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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, "Animal, Vegetable, Criminal". Brent brings the case against his wife Maite. Maite likes to unwind by playing 20 Questions with Brent, but Brent doesn't want to play the game with her anymore! He says she's doing it wrong. Her answers are too vague. But Maite says his 20 Questions gameplay is too basic! 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: "I'm fed up with this idiotic game! I'm going home!" *(Thumping sounds.)*
(Distant from the microphone.) Whoop—okay!

(Returning to the mic.) End of drama.

Baillif Jesse Thorn, please swear the litigants in

Jesse Thorn: Brent and Maite, please rise and raise your right hands.

(Chairs squeak.)

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

(They swear.)

Do you swear to abide by Judge John Hodgman's ruling, despite the fact that he's never beat me at any games ever in his entire life? Now granted, that's because I don't like to play games, because I feel bad when I win, and I feel bad when I lose.

(They swear.)

Judge Hodgman, you may proceed. You freaking loser!

John Hodgman: There's no way I'm gonna beat you at the bailiff uniform game, that's for sure.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, I put my pants on today, John, 'cause we have litigants in the studio!

John Hodgman: Litigants in the studio means Jesse Thorn must wear pants! And if you'd like to see them, go right now to Youtube.com—popular website. Our channel is

@JudgeJohnHodgmanPod. And if you go there now, you'll see that when I say you may be seated, it's lying! 'Cause Brent and Maite are already comfortably seated there at Maximum Fun HQ in Los Angeles. Very nice to see you both. But I do offer you this chance for an immediate summary judgment in one of yours favors.

I... let's see. How are we gonna do this? Rather than you guessing the quote, let's play a little game—not of 20 questions, but of 5 questions each. Earlier you heard me read the quote. “I am fed up with this idiotic game. I'm going to go home.” The first one who can guess the person who said that will get an automatic immediate summary judgment in their favor. You may ask up to five yes or no questions, and I'm going to give you a hint. This is a person, a human animal. And ummm, Maite, why don't you start?

(Without waiting for an answer.)

Now, one of the techniques for playing 20 Questions is you want to continually, if possible, sort of break the answers down into 50/50 chances. So, a very common one—even though there are obviously more than two genders, and gender is obviously a construct as well—some people will say, “Is this person a man or a woman?”

Maite: Is this person a man or a woman?

John Hodgman: *(Chuckling.)* Yes.

Maite: *(Realizing.)* Oh! A man! Sorry. *(Laughs.)* Is this person a man?

John Hodgman: No, that counts!

Brent: I just won. I just won!

John Hodgman: That's one down for you.

(They laugh.)

Before we go to Brent, I understand the intention of your question, Maite. And the answer is: it is—or the person I'm looking for is a man.

Maite: Got it.

John Hodgman: Brent.

Brent: Is it from a movie?

John Hodgman: No.

Maite: Is it from a TV show?

John Hodgman: No!

(They chuckle.)

Jesse Thorn: Let the record reflect that they both shook their heads like, “What other forms of communication are there?”

John Hodgman: Yeah. What are you doing right now, for example?

Brent: Mm. Is it from a podcast?

John Hodgman: No.

(Jesse laughs mockingly.)

Brent: That was a trick!

Maite: Is it from a book?

John Hodgman: No.

Brent: Is it a comedian?

John Hodgman: No.

Maite: Is it a lyric from a song?

John Hodgman: No. That’s four.

Brent: Is it from a politician?

John Hodgman: No. Final question, Maite.

Jesse Thorn: You're so close.

(They laugh.)

John Hodgman: People are screaming this one into their radios... Into their radios.

Maite: Into their radios.

John Hodgman: Or however they're listening to their podcast. It might be that they've got a Bluetooth connection to an old-fashioned radio on which you might be listening to an old-fashioned radio show.

Jesse Thorn: I think he's suggesting that it's Elvis Costello, the songwriter behind “Radio, Radio”.

John Hodgman: Could be Radio Raheem from *Do the Right Thing*.

Maite: I don't know.

Brent: A radio personality...

Maite: A radio person. Ryan Seacrest? I don't know. (*Laughing.*) Is it Ryan Seacrest?

John Hodgman: It's not Ryan Seacrest, but you kind of asked two questions in one there. And in the interest of fun—or! In the interest of debating what is an appropriate way to play 20 Questions or no, I will allow that it is a radio personality.

Brent, your fifth and final question to me. Yes or no question.

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Brent: Is it Howard Stern?

John Hodgman: Is it Howard Stern? I would say that probably you got closest, Brent. But aaall guesses were wrong. The correct answer, of course—and I know I'm gonna be getting letters from people—Gilbert Harding. Gilbert Harding. You know Gilbert Harding, don't you?

Brent: Not a clue.

John Hodgman: How well do you know your 20th century BBC radio programmes?

Maite: Not at all.

John Hodgman: And I do pronounce it with a double M-E at the end. Programme.

Gilbert Harding was known as the rudest man in Britain. He was famous for it. He was the irascible and frequently very cranky host of the long-running BBC radio show called *20 Questions*. It ran from 1947 to 1976. He wasn't the host for the entire time, but he was host for a good chunk of that time. He was a former school master with a studied, stuffy, professional air and glasses. He later became a journalist and actor and a frequent panelist on the TV show *What's My Line?*, where he was notorious for losing patience with the person whose job he was guessing, often accusing them of being boring.

(*They laugh.*)

Later, he equally notoriously—

Jesse Thorn: (*Chortles.*) Cool.

John Hodgman: Equally notoriously walked off the job at *20 Questions* in 1960 when, according to Wikipedia, quote, “after having drunk a triple gin and tonic that he had originally offered to the executive producer, Gilbert Harding proceeded to completely ruin the night's game. He insulted two panelists, failed to recognize a correct identification after seven questions, and after revealing finally the answer on the 20th question, he yelled at the panel in the audience and ended the show three minutes early by saying, ‘I'm fed up with this idiotic game. I'm going home.’”

So, let's get into it. Brent, we played a little game of five questions. Your dispute here is with your wife, correct? Maite?

(*Brent confirms.*)

Right. Your wife Maite, who you say doesn't play 20 Questions correctly. How did I do as a 20 Question host? Did I play it correctly?

Brent: Yes. Very simple questions and answers.

John Hodgman: Simple answers. Because you were asking questions.

Brent: Yes. Right, right. No, that was pretty good. I was confused at the end, because we asked if it was a TV show, but it was a TV show. But—

John Hodgman: No, it was not. It was a radio show.

Brent: Oh, radio. That's right.

John Hodgman: He was on a TV show called *What's My Line?*. But the *20 Questions* show was a radio show on the BBC.

Brent: Oh. We just uncovered one of my weaknesses in this case.

Maite: Listening.

Brent: Listening.

John Hodgman: Listening. Brent, how often do you and Maite play 20 Questions?

Brent: Lately, a lot less.

(*They chuckle.*)

Our peak was—

Jesse Thorn: Since the divorce.

(They laugh.)

Brent: Our peak was, you know, maybe a year ago or so. Now it really depends. Maybe once a week.

John Hodgman: And what accounts for the decline in play? The fact that you hate the way Maite plays.

Brent: *(Snorts.)* Yeah. Um.

John Hodgman: What does Maite do wrong while playing 20 Questions?

Brent: Her answers—while the like the questions are very straightforward, like yours were—the answers tend to be a little bit vague, a little bit—there's some gray area; there's a little bit of maybe and not like definitive answers. So, my line of questioning/her line of answering will lead me astray. And then I get stuck in this nether region where, you know, the facts don't matter, and I'm completely lost.

John Hodgman: May I ask you a yes or no question? Is specificity the soul of narrative?

