir. I did not make them. I bought them. They were made by other makers. So, the—

John Hodgman: Oooh. Oh, so you're not a nerd. You're a geek.

(*They laugh.*)

Laura: She did make me a miniature for my 40th birthday based on *Anne of Green Gables*.

Liz: I did! And you did not submit that as evidence.

Laura: I didn't.

John Hodgman: I get no pets, and I get no *Anne of Green Gables* miniature? What was the miniature that she made for you?

Laura: It looks like the book, which is really cute. And then it has her bedroom, so it has like her little bed and her little desk and table. And then it has a mini-mini. So, it has like the mini version of *Anne of Green Gables* that you can put in the little bedroom.

John Hodgman: Remember Doug who never got to mount *Matilda* at that high school? He made a dollhouse. You know what he put in one of the bedrooms? A little miniature book called *Vacationland* by John Hodgman.

Laura: That's perfect!

John Hodgman: And he took a little—and a little miniature of me is lying down in the bed top of the covers in my clothes, which is accurate.

Jesse Thorn: You're probably lying in state.

John Hodgman: I don't know, Liz. Do you have a non-miniature *Vacationland*, Liz?

Liz: Judge, I'm sorry to tell you—

John Hodgman: (*Grumbling over her.*) Alright, okay. I've seen exactly—okay, got it.

Liz: —that I had no idea who you were or what this show was until my sister told me we were being interviewed by Jennifer. And I listened to my first episode after that interview. I'm so sorry!

(They laugh.)

Jesse Thorn: John's a pretty celebrated author.

Laura: I know, I've got the whole *That Is All* series. I've got *Medallion Status*.

Jesse Thorn: It would be one thing if you had an associate's degree in English. Or if you had just taken some literature classes at the learning annex.

(Laura and Liz struggle to control their laughing.)

John Hodgman: I'm over it.

Jesse Thorn: Let the record reflect that Judge Hodgman is over it.

Liz: Judge, I'm so sorry. Because I am not a nerd, I'm—he can't hear me.

John Hodgman: No, I get it. I get it.

Liz: I apologize. I don't listen to podcasts as a rule.

John Hodgman: My time is over. I understand.

Liz: I apologize. *(Laughs.)*

John Hodgman: Nerds move on. They move on to other nerds.

Liz: I thoroughly enjoyed the podcast when I started listening to it and plan on listening to more episodes.

Jesse Thorn: This is James Acaster's time, we get it.

John Hodgman: Yeah, we get it. Let's look at these little miniatures that you didn't make with your own hands.

Liz: The furniture, are we looking at—?

John Hodgman: Well, okay. So, you submitted this evidence, Liz. And all of this evidence is available on our show page at MaximumFun.org, as well as our Instagram account, [@JudgeJohnHodgman](https://www.instagram.com/JudgeJohnHodgman).

Exhibit A, submitted by Liz, “The dollhouse my dad made that my mom and I decorated on the right. And the dollhouse my husband bought for me to work on, on the left.” There's a beautiful, well decorated exterior dollhouse. And then there seems to be one in progress. Why am I looking at these little houses?

Liz: You're looking at these because they're, first, an example of my hobby. I thought it would be good to present a visual representation of the hobby. The dollhouse on the right, especially—

[00:25:00]

—the one my dad made—has seen better days. So, it's going to be undergoing rehabilitation, which is something pretty popular in the dollhouse world.

John Hodgman: Is there a dollhouse decorating culture?

Liz: Yes! In fact, one of the Facebook has over half a million members.

John Hodgman: Miniature groups. That's a pretty—

Jesse Thorn: Sounds like a pretty large group to me.

(They laugh.)

Liz: It is the largest of the miniature groups that I am a member of. This is—yeah, it's quite a popular hobby.

Laura: You actively sought out a group to join for this hobby of yours, so you went above and beyond just like enjoying miniatures. You actively sought out—

John Hodgman: *(Interrupting.)* Uh, your point is well made, Laura. Let's move along. Exhibit B. I thought—so, here we see like an armchair and a side table and some vases and like a salad bowl, all in miniature. I thought you made these with your own hands! But you didn't, did you?

Liz: No, these are all handmade by artisans. So, this is evidence of miniature as art, not miniature as nerd-dom or even hobby. So, all of this—including the itty bitty, teeny tiny perfume bottle—were made by artisans.

John Hodgman: You're saying there's no artisanship in nerdery? You're saying that *General Hospital* fanfic is not art.

