

[Transcript] No Such Thing As A Fish / 485: No Such Thing As Ballet On A Staircase

Hi everyone, welcome to this week's episode of No Such Things a Fish where we are joined by the incredible Beck Hill.

Now who is Beck Hill you ask?

No you don't because you're already a listener to A Problem Squared which is her amazing podcast that she does with mathematician and comedian Matt Parker where they spend their time solving everybody's problems.

You probably also know Beck through her YouTube channel, she's got all sorts of stuff on there, I think notably you might know her for her flip chart comedy where she miss his lyrics.

There's videos about her show Makeaway Takeaway that she used to do on CITV, there's loads of stuff on there and of course if you're the right age or if you have children of the right age you will know her from her books.

She has a series of books called Horror Heights, there are three in the series at the moment, the latest is called Dead Ringer and they are of course available in all places where you buy your books.

So that's all about Beck, there will be a little thing later on towards the end of the show where we might have an object which we will sign and give away to one of our listeners. If you want to know more about that you will have to sign up to Club Fish, we will give more details on how to win that during our next bonus drop as a line which will be out next Tuesday.

Anyway, not much more to say, I mean we do have a live show coming up which I think the tickets might be all but sold out but you can get streaming tickets from that, you can go to know6thingsasafish.com forward slash pod fest, apart from that, really this is the end, it's time to say 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 Shriver, I am sitting here with James Harkin, Andrew Hunter Murray and Beck Hill and once again we have gathered around the microphones with our four favorite facts from the last seven days and in no particular order, here we go.

Starting with fact number one, that is Beck.

In 1927, a painton was filed for an upper artist designed to scare criminals into confessing their crimes by creating an optical illusion of a ghost skeleton.

How to do it, it's pretty cool.

Yeah, I mean the painton was filed and I mean it was granted in 1930, it expired in 1947 so if anyone wants to make that now.

I wouldn't make Call of Duty better, wouldn't it, where they're trying to get, is that what happens?

Line of Duty?

Line of Duty.

Call of Duty, yeah, sinking.

Is that video games?

It is, yeah, yeah.

I just want to look at how you fit in.

It would work there as well.

I think it would work everywhere.

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Pop and glowing skeleton.

Sorry, we'll get messages from the gamers, it won't work in Call of Duty, by an intensely realistic war experience, it's more a kind of like, can you storm Normandy than where were you on the night of the 4th?

More games need interrogation.

The Mario interrogation.

Where's Peach?

I was reading about show jumping the other day, you know, in the Olympics and in the first Olympic show jumping part of it was, just because we're talking about video games, the horse had to walk along and people would roll barrels towards them and they'd have to jump over the barrels like in Donkey Kong games, isn't that cool?

That's amazing.

Yeah.

Imagine if that was your job.

Just the barrels.

I rolled the barrels at horses.

Sorry, this was off topic so quickly.

Skeleton.

Oh yeah, so it was a light, do you know what, I couldn't find out whether it was a real skeleton or a fake one, but given the date, I'm guessing it was a real one, but it was a life-sized skeleton with red glowing light bulbs in the eyes that would turn on and off to create the effect of blinking and it was lit from the top and the bottom and basically the suspected criminal would be put into a chamber, like a room that's completely darkened and then the interrogator would sit behind the skeleton and talk through a megaphone that would sort of come out of the skeleton's mouth and the skeleton would be lit a little bit to create the effect of a ghostly outline of the skeleton.

That's amazing.

Glowing eyes, yeah.

Yeah, and the effect, the idea was the criminal would go into a darkened room to begin with so there's sort of going, what's going on, where's the police officers, what's happening and then suddenly this curtain would raise and this furious glowing skeleton would be there saying, you did it, didn't you?

Or whatever it was.

Yeah, it would work so well the first time on, I presume everyone who'd committed a crime and was trying to cover it up, isn't it a very striking experience to have if you're the one being, you know, questioned by a skeleton, but I guess the criminal fraternity would be more, you know, would be blasé about it after a few years of the skeleton being.

They'd have to know about it, wouldn't they?

Well, yeah, they'd have to keep tracking it out and, you know, dress up the skeleton.

There's a detail in this which kind of confused me because this is the 1930s, which said that as well as having the megaphone and the glowing eyes, it also had a camera in the head.

Yes.

So film, would you get sound recording as well?

It was to record sound as well and it actually included a way of recording the sound and

the visuals at the same time onto this film.

Yeah.

That is very early, isn't it?

We had photographs and we had cinema and stuff like that.

So I think this, it was a woman who did it, wasn't it?

Well, Helen Adelaide Shelby was there.

I think she basically took a load of things that had been invented around that time and said, oh, we could do this with this, or we could do this with this.

Oh, flashing lights.

Let's do that for the eyes and stuff.

One thing I couldn't find out was her decision to turn it into an interrogation thing.

Like that's quite a cool effect if you were like, oh, well, we could create this effect and put it on stage.

Like, did she just read a Christmas carol and was like, oh, I know what gets people guilty?

