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Transition: Three gavel bangs.

Jesse Thorn: Welcome to the *Judge John Hodgman* podcast. I'm Bailiff Jesse Thorn. This week: "I Declare a Hisstrial". Kate brings the case against her husband, Wes. Kate and Wes recently had to put down their elderly corn snake, Ember. Now they're ready to let another snake slither into their hearts and home. Kate says a senior snake is the way to go. Wes is opposed. He didn't have enough time with Ember; he's not ready for the heartbreak that comes with senior pet adoption. 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 banned for life at Duke Lee's Pet World. So, I need you to go get me cat food, bat food, snake shampoo, and 100 frozen mice."

Bailiff Jesse Thorn, please swear the litigants in.

Jesse Thorn: Kate and Wes, 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 himself uses snake shampoo?

(They swear.)

It's sensitive, for when he's molting.

John Hodgman: Exactly. I mean, when I shed my scalp, I need sensitive snake shampoo in order to not irritate my scalp. Also, it's very good for maintaining those essential hair oils.

Hey, Wes and Kate! It's nice to see you again. Of course, I know you from before. We've met before on *Get Your Pets*, my every-now-and-then afternoon streaming talk show where I interview people's cats, dogs, and other pets—*(under his breath)* including snakes. But I'm not gonna let our prior association cloud my judgment as I stand—or sit—before you. You can be seated as well.

(Chairs scrape.)

Let's hear this case for an immediate summary judgment in one of your favors. Can either of you name the piece of culture that I referenced as I entered this courtroom? Kate, do you want to take your first guess or the first guess? You know what, Kate? I'm gonna give you two guesses. How do you like that?

Kate: Thank you, your honor. My first guess is my pre-assigned guess.

John Hodgman: I love it.

Kate: Which is episode 170 of this very podcast, called “Monte Belmonte Python”.

John Hodgman: Uh-huh! Uh-huh. “Monte Belmonte Python”. Mm-hm. That's a good guess. Hang on, let me write it down. I almost forgot. Those of you on the YouTube know I'm aalways writing these down. And you can check for sure. You can see I've written it down. Alright. What's your second guess?

Kate: My second guess is one of the ad-reads that are on *The Thrilling Adventure Hour* podcast.

John Hodgman: One of the ad-reads on *The Thrilling Adventure Hour* podcast. *Thrilling Adventure Hour*, just having a wonderful—I dare say triumphant!—return to the boards at the Bellhouse Inn in London. (*Under his breath.*) With someone named John Hodgman rrrrounding out the cast. Alright! Wes. I gave Kate two guesses. I'm gonna give you two guesses too.

Wes: Okay. You know, at first it kind of sounds like something from *Bob's Burgers*. I could see somebody having some scheme or something.

John Hodgman: From the animated show *Bob's Burgers* is what you're saying?

Wes: Yes. That's my guess.

John Hodgman: The animated show *Bob's Burgers*. Not a different animated show. *Bob's Burgers*. Got it. Okay.

Wes: Yes.

John Hodgman: Guess two?

Wes: And I'll take my second guess and say something from *Dicktown*. How about that?

John Hodgman: Something from *Dicktown*!? Lemme write that right down.

(*Wes confirms and laughs.*)

You're absolutely right! It is something from *Dicktown*. Now, am I gonna give it to you, Wes? (*Beat.*) I don't think so.

Wes: No.

John Hodgman: Because you guessed *Bob's Burgers* first, and that hurt my heart. No, that was great. It was a great guess. All the guesses were great, even though they were all... wrrrrong? Except for one! But I was looking specifically for episode 209 of *Dicktown*, in which my character, John Hunchman, is forced to go into a pet store to buy a lot of supplies for Lance, the juvenile delinquent played so wonderfully by Griffin Newman in the show. *Dicktown*, season two, episode nine. All are available on Hulu. Wes, I really am grateful that you thought of that, especially after your *Bob's Burgers* guess. I'm going to continue to hear the case. I hope you understand. Good job.

Wes: Yes, I do.

John Hodgman: And by the way, Griffin Newman and I are reunited in a very fun, horror comedy short on Nebula streaming service, called *The Dinner Plan*. Directed by Patrick Williams and co-starring me, Miriam Shor and Zach Cherry, among others! It's a really funny little thing that happened. We shot it last year, and it's available now on Nebula. Which is an independent streaming service, which you can get if you wanna see it. Okay. Plugs are over. Let's get into the case. Who seeks justice in the court of *Judge John Hodgman*? Who comes to bring this case before me?

Kate: I do, your honor.

John Hodgman: Kate, as mentioned, we have spoken before on *Get Your Pets*. You, if I remember correctly, have a number of pets.

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A menagerie, you might say. What's the roster of pets you've got going currently?

Kate: Ooh. Okay. So, we have two dogs, a cat, a turtle, a betta, and three fish tanks.

John Hodgman: Now let me ask you—let me see if I can remember correctly. 'Cause when, did we speak on *Get Your Pets*, would you say? How many times? How many years ago?

Kate: We've spoken a couple times. Every time we get a new pet, I end up on *Get Your Pets*.

John Hodgman: Yeah. And the last one was probably over a year ago, right?

Kate: The last one was about six months ago.

John Hodgman: Alright. Well, I count that as a year. Time has no meaning anymore. Now, was your pit bull named Rocket?

(Kate confirms excitedly.)

Was your cat—? And if I remember correctly, it was a three-legged pit bull, right?

(Kate confirms.)

And you have a three-legged cat also, named Sparks.

Kate: For Sparks, Nevada.

John Hodgman: Well, also from *Thrilling Adventure Hour*. And a turtle named Hatch Green Chile in honor of New Mexico, the state in which you live. And a golden retriever named Cosmo, and threeeee fish tanks full of aquatic shrimps, Endler's, and a betta fish named Phoenix. I'm cheating. Obviously. Jennifer Marmor gave me a rundown.

Kate: I was gonna be very impressed.

John Hodgman: What if I just did that off the dome? No, I've enjoyed meeting all of your pets before. But I can barely remember the names of my human children, never mind your animal pets. This case is about a pet that is no longer with you, I'm so sad to say. Ember. Tell me about Ember the corn snake.

Kate: Ember the corn snake was a foster, like a hospice foster that we took on. Basically, what happened is we found a space in our house that was perfect for a tank, and I put some feelers out in the community to see if anybody had a corn snake that they were looking to rehome.

John Hodgman: If I had a dime for every time I saw a poster in Park Slope saying, "Hey, anybody got any dying corn snakes on offer?" Sorry to be crude about Ember, who passed away.

(They chuckle.)

Kate: Oh, it's okay.

John Hodgman: You put some feelers out, and Ember came into your life.

Kate: Yes. He was on foster from a lady who owns quite a number of snakes, and she gives them out to families who potentially have small children, and they might want a corn snake for a little while or maybe give it back.

John Hodgman: And you're in Albuquerque?

Kate: No, we're in Los Alamos, New Mexico.

John Hodgman: Oh, okay. Alright. You're recording in Albuquerque right now, in the podcast Studio of Albuquerque.

(Kate confirms.)

Wonderful.

Jesse Thorn: So, you're saying these are nuclear snakes?

John Hodgman: Yeah, nuclear snakes, obviously. What's the name of the lady who's handing out snakes in Los Alamos?

Kate: Her name is Jan.

John Hodgman: Is that how she's known around town?

(Jesse cackles.)

Kate: Well, we call her Jan the snake lady.

John Hodgman: Jan the snake lady?

Jesse Thorn: *(Giddy.)* This lady named Jan that gives out snakes! To families with children!

John Hodgman: Or potentially have children! This is a wonderful— How did you get to know Jan the snake lady?

Kate: Facebook!

John Hodgman: Facebook, of course. And Jan—if you had to estimate how many snakes Jan is sitting on currently...?

Kate: She has, I think, somewhere between 15 and 20 snakes.

John Hodgman: Is Jan doing okay?

Kate: She's getting a little older, which is why she's hoping to give her snakes away. But yeah, she's great.

John Hodgman: But I'm presuming she's a very considerate snake owner and expert, and not someone who has a problem over collecting snakes, shall we say?

Kate: No, she really doesn't. She takes great care of her snakes, and she's a very nice lady.

John Hodgman: Jan the snake lady, thank you for your service in New Mexico and, indeed, throughout the world. So, Wes. Ember the corn snake came into your life. I believe we have an Exhibit A. A wonderful photo of Ember the corn snake. Maybe we take a look at that. Those of you who are watching on our YouTube channel, [@JudgeJohnHodgmanPod](#), can see this right now. If you're not, make sure to check out that YouTube channel and perhaps subscribe while you're there. Not perhaps. Absolutely do it.