Liz: I am saying that, yes. Yes, I am saying that. *(Laughs.)*

John Hodgman: Alright. Well, there you go. You're on the record now.

Liz: If literature is art, fanfiction is not, yes.

John Hodgman: You're saying this is too well made to have been made by nerds.

Liz: I'm saying—yeah! They're artisans, and there's actually a group for miniature artisans. And that's—I can't remember the entire name of the group, but it is something with miniature and artisans in the title.

Jesse Thorn: Sorry, I can't hear you over the sound of 20% of our listeners stomping up and down on their phones after you said that fanfiction isn't art.

Liz: That's okay. They can direct their ire to me; I'll take it.

John Hodgman: Yeah, that's right. Everyone get everyone else's address. Mine is now secret.

Liz: *(Giggles.)* By the end of this, we'll all be getting comments.

John Hodgman: You know who lives in these dollhouses with all this artisan little craftwork? Little snobs.

(They laugh.)

Jesse Thorn: You can't—I can't even—it would be impossible for me to overstate how excited I am to have a litigant on our program who makes me and John look unpretentious.

(Liz cackles.)

Laura: Honestly, no matter the outcome, I am satisfied.

Liz: *(Stammering.)* They were made by an artist named Ferd Sobol, who's a very, very well-known name in the miniature furniture community.

Jesse Thorn: Liz, I have a sincere question for you. Do you think that someone who is exceptionally good at something is, by nature, an artist or that art involves qualities?

Liz: I would say somebody who is exceptionally good at something as an artist, yes.

Jesse Thorn: Even something—if someone is exceptionally good at building a campfire when it's cold.

Liz: I think that there is an art to building a campfire, especially a campfire that lasts.

Jesse Thorn: Because I have heard it argued—for example, I think Scott McCloud in *Understanding Comics* argues, which is a wonderful book, that art is the non-essential

functions of life. Right? It is the application of effort to—I'm paraphrasing, but it's the application of effort to things that aren't necessary for survival.

John Hodgman: Yeah, the aesthetic is that which serves no practical purpose. Like, for example, dollhouse furniture.

Liz: Which is art.

Laura: Or *General Hospital* fanfiction.

Liz: (*Quietly.*) That's not art. I think that—

John Hodgman: Why is *General Hospital* fanfiction, not art, but building a campfire is?

Liz: It depends on the way the campfire is built. A campfire can be utilitarian, or it can be artistic.

John Hodgman: Let's say it's built on decades of potboiler romantic stories set in a hospital that has captured the imagination of people for generations.

(*Liz laughs.*)

Laura, you submitted some evidence as well. Exhibit C. This is a weather station of some kind.

Laura: Yeah, my sister has this digital weather station.

(*Jesse erupts into laughter.*)

And my sister does not have the largest social media presence. Especially nothing that is public. But if you go to her Facebook and scroll through her photos, maybe every third or fourth photo is a photo of the weather station sharing what the weather is for that day. She is so weather obsessed that when she moved—they lived in Florida, and they moved to Washington. When she moved, our friends and I got—we created a weather persona for her. Her weather persona is Zibby Wibby, and she has a jacket with a patch on it so that she can report on the weather whenever she wants to.

John Hodgman: That's something you gave to her.

[00:30:00]

Not something she got for herself.

Laura: Correct, but she immediately put it on.

John Hodgman: That's not a weather person character she rolled in a meteorological RPG.

Laura: No, but she immediately put it on and started recording videos and still sends videos out.

John Hodgman: Give me a little weather pattern, Liz. You got—what's going on? What's going on in the weather today?

Liz: *(In a cheerful reporter voice, with almost no hesitation.)* Welcome to the beautiful Columbia River Gorge! Today it is cloudy, drizzly, perfectly normal winter day.

But in my defense, your honor! The reason—

John Hodgman: I could have listened to that for another hour.

Liz: Oh, thank you!

John Hodgman: What is the name of your character again?

Liz: Zibby Wibby!

John Hodgman: Zibby Wibby is the character in your weather LARP. Got it. Are you a weather nerd or a weather artist?

(Laura titters.)

Liz: I'm a weather informer, I would say. I'm a weather informer. And I will say—

John Hodgman: A weather narc.

Jesse Thorn: There's only one weather informer, and that's Canadian rapper Snow. Liz, will you stipulate to the—as far as I'm concerned—self-evident fact that weather is second only to *Dungeons & Dragons* in the area of classic nerd feces?

