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Sound Effect: Three gavel bangs.

Jesse Thorn: Welcome to the *Judge John Hodgman* podcast. I'm Bailiff Jesse Thorn. This week, "Cease & De-list". Abby brings the case against her husband, Tyler. Tyler loves to make top five lists about anything and everything. He especially loves quizzing strangers about their top five lists. He says he's trying to get to know people. Abby says he's number one annoying, with a bullet. 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: One, any song by the Mountain Goats. Two, any quote from Augustus in *I, Claudius*. Three, "The Third Man Theme" by Anton Karras. Four, "The Rainbow Connection" as sung by Tom Waits. Five—I was thinking we could take care of it right here in Brainerd. Bailiff Jesse Thorn, please swear them in.

Jesse Thorn: Please, Abby and Tyler—please rise and raise your right hands. Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God-or-Whatever?

(They swear.)

Do you swear to abide by Judge John Hodgman's ruling, despite the fact that he's not in my top five cast members of the movie *Baby Mama*?

(John "wow"s.)

There's a lot of good—Maura Tierney's in that! I love Maura Tierney! She's my favorite!

John Hodgman: Uh-huh. That's fine. Yeah. That's fair.

Jesse Thorn: Jason Mantzoukas is in it, Will Forte, Tina Fey.

John Hodgman: Okay. I got it. I know that there are other people. Yeah.

Jesse Thorn: Steve Martin is in it. There's a lot of great people in *Baby Mama*. You're great in *Baby Mama*,

John Hodgman: Amy Poehler. You didn't even mention Amy Poehler. Is she in the top five?

Jesse Thorn: Didn't even—no, Amy Poehler's out of the top five. Had to make room for Mantzoukas. Okay, Judge Hodgman, you may proceed.

John Hodgman: Can I even? 'Cause I think I'm dead.

Jesse Thorn: Well, I don't—I mean, there's a lot of great, there's a lot of great people in *Baby Mama*. You're great in *Baby Mama*. Many times I've mentioned to you how great you are in *Baby Mama*. It's true. You really are. You're hilarious.

John Hodgman: I'm not even in the top 30 in that film. I know! I know. I don't even like my uterus. That's an obscure cultural reference to *Baby Mama*. But speaking of obscure cultural references, Abby and Tyler, 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 did reference as I entered the courtroom. Abby? What's your guess?

Abby: *High Fidelity*.

John Hodgman: Interesting. *High Fidelity*. Film or novel?

Abby: The film.

John Hodgman: Film. Alright. I'll put that into the guess book by writing it in the air with my left hand, as you can see if you're watching us on video right now on YouTube or anywhere else where you see videos. Tyler, what's your guess?

Tyler: My guess is Colonel Gentleman's list of things not to do from season five, episode nine of, *The Venture Brothers*.

John Hodgman: I really, really love this guess. Hang on. I'm gonna go the extra mile and pretend to write this one down on paper.

Jesse Thorn: In general, I love any *Venture Brothers* guess that cites chapter and verse. Just the idea that a *Venture Brothers* fan doesn't just say *Venture Brothers*, but—

Tyler: It's on a list! (Laughs.)

John Hodgman: Wow! What a couple of guesses! What a couple of guesses. All of them are wrong. I mean, I got to give Tyler credit for pandering to my great love of *The Venture Brothers*.

Jesse Thorn: Great show.

John Hodgman: Go Team Venture. And I got to give Abby credit for making a very reasonable guess, which is *High Fidelity* the movie. And I was inclined to make a quote from *High Fidelity* the movie. I actually had a quote lined up from *High Fidelity*, the novel that it's based on by Nick Hornby. "Did I do and say these things? Yes, I did. Are there mitigating circumstances? Not really. And before you judge, although you have probably already done

so, go ahead and write down the four worst things you've done to a partner. Even if—especially if your partner doesn't know about them. Don't dress things up or try to explain them, just write them down in a list in the plainest language possible. Finished? Okay. So, who's the a-hole now?" Question mark. That was what I was going to go with from the novel *High Fidelity*. Of course, both the novel and the film are based on a person who obsessively makes top five lists of the top five albums, top five songs about XYZ or whatever it is.

Anyway, you're wrong though, Abby. Sorry. Because what I was referencing was my rough top five obscure cultural reference categories over the years. I've quoted many songs by the Mountain Goats. I feel like I've quoted from *I, Claudius*. I don't know. I think about it a lot. I've certainly talked about "The Third Man" a lot, but I don't think I've ever quoted the theme. Maybe I've sung it. Maybe I'll sing it at the end of this episode.

Jesse Thorn: We love to hear sung zither. Sing zither, that's what I say.

John Hodgman: Maybe I'll sing zither in the style of Tom Waits, another great obscure cultural reference point. And the fifth one—or the first, depending on how you're counting—I was thinking we could take care of it right here in Brainerd, which was a movie quote. That's what I remember as being the first obscure cultural reference, way back when, that started it all.

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And that quote was from... it was from *Fargo*. Now, who seeks justice in this court? Is it you, Abby?

Abby: It is.

John Hodgman: Abby, you take issue with Tyler's top five lists, correct?

(Abby confirms.)

Yeah, and Tyler, what kind of top fives are we talking about? What are your top five top fives?

Tyler: So, my top five top fives—probably the one that really broke Abby was when I referenced my top like five to ten boutique hotels in the Midwest.

(They laugh.)

John Hodgman: Five to ten!?

Tyler: Yeah, yeah. It adds sometimes, and it gets worse and worse as it goes, probably. Then number two is probably things in movies that should not make me hungry, but in fact make me very hungry. So, number one on that, for example, is the T-Rex eating the goat in both

Jurassic Park and *Jurassic World*. There's a delightful crunch at the end of it slurping it up that just is delightful.

Another one would be like *Tampopo*, with the Yakuza seafood scene, if you've seen that film.

John Hodgman: Not only did I see *Tampopo*, I worked it at the Coolidge Corner Movie Theater. I saw it about 19 times.

Jesse Thorn: That movie rules. What a great movie.

John Hodgman: I've seen the movie all the way through at least two or three times, and I saw the beginning and end countless times.

Tyler: That scene makes me also very hungry. Jesse, this one might be for you. Abby's a big sports fan. So, to bond on this, we were sitting—it was almost like going to a sporting event with my dad. I was like, “Oh, who do you think the like most snuggly baseball player is?” Because, you know, I'm not a big baseball fan. But watching them, you're like—sometimes you just—like, when they give them hugs, they look like they're so safe and comfortable. And so, I started listing off top five snuggly baseball players.

