

Sound Effect: Three gavel bangs.

Jesse Thorn: Welcome to the *Judge John Hodgman* podcast. I'm Bailiff Jesse Thorn. This week, "Power of My Turny". Garrett brings the case against his wife, Kara. Garrett and Kara like to play boardgames together. Early in their relationship, they agreed to one rule: they will not harm each other's gameplay. This way, they can keep their game nights relaxed and friendly. But Kara wants to start playing more aggressively. She says a little competition can be fun. Garrett is a conflict-avoidant Midwesterner. He wants to keep the peace. 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: "You see, there is no such thing as *Words with Friends*. There is only *Scrabble with Enemies*."

Bailiff Jesse Thorn, please swear the litigants in.

Jesse Thorn: Garrett and Kara, 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 I don't even... I don't play any games at all, because it only gets you in emotional trouble.

John Hodgman: Doesn't like games.

Garrett: I do.

Kara: I suppose. (*Laughs.*)

Jesse Thorn: Judge Hodgman, you may proceed.

John Hodgman: Kara and Garrett, in Salt Lake City! You may be seated.

(*Chairs squeak.*)

For an immediate summary judgment in one of yours favors, can either of you name the piece of culture that I referenced as I entered the courtroom? We'll start with you, Garrett.

Garrett: It it's not ringing any bells for me, so I may go with my prepared response, which was *War and Peace*.

John Hodgman: Warren Piece? Who's that guy?

Garrett: Eh, some old Russian guy.

John Hodgman: Warren Piece? Have you heard—?

Jesse Thorn: Warren Piece.

Garrett: Old Warren Piece.

John Hodgman: That'd be a cool name.

Jesse Thorn: Junior or the old man?

(*They chuckle.*)

John Hodgman: I'll write it down. *War and Peace*. I'm writing it down very clearly. Anyone who's looking at our YouTube channel, [@JudgeJohnHodgmanPod](#) can see

I'm not lying. And we'll also see that I'm here once again at Technica House, not only with Jacob Durwin, not only with Jennifer Marmor, but also with Jesse Thorn!

Jesse Thorn: He just touched me physically!

John Hodgman: And we're not in Salt Lake City. We're all here in New York City together. We just did a couple of wonderful shows at the Bellhouse.

MaximumFun.org/events, if you want to see the next things we're doing. But in the meantime, we're all here together in many configurations of *Judge John Hogman*. But I think this is a first where you and I are in a room, and the litigants are in a room. So, people keeping a track of that can update their spreadsheets. Meanwhile, Kara, what is your guess?

Kara: I know my prepared guess is wrong, but I don't have another one. So, I'm gonna go ahead with my prepared guess of Tom Wait's 1978 album, *Blue Valentine*.

John Hodgman: Any song on Tom Waits' 1978

Jesse Thorn: Yeah. 1978 album.

John & Jesse: (*Entirely out of sync.*) *Blue Valentine*.

Jesse Thorn: It's the one where he growls and bangs on trash can lids.

John Hodgman: Well, I'm gonna say—unfortunately, Kara—it's not from any Tom Waits album. In fact, it is from a book. But it is not a book that was written by the famous author Warren Piece, I'm afraid to say, Garrett. So, all guesses are wrong. Throw this piece of paper away! In fact, it was from a book called... (*chuckles faux-humbly*) *Vacationland* by John Hodgman.

Garrett: (*Whispered.*) Dang it.

John Hodgman: I'm not averse to a little self-plugging! Especially when it's so on topic for our episode.

Jesse Thorn: I just happened to have had a text conversation with the great John Dickerson—

John Hodgman: John Dickerson!

Jesse Thorn: —about how much he was enjoying reading *Vacationland*. And if you're out there, you can read it too.

John Hodgman: Uh, yeah! If you or a friend of yours is going to visit Maine at all this spring, summer, or fall, *Vacationland* is something you can give them. And also, if you like cartoon versions of me solving dumb mysteries, you can watch *Dicktown*—still on Hulu. For now. In the meantime, for now, we are going to hear this case. So, who seeks justice in my courtroom? Is it Garrett or Kara?

Garrett: Oh, it's me.

John Hodgman: Garrett, what is the nature of the justice that you seek?

Garrett: Well, as Jesse said, we agreed long ago that we would play peaceful boardgames—almost like a parallel play situation, where there's no conflict, there's no aggression, it is just good times together where we—

John Hodgman: (*Scoffing.*) Just good times? What's the point?

Garrett: Yeah, just good times. It's good. It's so pleasant. It's so pleasant. (*Laughs.*) That's it.

John Hodgman: What's the point of playing a boardgame if you're not going to bring up seething resentment?

Garrett: (*Laughs.*) That's a great point.

John Hodgman: We'll get into the details of how you play boardgames without conflict currently, but I guess I understand Kara wants to introduce something new and spicy into your relationship? Competition?

Garrett: Yeah. Spicy is right. Competition, yeah.

John Hodgman: Kara, how do you defend yourself? What's your what's your situation there?

Kara: Well, we started playing in nice mode, because when we first started dating—13 years ago—

John Hodgman: Nice mode.

Kara: —I was a sore loser. And so, we developed this way of playing to make sure playing was pleasant. But now we've grown! I've grown a lot. So, I think we can handle and enjoy playing more traditionally and more competitively now.

John Hodgman: I have three questions for you. What games do you play?

Kara: We play— Primarily together, we've been playing the game *Azul*.

John Hodgman: *Azul*!

Kara: We also play *Dominion*.

John Hodgman: *Dominion*.

Garrett: And *Ticket to Ride* comes out once in a while.

John Hodgman: *Ticket to Ride*. All three of those got hearty nods from Jacob, here at Technica House.

Jesse Thorn: Only when it got to *Ticket to Ride* was I convinced that those weren't like the new 2027 Cadillacs.

(They laugh.)

John Hodgman: Can we get can we get some b-roll of Jacob pumping his fist, please? Just come in here. Come right in front of the camera, Jacob.

(Muffled sounds of Jacob speaking off mic.)

Blow the focus. Pump your fist. *(Beat.)* Choo-choo!

(Garrett laughs.)

Jesse Thorn: Let the record reflect that Jacob offered a choo-choo gesture in support of the game *Ticket to Ride*.

John Hodgman: Now I'm not a tabletop gamer myself, other than *Scrabble*. I play *Scrabble* with my wife, who's a whole human being in her own right. And we've only just started playing again recently. So, I do have thoughts on this. But I'd never heard of any of these games you described, except I did try to do some research, Jesse. While you were out of the room, I was looking up a little video about how to play *Azul*.

Jesse Thorn: Okay.

John Hodgman: And it's a tile game. You create a beautiful mosaic-type pattern, apparently. And I was like, "This sounds fun." And then the nerd on the video started explaining the rules, and it immediately got so complicated I threw my phone across the room.

Jesse Thorn: (*Laughs.*) It just occurred to me that they can't all be 2027 Cadillacs. They could all be new club drugs.

John Hodgman: That's true. That's true. *Ticket to Ride* sounds like a fake drug in an '80s action movie. You know what I mean?

Jesse Thorn: Exactly.

John Hodgman: Yeah. Alright. So, those are the games you play.

Jesse Thorn: (*Interrupting.*) Wait, I have a question about these games.

John Hodgman: Yeah?

Jesse Thorn: Because I don't know the boardgames. Are you describing playing competitive games in a friendly manner? Or are you describing playing cooperative games rather than competitive games?

Kara: We are describing playing competitive games in a friendly manner.

John Hodgman: So, as we all know, in *Azul*, you try to put tiles on a thing, right?

Kara: Correct.

John Hodgman: Well, how—? How do you play it nice? How is—? What is nice mode compared to non-nice mode?

Garrett: Well, the competitive nature of the game is you are competing for a pool of resources. And if Kara, say, takes—

John Hodgman: (*Dryly.*) What fun.

Garrett: (*Laughs.*) It is a delight, in all honesty!