Liz: I would—*Dungeons & Dragons*, *Star Trek*, weather. So, I'm gonna go with third. I will capitulate to third place, yes.

John Hodgman: And I see Exhibit D here, Laura. I'm not sure what I'm looking at here. It looks like some kind of droid or robot, but it says—the caption says, “Liz's tea obsession”. T-E-A obsession. Explain to me.

Laura: Yeah, so with aforementioned weather, where she talked about the terrible winds and everything, they were without power. And one of my sister's high priorities was to be able to—this is a tea kettle that basically makes tea like a coffee pot does. And she uses her own special blend that she orders. It has a mix of exactly what she wants to go in it. And as like

their pipes were frozen, and their dog was ill, and their house was freezing, Liz had to make her tea. And using her special blend, using her fancy teamaker. So, she's plugged into generators and things like that in order to be able to get her Liz Tea Blend made and consumed.

John Hodgman: But why does that—what does that have to do with nerdism? How does that fit into your definition?

Laura: It's that extreme level of the tea snobbery or the tea nerddom where, when she travels, she takes the tea, and she takes her own tea bags. Like, a Twining's English breakfast is not good enough for her.

John Hodgman: She likes what she likes. Having an obsession with a particular kind of tea—I mean, let's face it, Twining's English breakfast is kind of—it's chump tea, pretty much. Now, the fact that you have pointed out that she has a special machine to essentially boil water in a special way—like, taking something that is easy to do and making it complicated, that to me speaks of nerdery. But Liz, let's get a baseline from you. If not you, how would you define a nerd?

Liz: I think of nerddom as sort of being on the fringes. I think that it's also something that is tied to or outside of what a lot of people know. So, for example, fanfiction. You know, especially early adopters of fanfiction, because my sister was a very early adopter. So, I think that—and really took to it. I mean, it became a part of her identity. I think for me, that's the definition of nerddom.

John Hodgman: I understand that you went to a miniatures convention, Liz.

Liz: I did, your honor.

John Hodgman: What happens at a miniatures convention? People cosplaying as like umbrella stands and stuff?

Liz: (*Laughs.*) So, the actual—there's two parts of the convention. You can go a few days early, and you can attend workshops and learn how to build miniature furniture, for example, or to build houses or to engage in miniature arts.

John Hodgman: Where does it happen?

Liz: This one is the Tom Bishop show that happens in Chicago annually. It's the largest miniature show in the United States.

John Hodgman: Laura, how does it feel when your sister calls you a nerd?

Laura: Oh, I don't mind it at all. I am a little offput by the comments on the fanfiction.

John Hodgman: Okay, let me hear it.

Laura: I mean, in this day and age, like when I look back I'm like, yeah. But you know, 18-year-old Laura—I did some good writing. I got a lot of positive feedback from people; a lot of people followed me. So, to say that's not art—like, to me, any kind of writing is art. So, that was a little, you know. But—

John Hodgman: It stung?

(Laura confirms.)

So, Liz has stung you by calling your art form non-art. Why do you want to put the label nerd on her so badly? Do you want to prove to her that you're actually cool? Cause nerds are cool.

[00:35:00]

Or are you trying to point out to her that she's not as cool as she thinks she is?

Laura: Probably more the latter. *(Laughs.)* I just feel like she's not letting her true self come forward, that she's hiding under this academic guise.

John Hodgman: Come on, Laura. Why do you think—you're throwing—look, you're throwing nerd at her pretty hard.

(Laura agrees.)

And I would think that someone who's pretty confident in themselves and what they care about would be like, “Yeah, I guess I'm kind of a nerd for miniatures. Like, sure.” But Liz is over there going, “No, am not a nerd. That is my sister. And what she does is lesser than the people who make a little tiny library chair! The things she loves are stupid compared to this teeny tiny vase.”

Jesse Thorn: And her digital weather center, John.

John Hodgman: Why do you think she's doing that to you, Laura?

Laura: Why do I think Liz is doing that to me? I think—

John Hodgman: Yeah, because you're out here going like, “I want to be the nerd sisters! You're nerdy for your stuff. I'm nerdy for my stuff. Let's be nerds together.”

And Liz, your older sister, is going like, “Uh, no. I am not like you. You're fine. You're one of the good ones. But never—there is a bright line between me and you. And on that side, nerd. And on this side, artisan.” Why do you think she's doing this?