Or check it out on our socials, our Instagram, on the show page at [MaximumFun.org](#), everywhere you get your exhibits. And here's a wonderful snake!

Jesse, look at that beautiful, golden snake.

Jesse Thorn: Oh, what a gorgeous snake!

John Hodgman: Ember looks like a real delight. Wes, tell me about Ember the corn snake.

Wes: Yeah, so when we got him, he was—I think she was saying maybe 15 years old was kind of her guess. At least that. But yeah, he was a really good snake. He would— You know, you can kind of see him there. He has the—he's what you would call an amelmorph. Or amelanistic.

John Hodgman: I guarantee you I would not call this snake an amelmorph. I don't know what those words mean. Could you explain?

Wes: So, it's, short for amelanistic. So, a big thing with corn snakes is looking at various morphs. And you know, people will breed them to look different ways.

John Hodgman: Wait, wait, wait, wait, wait. Let's just break this down one piece at a time. Amelanistic. Is that the same thing as albino? Lacking melanin or—?

Wes: Kind of, yeah. Yeah. And so, that is what it means, lacking that pigment.

[00:10:00]

And so, it's like the darker black type pigments/pigmentation. You can see that he still had the orange and the red. So, that's something different. Um, yeah.

John Hodgman: Riiight. That's because of the amelanistic gene or—?

(Wes confirms.)

Right. Okay. So— And that's why Ember is such a—? What a beautiful name for a corn snake that looks like a beautiful, glowing, orange Ember! Now, morph I know from *Animorphs*. I used to work in young adult book publishing. But what is a morph in a snake context?

Wes: So, that is whatever coloration and pattern specific combinations that have been bred into the snakes. So, he was a pretty simple, I guess, morph. It's just that amelanistic—

John Hodgman: Is that how you began Ember's eulogy?

“Ember was a simple morph... but a proud morph. And indeed, a kind morph.”

I mean, look, I don't want to— I know that you're upset. You've lost— When did Ember pass away?

Wes: So, that was in June. We had him put down. He hadn't been eating for... it had been a couple of months, I think. And we started to notice a couple of lumps in different spots along his body. And then, sort of the most I guess disturbing thing was he was having some—

John Hodgman: Is it too disturbing for the podcast, do you think?

Wes: Not if I describe it. It was thrashing that he was doing.

John Hodgman: “Not if I describe it to you in incredible detail.”

(They chuckle awkwardly.)

Wes: In light detail. Light. Yeah. *(Laughs.)* But yeah, so he was— I mean, he was kind of getting to the place where he would, you know, thrash around. And it was something where we could clearly tell that he was in pain, and something wasn't right.

John Hodgman: And you had to do the thing that pet owners—responsible pet owners—have to do that's very hard, which is acknowledge that the quality of life that Ember was leading was not the quality of life that he deserved. And it was time to do the humane thing, as it were—ironically called humane thing—and have him put down. So, I'm very sorry to hear that.

Wes: That's right.

Kate: The thing about Ember is he was a very sweet snake. He's pretty, of course, but he loved being handled, was very tolerant of the kids handling him as well. He was a really great snake.

John Hodgman: Anything you want to add, Wes? Because I mean, this debate is over whether you get a new snake and what age new snake you want to get. Did you enjoy Ember? Did you bond with Ember? Was Ember a kindmorph? Was Ember a sweetmorph? Tell me about Ember's day-to-day.

Wes: *(Chuckles.)* Yeah, so he was— I mean, he was a really good snake. You know, obviously, you get him— When we first got him, we kind of had a little settle-in, and we would see him disappear under his substrate. Which, you know, at first we had him on

newspaper. That was kind of the— We were like, okay, that's what we'll start with. And then as we got more comfortable, we got him some corn husk. That was what you saw in the picture, and he was really happy with that.

John Hodgman: Well, I would imagine a corn snake would love a corn husk!

Wes: Did I say corn? I meant coconut.

John Hodgman: Oh. That's okay.

Wes: Yeah, but it was the— But he was able to burrow and go through all of his little spots. And you know, we had his tank set up so he could go to the warm side or the cold side. And he had his water and he would, you know, do all of his different things. Sometimes he'd get a little bath, and he would— Yeah he had a good time exploring his environment. And that was really fun to see. And it was fun to take him out and handle him. And you know, corn snakes are known for moving around when you handle them.

John Hodgman: Uh-huh. Not staying stock still, but s-slithering in a cute way?

Wes: Yeah. Kind of slither up your arm, and then go— You know, you might have to be like, “Okay, maybe not in the hair.”

John Hodgman: Ember was an interactive snake. A genialmorph.

Wes: Yes. Yeah, very— Yeah. He was active, and he'd move around. And yeah. It was really great to sort of get him out and interact with him.

Kate: He's one of our best pets.

John Hodgman: Oh, I'm sorry that you had to lose him. He sounds wonderful.

Transition: Three gavel bangs.

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Transition: Three gavel bangs.

John Hodgman: Just outta curiosity, is a corn snake—? What's the feed? What does a corn snake eat?

Wes: Mice.

John Hodgman: Mice. And you get 'em frozen? You get 'em frozen?

(They confirm.)

Kate: It's not the weirdest thing in our freezer.

(Wes chuckles softly.)

John Hodgman: Well, now you ask—you pose the question. What is the weirdest thing in your freezer, Kate?

Kate: Until very recently, I had about 10 frozen placentas in my chest freezer.

John Hodgman: This is part of your work as a doula, correct?

Kate: Yes, this is. Yes.

(John affirms.)

Jesse Thorn: *(Suppressing giggles.)* This isn't just a collection you're working on.

John Hodgman: Do they call you Kate the placenta lady around town?

Kate: They do.

John Hodgman: Oh no!

Kate: So, until very recently I was volunteering with a search and rescue dog team organization that trains human remains detection dogs. And they use placentas to learn the smell of decaying human material. It's a little gross to a lot of people.

John Hodgman: WOW! It's fascinating!

Jesse Thorn: Do you also encapsulate placentas?

Kate: I do.

(Jesse affirms knowingly.)

John Hodgman: What does that—? *(Stammering and restarting.)* Alright, let me— Let's— now, look.

(They laugh.)

This is like amelanistic morph. I need to break down some vocab here. So, you are a doula. You, help people who have just had babies, right?

Kate: Yes.

John Hodgman: And the human placentas, I presume, are... products of some of the pregnancies that you have helped families go through.

Kate: Supported.

John Hodgman: Or supported, thank you.

Kate: Yes. Some of them are.

John Hodgman: And you have them on hand, so why not offer them to local dog trainers who are training dogs to sniff out human remains? Terrific hobby.

Kate: People donate them with the express intent of donating them to the dogs.

John Hodgman: I was not accusing you of kidnapping placentas for your hobby. I understand. They've been donated. And placentas, for those of you who are listening and don't know—you might be a child—maybe you can explain what a placenta is, Kate, before I do it. *(Speaking over her.)* Before I mangle it, which is something you don't want to do to a placenta.

Kate: *(Giggles.)* The placenta is an organ that supports the growth of a baby in utero.

John Hodgman: And once a baby is born, the placenta is no longer needed, and it comes out with the baby, and is honored or—

Kate: Yeah, from experience, it's easier to give birth to something that doesn't have bones.

John Hodgman: Wait a minute, what does that have to do with anything? *(Chuckles awkwardly.)*

Kate: The placenta! It comes out.

(Wes chuckles.)

John Hodgman: Oh, right! Okay.

Kate: It just—*(makes a schlorp sound.)*

John Hodgman: Yeah, no, okay. I thought you were saying that somehow people were giving birth to babies without bones, because it was easier. I misunderstood. Got it. Okay.

(Kate laughs.)

Jesse Thorn: No, you put the bones in later, John. That's what doulas are for!

John Hodgman: *(Laughs.)* Oh, right! Doulas put the bones in babies afterward!

Jesse Thorn: Yeah! You don't want an amateur putting bones in your baby.

John Hodgman: So, encapsulated placenta that Jesse just mentioned, I don't know what he's talking about. But you two are having a grand old time talking about it and making me feel left out. Please explain.

Kate: I have heard Jesse's story about encapsulating placentas.

(Jesse wheezes into giggles.)

Basically, um—

John Hodgman: And I must have too! I've known him for decades. What have I forgotten this time?

Jesse Thorn: Alright, so encapsulating placentas is essentially freeze drying them and then putting them in capsules. Because some believe that consuming the placenta after giving birth is beneficial in various health ways. Many animals consume the placenta after they give birth.