John Hodgman: And who are they?

Tyler: So, my number one is Willie Adames for the Milwaukee Brewers. It's a little bit of a favoritism, but he like gives big hugs. He's always celebrating. He has a beautiful smile.

Jesse Thorn: I would have guessed that, if you went with a hometown favorite, it would've been Rowdy Tellez—former Milwaukee Brewers first baseman, Rowdy Tellez.

Tyler: So, Rowdy Tellez is up there. He is actually number two.

Jesse Thorn: Okay.

(They laugh.)

John Hodgman: Wait a minute. Give me some of the top five boutique hotels in the Midwest.

Tyler: Yeah, so the number one for me is the Hewing Hotel in Minneapolis, St. Paul.

John Hodgman: I should be counting down from five.

Tyler: Okay, counting down from five.

John Hodgman: I mean, I'm—yeah, I'm dinging you for your technique, anyway.

Tyler: Number five, Hewing Hotel. Number four, the Charmant, in La Crosse, Wisconsin. Number three, the Surety Hotel in Des Moines. And then this one, number four, is a really special one just for us—is Howie's Tackle Shop in Sturgeon Bay in northern Wisconsin.

John Hodgman: That's a hotel?

Tyler: Well, it's a tackle shop mixed with like a motel. But there's something—you know, they were so excited to have people there that, you know.

(Jesse laughs.)

There's also a special sign there that says there is a fine—like, a \$250 fine for cleaning your fish in there. And that's just like something truly unique to, you know, northern Wisconsin.

John Hodgman: They should have that sign in every hotel room, honestly.

Jesse Thorn: I think the surest sign that you're in a good hotel is when they're excited someone came.

(They laugh.)

John Hodgman: And you are in the Midwest. In fact, we find you in Milwaukee. Can you name the top five places in Milwaukee that I have been? The buildings that I've been in, in Milwaukee? Top five?

Tyler: Pabst Theater is probably one of them.

(John confirms.)

Let's see.

Abby: Pfister Hotel, probably.

Tyler: Pfister Hotel is definitely one. Haunted Pfister Hotel, have you been there?

John Hodgman: I don't remember where I stayed. So, let's say yes. That's two. I'm going to say I can only think of four.

Tyler: The Milwaukee Art Museum.

John Hodgman: Nope.

Tyler: Really?! Okay. Milwaukee Public Museum? That's a nice—

John Hodgman: Nope. No museums.

Abby: Public Market, though.

Tyler: Oh, Public Market.

John Hodgman: I've been to the Public Market. That's three. Four, Turner Hall Ballroom.

Tyler: That's a good one.

John Hodgman: And five, which is actually number one, with a laser beam directly from James Bond's 1970s wristwatch.

Tyler: Safehouse. *(Laughs.)* Nice!

John Hodgman: You know what I'm talking about. The weird, dad Cold War bar.

(They confirm.)

Yeah, absolutely. Oh, this is fun. Abby, are you married to Tyler?

(Abby confirms.)

Ugh. Can I marry him?

Abby: It might take some work off my hands, yeah.

John Hodgman: I'm enjoying it a lot. Why are you annoyed by the top fives?

Abby: I think they have a place, like bonding with people who also like top fives. Like, this seems to have been really good for you guys and your relationship.

John Hodgman: Yeah, weird dudes. Other weird dudes.

Abby: I think it can come off as a little—not aggressive, but restraining, if you're meeting someone new who doesn't like ranking things that they like.

John Hodgman: And this has happened in your life, right? Tyler has—

Abby: Yes. He's used it as a tool for making connections with my coworkers and friends that he hasn't met before.

[00:10:00]

John Hodgman: How do they react when he whips out the top fives?

Abby: Some people are on board with it, and I'm fine with him continuing to make lists with them. Some people are unnerved by it. And it's never gone terribly wrong. I just think it can sometimes not be the jumpstart to a friendship that he's—

John Hodgman: What do you do for a career?

Abby: I'm an actuary.

John Hodgman: Oh, really? And your coworkers are actuaries?

Abby: Most of them, yeah.

John Hodgman: I mean, 'cause what you're doing is you're analyzing risk. Right?

(Abby confirms.)

But in Tyler's conversation, I could see how an actuary might be a little bit flummoxed.

Abby: Yes. The worst example I can think of was someone was talking to him who doesn't really like video games, but she had one that she enjoyed and was trying to kind of bond over that. And he asked something like—

Tyler: Top “top 1990s dinosaur games”.

John Hodgman: The way you finished that sentence made me flashback immediately to *When Harry Met Sally*. It's like one of those interstitials, the married couples finishing each other's sentences.

(Abby laughs.)

I loved it. Alright. And what did—what was her response?

Abby: It was a blank pause for a few seconds, followed by, “I don't understand the question.”

Tyler: So, to be fair in this case, she was actively trying to remember what like videogame she was trying to play. And I was like trying to share with her like, “Here's my top five, does this—do any of these ring a bell? Do you have like some that you remember?”

John Hodgman: Uh, okay. You were using it more as a prompt than as a quiz. And how did she—how did your coworker take it though, Abby?

Abby: She was really confused, and didn't really want to continue the video game talk anymore. And they're friends now, but it took the introduction of her now husband really liking Tyler for her to kind of come around on the fact that he's a good guy and can have normal conversations with people.

Tyler: This is one of those moments where you thought you were friends with someone the whole time, and then you horribly discover on a national podcast—*(laughs)*.

Abby: Sorry.

John Hodgman: You just learned?

Tyler: *(Laughing.)* I just learned. It happened at this moment.

John Hodgman: Yeah. She just decided to be friends with you yesterday, finally. How long ago was it that the top five '90s dinosaur video games came up? When was this event?

Abby: Seven or eight years ago. It was pretty soon after I started full time here.

John Hodgman: You thought you were pals on that night, and it took a while. Hm. But what are your top five '90s dinosaur games, Tyler?

Tyler: So, *Turok* has to be—the *Turok* series has to be up there.

John Hodgman: I'm not arguing.

Tyler: Okay, then there are some *Jurassic Park* games that are kind of fun in that kind of ridiculous way where they're kind of like they haven't seen the movie *Jurassic Park* yet, so it's sort of like, "Here's a description of what we're going to make. Make a video game from it." And so, there's just like weird games where you're just collecting eggs for no reason.

And then there's also like a Discovery Channel kind of like make the dinosaur hatch and then you get like a full 3D model. And back in the '90s, that was like mind blowing for me.

Jesse Thorn: So far, that's three.