Laura: I think part of it is when I—because we're about six years apart. There is a pretty big age difference, and so Liz to me was very cool when I was like 12 and 13. And the older she gets and the older I get, the more I realize how alike we are in certain ways and with certain

things that we're into. And I would just love my, you know, seemingly thinks-she's-very-cool sister to admit that there is some nerddom in there. I mean, Judge, this woman bought a house that has a mini house in front of it.

John Hodgman: (*Snorts a laugh.*) Why? Why am I only learning this? And why isn't there a photo of mini house?

Laura: Well, that, I believe, was evidence that I submitted that was not used, but she posted on Facebook, "I bought a house that has a mini house."

And I said, "Adorable, but also—nerd."

And she said, "I refuse to like this post on the grounds that it may incriminate me in the future."

John Hodgman: What is the mini house in front of your house, Liz?

Liz: Our house was built as a gas station in 1931.

John Hodgman: Nerd.

Liz: (*Laughs.*) And it still has the original pumphouse out front, but I believe the house that Laura's referring to is the original owners, as they were building the gas station, built a small stone house that they lived in. And it's smaller than the studio I'm in. I mean, it literally has enough room for a teeny tiny bed and a wood stove. That's all that would have been in there.

John Hodgman: Why don't you just live in a regular house?

Liz: Because I can live in a former gas station that's a landmark house. Everyone knows my house. I am introduced to people as, "This is Liz. She lives in the house that used to be a gas station, across from the Iris farm. I live across from an Iris farm."

John Hodgman: I gotta admit, it's pretty cool. That's pretty good.

Liz: Thank you. Thank you, your honor.

Laura: What was your intention for the mini house, Liz? The usage of the mini house?

Liz: Eventually, we would like to electrify it and turn it into a studio where I can work on my hobbies, including miniatures in the miniature house.

John Hodgman: Not everyone who has a hobby is necessarily a nerd, Laura.

Laura: But if you're dedicating a house on your property to that thing—it's like I have, you know, enamel pins for MaxFun all over my house and McElroy posters and Adventure Zone stuff everywhere and Hodgman books on my bookshelf. Yeah, I'm a nerd. It's everywhere.

John Hodgman: Which, by the way, I appreciate very much.

Laura: Thank you. I read every (*inaudible*).

John Hodgman: But there are those who would say that collecting merchandise is what makes you a geek, not a nerd,

Liz: And my hobby requires space, because construction is happening. There's gluing, there's cutting. (*Laughs.*)

John Hodgman: Gluing. And there are those, Liz, who would say that because you are—that you are hands-deep into the making of this stuff, that that makes you a nerd less than a geek.

Laura: I'm curious, Judge, what is your distinction between a geek and a nerd?

Jesse Thorn: You'll have to wait to find out, ma'am!

(*They laugh.*)

John Hodgman: Jesse is absolutely right.

Liz: I would also, if I may—this is Liz again—state for the record that I do not think anything my sister does is stupid. I may look down on some of it, especially since a very, very popular, terribly written book originated as fan art. The novel that shall not be named. And that is part of my derision of fanfiction.

John Hodgman: Yeah, but that's just one miniature bad apple in a tiny little barrel next to a model train set.

Jesse Thorn: I hate to be the one to tell you, but there are some pretty bad not-fanfiction books.

[00:40:00]

(*They laugh.*)

Liz: Yes, there are. Yes. That is a good point, Jesse. I would not equate publication with art, yes.

Jesse Thorn: They ain't all diamonds, Liz.

John Hodgman: What would you have me rule if I were to rule in your favor, Laura?

Laura: Just that my sister finally admit that she is a nerd. And embrace it. Be happy about it. Celebrate it.

John Hodgman: Liz, what's so problematic about being a nerd? Other than being a practitioner of lesser art forms?

Liz: I think it goes back to being an adolescent, and it was such a negative term that the idea of thinking of myself in those terms today sort of brings me back to that painful time in adolescence. I really think that's one of the main reasons that shrug it off.

John Hodgman: But you acknowledge that the definition of nerd has expanded since we first watched *Happy Days*.

Liz: I do. I do.

John Hodgman: What used to be an incredibly—I mean, let's say pushed to the margins form of creativity, which is fanfiction, is rather central and much more acceptable now than it used to be. Indeed, people are writing fanfiction that goes on to be translated into millions of dollars at the box office, no matter what our respective judgments of that work.

Liz: Yes, that's—it's a very salient point. And I think that you rule in my sister's favor, then maybe I will shed that adolescent angst.

