

Hi everyone, welcome to this week's episode of Gnosis Things of Fish, where we are joined by the wonderful Ella Al-Shemahi. You might remember Ella from episode 373 of Gnosis Things of Fish when she last appeared, but if you don't remember that then she is a paleoanthropologist. She's an expert in Neanderthals, she is a National Geographic Explorer, she's just an all-round badass. Ella has written a book called *The Handshake, A Gripping History*, which we talked about last time she was on, but she's also been on loads of TV shows, loads of documentaries, and the last one I think was called *Our Changing Planet*, all about the world's most threatened ecosystems, and you can actually still watch that if you go to BBC iPlayer or PBS Video app. Anyway, really hope you enjoyed this week's show, don't forget Club Fish exists, a place where you can get loads of extra content and ad free episodes, don't forget there are still one or two tickets I think possibly left for our live shows coming up in the Soho Theatre in London, and you can get those by going to GnosisThingsafish.com forward slash soho. Anyway, that's enough of that, really hope you enjoyed this week's show with Ella, and it's 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 Highbury. My name is Dan Schreiber, I am sitting here with Andrew Hunter Murray, James Harkin, and Ella Al-Shemahi, and once again we have gathered around the microphones with our four favourite facts from the last seven days, and in no particular order, here we go, starting with fact number one, and that is Ella.

American beer was so bad in the early 1900s that the US government sent Alexander Graham Bell's son-in-law on a secret mission to Bavaria to steal German hops.

Wow, so much to unpick.

Yeah, OK, so Alexander Graham Bell's son-in-law, was that an important part of it?

Was that what the American government was looking for?

Was that the brief?

The really sad thing is, David Fairchild is like a hugely celebrated botanist and is described as the food explorer, and yet for our purposes, he's just Alexander Graham Bell's son-in-law, because to be fair, if he was your father-in-law, that's the end of your identity, right?

But was it maybe this was at the point when there was only two telephones in the country, and so the government would just call him up and say, you got anyone we could use?

Yeah.

So you think when he invented two telephones, Alexander Graham Bell, he gave one to the government, they can't want himself.

Yeah.

No one else needs one, it's fine.

And it became like the bat phone, was any time they were needed for anything?

The bell phone.

Yeah, the bell phone.

I'm loving the facts today, guys.

So yeah, what's this guy, Fairchild?

So, all right, so David Fairchild, so he's a food explorer, and I think he's absolutely fascinating, because explorers usually go around the planet, let's be honest, discovering stuff, but also pillaging a lot, and what have you, and like stealing artifacts and

whatever takes your fancy.

But this guy did it with plants, with botany, which is, in my mind, is just like the loveliest thing to go around the planet stealing, because all he's doing is, he's basically turned around at the beginning of the 1900s going, and the end of the 1800s going, America is a country clearly on the rise, but our agriculture is bad, our food is bad, but industries as related to, you know, as they relate to plants are just bad.

So I'm going to go off to 50-odd countries, and just collect samples, send seeds back, send saplings back, that kind of thing.

And because it's plants, I just can't get mad at him, because I'm just like, you were just helping to feed your people and build industry.

Could we get him cancelled because he was like stealing from the farms in the country?

Are you trying to get him cancelled?

I'm doing my best.

I do this on this podcast, you know what we have on it.

Don't ever mention anyone you like on this show, James, or find a way to destroy it.

Do not do this to me, because I actually, I've decided that he is, he's like the one explorer that I really have nothing bad to say about.

I'm like, oh, fair enough, you're trying to feed your people.

I think he did give the Americans broccoli and kale, so.

Oh yeah, yeah.

I love those two things.

It's interesting how limited American food was.

I didn't really appreciate that before the 1890s, when he really got crack.

They had occasional introductions like in the World's Fair in 1876, which was effectively America's 100th birthday, they got the banana.

That was good.

That was a big advance.

Also, can we just take a second to talk about world fairs?

Aren't they just the best thing ever?

Just this world where you were like, oh, let's just do a world fair.

And it actually was like everyone was like, oh crap, that's actually, that's new.

What is that?

It's yellow and it's bendy.

That's amazing.

Well, I went to one in Dubai this year.

Oh, yes.

Okay, so this year.

Oh yeah, they did that.

I don't know.

Well, they did one during COVID, and obviously no one could go.

And then when I went, everything was closed.

So you couldn't even get an Uber.

Everyone had gone home.

Oh, right.

Because that's what it is.

They build them these sort of huge things, don't they?

And all the different countries have their different stalls, whether it's saying, in Uzbekistan, we make amazing bananas or whatever, and then two years later, they all go home and that's it.

They only do with countries that are on the rise, right?

Yeah.

Like, we wouldn't do a world fair, America wouldn't do a world fair anymore.

We are the world.

Why would we do a world fair?

There was the big one in America, Carl Sagan went to as a kid.

So Sagan would be in his 80s if he was still alive or 90.

So, you know.

Oh, okay.

The one in Dubai, just to say this is quite interesting, because each country made their own sort of building and they were all kind of shaped with Uzbekistan-y design or Azerbaijan-y design or whatever.

And now they're changing it and they're turning it into flats the whole place.

Oh, wow.

And they're going to make it so you can live in this area, but it means that all these buildings are just these incredible designs that have made from the best architects in the world.

It sounds like you're selling Dubai instead of cancelling Dubai, which I thought you were the canceling Dubai.

What?

Is it Dubai?

There's no, you can't get an Uber there, you can't, there's no shops there already for you.

So, I'm going to live here.

Oh, that's the bad side of Dubai, guys, that I'm all the bad crap that you can get.

Famously, there are no shops in Dubai.

Um, someone emailed in and I've got a bunch of their fact now and also not credit them because I didn't think we were going to end up talking about world fairs.

It was a few years ago, the Brazilian delegation turned their entire thing into a trampoline.

It was something like a 4,000 square foot trampoline, the Brazilian bit of the world.

That can't be said.

Was it to sell rubber?

I don't think it was.

I don't even think it was.

I think it was just saying, look, everyone else has got good stuff here, well, you've got a big old trampoline.

So, just come along, have a balance, enjoy yourself.

They had a big project that at the last minute got taken away.

What have we got?

What have we got?

Why are we talking about the world fair?

I'm sorry, I got distracted.

Yeah, this is what happens when Ella is around.

Because during the world fair, the banana was introduced to America and it's not food introduction.

By fair child or someone else?

By someone else.

That was like a sporadic thing, but then when he really got going, he was privately funded as well.

Yes.

By Barbor Lathrop.

Yes, yes, yes.

He was a very gay, fabulous figure, basically, who was just this incredible philanthropist.

Squillionaire, just looking for something to fund.

And they bumped into each other on a boat, didn't they?

And he just went, I'll fund this trip with you trying to steal avocados.

Yeah, why not?

This sounds great.

What can I just say?

As an explorer with National Geographic, that is our dream.

No, no, no.

If you think I am kidding, you do not know my friend group in the sense that we literally just sit there constantly going, right, how do we get this kind of thing from philanthropy?

And every so often, it works out.

So I've got friends that like, they're like this smart friend of the philanthropist who is like some billionaire or millionaire.

They're like their sugar mama, dad or whatever.