Jesse Thorn: There is nothing an adult boardgamer loves more than to manage resources.

(Garrett and Kara giggle.)

John Hodgman: What a delight. *(Sarcastically.)* What a wonderful break from real life.

How do you avoid conflict and confrontation in a competitive game?

Garrett: So, in *Azul*, it's pretty simple. I see what she's picking up, what colors of tiles she's picking up, and I avoid those colors of tiles. Or I will allow her to finish her row of tiles, to set one on her board, and then I will do something else in the meantime. And then I'll take those colored tiles for myself later, if there are any. It does come at the detriment to the person—

John Hodgman: *(Interrupting.)* So, let me— Yeah, I mean, if you're playing *Azul* the hard way... if you're playing *Azul* mean, you would be looking at what tiles she's picking up, figuring out her strategy, and actively blocking her somehow. I would presume.

Garrett: Oh, absolutely.

John Hodgman: So, you're sandbagging your own game to a degree.

Garrett: Only if you want to play that way. There's no—

John Hodgman: Under your agreement, under your marital agreement, nice mode means—in the case of *Azul*—seeing what she's doing and not getting in her way. Is that a reasonable interpretation to a layman, sir?

Garrett: 100% correct.

John Hodgman: And Kara, do you reciprocate when playing *Azul*?

Kara: Yes, we mutually have agreed to play in this particular style where we not only don't screw each other over, but we also make sure that we are not getting in the other person's way.

John Hodgman: Aaand this is enjoyable somehow?

Garrett: It's wonderful.

John Hodgman: But I can tell—*(dryly)* okay.

(Garrett and Jesse laugh.)

That was a—that was a more sensual read than I expected from Salt Lake City around that question.

(Garrett cackles.)

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, that was a... that was probably about as vulgar as you could say a phrase when you are describing not screwing your partner.

(John agrees and they laugh.)

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John Hodgman: Kara, let's take a trip back in time to when you were a sore loser. How did your sore-loserdom manifest in your marriage?

Kara: At first, it would manifest with upset at being attacked in games by Garrett. And I was trying to remember—it's been a long time now, but I think it would

probably fizzle over into some like anger and irritability outside of the game too, unfortunately.

John Hodgman: It sounds like you're minimizing your sore-loserdom. It doesn't sound like a huge problem, if the problem was that, yeah, Garrett played competitively; and when you lost, you felt bad about it.

Kara: I think the problem is somewhat cultural. I'm from Texas, where it's very acceptable to express anger. And Garrett is from the Midwest, where it is very unacceptable to express anger. And so, any expression of anger for Garrett is very uncomfortable (*unclear*).

John Hodgman: I see. Garrett, how would you describe Kara's sore-loserdom?

Garrett: I think she did a very good job of describing it. When we had first gotten together and started playing boardgames—

John Hodgman

I think she didn't do a very good job, honestly.

(They laugh.)

No offense, Garrett. It sounded like this wouldn't be a problem at all in any marriage if someone's just like, "Aw, geez!" You know what people from Texas are like famously, Jesse?

Jesse Thorn:

What are they like, famously?

John Hodgman: Like, "Aw, geez! I wish I had won."

(Jesse agrees.)

“Shoot! Well, shoot.”

Uhhh, is that true? That she was just like, “Ah, well?”

(Garrett stammers noncommittally.)

There was no—?

I’ll tell you—let me tell you something. Let me tell you what a sore loser is. My wife, who’s a whole human being in her own right—

Jesse Thorn: *(Bursts into laughter.)* Yeeees?

John Hodgman: Look, when we play *Scrabble*, it’s all— Look, we’re competitive. But we’re supportive. If she a good play, I enjoy it.

Jesse Thorn: And I don't mean to speak broadly, but your wife is... tougher than you.

John Hodgman: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely tougher than me. But when she plays the card game *Spit* with our adult daughter, I get out of the room.

(Jesse chortles lowly.)

Because our daughter is too good at that game. And one time I was sitting—*(laughs)* were on a family vacation together. “Hey, let's play *Spit*.” I'm doing a cross, I'm doing a jigsaw puzzle, I believe. And I hear them going *(imitates high-speed card slapping sounds.)* And then all of a sudden—and you're gonna have to get the bleeping button ready for this—I hear my wife say to our daughter, “Oh, *(censor beep)* you! You *(censor)* loser!”

(Jesse cackles.)

That's what she said.

Jesse Thorn: John's wife is cool. If you guys are wondering, John's wife is really cool.

John Hodgman: She was so mad because our daughter's too good at that game. And my wife, a whole human being in her own right, lost composure! And apologized. But it was unnerving. But that's not what's going on with Kara? Kara isn't yelling at you, calling you an f-ing loser? For winning?

Garrett: Eh, not anymore... (*Laughs.*)

John Hodgman: Not anymore. I mean, this is— You understand that these are the stakes.

Jesse Thorn: What was the worst incident in the early days of your relationship?

John Hodgman: Terrific question.

Garrett: Ooh. I honestly it's been so long. We've probably been playing this way for a decade. I don't have any specific memories of how poorly it went, but broad strokes, there was a lot of “shucks”-ing, and a lot of “oh, geez”-ing. Maybe a little more intense than that.

John Hodgman: It was so traumatic to Garrett, Kara, that he erased his memory of it.

(*They laugh.*)

Garrett: (*Laughing.*) That does sound right...

John Hodgman: Garrett, if you were— Listen, Garrett. If you came here as a competitor, instead of playing *Judge John Hodgman* on nice mode, you would have gathered up some data, some stories, some evidence about why we dare not open the

door again to returning the truly competitive *Azul*ing that you used to do. Instead, you sent in one piece of evidence, which I believe we have on hand here. It's photographic evidence. Let's take a look at that.

(Jesse giggles in surprise.)

That's Garrett with an *Azul* board before him...

(Jesse continues giggling.)

Along with his *Azul* coach, a dog. What's the name of that dog?

John Hodgman: That is Charlie.

John Hodgman: That's Charlie.

(Jesse continues laughing.)

Charlie's sitting up like a human, Jesse! Did you notice that?

Jesse Thorn: Yes! I haven't been so amused by a picture of a dog not doing anything funny in a long time! *(Laughs.)* It's just a really great picture of this dog.

John Hodgman: I agree with you. What's Charlie's deal? What kind of dog is Charlie, there?

Kara: Charlie is a dachshund. He's a wiener dog.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, he's up on—I guess that's Garrett's lap with his back legs, but then his front legs are up on the table. And so, he looks like he's got little tyrannosaurus arms.

Garrett: (*Laughs.*) He's actually on a king-sized pillow. That is the only thing he'll sit on our laps on. So, he's essentially carried around on this king-sized pillow, from chair to chair. And he's living his best life.

John Hodgman: Garrett— Alright, that's a that's a— What did you want to show us with this evidence, Garrett?

Garrett: Basically, I wanted to show you Charlie, in reference to a boardgame. It felt really appropriate for Jesse to Charlie.

Jesse Thorn: Kara, would you get mad at Garrett in the olden days because he won, or because of something about the style of his play?

Kara: I would get mad about his attacking style of play.

John Hodgman: Go on.

Kara: So, in *Dominion*, there are cards that are specifically meant to attack the other person. And they can really mess up the other person's gameplay. And they could basically completely destroy your enjoyment of the game. And that is what happened sometimes when Garrett would play those cards. And so, he would see that I was building a specific game and attack me in a way that felt very personal. (*Laughs bashfully.*) And I would get upset about that.

John Hodgman: What are some examples of attack cards in *Dominion*? Just out of curiosity.

Kara: There is a witch card that makes you gain a curse every time the other player plays it, which dilutes your deck and makes it harder to play.

John Hodgman: Oooh, Garrett, you were playing that witch card hard, huh?

Garrett: I was. And I was playing the militia card. Which made her discard down from five cards to three and reeally screwed up her game.

John Hodgman: But that's all fair play within the game, right?