Tyler: This was a long time ago! Sometimes it's hard to remember these top fives!

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, this isn't—this top five is not a top five. This is a nerd challenge. This is a "name five '90s dinosaur games".

(John whistles.)

This is not "what are your five favorite dinosaur games". By the way, Yoshi is a dinosaur, and he's in lots of good games!

John Hodgman: Abby, I'm sorry about this. I just have to—let's steer this ship back to you. I apologize.

Abby: Well, I think Jesse landed on one of my concerns, which is that if you prompt someone unsuspectingly with a top five list, you're not going to get a top five list. You're going to get just some random assortment of stuff they remember. So, I think the premise is skewed.

Tyler: If I may, I do feel like I've found a way to evolve it to the point where it's not as direct and more kind of natural. It does involve wine—quite a bit of wine and gin. But—

John Hodgman: So, this involves kidnapping me and putting me in your basement and feeding me a bunch of gin and then demanding my top five characters in *Oddworld: Abe's Oddysee*?

(They laugh.)

Did you ever play *Oddworld: Abe's Oddysee*?

(Tyler confirms.)

Yeah, of course. Abby, you ever play *Oddworld: Abe's Oddysee*?

Abby: No idea what you're talking about.

John Hodgman: No, I know. I'm sorry. I really apologize for all of this.

Sound Effect: Three gavel bangs.

Sound Effect: Three gavel bangs.

John Hodgman: So, does this happen at parties? At mixers? What's the situation where this happens, Abby?

Abby: Yeah, it would usually be at like a happy hour.

John Hodgman: And why are you doing this, Tyler?

Tyler: You know, so I came to Milwaukee—we both went to University of Wisconsin Eau Claire, and Abby graduated a year ahead of me. And so, I followed her to Milwaukee. And by the time she was here, she had all these like work friends, and I was just starting to *(inaudible)* a nonprofit area.

[00:15:00]

And so, when we were going to all these parties at her work, I was just trying to find something that I could connect with people. And I'm kind of—it's hard to socialize with actuaries.

(John snorts.)

Because at that point in time, all they're talking about is how many exams they've passed. And I don't know what the exams are. They're all letters and numbers. So, it's like, "We passed Q on September 4th. How are you doing on A, B, T?" Or something along those lines.

John Hodgman: You're aware you're sitting next to an actuary right now, right?

Tyler: Yes. Yes, sir.

John Hodgman: Yes. And you're married to this person.

(Tyler confirms.)

Abby, how do you feel about this actuary slander that's coming at you?

Abby: It hurts.

(Tyler makes a sad noise.)

(Laughs.) He's not wrong, especially early in our careers when so much of our workday was focused on passing exams. That was kind of all we talked about, and that wasn't fair to him. But we're all adults now with other hobbies and pets and kids and other things to talk about. So, I don't know that is still a rationale that he can—

John Hodgman: Tyler, to be generous to you, would it be fair to say that you felt like a little bit of an outsider at these group mingles, these work mingles?

Tyler: Yeah, it would be, yeah.

John Hodgman: You're trying to make yourself comfortable by bringing up topics that you're interested in and understand.

Tyler: So, usually how it goes is I'm trying to look for like a keyword or something. Like, I don't like doing lists—unless I know the people kind of well—that I'm interested in. I usually try to do—as much as possible, if I don't know a person, sort of lists that come up in conversation.

Jesse Thorn: Or if someone is an actuary, what are your top five surprisingly common causes of death?

(John laughs.)

Tyler: That was actually one of the first things I asked her when we first started dating. She didn't think we were dating at that point, but I did. So, yeah. That was one of the first things.

John Hodgman: So, you asked Abby on one of your early dates—from your point of view—top five causes of death. Is that right?

Jesse Thorn: Surprisingly common, yeah.

John Hodgman: Surprisingly common. Alright, Abby, let's hear it.

Abby: More than one person has been killed when they got hit in the head by a tractor. Same thing with turtles, being hit on the head by a turtle.

John Hodgman: *(Laughs.)* Alright. I'm going to say right now, Abby, that the tractor was a good lead-off. You know what I mean? Because I was like, eh, it doesn't surprise me that people are getting hit in the head with tractors. But turtles, you really got me there. Maybe turtles is the place to stop. Top two. Those are the top two. And this didn't feel like fun, dating banter to you?

Abby: Do you know, it didn't? It felt like I was being quizzed in one of my classes.

John Hodgman: And Tyler mentioned that you didn't think you were on a date at all. Is this when you decided this is not a date?

(They laugh.)

Abby: There was a period where he thought if we met for lunch at the cafeteria, that counted as a date. And I was informed later that we had actually been dating for a while.

John Hodgman: Abby, does he continue to ask you top fives?

(Abby confirms.)

How often does this come up?

Abby: It's really when he's bored, and I'm not bored, and he would like me to stop doing what I find engaging and do what he finds engaging.

John Hodgman: What kinds of things do you find engaging?

Abby: Well, we go to a lot of baseball games, and I really enjoy that. And he enjoys it for a little while but then needs some other stimulation.

Tyler: I enjoy the snacks.

John Hodgman: What's the top five baseball snacks?

Tyler: So, I guess, I don't know if we could count—I don't drink, but one of the things that's really nice at our stadium is you can get a baseball bat full of beer.

Jesse Thorn: That is really nice!

Tyler: It's a real bonding moment.

(They laugh.)

Jesse Thorn: That's sweet.

Tyler: We get giant German-style pretzels here, cheese curds—fried cheese curds, which are fantastic. We also have a really good sort of like Milwaukee-style pizza place. So, like Milwaukee—

John Hodgman: What's Milwaukee-style pizza?

Tyler: So, it's basically like graham cracker crust. So, very paper-thin crust, and we put cheese all the way to the edge, where there's basically no like crust at all.

John Hodgman: Uh-huh. Not graham—not actual graham cracker.

Tyler: No, no, no.

John Hodgman: It's not a sweet crust. Okay.

Jesse Thorn: Not like a key lime pie.

John Hodgman: *(Chuckles.)* Let's ask Tyler. Tyler, is it actually a key lime pie? Is that a Milwaukee-style pizza?

Tyler: No, not quite. *(Laughs.)*

Jesse Thorn: Alright, graham cracker crust, key lime pie filling, and then the cheese goes right to the edge, on top.

John Hodgman: It goes right to the edge.

(They laugh.)

Abby, what baseball team are you watching over there in—? Oh, the Milwaukee Brewers! Of course! Duh. One of the nicest logos in sports, for sure.