John Hodgman: (*Hurriedly.*) I've heard everything I need to in order to make my decision. I'll be back in a moment.

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

Jesse Thorn: Please rise as Judge John Hodgman exits the courtroom.

Laura, how are you feeling about your chances right now?

Laura: Honestly, I'm feeling pretty good, because I feel like my sister presented a lot of evidence that was supposed to be her defending herself, but which instead supported my case.

Jesse Thorn: Are you concerned at all that your sister's miniature house is gonna get standard-size egged?

Laura: (*Giggles.*) I mean, her house is right off the highway. It's definitely a possibility.

Jesse Thorn: Liz, how are you feeling?

Liz: I didn't think about the fact that I literally live in a landmark house, and everyone locally knows where I live, and that could end up very badly for me after this. I'm feeling terrible, quite honestly! I think my chances are zero that the judge will rule in my favor. I feel like I'm really playing devil's advocate here. And I think I've offended every person participating in this podcast and who will be watching and listening to it. So, I fully expect that I will be smeared on social media. And if I'm called a nerd, I'll be happy if that's the best thing that happens.

Jesse Thorn: Well, we'll see what Judge Hodgman has to say about all this when we come back in just a moment.

Sound Effect: Three gavel bangs.

Sound Effect: Three gavel bangs.

Jesse Thorn: Judge Hodgman, we're taking a break from the case. What have you got going on?

John Hodgman: Well, Jesse, some of you may know or some of you may not know that I have sort of a secret society that is available if you go to the website bit.ly/youareinvitedtojoinasecretsociety. All one word, all small letters. It's a newsletter that comes to your email with more or less weekly information from me about what's going on in my life, plus observations, as well as a secret message that I record for you every other week. And sometimes little conversations with friends like Josh Gondelman, or Jean Grae, or Janie Haddad Thompkins, or Autumn Mowry, who owns the Candlepin Bowling Alley in Ellsworth, Maine, who's an incredibly inspiring person. The other day I was getting ready to record a secret message when a good friend of mine called on the phone. And I stopped what I was going to do, and we just had a phone conversation. And it was a wonderful sort of serendipitous thing that happened, and it was great.

It's just a place where I share stuff that I don't otherwise have a place for in my life, and it's a wonderful community. And there are comments. You can leave comments, and I can respond to your comments, and if you're interested at all go over to bit.ly/youareinvitedtojoinasecretsociety. That's bit.ly/youareinvitedtojoinasecretsociety. All small letters, all one word. I'm making it complicated on purpose.

And also, I want to remind you, I am almost about to set sail on the Jonathan Coulton cruise. My offer is bona fide. If you haven't yet booked a cabin, go to JoCoCruise.com, code "hodgman24", H-O-D-G-M-A-N-2-4. And if you book using that code, then I offer you in return, I will play Scrabble with you in the crow's nest on a night of your convenience. If you don't like Scrabble, I'll do Yahtzee. I'll do Monopoly Deal.

[00:45:00]

But Scrabble is where it's at in the crow's nest. If you want it, go to JoCoCruise.com, use code "hodgman24". Jesse Thorn, what's going on with you?

Jesse Thorn: Well, I actually want to talk about something that's going on with someone else, and that is our brand-new show at Maximum Fun, of which I am a huuuge fan. I'm not the only one. I just read a huge endorsement of this show from Patton Oswalt that said it was like the funniest thing he'd ever listened to or something like that. It's called *Valley Heat*. It's a little hard to describe, but it's basically a community radio show from a particular neighborhood in Burbank where horses are allowed.

(John laughs.)

You don't have to know anything about Burbank. It is really—it came to me—I had heard its reputation, but it came to me because I got an email from Ian Maxtone-Graham, who is one of the most legendary *Simpsons* writers of all time, one of the truly great *Simpsons* writers. I did not know him. Someone gave him my email address. I was like buuuh! Yes, sir, we may have a telephone call!

And he said, “I'm in love with this podcast called *Valley Heat*. Can you help them?”

(Laughs.) So, yeah, Christian, the guy who created the show, is a total genius and features lots of other great geniuses. I think Kim Clark, our old pal from the MaxFun show, *The Goosedown*, has been on there. Yeah. But it's truly a magical world of...

John Hodgman: Comedic brilliance.

Jesse Thorn: Comedic brilliance. It's truly—it's like nothing else. *Valley Heat*, it's called! Let's get back to the case.