Brent: Yes.

John Hodgman: That's true! Do you have a specific example of a time—of Maite's bad play? Bad 20 Question personship?

Brent: Uh, sure. Recently the answer—like the thing that I'm supposed to guess—was cacao nibs.

(Giggling.)

And somewhere along the line of questioning it was— We narrowed it down to like a food. And I said, “Is this a manmade food?” And she said yes. And so—

Jesse Thorn: Because the cacao has to be de-nibbed?

Brent: Yeah. It has to be nibbified. And to me, I don't know; a manmade food means to me like much more processing, much more—

Jesse Thorn: Like a block of concrete or—yeah.

(Brent agrees.)

John Hodgman: Or a chair.

Brent: Yes. That's a manmade food. Uh-huh

Brent: So, when we got to the end and she revealed cacao nibs, and then we reviewed the transcript: manmade food. And I was like, no, that's not a man—

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It's a man-influenced food.

Maite: What?!

Brent: I mean, the cacao nib exists as a whole. You have to break it into a nib. But—

John Hodgman: What is a cacao nib!? Can someone tell me?

Brent: Well, we had to look this up, obviously, because it was a point of contention.

Maite: (*Correcting him.*) You had to look it up.

John Hodgman: Well, Maite, I hope that you were not playing 20 Questions with a thing that you personally would've had to look up. If you know what a cacao nib—you would have to know what a cacao nib is, right?

Maite: Absolutely, absolutely.

John Hodgman: What is it? What is it, Maite? What's a cacao nib?

Maite: It's pieces of cacao. Right? So, you take the cacao, and you break it down. But somebody needs to break it down.

John Hodgman: What is a cacao—? What is cacao now? I'm sorry.

Jesse Thorn: Cacao is another word for cocoa. So, the cacao bean grows on the cacao tree, and it is also known as a cocoa bean.

John Hodgman: Oh, okay.

Jesse Thorn: And it is a portion of the bean that has been dried and crumbled. This is something that is used in the making of very expensive chocolate bars.

John Hodgman: But sometimes you get those chocolate bars with the nibs in them.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, those are the— That's what we're talking about. We're talking about the nib.

John Hodgman: Little crunchy—crunchy little bits of real bitter and tasty chocolate.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah. We're talking about nim-nibs.

John Hodgman: Talking about nim-nibs. Maite, it says here that you and Brent used to play 20 Questions before bed.

(Maite confirms.)

Set the scene for me. Why would you play 20 Questions before bed?

Maite: Well, for me it's hard to unwind when it's bedtime. So, like I need something to sort of help me unwind, and that's the game of choice. And—

John Hodgman: And you get into a big fight with your husband over 20 Questions.

Maite: That is very relaxing to me. *(Laughs.)* No, but—

John Hodgman: Yeah. The end of the fight isn't relaxing, but I bet you would agree winning the fight is tremendously satisfying.

Maite: Absolutely. And I typically do. So, it's a nice way of, you know, clocking out for the day.

John Hodgman: Is that true that Maite usually wins your disputes, Brent?

Brent: Yes. A high majority. 90% of the games we play, I fail miserably in flames, much to her amusement. And then she's off to sleep.

John Hodgman: So, now you're out here trying to work the ref in this one area, trying to get a win. Even if it's with an asterisk.

(Brent confirms.)

Brent, has Maite always played 20 Questions wrong? When was the first time you ever played?

Brent: Yes, um—yes. It's been a long history of this situation. I guess when we were starting dating, so it's been at least 11 years of this. So, we're finally—

John Hodgman: So, dating 11 years. Married now how long?

Brent: Seven.

John Hodgman: Congratulations.

Brent: Thank you.

John Hodgman: And from the beginning, she was playing 20 Questions wrong. Is that what you're trying to say?

Brent: Yes. Yes.

John Hodgman: What else does she do wrong?

(Laughter.)

(John says something inaudible.)

Brent: She also thinks that when you have a cavity and you get it filled, it's still called a cavity. And that's another point of contention. So, her definitions of—

John Hodgman: Did this come up in 20 Questions or at the dentist's office?

Brent: No, prior to maybe a year ago, she had had zero cavities. I had maybe three. So, she held that over me for quite a while.

Jesse Thorn: Jen, how did you not get this in the pre-interview?! How did you fail on this cavity count?!

Brent: *(Laughs.)* So, she would still tease me that I still have cavities, and I said, “No, it's been taken care of. It's been cleaned and filled,” and that the definition of a cavity is an empty space. And yet she maintains that I still have cavities.

John Hodgman: A filled cavity would be called a filling, in my parlance. But this was not part of 20 Questions. This is just another example of my type being wrong.

(Brent agrees.)

A gratuitous example, you might even say.

Jesse Thorn: Well, you asked, John!

John Hodgman: Well, no, but I was asking about 20 Questions.

Jesse Thorn: Oh, okay. Yeah, that wasn't clear to me. I thought you just wanted a list of grievances.

(They laugh.)

John Hodgman: Yeah, you're right, Jesse. I'll allow it. Any other grievances?

Jesse Thorn: Brent was nice enough to provide one.

Brent: It's just an— It didn't come up exactly in 20 Questions if I recall, but it's the kind of difference we have in like the definition of things, how you define something, how you— If cavity came up in 20 Questions, this would be an example of where I would get led astray.

John Hodgman: There is an imprecision.

Brent: Yes.

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John Hodgman: That is frustrating to you?

Brent: Yes.

John Hodgman: In the way Maite absorbs and reflects and speaks the world.

Brent: Yes.

John Hodgman: Maite, are you a native English speaker?

Maite: I'm not.

John Hodgman: What is your first language?

Maite: Spanish.

John Hodgman: What do they call a cavity in Spanish? Like, a tooth cavity.

Maite: Cavidad.

John Hodgman: And when it's filled, what do they call it?

Maite: I don't even know!

John Hodgman: You don't even know.

Maite: Relleno. The filling is resina—resin. And then relleno is like filler? Yes.

John Hodgman: Filler. Yeah. Like, chiles relleno. So, the cavity is stuffed with cheese.

(They laugh.)

Do you think that might be part of the reason for some of this imprecision?

Maite: No. No, I do not. I do not agree with that representation, and I do not agree with calling it an imprecision as well.

John Hodgman: Fair enough!

Transition: Three gavel bangs.

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Transition: Three gavel bangs.

John Hodgman: Brent, what are the rules to 20 Questions?

Brent: Well, there's two players, at least. One has an object, a thing, in mind. The other person has to guess what that thing is within 20 yes or no questions.

John Hodgman: And so, if I'm the person with the thing in mind—like Gilbert Harding—and you're guessing, what are my responsibilities to you that Maite fails to fulfill?

Brent: You have to... I think you have to know a lot about that thing in order to field whatever questions I may have. So. And then you have to represent correctly, as cleanly and as precisely as possible, yes or no. The problem here is there's always a caveat; there's always some gray area. So, yes or no. There's a lot of "maybe"; there's a lot of "can", "maybe", you know. So, that slippery slope leads me down into ruin.

Jesse Thorn: The nether regions.

(They laugh and Brent agrees.)

John Hodgman: Is "maybe", in your opinion, an unacceptable answer? Or I don't know? Like, if we're playing, and I've got something in mind, and you ask a question about it, and I don't know the answer, and I say, "I don't know," does that just—? Does that mean you win? Does that mean you get an extra question? Is that allowed?!

Brent: It's allowed, because you can't be expected to—again—be an absolute expert on every subject. But yeah, that would be— For me, that would be a free question. Like, okay, that doesn't count as a question. Or! Let's pause, and let's figure it out, which we do quite often. There's a lot of Wikipedia-ing answers to make sure that we answer—that she answers correctly. And that's fine. That's allowed.