[00:20:00]

(Correcting himself.) Or carnivorous animals consume the placenta after they give birth. Famously, cats do that. My Aunt Claudia was a doula. She's no longer with us, but she was a doula—a really righteous one. And she worked a lot of times with people who didn't have the money to hire a doula. She was African American and like it was very important to her to work with African American women who might not otherwise have birth support. But she also worked for money for others. You know, to make a living. And she had a placenta encapsulator in her house, and I was at her house one time in Washington, DC. *(Chuckling.)*

And I'm like, “Oh, Claudia, what's with this placenta encapsulator?”

And she goes, “If these rich White ladies want to pay me to put their placentas in capsules, I'm not gonna stop 'em!”

(They laugh.)

Anyway, please support the Claudia Booker Memorial Midwife Scholarship. We'll put the link there. It is training for women of color to become midwives and placentas and—*(correcting himself through laughter)* Not placentas! Doulas! Midwives and doulas!—so they can reduce the gap in birth safety and health rates between White folks and people of color in the United States particularly.

Kate: Thank you, Jesse.

John Hodgman: Yeah, thank you Jesse! And thank you, Kate, for doing the work that you do! Wes, do you have a career?

Wes: Yes. I'm an electrical engineer. I work for a particle accelerator facility.

Jesse Thorn: *(With fake surprise.)* You're telling me that an electrical engineer that works at a particle accelerator facility has a special interest in owning snakes?!

Wes: Believe it or not. Yeah! Yeah. *(Chuckles.)*

John Hodgman: And when you say that you're working in particle accelerators in Los Alamos, what you're really doing is you're opening portals to other dimensions, correct?

Wes: I don't think I can talk about that. You know.

John Hodgman: Yeah, exactly. Perfect. What do you have frozen in your freezer? Frozen aliens from another dimension?

Wes: Oh, no. Mostly it's just the mice and the—

John Hodgman: Just the mice and the placentas?

Kate: Just the mice and the placentas.

John Hodgman: Do you have any food in your freezer? I mean, human food?

Jesse Thorn: Well, I mean, the placentas!

(They laugh.)

Kate: Well, it used to have human milk in it! But not anymore.

John Hodgman: *(Resigned.)* It used to have human—human milk in it. Okay, wonderful.

Let's get back to the wonderful memory of Ember. Ember passed away, reached the end of his life. He was very well cared for. You took him in, Wes and Kate, in a hospice-type situation. You knew that he was at the end of his life,

Wes: I don't know if we would really say that.

Kate: We knew that he was elderly. We didn't think that he was ill. So, we could have potentially had an additional five years, maybe even more.

John Hodgman: Right, right, right. So, you would like me to rule in your favor against Jan the snake lady? For misrepresentation of elderly snake and award you damages of \$5,000,000? Is that correct?

Kate: It was an honor to take care of him in his last days.

John Hodgman: Alright. I'm glad to hear that. And I'm sorry. Even if you did know, it's always hard to prepare for a loss of a pet, never mind a loved one. So, good on you for doing that work and giving Ember a very lovely quality of life towards the end of his life. But now, Kate, you're ready for another snake. And this is where the dispute lies. What kind of snake would you like to get? Kate?

Kate: I would like to get another snake from Jan, this time a ball python.

John Hodgman: And you have a specific ball python in mind, is that correct?

Kate: Yes. The ball python's name is Aspen.

John Hodgman: Let's take a look at Aspen right now here. This is Exhibit B.

(Jesse "wow"s in genuine awe.)

That's a beautiful animal.

Jesse Thorn: Incredible! Look at those spots!

John Hodgman: I would say that this would be a melanistic ball python. Am I right, Wes?

Wes: Yes. He'd be a normal morph.

John Hodgman: I had a 50/50 chance.

Jesse Thorn: Typical. Let's not melanin shame.

John Hodgman: But I mean, those— He's got big, black patches of variegated stripes and spots and so forth and beautiful melanin. This is what you— What did you call it? A typical morph?

Wes: Yeah. Typical or normal is what they would refer to. Basically, kind of what you would find in the wild.

John Hodgman: Kind of what you would expect from a cartoon snake, right?

Wes: Yeah. Yeah. More or less, I guess. Yeah.

John Hodgman: Yeah, if you saw a cartoon of a python—if you watched *The Jungle Book* or whatever—this is kind of what you imagine. This is the classic snake-looking snake.

But one thing I noticed here. It's in the lawn. This is also from Jan the snake lady, did you say, Kate?

Kate: Yes.

John Hodgman: Alright. And this is— I presume this Jan's backyard. It's in the lawn.

[00:25:00]

There's nothing near it to give you a sense of size other than grass. How long is the snake? What's the size of Aspen?

Kate: I would anticipate that he's between four and five feet long. The distinguishing feature of ball pythons are—or one of them—is how thick their bodies are. They're quite heavy.

John Hodgman: Mmm. Is Aspen a thick king?

Jesse Thorn: (*Casually.*) Yeah. Daddy's thick.

Kate: Yes.

(*Wes chuckles.*)

John Hodgman: Is this the full size that Aspen will get, do you anticipate? You said an elderly snake, so I'm presuming this is— Four to five feet is as big as Aspen's gonna get. Or will Aspen grow more?

Kate: No, he will likely stay the same. He might get a little chunkier. To me, he looks a liiittle tiny bit thin. But he will be about the same length.

John Hodgman: Oh, you're gonna fatten him up, you're gonna fatten him up with mice and placentas, right?

(*Kate confirms.*)

Yeah. And did you say how old Aspen is?

Kate: We think he's about 15 years old—maybe 16/17. Somewhere in there.

John Hodgman: What's the lifespan for a ball python?

Kate: 20 years would be really common, but they could potentially live longer—maybe more like 25.

John Hodgman: So, you're looking at a life of five to ten years, potentially, with Aspen?

Kate: Yes.

John Hodgman: Sounds pretty good to me. Wes, what's the problem with this idea? Here's a— I mean, here's a snake that lives. It needs a home. It's currently living in the grass, and this snake is dying to be shut up in a terrarium in someone's home. Why not yours?

Wes: Well, I think— You know, when we were planning on trying to get a snake the first time, we kind of came out of saying, “Oh, we have this space in our house.” We talked about—

John Hodgman: Counterpoint! No, you don't. Because you've already got—and I'm going back to my cheat sheet here—one three-legged dog, one three-legged cat, one turtle, one golden retriever, and three fish tanks. And a partridge and a pear tree, it says here also!

Wes: Yeah. Well, I mean— You know, we had a little corner—right?—where we were looking at it, and we were saying, “Okay.” We got new furniture, and kind of shifted the space a little bit. So, we said, “Oh! This would be a good spot for a corn snake.”

(John affirms.)

And so, I think what I was envisioning when that sort of came out was, “Ooh, we can really like sort of take the time, go out—you know, get all the cage, get everything sort of settled, find a snake that we really like.” And then, you know, Ember came along, and it was like, “Oh! Well, this seems like this would be a good opportunity here.”

John Hodgman: Right. I mean, Jesse, you know what that's like. You ever move the furniture around in your house, Jesse, and be like, “Oh, that's a good place for a corn snake!”?

Jesse Thorn: Yeah. I mean, more often I'm thinking ball python.

(John affirms with a chuckle.)

But, uh. Yeah, like a four- or five-footer. I'll look at a spot in my house and go, “Well, that's a good space for a five-footer.”

John Hodgman: Sorry, Wes. We got a little distracted there. You told us about how you moved the furniture around, and that inspired you to get a corn snake. But that doesn't answer the question what kind of snake do you want now.

Wes: I would be— I would look at either a corn snake or a ball python.

John Hodgman: Yeah. Aspen is a ball python!

(Wes concedes.)

It says here it's your favorite type of morph!

Wes: No, not that one.

Kate: Not that one.

Wes: That's the next exhibit, I think. But, uh.

Kate: The next exhibit is our favorite morph.

John Hodgman: Ohhh, excuse me. Let's go take a look at your favorite morph. Those of you who are watching on YouTube—if you're not, get over there; you should check out this favorite morph. *(Beat.)* Whoa!

Wes: Yeah. So, these are definitely, you know, different from the other ones. So, we went to a reptile show, mmm, a month ago or so?

(Kate confirms.)

And so, you know, we were able to get sort of a sense of the different types of snakes that we liked. And so, this was from a breeder here in Rio Rancho, near Albuquerque.

John Hodgman: This is a beauuutiful snake with sort of Halloween colors over a white body. And it says here it is a yellowbelly pied? I guess pied refers to the pattern.

Wes: Yes, yes. Right. So, the pie would be like the piebald pattern, where it's white with the blotches of the other morph that comes through. And the other morph then for that one's a yellowbelly.

Jesse Thorn: And in this case, yellowbelly refers to its lack of courage in gunfights?

John Hodgman: That's right. Yeah.