Kara: It is.

Garrett: It used to be.

(They laugh.)

Jesse Thorn: So, how do you define what is not aggressive gameplay in a two-person game where the two people are in opposition?

Garrett: We had a really loose definition! I don't think we formalized it in any way. It's just—we try to stay out of each other's way. I don't want to do anything that will intentionally harm her, but there are sometimes where it unintentionally it can harm her. Like, in *Dominion*, there are some cards that are attack cards that primarily help me but also kind of hurt her. Those ones are okay. Those ones are fine.

Jesse Thorn: But if you get a witch?

Garrett: Oh, I don't— Jesse, I have not bought a witch in eight years. Or militia. It has been eight years since I've bought any of those cards in that game.

Jesse Thorn: You can buy a witch?!

John Hodgman: Yeah, you can buy a witch?!

Garrett: Maybe that's a Salt Lake City thing. I don't know.

(They laugh.)

John Hodgman: Is this a card game like *Magic: The Gathering*, where you build your own deck and you can buy superpowered cards? Like, with money? And amp up your own...?

Garrett: *(Stammering.)* Kind of, but this is more of a “you build the deck as you play.” So, you start with maybe seven cards in your deck. And—

John Hodgman: *(Interrupting exhaustedly.)* I don't want to know the rules of *Dominion*.

Garrett: That's cool. Okay.

John Hodgman: What I'm trying to clarify is, can you—

Jesse Thorn: *(Interrupting.)* You can't just go to the store and buy a witch.

John Hodgman: Can you go to the card shop and be like, “Kara and I are gonna have a real night tonight. I need five witches.”

Garrett: No. *(Laughs brightly.)* No, you buy it in the game as you play. So, you spend your resources.

John Hodgman: Oh! You spend your resources on it.

Jesse Thorn: Got it.

John & Jesse: *(In unison.)* It's resource management!

(Garrett giggles.)

John Hodgman: The most fun game of all.

Jesse Thorn: Hm. Hm! You know what my favorite boardgame is?

Jesse Thorn: *Logistics.*

John Hodgman: Yeah! (*Laughs.*) You know what mine is?

Jesse Thorn: What?

John Hodgman: *Compounding Interest.*

Jesse Thorn: Yeah.

John Hodgman: Yeah. How long ago did you come to the agreement to play nice? Kara, I'll ask you that question. How long ago?

Kara: Over a decade ago.

John Hodgman: Okay. Over a decade ago. And did you, Kara, institute or initiate this discussion? Were you like, “Hey, I want—” How did it come to pass?

Kara: I don't remember us ever having a formal discussion. I think it's just something that we coalesced on after having multiple instances where we played more aggressively and didn't enjoy the outcome.

John Hodgman: I gotta tell you, Kara—I don't think this is you, but that sounds like some real secret bully language.

(Kara laughs.)

When did you decide to play nice with each other? When did you decide to force Garrett to play the way you wanted to play?

“Oh, I don't remember that there was any discussion about it. It just seemed like he finally came to his senses!”

(Garrett laughs loudly.)

Jesse Thorn: “Someone kept writing notes in blood on the walls...”

John Hodgman: Garrett, do you remember discussing the change to play nice?

Garrett: I have a vague memory of discussing it. I don't— Like Kara said—

John Hodgman: Give me a vague memory, as best you can, as to when it was—it was over a decade ago. And just to reset the table here, Kara is a—you call a sore loser, but all she does is really just go, “Oh, shoot! Rats! Meh!”

(Garrett laughs.)

Meanwhile, you're playing witch, witch, witch, witch! At some point, the two of you like, “This can't go on any longer, or we're gonna get divorced.”

Garrett: Yeah, we were living in Arkansas. We were going to school together. We had played *Dominion* for an entire summer, every night, two or three hours. It was a great time. And I would say about halfway through it, we had talked about it like, “Let's just try to play nice with each other.” Because you can choose which to play with. So, we just played a game with no attack cards. And it was so much more fun. The resource management—guys, it was delightful! And we had a great time! So, we decided to do that. And in fact, we bought an expansion for it, called *Prosperity*, which had no attack cards. It was just “get more resources better.” And it was a delight. So—

John Hodgman: So, it seems to me like it's a genuine style of play within *Dominion*—

Garrett: It is!

John Hodgman: —to collaborate more than compete.

Garrett: You're not collaborating; you're just not getting in each other's way. You're playing your own game. You could honestly play it solo; you just wouldn't know when the game is over.

John Hodgman: Kara, when Garrett would play these witch cards, that's part of the game. Isn't it?

Kara: It is.

John Hodgman: Would he overplay the witch cards? Was he overaggressive? Or was he appropriately aggressive for the game, would you say?

Kara: He has sometimes been overly aggressive with attack cards and resource hoarding.

John Hodgman: How do you respond to that, Garrett?

Garrett: I... support and sustain that. I cannot play *Catan* with anyone, because I am unpleasant to play with.

Jesse Thorn: Because you're trying to win?

Garrett: I am trying to win via resource hoarding and making it difficult for other people. Yeah. Unintentionally! I think I'm playing fine. Other people have... told me that it is not fine.

John Hodgman: And so, Garrett, what constitutes sore-loserdom in your mind?

Garrett: I think a certain amount of anger is acceptable at losing or having some aggressive play. I think that's—

John Hodgman: Frustration, surely.

Garrett: Yeah, frustration, absolutely. And at some point, when it crosses into the boardgame is over, and we're done, and there's still some frustration and irritability going on from where the boardgame was? That's where I would say sore-loserdom.

Or if it's like a very small piece of aggressive play or competitive play that elicits a bigger reaction. I would say that could be sore-loserdom. So—

Jesse Thorn: We're accused of being unfair or breaking the rules by Kara when she lost?

Garrett: I don't think so. No, I think she fully—yeah, I don't think so.

John Hodgman: It sounds like you're saying if you were playing a game and Kara lost due to your witch deployment or whatever, that Kara's frustration would extend beyond what you would say is a reasonable period of time. Like, the game is over, the night has moved on—maybe it's the next day, maybe you discover that all of all of your clothes have been burned.

(Garrett laughs.)

Maybe she has hired an actual witch to come to your house and place a benign curse on you. Which real witches aren't evil, of course. Real witches are just practicing a different kind of earth observance.

Jesse Thorn: He could have hired of a *(pronouncing both Vs)* vwitch.

John Hodgman: Yeah, could have hired one of those *(also pronouncing the Vs.)* vwitches.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, from the movie *THE VVITCH*.

John Hodgman: Right, from the movie *THE VVITCH*.

Jesse Thorn: That's bad news.

John Hodgman: What would Kara do that constituted sore-loserdom in your eyes?

Garrett: Oh, it was really small stuff, in all honesty. I think I was just really sensitive to it. Because like Kara said, I'm from North Dakota. I was raised there are no problems. There is no conflict. Anger is reserved for very bad stuff. Irritability? Also, very bad stuff. And it's a different cultural thing to express irritation in Texas. So, I think a big piece of it was anything outside of the game was upsetting to me, because I was so sensitive to any type of irritability or frustration (*laughing at himself*) at basically any point.

Jesse Thorn: You come from a culture in North Dakota where there are no other people.

John Hodgman: Right. No—

(Garrett agrees with a giggle.)

Jesse Thorn: The next person is 17 miles away. (*Laughs.*)

Garrett: Right. And you're just so excited to see anyone who's not a cow that you're just—yeah, you're overjoyed.

John Hodgman: But how would Kara express irritability?

Garrett: I would say primarily through tone. (*Laughing.*) It wasn't even what she did. It was more of the tone of voice that she used.

Jesse Thorn: Can you recreate it for us?

John Hodgman: Yes, please.

Jesse Thorn: We'll use the phrase “are you going to unload the dishwasher tonight?” That's something that a people in a relationship might say to each other in many tones.