Have I told you the story of Nat Geo, somebody walks up to me, it's really old guy, bless him.

The first time I've ever been at National Geographic and he looks at me and goes, I'm from Austin, Texas.

I'm not an oil man, but I've got money and I want to give you some.

I saw that money in my account, an expedition was part funded by it.

So as simple as that.

Okay, so it does happen.

Yeah.

That's amazing.

So Fairchild.

I agree.

I think reading about him seems like an extraordinary guy.

I'm surprised I'd never heard of him, for example, but if you're in America and you're eating say like peaches or nectarines or avocados or mangoes, most likely the one that you're eating right now, someone's bound to be eating one right now as they listen, shares genes from the ones that Fairchild introduced to the country all those years ago.

It's like a sort of footprint he's left in the country.

It's incredible.

Send us your photos if you're eating a mango now in America or an avocado or an avocado, some quinoa.

Yeah.

Did he bring in quinoa?

Yep.

Podcast at qi.com.

We want to see the mangos.

The mangos.

Oh, great.

Let's talk about this.

This is great.

Go on.

It's a fruit that he introduced and that never took off because he introduced thousands and they didn't all take off because you have to still buy mangos steens though, can't you?

Think so.

They just never exploded.

I had never heard of the mangos team before.

Really?

Yeah.

The guy who wrote the book on David Fairchild is Dan Stone, who's a friend of mine and apparently while he was writing this book, everybody would just send him really exotic fruit like the whole time he was writing the book because they were like, this is good for you, no?

Yeah.

The book's called The Food Explorer, by the way.

I think it's fair to say that every bit of research I have is from Dan Stone.

Yeah, well done.

So go on.

Tell us about mangos steens, Andy.

Well, as far as I can tell, again, Dan and I have never heard of them before and you two are having them for breakfast every day.

So correct me if I'm wrong, but the size of a fist, roughly, and they're like a lychee.

Really?

But the problem is they're not great for farming.

And what he was doing, Fairchild, you have to persuade the farmers to grow the things and the public to buy them because it's got two jobs to carry out, basically, and he couldn't persuade either or apparently either side of the equation because they're really hard.

They bruise worse than peaches and they're just a nightmare to transport and they go off really quickly, but he said they were the queen of fruits.

They were his favorites.

Oh, really?

I know.

And he kept trying to make them happen, like fetch in Mean Girls.

He kept trying to make it happen and no one was picking up on it.
And so all these things he brought into the country, but the one of which you headlined your fact with is very interesting because it was the beer hops.
And you'd think you'd just go into a country, grab some fruit and leave the country, but no, people were so protective, they would have boys sleeping with the hops at night to make sure no one would see them.
Yeah, they would pay to security.
That's the thing.
So he'd come in and integrate himself with the communities.
He would sort of become friends.
This particular hop, so this is, I think, the SEMS hop, he basically started talking about SEMS, the guy that came up with it, who was dead at this point.
And he offered the son of SEMS, basically, he said, look, I'm really scared that in a few generations people aren't going to know about your dad, blah, blah, blah.
So he was like, why don't you build a plaque?
I will pay for it.
So he basically put money down, impressive US diplomacy here, and they made such a song and dance about it.
Everybody was really happy.
The whole, like, everybody in the town was happy about it.
And then apparently somebody at night knocks on his door when it's raining and goes, do you want some?
Do you want some cuttings?
And apparently he has to really restrain himself to not be like, yes, this is exactly why I did all this.
I've been manipulating you guys for weeks.
And he was like, yeah, OK.
And he goes, OK, I can't do this publicly, I have to do it quietly, but I'll send 100 cuttings to the next station down the line.
Oh, not even handing them over now.
No, no, no, no.
It was proper espionage.
That's amazing.
It's hilarious.
But also to think of all the espionage that the US government has ever done.
I just can't object to this one.
That's why American beer now is so delicious.
I mean, how bad must it have been?
So here's the crazy thing.
Apparently during prohibition, all his hops were uprooted.
Yeah.
So all the same hops that Fairchild had.
Oh, really?
Yeah, they were all uprooted during the...

I read that.

Basically when prohibition came in, all the breweries closed down.

And then when they reopened, there was a few more big ones and they decided to sell what they knew would sell because they weren't sure anyone would buy any beer anymore.

And so they went with the really safe stuff, which was the light beers and the mass produced stuff.

OK, now can you explain Hershey's?

Hershey's.

Tastes like sick.

Yeah.

Tastes like sick to British people.

Well, you know, it contains some chemicals which happen to also taste like sick.

I love how people have gone round tasting sick.

They haven't.

They haven't.

They really haven't.

That's not happening.

If you're eating a Hershey's bar right now, please send a photo.

If you're being sick.

Yeah.

Either way.

Oh, yes, that one.

Podcast at qr.com.

Do they have your address?

Because I feel like if they have your address, they could send the mangosteens and the sick, et cetera, et cetera, to the address.

We've just moved offices.

And the reason being that the old office was just full of sick and mangosteens.

Yeah.

Soon on day said, yeah.

But everyone's tasted sick if they've ever been sick.

True.

You know.

Yeah.

You just taste it in reverse, don't you?

Sorry to, I mean, to, you know, to lower the tone.

That's nasty.

That's how we know what American chocolate tastes like.

Yeah.

Great.

Thank you.

You guys hear about the cherry blossom trees in DC and how he's responsible for all of them, basically.

So, I mean, we have them now in London quite a lot.

Kind of ornamental and very beautiful.

But he introduced them from Japan and then it became all the rage and people were like queuing up to see him and Alexander Graham Bell's daughters.

Is it their house, wasn't it?

Yeah.

He put it to his, yeah.

Exactly.

Exactly.

And then basically Washington DC was not the beautiful metropolis it now is.

Back then it was kind of ugly.

And he started saying, well, maybe we should just plant some cherry blossom trees around here and that would be kind of beautiful.

And then the, the first lady heard of this.

And before you know it, the Japanese who at this point, they're not particularly like chummy with, they're like, okay, this could be a symbol of friendship.

If you give us 300 cherry blossom trees, we can plant them in DC.

And the Japanese got carried away, ended up shipping 2000.

But they opened the crates.

I think it was in Seattle and went, oh crap, they were diseased.

They were absolutely infested with invasive species.

So then they had to publicly burn the symbol of friendship between Japan and the US.

Yeah.

And the thing I read was it was from orders of the president, which feels like he should have been busier than having to make second decisions of agricultural imports.

Although it was his decision, wasn't it?

Because it was him and the first lady who kind of made the decision to bring it over.

Wasn't it?

Wow.

But the Japanese were like, are bad.

And so it was all fine.

They sent, they sent more over and then they are now.

And as a result, US Japanese relations stayed very harmonious.

Didn't they?

Yeah.

Good.

It's interesting because the ones that they sent over the second time, they had to make sure that they were really not infested.

So they raised the trees in virgin soil.

So the soil was brand new and they'd never been anywhere else.

They wrapped the roots in damp moss to stop any.

It's a long work for a friendship, man.

Yeah.

That's great.

It's great.

And they fumigated it twice, once to asphyxiate the insects and then once just in case.

But yeah.

And the reason that they did this is because this guy, a fair child had a nemesis called Charles Marlatt.