Wes: Yeah. I'm sure.

Kate: Something that you'll notice is that snake is of a reasonable size. It's got some heft to it. A young, sellable—

(Jesse dissolves into loud giggles a little away from the mic.)

John Hodgman: That was the first thing I noticed. When I see a snake, I'm like, "Hmm." So, this seems like it's your mutual dream snake, Kate.

Kate: It could be seen that way, yes.

John Hodgman: It's got a beautiful— It's a beautiful morph, and it's got a lot of heft! It's not gonna escape like a corn snake.

[00:30:00]

Did Ember ever sneak out at night?

Kate: No, but he was full-grown.

Wes: Yeah. Yeah, it's definitely a lot— You know, the small snakes, they might be the size of your hand. You can see them sort of go around people's hands, and maybe the width of a finger or something like that. So, they're quite small, easy to get out of some enclosures.

John Hodgman: Well, how big is yellowbelly pied here? Is this a baby? Is this a baby snake?!

Kate: Mm-hm! Yeah.

Wes: Yeah, he was— I mean, he was probably at least a foot. I mean, a foot and a half or something. Yeah, I don't know.

John Hodgman: Alright. But he's gonna get big. He's a ball python, but he's got this yellowbelly pied pattern. Right? He's a ball python.

Jesse Thorn: He's a foot, but he is got good heft, John.

John Hodgman: Given his heft—Kate or Wes, if you wanna weigh in on this—how big do you expect yellowbelly pied will get in their life?

Wes: We'd expect something like five feet. Yeah, that four- to five-foot. The males are a little bit smaller than the females, but.

John Hodgman: Is this a male or a female? Do you know?

Wes: I think it's supposed to be a male. I think that they have the label—the M there. The one next to him has an F label. So, I think that's for—

John Hodgman: You never know for sure.

Kate: When they lay eggs, you're pretty sure that they're female.

John Hodgman: That's a good guess!

So, this is your dream snake Wes, right? This is the snake you want?

(Wes confirms.)

And you want this snake because it's beautiful. It's got this coloring that you like, and also 'cause it's a baby. Right?

Wes: Yes. And something that we've sort of learned about getting baby snakes is that they're— It does kind of help to be able to come up with them and raise them while they're young. Like, a lot of times they will tend to adapt to sort of however you're raising them and their environment and things like that. Whereas sometimes with older snakes—you know, they go from what they had to something different, and now it's like there might be some—a hard time adjusting, I guess, for them.

John Hodgman: Sure. Well, I mean that's the same as adopting any older animal. They've had a life. They don't know—

Jesse Thorn: Then all of a sudden they're making weird posts on Facebook, posting weird memes that are upsetting.

(Wes laughs.)

Their nieces and nephews are trying to decide whether to talk to them about it at Thanksgiving.

John Hodgman: Do you have any reason to believe that Aspen is gonna be the kind of snake that Jesse talked about? A weird snake that's posting strange memes that make your children uncomfortable?

Kate: So, we've asked Jan about this snake. And the two things that I think are really great about having an adult snake—and this one in particular—is that you can predict whether they're going to be biddable, that they're going to be able to be handled, if they're comfortable with that, and if they're reliably eating. Because ball pythons are not always reliable eaters, and they're not always really comfortable with handling. So, if we have a known snake, and we know that they're gonna be handle handling well and eat well—

John Hodgman: Did you use a term called biddable?

Kate: That might not be the right word, but yes. I said biddible.

John Hodgman: How would you spell that word?

Kate: B-I-D-D-I-B-L-E.

John Hodgman: Bid-duh-ble. What does that describe?

Kate: So, in dogs, biddable means that they are like looking forward, excited about listening to your commands.

John Hodgman: Oh, got it. Okay. I understand. As opposed to like being a callow teenager dog who's like, "I don't care what you have to say!" Right? That's nonbiddable.

Kate: Think of a husky. They're gonna do what they want.

John Hodgman: *(Beat.)* I often do think of a husky.

Jesse Thorn: Specifically, they're gonna pull my aunt through a park in Oakland on a sled with roller skate wheels.

John Hodgman: Yeah. Claxon, claxon. I feel another aunt story coming on. Let's go, Jesse!

(Jesse laughs.)

So, I guess the argument you're making, Kate, is that Aspen is a known quantity. And while that can be a little bit daunting—say, to Wes, who is concerned that the shift in home life of Aspen might be— Eh, I don't know if you wanna say traumatic, but it might cause some behavioral issues or some confusion in Aspen. At the same time, you'll know that this is a biddable, known-reliable eater snake. Presumably.

Kate: Yeah. The other thing that's nice about that is it's more like a 5-year commitment, as opposed to a 20- to 25-year commitment.

John Hodgman: Well, you're young people, aren't you? I don't want to know your ages, but you're younger than me.

Kate: I mean, we could have the same snake into our 50s, which would— I mean, that's fine! But—

John Hodgman: It doesn't sound like that's what you're so excited about.

Jesse Thorn: No, most people swap out their snakes in their 50s.

John Hodgman: Yeah, that's why I only lease my snakes.

Kate: That's why Jan has so many snakes!

John Hodgman: You're saying that you don't want to be Jan the snake lady. You want to be Kate and Wes, owners of many animals.

Kate: I would just like the option of just trying out a different species, one that we haven't cared for yet, and doing with like—

[00:35:00]

I don't know! What if Wes dies?! And then I have to take care of the snake by myself? Like, you know, I like the idea of having a shorter time commitment.

John Hodgman: Uhh, yeah. I mean, the question I have is, Wes, are you a reliable eater?

Wes: I am, yeah. I do worry about the older snake though.

John Hodgman: Well, let me ask you this question, and it's an emotions question. How was it taking care of Ember at the end of Ember's life?

Wes: I mean, it was hard. I think the—

John Hodgman: Tell me more.

Wes: The difficult thing was, you know, when he stopped eating. And you know, snakes, their eating schedules—you know, different from what you're used to if you have dogs/cats. They eat, you know, once every maybe 10 days or so. And so, if he misses a meal and then maybe you wait another week and then try again, and he just really would not take the mice. So, I think that was really hard trying to figure out, okay, what's going on? Why wouldn't he eat? You know, it was difficult to sort of go through and be like, “Okay, well he's missed this month now. And now how much longer before we have to actually try to do something like force feed him?” Which was something I tried to do, but it was—

Kate: Horrible.

(Wes agrees.)

John Hodgman: Is that something that is done?

(They confirm.)

Or is that a technique that you invented, Wes?

Wes: No, that's something that's done. You try to actually like take their jaws and start to pry the mouse in there and get them going.

John Hodgman: I can—believe me, I can picture force feeding a snake very easily. I don't think we need any more description than that. That's what I'm gonna be thinking about as I fall asleep tonight.

And during this period of intense ambiguity—is he just being normally picky; is he hurting; is he suffering; should I force feed him?— How would you describe your feelings during this period of time?

Wes: I don't know. I think I tend to be like, “Well! He's never gonna eat again!” (*Chuckling.*) That's kind of where my mind immediately goes to if he doesn't eat. A little bit of catastrophizing, you know? So—

John Hodgman: Mm-hm, mm-hm. That's not a good feeling.

Wes: No, no.

John Hodgman: No. Okay. Would you say, Wes, that you were the primary caregiver to Ember?

Wes: Yes. Yeah. So, I was the one. I would go through and, you know, check his substrate every morning and do spot cleaning, try to mist, make sure that there was moisture in there, keep an eye on that, make sure that the temperature was good. And you know, I could see that the heat pad was still working, things like that, and actually going through and thawing the mice and feeding,

Kate: I know it's settled law that the one who does the work gets to decide in this court. However, Wes and I do share responsibilities of the pets. It's just that he does the reptiles, I do the fish, and we together take care of the mammals.

John Hodgman: Well, I was just going to ask you how you break down the labor across your pitbull, your orange cat, your turtle named Hatch Green Chili, and then your three tanks, and also your golden retriever Cosmo. That was off the dome! I couldn't get all the names, but I could remember all of them! So, Wes does the herps—the reptiles. And the fish? No. Yes?

Wes: No.

Kate: I do the fish.

John Hodgman: You do the fish. Cats and dogs are shared. And obviously, Hatch Green Chile the turtle falls under the herp designation, so that's Wes' deal. So, yeah. I mean, Kate, you're making Wes's case for him. It is settled law that the person who does the work has the—if not makes the rules, at least is given the better part of decision-making. Why should I overrule my own settled law on behalf of you?

Kate: Because when you take a look at all of our pets together, we are equally doing the work of taking care of all of our pets.

John Hodgman: Yeah. But I'll tell you what, Kate. When I take a look at all of your pets together, I say, “Maybe that's enough pets.”

