

[Transcript] No Such Thing As A Fish / 479: No Such Thing As Fake Coal

Hey everybody, Dan and Andy here. Just wanted to let you know our special guest on this week's fish is none other than old friend of the podcast, your friend of mine, Alex Bell.

That's right, Alex has returned. I mean he hasn't been on for ages but he has been there in the background the whole time. Anytime you hear a song or a noise. Shadowy the spider master. But now he's back, he's funnier than ever, we can't wait for you to hear it. He's brilliant. It's gonna be great. So now I guess with no further ado, let's get on with the only podcast any of us has ever made or will ever make. Right Dan?

Ah, actually I've got a bit of news. What? Yeah, I don't want this to be a shock but I've actually launched a new podcast. Alright, what's it called? It's called We Can Be Weirdos. Oh, I see. And I guess it's just about solid facts though, right? It's about stuff with a strong evidential base. Well, let's ignore that question quickly and focus on what the show is about. So it's a weekly show where I sit down with someone remarkable and I try and find out all the weird stuff that they believe in and all the weird stuff they do in their life.

So it features everyone from British Museum curators like Irving Finkel who told me stuff about how he sits on buses and stares at the back of people's head trying to make them turn around. It's got a Betsy Cameron who used to be a part of the Children of God cult but who escaped and wrote a fascinating memoir about it. There's Steve Feltham who is the Guinness World Record for the longest continuous search for the Loch Ness Monster. Dan Aykroyd is coming on. There's so many amazing guests and it's a weekly show where I ask them to tell me about every single weird belief that they have. That's right. And guys, the rest of us know how hard Dan's been working on this. It sounds absolutely great. It's called We Can Be Weirdos. Give it a go wherever you get your podcast now and we should say it's all based on Dan's book, The Theory of Everything Else which is out now in the UK in paperback and it's out in North America on the 27th of June Louis Theroux himself has called it totally compelling and utterly bizarre.

That's right. So it would mean the world to me if you all fish listeners would subscribe to it, follow it, give it a listen and also pick up a copy in my book and okay, okay, okay, back to the actual good podcast. Here we go. On with the show. On with the podcast.

Hello and welcome to another episode of No Such Thing as a Fish, a weekly podcast coming to you from the QI offices in Hoburn. My name is Dan Schreiber. I am sitting here with Andrew Hunter Murray, James Harkin and Alex Bell. And once again, we have gathered around the microphones with our four favorite facts from the last seven days and in a particular order here we go. Starting with fact number one and that is Alex. My fact this week is that when the founder of the budget supermarket chain, Aldi, was kidnapped in the 1970s, he successfully negotiated a discount off his own ransom. Brilliant. Did he claim that he was going off and that result? He had a yellow sticker on him. Oh, he's such a good idea. So this guy is called Theo Albrecht. He founded Aldi with his brother, Carl. And they've got quite an interesting story in how they founded the supermarket. But in the 1970s, when he was one of the richest people in the world, he was kidnapped at gunpoint by a convicted burglar called Paul Cron. Diamond Paul. Yeah. And his crooked lawyer, apparently, who had gambling debts called Heinz Joachim Ollenberg. Joachim Diamond Paul.

Home Alone Wet Bandits kind of duo. Yeah. And yeah, they kidnapped him for 17 days and held him in an office. Apparently he's... What, cupboard, wasn't he? Yeah, he was in a cupboard, he was in a cupboard. And apparently his appearance was so non-descript and he sort of wore quite kind of cheap suits because he was as money pinching as his discount

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supermarket reputation suggests. They had to ask him for ID to check. They definitely kidnapped a billionaire. The thing was that he didn't do any interviews, did hear anything like that, right? He was really not very well known at the time. I read a US newspaper article from the week when he got kidnapped and they described him as West Germany's least known millionaire. Yeah. So, you know, no one knew what he looked like. It was just a name. So he was kept for 17 days. He negotiates a cheaper ransom and they agreed to it. A bishop comes and delivers it. The Bishop of Essen, which is the city that they were from. I guess it's where they lived at the time. But I didn't realize that was a bishop's responsibility to do it. He mediated. Yeah. Yeah. I mean, what a call to get as the bishop. You must never get that. No. But then he was, didn't he, isn't he the one who left the money? Yeah. The actual suitcases of cash. Yeah, exactly. And I think Albrecht stayed with him for 24 hours afterwards, stayed with the bishop. Why? Because the police were kept out of it completely because the family didn't want the police involved because they thought he might be in danger. Right. And the kidnappers said they wanted the 24 hour period to get away. And so they said, okay, well, he'll stay with the bishop for 24 hours. And then after that time, we'll let him go and he'll tell the police who he's seen and stuff. Okay. So he gets out the bishop, they get these 24 hours and they do, they catch them as well. And they catch them. Yeah, that's right. And they only get half the money back. And to the dying day of the two guys, they never recovered the missing 3.5 million. And they died within a month of each other. How weird is that? Because they were about 20 years difference in age. That's so romantic. Within a six. Yeah. Oh, yep. Almost 87. The other was 93. But no, so after he gets let out, Theo is goes even more recluse. He goes into total lockdown. No photographs are going to be taken of him evermore. He is, every time he gets into a car, it's an armored car, a different route every single day when he's going into his office. If he's staying somewhere, he goes and he finds the exits immediately. So it's obviously a huge trauma. This experience. But he also, sorry, I know one thing that will make you interested in him, especially Dan, which is that Forbes described the brothers, the Old Brecht brothers, Theo and Carl, who co-founded Aldi, described them as more elusive than the Yeti. I'm pretty sure like the Yeti doesn't have like a business trail, like a paper trail. It's like he's not registered with company's house. Also, that doesn't make me more interesting. If he was a Yeti hunter, that's interesting. Saying the word Yeti in a sentence doesn't immediately mean higher threshold for interesting. I do. Okay. I think my favorite bit of this whole story was that after the whole ordeal, Albrecht went to court to try and claim the money that was paid as the ransom as a tax deductible business expense, which is brilliant. I don't think he was successful, but like that's so cool. I think you can still do that certainly in some places. If you have a good accountant, because I think it's in America, it's been done in America for sure. Yeah. Um, famously Getty. I guess it's a business expense, isn't it? Or is it? If the person who is abducted is the CEO of the company, then it's to do with the company. I think that's the argument. His brother Carl stumped up a lot of money for that as well, the ransom. He was part of it. Um, but yeah, I love how much the Albrecht brothers were really sort of stingy with their cash. They're brilliant. I think Theo was the one who, uh, they used to approve all the designs for all the shops. Um, and, um, there was one where he was given the plans and he said the plans are fine, but the paper you printed on is too thick printed on a cheaper paper. Yeah. He used to, he used to famously use pencils right down to the end. Like when you see people with the pencil meets the