John Hodgman: Maite, did you learn different rules to 20 Questions when you were growing up?

Maite: Well, actually, what's interesting about this is that I never played 20 Questions until I met him. So, everything that I know, everything that I learned about this game, I learned by playing with him. So, he taught me the rules of this game. And I think this is just his—

John Hodgman: Brent. You are the source of all of Maite's sins.

(Brent agrees with a laugh.)

Maite: Correct. I think this is just a—you know, your typical case of the student surpassing the teacher.

(They laugh.)

And he's just sour about it.

John Hodgman: What was the one with the kangaroo? Brent, do you remember the story that I'm alluding to?

Brent: Yeah, I think it was— The answer, the thing I was supposed to be guessing, was kangaroo. The question was—we had narrowed it into it being an animal, and I said, “Is this a pet? Is this an animal that lives in a house?”

Maite: *(Laughing.)* No.

Brent: And she said, “Maybe.”

(Jesse “wow”s.)

And then the justification at the end was, “People can have pets of all kinds. Maaaybe there's a kangaroo somewhere. I can't say no, because maybe there's a kangaroo somewhere.” And that's exactly the problem. Like, the answers should be in a general knowledge area. None of these niche, fringe exceptions should be allowed.

Jesse Thorn: Judge Hodgman, do you have any experience with house kangaroos?

(Tittering.)

John Hodgman: I've held a baby kangaroo, and I know you have as well, Jesse.

Jesse Thorn: And those kangaroos lived in—?

John Hodgman: A declining mall outside of Minneapolis.

Jesse Thorn: No! Those kangaroos lived in that nice lady's house!

Maite: There you go.

John Hodgman: Oh, really?

Jesse Thorn: The medical director of Sustainable Safari—

John Hodgman: Which is in a declining mall outside of Minneapolis.

Jesse Thorn: That's true. Yes. Well, maybe now it's an ascendent mall now that it has capybaras inside of it.

John Hodgman: That's true. That's a pretty wonderful mall, I must say.

Jesse Thorn: But that nice woman that brought them to our live show in Minneapolis that one time when we held baby kangaroos in swaddling clothes, she was—

John Hodgman: Yeah. And the baby kangaroos had diapers too.

Jesse Thorn: Exactly. She was taking care of those baby kangaroos in her home.

John Hodgman: But she was fostering them, right?

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Until they could go and live at Sustainable Safari in a mall.

Jesse Thorn: (*Coyly.*) Maybe. Maaaybe! Maybe!

(*They laugh.*)

John Hodgman: You're saying there could be a foster fail, and that kangaroo lives with her forever?

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, it could be.

John Hodgman: I mean, look, there was almost a foster fail that night at the Fitzgerald Theater when I tried to hide that baby kangaroo in my garment bag!

Jesse Thorn: (*Laughing.*) Yeah. You had 'em both underneath your robe the whole show! Hoping no one would notice!

John Hodgman: I was gonna take those cuties home with me! Now, Maite, come on. You know that most kangaroos are not kept as pets!

Maite: I agree. I can agree with that!

John Hodgman: Do you feel like it's your job to mislead Brent in your replies?

Maite: No, I feel like I'm trying to be extremely precise with my answers. And because the questions he asks are so vague, over-broad, ambiguous, it's hard to give him a straight answer. So, I mean, is this animal a pet? It can be. For someone! I don't know. People have peacocks as pets.

John Hodgman: You know, Brent, what I'm thinking here is that maybe, uh, your questions are terrible. I mean, is it a manmade food? I don't care what food you're talking about. Pick a food.

Brent: Apple.

John Hodgman: Alright. That's not manmade, I would say. Fair.

(Brent laughs.)

But it's still—that's a real stumper for something like cacao nibs. Now, cacao nibs are also a stumper. So, you stumped each other. And got into a fight. But is the animal kept as a pet? I can see—I have to say that I can see why Maite was a little bit like, “I don't know how to answer this one.”

Jesse Thorn: WHAT?!

John Hodgman: “Not generally,” would be the answer.

Jesse Thorn: A KANGAROO?!

John Hodgman: Well, I mean, define kept as a pet.

Jesse Thorn: *(Distraught.)* Define an overbroad question for 20 Questions! Asking broad questions is the point of 20 Questions! That's how the game works! You ask broad questions! And then you ask specific ones!

John Hodgman: I'm not sure—I don't want to get into a fight with you just before we go to bed!

Jesse Thorn: *(Shouting over him.)* Otherwise, it's just 20 Guesses! Otherwise, it might as well be, “Is it a marble? Is it a dog?” You have to start with broad questions!

John Hodgman: I don't know that that's true! That's not my strategy. My strategy is to ask specific questions that eliminate categories.

Jesse Thorn: Is it Frank Sinatra?

John Hodgman: Is it, Maite?

(Giggling.)

Brent: Maybe!

Maite: No.

John Hodgman: Alright. Brent, it also says here that Maite makes up other games. What kind of games does Maite make up, and how are they also unfair to you?

(Maite and Brent chuckle.)

Brent: Actually, the games she makes up are maybe more fair, because they're her rules, and they're very— They're simple, and it doesn't require any sort of nuance. The extra games that we're talking about came up because, you know, I started refusing to play 20 Questions. But she wanted to, again, unwind, have a chat as we go off to sleep, whatever.

So, she'll just make up a game that I'll play instead. For example, there's one that was pretty popular for a while called Badoosh.

John Hodgman: Badoosh! What are the rules of Badoosh?

Brent: *(Laughs.)* One person asks the other—or gives them a word. And that person has to take that word, think of a song that has that word in the lyrics, sing that part of that song. But at the same time—for no good reason other than it's just silly, half-asleep craziness—you have to flop your legs up and down like a fish as you're singing.

(Maite giggles.)

Jesse Thorn: Badoosh!

John Hodgman: And that's called Badoosh!

Brent: Yeah, that's it. Trademark.

John Hodgman: The name of the game is Badoosh. So, without the flopping—

Brent: You lose.

John Hodgman: Gimme a word and let me see if I can play it.

Brent: Mm! Kangaroo.

Maite: There's an important rule. You can't just spew out a word. You, yourself, have to know of a song that has that word in it. 'Cause otherwise—

(Brent concedes.)

John Hodgman: Do you know of—? Alright.

Brent: No, I already failed.

Maite: He doesn't know a song with kangaroo. He doesn't know a song.

Brent: Probably a Men at Work song, I'm sure! But I can't quote it right now. Um.

Jesse Thorn: First of all, that is racist.

(They laugh.)

Just because Men at Work are—just 'cause Colin Hay, the great songwriter Colin Hay, hails from the island of Australia doesn't mean all his songs are about kangaroos!

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John Hodgman: It says here, Maite, that you feel that Brent's questions are often too specific. What do you mean?

Maite: His questions can be very limiting. Right? With the example of the kangaroo, the example of the cacao nibs. You know, like it's a food; it comes from a natural source. But the thing that I am thinking about is not in its natural state.

John Hodgman: Unlike an apple.

(Maite confirms.)

Brent, you say that Maite often has to look things up in order to answer your questions. Is that right?

(Brent confirms.)

Is that off limits in your game, in your version of the game?

Brent: No, I appreciate the—if there's a gap in knowledge of like what this thing is, I obviously want a more precise answer.

John Hodgman: Ultimately, do you feel like you're not on a level playing field? That you're not playing—Maite isn't playing fair? Or is she just playing tough, and you'd like it to be easier for you?