Didn't he?

Yeah.

This is an amazing story.

So Charles Marlatt was in charge of the FDA sort of anti-insect part of the FDA.

But they were boyhood friends and actually Marlatt was Fairchild's best man at his wedding.

But then they fell out because Fairchild basically got a load of easy jobs through his friends and family.

He'll have a bit of nepotism and stuff.

And Marlatt had to work hard for his job.

And so they really fell out.

And Marlatt basically whenever Fairchild brought in any new species, he would be like, there's insects on that.

Get rid of it.

Burn it.

Do it now.

And so they really, really fell out.

I have to defend the entomologist even though I love doing Fairchild.

So it's worth saying that like Fairchild, he did get a lot of fame.

But a lot of that was off his own back.

But then, yeah, sure, he married into like this really prominent family and became really big with National Geographic.

But today we would actually side with the entomologist.

Yeah.

Like scientifically, he's the sound one.

Yeah.

Not the botanist just being like, well, let's just hope it's going to be fine when we bring all these parts from all over the world.

Yeah, definitely.

It was dangerous.

I read this amazing story that he wanted to send a thousand mangoes back to America.

But he put them on a boat and they were too heavy.

So he solved it by getting a load of local children to eat them all.

What?

Because all he needed were the stones.

He didn't need the mangoes themselves.

Oh, really?

So he just got all the kids and said, free mangoes as many as you can eat.

They went on, on, on, on, on.

U.S. diplomacy.

There we go.

That's another story.

I thought you were going to say something really clever.

Like he only needed to ship the children there.

And then they pooped them out.

Exactly.

Exactly.

And I was thinking, God, those children are brave, like pooing out a mango stone.

That's not funny.

No, children famously a bit more heavy than a mango as well.

So weight was your issue.

I know.

I'm sorry.

Stop the podcast.

Stop the podcast.

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Okay.

On with the podcast.

On with the show.

Okay.

It's time for fact number two.

And that is James.

Okay.

My fact this week is that up one stage of the 17th century, every woman living on the Yemeni island of Sokotra was called Maria.

Was it?

Okay.

Okay.

How many women were on the island?

Well, I don't know, but it wasn't completely insignificant.

It's a big island, right?

Yeah.

It's about the size of what New York you've been there.

Long Island.

It's big.

Long Island, yeah.

Is it that they were hosting a sound of music reality show?

17th century.

Yeah.

I feel like that's a real Yemeni vibe.

It's like the tribesmen and the sound of music.

Yeah.

Well, I don't know exactly how many people live there.

How many people do you say live there now?

It's in the 10, 10,000.

I think it's about 40,000.

40,000.

Yeah.

It wouldn't have been less then, but basically it was a Christian island.

By tradition, it was Saint Thomas who was shipwrecked there in the year 52 AD.

And he supposedly brought in Christianity, but definitely the Greeks brought in the fourth century.

That definitely happened.

And Marco Polo wrote about it in the 13th century that there were Christians there.

And in the 17th century, there was a guy called Padre Vincenzo, and he visited Sokotra.

And he found that they were still Christian ostensibly, but they kind of moved to other beliefs because Sokotra is a place it's very difficult to get to, especially at certain times of year.

You can't really get there at all.

The monsoon is, yeah.

Good luck.

So because they were isolated from the rest of the world, they kind of had this new version of Christianity.

So a lot of them were called Maria.

There were still a lot of churches, but for instance, they used to do sacrifices to the moon and a few different things.

Why not keep to my old beliefs and just spice it all up a bit?

What year was that again?

It was in the mid 17th century.

Why were they called Maria?

Because Mary, the mother of Jesus.

Oh.

Yeah.

That must have been confusing.

Oh, yeah.

Have you been there?

Yeah.

So I've been to Sokotra is I can verify that it's very difficult to get there.

Have you met a Maria?

I have not met a Maria because weirdly, there's no Christians left on the island.

What's up?

Someone said, Maria, come on here.

They're all Muslims now.

So I went there kind of 2018, I think, or 2019, and we had three options to get there.

Either we fly in via mainland Yemen, but the airport we're flying into was on Al Qaeda stronghold.

So decided maybe that's not the best way of getting in.

And then the other route was via kind of almost like a private jet via the Emirates, the place that you like, but they were only giving us verbal permission, not written permission.

And then the third option was to get on a cement cargo ship from Oman and sail through pirate waters.

And the ship was like infested with cockroaches, like completely infested.

It had like a, the toilet was like a basket on the side of the ship, like attached with rope.

Is this the route you went?

Yeah.

It was hilarious.

No pirates.

Well, yeah, we luckily didn't have the, you know, the, the Swede in the group had his wits about him.

Let me tell you that every time, every time a ship went past, you were like, just very nervous.

But yeah, so it's, it's really hard to get to, and that's the thing, right?

But then that's good news for other things.

So it means that they have amazing biodiversity there and you've seen the trees there. They look incredible.

I mean, the dragonblood tree, I know that's the most famous really, that's the sort of like the headline tree out there, but they do look beautiful.

It is amazing.

They look, they're described, if you'd want a picture, they're described as sort of looking like umbrellas, but a lot of them look like umbrellas with a high wind where, you know, when you're in the umbrella, you flip some side out because you see the stems coming up and they're known for the fact that if the sap comes out, it's red sap, hence the kind of dragonblood thing.

And they've been exporting that for years and it's been used for all sorts of like nail polish and medicines and so on.

Smearing gladiators?

Really?

I think gladiators supposedly had a bit of it to smear on them as decoration and a bit as disinfectant.

But the thing is that the tree, I think it only exists there now, but pollen has been found all around the Mediterranean as in fossilized or archaeologists have found pollen of it around the med.

So this is what the med used to look like.

There used to be these trees much more commonly.

So the dragonblood tree, there's different species of dragonblood and there are still what we call in biology relic populations.

So kind of populations that are on their last leg in Socotra, but there's different species of dragon's blood in the Canary Islands.

There's another species in Ouan and kind of a remote part of Oman.

And it looks like the dragon's blood tree was like a really dominant tree in the in the whole of kind of that old world.

It's kind of old school.

It should kind of really be on its out and it is.

It is right.

They're saying possibly in the next 80 years, if we're not careful, it's going to be an extinct species of tree.

Yeah.

And it's so interesting how it survives because most trees obviously get their water through the roots under the ground.

But this this tree has worked out a way.

I don't know if that's a language you use about trees, but it's got the ability to take in the moisture of the clouds that are going above it so it can pull from above as well as below, which is pretty amazing.

It injects much more water into the soil from the air than it gets in rainfall, because it's sometimes it's foggy and cloudy and it sort of sucks all that.

It's called horizontal precipitation capture, which is as it sounds.

But they've got nine.