But that's the thing as well.

She doesn't come from that background.

So it's Helena, sorry, or Helena rather than Helen.

And she was a real estate mogul.

She was like, she's the bed on horses.

There's nothing else in the literature about her that suggests that this came from any background in policing or anything like that.

And she kind of disappears as well.

You don't really see her.

I'm embarrassed, man.

I found that she did die in 1947.

Right.

I found it in the newspapers.

When it expired.

And I found that her father-in-law Samuel was a famous Civil War veteran.

His first foray in the Civil War was down the Mississippi River.

And the entire platoon was hospitalized because they all drank swamp water.

That's all I found out.

She had a husband called Edgar.

That's the only other detail I've got.

Oh, stop blinding us with overwhelming information about this.

It is fascinating.

It's all she's remembered for now is mostly the skeleton thing.

I found out that Tom Scott, the YouTuber, had recreated this invention in 2020.

So they recreated the actual skeleton and everything and did an experiment with three other people where he left them alone with a cookie and one of them had to steal the cookie.

And then he interrogated them and they didn't know what he was doing.

So he was just like, I'm trying out a new technique.

So funny.

And then he puts them in this room and the first two, I've scared at first

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because they're in a dark room and they have no idea what to expect.
And then when the skeleton appears, they just crack up laughing.

Oh, really?

And because you would though, wouldn't you?

I mean, I can imagine it being spooky at first,
but I'd be far more scared of a dark room.

Yeah.

So you know the one-way mirror thing?

Yeah.

There's actually, there's no such thing as a one-way mirror.

There is.

It's actually a window.

That's the dullest fact I've found in the course of research.

What do you mean?

It's all about the lighting.

Yeah.

It's a window covered with highly reflective coating.

It's not a mirror.

What makes the difference between a mirror?

Is it just because a mirror has like a steel background?

I think the mirror has the, yeah, it's like a properly opaque background.

Whereas with the one-way window, as all the kids will be calling it.

A one-way window.

It's just a lighting thing.

The O-W-W.

Because the lights are always off, aren't they?

In the room where the senior cops are watching the questioning happen.

But the lights are always dark in that room.

If you turned on the lights in that room, you'd see them.

The thing is, Anthony, is you want people to think it's a mirror, right?

That's the whole point.

If you say we've got our window here, then they're going to go,

oh, I thought that was a mirror.

Like, you have to call it a mirror in order to keep up with illusion.

But everyone knows there are people behind there now.

Do they?

Yeah.

Yeah.

No, the question is, you don't know whether there's someone behind there or not.

I can't believe they exist, actually.

Do they exist?

I've never been arrested and interrogated.

Have you been interrogated?

What did you do?

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I used to work in market research, my first job.

Oh.

And there was a market research house which was in Slough.

And I was conducting the surveys.

How interesting.

Like the focus group stuff.

Yeah.

And it was all one-on-one stuff.

It was with women between the age of 18 and 39 who had acid reflux.

And they had to speak to me for an hour and a half each.

And I had to ask them all the questions about their reflux.

Oh, wow.

Gosh.

Yeah.

And you had people who watched.

And you watched them through a one-way mirror.

There were people from, I'm not going to say which pharmaceutical giant were watching them through the window, the mirror or whatever.

And they were in the next room.

And after the interview ended, I'd pop next door and I'd say, was there anything else you wanted me to ask?

And they'd say, yeah, can you just ask question 17 again?

OK.

So this woman, middle-aged woman with acid reflux, imagine I'm talking to you, I'm here.

There's a big window there.

I mean, mirror.

Yeah.

Is she thinking all the time there's someone behind that or was the illusion kept the whole time?

Because I reckon they wouldn't have.

No, otherwise, what's the point?

I think I thought I might have had to say there might be people.

How did you?

Observing.

But don't worry about it.

Just talk to me.

You look into my eyes.

Yeah.

I love the eyes.

Yeah.

Were you good interviewer or bad interviewer?

Like you get good, cop and bad.

Yeah, yeah.

I was.

Tell us about the acid reflux.

No, honestly, acid reflux is totally normal.

Don't worry about it.

You can tell me about it.

You're a sick puppy and you're going to burn.

Yeah.

I was not a very good interviewer.

Right.

And the weird thing was, it was just two of us working on the case, me and my boss.

And after the fourth day of questioning sessions, we came down to breakfast at the sort of like premier room we was doing whatever and we both had acid reflux.

We talked ourselves into having it.

That's really interesting.

And then it turns out there was another window viewer that was watching you as a bigger conspiracy.

And then another interviewer comes in and interviews you and they get it and wow.

I once once in a focus group with with the with the windows.

But we knew that they were people because you just know like, oh, well, someone's got to watch.

It's just so you don't get distracted.

But we had to play video games and give feedback on on on the video games.

I think it was a little big punnet.

Yeah.

And I said there should be more interrogation.

I was wondering what happens if you confess, but the police obviously confess to it as a Catholic because obviously they can't pass on what confessions.