Jesse Thorn: It's an M and a B that take the form of a baseball glove.

John Hodgman: It's a little visual puzzle! Exactly! One of the top five sports logos in the world, I would say!

Tyler: I did think about that! (*Laughs.*)

John Hodgman: Well, we all know what the number one is, and I'll quiz you on it later to see if you win. But Abby doesn't enjoy when you do this, Tyler. But you have provided some evidence that suggest that the people in your *D&D* group really enjoy it.

Tyler: Correct.

John Hodgman: These are people you play *Dungeons & Dragons* with, right?

[00:20:00]

Tyler: Correct, yes.

John Hodgman: Alright. And we have some testimonials here. Austin, aka Armit the Half-Orc says, "People want to know the best, not the blandest. Nothing is truly known until it's documented and peer reviewed, and such lists allow for both." That's some Half-Orc speak if I've ever heard one. Matt, who plays Jirak—or Zirak? How do you pronounce this character's name?

Tyler: He pronounces it Cherik.

John Hodgman: Say it again?

Tyler: Cherik.

John Hodgman: Cherik. Okay. Who is—what?—a Polish paladin?

Tyler: Yeah, I think kind of! Pretty much. That's pretty—

John Hodgman: I had it right. "Lists offer a point of comparison to understand the relativity of a subject within the list!"—Exclamation point!

Jake, who plays Falk Greenleaf—that's gotta be an elf, right?

Tyler: That is actually a Fulborg? It's like a cowman, basically.

John Hodgman: A Fake-borg?

Tyler: A Falborg? Someone's gonna yell at me.

Jesse Thorn: Is this a Wisconsin-only rule? The cowman? (*Laughs.*)

Tyler: Nope, but they were all very excited about it—to show it off, yeah.

John Hodgman: Wisconsin, of course, is the birthplace of *Dungeons & Dragons*. Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, is where it was first played—Gary Gygax’s hometown, one of the top five towns for inventing roleplaying games. So, it sounds like in-between moves in your *Dungeons & Dragons* group, you were all making top five lists. Is that right?

Tyler: Yeah, so we have—there's different types of lists that we make. So, they do sort of—if someone's running late, we do about 15 minutes of tier lists. So, like for example, I'm just gonna put one out there. It starts with S as the top. S, A, B, C, D, F.

John Hodgman: So, just to clarify for listeners, you're talking about tiers, T-I-E-R. When something is top tier, it is S tier. This is some—I think this is some video game parlance that's made its way into common language now. Right?

Tyler: I believe it came from like Japanese sort of style games. Yes.

John Hodgman: Right. And then A, B, C tier are decreasing below S, right? So, S is the top tier.

Tyler: So, S is like *Dicktown*. A is like *Venture Brothers*.

(John “woah”s.)

I really like *Dicktown*.

John Hodgman: Thank you! I appreciate the plug, but you know, I'm friends with those Venture Brothers.

Tyler: I do. You were really good in that as well. I really liked your character.

John Hodgman: Oh, thank you! Alright. I think I've heard everything I need to in order to make my decision.

(Abby laughs.)

And the category is animated shows. S tier is *Dicktown*. A is *Venture Brothers*. B is what?

Tyler: B, I would say could be like a *South Park*, right? It's not for everyone. And it can have, when you're looking back—like, I think *Venture Brothers* has like a kind of timeless quality to it. I think they don't do too many references that like age out, but *South Park* does very—like, their whole thing is like up to date, timely things.

John Hodgman: Very timely. Right. Right. And *Dicktown* only makes references to my weird only-childhood.

Tyler: Which I love!

John Hodgman: And Abby, do I understand correctly that you led Tyler to this *Dungeons & Dragons* group somehow? Or encouraged him to play?

Abby: Encouraged him. He knew the people already.

Jesse Thorn: You had heard that there was a local *Dungeons & Dragons* group where everyone liked making lists.

Abby: (*Laughs.*) It's actually not local. They all live in different states. So, it's a nice way for them to keep in touch. And I thought maybe he would channel his list making there, and that has not been the case.

Jesse Thorn: Abby, how often—when Tyler asks for a top five—is he asking for a top five that anyone can participate in easily? And how often is he asking for what I would characterize as a sort of nerd challenge? What are your top five '90s dinosaur video games?

Abby: Probably a pretty even split. Because Tyler is a big fan of nerd culture, like video games and movies and obscure movies, things like that. But he's also into cooking. So, he'll often ask people—like, pizza from your neck of the woods is a pretty common one, or what do you like to cook at home? So, I think it's an even mix.

John Hodgman: It's not just him trying to reflect glory upon himself for having these preloaded top five lists.

Abby: It's very rarely.

Jesse Thorn: He's only doing that half the time, apparently. (*Chuckles.*) It's an even mix, John.

John Hodgman: When you're not around other people, Tyler, how often do you think about top five lists?

Tyler: I don't often think about like Troy or whatever most guys are apparently supposed to be thinking of. I think of random lists. That's my like—half the time or 75% of the time. I think of them quite a bit. I think it's just sort of stemmed from like if I'm not able to have like a conversation or keep up with people in conversations—I try to listen, but if it's sort of focused on something that's really not meant for me, I'll start thinking about things like that. And I'm also—

John Hodgman: Just thinking about it quietly to yourself?

Tyler: Yeah! If there's an opening or if I know like for example, her friend's husband's really into it too.

[00:25:00]

If he's there, and he's also bored, I'll talk with him about it.

John Hodgman: So, let me understand. When you're in a social function, and people are talking about something that you don't immediately relate to or understand, you'll tune out and start thinking of top five lists, and then look for a chance to insert that into the conversation?

Tyler: No, not quite like that. More like—

John Hodgman: (*Amused.*) That's kind of what you said, but okay.

Tyler: Yeah, yeah, if I could correct, I guess it's more like gossip. Abby has like a lot of work gossip at this point that's kind of replaced the sort of tests.

John Hodgman: Tyler, be quiet. Abby, give me some of the actuary goss. What's happening?

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, what's the table tea?

John Hodgman: If I promise you that we will edit it out by playing some music from *Abe's Oddysee* while you're giving me one piece of gossip, and we won't release it, but I want to hear one piece of good gossip so that I can evaluate how good this goss is—is that reasonable?

(*Abby agrees.*)

Alright, play some music from *Abe's Oddysee*. I don't care if we have the rights! Play it!

Abby: Well—

Music: “Main Theme” from the album *Oddworld: Abe's Oddysee OST*, a surreal, echoing, atmospheric track.