John Hodgman: Right. There might be a tone which is like, “Oh, I was wondering if you were going to do it.” And then there's a tone which is like, “Why haven't you done it already?”

Garrett: Okay. So, a normal tone would be more *(brightly)* “When are you going to unload the dishwasher?” And an irritable tone would be more *(tersely)* “Wheeen are you going to unload the dishwasher?”

Jesse Thorn: That does sound pretty intense, John!

John Hodgman: Kara, does that sound familiar to you?

Kara: Somewhat.

Jesse Thorn: Kara, are you getting a rush of memories back of times that he played the witch? *(Laughs.)*

Kara: Absolutely.

John Hodgman: Kara, Garrett cannot imitate you in angry, frustrated, resentful mode. Can you give us a sense of how your sore-loserdom—and that's in very vigorous air quotes—manifested itself externally? What'd you do? What'd you say? How'd you say it?

Kara: Yes. Asking me to work against myself here, but I have specific memories of Garrett—

John Hodgman: *(Interrupting.)* Not necessarily! Because what I'm trying to evaluate is whether your behavior merited changing the rules or not. Do you know what I mean?

Kara: I think it did back then. So, for example, Garrett might play a witch card, and I might look at him and say something like, *(with very mild irritation)* “Seriously?! You’re gonna play that?”

(John “whoa!”s in playful shock.)

And that might happen several times over the course of a game.

John Hodgman: You know what they say in *Mortal Kombat*. FATALITY.

(Jesse agrees with a laugh.)

Out of bounds!

Jesse Thorn: That's Kara holding his spine up out of his body!

John Hodgman: Finish him!

Jesse Thorn: John, are you allowed to issue divorce decrees?!

John Hodgman: I don't know. I'm gonna have to look through the wall books.

(Jesse sighs heavily.)

It sounds like it wasn't much worse than, “Seriously, you're really gonna do that to me!?” That was the vibe, right?

Kara: *(Hesitation.)* Yeah. And I would say an underlying tone of anger that I knew Garrett would not feel comfortable with.

John Hodgman: Right. Because in his North Dakota feelings, that was beyond the pale.

(Kara confirms.)

Okay. So, to recap, Garrett would play more aggressively than you liked. And Kara, you respond with more “anger and frustration”, quote/unquote/unquote/unquote, than Garrett was comfortable with. And very smartly, you came to a compromise as a spousal couple to play nice with each other. And that seems like a good solution.

So, Kara, why do you want to undo all of that work now?

Kara: Yes, two reasons. First, I think that sometimes playing nice now can get kind of boring. We know what's going to happen in the gameplay, because we know that we are not going to harm each other's gameplay. And so, sometimes in games like *Azul*, you can even predict who's going to win far in advance. And second, I've grown a lot as a person. And I think Garrett has too, in terms of our ability to handle conflict. And so, I think it would actually be really fun for us to explore playing in a more traditional or even aggressive ways.

John Hodgman: You've got some deep Texas aggro's still in you that you want to express in your marriage.

(Kara confirms.)

Jesse Thorn: Inside of each of us is a tiny Yosemite Sam, ready to dance on his heels and shoot six guns in the air.

(They all giggle.)

John Hodgman: And Garrett, you're afraid of what might happen. You want to shut this down before it even starts.

Garrett: I wouldn't say that I'm afraid of what would happen, because I totally agree with everything that Kara said. I think we've grown a lot as people. And I am more capable of handling any emotion that isn't just pleasant and comfortable and calm. I

think it's just a fun way to play. I really enjoy the way that things have been going! The games are very fun to me. And as I'm talking, am afraid—

John Hodgman: *(Interrupting with a scoffing, sardonic tone.)* Yeah, North Dakota fun!

Garrett: *(Entirely earnestly.)* North Dakota fun! Absolutely! The most fun!

Jesse Thorn: *(Making himself laugh.)* North Dakota fun is defined as seeing a person that's not a cow.

(They laugh.)

John Hodgman: Sorry, North Dakota. Where in North Dakota are you from?

Garrett: A small town of about 2,000 people. Right in the middle of it.

John Hodgman: Oh, wait, a small town?

Garrett: *(Playfully.)* Believe it or not, they do exist there.

John Hodgman: *(With pretend surprise.)* Oh. Okay.

Jesse Thorn: You're not from Tokyo, North Dakota?!

(Garrett laughs.)

John Hodgman: Mega City 1, North Dakota? No? Okay. Kara, do you have a career?

Kara: I do.

John Hodgman: What do you get up to every day?

Kara: I am a Legal Psychology professor at the University of Utah.

John Hodgman: So, you're both psychology experts.

(They confirm.)

Excellent. And so, have you played games with other people?

(Kara confirms.)

And do any of the aggression on Garrett's part and the defensiveness on your part manifest when you're playing with other people? Has anyone else complained about either of those things?

Kara: ... Only when we've played *Settlers of Catan* with Garrett's family.

(Garrett agrees immediately.)

They get upset with him for being too aggressive.

John Hodgman: Oh, his family in North Dakota.

(They confirm through laughter.)

Garrett: I'm too aggressive for them.

John Hodgman: Do they blame you, Kara, for teaching him to be a bad boy?

Kara: They don't.

John Hodgman: No. Okay, good.

Garrett: They know me well. They know that when I do play boardgames, I do— If I'm allowed to be untethered and unbound by rules, I will go for it. And I get pretty competitive.

John Hodgman: Oh, so you're not afraid of what Kara's gonna do. You're afraid of the monster that you're gonna become.

Garrett: Yeah! I think that's a big piece of my fear here is I am afraid of the monster inside coming out. It does come out with my family, because I know what's gonna happen there. But if it comes out anywhere else, maybe the competitiveness will really overwhelm me. I'll flood the board.

Jesse Thorn: Garrett, you keep talking about your style of play as though you are breaking the rules, as though you are cheating, as though you are outside of the bounds of the game—when in fact, you're entirely within the bounds of the game! You just happen to be playing in a style that you find distasteful!

Garrett: That is true. That is true! And I think—historically—when I play within the bounds of the game but play aggressively, I can get a little too into it. I think that is probably true.

John Hodgman: Hmm! You can be a sore winner!

Garrett: I can be a sore winner. I think—yes, we played some *UNO* last night. And would you say there was a little sore winning going on?

Kara: No.

Garrett: No? Okay. I guess it was just internal.

Jesse Thorn: YOU JUST GOT *UNO* REVERSE CARDED!

(They laugh.)

John Hodgman: Well played, Kara. Who won *UNO* last night?

Kara: Garrett won many rounds of *UNO*, and I won a few rounds of *UNO*.

John Hodgman: Why do you think you may have been a sore winner at *UNO* last night, Garrett? Kara doesn't think so.

Garrett: She doesn't think so. Internally, I was dancing. I was celebrating victory over my enemies. It was devastating.

John Hodgman: And externally?

Garrett: Cool as a cucumber. Charlie was on my lap, and everybody was having a good time.

John Hodgman: Cool as a North Dakota cuke. Kara, if had allowed himself to feel and express emotions— We know that he's a trained therapist, so obviously he knows the first rule is “bottle it up, keep it inside.”

(Jesse agrees.)

But if you would allow himself to feel and express emotions, and that emotion was, “I'm so happy I won, and I'm gonna do a little dance,” how would you feel about that?

Kara: Um, I would feel fine about that.

John Hodgman: Do you think that he holds back from playing aggressively, because of you, or because he's afraid of what he himself becomes when he plays that way?

Kara: Maybe because he's afraid of what he himself will become. And he I think he knows from playing with family that if he plays extremely aggressively, people do get upset. *(Laughs.)*

John Hodgman: How do they get upset up there in North Dakota?

Kara: Um, there's some cursing.

(John “whoa”s and Garrett giggles.)

And some “I’ll never play this game with you again.”

John Hodgman: Woooah! He’s probably pretty good at *Settlers of Catan*, huh?

Kara: He's actually not, because he's too aggressive in setting trade rules. So, no one will trade with him.