Brent: It is tough, and we have in the course of this constant situation—I do see her point about my questions being too specific or too, you know—

John Hodgman: I'm not even sure that I agree with that description. Like, there is something about your questions. Too specific? Is that—? You know, Maite characterizes— I'm not sure if you know this, but in the affidavit, Maite characterizes your 20 Questions game as basic.

(Brent laughs and affirms.)

Maite says you're a basic player. What does that mean, Maite?

Maite: I think— You know, maybe because he played this game growing up when he was a child, I think he just stayed at that level. You know, guessing farm animals and stuff like that. But we are playing into adulthood. Right? This is a different stage of life. And he needs to get with the times! I feel we've graduated primary colors; we've graduated basic household items.

John Hodgman: It's time to get a little bit tougher in the 20 Questions game. Time to start thinking about some nibs.

Jesse Thorn: The answer cannot be pumpkin spice latte. Not again.

(Laughter.)

John Hodgman: Maite, did I hear from you what you spend your days doing? What is your calling in life, aside from—?

Maite: I'm an attorney.

John Hodgman: Yeah.

(Maite laughs.)

I can see why Brent's operating at a disadvantage here.

Brent: Thank you.

John Hodgman: Is it always the case, Maite, that you are the person with the answer, and Brent must ask the question? Or does it alternate?

Maite: It typically doesn't alternate. It's typically me with the answer and him asking questions.

John Hodgman: Well, have you ever tried playing it the other way?

Maite: I have. Um.

John Hodgman: And what is your opinion of Brent's game play as the answerer?

Maite: The problem with him is that he tries— Like, he is actively trying to match my level, so he will try to pick things that are difficult half the time, I guess. Or half the time, the things he's thinking about just—that's not—it doesn't—no, it doesn't make sense. He doesn't know how to answer the questions appropriately. So, it's challenging for him to pick good things, to answer things appropriately. So, we find it better—right?—that it's me.

John Hodgman: By we, I mean, "I and all impartial observers" know that it's better that Maite answer the questions.

(Maite confirms.)

Maite, what are some examples—or an example—of a thing that Brent was trying to get you to guess?

(Maite "hm"s.)

Not very memorable, apparently, 'cause this game is so basic.

Maite: No. *(Laughs.)*

John Hodgman: Brent, do you remember one where you were allowed to be the answerer instead of the guesser?

(Brent "hm"s.)

Maite: It's been a long time.

Brent: It's been a long time, and it rarely happens. So, I'm struggling there. But I try to play a little bit more straight down the line. I mean, a little bit more... It can be a simple answer, but I think it's— Even if it was an apple, you still—it still would take you at least ten questions to get there, you know? So, there's still gameplay involved. There's still strategy involved. It doesn't have to be so complicated.

Jesse Thorn: I'm gonna be honest with you. This is a family podcast. But the more specifics of this dynamic you describe, the more it starts to feel like something that should be going on in some sort of adults-only tent.

(They laugh.)

John Hodgman: Well, it sounds like ritualistic bedtime humiliation is fun for some.

(They laugh.)

Jesse Thorn: The more I hear about getting caught in the nether regions!

[00:35:00]

John Hodgman: Well, Brent, let me ask you this question then. You said that sometimes when you get into these disputes and start bickering about, you know, Maite's gameplay and Maite's answers, it's fun. You said it's fun, right? I mean, it's fun to get into a little fight. Fun fight.

(Brent agrees.)

Is that the only feeling you have when you are humiliated time and time again?

(They laugh.)

Maite: Oh my god.

John Hodgman: I mean, that's what happens! I mean, how often does he get it right, Maite?

Maite: Mmm... I would say like maybe 35% of the time.

John Hodgman: 35% of the time.

Brent: It's generous.

John Hodgman: And so, Brent, how do you feel—? What's 100 minus 35? 65% of the time?

Brent: Mm-hm. Um, okay. So, there it is fun. There is an element of fun.

John Hodgman: *(Dismissively.)* Yeah, yeah, you love each other. It's fun, blah, blah, blah.

(Brent laughs.)

Is there another feeling? Like, "I wish I could just go to bed."

Brent: Yeah. It's relief that the round has completed. Okay, you got me again. We identified where we went wrong, where I went wrong. Okay. Good. Thanks. You know, I'll see you tomorrow.

John Hodgman: When Maite wants you to understand where you went wrong, does she often open up like a PowerPoint presentation?

Brent: No, but she knows. She knows as soon as I ask the question like, “Oh, here's—” Because she'll—like she said, she'll mention it like, “Oh, this is gonna be the thing, but here's my answer.” So, she knows where it went astray.

John Hodgman: And Maite, I'll ask you a slightly different question. When Brent gets it right that rare 35% of the time, how do you feel?

Maite: Disappointed.

(Brent laughs.)

Disappointed, yes.

John Hodgman: You get no pleasure in when your partner figures out what you're thinking about and guesses it correctly?

Maite: Um... very little.

John Hodgman: I appreciate your honesty.

(She laughs.)

Brent, what would you like your nighttime routine to be?

Brent: I don't wanna outlaw gameplay at all. I think there should be a time limit; nothing after 11 when I'm particularly exhausted. We can play 20 Questions, but I do appreciate mixing it up with other things.

John Hodgman: Well, what would you have me rule if I were to rule in your favor, Maite? Obviously, 20 Questions every night. Brent loses and flops every night. Or what?

Maite: *(Laughs.)* It doesn't have to be every night, but I do not agree with a cutoff time. You know? Because he can control that basically. You know? Whenever it is that he's tired—like, 11? Like, what if we don't make it to bed until 11? Like, and it's because of you? Then you're infringing on my 20 Questions time, and that's not fair.

(Jesse cackles.)

So, if there is gonna be *(unclear)* time, there needs to be a provision somewhere to allow for 20 Questions times after 11PM if it is because you—

Jesse Thorn: Maite, you're suggesting that in addition to a hard, temporal cutoff time on the clock, you're also demanding a window after the bodies have hit the bed.

Maite: Right. Right.

Jesse Thorn: Because otherwise he could just run out the clock while everyone's on their feet.

Maite: Exactly!

Jesse Thorn: And then he doesn't have to play 20 Questions at all. He falls straight to sleep, and you're just sitting there trying to flop like a fish by yourself.

Maite: Exactly. So, that would be one thing. Two, he needs to, again, level up his gameplay. I feel like he needs to ask better questions. He needs to be a lot more receptive to my answers as well and actually listen to what I'm saying and how I'm saying it. Because I do give you clues!

Brent: You do.

Jesse Thorn: Mr. Policeman.

(Chuckling.)

Brent: But my half-asleep brain is incapable of handling that. So, that's why we have to find that middle ground.

Jesse Thorn: Do you ever play 20 Questions when fully awake?

Brent: Nope. I try! Especially when driving, which is when you're supposed to play 20 Questions. And she's not interested all of the sudden!

John Hodgman: That's also when you're supposed to be fully awake, too.

Brent: Good point.

John Hodgman: Brent, do you wanna play 20 Questions where Maite asks you questions sometimes? Or do you not care?

Brent: No, I would—

[00:40:00]

That would be definitely a way that we could play more often is if we agreed to an alternate schedule, instead of 10 to 1, which is usually the ratio.

John Hodgman: Why not alternate back and forth my day?

Maite: Because then I get frustrated, and then that doesn't help me sleep. You see?

Brent: *(Laughing.)* Oh.

Maite: So, that's— And I don't like to lose. You know, I would have to win.

Brent: Counterintuitive too.

Maite: It kind of does the opposite of a soothing bedtime practice.

Jesse Thorn: You're only able to, as they say, rest in power.

(They laugh.)