Sound Effect: Three gavel bangs.

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.)

John Hodgman: Well, this really takes me back, this conversation. This feels antique in a way. It goes back to when, you know, a decade or so ago—or maybe 15 years ago—when nerdism still had a lot of social stigma attached to it and was still something that was considered to be an insult to a degree. And there was a movement that was growing the late 2000s, early 2010s, to reidentify that term from being sort of like a social outcast to “is primarily involved in math and computers and *Dungeons & Dragons* and weird marginal stuff, and no one really likes them very much, and they're not the popular kids, AKA the jocks”.

And to really just say, no, this is a sort of a beautiful thing. As Wil Wheaton says, it's not what you love—whether it is miniature furniture or writing fanfiction for Hugh Laurie or *Star Trek* or *Star Wars* or whatever it is. It's the way that you love something, right? In a way that is complete and genuine and enthusiastic and accepting of other people's love for things. I believe that was the Wil Wheaton definition. And it became kind of accepted, right? At the same time, nerdism was becoming less of an insult, because the internet had afforded nerds a

whole lot of connection with each other. And they formed themselves into a purchasing class. And what they purchased succeeded very well in the marketplace, particularly superhero movies. There was this ascendancy of the nerd in popular culture such that all of the stuff that had been maligned and marginalized was now the most successful popular culture there was, right? And in this universe, you could imagine that nerdism had become almost a high-status appellation, to the point nerds very quickly—and perhaps always did, but I think it got a little intense during this time—began to gatekeep nerdism.

In other words, Laura's trying to foist nerdism upon Liz and welcome Liz into the fold of nerdism. But a lot of nerds would say, “You're not really a nerd; you're a geek.” And a division grew between whether someone would be a nerd or a geek. And a geek was considered to be kind of hipster-nerd like. Someone who might like genre stuff, but mostly will buy toys rather than paint miniatures. Now it is—I think it's very appropriate to speak about being a nerd for anything that you feel particularly enthusiastic about. Even, I dare say, sports! Which is hard for me to say. Literally, the word is for me to say. Sports.

[00:50:00]

But it is true that people can be nerds about sports. I have a very dear friend, named Jesse Thorn, who is the living embodiment of a true sports nerd. Wouldn't you say, Jesse?

Jesse Thorn: I'm artsy.

John Hodgman: You're—right.

(They chuckle.)

Nerdism began as an insult, evolved into a class identifier of high status, and now is worming its way back around to being an insult, honestly. Because back in 2009, when I had addressed the president of the United States—then a person known as Barack Obama—in the radio and television correspondence award dinner, and I said, “Are you a jock or a nerd, sir? You seem to be an amalgam of the two.” And then he flashed me the Vulcan greeting sign. Me, in person. That happened. The nerd/jock convergence seemed to have happened, and nerds seem to have won, but then they won maybe too much. Now you look at the computer nerds who have developed the algorithms that are reprogramming our brains and filling them with misinformation, and we cannot get rid of them. And indeed they've worked hand-in-hand with jockism to really put democracy on the brink.

I'm going on and on about this essentially to buy time, but also to puzzle out the fact that nerdism is challenging to define in this year of our God-or-Whatever, 2024, when we're recording this. Right? As a certain Supreme Court judge once said about pornography, “I can't define it, but I know it when I see it.” And the truth is, a lot of nerdery is pornography now too, so who knows?

(They laugh.)

But I will say this. I know a nerd when I see one. Laura, I see you, and I respect you, and I think what you do art. And I see you, Liz. And when I see you, Liz, I do not see a nerd. Instead, I see a snob.

(Laura and Liz cackle.)

It may be hard to define what nerdism is. And I've spoken about the gatekeeping of traditional nerd cultures as being gross and retrograde. But in its best definition, it is nonjudgmental enthusiasm for the things you love and not judging the things that other people love. And when you draw a line between your younger sister's passion and call that lesser—call that non-art, for example—and on the other side of the line are little, teeny tiny dollhouse decorations, and that is art? That line is imaginary. I would have to say, Laura, I apologize to you. I really would love to bring Liz into the fold. But by the most old and traditional and hide-worn definition of nerd, the things that she nerds out over are not the traditional nerd trapping stuff. It's not the nerd stuff that we associate not just with nerdism arbitrarily, but all of the non-sports obsessions that are traditionally marginal were traditionally marginalized in the culture. And even though they aren't now, they still, frankly, are.