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rubber, he would be using pencils like that. And if he walked into the office of the Audi officers and he saw that the lights were on, but he could see that you could see in a room without the lights, he'd go around turning off all the lights. It's so screwed. Yeah. I did read one article that said, um, he and his brother were the first people to ever turn off the lights in the room because they were worried that they were wasting electricity. What a thing to invent. That's great. I thought I was thinking like a timing. Yeah, exactly. He invented being a dad. The timing almost works. That's really funny. I think the, the story is very interesting because they founded it together, didn't they? They found it all together. Yeah. Their mother, their mother ran a shop like, I mean, like they took over the shop as part of their journey, but she was the one who really started there. I think she does a little bit of credit. You're right. That's a good point. And then actually they were dragged into helping their mum because their father, he's been a coal miner and he got emphysema. So he couldn't really work. So they had to support the family. But anyway, they fell out over whether or not they should sell cigarettes in their shops. And I think Theo said we should and Karl said we shouldn't. And I think it was for shoplifting reasons. Yeah. They didn't care about the health reasons. It was its dinginess as well. Despite their father having emphysema, it was more about the deal. Is that so interesting? Okay. And then they had this thing, the Aldi Equator. Where they divided Germany top to bottom and north was Theo's territory. Not with any kind of wall, we should say. So many people died crossing the Aldi Equator. Very sad. People were desperately trying to get to those. Because they did. So this was 1961 and they had about 300 Aldi's all over the country. And that's what got split up between them. And if you look at the logos, they are different colours across the Aldi Equator. And so they are definitely two different operations that are going on. Ironically, if you were kidnapped in Germany, you could use that to work out which half of the country you were in. Yes. What a brilliant idea. They're still different companies now, aren't they? Aldi Nord and Aldi Sud. Yeah, that's right. And I think, which ones do we have? We have Aldi Nord. No, we have Aldi Sud. And in America, they have them both, but one of them is called Trader Joe's. Wow. You have that sort of Trader Joe's, I never heard of it. And Aldi itself is the name Aldi that we said it's a poor mancher of Albrecht discount. Discount. I was trying to remember what the German version was. His brother came up with that, didn't they? Distingy cunt. The two businesses are called Discount and Dackerel. I imagine like big billboards with them kind of like over the border. I'm with this cunt. I think they liked each other. I think they got on perfectly well. They just disagreed over this. I think the split was amicable. Yeah. I've never read it to Aldi before. I've been to Aldi many times. God damn it. I love it so much. I don't want to treat this as an advert. What an operation. Well, okay. So for example, they don't stock as many items as a regular supermarket will and they've never compromised on that. It's grown ever so slightly, but an average supermarket might have something like 200,000 different items, whereas they might have 2,000 items. It has grown since the earlier days when it came to Britain. But one of the things was everyone who was working there was required to memorize the price of every single item in the shop. So every 2,000 item, which meant that there was a thing that's known as Aldi Panic, which is when you get to the checkout, the panic is, I can't pack my bags as quickly as they're