Brent: Absolutely.

John Hodgman: One of the contradictions of the ruling that you're asking for, Maite, is that you're hoping—you're asking me to order Brent to get better, to improve his game, to make it less basic. And if I were to so order and Brent were able to do that, would mean that he would start winning more than 35% of the time, in which case you would not be getting your bedtime routine basking in his frustration. You'd be getting less out of the game than you currently enjoy.

Maite: I think it would make me have to also level up and to keep up with the current ratio, that just means that we have to play more.

John Hodgman: How do you level up beyond cacao nibs?!

Maite: It's possible.

John Hodgman: Is that the most obscure one she's ever come up with, Brent?

Maite: No.

Brent: No.

Maite: We did protractor the other day.

Brent: Protractor was one. I can't remember precisely, but I do somehow remember that it was air? No. Or some it was something like that. Some invisible thing that just— Like, dark matter or something. It wasn't that specific, but it was something like that where there's absolutely no way you can like guess that. So, it's just impossible.

John Hodgman: Maite, was it dark matter?

(Brent laughs.)

Maite: I don't have a specific recollection of— I have a vague memory, just like you pointed out.

Jesse Thorn: I mean, it sounds like it was a vague answer.

Maite: It wasn't air, though. I wouldn't go to something like that. It must have been like helium or something.

Brent: Yeah, some sort of gas.

John Hodgman: Can you use helium to hunt an animal?

Brent: *(Giggles.)* Maybe!

John Hodgman: Brent, Maite says you not listening to the hints that she's giving you and the consideration that she's giving you. How do you respond to that?

Brent: Uh, it's true. I have to admit that, without— I guess I'm not making excuses. I'm just explaining what's happening internally is I'm both tired, and I get sidetracked by something she says. And I'm like hypersensitive to her answers, because I know I have to be on my toes. So, like even the slightest intonation or pause or something gets me stuck. And so, I'm thinking about that, and I forgot that I had already— I'll ask the same question again. Because I forgot. And so, just compromise across the board, trying to play this game.

John Hodgman: Look, I feel like I've asked every question—yes and no and other question—that I can without actually seeing this in action. And I think I need to see it inaction in order to make a decision. So, I'm going to go into my chambers now and get into pajamas and put on my facial mask, 'cause that's my bedtime routine. And when we come back, Maite, you're gonna try to stump me and Brent with a game of 20 Questions. We each get 10.

Jesse, you wanna be in on this?

Jesse Thorn: Yeah. I'll be in on this. Because that way if I win, I'll feel bad. And if I lose, I'll feel bad.

(They chuckle.)

John Hodgman: Sorry about that, but that's what games are like, I suppose. And yeah, and then as soon as I... well, I mean, I guess it's just trial by 20 Questions, right? I mean, if you can stump me, Maite, you win. If Brent or I get it right, then Brent wins. What do you feel

about that? *(Without waiting for an answer.)* Who cares? I'm doing it anyway. I'll be back in a moment.

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

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

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

Brent: About 50/50?

Jesse Thorn: Yeah. Not 35/65, for example. *(Chuckles.)*

Brent: No, which is where I'm usually at. But no. 50/50.

Jesse Thorn: Do you think you are better at 20 Questions than Maite is?

Brent: Yes.

Jesse Thorn: Maite, how do you feel about your chances right now?

Maite: I feel like—you know. I'm getting—what?—three against one? It's gonna be a little bit challenging.

[00:45:00]

But I will take it.

Jesse Thorn: Do you think you're better at 20 Questions than your husband?

Maite: Absolutely.

Jesse Thorn: *(Cackles.)* The certitude. She sold it, Brent! She sold it. I'm buying it from her. I'm not buying it from you! Well, we'll see what Judge Hodgman has to say about all this when we come back in just a moment.

Transition: Three gavel bangs.

Promo:

Music: Jaunty, playful music.

Amber Nash: Hi, I'm Amber Nash, the voice of Pam Poovey on the groundbreaking FX animated comedy *Archer*. Remember *Archer*? I sure don't. That's why I started *RePhrasing: An Archer ReWatch Podcast* on MaximumFun.org. Join me and a bevy of special guests as we discuss every episode of *Archer* starting from the very beginning. *Archer* executive producer, Casey Willis, and editor Christian Danley will provide insight and fun and help me remember everything I've forgotten about *Archer*—which is a lot.

So, join me on *RePhrasing: An Archer ReWatch Podcast* on MaximumFun.org. 'Cause I can't wait to watch *Archer* again for the very first time.

(Music ends.)

Promo:

Music: Fantastical, medieval style synth.

Griffin McElroy: *(With a wise, aged affect.)* The wizards answer eight by eight.

The conclaves call to demonstrate—

Their arcane gift; their single spell.

They number 64—until!

A conflagration! 63.

And 62, they soon shall be,

As one by one, the wizards die,

'Til one remains to reign on high!

(The music picks up tempo.)

(Returning to his normal speaking voice.) Join us for *TAZ Royale*, an Oops, All Wizards battle royale season of *The Adventure Zone*, every other Thursday on MaximumFun.org or wherever you get your podcasts.

(Music ends.)

Transition: Three gavel bangs.

Jesse Thorn: John, you know, it's a very special time.

John Hodgman: That's right! It's the 25th anniversary of *Bullseye*!

Jesse Thorn: *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn*, my public radio program, turns 25 years old this autumn. I started it in my dorm room and at the college radio station at UC Santa Cruz, KZSE, the Heavyweight 88, when I was 19 years old. 25 years ago. I have been on the radio every single week without fail for 25 years. I can't believe it. We are doing some really cool stuff to celebrate.

John Hodgman: What are you doing to celebrate your silver anniversary of *Bullseye*?

Jesse Thorn: Well, for one thing, we just recorded a live streaming show that is on the *Bullseye* YouTube channel, in which I interviewed 25 people in a row. Including but not limited: to Tonya Mosley, the host of *Fresh Air*. Rob Corddry, Paul Scheer, Bob Odenkirk. All kinds of amazing people. Lisa Loeb. All kinds of amazing people who I love, as well as a few *Sound of Young America* old schoolers like Gene and Jordan, my original co-hosts, and Dan Grayson, who wrote the theme music. It is—

John Hodgman: Now to be clear, this is not a clip show. This was a live show.

Jesse Thorn: With 25 consecutive interviews, me sitting in the studio.

John Hodgman: With brand-new—

Jesse Thorn: Yeah. While people rolled through.

John Hodgman: And we're talking about people who have been interviewed on *Bullseye* before, have been part of *Bullseye* history. And it's not a coincidence that each and every one of them is a different kind of creative genius. Because the truth is, when you listen to Jesse Thorn interview people on *Bullseye*, you are gaining insight into how the creative mind works that you'll not get anywhere else. I love you as an interviewer, Jesse. It's how I came to know you. You interviewed me. And this is such an incredible thing, and people can watch it on the YouTube. Right? On the *Bullseye* YouTube.

Jesse Thorn: Indeed. Just search for *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* on YouTube. You will find it there. We also have three live shows: Los Angeles, where I and the show live. New York City, where we did our first ever live show—I don't know, 15 years ago? 18 years ago? Gosh, a long time ago. And Santa Cruz, where the show started. So, in LA on October 16th, we've got Jason Mantzoukas, Aparna Nancherla, Cheech Marin, and Roy Wood Jr. Not half bad, John!

John Hodgman: A murderer's row. Not half bad. Not half bad.

Jesse Thorn: Get a load of this! Get a load of this! In Santa Cruz, California? I know what you're gonna say. (*Mockingly.*) “What are you gonna interview? A freaking banana slug? What are you gonna interview? The— What are you gonna interview? The caveman that's on the sky tram at the Santa Cruz beach boardwalk?!” Jennifer knows what I'm talking about.