The truth is like, I know we're all tired of superhero movies, right? But I just remember—I was just in an airport after a big football game, and I remembered, “Ooh, people like me are still in the vast minority. People who are thinking about the box office returns of superhero movies are still outnumbered by the, quote/unquote, “normal dudes” who wear sports themed pajamas to the airport and only think about football all the time. Like, they are still normal in the society compared to so many, many other interests. But none of the interests that Liz has, you know, have ever really traditionally been marginalized in the way fanfiction has, for example. Or put down, do you know what I mean?

Like, no one's putting down miniature dollhouse and meteorology. It's a little bit weird. There are some stats to meteorology, et cetera, but it's just not part of that traditional nerd culture, nor does she really fall into the more expansive definition of nerdism. Because the most expansive definition of nerdism, yes, is Wil Wheaton saying, “It's not what you love, but it's how you love it.” She is passionate, right? But nerdism at its best should be nonjudgmental. And Liz is profoundly judgmental. I don't think I can call her a nerd, as much as I would like to welcome her into this fold. But I do have to put it on Liz to be aware of what you're saying.

[00:55:00]

One of the defining factors of nerds has traditionally been exclusion from in-groups, right? And you are an older sister, so it perhaps comes to you genetically to make sure you keep your younger sister down and small enough to fit into one of your little homes. I know that you don't do this consciously. It's just as an older sibling thing to do. I've learned and observed over time. I know you love your younger sister, but you are being very judgmental of the things that she likes. And that is not the greatest look. I think that you should strive to become a nerd of the best quality, one who says, “Yeah, whatever. I just love the things I love. They love the things they love. It's not a big deal either way. It's all art. It's all somebody's art form.”

But unfortunately for you at this time, are not a nerd. And so, I find in favor dropping the hammer with only as much contempt as you showed your own sister.

(Laughter.)

This is the sound of a gavel.

Sound Effect: NEEEEERD!

John Hodgman: Judge John Hodgman rules. That is all.

Jesse Thorn: Please rise as Judge John Hodgman exits the courtroom.

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

Laura, how do you feel?

Laura: Pretty good, actually. ‘Cause, you know, I am the little sister. No, I mean, I think Liz does have those tendencies. I kindly refer to her as an academic, but she definitely can, you know, have strong opinions. Which is perfectly fine. But yeah, I like the—I like your definition in the welcoming aspect of things and the nonjudgmental acts. So, yeah, even though I technically lost, I'm calling it a win for me and a win for nerddom.

Jesse Thorn: Liz, how are you feeling?

Liz: I am happy that I won. So, thank you, your honor, for ruling in my favor. I accept the criticism and will definitely be more inclusive of nerds in the future. I'm also thrilled that we had this opportunity. It means the world to my sister, and I am happy to be derided and called names on the podcast. *(Chuckles.)* Rightly so! I own how, you know, I came across. But this means the world to my sister, and I just—*(choking up slightly)* I'm just thinking about how proud my dad would have been. He just would have been so thrilled to see us get along as well as we do, *(laughs)* despite the evidence presented today. And it's, you know—

Laura: While not understanding it at all. Nope.

Liz: No, no. My mom won't understand it, but that's okay. Because we're here, and we love each other, and that's all that really matters.

Jesse Thorn: Liz, Laura, thanks for joining us.

Laura: Thank you so much.

Liz: Thank you.

Sound Effect: Three gavel bangs.

Jesse Thorn: Another *Judge John Hodgman* case is in the books. We'll have Swift Justice in just a second. First, our thanks to Redditor u/GuitarJ1066 for naming this week's episode, "Motion to Diss-sis". You can chat about this week's show on the Maximum Fun subreddit, [MaximumFun.Reddit.com](https://www.reddit.com/r/MaximumFun). That is also where we take those title suggestions, and those threads are always a lot of fun. The evidence from this week's show is on Instagram at [Instagram.com/judgejohnhodgman](https://www.instagram.com/judgejohnhodgman). Follow us there. We are also on TikTok now, [@JudgeJohnHodgmanPod](https://www.tiktok.com/@JudgeJohnHodgmanPod). So, follow us on TikTok and on YouTube!

John Hodgman: YooouTube!

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, whole episodes of the show going up on YouTube now! Absolutely free!

John Hodgman: It's a whole new thing. Yeah, for those of you who are just listening, you may not know that Jesse Thorn is wearing his bailiff's outfit, and I am wearing my judicial robes. And you can see us wearing these things over on our YouTube channel. You can see it all!