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running the stuff through the till. So you get a bit worried. That's really common now because they're so fast at scanning. Well, here's the thing. The reason they're so fast at scanning these days because this is another Aldi innovation is if you buy a product from any supermarket, you got a barcode. You get there. The person's looking around for the barcode. If you look on Aldi products, specifically Aldi, they print the barcode all over it. So no matter where you turn the product, it scans exactly and it's right through. Yeah, because they also open, I think in the 50s, the first self-service grocery store in Germany. But in those days, self-service meant you go in and get stuff off the shelves and bring it to the checkout as opposed to giving your list to a clerk who were going to get it for you. So that must have been a huge efficiency. And they brought in shopping trolleys. And I think they were the first company to bring in the shopping trolleys where you had to put a coin in. That's what they say. I read an article with the communications director Aldi and he said, we're always amazed by the pay it forward spirit that happens in our parking lots. And apparently they reckon that in Germany at least, people will pay for the next person's trolley. And I just, I've never seen that happen in my entire life in the UK. I go around checking to see if anyone's left acquitted. I could lose an hour or two sometimes. I literally only have one quid that I keep in my car for that thing. Because I don't really use cash these days. Do you keep it on a string? Because you're sounding a bit like Theodore Albrecht. They got big in Germany because they started looking at the models of what was happening in America with grocery stores. And so there was a Memphis grocer that was called Pigley Wiggly. So it was Pigley Wiggly, Hogley Wogley, and Handy Andy was the last one. These were all of the things going on in America at the time. So Pigley Wiggly was famously the first place that would let you take things off the shelves and put them in your trolley and then pay for them afterwards. And I'm not sure if we said it here, we might not have done, but basically people didn't want to do it because they felt like they were shoplifting. Well, I feel like that with the new Amazon Fresh Stools, when you walk in and you scan. Yeah, but you go and wear a motorbike helmet, don't you? You don't scan anything and you're shouting and holding a baseball bat. I actually was going to kidnap Jeff Bezos, but he just walked into my house, into my cupboard. Two weeks later, they put loads of money in my car, it was perfect. So when you go to Audi, there's always, and I didn't realize this was a big thing, but in the middle of Audi, there's always this weird aisle where it's just random stuff. Oh, it's like the room of requirement. It's sort of like every time it's different. It's huge. It's so bizarre. So at the middle aisle, and it's sort of famous amongst online people, there's Twitter accounts where what random thing have you found in the middle aisle? It's huge. Yeah, it's massive. Yeah, so everything from motion-activated toilet bowl nightlights, you know, just randomly to traffic cones. It feels like it fell off the back of the lorry kind of vibe. Yeah, yeah. But which definitely is not the case. Sorry, they definitely did do that, obviously. No, because I remember, like, you would always get like a flyer through the post, and it would tell you what was going to be in the middle aisle in the next month or so. Oh, really? And you would know that there was going to be a canoe there, and you'd be like, oh, shit, we got to get there on the second Tuesday. Well, they only have a certain amount, and so if it was something really cool, everyone in the town would want to get there as quickly as possible. And they never restock ever. So it's just that. It's like a one-flash sale. It gets called the Isle of Shite. That's very good. Yeah, that's very good. One other thing on German

kidnapping. Oh, yeah. I think German. Do you know about the Pied Piper of Hamelin? Yes. Famously kidnapped all the children of Hamelin. I never thought of it that way. I thought he'd got rid of the rats. And the parents didn't pay him? Yeah. So then he did the same thing. He played his pipe and led them. He basically hypnotised children to come with him. There's a question of consent, really. Yeah, it does sound like there is. There's no question. There was no consent. Like, basically, he took all the children out of the town because they didn't pay his bills. So he was fictional? Well, there was an entry in Hamelin town records dating to 1384 that says that it is 100 years since our children left. And that fits in with the date of when people said this happened, which was in 1284. And it supposedly happened on the 26th of June, the day of St John and St Paul. And 130 children in Hamelin disappeared. And that's what the story is based on. Was there a day of St George and St Ringo as well? But we now have theories as to what the Pied Piper was. So we think that possibly the Pied Piper story is a fictional account of something that actually happened. And the children did go missing and did get taken by someone. Can you guess what the actual job of the real life Pied Piper probably was? Okay. Is this guessable from the school bus driver? School bus driver? That's really good. I mean, the dates don't quite work for school buses. 1284. I've got it. I've got it. It's called cart drivers. Swine hood. Dresses the children up as pigs. Really? No, that's not what he really says. How was he one of the Wiggles then? Aldi trolley manager. Learned them in with free trolleys. Well, according to most theories at the moment, he could have been a recruitment consultant. Pied Piper. I followed that in the street. I find it so beguiling. These children were now working like Deloitte. There was an economic depression around that time and a lot of the youth of various towns were taken out of German sort of villages and taken to the bigger areas of Western Europe. And they had locators or recruiters that would go around these towns and try and bring the youth out there to work in different places. And so there's one possibility that the Pied Piper story is based on a recruitment consultant. Wow. They all got sort of free mugs. It is time for fact number two and that is Andy. My fact is that the world's largest collection of model trains doesn't fit on standard model train tracks. I'm really pleased you added the word standard in there because it's a big discussion. We had a big email chat about this. No, but I just got to say Alex has got in front of him actual like this is the weirdest bit of research I've seen. I'm not going to go into it. I'm going to say the basic fact and then we'll have the argument. Yeah. This by the way, thank you to Neil Gibson who sent in this fact who didn't realize the chaos he was unleashing in our previously happy team. This is something that's from the National Rail Museum in York. They have a collection of 610 model railway vehicles all made by the same man who was called James Peele Richards 1902 to 99. And he was incredibly devoted to detail and accuracy. And he thought he could get his models more accurate if you made them to a 33 millimeter gauge. So the gauge is the distance between the two train tracks and the normal gauge for model trains is 32 millimeters. And they're not compatible with the vast majority of model railway lines. And even the National Rail Museum don't have a layout where they can put these trains on a train track. Yeah. I just think it's a very sweet fact, I think. Can I, I don't want to make this fact even more contentious, but I have a feeling it was 612, not 610. What did you guys read? Could you maybe forgive me for a fractional rounding?