I think 92 different plant species, which live in the undergrowth.
The few surveys have found that and seven of them are only found.
Living in the undergrowth of the dragon's blood tree.
That's mad.
It's so close.
I would make it an umbrella species that looks like an umbrella.
I'll tell you what, at National Geographic, they go wild for that.
Yeah, yeah.
I mean, when you turn up there, I'm not going to lie.
You're like, what is this place?
It looks there's so few places on earth where you look at them and you go,
oh, that looks really alien.
Like that's that's a really unusual landscape.
And so Cotra is definitely that, like these canyons, like Grand Canyon,
although obviously not that scale, but with with these dragon blood trees
and other trees as well, you know, and giant snails and a bunch of stuff
that you're just like, what is this?
I can ask you, as the only one who's been there, did it seem to you at all
like the atmosphere of the planet Pandora in the global mega hit
Avatar films.
OK, OK.
Because I read somewhere comparing it.
This is a good crowd to ask this, because I I've heard that as well,
but that was an inspiration.
And I wondered if we knew what the source of that was because I could.
Here's the thing.
The thing with Cotra is if you speak to people that are really in the know,
so people, the kind of off the beat travelers, people that are very interested
in kind of biology, that kind of thing, they all know Cotra.
It's like this this hidden secret that actually everybody in a certain industry
knows about, like, you know, and it's on people's dream.
I've met very rich people that are desperate for me to take them to Cotra.
And I'm like, sure, once I've dealt with the pirate situation,
I will get you and you're very rich.
A queue of wizards, Texans just waiting to be.
But yeah, I wondered about that because I was I can see that.
But I just wonder what the source is because I just being that we care
about fact here, guys, right? Right.
Right. I need more.
Well, there's one thing we care about more than facts,
and that's the continued success of the way of water franchise.
I have one of one of one.
Just on the Christianity in Yemen in the 17th century,
this was what Padre Vincenzo was talking about.

A few weird things that they did.
They had a priest called Adambo,
who was elected by the people and changed every single year.
It's like almost like an archbishop of the of the island.
But democratic. That's quite cool.
Yeah, let me tell you about modern day Yemen.
And the other thing is in the churches, they had like a
what would you call it, like an altar and every day they would smear it with butter.
Oh, lovely.
That's great. What for what reason?
Yeah, do they slide along it?
Oh, yeah.
Because that would be a great way of starting a service, wouldn't it?
You know, whoosh, I'm here.
Was it sort of like you're going up for your body of Christ?
Would you like would you like some butter?
I don't know how this is just the fantasies of these two.
That's what would take those two heathens back to church.
I've got a general Yemen fact.
Oh, yeah, yeah.
During so, yeah, Yemen, I think used to be a British colony protector.
That's safe to say about anywhere in the world.
The British were involved in something.
Well, you know, yeah, they during during that era, the the port of Aden,
which was and I think even after the rest of Yemen might have
gained it as Aden maintained a kind of special status.
Basically, Aden was in a pretty constant state of emergency.
Things were so dicey there that British citizens living there
were issued pretty much as standard with revolvers in case of
assassination attempts on them.
Imagine that just moving to someone and being fitted with a revolver.
Yeah, Yemen's an interesting place.
Like during so there was a revolution and obviously now there's a war
and there was like a protest and outside the protest.
It says no bazookas.
So you're allowed to.
Other way, which is no bazooka.
We're drawing the line of a lot of minds.
They were like no bazooka is a no hang grenade.
Oh, my God.
It's like we just have process here.
And if you brought like a whistle or a luggage tag,
they kind of ship your way to prison.
No, no, no, no.

But in defense of my parents' homeland, I will say it is a.
Have you seen pictures of mainland Yemen and the island of Scotland?
It's the most stunning place.
And I know I'm biased, but it is absolutely beautiful.
I saw a photo of place.
I wonder if you've seen it in person.
You've been there quite a few times, right?
It's described as the Manhattan of the desert.
Yes. I mean, it sounds incredible.
That was Freya Stark, explorer who called it that in the 1930s.
But this is a 16th century walled city
that was the first ever city of skyscrapers.
They went seven floors high and the buildings were made of mud.
It was just a high and there's still obviously there's been renovations and so on.
But is there anything original?
Oh, it's older.
Yeah. So it's a UNESCO World Heritage Site.
Again, it's so it's so.
So Cotro is also UNESCO World Heritage Site
and it's basically buildings, 10, 11, whatever, stories high.
The really cute thing is that some of those houses have bridges.
Yeah. On the top of the houses, because people can't be bothered to go all the way
downstairs because they don't have elevators.
They're like, right, historic buildings, right?
So they instead of going all the way downstairs to go visit the neighbors,
they just go to the to the to the top, which they call the Juba.
And they just leg it along these little bridges.
But the thing is, it's so old and it's still an habitat.
That's the only way it's amazing.
It's completely inhabited.
It's a lived in a World Heritage Site.
It's great. I mean, when you turn up there, you're like, are you kidding?
So bazookas and pistols, yes, but also heritage.
Go visit, guys.
It was the only place you could get coffee from for 200 years
until one of these people who stole plants went in.
Your hero, Jalla. I don't like them.
Went in, nicked all the coffee.
And if Mocha, which is the place where the coffee was exported from,
if they still had the monopoly on coffee, there would be enough money
for everyone in Yemen to get a payment of \$16,000 per year on top of anything else
they earned. Are you kidding me?
And that would be eight times higher than the actual average salary of a person
from Yemen. Wow.

So, yeah.

Oh, man, that's depressing.

Just one more thing on Mary's.

Oh, yeah.

At the end of the 18th century, 24% of women in England were called Mary.

The secotra of the North, they're called it.

And in Vexan, which is in France, just northwest of Paris,

in 1740, 68.4% of women were called Mary.

What? Or Marie, it would be.

Do any of you have Marie's in your family's?

I have a cousin.

Yeah, my Rosemary is my auntie.

So there's, yeah, I wonder if it's that if it's the double barrel first.

Well, in France, that's what happens.

So around that time, around the 18th century, they started doing the double names so you could have Marie Claire or Marie, whatever.

And, yeah, so they started almost everyone was called Mary something.

In 1379, 33% of the male population of Sheffield were called John.

And 22% of the women were called Alice.

John and Alice have invited us round.

Pimols versus Rick.

That's us.

OK, it is time for fact number three, and that is Andy.

My fact is that during the Second World War,

the making of Spitfires was so secret that one married couple didn't know they were both working on it.

Is that John and Alice?

It's John and Alice.

That's cool.

So it's so weird.

I wonder if they both thought that the other was having enough.

I know. I imagine them going to work in the morning, playing off to work.

Yeah, me too.

OK, see you later.

I'm going in this direction.

Oh, I'll just pop back to the house for a minute.

But there's someone at work whose job it was to keep them apart as well.

A nightmare life of they're coming to the canteen at the same time.

Oh, hey, what are you coming for?

It's such a weird fact.

How did they find out?

So they found out decades later.

That's the crazy thing.

So was that the only secret thing they were working?

I have so many questions.

Was that the only secret thing they were working?

I think they were both working in this specific factory.

So the same factory, even.

Yeah, it was the same factory.

Yeah, yeah.

But so they might be idiots, guys.

Basically, for anyone who doesn't know, we're talking about the Spitfire, the Supermarine Spitfires legendary plane of the Second World War, you know, big, big, big thing in Britain, big kind of national myth item in Britain, the Spitfire.

And there was a factory in Southampton, which made, I think most of the Spitfires and it was bombed in 1940 by the Luftwaffe.

And it was not just bombed, it was flattened.

And this is a disaster.