(They laugh.)

John Hodgman: Soooo... does the aggression—

Jesse Thorn: Not to get into topical satire here, but...

(They laugh.)

John Hodgman: You recognize, Garrett, that the object of most two-to-four-person boardgames is that there should be a winner. Right?

(Garrett confirms.)

They're not collaborative for the most part, these games.

(Garrett agrees sadly.)

They're not designed to make everyone great. They're designed for everyone to have fun but one person to have a very special kind of fun, which is triumphing over the vanquished?

Garrett: Absolutely.

Jesse Thorn: When you're playing a four-person game with family—let's say you're playing *Settlers of Catan* in North Dakota over there. And you’ve got half the population of the state in the room.

(Kara and Jesse giggle.)

I'd love to visit North Dakota.

Uh, are you playing aggressively... equally across your competitors? Or are you focusing on one person with the effort of frustrating them?

Garrett: Ooh. I would say equally across all competitors. I am vicious in some of those circumstances. Absolutely.

Jesse Thorn: So, it's not a matter of you unbalancing the game by teaming up with somebody, accepting that you're not gonna win, and...? 'Cause that, while within the rules of most games, is a bit unsportsperson-like.

Garrett: Absolutely. I don't do that. I maybe have done that in the past a few times, but it's pretty irregular. Generally speaking, I am just going all out to... ruin the board. I just wanna take victory.

John Hodgman: Kara, you're the one who's opening this door potentially to playing more competitively. Are you concerned at all? Or it sounds to me like you're not concerned about Garrett bringing out his inner vuh-vitch.

Kara: I was not concerned...

(Garrett laughs.)

But I am a little concerned now!

(Jesse laughs.)

John Hodgman: Now? Why?

Kara: I think that— Well, the way that he's described some of the extremely aggressive play is reminding me of some of the issues of the past. However, I think that Garrett's case is that he wants to play nice. And so, I think even if we experiment with more traditional or aggressive gameplay, he's not gonna unleash the beast.

(They laugh.)

Garrett: Garrett, what are you afraid is gonna happen if I rule Kara's favor?

Garrett: My primary concern is that we will lose a method of play that I really enjoy, which is resource management and playing your own game better than the other person next to you—as opposed to being in conflict, so that that conflict makes them play worse. I want to win on those merits more so than conflict will prevent them from winning. And the second thing I'm afraid of is definitely I get a little unhinged and go too hard in the paint.

John Hodgman: Hmm. That's a *Settlers of Catan* term. Going too hard in the paint.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah. That would be like a Draymond Green move.

John Hodgman: Right.

Jesse Thorn: When he's playing *Settlers of Catan*.

(Garrett giggles.)

John Hodgman: Famous *Settlers of Catan* player.

So, Kara, what specifically do you want me to order? You mentioned “experiment.” Tell me what you want to do. Pick a game and how you want to play it.

Kara: I would like you to order that we experiment with—we try out playing *Azul* with a more traditional gameplay where you don't necessarily know how aggressive or competitive the other person is going to be towards you.

John Hodgman: And you're picking *Azul* in particular, is the one that you would like to experiment spicing up your game life with.

Kara: I would like to do it with all of our games, but I think *Azul* would be a great start. Because it's the game that we play the most frequently and has the most rules around being nice.

John Hodgman: Kara, you said that you instituted the play nice rule about ten years ago. How long have you been together?

Kara: We have been together for 13 years.

John Hodgman: So, is it fair to say that the thrill is gone? From those early years?

Kara: *(She and Garrett laugh.)* I think the thrill of playing nice in the same way is somewhat gone. I don't want to stop playing that way completely, but I do want to be able to play in different modes.

John Hodgman: What's changed in you that you feel like it's time to make the change, Kara?

Kara: Um, I think I've grown a lot in my emotional capacity to handle like games and just things in general. So, I think that I can be a better winner and a better loser if we play competitively.

John Hodgman: And also, it's boring the way you're playing now, right?

Kara: *(Shyly.)* It's somewhat boring, yes.

(They laugh.)

John Hodgman: Thank you for acknowledging that you are under fake oath.

Jesse Thorn: Kara, if the beast is unleashed, will you be able to handle it?

Kara: *(Beat.)* I don't know, but I want to find out! *(Laughs.)*

John Hodgman: Garrett, if the beast is unleashed, will you be able to handle it?

Garrett: The beast feels great. I can handle it.

(Jesse cackles.)

John Hodgman: He's ready to Hulk out.

Jesse Thorn: *(Shouting.)* The beast feels great!

John Hodgman: Garrett, your argument is that you actually have fun playing on nice mode, as you say. And you enjoy it. But isn't the point of the game that everyone have fun to some degree?

Garrett: I feel compelled to say yes.

John Hodgman: Whoa!

Jesse Thorn: He's about to unleash the beast! *(Laughs.)*

John Hodgman: Yeah, but what would the beast say?

You feel compelled to say that everyone should have a good time.

Garrett: Mm-hm. Yeah. I do.

John Hodgman: But what does the beast say?

Garrett: Uuuh, the beast would say it's all about me, and victory is the only thing that matters, and feeling good is the only thing that matters. Sooo, nobody else—*(giggling)* nobody else's concerns are as valid as me!

John Hodgman: It's really hard for me to hear you say that in that nice, North Dakota voice and believe that there is a beast inside of you. But I have to believe it!

Jesse Thorn: I think the nice North Dakota voice is the trick. That's the façade!

John Hodgman: That's the facade. Oof.

Jesse Thorn: The beast runs the show!

John Hodgman: Kara says that she's grown and tolerates adverse outcomes better than she used to be able to. In the ten years that the beast has been held inside of you, has the beast changed? Have you grown?

Garrett: I think I've grown! I would say that I've grown quite a bit, especially in my tolerance and resilience in the face of any emotion that is not calm and placid. Have I grown in relation to the beast inside? I have no idea. I don't engage in many conflictual activities. So, the beast is still there. I'm a little uncertain as to what it will look like.

Judge John Hodgman: How do you feel about conflict in other aspects of your life?

Garrett: Generally avoidant of any and all conflict outside of my work capacity, which involves quite a bit of conflict sometimes.

John Hodgman: Maybe when you come home after a day of managing hard feelings and conflict in your work, you don't want to do it—you don't want to rehearse it again in games.

Garrett: That is absolutely true. And this was especially true around the time where we were in school together, and I was learning how to be a therapist and be a psychologist in this in this capacity.

John Hodgman: Right.

Garrett: There was not much room for anything else after many of those days. And Kara was incredibly supportive and really, really helped with that. And so, there is there's a certain amount of that, I think, that is true but doesn't have to be true anymore.

John Hodgman: Have you ever considered not playing a game, and instead being a normal couple just watching television? And maybe watching *All Creatures Great and Small*, which has no conflict in it whatsoever.

Jesse Thorn: Well, John, there's lambing season.

John Hodgman: There is an inciting incident, it's true.

(They chuckle.)

To what degree there is conflict is arguable. Whatever conflict there is is swaddled in many layers of intricate knitwear.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah.

John Hodgman: Yeah. I didn't mean to suggest that you're abnormal for playing games. Of course, many, many couples love to play games. But there are other ways that you could spend your time together, like having dinner conversation, watching a movie, being distracted—especially if you feel you need to space out at the end of the day a little bit, Garrett.

Garrett: Yeah. I would say our jobs are complicated and difficult. And we do that pretty frequently. And I think we use games as a way to do that and have nice times with each other where we're directly interacting as well. So, I think the pleasant way to play games is a really great way to manifest that in our lives.

Jesse Thorn: Why are you playing competitive games? There are cooperative games. I'm not a board game guy; (*stammering*) I don't have a board game library at my house, but I can tell you that *Save the Whales Game* is a cooperative game! I had that as a child. It has pewter whales in it!

John Hodgman: Pewter whales.

Jesse Thorn: You work together to save the whales!