John Hodgman: Some of the underground dwellers from the movie *Us*?

Jesse Thorn: Yeah. “What, are you gonna interview? A surprisingly large people group of people on mushrooms?” No!

John Hodgman: What are you gonna interview? A boardwalk made of cement?

Jesse Thorn: There you go.

Adam Scott from *Severance* and *Parks and Recreation*—Santa Cruz's own!

[00:50:00]

John Hodgman: Santa Cruz's own Adam Scott. What a delight.

Jesse Thorn: Plus, representing Oakland, California: one of the greatest rappers of all time and a brilliant filmmaker, Boots Riley. My friend Glen Washington, the host of *Snap Judgment*. And our very old friend, Scott Simpson, is going to be doing some standup comedy. He's not that old. He's just an old friend of ours.

John Hodgman: No, we've known him for a long time. He is a brilliant comedian. You remember him from, *You Look Nice Today*, and he is such a delight. Well, that's a lot of show, Jesse, in Santa Cruz.!

Jesse Thorn: John, I didn't even mention Mariachi Ateño, the UCSC mariachi ensemble.

John Hodgman: (*Smacks his desk.*) This is gonna be quite a night!

Jesse Thorn: Then November 15th at the People's Improv Theater in New York City: Jon Benjamin, Josh Gondelman, Jad Abumrad, and our friends and past *Judge John Hodgman* guests, Kristen Anderson-Lopez and Bobby Lopez, playing some of the legendary songs that got them an EGOT. (*Laughs.*)

John Hodgman: These are all amazing shows. I can't wait to be at everyone that I can be. You shouldn't wait either! How do they get tickets?

Jesse Thorn: MaximumFun.org/events is where all the information is. MaximumFun.org/events. LA, Santa Cruz, New York City, live on the internet. All of that at MaximumFun.org/events. Plus, if you subscribe to *Bullseye*, we are going to have a full autumn of special programs, including but not limited to highlights from these live shows—but also highlights from 25 years of doing our show. Gene and Jordan, my original co-

hosts—one of whom I still do *Jordan, Jesse, Go!* with—came into the studio. And our producers made us listen to clips of us 25 years ago on college radio. And, uh, it was intense. We listened to the episode— One time we had to give away these tickets to a flamenco show in like Felton, California maybe. And somebody called in, and they won the contest, but they said they would only take the tickets if Gene would go with them.

And so, we decided on the spot to simulate a date between her and Gene. Like, how would it go? She did so well that Jean went with her, and then they were boyfriend and girlfriend for like a year.

John Hodgman: Wow!

Jesse Thorn: That's a true story. Anyway, all of that on *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* for the 25th anniversary. I'm so excited.

John Hodgman: And I join the world in congratulating you on 25 years of an incredible series of conversations, one of which included me! It's how we met, and I'm so glad that we did, and I hope to see you all there at all these wonderful shows.

MaximumFun.org/events. Is that where you go?

Jesse Thorn: MaximumFun.org/events.

John Hodgman: Go and get it.

Transition: Three gavel bangs.

Jesse Thorn: Please rise as Judge John Hodgman reenters the courtroom and presents his— Well, I guess is 20 Questions game.

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

John Hodgman: Well, I am going to be a guesser in the game that Maite leads. Jesse and Brent will also guess. We will each guess—? What's 20 divided by three? We'll alternate starting with Brent, then Jesse, then me, and go round-robin. Jennifer Marmor, if you'll keep track of the total number of questions. And the promise that I have made, that if Maite stumps us, all Maite wins the case; if Brent or Jesse or I get it right, then I may give a different verdict.

Jesse Thorn: John, we will each get 6.66 guesses, the guesses of the beast.

John Hodgman: Couldn't be more appropriate. Maite, do you have the prompt in mind?

Maite: I have a few options. I need a few seconds. But—And I guess this is sidebar.

John Hodgman: Yeah, you can ask a clarifying question, certainly.

Jesse Thorn: She's trying to decide between pencil eraser and the metal that goes around the pencil that holds the eraser to the wooden part of the pencil.

Maite: Got it! No.

Jesse Thorn: Let the record reflect that Maite's eyes are closed, and she's searching deep within her nether regions for a possible answer.

(They laugh.)

John Hodgman: Will it be Kant's categorical imperative, or freon, or the concept of shame?

Maite: *(Laughs.)* Alright, I got it.

John Hodgman: Okay. Brent, you gonna start it off?

Brent: Yes. I usually start off with: do we own one?

John Hodgman: I'm learning a lot already.

Maite: *(Laughing.)* You see?

Brent: That's a legitimate question!

Jesse Thorn: Maite is gazing into the sky! We're already in the nether regions! The first question: do we own one? A point of fact!

Brent: That eliminates many things.

John Hodgman: This is when we learn that they actually own five kangaroos.

Maite: Well, here's the thing. Now I need to remember— I'm trying to go in my mind.

[00:55:00]

Do we actually own one? Because maybe he remembers that we do, and I don't. So, this is why it's tricky. So, I'm trying to be very precise. I am going to say no.

Brent: This is also difficult, because the judge and the bailiff don't know what we own.

(They laugh.)

John Hodgman: I'm just trying to— I'm trying to determine style of play here. I'm trying to understand the dynamics of the play. So, everything is correct.

Jesse Thorn: Is it alive?

Maite: No.

John Hodgman: Is it a physical object?

Maite: Yes.

Brent: Is it bigger than a basketball?

Maite: No.

Jesse Thorn: Can you—? I'm not falling into that trap. Not can you eat it! Do people regularly eat—? No.

Brent: That still won't work.

Jesse Thorn: Is it food?

(They laugh.)

Brent: No.

Jesse Thorn: No?

Maite: Is it what? Is it food? No, it's not food. How many questions are we in?

John Hodgman: Jennifer Marmor says five.

Jesse Thorn: I just assumed Jennifer was Brenting out and not listening.

(They laugh.)

John Hodgman: *(Sarcastically.)* I can see why you find this a relaxing game to play. I'm over here breaking pencils in half maniacally and flopping my legs around trying to think. Is it something you find in a kitchen?

Jesse Thorn: This is classic. This is classic!

John Hodgman: Is it something you typically find in a kitchen?

Jesse Thorn: My gracious!

(They laugh.)

Maite: I'm gonna say yes. Yeah.

Brent: Oh wow. Does it require electricity?

Maite: No.

Jesse Thorn: To use!

Maite: Is that a separate question?

Jesse Thorn: Not to exist!

John Hodgman: Well, for atoms to stick together, there need to be a positive and a negative charge. So, in that sense—

Maite: It does not require electricity.

Jesse Thorn: Is it used for cooking?

Maite: No.

John Hodgman: Would you find it in a refrigerator?

Maite: No. *(Beat.)* Well, I mean, maybe. But no.

Brent: Maybe?! See?!

John Hodgman: I know.

Jesse Thorn: It's a real short list of stuff that you don't eat that you keep in the refrigerator. It's like—batteries?

John Hodgman: I know! Well, it could be baking powder. Or soda, I guess. Batteries.

Brent: Is it a tool?

(Long beat.)

Jesse Thorn: Just because chimpanzees use sticks to get ants doesn't mean sticks count as a tool!

John Hodgman: Is it a kitchen stick?!

(They giggle.)

That wasn't a guess. Is it a tool, is the question.

Maite: Yes.

Brent: It is a tool. Okay.

Jesse Thorn: Is it used to eat?

Maite: Um. Define eat.

John Hodgman: Wow.

(Laughter.)