And they needed to work out how to, you know, keep Spitfire production going, but keep it safe from bombing raids.

And what they did was they said, well, we'll make it in secret.

And not only that, we'll divide all the factories into, you know, lots of different tiny micro factories around the place, which are all hidden.

So they used all sorts of little offices or garages, a laundry, an old glove factory.

They just divide. It was amazing.

They just divided it up.

And lots of them were in Salisbury and Reading and Trowbridge and just like all over the place, basically.

And this came out decades after the war, that this is how it had been done, basically.

And there was an engineer who worked on them called Norman Parker.

And he said in 2021, he was interviewed about it.

He was about 95 at the time that he was talking about this.

He said, we had one case.

There was a couple at a dinner party in the 1970s and over the dinner table, the wife said, oh, I was building Spitfires in Salisbury during the war.

And the husband said, no, you weren't. I was.

And they had both been working in the same factory and they didn't know it.

It could be a false memory.

Couldn't it? I guess.

I think this is a really bad marriage, guys.

Yeah.

Well, there are a number of things it could have been.

But basically.

Yeah, I reckon I have things with my siblings that we talk about when we were really, really young and we all think that we were the one who did a certain thing.

Oh, right. I mean, you're throwing.

Yeah, I see you're throwing shade on the.

Yeah, I'm not saying that's true, but I'm just saying, like, I remember,

like, I was, you know, my brother was locked in a toilet in France

when we went to a restaurant once and we had to get him out.

And then he thinks it was my sister who was that.

Do you know what I mean? So it's like.

Yeah. Weird day.

Yeah. Yeah.

Or it could be that they're both that they're telling the truth

and it's a real thing.

Do we know what they worked on specifically?

Well, I think that's the other thing production was divvied up in lots of ways.

So it might have been by same factory.

It was, you know, a factory.

It was at different sites or it was, you know, they probably weren't in the same room.

He could have been making the leather chairs

for what could be used for a car, but was for a plane.

And as in, like, that's what I mean to the level of what were they making.

Exactly. Yeah.

And people. It's plausible for sure.

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

I think they sort of dug into it.

And people were very secretive or you might know in a couple,

I'm working on something that's secret and I can't really tell you what it's about.

And and they're both in war work.

And the thing is about aviation during the Second World War,

65 percent of the aviation workforce were women because most of them were.

So statistically, she's more likely to be correct.

Like I say, I think they're both correct.

So she's told this guy at the dinner table.

He's gone, wow, what an amazing life.

What did you do?

Yeah, yes, it fires as well.

So anyway, the Spitfire Spitfire is apparently.

So are you into the Spitfire?

Yeah, because I feel like I don't.

I feel how do I put this politely?

The people that talk about Spitfires a lot tend to be a few years older than you.

Thank you.

That's actually a compliment, guys.

I don't know if you heard that.

I'm young, young seeming for a guy is interested in Spitfires.

I'm not my teacher at school when I was a kid,

right, an older guy was really into Spitfires.

I think actually, you'll find the more that you meet Andy and talk to him.
He's an old man.

Well, a lot of the things he's interested in,
you would expect older men to be interested in.

Is that fair to say?

I think it's not unfair.

Yeah, I'm not I'm not really I'm not deeply into them.

But I am interested in logistics.

So for those who can't see this, he might be shaking a little bit.

I'm not really, really into it, but I'm trembling with joy.

Yeah, I can't but I had a look at just, you know,
we check what we've talked about before on this podcast.

I had a look.

I can't believe you guys have stopped me for nine years
from ever mentioning the Spitfire on this show.

We've never mentioned it.

High five the rest of the year.

Great place.

Yeah, incredible plane.

And also, what a group effort of the UK during wartime
to make this plane built to the numbers that it was built at.

Basically, there was I was reading an article
saying that it was effectively like one of the early kick starters
where people funded.

Cold communities would go around funding single planes
and and they as a result got to name the plane.

So lots of the planes flying that were in the war
had names like Dorothy of Great Britain and Empire.

And that was funded entirely by women called Dorothy.

So it's so yes, it's so funny.

Maria play.

Yeah, but in fact, a 70 percent of women were called.

There was the dogfighter as well.

There was that.

That was the Kennel Club.

All right, it wasn't people who did dogfighting.

Think for the back of the pub.

But check this out.

This is this is the most incredible one.

There was one that was P.O.W.'s of Oflag.

This is a prison camp in Germany.

Yeah, captured officers who donated their months
pay through the Red Cross.

Then that went into the building of a plane.

So they were in prison and they were funding the plane.
That's war.
I read about that.
And it's they had to send letters back saying,
I want to give my money to this crowdfunding.
Right. Yeah.
But they had to do it in code.
So because you couldn't send the message
that the Germans will be able to read saying,
please put all my money into spitfires.
Otherwise, they're just going to accidentally lose it.
At least. Yeah, exactly.
It's amazing.
It was that was a really nice thing.
This crowdfunding effort.
Yeah. What would they have called it back then?
They wouldn't have been crowdfunding.
They were called Spitfire funds.
And the planes were kind of arbitrarily priced.
They said £5,000 will buy a Spitfire,
which was not actually a true figure,
but it sort of was a peg for people to.
But also that thing of charities.
They say £2 will buy a meal for one.
Yeah, it was like the Sixpence will buy a rivet.
Exactly. £2,000 will get you a wing.
No. So you can see the what you were buying.
It raises a lot of lot of money.
It was nearly given a much less sexy name than the Spitfire.
Spitfire is quite a swashbuckling name.
Other contenders included Scarab, Shrike,
which is quite good because that's a bird
that impales its prey and it's quite sort of.
But I looked up the complete list of Super Marine aircraft
and there were some many,
there were many bad options
that the Spitfire could have been called.
There was the Super Marine commercial amphibian,
the Super Marine sea urchin,
Super Marine spiteful.
Sure.
Super Marine seagull, Super Marine sea otter.
No, no, no, no, no, they're taking the fish.
No, they're a rip.

And the Super Marine baby.
Oh, yeah.
In a brainstorm, sometimes there are bad ideas.
Unleash the babies.
Yeah, yeah.
But they mostly began with this
and they were mostly sea planes.
That's what they started out as,
the firm started out making sea planes and so, yeah.
I love sea planes.
Yeah, they're cool.
Imagine there are planes where you can just land anywhere.
As long as there's a body of water, you just land.
So not on land.
Well, you're...
I'm sorry.
Dan suddenly brings the facts.
You get special life jackets in case you land on land.
Yeah, yeah, exactly.
These Super Marine Spitfires,
when they were taxiing,
so just kind of driving around the airport,
they were quite often sort of,
not overturned, but get really wobbly.
And so what would happen is someone would often sit
on the tail of the plane to keep them steady.
And it was often a woman who did this
and there was a particular woman called Margaret Horton
who did this in 1943 at RAF, Highboldstow.
And she was sat on the back
and the guy was a little bit anxious to get in the air
and forgot to get her off the tail.
So started taking off
while she was sitting on the tail of the Spitfire.
And he radioed down to traffic controls saying,
there's something wrong with this plane.
It's kind of really heavy.
And so they talked to me down,
but they never told him that there was a woman on the back.
Oh, no way.
Well, because as soon as they tell him, he's going to be.
Yeah, yeah, yeah.
So they're like, oh, yeah, there's obviously a problem
with the wing. We'll just talk you down on how to get down.