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The idea is a lot of these model trains, you take anything that's one foot long and you make it seven millimeters long. And you do the same for everything else in all the trains, right? Now, if you do that, then you get your gauge to be exactly 33 millimeters to a 0.01 of a millimeter. So it's pretty much 33 millimeters. But historically, they've always had 32 millimeter gauges. And so all the other trains that you would have are slightly not exact. So that's like the Hornby standard, for example. The Hornby standard, yeah. Like nearly all the track you'll find is that width. A lot of them is called the O gauge. But basically he decided, well, I want mine to be exactly right. So I'm going to get this one millimeter difference, even though I won't be able to go on hardly any tracks, I'm going to make it because I want it to be perfect. Yeah, he's a hero. Did he make his own tracks? He must have, right? I think, I think as I went there and I had an amazing two days, I stayed over night. Was there a sleeper train in the... Alex Kramick, one finger into the sleeper train. No, because they have actual other stuff. They don't just have a model. They have actual trains there and all sorts of that. No, it's amazing. And I remember seeing them, they've got this fantastic, I think it's called an open archive where they've got all this stuff that they can't, they don't really have room to sort of display in proper museum, just like thrown on the shelves and sort of displays. You can see it. And I remember also seeing they've got scale models of Queen Victoria's Royal train, which is all sort of entirely plush inside with a velvet upholstered toilet and things like that. In miniature? Yeah, yeah, this is all miniature. When they were designing and building the train, the actual full on steam trains, they used to make scale models of the steam trains that are about, I'd say, like a foot wide and several feet long, that were full on working models to check that they worked and they walk on the right side. So they have these really stonking great models of like working steam trains. They've also got, you've mentioned it before on the podcast, there's a massive train set that was used to train the signal operators. So was his train set, but the fun of the train set was like all about the signals and not the trains. So can I ask, Alex, did you see the entire collection of J.P. Richards' trains when you were there? I don't know because there's loads on the wall. I remember them, they're all stacked up on the wall. You've seen them because they're all there. But I don't know if I saw 610. What's really interesting is that J.P. Richards never saw the entire collection himself. We think, and that's because he always kept them in his home when most of them were in boxes. So they were never all out at the same time. And when he donated them to the museum, he was really, really sick. It was just before he died. He was too ill to travel. So when it was on display, he never got to see it. So he actually never saw his entire collection on display. I'm really sad about that. Because what a hero. What a great guy. I love it. The collection is still growing, but actually I should quickly say thank you to my friend Chris Valcoinen, who is the associate archivist at the National Rail Museum, who sent me loads of stuff for this. Absolutely brilliant. But yeah, the collection is still growing because a lot of his wagons weren't quite finished when he got there. So he left them to other people to finish them. Because he wanted the entirety of the train system of the London and Northwestern trains from between 1902 and 1944. So he wanted everything. They weren't all exactly done at that time. So some people are still doing them now. They're still kind of making them better and better. It is the most impressive thing when you see the detail that someone goes into to recreating an area because you make it's not these aren't things you buy from the shop.

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You create the buildings and you create and this is like when you're making a whole landscape. So the tracks, the trees, the buildings around it. I've only ever played with two model train sets before. Oh yeah. And they belonged to Eddie Izzard. So clang. Trust you to have a celebrity train set anecdote. This is not, it's not what it sounds like. So every time I go to Bexhill on Sea, which is my family goes there a lot, I always take my boys to the Bexhill Museum and inside is Eddie Izzard's childhood model train set that her father had built when Eddie's brother was born, started building it then and then Eddie's mother got a bit ill and and eventually she passed away and part of the project of keeping themselves busy from the sort of, you know, the horrible depression of it all was to continue building this train set. So you can go and press buttons and it sends two trains around and it's where Eddie's dad worked. You can see the train he used to get into London and it shows all the buildings around and they've commissioned all of Bexhill on Sea as a train set as well. Eddie's kind of put money into that and you press buttons and it goes around, it snows. I love that. It's incredible. Did you guys read about Simon George? Simon George is a Model Railway fan, currently, currently modeling and making huge sets. So in 2021 he had just made

a Model Railway which was really big, it was 61 meters and it was a model of a specific line from where he'd grown up in the 80s. It was the Calder Valley, lots of coal-fired trains and it's one of Britain's biggest, if not the biggest, model train set. Really impressive. He spent eight years working on it and he met someone, he met his girlfriend while he was making it.

Wow. Yeah, it's amazing. This is the thing. Okay, fun. So he was interviewed about it and he said when I first met her she didn't know I was building this and what had happened was it wasn't in his home this train set he was building. He'd leased a mill because it had this enormous basement.

Okay, she knew I leased a mill with a huge basement, Simon said, but I kind of led her to believe I was a wine merchant because that sounded cooler than building a model railway.

I'm just imagining the discussion that he had when he said,

now we've been getting on very well. I think there could be something here. I need to tell you that the basement in the mill, I'm not letting you go in. It's not a wine collection. What must she have thought? She turned up unannounced at his work one day. She wanted to surprise him

and she turned up to his wine merchant. What did he do? Don't come in. I'm wanking.

There are loads of bodies down here. This is where I keep a family locked up. Come on.

He said she wondered where all the wine was, but actually she really appreciated the detail and the artistic element. Very, very cool. Herman Göring, the Nazi. Who's Herman Göring,

not the Nazi. Is there any others out there? He was an enthusiastic modeler. Yeah, Nazis love trains. They love models, obviously, you know that famous Big Third Reich one.

Again, Alex, you spent two days in the National Royal Museum.

There's nothing to do with the train. No, no, sorry. That's a totally, totally off topic, but the Hitler commissioned a huge model of what the center of Berlin was going to look like, and it's a really horrible, scary model that still exists. You can go see it there.

And it's really bizarre and interesting, but I think that whole element of control from afar, you know, you're saying Göring did the trains. He had two train sets, just like Eddie is odd. Wait, you said you've seen two train sets in your life.

No, played with it twice. Both of them were Eddie's.