(They laugh.)

Jesse Thorn: Yeah. I see a shortage of legs!

Kate: We have a staggeringly low leg-to-pet ratio.

(Jesse snorts through a giggle.)

John Hodgman: Yeah. And adding a snake to it is only going to throw those numbers further out of whack! 'Cause last I checked, no legs on that snake!

Wes: Nope.

Kate: So, when I told people about the case, some of them said, “Oh, couldn't you just do both? Get a new one and have the old one?”

And I said, “No. We cannot do that.”

We have very thoughtfully brought in each of the pets that we've brought into our home. We don't do it lightly. We don't collect pets. We do it thoughtfully.

(John affirms.)

Wes: We would like more. But—

Kate: We would love more!

John Hodgman: What is the constraint? Space?

(They confirm.)

And is this why you're trying to find a portal to another dimension, so that you can live on a menagerie planet of your own making where you're the only humans, and you're surrounded by as many snakes and turtles and dogs and cats as you like?

[00:40:00]

Wes: That does sound ideal. Yeah, yeah.

Kate: That sounds wonderful.

Jesse Thorn: I mean, the honest truth is if they can guide you these things successfully, they're gonna take care of themselves!

(John agrees.)

All they gotta do is chomp down on some power lines!

Wes: Well, we were talking about if we could get rats at some point. You know, they have a short lifespan. And I was saying we kind of have like the whole food chain if we can start to get that, you know?

Kate: Whole ecosystem.

John Hodgman: Yeah. Often, their strands are particularly constrained when they are living with snakes.

Wes: Yyyes. Yeah.

(Jesse laughs.)

John Hodgman: So, you are saying you are both in complete agreement that you have room in your lives and hearts for one more snake, but that's it.

(They confirm.)

And you are both in complete agreement that there is such room in your hearts and lives for one more snake that the absence of a snake on top of your existing pet portfolio is intolerable. You must have a snake.

Kate: Yes.

Wes: Yeah, we want a snake.

John Hodgman: Okay. Wes, it says here that you want an interesting and cool snake.

Wes: Yeah. So, I mean, that's where we get into the different morphs like we saw. You know, the pied ball python was really cool. I think we both really like that. Just something like that. And you know, we have— That breeder is, you know, local enough to us that we can go pick him up. And yeah, that's what I'd be looking at.

John Hodgman: I mean, Kate, the python—the cool and interesting yellowbelly piebald python that Wes has got his eye on, uh—

Wes: She had her eye on it too.

Kate: *(Whispered.)* I did.

John Hodgman: No, I— *(Surprised.)* Oh, you like it too?

(Kate confirms quietly.)

But I'm saying that this is also a snake that needs a home. It's not a hypothetical snake. Both Aspen is a real snake, and— What do you think you would name—? I mean, maybe you don't want to go there, because you don't want to get attached to this idea, but do you have an idea for the name for this interesting and cool pie bald snake, Wes?

Kate: I have a note in my phone that's just called “pet names.”

Wes: Yeah, she does better with the pet names. Yeah.

John Hodgman: So, you're saying even though he takes care of the herps, you're gonna name this snake?

Kate: *(Laughing.)* Probably. Yes.

John Hodgman: Let me hear your list. I have a note. I have a list in my phone, which is names for human characters and stories. You want to go one by one?

Kate: Let's do it.

John Hodgman: Alright. Well, I'll go down the list. Honestly, *(laughing)* I don't know where— I don't recognize half of these names, and a lot of them are not really good names for real human beings. But here we go. Who's gonna go first?

Kate: I'll go first.

John Hodgman: Okay. Kate, you go first.

Kate: Cinder.

John Hodgman: Donald Freeberg.

Kate: Echo.

John Hodgman: Mysterious Mike.

Kate: Ouija.

John Hodgman: Sumner Green.

Kate: Sable.

John Hodgman: Hecate Price.

Kate: Rune.

John Hodgman: Rodney Curtin.

Kate: Neptune.

John Hodgman: Guido Guidi.

Kate: Grim.

John Hodgman: Lorenzo Census.

Kate: Sputnik.

John Hodgman: Thisbe Brown.

Kate: Fable.

John Hodgman: Johanna.

Kate: Nix.

John Hodgman: Cordell Warren Gross.

Kate: Jinx.

John Hodgman: Carolanne Nesbitt.

Kate: Nimbus.

John Hodgman: Amanda Mayo.

Kate: Amos.

John Hodgman: Emery Dodge.

Kate: Nova.

John Hodgman: Donovan Nissen.

Kate: Timber.

John Hodgman: Critter.

Kate: Glacier.

John Hodgman: Live Picco.

Kate: Roswell.

John Hodgman: Nick (*censor beep*) the fourth.

Kate: Juno.

John Hodgman: Rathke Kraus.

Kate: Nebula.

John Hodgman: Longo Couse.

Kate: Platinum.

John Hodgman: Sweeney Villalobos.

Kate: Orbit.

John Hodgman: Buske Redmond.

Kate: Ambrose.

John Hodgman: Johann von Nekirk.

Kate: Opal.

John Hodgman: Polly Dugan.

Kate: Lilith.

John Hodgman: Veronica Bulgari.

Kate: Pixie.

John Hodgman: Caleb Custer.

Kate: Lightning.

John Hodgman: Andrea Kulko.

Kate: Pocus.

John Hodgman: Adam Prosser.

Kate: Cobweb.

John Hodgman: Ben Medina.

Kate: Omen.

John Hodgman: Hayden Crawford.

Kate: Limbo.

John Hodgman: Ross Keen.

Kate: Flare.

John Hodgman: Odin Roose.

Kate: Blaze.

John Hodgman: Lisa Freights.

Kate: Smokey.

John Hodgman: Gretchen Manning.

Kate: Clover.

John Hodgman: Mamie Dunlap.

Kate: Venus.

John Hodgman: Billy Tibbits.

Kate: Jupiter.

John Hodgman: Jennifer Vineyard.

Kate: Soot.

John Hodgman: Scott Reset.

Kate: Syble.

John Hodgman: Annette Larkin.

Kate: Celeste.

John Hodgman: Ronald McIntyre.

Kate: Beaker.

John Hodgman: Lena Tosen.

Kate: Ash.

John Hodgman: Anthony and Howe.

Kate: *(Laughing.)* Stardust.

John Hodgman: Bones Ashford.

Kate: Roger.

John Hodgman: Doc Alcivar.

Kate: Mischief.

John Hodgman: Deanna Montrose.

Kate: Asteroid.

John Hodgman: Monica Peele.

Kate: Crush.

John Hodgman: Ronna Deer.

Kate: *(Giggling helplessly.)* Phoenix. Okay, I'm out! I can't do it!

John Hodgman: We could go all day! I got more! You got more?

Kate: *(Laughing.)* I have a few more.

[00:45:00]

John Hodgman: Let's just run it down. Run it. Let's get it all out!

Kate: I think that's it.

John Hodgman: Alright. Lamont Jackson, Sheila O'Shea, Jordan Church, Graham Carroll, Lana Devecchio, Lily Quinn, Wayne Pompano. Oh, and now I'm getting a text.

Jennifer Marmor says, "This has to stop."

(They laugh.)

Sorry, Producer Jennifer Marmor. Back to the case.

Jesse Thorn: I know you guys read a lot of names, but I can pretty much beat it in one. I'm just gonna show my phone to the camera here.

Wes: Hambone!

Kate: Hambone. Yeah. Or Tugboat.

John Hodgman: Hamboooone! Yeah. Hambone is the best name for a dog. That's also settled law. How is it as a name for a snake, Jesse, would you say? Hambone? It's pretty good.

Jesse Thorn: Pretty good.

Kate: That's pretty good.

John Hodgman: Pretty good for a snake.

Jesse Thorn: Snakes got a lot of bones in there.

John Hodgman: I would say, Kate, those are A+ names for all animals.

Kate: Thank you!

John Hodgman: But I do have a question. Who brought Ember into your home and marriage? Who initiated?

Kate: I did.

John Hodgman: You did. So, don't you think that maybe it's Wes's turn, Kate?

Kate: You make a fine point.

John Hodgman: I mean, Wes has described feeling sad. And the process of helping Ember at the end of Ember's life was hard. It seems to me that, while you might get five or ten years out of Aspen, that since West does take care of the snakes primarily, that that could be something he would go through again. Why would you want him to go through that again?

Kate: Something that I didn't realize until we started talking to Jennifer about this case is how much, I think, guilt that my husband feels about sort of the end of Ember's life and if there's anything he could have done differently. And I have a whole lot of empathy for that. I really—I feel very strongly that that's something to consider. And it's a strong argument in Wes' favor.