But it doesn't really know.

You mean if they're a priest?

I do.

So if you like it's a priest cop, that's the that's the pitch of the TV series.

He's a priest by day.

He's a cop by night.

You know, but the priest is not allowed to tell anyone what and confessed, right?

Right.

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Because although when I was at school
and I used to go to confession,
we had good priests, bad priests.
The bad priests used to rat on you all the time.
Oh, man.
Yeah.
Also, there's that one way mirror in the confession booth,
which technically there's spooky images
in Catholic churches.
They do, you know, yeah.
Yeah.
The chalice would work great.
Right.
The priests are fixed from the top and the bottom.
Glowing red eyes.
Yeah.
But this is the way that...
So I think in, I think the rule in confession,
so in confession booths, the rule is
that the priest can't disclose anything to anyone.
That's how I understand it.
Yeah.
But there is some leeway.
I think if there's...
So like if Dan, I'm the priest, right?
Dan comes into the booth and he says,
I'm going to kill James.
In fact, number two.
It's from the next episode of Knowledge Singers of Fish.
Right.
I think I am allowed as the priest
I think some schools of thought say,
I am allowed to go to the police and say,
you might want to check on James,
check he's all right.
Yeah.
It might be a threat to him at some point.
But I'm not allowed to say,
Dan is going to kill him.
Yeah.
Yeah.
That's interesting.
Psychiatry, right?
When you admit, you know,

planning to murder someone.
Planning to murder James.
It took me a long time to get that out in the sessions.
It's a good therapist.
It's a real breakthrough, yeah.
Just kill him.
What are you waiting for?
But they're allowed to pass on active threats, aren't they?
They must be able to.
There must be vanishingly few cases of people
in confession booths or therapy sessions saying,
look, this is the time and place I'm going to commit the moida.
I don't think it happens much.
I like that you tried to make a lighter thing by calling it moida.
Well, this has gone a bit dark.
Let's say moida.
Fun cop.
Music is often used in interrogation tactics.
That's a big thing.
Metal music, particularly.
We've heard about that.
Oh, and like Guantanamo and stuff.
Yeah.
And John Ronson wrote about the fact
that like Barney music would be played.
Barney, the purple dinosaur.
I love you.
You love that song over and over to make people go insane.
Did they ever play the blobby Christmas number one?
I bet they have.
I bet they have.
It's Cedars' torture.
But one band that gets used a lot is Metallica.
And Metallica hates it because, you know,
as any musician would have this opinion,
it's that music and politics, music and, you know,
interrogation and questionable torture shouldn't be mixed.
I wouldn't say all musicians think that,
but many of them would.
Yeah, I imagine most of them would.
I think there is a band in the States,
a Christian rock band that were like,
you can use our music.
Demon Hunters, I think they call it.

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Demon Hunters.

It's not quite.

It's not quite.

Bloody hell.

Yeah.

So Metallica asked for their music not to be used,
which it wasn't.

There was an interview with a guy who has claimed
that he killed Osama bin Laden.

I don't know if that ever was confirmed, the CL6 team.

And he said that Metallica reached out to them
and said, can you not use our music?

And Demon Hunter, he claimed, then got piped up and said,
you can have our music.

It's fine.

And here's some patches.

Demon Hunter came out and said,
actually, that's not the case.

We didn't know what it was being used for.

They just said they like playing our music.

They made their own patches.

So supposedly a demon.

What sort of patches work?

Like an iron on patch for you.

Like an iron on patch for your uniform.

They only, yeah.

Military would like to wear lots of different patches.

But like, you've got like the scouts.

That's what I got for killing Osama bin Laden.

You've earned your killing Osama bin Laden badge.

Yeah.

What a dark dog ear for saying that is.

One of the most feared Nazi interrogators
was a guy called Hans Schaaf in the Second World War.

He wasn't a soldier.

He was a Polish born, I think he was a farmer.

He lived in South Africa.

But he was fluent in English.

And if you were an pilot or air crew and you were caught,
you would go to this little town near Frankfurt
and you'll be put up in reasonably nice digs.

And they just talked to you for a couple of weeks.

And Hans Schaaf was the one leading these efforts.

And they would present you with this incredible dossier.

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They'd say, here are all your unit members' names.

Here's your home base.

Here's the commander's dog's name.

Here's the pub that you guys all drink in.

And they just, they would present you tiny fragments of information that made you think that you absolutely everything.

Yeah.

Which meant you were likely to talk and give away secrets of, you know, the weaknesses of your planes or whatever it might be.

But the incredibly weird things that Hans Schaaf after the Second World War, he went to work at Disneyland.

He became a mosaic artist.

And he did Cinderella's Castle at Disney, or Disney World, I think, in Florida.

Yeah.

That is, do you know what though, if I worked in Nazi interrogation, I want to go off and then work in a magical wonderland.

Yeah.

Do art.

Like, you've earned that.

Yeah.

That's amazing.

Yeah.

I just imagine the interview where they want to find a mosaic maker.