Jesse Thorn: Thanks to Mr. Rowan Day on Apple Podcasts for a 5-star rating. They say about the show, "*JJHO* is like a Mexican Coke: always good and consistent."

John Hodgman: That's a comparison that I will take. That's wonderful.

Jesse Thorn: *Judge John Hodgman*, the only podcast that comes in a glass bottle.

If you're listening to us on Apple Podcasts, please do rate and review the show there. It makes a big difference in people seeing the show. *Judge John Hodgman*, created by Jesse Thorn and John Hodgman. This episode, engineered by Eric Stolberg at Digital One in Portland and by Jason Mundock at So Good Media in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. The podcast is edited by A.J. McKeon. Our video editor is Daniel Speer. Our producer is Jennifer Marmor. Now, Swift Justice, where we answer small disputes with quick judgement.

[01:00:00]

This one has probably come up before on the show, but for new listeners: u/GrammarGiraffe has asked on the Maximum Fun subreddit, "Am I allowed to recline my airplane seat? What if the person in front of me reclines?"

John Hodgman: Grammar Giraaaaffe. Why didn't you just ask a question about grammaaar?

Jesse Thorn: I know.

John Hodgman: Why did it have to be this one?!

Jesse Thorn: Classic.

John Hodgman: I am going to eat seat-back no matter what I say.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah.

John Hodgman: So, what I'm going to say is this. If you are seated in first class or business or a place where everyone's got plenty of leg room, recline it up. If you are not seated, do everyone a favor and take a look behind you, and make sure that the person sitting behind you is not Jesse Thorn, who is not a tall person or a large person or a person who's already struggling to fit in. Because the amount of comfort that you're going to get out of reclining is basically none. And the amount of discomfort that you're going to put on someone else is basically a lot. So, I would exercise your right to recline with extreme caution and consideration. It's not 100% never, but take a look at the person behind you. Just take a little look, and use your best judgment.

Jesse Thorn: Here's the thing, John. Here's something I think people miss about this question. "Are you allowed to" is a different question from "should you".

John Hodgman: Right. And I think that you can determine whether you should or not by taking a gander at the person behind you. And if it's a little, teeny tiny child, then recline it all the way. They're kids.

Jesse Thorn: John, I'll add one more wrinkle that I feel is too rarely acknowledged in this conversation. When you put your seat back, you eliminate a lot of the person behind you's leg room. When you put your seat back, you gain no legroom.

John Hodgman: You gain basically nothing.

Jesse Thorn: I think that's settled forever, right? Everybody can accept that.

John Hodgman: Oh, yeah, yeah. I'm definitely not going to get any mail about that one.

(They giggle.)

But hey! I don't want to hear your disputes with me. I'm never going to hear them on this podcast! I need disputes with other people between you. And here we are. We are weeks away from the Academy Awards. That's a big movie award. And it's been a long award season. We just had the Grammy awards! Look, I want to hear your awards related disputes. Awards are stupid, and they shouldn't exist. And I bet you got some disputes around them too. Did you lose a high school senior superlative to someone less deserving? Maybe I should have given the valedictorian speech, not Jeremy. He did a better job though. Which of your friends cheated on their ballot at the last Oscar viewing party? Did you ask for a Stanley thermos for your birthday only to receive the actual NHL Stanley cup? Whoops. That thing's got to be expensive! You might want to return it to the Vegas Golden Knights!

Give us all of your awards related disputes at MaximumFun.org/jjho. That's MaximumFun.org/jjho for your awards related disputes. And really any of your disputes, right, Jesse?

Jesse Thorn: Absolutely. MaximumFun.org/jjho. No case is too big or too small. And we've been having a great time answering some of those small questions on our Instagram and YouTube channels and TikTok as well. So, make sure to follow us there for a little bit of extra bonus stuff.

John Hodgman: Yeah, you get a little content and another way to reach us to tell us that we're doing it wrong. Or! To submit your disputes. Maybe the latter more than the former.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah. (*Laughs.*) We'll talk to you next time on the *Judge John Hodgman* Podcast.

Sound Effect: Three gavel bangs.

Transition: Cheerful ukulele chord.

Speaker 1: Maximum Fun.

Speaker 2: A worker-owned network.

Speaker 3: Of artist owned shows.

Speaker 4: Supported—

Speaker 5: —directly—

Speaker 6: —by you!