John Hodgman: I never heard of that game, but I believe that it's true. Then there was *The Ungame*, too. Wasn't that one?

Jesse Thorn: I'll tell you this, John.

John Hodgman: Yeah, tell me.

Jesse Thorn: If we need some ideas for cooperative games, uh... we can just ask literally anyone who listens to our show!

John Hodgman: That's true.

Bailiff Jesse Thorn: And get 10,000 suggestions.

John Hodgman: Many, many, many, many suggestions are being emailed to me right now.

Jesse Thorn: Nothing over—probably no personal characteristic more over-indexed for in the *Judge John Hodgman* audience than knowledge of cooperative boardgames.
(Chuckles.)

John Hodgman: Yes. That's right. And also, Dewey decimal expertise. Yeah.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah. Why aren't you playing cooperative games?

John Hodgman: Yeah. Maybe there's a cooperative game to play.

Garrett: That's a great question. I don't think I've ever thought about that.

Kara: I would say that we still enjoy the somewhat competitive nature, albeit subdued. But I think we still enjoy competing, even though we're doing it in a very subdued manner.

John Hodgman: Yeah, I think that there's a little bit of Texas in you that's perhaps saying, *(completely without changing his usual speaking affect)* “Cooperative games? No.” That's my Texas accent, by the way. Pretty good, right?

Jesse Thorn: *(In his usual accent as well.)* Great job, y'all.

John Hodgman: Yeehaw.

(They chuckle.)

Kara, when Garrett talks about wanting to leave conflict behind at the end of the day, how does that resonate with you? What do you think about that?

Kara: I want to support Garrett in that. I think there are definitely opportunities though where it might be fun to have conflicts—like maybe on the weekends—to mix up the way that we play games. And I think he would enjoy it too.

John Hodgman: *Azul* is the game that you want to play a little bit rougher.

Kara: It is.

John Hodgman: You don't want to go into the blood sport of *Scrabble* just yet.

Kara: No.

John Hodgman: You ever play *Scrabble*?

Kara: I have.

John Hodgman: Why don't you guys like to play *Scrabble*? What's going on?

Garrett: It's a little slower paced, I think, is my is my thing.

John Hodgman: Oh, it's the slowest paced.

(Garrett chuckles.)

It's truly tedious. Or it can be. That's when the real frustration starts to bubble up.

Do you guys have a vacation coming up?

(They confirm.)

You going someplace?

Kara: We are going to Mexico City.

John Hodgman: *(Gasps.)* Mexico City!

Jesse Thorn: It's a great city!

John Hodgman: Great city. So, before I go into my chambers, just to recap: ideal ruling for you, Kara, is to play five to six games of *Azul* aggro-style—however that's

defined for each of you—and see how it goes, and trust that you can get through it if it goes sideways.

And for you, Garrett, you would like me to rule that nothing change.

Garrett: Absolutely.

John Hodgman: And that the beast and the sore loser and all the big feelings and emotions be kept deep, deep, deep in that vault at the bottom of Salt Lake. Is that right?

Garrett: 100%. And we have the same amount of fun we're already having.

John Hodgman: Okay, I think I understand. Before I go into my chambers to consider my verdict, I will remind everybody that my gavel was confiscated by TSA a few weeks ago. The Offerman Woodshop and I are in heavy consultation right now—

Jesse Thorn: Really?!

John Hodgman: —in terms of uh in terms of size, which—

Jesse Thorn: *(Interrupting.)* Wait, this is like a Camp David situation?! *(Laughs.)*

John Hodgman: Yeah, that's right. *(Chuckles.)* We're just sending emails back and forth, and we're consulting on size of the new gavel, which will be quite large.

Jesse Thorn: Great.

John Hodgman: Materials, finish, grain. It's all being figured out, and we'll have it eventually. In the meantime though, I am using books for gavels! And this week, my gavel book is the memoir *Destroy This House* by the great Amanda Uhle, who is uh the publisher of McSweeney's Books.

Jesse Thorn: Ahhh!

John Hodgman: And a fantastic writer in their own right. And I've read this really wonderful memoir about a really interesting family life. Um it's called *Destroy This House* by Amanda Uhle. I will go into my chambers now. And when I come back, I will determine to whom I am going to throw this book at.

(They chuckle.)

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

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

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

Garrett: I am feeling far more optimistic than I had anticipated being. I anticipated—

Jesse Thorn: You could be telling the truth. You could be lying. There's no way for me to know!

You might not even have been paying attention this whole time. You got that placid therapist face so perfected. You might have been thinking about tomatoes you're buying for dinner!

Garrett: That's right. Roadside tomatoes. It's all buried deep down inside. No one knows a thing.

Jesse Thorn: Kara, how are you feeling?

Kara: I feel really good. I think that the request to try out a handful of games in a different way is a reasonable one that I hope the judge will honor.

Jesse Thorn: *(Softly.)* Kara, what if you really like the beast?

Kara: I mean, that's... fine.

(They laugh.)

Garrett: That's it?! It's just fine?

Kara: It's a good discovery.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah. Gotta keep your marriage lively.

Kara: Yeah!

(They giggle.)

Jesse Thorn: 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: Bright, exciting rock.

Speaker: MaxFun Meetup Day is on Thursday, April 23rd. MaxFunsters from all over are getting together to hang out and celebrate their favorite podcasts. Want to go and meet some friends who like similar stuff and care about the same things as you? Head to MaximumFun.org/meetup to see where and when your local meetup is. Don't see one nearby? Host your own and make some new pals! All you need to do is pick a place that can hold a small group. A bar, cafe, park, library, wherever! Then fill out the form at MaximumFun.org/meetup. We'll add you to the page and help get the word

out. So, go to MaximumFun.org/meetup and maybe we'll see you on April 23rd.

Promo:

Music: Playful synth.

Alden Ford: Hello, this is Alden Ford.

Moujan Zolfaghari: And Moujan Zolfaghari!

Alden: Two of the creators of *Mission to Zyxx*, your favorite improvised, obsessively sound-designed, sci-fi sitcom here on the MaxFun Network. And the news is...

Alden & Moujan: (*In unison.*) We're back!

Moujan: With an all-new miniseries set in the Zyxx universe! *The Young Old Derf Chronicles*. Will Derf find his own killer before it's too late?!

Alden: Oooh!

Moujan: To find out how that question could possibly make sense—well, you just have to tune in.

Alden: Yeah. And as always, it's ambitious and labor-intensive to—frankly—an absurd degree.

Moujan: Indeed!

Alden: So, if you are looking for a little break from your own galaxy, we would love for you to check it out.

Moujan: That's *The Young Old Derf Chronicles*. Search *Mission to Zyxx*, Z-Y-X-X, in your podcast app!

Alden: Or on MaximumFun.org.

Moujan: Keep it fresh!

(Music fades out with a sick guitar riff.)

Transition: Three gavel bangs.

Jesse Thorn: Judge John Hodgman, our new T-shirts are in the Max Fun Store right now, but only until April 3rd. These came from a recent case on the program with Cordelia and Patty.

John Hodgman: Yes, Jesse. Cordelia and her son Patty were in the courtroom disputing Patty's perhaps, uh, overblown love of a certain comic book.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah. And Patty wrote us a beautiful poem. *(Chuckles.)*

John Hodgman: And that poem is: "The sky is blue, the grass is green. I love the X Men, and I'm gay."

Jesse Thorn: *(Giggles.)* And we made an incredible t-shirt design!

John Hodgman: Yeah. Don't take our word for it. Get thee over to MaxFunStore.com. Take a look at it right now. We have not done an improv t-shirt like this in a long time. And supplies will not last, because we're shutting it down on April the 3rd.

Jesse Thorn: Only until April 3rd.

Thanks to everybody who came out to see us at the Bellhouse in Brooklyn. We had a great time.

John Hodgman: That was wonderful.

Jesse Thorn: Berths sold out on the boat that we're riding on!