Jesse Thorn: So, every human being—

John Hodgman: Counselor, I'll see you at my bench, please. Alright.

Jesse Thorn: I mean, the only possible answer now is one of those pouches that applesauce comes in sometimes?! *(Laughs.)* Or possibly something that holds like a soup that you drink? Because I can't imagine what else could be maybe eating and maybe not.

Brent: Go-gurt.

Maite: It's hard to answer. Again, rephrase the question.

(Brent cackles.)

John Hodgman: I'll allow it.

Jesse Thorn: Is eating something you do with it?!

John Hodgman: I don't like that. Rephrase.

Jesse Thorn: *(Shouting.)* Well, I liked the first phrase! Obviously! It's the one that made sense!

Maite: I am going— Again—

Jesse Thorn: It's not for cooking, right? We established it's not for cooking? So, the question is: is it a tool for eating?

John Hodgman: Did we establish that it's not for cooking?

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, we did. Right? The answer was no?

Is it used to eat or drink?

Maite: Yes.

John Hodgman: Is it used to drink?

Maite: Yes.

John Hodgman: Those of you who are watching YouTube can see that Jesse Thorn has a guess, but it's Brent's guess now.

Brent: It's not gonna be that easy.

John Hodgman: No. I can tell you. It would never be this easy.

Brent: I'm gonna say...

Jesse Thorn: It's gonna be one of those hollowed-out coconuts that you drink tiki drinks out of.

Brent: I'm gonna say an espresso—is it an espresso cup?

Maite: Mmmm, no.

Brent: Did you see the—?! Did you hear the—?!

John Hodgman: It was the delay on the no! Right?

Brent: Right? Right. Because then it gets you thinking.

Jesse Thorn: I mean, you could put an espresso in one of those hollowed-out coconuts. I think that's Maite's point here. *(Laughs.)* So, just to recap. It's a tool. It lives in the kitchen. It's smaller than a basketball.

[01:00:00]

It is used for drinking. But it's not an espresso cup. How many questions have we asked? That's not one of my questions! *(Beat.)* 13. Oh, this is great. This is great.

John Hodgman: Lucky 13.

Jesse Thorn: This is gonna be great. Is it generally for hot drinks?

Maite: No.

Jesse Thorn: Well, I take this back then, the thing I was waving at the camera.

John Hodgman: Is drinking its primary purpose?

Maite: Yes.

John Hodgman: Number 15, Brent.

Brent: Alright. We don't own one. So, here's where I have the advantage over you guys. We don't own like a stein or a—

Maite: What's a stein?

Brent: Like, a big mug for beer.

John Hodgman: Don't guess stein. Doesn't even know what it is.

Jesse Thorn: Be realistic! Be realistic. Go with hollowed-out coconut. *(Laughs.)*

Maite: You guys can't like exchange info!

John Hodgman: No, you're right. We're not exchanging info.

Jesse Thorn: We're friends! That's what friends do!

John Hodgman: I'm just trying to have a fun time. Sorry. We thought for a second that it was a game.

(They laugh.)

My mistake.

Jesse Thorn: Wait, I have a question. Is this a podcast?! Okay, go ahead.

Brent: So, it's maybe a type of vessel for drinking that we don't own. I'm gonna say a canteen?

Maite: No.

Jesse Thorn: Is it a straw?

Maite: It is.

Brent: Ohhh!

John Hodgman: Wooow!

Brent: Dang.

Maite: You see? That's a perfect, reasonable—

Jesse Thorn: That was a pretty reasonable one.

John Hodgman: That was an— That was incredible.

Brent: But do you see?! Like—

John Hodgman: You don't own a goddamn straw?!

Maite: I don't think so!

Brent: We absolutely own straws.

Maite: No, we don't. No. Where? I mean, maybe—

Brent: For Sebastian's cups, for—the leftover takeout straws that we have in the drawer.

Maite: Maybe, but I don't know for a fact that we have some!

Jesse Thorn: Wow, here it is!

(Maite laughs.)

John Hodgman: That's really interesting.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah. What about Sebastian's cups?!

Maite: I didn't even think of that. You see? Like, it is not top of mind. So, I'm trying to be fair.

Brent: Mm-hm. Pretty basic.

John Hodgman: Is Sebastian someone you know, Maite?

Jesse Thorn: No, he's the crab from *The Little Mermaid*.

(Brent laughs.)

Maite: That's our son.

John Hodgman: Oh, you forgot that your son—? Jesus.

(They laugh.)

In your obsession with dominating 20 Questions, you forgot about Sebastian and his straws!

Brent: That's where she's at! That's the level.

John Hodgman: Alright, well now I'm gonna make my verdict, and I'm gonna make it swift. Maite, I thought you were gonna stump us there, and you were just gonna walk away with it. You didn't happen to. Congratulations, Jesse Thorn. I don't think I would've ever gotten to straw. Amazing creative thinking from Jesse Thorn. And by the way, Maite? That's a great clue. Love that clue. But it was really illustrative and helpful for me to see the gameplay, because I got to see the faults in your respective games.

One being: you don't know if you own any straws. And you gave the answer “no?” after some back and forth hesitation. Whereas I think an appropriate answer would've been, “I just don't know. I'm not sure.” That would be a fair and accurate answer. Brent, in the meantime, I thought you were out of bounds with “do we own one?” Because my style of play is trying to break things down into broad categories of—existential categories. Size, usefulness. What is it made of?

Jesse Thorn: When you said existential categories, I was sure you were gonna say like, “Does it make life worth living?”

(They laugh.)

John Hodgman: Yeah. That. Well, I mean that— I do feel that, Brent, some of your questions— You complain about going into these gray areas, but you're opening gray areas. Right? Like, “Can you use it to hunt?”

Jesse Thorn: “Does God love it?”

(Laughter.)

John Hodgman: You know, “Is it a manmade food?” And “Do we own one?” are questions that are really open interpretation rather than clear elimination of category. And yet I have to give you credit. We kind of got closer and closer to it because you reoriented our thinking into—for me at least, into, “Well, Maite says it doesn't exist in your home, but let's think about your home. Let me break your home down into categories.”

[01:05:00]

Is it a kitchen item? Is it a bedroom item? Is it a bathroom item? That sort of thing. And I think that helped us get there. We all played our part, but only Jesse Thorn made that creative move to straw.

Jesse Thorn: And I wanna be clear, I apologize to you guys for winning. I feel like such a jerk!

John Hodgman: Well, Jesse, I understand, and I appreciate that, and I wanna talk about that feeling in a moment. But you don't have to feel like a jerk. Because really, we cheated. Jennifer Marmor gave us a hint, which was not fair to Maite, by suggesting that we ask, "Can you use it to drink?" We might have gotten there! Eventually. And I think it's producer's privilege to keep things moving along and creating an interesting outcome. It was an exciting, fun game. And what I wanna say about it was that it was fun. That we had fun together. In no way—right? In no way was that relaxing or calming. To me, to Jesse. Jesse ended up feeling bad. And I don't know! To Brent, I'm not sure how he felt about it.

But I mean, was it relaxing to you?

Brent: No.

John Hodgman: I mean, here's the thing, Maite. I think that this is a game where people feel put on the spot and forced to prove their intelligence. And that's not relaxing to most people, and I dare say, not to Brent. I can understand why it would be relaxing to you if you are primarily the person giving the clue. Because then you don't have to prove your own intelligence. All you have to do is flaunt your own intelligence. And that I find to be extremely relaxing. That's why, in our automobile family road trips, we take turns. Because it's obviously an advantage, being the person giving the clue. It's a much better feeling than being the person who is literally clueless, which is a horrible feeling to have! And then feeling like you're gonna lose and be judged, and you're gonna have to flop your feet in order for your spouse to feel good or whatever it is that's going on in your bedroom.