They're like, well, what did you do in your previous job?

Well, I'm going to be the one who asked the question.

Okay.

It is time for fact number two.

And that is my fact.

My fact this week is that in real life, the author of Charlotte's Web became the foster parent to the spider children he based Charlotte on.

Okay.

So spider dad.

Spider dad.

Yeah.

By spider children, you mean the children of a spider and not half spider, half child.

That's right.

So E.B. White, author of Charlotte's Web,

who also penned the classic Stuart Little,
and quite a few bigger adult books as well,
The Elements of Style and Is Sex Necessary,
which he wrote with James Thurver.
These were huge books back in the day.
He loved animals and Charlotte of Charlotte's Web
is based on a real spider that he'd seen.
He'd spotted it one autumn in 1949
and he came back later and the spider was gone.
And the sack of the eggs was still sitting in the web.
And he thought, okay, I'm going to collect that.
So he took it down and he put it into a box
and he goes to New York and he travels with this
and he has it in his office and the eggs survived.
And they came out these spiders
and started crawling over his office
and they even had their web shoot up
and they saw them flying across the office
and he thought, this is great.
I'm just going to let them do what they do.
And so for weeks, they just made home on his desk in his office.
This is flat, I think.
It was his... Yeah, yeah.
Sorry, in New York.
And it wasn't until his cleaner came along who just went,
I'm sorry, I can't clean everything,
but the spiders that are infesting this room
that actually then they were murdered.
What? Did she not work around?
I don't know.
Since my cleaner doesn't kill my cat
every time she comes around, she could work around the spiders.
You don't have hundreds of cats each size of a tiny eyelash.
I don't know, it feels like she could work around the spiders.
Yeah, you'd think so.
But she complained.
He said, fine, you can kill them.
Just don't have a cleaner.
Geez, I don't have a cleaner.
That's how you not get your spider children murdered.
Yeah, do your own cleaning.
Yeah.
So yeah, but it's quite nice to know
that he never knew the fate of Charlotte, the spider itself.

I believe the species.
Exactly, the species once they lay eggs.
Yeah, they only live for a year, don't they?
If it's a bad spider.
Yeah, I think so.
Because a spider called a barn spider.
That's what that was, I think, was it?
It's got a scientific name.
I didn't see it.
Oh, yeah, but I didn't even know
there was a common name of a barn spider.
I've heard of the house spider, though.
So the spider's called Charlotte Kovatica.
Yeah.
And is Kovatica maybe the scientific name?
It is.
So Charlotte A. Kovatica.
And the A is a shortened scientific word.
Uranus, I think.
Right, Uranus Kovatica maybe.
I might be pronouncing that wrong.
Uranus Kovatica.
All right.
Cool.
Sorry, just to put you in the cap of the Charlotte's Web.
So there's a pig and a spider.
Yeah.
And the spider saves the pig's life
by spinning words into the web.
Someone's going to kill the pig.
The farmer's going to kill the pig.
The farmer's going to kill the pig right
at the beginning of the book, I think.
And then, yeah, Charlotte and the pig
have an unlikely friendship.
It is weird that as a farmer,
you would see the words written in the web
and think, oh, this pig is incredible.
Yeah, exactly.
No one's like, oh, I'm pretty sure a spider's behind this.
This pig makes such good webs.
So I actually didn't write down
his full first two names, E.B.
Elwyn Brooks.

Elwyn Brooks.

Thank you.

Yeah, so E.B. is Elwyn Brooks,

but actually went by the name Andy his whole life.

Did he?

Yeah.

And it's a really odd reason.

He went to Cornell University

and there's a tradition at Cornell,

which is if you happen to have shared the surname

of the person who was the co-founder

and the first president of Cornell,

who was a guy called Andrew Dixon White,

then you had to just be called Andy

because he was called Andy.

So they shared the surname, White.

And so he got given that at Cornell

and then the rest of his life.

That's what his wife called him.

It's what his friends.

It's what his colleagues.

I wonder if that still happens at Cornell

if you had the surname, White,

that you get a nickname, Andy.

Get called E.B. Elwyn.

You know it was a real pig as well as a real spider, is it?

Yeah.

So it's a lot of it.

It's really drawn from life

because he lived in Maine on a lovely farm

and as Dan said, he connected with nature a lot

and he almost preferred his farm to...

Well, he definitely preferred his farm to city life.

But he kept a pig and in 1948,

so three or four years before writing Charlotte's Web,

he wrote the essay Death of a Pig,

which is all about a pig.

He'd been planning to slaughter,

which then got very ill.

And the pig had erycepilis, which is a skin condition.

Erycepilis?

Yeah, erycepilis.

It's a skin condition Dan Fainesley

couldn't pronounce a few years ago on this podcast.

That's amazing.

Yeah.

And it's dangerous because it can transfer to people as well.

Friend of the podcast, erycepilis.

That's so weird.

And he wrote,

I discovered that once one has given a pig an enema,
there is no turning back.

The pig's lot and mine were inextricably bound now.

Oh.