And so he never knew until he landed that this woman.
Bloody hell.
She survived, guys.
She survived.
There's a museum called Tagmeer Military Aviation Museum.
And when you go to it, there's a model that they've made.
So you can see a model of a Spitfire taking off with this woman.
A little plasticine woman or whatever the material is,
holding on to the tail wing.
So funny. It's so brilliant.
Should we say why it was so good?
I guess we're intrigued.
Yes. So apparently all the pilots loved it,
but I'm like, what, why, why did they all love it?
Well, it was it was it was really nimble.
It turned very, very fast.
And also the other thing about it was it was
it flew very, very fast partly because, OK, this is quite niche.
If you guys want to tease me when I say this bit, I don't mind.
OK. Right.
But basically they had flush riveting, which is a good.
OK, talk amongst yourselves.
Dear listener, no, the metal skin, very, very cool.
But if you had lumpy rivets all over it,
which most planes did before that, it drags the plane back a bit.
Whereas if you sink these little countersunk rivets,
so you sort of it's exactly level with the surface of the plane,
then the airflow is very efficient and you get a much faster plane.
And they did some experiments on early spitfires.
They replicated what it would be like if it had external rivets
by gluing split peas onto the spots where the rivets were all over the plane
and then flying it, doing a speed test, basically.
And it was about 20, 22 miles an hour slower.
It was a fair chunk slower,
which would have had a serious effect if you were in a combat situation.
And, you know, so, yeah.
Could you have, like, stopped the enemy by going in
and putting peas on his plane?
Definitely. That was a big part of the early SAS job was, yeah.
I used to do that and so did my wife.
So that fact would be even more impressive if I knew what a rivet was.
Yeah, well, you've got to retain some mystery, I'm afraid.
That's still under the secrets act, actually.
What the hell is a rivet?

A kind of screw, kind of screw.
It's like a big old screw.
It joins the bits of the plane to the other bits of the plane.
A rivet. That's so funny.
You know the word riveting?
It's got nothing to do with what a rivet is.
Hold on, rivet.
She's googling.
It holds you in place, yeah, you're right.
This is, yeah, they're just, it's a kind of screw.
Yeah, basically, yeah.
Message in if you didn't know what a rivet was.
And if you like, I can repeat that fact for you now, Ella.
And it'll be even more exciting this time round.
Should we move on, though?
Yeah, I'll just go with the magic.
I feel like we've got it now.
I've read a tenth of my stuff out.
I haven't told you about the Super Marine Walrus.
So it's just that of interest.
Like, what are your subjects that they won't let you normally talk about?
I just need to know, like, how valid?
It's mostly second-world war logistic.
We end up letting him do it
because he does crowbar it in somehow into any old fact.
So there is a question for you.
Do you follow current war strategy and logistics?
Like, I've got a whole bunch of male friends
who are so into the logistics of the Ukrainian war
that it's gone beyond anything that I think is normal.
Um, you'd have to ask my wife what's normal
in terms of what...
It's past and present.
I think logistics is interesting.
It's this...
And I'm not...
I'm blushing now, but actually, I'm not ashamed.
Logistics is interesting.
Needs to go on your tombstone.
We can't only bloody explorers, you know,
on cool cement ships.
I'm going to stay on the cement ship.
Thank you. I'm going to seize the culture.
Look at the rivets on Andy's tombstone.

Oh, dear.
We've been so mean.
Look, some people need to be in logistics.
Just...
Well, actually, James is right.
We're not actually out of time, but we should move on.
Oh, can I tell you one more?
Like, sort of...
Yeah, go on.
He actually wrote a book, partly, about the Spitfire.
Douglas Bader?
Yeah.
He was a really famous pilot,
partly because I think it was in...
I don't know if it was an accident.
Well, he famously had no legs.
He had no legs.
But he nonetheless...
He lost both his legs during missions.
Yeah, a flying accident.
Yeah, flying incidents.
And he became a Spitfire ace nonetheless.
In the Second World War, he was shot down over France
and he ejected, so he survived.
But he lost one of his prosthetic legs
in the course of being shot down.
Well, no, he was treated with a lot of respect
by the Germans who captured him.
Because there were rules about that.
And he was in a prisoner of war camp.
And Göring, who was the head of the Luftwaffe,
gave special permission for an artificial leg,
a spare leg, to be parachuted into his prisoner of war camp.
Amazing.
I think what happened was, though,
he kept trying to escape,
and so they confiscated his prosthetic in the end.
He did, yeah, yeah.
That was before the relationship started, I guess.
Yeah, yeah.
And that was called Operation Leg.
Nice.
Where do they come from?
There's one other hero we should mention,

which is Lady Houston.
Lady Houston's sort of the reason
that the Spitfire became the Spitfire during the war.
She was a suffrager, political activist.
She also was one of the richest women in the UK,
if not the richest at one point.
And she was someone who kept helping out with war efforts.
She was always donating things.
I think the war people didn't like her very much, right?
Because she kept saying that, you know,
they weren't giving enough money to the war effort.
They weren't giving enough equipment,
all that kind of stuff.
And she would go around with placards saying,
give them more guns, kind of thing.
And they got really annoyed.
But she did, like, get a lot of money together.
And I think, are you going to say that she helped
to pay for the design of the Spitfire?
Yeah, basically what it was,
was there was a thing called the Snyder Trophy,
which was a biannual international airspeed race.
And Britain won it twice.
And the idea was if they won the third one,
they would get to keep the trophy for good.
But at this point, the government said,
we're not going to fund this stuff.
We need all the money.
And she thought that was a huge mistake.
It seems a bit of a, like,
this is a crazy wonder weapon idea.
It's not going to, like, this is a mad waste of money.
It was in a depression.
It was, yeah.
This was in, like, late 20s, early 30s.
This was before.
Exactly. And so she said,
well, no, that shouldn't be the case.
So she funded it.
She funded it for it to go ahead.
And as a result, Rolls-Royce developed a new engine
that became the Spitfire's engine and so on.
So it was down to her and making that happen.
She was the wizened old Texan of her day.

Yeah, she was.

Exactly.

But they're wonderful.

Let me tell you, if you've got some money,
lose some of it with me.

It's fine.

We also have a Patreon, just to say.

Damn it.

Stop the podcast.

Stop the podcast.

Hello, everybody.

James and Andy here, just letting you know
that this week's fish is sponsored by Express VPN.

Absolutely.

Did you know, Andrew, that what you watch on Netflix in the UK
might be different to what someone in Italy
or in South Korea might see on their Netflix?

Well, actually, James, I exclusively watch Italian
and South Korean dramas and reality shows.

So I'm afraid not.

Well, I actually do watch quite a lot of South Korean reality shows.

I watched one called Run for the Money quite recently
and another one called Siren, both on Netflix.

And I'm really excited to see what else is coming out
of South Korea and Japan at the moment.

And so how on earth am I going to get these new shows?

James, have you considered using Express VPN?

And in particular, the Express VPN app,
which allows you to change your online location.

Really? Have you considered that?

Well, you know what? I probably should have thought of it.