(They laugh.)

First of all, games should be fun. And I think that when Jesse talks about the fact that he feels bad both when he loses games and when he wins games, and therefore he avoids games, that shows a lot of self-knowledge about the fact that games can often be anxiety-producing in any direction. And I think that it's interesting to me—at least, to say the least—that for you, the fun of the game is enjoying Brent failing. There's another kind of fun to have, which is when the person guesses correctly and picks up what you've been laying down. That's not fun for you. But the way you are playing now is not really fun for Brent either.

And one of the laws of the court of Judge John Hodgman—as I'm reminded time and time again when I forget to say it—is that if it's not fun for everyone, it's no fun at all. Torturing Brent is not fun for Brent. It's fun for you. I get it! I understand why! Brent does need to improve his game, however. And I think there are strategies for playing 20 Questions that you can read up on that I think will help you get out of these gray area questions and get you into—get your winning quotient up a little bit further. And in that regard, I do rule in Maite's favor. But overall, I rule in Brent's favor. Because the game has to be fair. That means

defining the rules very clearly ahead of time. Like, when do you say yes? When do you say no? When do you say I don't know? When do you say maybe? And what does that mean? And do you need to get an extra question if the person doesn't know the answer to one question?

You know, you figure it out, establish the rules. But the fairest form of fair play is turnabout. And that means you gotta take turns having the clue. It can't just be you every time, Maite. It's gotta go back and forth. Because there's one version of this game that is fun. And there's one version of this game where it's just anxiety-producing. And it just depends on who's playing what position. And the real joy of the game is that when someone stumps you, then you get to mess with them directly afterward. And everyone should write this down. You're never gonna have a happy marriage unless you allow your spouse revenge.

(They chuckle.)

Maybe that's not something I should say out loud. But the point is, you gotta take turns. This is the sound of a gavel.

[01:10:00]

Clip:

Speaker: I'm going to ask you a bunch of questions. I want to have them answered immediately.

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.)

Maite, how are you feeling?

Maite: I'm at peace. I feel like I can live with this ruling.

Jesse Thorn: Brent, how are you feeling?

Brent: Yes, very good. That's a fair ruling. I think there's a good compromise there that I'm more than happy to enact.

Jesse Thorn: Brent, Maite, thank you for joining us on the *Judge John Hodgman* podcast.

(They thank him.)

Transition: Three gavel bangs.

Jesse Thorn: Another *Judge John Hodgman* case is in the books. In just a second, we will have Swift Justice. First, our thanks to Redditor Little Sad Rufus for naming this week's episode, "Animal, Vegetable, Criminal". Great name. Join the conversation over on the Maximum Fun subreddit. John, that's at [Reddit.com/r/MaximumFun](https://www.reddit.com/r/MaximumFun). That's where we ask for these title suggestions. You can also check out the title suggestions there. Evidence and photos from the show posted on our Instagram account. That's at [Instagram.com/judgejohnhodgman](https://www.instagram.com/judgejohnhodgman). We're also on TikTok and YouTube at [@JudgeJohnHodgmanPod](https://www.youtube.com/@JudgeJohnHodgmanPod). Follow and subscribe to see episodes and video-only content.

John Hodgman: And speaking of YouTube, our YouTube comment of the week this week comes from User @80SGMA10! In our "Comfort Feuds" episode recently, we had the great Deb Perelman and Kenji López-Alt of the *Recipe* podcast. And we were discussing the big controversy over whether chili has beans or not. Real chili, does it have beans? @80SGMA10 says, quote, "I'm a vegetarian. My chili is all beans." You stay all beans, @80SGMA10. Thank you so much for watching and commenting on YouTube, where we always have a blast reading your comments. Please go check out our YouTube channel, [@JudgeJohnHodgmanPod](https://www.youtube.com/@JudgeJohnHodgmanPod) on YouTube. We have whole episodes there, often YouTube-only extras. And of course, your chance to like, share, subscribe, and leave a comment—all of which helps our show reach more people. So, thank you.

Jesse Thorn: John, those commenters are often full of beans. Am I right?

John Hodgman: They're all full of beans. Don't get Jesse Thorn started on beans!

Jesse Thorn: *(Laughing.)* Big, fat, juicy beans!

Judge John Hodgman was created by Jesse Thorn and John Hodgman. This podcast, edited by AJ McKeon. Our video editor is Daniel Speer. Our producer is Jennifer Marmor. Okay, you ready for Swift Justice, John?

John Hodgman: I am ready for Swift Justice.

Jesse Thorn: *(Struggling to pronounce it.)* Co... mattic... tic on the MaxFun subreddit says, "While putting up closet shelves, my wife very earnestly said, 'I wish I was a little bit taller.' Equally earnestly, I responded, 'I wish I was a baller.' Was she right to be upset with me or is there a Skee-Lo carve out?"

John Hodgman: Uhhh, *(laughing)* only now have I ever learned the rest of the lyrics of that song. 'Cause I just looked them up.

Jesse Thorn: Really?

John Hodgman: Yeah. I mean, I've heard it, so many times, but all I can remember—because of my bad brain—and I'm not talking about the lyrics of a Bad Brain song. I'm talking about my brain functions badly—is “I wish I were a little bit taller. I wish I was a baller.”

Jesse Thorn: But then you pulled a rabbit out of a hat and—?

John Hodgman: “I wish I had a rabbit and a hat with a bat and a six-foot impala.”

Jesse Thorn: Six-four. That'd be a six-four Impala, I would think.

John Hodgman: Six-four impala. I read it wrong over here on the lyrics website that I was looking at. Hey, I like that song! It's a great song. And if you say, “I wish I was a little bit taller,” you've gotta imagine “I wish I was a baller” was coming back at you from the universe somehow. So, sorry. Have fun! Have fun with your rap music quotes! And you know, there's always time for fun, even when putting up closet shelves.

Jesse Thorn: That's one of those songs that like people who don't really like hip-hop talk about a lot. And I heard it the other day, and I was like, “Oh, well yeah, that's just 'cause it rules.”

John Hodgman: It rules! It's very, very catchy.

Jesse Thorn: It's totally a great song. Yeah, it's a great song.

John Hodgman: By the way! The leaves are falling from the trees. We're inching towards All Hallow's Eve. You know what that means? It's cozy goth season! Coooozy disputes are what we're looking for now. Do you like a lot of throw blankets, but your roommate doesn't want blankets thrown all over the place?! Are you ready to decorate for Christmas even though it's not even Halloween yet? Well, you're wrong, but I wanna hear about it. Do you want to use that fireplace, but your partner says it's too soon in the season? What are your cozy disputes? I wanna know 'em. Send them to me at MaximumFun.org/jjho. Or email me directly at Hodgman@MaximumFun.org. I read all of your disputes. I sort 'em. I love them. I enjoy them.

[01:15:00]

I put them in for the cozy goth docket that we're gonna do. I put them in for a regular episode. I put them over there for the *New York Times Magazine*. Every one gets read and appreciated by me. And it doesn't even have to be just cozy goth disputes, right Jesse? Could be any kind of dispute.

Jesse Thorn: No matter what your dispute is, big or small, we judge 'em all. MaximumFun.org/jjho is where to go to submit them. And please do MaximumFun.org/jjho. We'll talk to you next time on the *Judge John Hodgman* podcast.

Transition: Three gavel bangs.

Transition: Cheerful ukulele chord.

Speaker 1: Maximum Fun.

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Speaker 4: Supported—

Speaker 5: —directly—

Speaker 6: —by you!