Herman Göring had one train set in his attic and one in his basement.

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Oh, yeah. Okay. And there are pictures of it, and they're really, it's pretty extensive, is that he lived, he lives in a big old Nazi house and had a huge attic and a massive basement. And there's a rumor that you can sort of maybe see evidence for in the pictures that there was, there were wires that went over the one in the attic that planes went across and you could drop little bombs out of the planes.

Okay, right. Which is good fun. Wow. They originated in Germany, didn't they? Model railways, basically. There was a company called Marklin and they'd be making toys and stuff, but they mostly made dolls houses. The idea is you make a doll's house and you sell them the house and then they have to buy the dolls to go inside and they have to buy the cookers and they have to buy the chairs and they have to buy all the bits and pieces and they wanted something that boys would like. How are the dolls going to get to work? Yeah.

And they just thought, well, by doing the railways, then we can sell the railway tracks, but then we can sell the stock and we can sell them little bushes that go, I don't know, I've never played there. There's another German connection, which is maybe the earliest ever model train belonged to the poet Goethe. Did it? Clang yourself, mate.

This is from 1829. It's six years before Germany had even a railway, a steam railway of its own. Some English well-wishers gave him a tiny, tiny model of Stevenson's rocket, the earliest steam railway engine. I think the earliest steam railway engine. And it came with a set of wagons and rails and Goethe put it on his desk. I think he might have given it to his grandchildren at the time, because he was an old man by that point. Yeah, cool. Wow. Do you want to hear it incredibly? Well, so, okay, here's a fact about model railways. I'm just going to tell you what.

Okay. That's what we're all here for. Okay. What a change of topic.

I know what's about to happen. So you know how you use different things to represent, so you might use a coffee stirrer as a piece of fencing. Like things from our world. You could use a marble as a boulder, for instance. You paint it or whatever. Yeah, exactly. Okay, so do you know what they use to make coal? Okay, so it's got to be something that looks like coal, but is much smaller. But maybe it's not the same color, but you could paint it black, right? Is it not just small bits of coal? They use coal.

They hit it with a hammer and grinded it up small. What?

Well, it's definitely a fact. It's just by any chance the fact that you messaged us saying, I just told my wife a fact, and she said that's the dullest thing you've ever said in your life. That's the fact. She just said, stop talking.

I found it so interesting and it's so boring. She took off her eye with this condition. Amazing, Andy. Great fact. Great fact. Thank you. You know, the really tragic thing. We last talked about model railways four years ago. I looked through my notes for that show. It was a nerd. So probably the most famous model railways in the world have to be the ones that we see in Thomas the Tank Engine. Thomas the Tank Engine.

I mean, that's globally the biggest, most famous. And just a cool connection. So there is famously the Fat Controller, who's now been renamed Sir Topham Hatt. He was always cool. But they kind of phased out the Fat Controller. He's in the cartoons. He's back to Sir Topham Hatt. And we know someone who was the real life Sir Topham Hatt. What do you mean that's in the voice? No, so they used to have offices for Thomas the Tank Engine when children wrote in, they had an official Sir Topham Hatt who would write letters back to the children. And we know that person. They've been on fish. They've been on fish.

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Is it Craig Glenday? Yes, Craig Glenday, Editor-in-Chief for the Guinness World Records. Okay, that's bizarre. When I was tiny, I wrote to Sir Topham Hatt and I got a letter back. Did you? It's just small coal. You're a really annoying child.

Okay, it is time for fact number three, and that is James. Okay, my fact this week is that in 1760, a book was publicly burned in Switzerland because it claimed that William Tell did not exist. It's a game. Yeah. Because I sort of think he did. I sort of think he did.

Is it like the Pied Piper and he was just like a management consultant? He's less historical than the Pied Piper, I would say. He was part of the foundation myth of the country of Switzerland, basically. Yeah, he's kind of Robin Hood-esque, right? Yeah, he is.

Dr. Power. You're spot on. Shot an apple off his son's head.

That's the only thing I know. Shot an apple off his son's head. I didn't know any of the context. I just knew. I never questioned it either. It was quite contrived. For some reason, he ended up in a situation where they were like, shoot it or we'll kill you and your son. And then he did it. And then they were like, well, how come you've got two arrows then? And he was like, well, if I accidentally killed my son, I was going to shoot you.

It's quite cool, wasn't it? Because the reason this whole thing started was he was going through this town, which was called Altdorf. And there's a guy there who was a bailiff called Gessler. And Gessler had this thing where he put a hat on a pole and it was in the center of the town. And if you walked past the pole and you had a hat on, you had to sort of take your hat off and be like, hello, pole. I think we should say the pole represented the immensely powerful Hatzberg empire. It's still weird. It's still weird. So he goes past, doesn't take his hat off. I guess Gessler, who's just happens to be monitoring every passing by sees that says, hey, take your hat off. He says no. And then that's where this thing happens where he says, you need to now shoot your son or rather shoot the apple. He says, you got to put your son, you got to put an apple on his head and you got to shoot through it. And if you get it, then you guys can go free. If you miss, then I'm going to kill you as well. So it was a kind of big challenge. Perfectly fair challenge punishment that fits the crime. It doesn't make any sense. It makes sense for someone who's put a hat on a pole and made it to the apple to it.

Could he choose the apple though? Could he choose a very large apple, like a pink lady? Like the one I saw in mebuyanycar.com that time. Honestly, I could have hit that for 200 yards. I know you've stopped listening, Alex, but James has an anecdote about this very, very big apple he once saw. It's actually, it's really weird to get bored on a podcast that you're on, not even listening to. But if it had been that apple, yeah, you're right.