(*John and Jesse erupt into laughter.*)

Jesse Thorn: Wait, why is it—why is it—?!

John Hodgman: No, no! We can't ask any questions. We can't reveal anything. It's just incredible though.

Abby: (*Laughs.*) That was pretty good, right?

Tyler: That one was good! (*Laughs.*)

Jesse Thorn: I heard Jennifer Marmor gasp like a fish out of water.

John Hodgman: I gasped too! Wow. I don't even want to reveal the person's name, but let me just say: if I were trying to come up with the name of a character in a fictional story who was an actuary, I couldn't have thought of a better name than this person's name.

Abby: (*Sighs.*) This is like the dumbest reason to get fired.

John Hodgman: Pretty much—you're not going to get fired. No one will ever hear this goss. It's good goss though. I mean, I don't know, Tyler, why don't you just get up in the goss? That sounds fun!

Tyler: You know, it's because I'm so—she does sometimes say like you cannot tell anyone about this.

John Hodgman: Yeah, but if it's—I'm talking about in a social function, when you're with the actuaries.

Tyler: I mean, I sometimes do.

John Hodgman: Or simply ask questions about their work and attempt to understand it.

Tyler: I do. It's sort of one of those situations where I'll say like, “Oh, what's up with this person?”

And they'll be like, “Oh, he's the—like—”

John Hodgman: You better not reveal anything that gets Abby fired right now.

Tyler: Yeah, he's—let's just call him the custodian, because that's not someone they ever talk about.

John Hodgman: Tell you what, we'll play the music again. Go ahead.

Music: “Main Theme” from the album *Abe's Oddysee OST*.

Tyler: Alright. So, I can say names then?

John Hodgman: Yeah, go for it.

Tyler: So—

(*Tyler's audio cuts out.*)

Abby: God.

(Jesse cackles.)

(Music fades out.)

Tyler: And then they'll continue on with the conversation kind of thing.

John Hodgman: Alright, we're out of the music now. Your goss was not as good as Abby's goss. Sorry.

Tyler: It's not my goss!

John Hodgman: I know, but maybe you should make it your goss. You know what I mean?

Jesse Thorn: What I heard in that redacted bit of gossip was that Tyler is trying to participate in the gossip, and what he needs to understand what's going on is being elided. He's being poo-pooed. They're saying, "I'll talk about that with you later, right now. We're moving too fast through this gossip sea," and he's being left behind in his little—clinging to a buoy.

John Hodgman: Yeah. Jesse's right. I mean, we can't reveal what Tyler said, Abby. But he did end the story with him asking a question and you saying to him, "We'll talk about that later." My question to you is: do you talk about it later with him?

Abby: Yeah, we'll—yeah, I'll catch him up in the car ride home.

Jesse Thorn: But you don't work to include him in the conversation as it occurs.

Abby: Yeah, in those kinds of examples, no. I probably wouldn't stop the conversation and catch him up on everything.

John Hodgman: Do you feel excluded, Tyler?

Tyler: No, you know, because I want to see my wife like happy.

John Hodgman: What are your top five moods of your wife?

(They laugh.)

Tyler: Oh, whiskey is my number one.

John Hodgman: That's not a mood.

Tyler: Oh, it's a mood. *(Laughs)*

John Hodgman: Fair enough. You're right. I take it—I stand corrected. I rarely say it, but you're right. Abby, do you think that Tyler needs an in-person friend group?

Abby: Uh, wow. Probably.

John Hodgman: Does he have one in Milwaukee? I mean, we know he's got his Zoom *D&D* pals.

Abby: Not a group. There are individuals. And there are often couple friends, so it's the two of us hanging out with two other people.

(John affirms.)

Jesse Thorn: That one husband really likes him, right?

Abby: Yes. So, the other husband makes lists quite a bit, and he made a list of friends that he enjoys playing video games with, and Tyler was number one on the list.

John Hodgman: Oh, phew!

(They chuckle.)

I thought the story was going to go someplace else. If I were to ban Tyler from doing top fives at parties—

[00:30:00]

How would you suggest that he get to know people?

Abby: I mean, he can ask follow up questions. Like, if someone says, “I played this board game I really liked,” he can ask, you know, what other types of board games do you like?

John Hodgman: He just can't initiate?

Abby: Or I would prefer if it's just less structured.

John Hodgman: When you originally submitted the dispute, you said that this was a quote, “cute way”, end quote, for Tyler to bond with people. First of all, you have to admit Tyler's pretty cute.

Abby: Yeah, he's pretty cute.

John Hodgman: He's pretty cute. When does it get not cute?

Abby: Well, I think it's cute when he's doing it with people who have already agreed to making lists with him in the future. It's less cute when he has surprised someone who is unprepared.

John Hodgman: Has anyone in your work group or otherwise has been ambushed by one of Tyler's top fives ever complained to you about it privately? You don't have to say the name.

Abby: No, they wouldn't complain to me about it. It's more just like in the moment you can tell they weren't prepared and don't really feel like engaging in this sort of conversation.

John Hodgman: When he goes into a top five with one of your work colleagues, how do you feel?

Abby: Worried. Not that it's going to go poorly, but that it's going to be awkward and no one's going to really enjoy where it went. And Tyler's not going to feel happy about it in the car ride home.

John Hodgman: How badly has it ever gone?

Abby: Well, the example, like—

John Hodgman: What's the worst-case scenario?

Abby: The worst case was just the person who flat out said, "I don't understand the question," and then didn't engage any further.

John Hodgman: But that's one data point. As an actuary, you have to set that aside as an outlier, don't you think? It's not statistically relevant, it seems to me. Sorry.

Abby: It was an outlier in that she was so direct about it, but there have been plenty of other occasions where people have sort of gave him maybe one or two and then mentally wandered off.

John Hodgman: And this is mortifying to you?

Abby: No, I just think it is hampering his relationship building with them.

John Hodgman: And you would like me to order that Tyler not do top fives with you?

Abby: Yes.

John Hodgman: How often does it come up in your lives?

Abby: I would estimate once a month.

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

Tyler: You know, I think it's important—I agree with Abby with sort of like having it be like a more natural thing and know that people want to do sort of lists with me. I can agree to that.

I do—Abby kind of keeps cards close to her chest sometimes about her day. So, I sometimes use these lists—like, if we go on like a vacation, right? Like, to sort of get more out of her, because she's hard to read sometimes. So, I use these things to sort of like—a quick way of getting some ideas out of how something went, or if she enjoyed something, or learned something new about her.

John Hodgman: So, if you want to know like how her day was, you say, “What are the top five paranoid thrillers starring Robert Redford?”