And I should have known that that would be the answer
to my somewhat rhetorical question.

But if you would like to see what is happening
on various streaming services all around the world,
then getting a VPN is the thing to do.

And Express VPN is a very, very good example of them.

And you can go to expressvpn.com slash fish right now.

And if you do so, you can get an extra three months for free.

That's exactly right. Go to Express VPN.

That's E-X-P-R-E-S-V-P-N dot com slash fish.

And if you buy a subscription there,

I think a year subscription,

you'll get an extra three entire months for free.

OK, on with the podcast.

On with the show.

OK, it's time for our final fact of the show.

And that is my fact.

My fact this week is that one of the original names proposed for what we now know as Neanderthals was Homo Stupidus.

Brilliant.

Yeah, so this was in the early days

when we were finding skulls of what was then thought like, is this a bear?

Is this a sort of just like no one knew what it's a plane?

There was a point where we were finding lots of skulls and we didn't quite know what this thing was.

It would later turn out to be Neanderthals.

And when they got to a point where they were thinking,

OK, actually, we do have a new different species of Homo here.

We need to give it a name.

But by the look of it and by the skeletons that have been found, it looked like a very clumsy, bulky idiot.

And so a very famous scientist at the time, Ernest Haeckel, suggested why not call it Homo Stupidus to really dig home that this is why this moron is no longer existing on our planet.

Now, we now know that this is completely wrong, that Neanderthals were actually very intelligent.

They did art.

They could sing, perhaps, you know, there's lots of things that we're discovering more and more about them.

They used penicillin even, like an old version of penicillin.

I mean, prehistoric version.

Prehistoric.

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

The counter stuff.

Sure.

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

But you're a Neanderthal expert now, are you?

So I have a number of questions.

One is...

I feel like we're doing this the wrong way around.

No, this is definitely targeted at you three.

So when you have the guest on, are the topics always consistently the topics that they are specialists in?

And if so, why did I get a spitfire?

I think we try a bit of inside baseball.

We try to do things that our guests are going to know a lot about.
On your Wikipedia page, it says you're an expert
in rivets.

Please, nobody edit it.

There's already a whole bunch of untruths on that page.

But sometimes a little fact about maybe logistics
or military strategy will just slip through that.

I'm like, which is this being filmed?

Because you're face, right?

Yeah, no.

The thing with...

So taxonomy is a system of naming things in biology.

And there's this rule called...

It's an a priori thing.

And what it means is that if we find a fossil today
and we call it something,
that is the name it is given if it becomes a species.

So if I find a fossil today and I go,

oh, it might be homo sapien,

or it might be homo schreiber.

We already had a whole lot of stupidity.

Then let's say there's this...

But I publish it.

So if I publish it in any journal,

then later on, if people are still like,

no, no, no, we don't think that's a separate species.

If suddenly two more of them are found
that really do look similar.

And somebody goes, no, actually,

we really do think that now needs to be a species.

They can't go, well, we wanna call it homo, whatever.

No, no, the a priori rule is very clear.

It has to be called that.

So luckily, homo neanderthalensis

must have got in there earlier.

Because otherwise we would be stuck with that bloody name.

Yeah, it was proposed.

It was never seriously taken to a board.

It was a guy called Dr. William King,

who was an Irish geologist,

who eventually was the one who said,

let's call it neanderthal,

because it was found,

the particular one they were looking at,

found in 1856 at the Neander River Valley.
And so it was named after the area.
Yeah.
And that is a valley, isn't it?
I don't know that.
Oh, I don't know that.
It was in the Neander Valley.
It was in the Neander Valley.
Wow.
Yeah, that's all.
So the homo neanderthalensis is what we call it now.
But some people call it homo sapiens neanderthalensis,
because it might be a subspecies of homo sapien.
If it was called homo sapien stupidas,
then that would literally be stupid wise man.
Oh, yeah.
Because sapiens means wise.
Yes.
And that would have been quieter.
Yeah.
I don't actually know how sapiens was picked,
because it does feel like we've given ourselves
the nice end of the target, do you know?
Can't we?
Yeah, we're great.
But I'm just saying it's a bit...
We're the naming committee.
Of course we're gonna.
Some people said once that the brain is the only thing
that named itself.
Yeah, which I think is nice.
So brain must be a really good word for it.
Yeah.
It's actually a rubbish word, isn't it?
Yeah.
Your brain would have come up with something better than that.
Yeah.
One of the names that the Neanderthal could have had
was Gibraltar man, homo gibraltaris or whatever.
Because the first...
I think the first skulls were found in Gibraltar,
but they were found too early.
And they were found by, I think, a soldier.
And he was a soldier and geologist.

And he said, I think this might be something new,
but he didn't really get anywhere, you know?
Yeah, I think there was a few that were found technically before,
but they just didn't identify that.
I think there was one in...
I think there's Shpey one as well, which is Belgium.
I think that's also an early one, where they just didn't...
Oh, Flint. Sorry, Flint was his name.
Edmund Flint, which is a nice sort of prehistoric-sounding name.
Yeah, he smells like he's from the Flintstones.
Yeah, he does.
And he found it, but again, he didn't get anywhere.
And actually, I think the last Neanderthals
also lived in Gibraltar.
Well, yeah.
That's... I disagree with that.
Ooh, go on.
No, I think the team out there really believed that,
but I don't think most of the rest of us believe that.
I think we think it's a toss-up.
There might have been the Iberian Peninsula, but I just...
Was it somewhere islandy, where things kind of cling on a bit?
Yeah, it was probably just the south.
But also, we just don't know, actually.
The dates are consciously shifting.
When I say that, I mean, that when the scientists are dating them,
they're realising that all the dates we thought we had are kind of...
Not as great, shall we say.
There's many question marks about these dates.
I was reading about a Neanderthal site in Croatia
called Krapina Cave.
Yeah.
And what I found is that they found coprolites in there.
So that suggests that the Neanderthals
might have actually crapped in a cave.
Do you know what?
Do you know what?
It would take you lot for me to realise that Krapina,
which is an integral part of my research,
is actually crapping.
I had never in all my years realised that before.
That's so good.
Thank you.
You're very welcome.

Don't really appreciate it.
No, I'm not going to high-five you.
Sometimes it takes a fool to teach a wise woman.
That's stupid.
Ella, do you know whether or not you're a bit Neanderthal?
Yeah, yeah.
I got tested.
Yeah.
What's your number?
I don't know.
I can't remember.
You can't remember?
I can't remember.
You study Neanderthals and you can be bothered to...
I can't remember.
I can't remember.
Retaining it.
It was average-ish.
As far as I remember.
Right.
In the graphic society,
they have a geographic project where you do a swab in your mouth
and you send it in
and then they can give you the results
and tell you whether you're not.
And then I think we've...
We know Ozzy Osbourne is a bit Neanderthal.
We are.
I mean, we mostly are.
Is it...
Everyone outside Africa is a couple of percent
because early humans left Africa,
bred with Neanderthals,
those populations spread to like Europe, Asia.
But then...
Is it called ghost DNA?
I love this.
Yeah.
Even people in Africa these days
have kind of a small fraction of a percent of Neanderthal DNA.
Well, so there's a few things going on there.
One is that, yes, it's...
So everybody outside of sub-Saharan Africa.
So like the Tunisians have got some.