So he had to give the pig a medical enema at one point or another.

Right.

And it really brought them class together.

Sure.

I love, everything I've read about EBY, I love.

He just seems such a dork.

He would have been perfect, I think, on this podcast.

Like, here's an example of how dorky he was.

So he fell in love with this girl

called Catherine Sargent Angle,

who was a fiction editor who worked at The New Yorker.

And that's, he was a writer for The New Yorker.

And so that's how they met.

She was married at the time.

Yeah, that's right.

Yeah.

And they eloped.

And they had, you know, they had their marriage.

And then he said later on,

I soon realized I'd made no mistake in my choice of wife.

I was helping her pack an overnight bag one afternoon

when she said, put in some tooth twine.

I knew then that a girl who called dental floss tooth twine
was the girl for me.

Oh, that's so sweet.

Well, I quite enjoyed finding out

that when someone asked him why he wrote Charlotte's Web,

he said, I haven't told why I wrote the book,

but I haven't told you why I sneeze either.

And a book is a sneeze.

That is his, yeah.

And he doesn't know why he wrote it.

Inside you and you just have to,

you have a story inside you

and you have to share it with the world.

Yeah, I guess so.

It leaves your body at 17 miles an hour.

Yeah.

And if you keep your eyes open,
when you're right in the book, they will pop out.

Did you see that letter that a little girl wrote to him,
asking him why it was nine years after Charlotte's Web had come out
and she said, when's the next book coming out?

And he replied, I would like to write another book for children,
but I spend all my spare time just answering letters I get from children
about the books I have already written.

So it looks like a hopeless situation
unless you can start a movement in America called
Don't write to E.B. White until he produces another book.

That's harsh, that, isn't it?

Yeah, that is pretty harsh.

But that is exactly the sort of reply
that I end up start doing on Twitter.

Like with the reply guys and stuff.

I'm like, I'm just running out of patience now.

Do you reply to reply guys?

I used to.

Really?

Don't bother now.

No, no, no.

No.

I've never heard that term.

Is that just people who reply no matter what?

Well, no, it's quite a sex-specific thing, isn't it?

Yeah, well, generally reply guys tend to be due to reply to women too.

And in my case, explain our own jokes to us

or why they might be better somehow

in addition to something often incorrect.

So you do it all the time.

I do it all the time.

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Have you thought of trying harder?

He had a really interesting process for writing E.B. White.

So he could never listen to music

because that would be, it would get his attention diverted.

And that's, I think, quite famous for any writer,

anything with lyrics, get that away.

But what he did used to do was sit in the bit of his house

that had the most traffic in it.
So his wife passing through, his kids passing through,
whoever was in the house, yeah.
Not like cars and stuff.
No, exactly.
But like just foot traffic from his family.
I think that's crazy.
I agree.
I think that's really difficult to concentrate
when there's so much happening.
Yeah, it's bad.
That must be one of the most unusual writing methods
anyone's, any writer's ever had.
Yeah, like is it like Dan Brown hangs upside down
or something to write?
That sounds like a Dr. Zeus book.
Dan Brown hangs upside down.
Yeah, he would do that if he had,
if he just needed thinking time,
he would hang upside down.
I don't think he physically would.
Because the pen just wouldn't work after a while.
Exactly.
We might have a space pen.
Yeah, on this anti-gravity or a pencil.
You know Stuart Little?
Yeah, man.
What is it?
What is he, though?
Oh, a best friend.
A mouse.
Right.
And when I say right, I mean wrong.
He's not a mouse.
He's not even a mouse.
Is he a door mouse?
No.
No, he's, so he's a child.
Very small.
Who looks like a mouse.
What?
Oh, right, really?
It's very weird.
No.

In the book.

Really?

Yeah, in the book it's described as,
because he's given birth to by his human parents.
And they say, and the book says he's the size of a mouse.

I see.

And he has all the characteristics of a mouse,
but he is, he's quite indeterminate as a species.

Interesting.

So in the book it's not illustrated, is it?

Or is it?

I don't know if the original edition was illustrated.

Because in Charlotte's web,
the illustrator wanted to give the spider
human woman facial features.

Terrifying.

Yeah, and, and they were like, no.

She just looked like a spider.

And so that was just a spider.

But in the animated film, she was given
like a face.

Given, she's got a lady face.

Maybe that's why, because he hated the movie, didn't he?

Did he?

Yeah, he saw it.

And I guess like a lot of children's authors
like P.L.

Travis seeing Mary Poppins, the movie,
hate the way that their work is translated.

But he hated Charlotte's web.

That might be the reason.

But this kind of makes sense
that maybe Stuart Little wasn't a mouse
because he did have a bit of a bugbear about
when people made animals a bit more human-like
rather than like Charlotte's web.

It was a pig and it was a spider
whereas he can never understand Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck.

He's like, why are they driving a car?

What the hell is going on there?

You feel like a mouse, a mouse doesn't drive a car.

Because I haven't read this book,
because his spider quite realistic.