(They laugh.)

Like that? Or do you just ask her questions about her day?

Tyler: I guess for the daily things, I'd ask more about her day. But bigger—yeah, yeah, okay, I see your point. Yeah, ask her about her day.

John Hodgman: Abby, do you feel that Tyler wants more chat from you than you feel comfortable giving? Like, is there an introvert/extrovert? Like, some people like more silence in a couple. You know what I mean? Like, and some people can't stand silence.

Abby: *(Laughs.)* Yeah, I think that's certainly an element of it.

Jesse Thorn: What are the top five ways that it affects your relationship?

(They laugh.)

John Hodgman: What are your top five feelings about this?

Abby: You've probably picked up that I'm the quieter one here, and Tyler will take a story and run with it to the point where most people would have wanted to stop talking a while ago.

(Jesse chortles.)

John Hodgman: And when Tyler gets going on a topic in mixed company, how do you feel?

Abby: Good. I think it's—you know, if he's talking about something that he's really excited about, I think people are pretty engaged by it. He's very funny. He's a really charming person.

John Hodgman: I agree with you. I would like to marry him, if anything happens in either of our marriages.

Jesse Thorn: I'd like him at the very least to give me a Rowdy Tellez style hug.

Abby: He's a little short for that, but he could try.

John Hodgman: So, in the ideal ruling that you submitted, you had two parts. One is that Tyler not be allowed to do top fives with your coworkers and that also he'd not be allowed to do top fives with you. Is one of those more important than the other?

Abby: So, he's allowed to do top five lists with me. I like hearing about his.

John Hodgman: Right. That's the price of marriage.

Abby: I do not want to be asked for my top five lists.

John Hodgman: Ever?

Abby: Yeah, I think ever.

John Hodgman: If I were to ban top five requests from you or your coworkers, which would you pick? Which is more important to you?

Abby: (*Hesitantly.*) Probably me, but I feel like a jerk for saying it.

John Hodgman: That's okay. I'm just, you know. I mean, it's a false dichotomy. I could order both. I was just trying to get at the heart of where you are most bothered by this top fivedom.

[00:35:00]

Abby: I would say I'm more annoyed when I'm asked to provide my top five lists than I am worried when he asks a coworker for theirs.

Jesse Thorn: Abby, would you be willing to provide your husband with information about your feelings and experiences in a non-list format?

Abby: I think I could accommodate that. Yeah.

John Hodgman: Tyler, to get a real-world sense of how this works in your relationship—before I go into my chambers, would you please ask Abby For a top five list of your choosing, perhaps for the last time in your relationship?

Abby: I'm so curious what this is going to be.

Tyler: I guess, top five things our cats have done that have really bugged you.

Abby: Oh! Why do I hate our cats?

Tyler: No! Well...

John Hodgman: I'll allow it.

Tyler: It's a challenging one. They've been keeping me up for days now, so. *(Laughs.)*

John Hodgman: Is that the really the one you want to ask her, or the one you feel safest asking?

Tyler: No. I panicked. Safest one. What's the five things you love about my brother the most?

John Hodgman: *(Whistles.)* You know what, Abby? Don't answer. I'll be back in a moment. I'm going to go into my chambers and think it over. I'll be back in a moment with my verdict.

Jesse Thorn: Please rise Hodgman exits the courtroom.

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

Tyler, how are you feeling about your chances?

Tyler: *(Sighs.)* People always say this on this podcast, but I was feeling really good. And now I'm a little bit nervous.

Jesse Thorn: What are the top five reasons you're nervous?

Tyler: Number one, my family often debated at the dinner table rather than talking about our day. So, I have a fear of sort of debate. The next one is Abby was like a debate champion in high school and is very good at it still. So, I came in a little bit nervous about that. Next one would probably be Abby's very charming. Often times when people meet her who are my friends they're like, "Oh! You should bring Abby around to hang out." Which kind of feels weird sometimes. The final one is I always kind of want what's best for her, or like what she wants. So, like if I win, and she has to keep doing this stuff, I'm worried about the thought of her like having to engage with me on things that she does not like actively doing.

Jesse Thorn: Abby, how are you feeling about your chances?

Abby: I am also nervous. I feel like Tyler and the judge hit it off more than I expected. I'm also worried I'm going to get fired, but that's fine. I'm sure it won't happen.

Jesse Thorn: Did you have reason to believe previously that the judge might like lists? Like, for example, that he wrote a list of 500 hobo names in his first book?

(They laugh.)

Abby: That had crossed my mind, yeah.

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. I know that you're headed out on the JoCo cruise soon.

John Hodgman: Yes, Jesse. I am packing my steamer trunk as we speak, including my *Scrabble* set, and my *Yahtzee* set, and my *Monopoly Deal* set. Because those are three games that I enjoy playing. And if you have not yet booked your cabin on the JoCo Cruise, go to JoCoCruise.com. Check out with code "HODGMAN24". will alert me that this has happened. And if you wish, I offer my services as an opponent to you in *Scrabble*, or those other games, in the Crow's Nest on a night of your choosing. And don't be intimidated. I haven't played *Scrabble* meaningfully in years. But I love playing the game, and it would be fun to play with you.

And one way to make sure that you have time to do that with me on the cruise, go to JoCoCruise.com, use code "HODGMAN24". And even if you're not interested in playing *Scrabble* with me, there's going to be so much fun for you on this cruise. Our friend Jean Grae is going to be on the cruise. Our fellow MaxFunster, Janet Varney, is going to be performing on the cruise. We have so many talented musicians, comics, writers. Go to JoCoCruise.com and see the lineup. It's really amazing. And it's been years since I've been on the cruise. I'm really excited to get back there and see old friends and meet new ones. Maybe some of you over at the *Scrabble* table up there at the crow's nest at the top of the ship. That's JoCoCruise.com, code "HODGMAN24".

Jesse Thorn, what do you have got going on?

Jesse Thorn: Well, I'm just keeping an eye on the MaxFunDrive coming just around the corner in mid-March.

(John whistles and agrees.)

I'll tell you; this has been a year of watching a lot of media ventures go out of business—not just in the podcast space, but across all of publishing.

John Hodgman: They say it's a time of contraction the biz of show.

[00:40:00]

Jesse Thorn: And I can't emphasize enough how incredible it is that MaxFun has been held aloft by our memberships. So, MaxFunDrive is a celebration of our members, a celebration of becoming a member of Maximum Fun. It's going to be a really great time. We're going to

have special bonus episodes and stuff. I know me and Jordan are going to do a live show called the *Cavalcade of Stars* that will be available streaming.