John Hodgman: And obviously, there's a difference between rescuing a snake from Jan the snake lady—not that Aspen necessarily needs rescuing from Jan, but you know what I mean; adopting an elderly snake, opposed to buying one from a breeder. What's the difference that you would argue, Kate?

Kate: You know, I don't really have much room to talk. I do own a purebred dog. So, obviously— But it is, I think, in some ways admirable. And it's something to strive for is to provide a home for an animal that needs one that other people might not be interested in. But we are.

John Hodgman: What's gonna happen to Aspen if you don't take Aspen in? Do you know?

Kate: Aspen will likely die in her care. I don't anticipate a different outcome.

Wes: I think she's— You said that she's trying to actually get Aspen back to Aspen's original owners, right? That's the—

Kate: Yeah, mm-hmm. She's like the second or third owner of this snake.

John Hodgman: Who are the original owners?

Kate: We don't know.

John Hodgman: Is this a detective story?

(Jesse laughs.)

Is there a scenario where the two of you take Aspen on a long road trip trying to find Aspen's original humans, and it becomes like a heartwarming, indie comedy drama like *Little Miss Sunshine*?

Kate: Yeah, we just have him hanging around our neck as we're on the drive and passing important landscapes on the way.

John Hodgman: Yeah! Come on. Throw some Sufjan Stevens under that, and you've got an Oscar, basically.

Kate: Mm-hmm. He hasn't started his New Mexico album yet.

John Hodgman: Kate, it says here your ideal ruling obviously is to get an old ball python and keep the old setup. In other words, Ember's home is up for grabs. If you were to move Aspen into that enclosure, you would not have to make any major adjustments. Do I understand that correctly?

Kate: Yeah. So, Jan gave us the enclosure along with Ember. She also provided the food for him. And so, it would just basically be a lateral move. We would keep the same enclosure. We would keep everything the same, except for we'd just have a different snake.

John Hodgman: But Wes, it says here you want to adopt a younger snake—as we discussed—one that is, quote, “interesting and cool” with a new setup. Right?

Wes: Right. And I think even if we went with Aspen, we would need to upgrade the enclosure. You know, with his length— The corn snake that we had, Ember, it was a good size for him. You generally want it to be long enough where they can stretch out their entire body the length of the tank. And so, typically with a ball Python and looking at Aspen, he seems like he'd be about that same size. We'd probably need a slightly larger tank than what we have now, by maybe a foot or so longer. And basically, bigger in every dimension. So, I'd still want a new tank no matter what.

Kate: This is news to me.

John Hodgman: How do you take this news, Kate? Does it seem reasonable or unreasonable?

Kate: It's reasonable. I think also, like cost-wise, we can swing it either way.

[00:50:00]

But yeah, I did not know that he wanted to replace it either way. I thought we would just keep everything the same!

John Hodgman: This is a hard one. I think I'm gonna have to take some moments to go burrow into my substrate and maybe hibernate for a while, while I think it over. But I think I'm gonna come to a conclusion soon. So, stick around. I'll be back in a moment with my verdict.

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

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

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

Wes: You know, I feel alright. I think there were a few things that were definitely going in my favor. I don't know. I kind of left out the big one, I guess. Kate wanted to come home with the one snake that we had at the reptile show. So, she was thinking about that, but—ehhh, you know. *(Chuckles.)*

Kate: Yeah, I got swept up by all the babies. They were so cute!

Jesse Thorn: *(Laughs.)* Who hasn't been charmed by those little slithery guys?!

Wes: Yeah!

Kate: Yeah! Exactly!

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

Kate: I am not feeling super confident. The judge tends to favor people who are well-researched, and I think Wes has really done a good job to like determine what he wants. And so, I'm not—*(laughs)* I'm not feeling great.

Jesse Thorn: Well, we'll have to see what the judge says about all this when we come back in just a moment.

Transition: Three gavel bangs.

Promo:

Music: Playful, plucky synth.

John Hodgman: Greetings. I am John Hodgman, co-host and co-creator of the *Judge John Hodgman* podcast, along with Jesse Thorn, here on The Maximum Fun Network. And I am here with MaxFun member of the month Keith, who's been a Maximum Fun member since—when, Keith?

Keith: Oh, at least three or four years now. I don't recall exactly when I fell prey to the pledge drive, but it got ahold of me, and I've yet to relent.

John Hodgman: Oh, and we shall not ever let go. Now you join us telephonically from a different country from ours, which is which?

(Idyllic sounding birdcalls in the background.)

Keith: I moved to Aveiro, Portugal back in August of this year.

John Hodgman: I hear evening birds chirping behind you. And what are the names of those birds?

Keith: We do have quite a few spoonbills and quite a few flamingos as well.

John Hodgman: So, what would you say to the birds around you and the people listening who are considering supporting the show?

Keith: You know, it's just nice to have a little bit of investment in the things that I love.

(Birdsong quiets down.)

Knowing that I'm making sure that those podcasts are still being created makes me feel good!

John Hodgman: We're so pleased to have you be our Maximum Fun member of the month. Thank you very much, Keith in Portugal: this month's Maximum Fun member of the month.

Keith: Obrigado.

Speaker: Become a MaxFun member now at MaximumFun.org/join.

(Music fades out.)

Promo:

Music: A bright, playful tune.

Emily Fleming: I'm Emily Fleming!

Jordan Morris: I'm Jordan Morris.

Matt Lieb: And I'm Matt Lieb.

Emily: We are real comedy writers!

Matt: Real friends—

Jordan: And real cheapskates!

Matt: On every episode of our podcast, *Free With Ads*, we ask, “Why pay for expensive streaming services when you can get free movies from apps with weird names?”

Emily: Each week we review the freest movies the internet has to offer—classics like *Pride & Prejudice*.

Jordan: Cult classics, like *Point Break*.

Matt: And “holy (*sensor beep*), what did I just watch?” classics like *Teen Witch*.

Emily: Tune in every week as we take a deep dive into the internet's bargain bin.

Jordan: Every Tuesday on MaximumFun.org or your favorite pod place.

Music:

Free with ads!

(Music fades out.)

Transition: Three gavel bangs.

Jesse Thorn: Judge John Hodgman, we are running out of days in this holiday shopping season! I hope people are going to MaxFunStore.com!

John Hodgman: I hope so too, because we have such wonderful brand-new holiday merch right there at the MaxFun Store, ready to stuff into your stocking. We're talking about hats. You know, Jesse, we open every episode—you say, “Who's right? Who's wrong? Only one can decide.” That's me! I'm the one who has to decide, and it's hard! It would be so much easier if people just wore hats that said right or wrong on them.

Jesse Thorn: I see this as our equivalent to the ham helmet that Heathcliff wears.

John Hodgman: (*Snorts a laugh.*) Boy, oh boy. That ham helmet is something else. I don't wanna go down that rabbit hole right now!

Jesse Thorn: (*Laughs.*) We also have an incredible, new pure justice smell candle and comfy clothes for the cozy goth in your life. All of those are available online at MaxFunStore.com.

John Hodgman: And you can ship 'em to whoever you like. But what if you have someone who doesn't like getting stuff shipped to them or simply doesn't like stuff? Well, why don't you give them the gift of an experience? Come join us at Marine's Memorial Theater on January 18th when *Judge John Hodgman* returns live at San Francisco Sketchfest. Tickets are available at MaximumFun.org/events. That's where you find out where all of your favorite MaxFun podcasts are going out into the world. To get to an event is such a lovely gift, and that's definitely something you can fit into a stocking.

Jesse Thorn: I've also got some beautiful things in the Put This On Shop, at PutThisOnShop.com.

[00:55:00]

And I made a code, JUSTICE, for 10% off anything in the Put This On Shop if you're out there shopping. We have everything from clothes and luggage and sunglasses to wonderful gifts. I just got this little—I just got this pin that's for the Sisters of the Swish. If you know, a Sister of the Swish out there, I recommend going to PutThisOnShop.com. 'Cause that's gonna go fast.

John Hodgman: I'm going—I might go over there and get it myself for a basketball fan that I know.

Jesse Thorn: (*Laughs.*) Excellent. There are all kinds of gorgeous things, men's and women's and gender neutral, all at PutThisOnShop.com. 10% off if you use the code JUSTICE. Let's get back to the case.