Like bad spider, female bad spiders will

stick some like silk out of their bum
and then walk around and it's got like pheromones on it
and then the males will follow her around.
Oh, there's a whole chapter about that.
It's where the spider babies come from.
Brilliant.
But he did use a lot of technical terms.
He explained like the different bits of the,
like he was very, he researched spiders for ages
to get all of the understanding.
So when you read it, you'd get an understanding about like,
you know, this bit of the leg is called this,
this bit of the hand, the hand is called this.
He was incredibly shy as well, E.B. White.
Yeah.
He was very, he's very anxious guy
about not pretty much everything.
When he worked at the New Yorker,
he would sometimes go out of the fire escape.
If someone he didn't know turned up at the office,
he'd just pop out, you know, of the window effectively.
Wow.
He skipped.
Well, anytime it was someone he didn't know at the office
or someone who was coming to talk to him.
I think probably someone coming to talk to the office
isn't it?
He wouldn't have done anything done.
Yeah, you're right.
Because to me, it just sounds like someone who's smoking
and trying to...
Yeah, he skipped parties.
He skipped his, the burial service of his wife of many decades.
He skipped the Presidential Medal of Freedom Award ceremony
where JFK was trying to give him a medal,
the National Medal for Literature Award.
He skipped that too.
He just did not want to go out.
He was shy around women, wasn't he?
Was he?
Yeah, he once said,
I have too small a heart and too large a pen.
And it feels like he didn't get to the end of that sentence.
He ain't ran out.

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Yeah, his wife even, when he was communicating sort of love notes and stuff, he would still even hide behind an animal persona.

I don't think he was a furry.

I think he just didn't have.

Yeah, I don't think anyone thinks that.

But he thought that.

I think it now.

Actually, he wasn't a furry.

He was a human with the characteristics of a furry.

This is all, by the way, it's a guy called Michael Sims

who wrote this amazing biography on him

who discovered that Charlotte was based on a real spider,

found out this story about the the egg sack

and he did an interview on NPR where I was reading this on.

And he said that when it came to the audio book, the death scene,

so spoiler alert, Charlotte dies in the book.

He found it impossible to read the death scene out loud.

And according to the producer,

it took him 17 takes in order to get it out finally.

How many takes did your book take?

I was just crying the whole way through.

You shouldn't have put the word airy soupless in.

I really tried to turn.

That's the problem.

But he would go out.

He would go out for walks,

would try and get himself together to go back in and do it.

And he would say, yeah, he's like, this is ridiculous.

A grown man crying over the death of an imaginary insect.

Go back in and then just start crying all over again.

Not an insect, mate.

Yeah, yeah, good point.

Yeah, James is in the booth, pressing the button.

Maybe that's when he was crying.

You know the final line is, and then the insect died.

It is time for fact number three, and that is Andy.

My fact is that one of the world's best dance choreographers

is called Mr. Millipede.

I should say this was sent in by a listener.

So thank you to Maggie Mortensen who sent it in.

Yeah, and Mr. Millipede.

I think he's Benjamin Millipede.

Yes.

And no, now James is looking, he's giving me a look.

Millipede is Millipede.
It's how he would pronounce it.
It's how he would pronounce it,
but it's not how I'm pronouncing it.
And he's not on this podcast.
So no, but it's Millipede.
Yeah, it translates into French as a thousand feet.
Right?
Yeah, there we go.
I've seen newspaper articles interviewing him
who call him the man with a thousand feet.
Really?
Yeah, that's great.
I think because he dances so well,
it's almost as if he has a thousand feet, maybe.
Yeah.
I think I get a lot harder to dance.
It would be hard.
Yeah, if two left feet, but you've got like, what, 500?
And this is just a fact about someone
with an amusing name in the world of dance.
Hmm, no one is to have determinism.
Yeah.
Hmm.
Yeah.
I went to school with a girl called Erin Trimmer
who became a hairdresser.
Nice.
Yeah.
Brilliant.
Shout out to Erin Trimmer.
So Mr. Millipede is quite notable in the world of Hollywood.
He has choreographed a lot of movies.
He's done June, the first June movie.
He did the choreograph for the giant worm dance.
The giant Millipede.
Yeah, the big Millipede that comes out.
There's a dance in there, I believe.
I haven't seen the movie myself.
Oh, yes, there's a dance.
There's a cool shifting dance over the sand.
We sashay to avoid attracting the attention
of the big old worms that live in the desert.
I see because they feel the vibrations of your feet.