Look. I'm not saying Lisa Loeb is going to be there, but I am saying I'm going to email Lisa Loeb to ask if she'll be there. (*Laughs.*) That's my promise to you. I will send an email to Lisa Loeb, my number one crush from middle school, and ask her if she will come. And she might, (*stuttering*) because she comes to stuff! She's a—she's a cool lady!

John Hodgman: I've said it before, and I'll say it again, and I'm also going to say it right now. We are so grateful to all of you members of Maximum Fun for your continued support over the years. I cannot overstate how much it means to me, so just please circle your calendar. March 18 starts two weeks of the MaxFunDrive. This is the time of year when we not only offer you some of the wildest bonus episodes and special guests and have all kinds of fun crossovers and everything else, but it's also the time of year when we ask you to go ahead and become a member if you're not one, or to upgrade your membership if you're able to.

It all happens at MaximumFun.org/join. But just circle that URL, and circle March 18, and get ready to join in the MaxFunDrive. It's max and fun and drive. Come be a part of it.

Jesse Thorn: 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: Normally, I don't start a verdict with a question. But I received some information right before I went into my chambers, and then I received some information through the paper-thin walls of my chambers while you were talking to Jesse, Tyler. And so, I just wanted to say: why did you want to ask Abby top five reasons she loves your brother? Why is that a complicated question for you?

Tyler: They're both very—they're the two people I consider the most intelligent people I've ever met, and I respect them both a lot. But they butt heads like crazy sometimes. And my brother lives out in California now.

John Hodgman: Are you anxious that Abby and your brother don't get along as well as you wish they would?

Tyler: Yes.

John Hodgman: Right. And so, you're asking the question—top five things—to maybe foster some reflection on her part about what a good dude he is or something?

Tyler: I would like to know that there's something there, you know. Because he's kind of almost the only family. So, I want to make sure that we can like maintain that relationship to keep going and visiting him throughout our lifetime.

John Hodgman: Okay, that's something for you two to discuss between—that's a heavy thing for you two to discuss between each other. But I'm grateful to you for being so open about it, and I think that it helps me with regard to my verdict. And now it's verdict time.

The thing that I heard through the paper-thin walls of my nonexistent chambers was that you were feeling anxious about this, because you grew up, and at the dinner table, your family would debate topics rather than simply talk about their day. That's exactly what you are doing now, right? You know, the top fives are an expression of enthusiasm on your part and also of curiosity, but they are framed in a very arbitrary and remote, debate-y way. Like, rather than simply say, "What is your favorite kind of door? Have you ever thought about it?" Instead, you might ask someone to name their top five doors. And I think what Abby is feeling is that there is an implicit challenge in there—that if you ask for the top five, or you offer your top five, there is an invitation to debate. Or there is a worry that maybe I'll say something, and you'll go, "Wrong."

There is, in the top five, an implicit challenge that my taste is perhaps more interesting than yours, or you're not going to answer the right top five for me. And I think that it puts and keeps people at a distance. And your family, if I were to guess—and I probably am guessing correctly—like, your family's willingness to debate topics at the dinner table rather than speak plainly about their lives and their feelings is—that is keeping everybody to safe distance from their own emotions as well to a certain degree. And perhaps—maybe you've inherited that a little bit, and you feel more comfortable talking with people about hypothetical situations or lists of cultural references or whatever it is than simply saying like, "I don't know what an actuary does, and I'm married to one. Can you explain it to me?" Or whatever it might be, you know. And I think that's something that you should think about. I think you are a genuinely curious person.

[00:45:00]

And for someone who thinks in terms of lists like me, it is a delight talk to you! This is a prompt that really, really works for me in terms of sparking conversation, but I think you've observed that this is a prompt that sort of chills conversation or makes Abby feel like she's being quizzed on something. Or her actuary friends feel confused. And for that reason, while I find you very charming and fun—and my offer of marriage stands, which is really irresponsible. And I would love to hang out with you in Milwaukee and go to Safehouse and play *Euchre* and *Whist* or whatever else you get up to in Milwaukee.

Jesse Thorn: Eat cheese foods.

John Hodgman: Eat cheese foods and talk about the top five Milwaukeeans of all time or whatever.

Tyler: (*Immediately.*) John Gurda.

John Hodgman: Okay.

(They chuckle.)

I would say that you should develop a way to express your curiosity in a less ranked way. And I think—I mean, you pointed it out. Like, everyone's kind of got a favorite pizza. Like, it's okay to simply say, instead of what are your top five pizzas, like “What's the best pizza you ever had? Do you remember a time—?” Now, it can't just be out of the clear blue here. You know what I mean? It can't be like, “Oh, hi, we were all talking about what's happening at the state capitol today. What's your best pizza?!” You know, it can't be that. I mean, really the best conversation starter that I've ever heard in my life is the one that was prompted to me by my wonderful and departed, unfortunately, writing teacher, Lee K. Abbott: what did you do today?

The truth is everyone wants to talk about their work. Everyone wants to talk about what they did today. And you'll get a lot further by asking questions than demanding answers. Or trying to steer the conversation to '90s dinosaur video games. When honestly, you didn't even have a good five list there. You were really struggling when I asked you. Like, if you're going to ask that question, you better be locked and loaded with an incredible list of video games featuring dinosaurs from the '90s. So, I am finding in favor of Abby in this case. I'm not banning—you can't ask her top fives anymore. Sorry. She just doesn't like it. It just doesn't work.

Tyler: Understood.

John Hodgman: And you know, when it's a topic as serious as, “Is there a way that you and my brother can find common ground? ‘Cause I hope you guys really can care about each other and get along,” it's best to ask that that way, rather than say, “What's your top five reasons you love my brother?” *(Chuckles.)*

(Tyler concedes.)

I mean, I knew what you were going for. You were put on the spot. And you felt it, right? I put you on the spot. And you don't want to put people—putting people on the spot is no fun for them.

Tyler: That really revealed a lot for me. *(Laughs.)*

John Hodgman: Great! So, I hope you won't take this too personally when I grab the big gavel over here and I say: I find in Abby's favor. Take it easy on the top fives. Make it only a top one at best. This is the sound of a gavel.

Clip:

(Polite applause.)

Host: Ladies and gentlemen, here is tonight's top ten!

(A booming musical stinger while the crowd cheers.)

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

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

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

Tyler, you sound chastened.

Tyler: Yeah, it's gonna be hard. It's something I think I wasn't prepared to do—entirely cut it off like that, but I can live with making Abby's day a little more easy with less quizzing on lists, for sure.