Transition: 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: Cesar Hidalgo, Olivia Perez, Lovy and Wayne Berlin, Danny Estrada, Astor Wise, Sonya Kim, Robert Sly, Tara Cohen, Joel Rosenberg, Helen Rosenmeyer, Tybee Mix, Annette Koh, Richie Lopez Dark, Paul Poland, Gualtiero Rocco. These and other names are on my phone, reminding me of the time that I once read 700 hobo names into a tin can. Since we're doing buzz marketing on this episode, it's the 20th anniversary of my first book, *The Areas of My Expertise*. And also, since we're doing buzz marketing, I forgot to note that that wonderful performance from Griffin Newman in *Dicktown* episode 209, in which he is instructing John Hunchman to go into the pet store to get snake food, in the form of 100 frozen mice, and snake shampoo—later, he instructs my character to go into the hardware store to get wood glue and wood. And I ask Griffin Newman why, and Griffin performs the joke that is my favorite joke of all of *Dicktown*, written by David Rees, where he goes, “I'm building a ramp for my snake! Duh!”

(*They laugh.*)

Building a ramp for his snake! Also, by the way, Wes wants an interesting and cool snake. And of course, the *Dicktown* theme song performed by Weird Al Yankovic in season two is called “Interesting, Cool, and Fun”. Just a little fun, little interesting and cool serendipity there, since we're doing some buzz marketing for various things.

I wanna do some buzz marketing for Jan the snake lady out there in Los Alamos or wherever she is in New Mexico. It is a benefit to the world, I suppose, that she is taking care—and I believe, so responsibly—of so many snakes and trying to find good homes for them. It was a boon unto the domesticated snake population that you were able to take Ember in and give Ember a high quality of life. And though it was hard to say goodbye to Ember, as it is hard to say goodbye to any beloved pet or even just beliked pet, it is a good thing that you did.

Normally there is a settled law, well established on this podcast, that we encourage people who are thinking of getting pets to adopt particularly an existing pet, as opposed to going to a purebred breeder. There are a number of reasons for this. Obviously, pets need homes. And perhaps less obviously, purebred breeders—there are some great ones, and then there are some less than great ones. And as well, purebred animals—cats and dogs in particular—can have inbred genetic problems because of that line of breeding that a good, old-fashioned mutt wouldn't necessarily have. And certainly, all animals that you bring into your home deserve love, whether they are a purebred whatever or a or a beloved mix up.

But that said—I mean, you have a purebred dog, you mentioned, Kate. And I'll say this to you. You know, we adopted a cat known as Lolo the dumb-dumb cat. Certainly came into our house with an entire life that is a mystery to us—and I think also to Lolo! Because Lolo, when I say is dumb, is pretty dumb. I think part of the reason that she is so dumb is—I mean, I don't say this unkindly. We don't make fun of her to her face. I mean, behind her back we do.

(Kate laughs.)

But like, she will—

[01:00:00]

You know, I once saw her sitting under a coffee table, as I said before, and she will sit up under the coffee table and hit her head. I've never seen a cat have so little field awareness as Lolo the dumb-dumb—I've never seen a cat that is so dedicated to staring rapidly into the middle distance as Lolo the dumb-dumb cat. You know? And I think part of the reason that she is a mystery to us and to herself is that, in her previous life, one previous owner had her declawed—which is not something that one should do to a cat. Both because they can't defend themselves, and it's an unnecessary surgery that is dangerous and that is not worth it to protect your furniture. But also, because I think Lolo could never play properly. I mean, depending on when she was declawed, she can't grab anything, 'cause all she's got is soft hands, right? She can't grab; I don't think her play—I think it undermined her ability to play. And play is an important part of a cat's developmental growth and brain development. So, I think that's part of the reason she's dumb.

We love her so much. We're so glad to have this adopted cat. But when the time came for our daughter to take in a cat, we ended up finding a responsible, purebred Maine Coon cat breeder in Maine, and we got her a purebred Maine Coon kitten. Now, why? Well, partly it's because—and this is a sad part of the story—she did adopt a stray kitten who was the runt of the litter. And as often happens with runts of the litter, particularly in a stray/feral cat environment, the cat passed away very quickly. And there was nothing you could do, and it was absolutely heartbreaking. Absolutely heartbreaking. So, when the time came for her to— After she had mourned for a period of time, when time came for her to get a new cat, she knew that she wanted something in the Maine Coon varietal for various temperamental reasons. And obviously, uh, maybe I pushed it on her 'cause I'm obsessed with Maine. I don't know.

But we decided to get her a kitten that we knew was going to be healthy and was going to be with her for a long time. This isn't to say that we couldn't have found a healthy kitten or young cat in an adoption/rescue situation. We could have. And indeed, we made a sizable donation to our local animal rescue operation. All of which is to say that, you know, when you are choosing a companion animal, while we do strongly recommend and urge you to consider adoption—as you already have; this is not speaking to you, Kate and West. You know, obviously. You've got two dogs—you've got a cat and a dog that have three legs. They weren't coming from a pure breed, right?

(Wes confirms.)

You have diversified your portfolio of care.

Kate: The turtle is also rescued.

John Hodgman: Oh, I don't care about your turtle. Sorry, was that not clear from the beginning?

(Kate giggles.)

I don't wanna ever hear about that turtle ever again. No, I love Hatch Green Chile turtle.

In this case, I mean, it's hard. I look at Aspen, it looks like a wonderful, normal morph. Would probably be a wonderful addition to your home, and you'd probably be doing— You know, you would afford Aspen a wonderful life. But it doesn't mean that you're the only people in the world who can. And in the meantime—you know, you can sense that I am sympathetic to Wes. Not merely because he cleans the substrate, but also because both of you went through—as well as your kids and I imagine some of your other animals—went through a sense of loss with regard to Ember. And the difficulty of caring for an animal at the end of its life is meaningful.

And I remember when our cat, Petey, died. And I was there when I took him to the veterinarian to be put down. I needed—I demanded a year of zero pet. Not even talking about getting one. Just a year of not cleaning a litterbox and purposeful mourning so that I could move on. This is something that you have to respect in Wes. Even though your

generous nature might be to bring Aspen into your home, you are married to Wes, not to Jan the snake lady. And I think that, particularly since you initiated bringing Ember in and presumably you named Ember and presumably you are going to name the new snake if it has no given name already—

[01:05:00]

—I think that we do need to afford Wes the decision-making power in this case. And if that means a purebred snake bought from a breeder that's got the interesting and cool pattern, there are people who are gonna say, I'm sure, like, “Why should that matter? An animal needs a home.” Well, that animal needs a home too. And I don't think it's wrong for Wes to get what he wants in this particular case. I wish you had room for two snakes in your life, but you as a doula surely know you can't split the baby. You gotta— Solomon was not wise. Well, I mean, it was a trick that Solomon did. But you know what I'm saying.

I gotta come down on this one side or the other. And while it's a challenging decision, I'm going to encourage you to work with Jan the snake lady to find Aspen's either original owners or some new owners, Kate, that you can help train—you and Wes can help train to keep Aspen and give Aspen a wonderful home. But in the meantime, let Wes have the snake he craves. This is the sound of a gavel.

Clip:

Sallah (*Indiana Jones: Raiders of the Lost Arc*): Asps!

(*Horses whinny.*)

Very dangerous.

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.*)

Kate, how do you feel about the decision?

Kate: You know, I'm going to find a lot of peace with this arrangement, and I'm very happy for Wes that he's gonna get to have a new project and a new baby in the house.

Jesse Thorn: I mean, your life's about to get 100% more piebald.

Wes: No more legs though.

Jesse Thorn: (*Laughs.*) That's fair. Wes, you must be feeling pretty good.

Wes: Yeah, I feel good. I'm happy. I think we'll both really be enjoying this snake.

Jesse Thorn: Wes, Kate, thanks for joining us on the *Judge John Hodgman* podcast.

Wes: Alright, thank you!

Kate: Thank you so much.

Transition: Three gavel bangs.

Jesse Thorn: Another *Judge John Hodgman* case is in the books. We'll have Swift Justice in just a second. First, our thanks to Redditor u/DoctorColossusofRhodes, legendary *Judge John Hodgman* case-namer, for naming this week's episode "I Declare a Histrial". Join the conversation over there on Reddit. It's r/MaximumFun. That's also where we ask for title suggestions. So, go over there, suggest a title, enjoy other people's suggestions. You can find evidence for the show at [instagram.com/judgejohnhodgman](https://www.instagram.com/judgejohnhodgman), as well as at MaximumFun.org. We're also on TikTok and YouTube, so go subscribe in both places. Please smash those like and subscribe buttons!

John Hodgman: Speaking of YouTube, our YouTube comment of the week this week comes from user JustOneAsbesto. I guess that's the singular?

Jesse Thorn: Single. That's the singular of asbestos.

John Hodgman: Singular of asbestos. Okay, very good. JustOneAsbesto commented on our episode "Shut Your Payhole" from a couple weeks back. You may remember that was the episode in which a daughter, Genevieve, took her dad, Mike, to court because Mike would never let his adult daughter, Genevieve, pay for dinner. Mike dropped some really serious life lessons on all of us, including Genevieve. Including this one:

Clip:

Mike: The sadness that she feels for not being able to give to me is the sadness of life. That's what life is.