[Transcript] No Such Thing As A Fish / 485: No Such Thing As Ballet On A Staircase

They sense movement and they're incredibly sensitive to it.
But if you walk in a particular way,
then they won't spot you.
Is it a dance or is it just someone walking?
Well, it's a gate.
You know.
A gate.
I'm not seeing June, but I imagined that it was a bit in the movie
where they're like, and now we do the worm dance.
And everybody joins in and they're like,
it's just a step to the left.
Yeah, basically, I'm imagining the time walk.
Yeah, Mr. Millipede comes running out in Leotards.
It's like a Jane Fonda video.
Yeah, but he also did Black Swan, which was the ballet movie.
And it was on that movie that he met his future wife, Natalie Portman.
So, yeah, Mr. Millipede is married to Natalie Portman.
Just some hot goss.
Great, yeah.
They split up, though, because he's got together
with one of the worms from Dune.
It's very, very sad.
Yeah, but no, just ballet.
Unless anyone's got anything more on Benny Mills.
Mr. Millipede has got a tattoo on his abdomen of a Bauhaus symbol,
which I think is quite cool.
You know, the German architecture thing.
It's like a profile of a face designed by a painter called Oskar Schlemmer.
And Oskar Schlemmer is really cool.
He had five of his artworks in the Nazi-organized
degenerative art exhibition in Munich.
Do you know about that?
They piled up a load of art.
Well, basically, the Nazis decided, and Hitler especially,
because he thought of himself as an artist,
they got a load of German artworks that showed the greatness of Germany
and put them all in an amazing museum.
And then down the road, they got all the stuff that they really hated
and said, this is all degenerate.
And I mean, which one would you rather see?
Yeah.
Like, I would so much rather see.
Trudging to yet another Hitler watercolor.
Exactly.

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But yeah, Schlemmer had a load of stuff there.
And then they had loads of ruses.
Like, a lot of them were quite anti-Semitic,
the names of the rooms and stuff.
But they had some that was like an insult to German womanhood.
And then they'd have a load of paintings
that were insulting German women.
And then madness becomes method and nature as seen by sick minds.
Wow.
Oh, yeah, these do sound quite cool.
They sound amazing.
Yeah, yeah.
Don't they?
Very nice.
Anyway, that's just a thing about Bauhaus.
Yeah, yeah, yeah.
The movie Black Swan just very quickly
while we're still on Millipede,
there was a lot of controversy about the movie
when Natalie Portman won the Oscar for it.
Because, well, there's a lot of scenes
which has to do with really intensive, amazing ballet dancing.
And there was a stunt double.
Natalie Portman was good at ballet,
but she'd only done it for a year.
She wasn't at the level that you needed to be
in order to pull those moves.
But the person who played the stunt double
didn't get any of the credit.
And there was a lot of questions about
whether or not best actor
should be going to someone
who is not necessarily acting or other.
But there's a lot of emotional scenes in there.
And, you know, so there's a lot of acting that goes on.
So it's justified.
Surely it should be a joint thing.
Yeah.
Like, if you win Best Actor for a particular role,
then anyone else in the film that had to play,
whether it's a stunt double or a stand-in or something,
they should all get on stage.
They share it.
But if it's someone doing the back of your head

for a day where you were busy shooting a different sequence, like, but they can come on stage, but they have to show only the back of their head. The Ruska Statue is only the back of the Oscars head, as well. And they all have to dress in whatever the actor is wearing. They're all wearing the same outfit. So we change it from the nominations being the actor's names to the character name of the movie. Therefore, you can have multiple people. Character is a really good category. I really like that. Yeah. And then, you know, then it's not as problematic when people eventually do something that makes you go, oh, I don't like them anymore. Yeah. But like, oh, I still like that character. Yeah, I love it. Interestingly, lasting on Black Swan, Black Swan was made by Darren Aronofsky, the director. And he also made The Wrestler with Mickey Rourke. And initially, Black Swan and The Wrestler were meant to be one movie where a ballet dancer fell in love with The Wrestler. And that was the initial movie. It was meant to be one cinematic universe combination. And then he just split it into two movies. That's brilliant. Why? What? I would have loved to watch it. Would Mr. Milipede also choreograph The Wrestler? Yeah, The Wrestler was. Pro ballet is fake. There's a thing called beat deafness. Have you heard of this? No. It's like, um. I think I've got it. Yeah, do you think? No, I'm sure you don't. It's like tone deafness. Only you can't dance. It's quite rare.

The dancing well is subjective, isn't it?
Really?
Yeah, it is.
It is.
I'm more talking about being in rhythm.
So they'd watch Strictly come dancing, for example,
and be like, wow, why are they not in time to the band?
It's that kind of thing.
Yeah, well, they would just,
it would be completely alien to them.
It would be, they wouldn't think they're out of time
or they're in time.
They would just be like, well,
I don't know what's going on here.
He's just moving his arms and there's music playing,
but I can't put the two together.
Right.
I wonder if anyone famous has that.
I mean, I definitely can't keep to time.
I found that out by trying to learn the drums.
After many lessons and a very patient teacher
realized I just can't keep to time.
I always get faster, always, all the time.
And the thing is, I love,
like I love dancing and stuff.
I did dance in high school.
I saw a video and I am clearly half a beat
behind everyone else.
Like, it's, yeah, yeah.
I've just had to...
What kind of dancing was it?
I did interpretive because it's a lot harder to prove wrong.
Yeah, that's the best.
There are some dances that it's clear
if you're a beat behind,
if you do the yonky-koky and your arms in
when everyone arms is out.
Yeah.
That's really obvious.
Well, because you'd have to do like group ones as well.
And that was more like modern dance or whatever.
Yeah, so that one was one I was always out.
Yeah, yeah.
I'd love to see just videos of that

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where someone doesn't know.