John Hodgman: That's true. The Grace Bailey schooner is now full. Although! Go over to MaximumFun.org/events. Or even better, I may say, subscribe to Hodgman.substack.com. In case you missed your chance to sail with us on the Grace Bailey, there may be some last-minute cancellations or openings that I will alert you to there. That is my every other week, more or less—that is my Substack where I announce stuff that I'm doing and places that I'm going to be or we're going to be. And beyond the paywall, I'm also continuing to read *Moby Dick* to you in a bad Maine accent. So.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah. We had a little brunch party here in New York City where we're sitting, and you just spent the whole time talking to my friend Jenny about *Moby Dick*.

John Hodgman: I was just—I'm talking to everybody about *Moby Dick*!

Jesse Thorn: (*Laughs.*) Okay, 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: So, another game that my wife, who's a whole human being, and I play—in fact, I don't play the game with her; she plays it against herself—is spotting

license plates. And when we drive to Maine in the spring for the first time, that is when the game begins. And then she will spend the summer, well into the fall—often long after we've gotten back—trying to spot every license plate—all 50 United States license plates. And you know, there are some that are quite easy to get, quite common. There are some that are more challenging. You would think that Alaska would be hard to find, but the Alaskans are all over Maine. Hawaii is challenging to find, but we do it almost every year. I help out. The one that never shows up, Jesse, never...

Jesse Thorn: Is?

John Hodgman: North Dakota.

Jesse Thorn: Wow.

John Hodgman: North Dakotans don't go anywhere, turns out. South Dakota, no problem! Every time. North Dakota? I'm not sure these people exist.

That's apropos of nothing except for North Dakota. But we do play *Scrabble* together. And there was a time when our playing *Scrabble* was quite contentious—earlier in our marriage and our *Scrabble* playing career. And we (*chuckling*) would get into little snits about it. In fact, a friend of ours would point out that in his marital games of *Scrabble*, it was determined that it was a fair play that (*chuckling*) any player could end the game at any time by flipping the board.

(They laugh.)

We never got to that point, but we did reach a point where—you know, there is an aggressive style of play of *Scrabble*, where you're not only trying to build the best word you can make but you are also actively trying to block valuable squares, so that your opponent or spouse—usually it's the same in life—cannot make the highest—

(Kara laughs.)

You know, like you'll make a lower scoring word of your own that is also not an interesting word just to block that triple word square, so that the other person doesn't use it or whatever. And consequently, over the years—particularly because our vocabulary is basically identical at this point—we were doing our two-letter words and our strategic *Scrabble* to the point that the board itself was just this tight knot of letters. There was no place to make a word. There was certainly no place to make an interesting word. And the idea of making an interesting word had been thrown out the window. Because the point was to win, not to have fun with words. That is when I wrote in *Vacationland* that there's no such thing as words with friends, but *Scrabble* with enemies.

And the end result was that overtime we stopped playing, because it just wasn't fun anymore. We would just— It's not like we were mad at each other or like getting upset, but the game itself just became tedious because our gameplay was exactly the same. And we were always tying the board up into these tiny, little, persnickety knots. And so, we stopped playing for a long, long time. And then we came to realize we missed it. And after years of being out of the *Scrabble* game, as it were, we decided to play again. And we were like, “Look, let's just have fun. Let's make the words we want to make. Let's play quickly”—because when you get really competitive and you're not in a tournament environment where your play is timed and you can just take all the time you want, it can get really, really tedious as you're trying to figure out the word that's not only going to give you the most points, but really stick it to the other person. And we're gonna—I mean, cheat. You know, we're gonna keep the list of the two letter words right next to us. We weren't gonna challenge each other. We were gonna look up words on the Merriam-Webster *Scrabble* Wordfinder to find interesting words.

The idea wasn't that we were going to just play nice for nice's sake but try to have fun again and develop more words in our vocabulary, so that if we wanted to go competitive again down the road, we would have a new bag of tiles and tricks—as it were. So, this sounds like I'm making an argument for Garrett. But in fact, I'm not. I'm making an argument for the beast.

Jesse Thorn: (*Triumphantly.*) HA!

(*Garrett and Kara laugh.*)

John Hodgman: In the sense of, yes, you have found a way to play your various games—as you say—on nice mode that has worked well for you all for a decade. But you know, games change. And so do personalities and so do marriages. They evolve. And one of the settled laws here in the court of *Judge John Hodgman*, of course, is: if it's not fun for everyone, it's no fun at all. And while I agree that it's clear that Garrett, setting aside all of the emotional appropriateness of keeping your feelings bottled up inside, I must take at face value that you are having fun playing the nice way. The nice way of playing *Scrabble* is a fun game too, but not if the other person isn't having fun. The rules of the game are only arbitrary sort of guidelines that you accept together. And if Kara is not having fun anymore playing these games, well, then it's time to spice things up.

This is true about your *Azul* game. This is true about your marriage. This is true about your friendship. This is true about whatever. It is worth exploring a little bit of a change. And I think that the—you know, I appreciate—and I think the real revelation to me, the crux that got found, was not that you that Garrett was afraid that Kara would be a sore loser, but that Garrett was afraid that he would be a sore winner.

Garrett: (*Chuckling to himself.*) Pretty true.

John Hodgman: And I think that that is something for you to explore and work through, through the therapy of playing a fun game with your wife. And I would say one of the ways to keep the beast contained, or to at least experiment safely with this new mode of play, is to do it in a different context. I suggested you play six games of *Azul* in beast mode. Kara countered with five. I can already see she's a competitor.

(They giggle.)

Not sure what weird game we were playing there just that time, but it was it was on! And that's why I asked if you were going on vacation somewhere. Because if you're going on vacation somewhere: A) Ideally, you're going to be setting aside some of the conflict and stress of your work life anyway. Vacation is a great time to explore being a different kind of person. And since you're setting that aside anyway, you can incorporate a little bit more stress in your *Azul* game to see how it goes. And I suggest that you take *Azul*, I guess, to Mexico City and bring it, at least once, to the ballgame court and sit in that blood-soaked history of games being played with the heads of your enemies. And play a couple of games of beast mode *Azul* right there, right there in the court. If that's allowed. I don't know. I've not been there, Jesse.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, I think you could probably—

John Hodgman: Is that something you could get away with?

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, you could probably get away with a few beast mode *Azuls* in there.

John Hodgman: Yeah, yeah. Yeah. And just experiment with being in a different place and being in a different context—and not being a different people but being the people who you are now and seeing who you are now once it is reflected in the game you play. And then at least you'll have some information to take with you back to Salt

Lake City. And you know, this is not a show where we talk about this stuff, but I think it's going to be hot, frankly.

(Kara and Garrett laugh.)

I mean, I don't—you know, look, I think it's gonna— I think it's some hot nights in Mexico City, is what I'm saying.

Jesse Thorn: *(Deadpan.)* John, we don't talk about this kind of thing a lot on the show, but I think this could be hot.

John Hodgman: I think this could be.

(Garrett and Kara laugh.)

We don't talk about hotness a lot on this show. This is not the sound of a gavel. This is the sound of *Destroy This House* by Amanda Uhle. By the way, this is a Midwestern memoir. So, take that, as it were. And how it is going to make the sound of a gavel. I rule in Kara's favor. This is the sound of a book gavel.

Clip:

Private Hudson *(Aliens):* *(Voice cracking.)* That's it, man. It's game over, man! It's game over!

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.)

Well, there's Judge John Hodgman's ruling for you. Garrett, how are you feeling?

Garrett: Uh... devastated, but also optimistic. I think if those two can go together, I'm feeling both of those things right now. I'm sad to lose, but I am I'm happy for the anticipated hot nights in Mexico City.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah! I mean, the beast must be looking forward to cutting off the head of his enemy!

(They laugh.)

Garrett: Always. Always. And it's gonna be nice to let the beast free to roam and collect some heads. That'll be fun.

Jesse Thorn: Kara, how are you feeling?