Be easy. Anyway, look, like Dan said, and Alex said, this is the story. And then because he did the apple thing, they said, okay, fine, Switzerland can exist. And he became like the foundation myth of this country. So everyone believed it and thought that he was a real character. And then there was a historian called Egidius Chudi. And he found out that actually the earliest writing of it was 250 years after the events. And then they found the original oath of Rutli, which was for the foundation of Switzerland, for the early cantons all getting together. And it named the three representatives and none of them was called Tell, none of them was called William Tell. And so, and actually they got the date wrong as well in the original sort of the original story. And so this guy called De Halle wrote a book called William Tell a Danish fable. And everyone in Switzerland thought this was outrageous that he could put this in writing. And the book was publicly burned in Altdorf. Was he a Swiss author?

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He was Swiss. Yeah.

Because I sort of vaguely thought of William Tell as a bit Robin Hoodish as in someone who might have existed, but not really. I didn't really think, oh, that's that doesn't seem like a very significant thing to me. But I read a piece about this from the Atlantic, but it's from 1890. And it's just this line, to understand the commotion produced in Switzerland by cops expose, we must try to imagine what would be the result in the United States if George Washington was suddenly declared to be a legendary character. Yeah, it's a huge, huge moment to find out. And then what happened was everyone was like, De Halle, what are you doing? This is ridiculous. And so he said, oh, no, no, no, this was a literary exercise. I was just, it was just an essay I was writing to see if I could, it was like, you know, it's like coming up with two reasons, whether we should leave the EU or not leave the EU. And this was the one I decided to go with. It wasn't supposed to be taken seriously. This is the first like, dude, it's a social experiment. It sounds like he was petrified. Like it sounds like had he not renounced that it could have been like a Salman Rushdie kind of situation where he might have gone into a, you know, hiding in a cupboard kind of thing. They were absolutely furious. But then obviously he'd opened the flood gates and suddenly all the skeptics came in, like skeptics do and said, well, actually, there was no organized uprising after all. And there's no evidence that anyone called William Tell had lived let alone shot and I pull off anyone's head. And they concluded that he was probably a fictional character, possibly based on a little bit of, you know, real life stuff. And then someone found this old story from the Danish sagas, which is basically the entire story. And that was written, you know, hundreds and hundreds of years before William Tell was supposed to have even existed. And so it seems like they've taken an old story from the sagas and they've kind of appropriated it. It was, um, it was a story of Harold Bluetooth. Yeah, definitely the name sake of it. Danish King of the 10th century. Yeah. Yeah. And it is like, I looked at it and it's identical. It is the same story. Yeah. And there was a play Schiller Schiller's play. Yeah. And then the play became an opera by Rossini. And it's just, it's such an international thing. So it's an opera about a Swiss hero by an Italian composer, Rossini, based on a play by a German writer, Schiller, which premiered in Paris. Brilliant. As in it's all of Europe is involved in this. And you know, the, but you know, the famous William Tell Overture. Rossini didn't actually write that for the William Tell opera. He was like running out of time when he was writing the William Tell opera. That's not how it works when you're running out of time, running music, when it speeds up. No, he was running out of time to finish the entire opera and didn't have an Overture ready. So he went and borrowed a preexisting piece from one of his earlier operas, which was called Elizabeth, Queen of England. So that was written almost 15 years beforehand. How interesting because everything I can think of about Elizabeth, the Queen of England, none of the events in her life fit in with that music. No, it doesn't really work, does it? Like you can't imagine some Walter Raleigh laying down his cloak and going, No, the opera was only performed in full three times because it was five hours long. Five hours. Is that average time for an opera? No, really? That's very long. Definitely more than a few hours is fine, but five hours is pretty long. Even three years. I've never been to one. I just always know that. Especially given that some of the music was so fast, like you would have thought the music would be slower if he was going to write it now. There's a Herman Göring link. I can't believe there's another Herman Göring podcast.