John Hodgman: Wow.

John Hodgman: So, JustOneAsbesto said, off of that comment, “I think that Mike might be Werner Herzog’s long lost twin brother from Boone, North Carolina.” Thank you for that quote from YouTube, and thank you for watching and commenting on our YouTube channel, [@JudgeJohnHodgmanPod](#). Commenting, obviously, is not only a lot of fun, it’s very valuable to the channel, as is subscribing. We’re about to break— Well, in the not-too-distant future, I hope we can break 10,000 subscribers. It’ll really boost the show if you’re able to go over there and subscribe and hit that bell and share the episodes over there. Thank you for that.

Jesse Thorn: *Judge John Hodgman*, created by Jesse Thorn and John Hodgman. This episode, engineered by Lester Watts at Albuquerque Podcast Studio, Megan Rosati runs our social media. The podcast, edited by AJ McKeon. Our video editor, Daniel Speer. Our producer, of course, is Jennifer Marmor.

Okay, Swift Justice. ConsistentArticle975 says on the MaxFun subreddit, “Despite my many requests, my husband won’t close the door of our shed at the end of a long day of gardening. But I’m too scared of our neighborhood skunk to close it myself. What should I do?”

(They chuckle.)

I demand, from this point forward, that all of our disputes be *Beatrix Potter* style disputes.

John Hodgman: *(Laughs.)* What’s the name of the toad that comes around?

[01:10:00]

Just—Piggy Winkles and just sits down. He’s like, “I’m coming for lunch!” And he just sits there for the entire afternoon.

(Jesse titters.)

A lot you can learn about manners from that terrible toad. Listen, I imagine that ConsistentArticle is concerned that the skunk has walked into the shed or is hanging out in there, and ConsistentArticle doesn’t wanna close the door on the skunk and get it trapped in there or get sprayed. And I will say, ConsistentArticle’s husband should be closing the garden shed. Just if you open the door, close it behind you. That’s just good manners. That said, I will also quote—or paraphrase, at least—Werner Herzog’s, twin brother, Mike from Boone, North Carolina, and say, *(in a cartoonish German accent)* “The terror that she feels for not being able to close the shed door is the terror of life. That is what life is.”

I’m no Paul F Tompkins. I can’t do a Werner Herzog. But you see my point? Like, you can figure it out. No offense, ConsistentArticle, but do not be afraid of skunks. They’re just animals. They’re trying to live their lives. They’re not gonna spray you. They’re not gonna bite you. If it’s rabid, keep your distance, obviously, but you don’t want to go through life being afraid to close a garden shed door. Just take a deep breath, go out there and close it, and then tell your husband, *(firmly)* “Hodgman says shut the door! What, were you raised in a garden shed?!” Go on.

Hey, we're just about a month out from our live show at San Francisco Sketchfest. We mentioned it before. If you're in the Bay Area or near the Bay Area, we would love to have your beautiful butts in seats. MaximumFun.org/events. But even more, perhaps, we would love to have your disputes. Can't have a show without disputes, Jesse! Is that right or wrong?

Jesse Thorn: No matter what your dispute is, go to MaximumFun.org/jjho and submit it. Can I offer something very sincere and possibly slightly bummery, but also possibly action galvanizing at the end of this week's episode?

John Hodgman: Jesse, I would love it.

Jesse Thorn: I was thinking about our friends at Al Otro Lado the other day. They actually reached out to us. I think we're gonna go visit them, their operation in Tijuana in northern Mexico sometime soon. Really looking forward to that. But I was thinking of them, because I was in Home Depot the other day—the Home Depot here in Cypress Park in Los Angeles. It's like down the road, Figueroa Boulevard, from my house. We just moved into a new office at Maximum Fun, and I was literally buying some picture hangers to put up posters—*Judge John Hodgman* posters—on the walls of the new Maximum Fun office in downtown Los Angeles.

John Hodgman: Thank you very much. Thank you very much. That's very kind.

Jesse Thorn: It was like eight o'clock in the morning or so. And as I was looking at the baffling selection of picture hooks and, as usual, not being helped by anyone at the Home Depot, I heard some people yelling, “La Migra, la Migra,” and saw some folks booking it from the front of the store towards the back of the store, where the lumber is. And there's a lumber loading dock back there. And it turned out that there was an ICE raid happening in the front of the store or in the parking lot in front of the store.

And it was— You know, it was the third time I've had a direct experience with ICE in Los Angeles since these raids started. Obviously, there was that time in MacArthur Park while we were recording. I also witnessed an ICE raid a couple weeks before that. And I will not soon forget the look on the face of the guy who ran past me. Nor will I forget what the teenaged, say 17-year-old, girl that was on the sidewalk in front of the Home Depot—the look on her face as she sobbed into the arms of an employee at the Home Depot. (*Beat.*) And I felt very lucky. I didn't witness the detentions. They were a couple hundred feet away from the front door in the big parking lot over by where there's a labor center, where I've hired day laborers before.

But then I read what had happened in that parking lot, which was—among other things—a man who was in his car with his toddler in the backseat—

[01:15:00]

—was boxed in, pulled out of his car, and arrested. His toddler was driven away on camera. I mean, there were observers there—on camera by two ICE agents in his car. The toddler was not returned to his family until 12 hours later. His family didn't know where the kid was. And

the man that was arrested was and is a United States citizen. Not that anyone deserves to be arrested for the crime of living anywhere. But this was a man who had been boxed in simply because he was in his car leaving the parking lot when these ICE agents decided to raid.

It was just another of this cavalcade of horrors that we have experienced here in Los Angeles and that people around the country have experienced; just this sort of parade of performative cruelty designed to terrify people who are living in the United States, whether it's with or without permission from the government, into leaving. And it's a horror to live with. And I'm hopeful that it won't come in this way to New York where you live, John. But we'll see. But it's been a horror to live with, and um... you know, one of the comforts that I have had in dealing with this— That Home Depot's on my way to work! You know what I mean? Like, I get the shakes every time I drive past.

And one of the comforts that I have experienced in the last year or so, as this has been going on, is the generosity of our listener community in *Judge John Hodgman* in supporting *Al Otro Lado's* work with migrants who are in the United States, migrants who are in Mexico and elsewhere—not just Mexican, but also Central American and Caribbean migrants who are on the Mexico side of the border. And we have—I'm loading it up here—we're at \$265,000. That's plus about \$100,000 in matching funds that listeners have offered.

And we have a pal who made a really generous matching grant. And if you go to AlOtroLado.org/letsdosomething, you can make a donation. We are coming up on fulfilling that matching grant. Our goal right now to fulfill that matching grant is \$275,000. We're at about \$265,000. But also, you know, it's a wonderful cause one way or another. This is like— These folks are doing direct work for people who really need help. And there's more people who need help than ever.

So, if you wanna make a diff, go to AlOtroLado.org/letsdosomething. It's the holiday season. It's a perfect time to do it. And so many thanks to the, at this point, hundreds of *Judge John Hodgman* listeners who have supported this cause. You rule, and I can tell you from my own experience that like when you're reading the news and you're feeling sick to your stomach, you can think about that support that you gave and think about the support that your fellow audience members gave, and you will feel good and comforted by that. And it will also make a direct impact in people's lives. So, it's AlOtroLado.org/letsdosomething.

John Hodgman: AlOtroLado.org/letsdosomething I wish everyone an extremely peaceful holiday season. But it is always time to remember, and especially this year, that this is a time to think about people who are not experiencing peace and to enjoy your time and—I hope--- your togetherness with your family, but think about families that can't be together, and to give of yourself to your community and to those in your community that you don't even know. And AlOtroLado.org/letsdosomething is a really important way.

[01:20:00]

I just wanna stress again that it's not just charitable; giving the money as a very direct impact on the people who are being harmed by this wave of terror on purpose right now. So, obviously, I'm sorry that you went through that, Jesse. I'm very sorry for the people who are

detained and being terrorized and families that are being torn apart. And I obviously echo your call to action here. Please go to AlOtroLado.org/letsdosomething.

Jesse Thorn: We'll talk to you next time on the *Judge John Hodgman* podcast.

John Hodgman: And if anyone in New Mexico needs an elderly snake, I've got a line on one.

(Jesse laughs.)

I got a line on one for you.

Transition: Three gavel bangs.

Transition: Cheerful ukulele chord.

Speaker 1: Maximum Fun.

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Speaker 3: Of artist owned shows.

Speaker 4: Supported—

Speaker 5: —directly—

Speaker 6: —by you!