Jesse Thorn: What are your top five Chris Rock movies?

Tyler: Oh, I don't know if I have any Chris Rock movies that are my top five.

Jesse Thorn: *(Yelling.)* *Top Five!* Which is a Chris Rock movie!

Tyler: Oh, is it?

Jesse Thorn: It's called *Top Five!* This case is about a guy who insists on making others give their top five list, and he's not even familiar with the movie *Top Five!*

Tyler: I'm sorry.

Jesse Thorn: Abby, how are you feeling?

Abby: Good! Yeah. No, that was great. I'm very happy. I think this will help real, noncombative personality shine, and he'll make a lot more friends that way.

Jesse Thorn: Top five MCs, dead or alive.

Tyler: Man, how about this? Top five grocery stores in the Midwest.

Jesse Thorn: NO! We're doing top five MCs, dead or alive! The subject of the top five lists in the Chris Rock movie, *Top Five*.

Tyler: You lost me. I don't have any.

Jesse Thorn: Wow.

Abby, Tyler, thanks for joining us on the *Judge John Hodgman* podcast.

Tyler: Thank you. It's been great.

Abby: Thanks.

Sound Effect: Three gavel bangs.

Jesse Thorn: Another *Judge John Hodgman* case is in the books. In just a moment, we'll have Swift Justice. But first, our thanks to Redditor u/Bobopolis5000 for naming this week's episode, "Cease & De-list".

[00:50:00]

Join the conversation about—

John Hodgman: I'd buy that robot companion—Bobopolis5000. Bobopolis5000, play Huey Lewis and the News' "Sports".

Jesse Thorn: (*Laughs.*) Join the conversation. Suggest names for episodes, check out other people's suggestions at MaximumFun.Reddit.com. Evidence and photos from our program are posted on Instagram, [@JudgeJohnHodgman](https://www.instagram.com/JudgeJohnHodgman). We're also on TikTok and YouTube now, [@JudgeJohnHodgmanPod](https://www.youtube.com/@JudgeJohnHodgmanPod).

(*John "wow"s.*)

And when we say we're on YouTube, full episodes of the program. If you want to watch the show, you can do it on YouTube, [@JudgeJohnHodgmanPod](https://www.youtube.com/@JudgeJohnHodgmanPod). So.

John Hodgman: Come see my great big gavel.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, go follow us. We wear our outfits. We do little dances for your entertainment. See, look, we're doing a little dance.

John Hodgman: (*Singing.*) Bobopolis5000, eh-eh, eh-eh!

Jesse Thorn: If you're only listening and you didn't get to see it, go subscribe to the YouTube channel. Thank you to 627 on Apple Podcasts for the five-star rating. They say this about the show: "While massively entertaining, they also have an insightful perspective on morality and conflict. They've helped me in approaching conflict in my own life, and I look forward to listening every week." Thank you, 627.

John Hodgman: Thank you, 627.

Jesse Thorn: If you're listening to us on Apple Podcasts, do rate and review the program. It helps us climb up those charts and find new listeners. *Judge John Hodgman* was created by Jesse Thorn and John Hodgman. This episode, engineered by Dusty Weis at Podcamp Media in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Great studio, great engineer. Thank you.

John Hodgman: Great city.

Jesse Thorn: Indeed. The podcast is edited by A.J. McKeon. Our video editor is Daniel Speer. Our producer is Jennifer Marmor.

Did you know this, John? At the ballpark in Milwaukee, they have a mascot race. But the mascots are all different types of sausages that you can get at the ballpark in Milwaukee. Did you notice that none of those sausages were cited as top ballpark snacks? Blew me away.

John Hodgman: Woah! Interesting. How about that?

Jesse Thorn: Blew. Me. Away. I thought we'd at least get—

John Hodgman: Not even one of the running—not even one of the running mascot sausages was listed, huh?

Jesse Thorn: Like, I didn't expect to hear chorizo, but I figured at the very least I would hear Polish or bratwurst.

John Hodgman: Brats. Yeah. Yeah.

Jesse Thorn: Unbelievable. Really surprising to me. I look forward to going to—I'd love to go to a baseball game. People say that's one of the best places to go to a baseball game in the country.

John Hodgman: Let's go do a show in Milwaukee, and then we'll go to a baseball game too.

Jesse Thorn: Here's Swift Justice, where we answer small disputes with quick judgement. Guiles asks: "Are pandas actually just people wearing costumes? I say yes, based on the attached photo. My wife and most others disagree."

John Hodgman: (*Laughs.*) You know, every now and then I'm like, should I look at these Swift Justice questions before they come up, so I can prepare something? And this is the time where I remember, no! it's better to be surprised by a picture of pandas. What are they playing? Dominoes or mahjong or what?

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, it looks like—I mean, it's basically—

John Hodgman: They're sitting around a table.

Jesse Thorn: It's a photograph of “Dogs Playing Poker”, only it's a real photograph, and it's real pandas—or possibly just people wearing costumes.

John Hodgman: I'm going to—look, I'm going to go with Giles on this one. Just like all birds are robot surveillance cameras and are not real, all pandas are people and humans. Uh, prove me wrong! Speaking of Bobopolis5000, we need your robot cases. We need your droid cases. We need your science fiction cases. Actually, I take it back. Droids are a part of the *Star Wars* franchise, which is a fantasy franchise! If you've read—

Jesse Thorn: Well, it's speculative fiction!

John Hodgman: I'm just trying to honor my own settled law in the *New York Times Magazine*. It got me a lot of letters, but okay. Any kind of science fiction, speculative fiction—indeed, any kind of fantasy! Did someone in your life want to watch the movie *Serenity* without having seen *Firefly* at all? Wow.

(*Jesse gasps.*)

Did the Jetsons stop being sci-fi when they crossed over with the Flintstones?

(*Jesse gasps.*)

That's time travel. I think that has to be—well, I don't know. Do you have a sneaking suspicion that your friend might be an android, but you don't have the right kind of test to prove it?

(*Jesse gasps.*)

Submit your cases about sci-fi to MaximumFun.org/jjho.

[00:55:00]

And by sci-fi, I mean SF or science fiction. We don't say sci-fi. MaximumFun.org/jjho.

Jesse Thorn: And of course, we're eager to hear about all your disputes—not just ones about SF. I'm eager to hear your ones about SF in addition to your ones about SF. 'Cause I'll settle them. It doesn't matter the subject. No case too big, too small. MaximumFun.org/jjho. And 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!