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Which Herman Göring, by the way? The Nazi one. Sorry, good. Just got to clarify. The Nazi regime made a movie of William Tell and they treated the Tell story as a kind of Nazi myth because at that point, I think it was before the war, they claimed they were liberating ethnic Germans living in other countries who had been oppressed by those countries and Herman Göring's mistress was cast in a leading role. That was based on Schiller's play, wasn't it? Yeah. But then Hitler banned it later on because there was an assassination attempt on him by a guy called Maurice Bavo, who was known as the new William Tell. Yeah. And he thought, well, I better get rid of all other William Tells. People's Swiss as well. Yeah. Yeah. I've been in Switzerland for Swiss Independence Day on the 1st of August. Oh, yeah. Which is when they have a lot of sort of fireworks and stuff like that. Yeah. It's relatively low key. Lots of chocolate, probably cheese. Yeah, lots of chocolate. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Where did you go? Like specifically? A few different places. Oh, they sound great. Did you go to Bern? I've been to Bern. I don't think I did get to Bern. I was very young. They got rid of all the books. Oh my God. Brilliant. Brilliant. That was worth it. In the Bern, there's a lot of like bears because a bear is the symbol of the city of Bern. And the Appenzell Canton flag. So the area of Switzerland called Appenzell has a flag, which is a bear with an erection. Crikey. Yeah. So if you look at it, it's only a tiny little red triangle. If you can imagine a bear rampant. Yeah. And then you've got a little red triangle where his penis would be. And there was a time when St. Gallen, this was in 1579. So the Canton of St. Gallen had a printer and he did a calendar of all the Swiss Cantons. And he did the Appenzell Canton flag, but he didn't put the erection in the bear. And this was, it kicked off. It really, really kicked off. They almost went to war because they didn't have the penis on the bear. And then it was only averted when the printer offered abject apologies and St. Gallen agreed to destroy every single copy of the calendar they could find. Wow. Again, lots of rounding things up and destroying them. Yeah. It's a very spicy time. No wonder Switzerland is so determinedly neutral and calm today. They're very, for a very like organized country, they've got a really chaotic origin story. I think they've got it all out of their system. They must have decided, I think at a certain point that we cannot stop rounding up and destroying calendars and things like that. Okay, it's time for our final fact of the show. And that is my fact. My fact this week is that to make sure that no one leaked the answer to who shot JR on the TV show Dallas, the production team had every main character film a scene of them shooting JR, including JR. It's an amazing thing. So this is, we need to explain what Dallas is exactly. So Dallas was a soap opera in America, went on for a very long time in the 1980s. It began and it was a show that kind of really transformed the idea of soap having these dramatic plot twists and also cliffhangers and so on. And it created the greatest cliffhanger probably in TV history, certainly American TV history. And it's about like a, it follows like the escapades of like a wealthy oil tycoons family in Dallas, Texas. Early cheesy succession really. It is. It's about it's William is and the main character is an anti-hero just like Logan Roy. I do think that succession is a very original idea and they definitely didn't rip off Dallas in any way whatsoever, just as an ultimate opinion. I'm not so sure. I think but so yeah, it's at the end of this third series. It's the finale and JR, who is the character played by Larry Hagman is shot. We don't know who's pulled the trigger. And then there's a big break in the season. And in that time, America goes slightly ballistic,

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we're trying to work out the world almost who shot JR was basically the big question that everyone with t-shirts next to the I'm with discount who shot JR politicians were referencing it. Yeah, everyone. And just a spoiler alert, it was Kristen. There we go. What? But the thing is they, the shooting of JR, this, this huge event, maybe the biggest event in fictional TV history was not meant to be the end of the series. They had already filmed an ending of the series and they'd had a load of events. They'd had a deathbed murder confession. They'd had a sectioning. They had all sorts of great written themselves into a corner kind of thing. Yeah. And then they got told, Hey, great news. You got four more episodes. They had to write four more episodes. And then there was a big head scratching thing in the writer's room. And someone said, Why don't we just shoot the bastard? Because apparently a lot of the writers were comedians or funny people at least. Yeah. And this was I read this in an interview with Lorraine Desprez, who was one of the main writers. And yeah, she said that these were really funny guys who were trying to come up with ideas and almost let's shoot JR was one person going, wouldn't it be funny if we did that? Wouldn't it fuck things up if we did that? And then they all went, Oh, actually, that would be good. Well, that's, I mean, a lot of the writers of succession are very funny comic writers. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Lucy Creeble, Preble, sorry. So, you know, it's another link, a little link between the two, I'd say. But you know, I mean, the world went crackers, didn't it? It did. If you were on a plane going from Europe to America at the time, if it was an Air France plane, they said that they would tell anyone over the intercom who'd shot JR. Because if you couldn't watch the show, someone would radio up from the ground, say it was Kristen, and then they were flying at 40,000 feet. And it was Kristen who shot JR. Oh, my God. Isn't that amazing? That is a huge spoiler. There's no way of avoiding a plane Tanoi spoiler. That's true. Although in those days, you couldn't watch things on demand. Like, you could have VHS'd it or maybe. So you actually kind of wanted to ask things more. Actually, even in 1980, I guess you would have had VHS's, but only just. So, you know, you had to watch it live. If you didn't watch it live, you were not going to watch it. Exactly. Well, the Turkish parliament suspended a session so that the legislators wouldn't be able to tune in and wouldn't miss it. There was a really fantastic piece in Texas Monthly, which if anyone's going to cover, who shot JR. Front page, surely. Absolutely. But no, there is an amazing piece, which is all about the madness that happened. So they shot at a real ranch. You know, they shot some scenes at a real ranch. Yeah. It was just shot in interior sets in Hollywood. But the son of the guy who lived at the ranch they shot at was, is called Joe Duncan. And he says that they had people turning up to take chips of the fence, take pieces of rock. You know, they could have taken a chip of the fence and used it as a tiny fence in a model railway. That's like, um, relics. That's mad. He said, listen to this quote. He said, I was once 20 feet away from a guy who jumped to the fence and went out into the pasture to pick up a piece of horse manure to take home as a souvenir. That was the time before eBay. Yeah, as well. His name was Dad Shriver. I read an article from, this was the day before they were about to show the who shot J.R. And this was in the Minneapolis star. And they asked some local celebs who they thought had shot J.R. And like the head of the coach of one of the local sports teams said, I don't know who shot J.R. But there's a lot of agents of players who I'd like to shoot. And then the police chief who's called Anthony Boozer, he said, I'm happy to report that I've

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never seen a single minute of that goddamn program. And they asked the mayor, Don Fraser, is the mayor of Minneapolis. And he said, I haven't the foggiest who shot him. Are you serious? I've only seen one episode of that show and it was quite by accident.