You know, the Egyptians have got some.
And what it is is Neanderthals were a more European Asian species
and never went into Africa.
So it was...
That's why sub-Saharan don't really have it.
The ghost DNA.
So this is really cool.
So now ancient DNA is so fascinating
that they have been able to identify
that there are other species out there
called Homo god knows what.
But they just don't have a single fossil for it.
They don't know anything about this.
But they know based on looking at all of our DNA globally,
there were other species that we interbred with.
And we just don't know.
So we know that we interbred with Neanderthals.
We know that we interbred with a species called Denisiva.
And then, yeah, in the process of doing all this,
they've also come across a few ghostly images.
And they're like, how do you marry it up
with the fossils that are out there?
Because you're like, I don't know what it looks like.
So do we not name it until we find a fossil?
So in genetics, if it's a ghostly image,
they tend to give it like population Y
or population X or that kind of thing.
They don't give it a name because they really don't know.
You've got to give it a cooler name than that.
You know?
Yeah, that's the whole point.
It's a standby name, isn't it?
Oh, yeah, I see it.
They'll come up with a really awesome...
Do you want to come up with a cool name first?
Yeah, you're right.
But imagine if...
So you've got Homo naledi,
which is a new species that they discovered in South Africa.
And that might be the ghost lineage.
But that might be one of them.
But we just...
We don't know because until we've got DNA,
we can't compare the two.

A DNA from a fossil?
Yeah, yeah, yeah.
You need the DNA...
You need DNA from the fossils you've got
to be able to compare it to this ghost lineage.
So it might be from...
It might be naledi.
It might be naledi.
We just don't know.
It's so cool.
So the guy that found naledi,
Lee Berger, is like, I reckon it is.
But we were like, maybe.
We don't know, though.
Yeah.
Sorry, I got very excited.
No, it is exciting.
It's incredible.
Do you know...
Is his name Svante Parbo?
Svante Parbo, yeah.
So he's a Swedish DNA expert.
Did he start the field of extracting DNA from ancient bones?
He just won a Nobel Prize for it.
Oh, nice.
Oh, congratulations.
That's a parbo.
Yeah.
And it was really funny because he won it for medicine.
And everybody went,
we just had...
What?
We just had COVID
and you've given it to this guy.
He's found Neanderthal DNA.
A slow clap.
He published this study.
And he'd realized that you could extract DNA from old bones.
That's a huge realization.
He worked out how to do it as well.
And he got letters, lots of letters from men saying,
I think I'm Neanderthal, actually.
I think I'm...
He said fully or partly Neanderthal.

Fully.

And offering him samples to analyze for his work.

I know.

I think spit samples.

I think...

But there's a really interesting...

There's definitely a gender divide here

because 12 women wrote into him to say,

my husband is definitely, he's a Neanderthal.

You can study him if you like.

Only two men wrote saying the same of their wives.

And I don't know if any women wrote in saying,

I'm in the...

I think I'm pretty sure I'm a Neanderthal.

Right, okay.

So there's an interesting thing about how we think of Neanderthals today.

That's what it tells us about really.

Yeah, yeah, fair enough.

That's actually so true because...

Sorry, I pointed at you very aggressively then.

Andy just for the listeners.

Yes.

So I made a show called Neanderthals for the BBC and PBS and...

Oh, with Andy Serkis.

Andy Serkis who is Gollum in Lord of the Rings.

Yeah, and a million other things.

Like the guy's got a very impressive resume.

And there was this really big discussion because we were like,

blatantly you're going to make the reconstruction is going to be a male.

But actually, why are the reconstructions of cave men always men?

Like it doesn't...

Like think about the descent of man image where it's like,
you know, from ape to human.

It's always just men.

And it's like, well, they definitely didn't do that on their own.

Right?

So it's like, where are the women in this?

And we had a really big discussion.

And in the end, we did make a man and we called it Ned.

But we did make a Nelly.

But the Nelly was not of the same quality.

But the animation wasn't...

It wasn't Andy Serkis' work.

Let's just put it like that.

Was Andy Serkis playing the motion capture Neanderthal?
Yeah, so he brought the Neanderthal to life basically.
Did he co-host as that?
He was...
No, no, no.
There's this scene where he actually...
And it kind of gives me goosebumps when I see it,
where he wakes the Neanderthal up from his slumber.
So it's an Iraqi Neanderthal and he wakes it up from its slumber.
So he's used it.
He's like, Andy's freaking Serkis.
Was he both of the male and the female?
No, no, no.
They literally...
No, he was forgotten about...
Not in your Nelly.
No, no, no, no, no.
But he was...
I do wish he co-hosted it as the Neanderthal.
What could she have been?
What could she have been?
Al-Shamahi?
So do you guys know why Neanderthals have got such a bad rep?
How was it...
Then they find what were effectively, unfortunately,
deformed skeletons and so on.
And so we just thought,
ah, that must be what they all looked like.
Yeah, so basically, it was an individual...
La Chabalo Saint, don't query my French.
And it was a highly arthritic individual.
It was an old man, although I'm pretty sure it was only like 40,
but old for the time.
But very young for today.
And they basically...
I don't like the way you looked at me when you said that.
He was highly arthritic.
And there's a number of things going on here.
But the guy who did the reconstruction of this fossil
basically portrayed it as being essentially knuckle-dragging.
Well, kind of its heads jutting forward,
its knees are bent, blah, blah, blah.
And then they obviously realized later on
that that was completely incorrect.

But it was too late.
It was like it got out there that this is...
And because we were looking for a missing link
in inverted commas, right?
So it kind of fit the narrative.
And it was a new field, right?
Reconstructing what somebody looked like from a fossil
was such a new field that...
And so essentially, everybody's speculating since
as to why he did such a bad job,
which is really embarrassing because he's a legacy
amongst other things,
because he's quite a renowned person,
is that he basically did an awful PR job
on the end of those.
It's amazing.
Like if just like, for instance,
in a million years time they find humans
and they only find my body,
I have very bad sinuses, right?
They're just going to think all humans
had a cold all the time.
That's it.
You know, that's basically what happened.
They're going to find Dan's body
and think all humans were unbelievably hairy.
I love how you guys don't know
how bodies and decomposition work.
We're sure, yeah, hairy's going to be found on...
They'll find Andy and they'll be like,
well, all humans used to make model airplane.
That's because they'll have found me in my tomb
where I've been buried with all my air fixes.
And all your rivet? Pivots, rivets, rivets.
Rivets.
Oh, my riveting.
OK, 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 have said
over the course of this podcast,
we can all be found on our Twitter accounts.
I'm on at Shriverland.

Andy.

At Spitfire, Spitfire, Spitfire.

Jesus.

James.

At James Harkin.

And Ella.

Ella underscore al-Shamahi.

Yep, where you can go to our group account,

which is at no such thing,

or you can go to our website,

no such thing as a fish.com.

All of our previous episodes are up there,

so do check them out.

And Ella does want to give another shout out quickly

to Daniel Stone's book, The Food Explorer.

It is an amazing book, so do try and track that down.

But otherwise, come back next week,

because we'll be back with another episode,

and we'll see you then.

Goodbye.