Kara: I feel two ways. I feel excited. I think that this will open the door for a new way of gameplay for us. And I'm slightly scared of the beast.

(They laugh.)

John Hodgman: *(Off mic and almost inaudible.)* Hot!

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

Garrett: Thank you both.

Kara: Thanks for having us.

Transition: Three gavel bangs.

Jesse Thorn: Another *Judge John Hodgman* case is in the books! We're gonna have Swift Justice in just a second. Our thanks to Redditor u/Halfloaf for naming this week's episode. You can join us on Reddit at [r/MaximumFun](https://www.reddit.com/r/MaximumFun). You can also join us on social

media if you want to check out pictures. [@JudgeJohnHodgman](#) on Instagram. John and I are also on Instagram. [@JohnHodgman](#), [@JesseThornVeryFamous](#).

John Hodgman: That's our Instagram handles. That's correct.

Jesse Thorn: You can also find the program on TikTok and YouTube, [@JudgeJohnHodgmanPod](#). I just put a new video on YouTube.

John Hodgman: Oh, did ya?

Jesse Thorn: It's a little tour of Manhattan Wardrobe Supply.

John Hodgman: *(Chuckling.)* Oh-ho-ho!

Jesse Thorn: Yeah. There's nothing I love more than like a store that only has industrial shelving and only sells things to people in a really specific industry who have really specific needs, but also I'm allowed to sneak in there.

John Hodgman: I'm going to watch this video that you made. Because this whole weekend that you've been here, you've been talking about Manhattan Wardrobe Supply—this costume shop. Specifically, their wall of—

Jesse Thorn: It's a—no, it's a shop for costumers. It's not just a shop of costumes; it's for people who make costumes for professional productions.

John Hodgman: But I certainly hope your video features the much now talked about Wall of Wounds.

Jesse Thorn: Yes! There is a real Wall of Wounds, and it's in the video.

John Hodgman: Speaking of video...

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, YouTube comment of the week, John!

John Hodgman: Yeah. So, we have we have lots of stuff on our YouTube channel, [@JudgeJohnHodgmanPod](#), including Jesse's Wall of Wounds, but also full live episodes on video. And we always pick a YouTube comment of the week. This week, our YouTube commenter of the week is Real Kangaroo Flu! They wrote, quote, “It's always fun to listen to the podcast and then watch the video to see if I pictured what the litigants actually look like.” That's a good point!

Jesse Thorn: Ooooh!

John Hodgman: You know, like when you read a novel or whatever, do you cast the book?

Jesse Thorn: Oh, like with celebs?

John Hodgman: Like, do you picture— Or people you know. Or like, how do you picture...?

Jesse Thorn: I don't think I have a vivid internal visual sense. I think I'm low on that scale.

John Hodgman: Hm. Well, if you if you listen to the podcast and you're picturing what the litigants look like, I gotta say you're probably wrong. Why don't you find out what they really look like by going to the YouTube, [@JudgeJohnHodgmanPod](#)? And while you're there—

Jesse Thorn: (*Interrupting.*) And hey, John, I would add to that: if you don't already know what we look like, make sure and look at it and comment that you're disappointed.

John Hodgman: Yeah, exactly. Exactly. Why don't you come over to YouTube and say, “Why couldn't they have gotten John Hodgman an apple box or something to sit on? He looks so small next to Jesse Thorn.” I do. I'm very short compared to you.

Jesse Thorn: I think that's the effect of the lenses or something.

John Hodgman: No, I think it's just I need something to sit—I need a booster seat.

Jesse Thorn: We gotta get Johnny a booster.

John Hodgman: [@JudgeJohnHodgmanPod](#) on YouTube! You leave a comment there; you might be the commenter of the week. But more important, please share the YouTube with anybody you think might enjoy it. And please, please, please subscribe! All those things really do help people find the podcast.

Jesse Thorn: Our thanks to the folks at Utah Podcast Studio in West Jordan, Utah. Megan Rosati runs our social media. The podcast, edited by AJ McKeon. Our video editor, Daniel Speer. Our producer is Jennifer Marmor. The show, of course, created by Jesse Thorn and John Hodgman.

John Hodgman: Oh, that's us!

Jesse Thorn: Yeah. Swift Justice! You ready, John?

John Hodgman: I'm ready.

Jesse Thorn: Charlotte asks, “Are food crumbs considered dirt? My wife, Miranda, says food mess is not dirt, because dirt only comes from the outdoors. I think crumbs are dirt. Who's right?”

John Hodgman: Uuuh, crumbs make things dirty, but themselves are not crumbs. And here's how I know the difference—

Jesse Thorn: *(Correcting him.)* Are not dirt.

John Hodgman: Yeah, they're not—excuse me. Crumbs are not dirt. Thank you, Jesse. And here's how I know the difference.

Jesse Thorn: How do you know the difference?

John Hodgman: Well, one thing that's unpleasant—right?—is crumbs in bed.

Jesse Thorn: Yes.

John Hodgman: Like, if you or your partner eats a snack in bed, you get crumbs. That's not—

Jesse Thorn: That's crummy!

John Hodgman: That's literally crummy. Right? But I know the difference between crumbs in bed and dirt, because we have a geriatric cat that tracks cat litter into our bed every day.

(Jesse snorts a quiet laugh.)

That's called dirt. This is real dirt, not crumbs. Crumbs, I might eat! Cat litter, I might not.

Jesse Thorn: It was raining in Los Angeles the other day. And my dog, Junior, just left like a science museum level of clarity dog pawprint path across my white bed spread. *(Laughs.)*

John Hodgman: Yeah. Exactly. That's dirt. Crumbs are crumbs.

Well, you know, it says here that it's Aries season.

Jesse Thorn: That's the ram!

John Hodgman: That's the ram, the season of the ram! I think Jennifer Marmor is into the Zodiac. I think she is! I think she's into the Zodiac.

Jesse Thorn: She gave an “I don't know...”

John Hodgman: I'm just looking for topics. The topic is: it's Aries season.

Jesse Thorn: We can't see inside your hearts and find the darkness directly, listener. We need your help.

John Hodgman: “Do you have any disputes about rams?” it says here. Which is—that would be cool. I mean, I know that we got a lot of listeners who probably keep sheeps and rams and goats and so forth.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah! Bah, ram, ewe, etcetera.

John Hodgman: Right, exactly. And you know... And of course, I know that there is a—

Jesse Thorn: I'm suggesting here that Babe listens to our program, (*laughing*) Babe the pig.

John Hodgman: Oh, Babe the pig. Right. My friend Ari in Maine, I know her mom, Pokey, listens to the podcast. So, maybe Ari—I don't know if Ari can listen to it, because she's too busy, uh—what do you call it? Herding sheep on islands.

Jesse Thorn: Wow. But Pokey listens.

John Hodgman: She has a flocks of sheep that she keeps on islands.

Jesse Thorn: Do we got an update on whether Gumby listens?

John Hodgman: She has a sheep dog named Storm!

Jesse Thorn: I love it.

John Hodgman: Maybe there's some disputes there. Anyway, other Aries-themed disputes? Mars, the planet. Type of candy bar.

Jesse Thorn: Sure.

John Hodgman: Aries is a fire sign. This is a good topic, Jennifer Marmor! I like it. What about fire disputes? Maybe you like lighting candles, but your roommate prefers candle warmers instead. I don't know what a candle warmer is.

Jesse Thorn: I don't know what a candle warmer is either!

John Hodgman: This is the kind of Aries-themed disputes we're looking for! Why don't you send them in to MaximumFun.org/jjho. Or as noted, my email is Hodgman@MaximumFun.org. Anything to do with Aries or anything to do with anything at all!

Jesse Thorn: MaximumFun.org/jjho. Big or small, we judge them all. Good night, and good luck! We'll talk to you next time on the *Judge John Hodgman* podcast.

(John laughs.)

Transition: Three gavel bangs.

Transition: Cheerful ukulele chord.

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