Sounds like a lifelong fan. They asked him, like they asked someone and they got these answers and they felt, well, it might as well print. I knew Dallas for because I'd never really seen it. But I know it as a famous, like a famous example of retconning, where you retroactively change what happened. So they wrote, filmed and shot and broadcast an entire season in which a character, Bobby Ewing, died. But this character was really popular and they decided they wanted to bring him back. So in order to do that, they retconned it by the beginning of the next series, they made the whole previous series of dream sequence, which is hailed as one of the like the cheesiest, most rubbish ways of like retconning. But one of the weird continuity things was that Dallas had a spin-off show called Not's Landing that existed in the same universe. But when they brought back Bobby Ewing and was like, oh, this character never died, in Not's Landing, they had referenced the fact that Bobby had died. So at that point, it's like a universe splintering moment. It's like spider-verse into the multiverse. But they were simultaneously taking into a, like they were like keeping track of the different universes while simultaneously wiping entire series off the face of the Earth. Because you would think it would be easier to say, oh, he didn't die, he faked his own death, or as in unless they showed on camera, the funeral, the like open casket. I think it was like the main part of a lot of the story of that scene. They literally were like, forget that series happened.

It's weird. There was a real life Bobby Ewing who lived in Texas and who owned an oil and cattle company. Oh, really? Yeah. And so when this big sort of who shot JR thing was happening, they really kind of cashed in and you could buy JR Dolls, JR Cologne, JR Playing Cards. And you could also buy fake certificates for Ewing Land Oil and Cattle Company, which was signed by Bobby Ewing, the fake Bobby Ewing. But then the real Bobby Ewing who lived in Texas sued them and said, well, you can't do this. Yeah, yeah. Like it makes it look like you're selling my company. And I found out that it was settled in the end and the real Bobby Ewing wasn't allowed to sell any novelty items. And it didn't say, but I assume he got a massive, you know, payout. He must have done, right? Yeah, it's amazing.

Larry Hagman, he played JR. So obviously there's a big break for the, you know, when they're not shooting. Yeah. He hadn't signed his contract when they started shooting the next series, and he held out for a long time. And he, he knows he's a star now, right? Everyone's talking about him. He wanted a huge pay rise. He dispatched his agents to negotiate wearing white stets and hats with the, the management of the show. And that was his kind of look. Sorry. Yeah, that was his thing. Yeah. But they feel really stupid if I was as Asian as I was told to do that. Well, they were like, you're overreaching with this negotiation and you want us to go and fancy dress. It was worse when Mr. Blobby asked for a pay rise. He wouldn't come in and be like, oh, Mr. Blobby. When they were, when they were trying to shoot the next series, they had to start shooting, but without JR being present and having signed off his contract, you know, without having signed

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his contract. So what they started doing, they shot a couple of different versions. One, they just shot JR from behind. He just shot someone with the same hair, which they, you know, they could just like fill in later. And then they also shot scenes with a guy bandaged up like he did. And they said, if we have to bring in another actor to play JR, we can claim you had to have reconstructive surgery. And now you look like this guy.

That's funny. The problem is JR was shot in the stomach.

No reason. That's great.

Hagman, what an interesting kind of personality he was generally. He used to do a thing for many, many years called Silent Sundays. He just didn't talk on Sundays.

So funny.

Yeah. He, so what happened was is that?

Religious, religious.

No, no, it was part of, he used to be on a different show called I Dream a Genie, brilliant show. And during it, he had vocal problems. And so he went to a doctor and the doctor said, why don't you try not talking for a few days? And he thought not only did it work nicely, but he really enjoyed the experience. So every Sunday, he thought I'm just going to do this and didn't speak for decades.

It's so good.

Yeah.

Yeah. He claimed that for 25 years, he never spoke on a Sunday. I think it's not 100% true. I think he kind of cheated a fair amount, but.

Because it's Sunday's your birthday or?

Yeah.

Tread on some Lego.

Sometimes he would go like four days in a row without talking, wouldn't he? And his family would hate him for it.

And really?

He kicked it because he says that he started realizing he was missing a lot of opportunities because he says in LA, a lot of business is done on the weekends. And so he said he couldn't call his agent. He couldn't talk to them to say, hey, get on the case of doing this.

It's incredibly good negotiating to stay silent. He probably should have done all this business on a Sunday. Just sit there in silence while they just keep upping the offer until like the clock goes over to Monday. And he's like, yeah, great.

That's so funny.

And Nazi, who was a fan of Dallas?

Great.

Was it Rudolf Hess?

No, it was.

Was it Rudolf Hess?

Rudolf has the Nazi.

Did we cover another person? There was another, there was genuinely another Rudolf Hess.

Really?

Oh, he was called Rudolf Hess, the avocado man.

Oh, the avocado guy, yes.

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So unfortunate.

The guy behind the house of avocado was called Rudolf Hess.

This one was the Nazi and presumably train enthusiast.

Was he still alive when?

He watched, he's found out prison. He used to watch it in, he used it Dallas and Dynasty with his two favorite TV shows.

They weren't all bad.

That is retcalling, Alex.

Okay, that's it. That is all of our facts.

Thank you so much for listening.

If you'd like to get in contact with any of us about the things that we've said over the course of this podcast, we can be found on our Twitter accounts.

I am on at Shriverland.

Andy at Andrew Hunter.

James at James Harkin and Alex.

I've quit Twitter.

Are you on Instagram?

No, are you on anything?

Are you on Be Real?

That's good.

That one's still on Bebo.

Are you on Master Done?

No, don't be disgusting.

That sounds horrible.

What is that?

Mafia based porn site.

Yeah, or you can email us at podcast at qi.com or you can go to our website.

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All of our previous episodes are up there.

Do check them out.

We'll be back again next week with another episode.

We will see you then.

Goodbye.