Hi, yeah.

So we're actually on knees, not shoulders.

Didn't you do a bit of dance?

Me?

Yeah, you.

Where?

I'm thinking of your school

because you went to a very interesting school.

Oh, yeah, yeah.

We went to a Riddolf Steiner school.

We did urythmi,

which is a dance invented by Riddolf Steiner.

Yeah.

So you used to go, it was,

you know, it's very kind to call it a dance.

What it is is you just get given a pole

and you have to walk forwards and backwards

just moving the pole from vertical to horizontal.

I met a pole.

Yeah.

You'd be disappointed if you go to see a pole dancer

and that sort of thing.

It's Dan telling you about the Yeti

while he walks back and forwards.

Ballet moves.

Oh, yeah.

Did you know one of the most iconic sports logos

of all time is a ballet move?

Okay, we're gonna have to guess.

Yeah, try and guess it.

Is it the Michael Jordan song?

Yeah.

There we go.

Is it?

Yeah.

Michael Jordan, the famous.

Can we keep guessing?

Oh, yeah.

No, no, no.

Sorry, sorry.

The Nike swoosh.

Sorry, go for it.

Go for it.

I was thinking the Olympic rings.
Yeah, no clothes.
Do you want one more?
No, no, no.
Oh, okay.
Yeah.
So James is actually, as I said earlier, correct.
Oh, wow.
The very iconic Michael Jordan looking
like he's going for a dunk.
So his arms are out.
He's got a ball in his hand.
Legs are wide.
It's not going for a dunk.
Going for a dunk?
Yeah, you go for a dunk.
He's dunking.
Okay, okay.
Dunking for a dunk.
Just go for a dunk.
Give it a few minutes.
I've just been for a dunk.
I had to bounce off the backboard.
That's everyone assumes that that's him dunking.
It's not.
He's in a photo shoot that he was doing
with a guy called Peter Moore.
He did a ballet leap and that was caught in the photo.
And they thought that just looked so perfect,
a stance for this logo.
Did he know it was a ballet leap?
Yeah, I believe so.
There's not too much information on it.
It's just from this guy, Peter Moore,
who pointed out that when the photos were taken,
that's what was happening.
So we know that it was specifically that.
So yeah, ballet in Michael Jordan land.
I think I might be wrong about that.
No, I'm right about this.
When my parents used to ask me what I wanted to be
when I grow up until I was about seven or eight,
I said I wanted to be a ballet dancer.
Wow.

Ah, legend.

And then I discovered football.

Oh, you get to go on my list of famous people calling you famous and famous people who started off as ballerinas or.

I wouldn't say I started off as a ballerina.

Other people on the list, Tupac, the rapper Tupac.

I did it with him.

There you go.

Yeah, Tupac was, he was the mouse king in the school play, the nutcracker, but he actually studied.

Interesting fact about the mouse king, not a mouse.

Yeah.

He just has the dimensions of a mouse.

Also on the list, the Daleks from Doctor Who.

Bit of a stretch.

No, not really.

So Terry Nation, when he was designing the Daleks, he was inspired by the Soviet dance troupe, the Georgian State Ballet, when they were performing in London, and believed that that would be a perfect, like he looked at it and went, wow, the way they glided, he thought a Dalek would be a perfect way of doing that.

And so not only was that the inspiration, but the very first people who sat inside the Daleks were dancers to help with the movement because they understood how to, yeah, use their feet. And that's why you never see ballet dancers going upstairs.

Exactly, incapable of going upstairs.

I think Louis the, who's the son king?

Louis the fourth.

Fourteenth.

Yeah, he was into ballet, and that's how he got called the son king.

It's named after a character in a ballet,

I don't know which one.

Yeah, he was massive into it.

He used to like try and do the dances himself, like dinners and stuff.

Yeah, yeah.

So what were they called?

Because I was reading that ballerina is the word that you would use for a female ballet person.

Oh, the Italian, wouldn't it?
So what's the word?
We don't have an English word for a male.
Ballerino.
Ballerino.
Probably.
Ballerino's, you know.
Ballerino's.
Yeah, yeah.
Ballerino.
I thought I'd take us down
a different lay note looking at ballet today.
And this was quite recent.
The director of a leading German ballet company
had to be investigated by police
because he smeared a critic's face with feces,
with dog feces.
Wow.
Because she'd said too many bad things about his ballets.
Yes, this is a terrible story.
Yeah, it's a bit...
It was a...
It was a...
Let's just start drive by...
It was a drive?
What?
No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no.
I'd take some skill, wouldn't I?
Just going for a dunk.
It's very high-passion.
It was a critic.
The critic had written very hostile reviews
of this particular ballet company.
It was a previous show, I think, yeah,
in the Dutch mountains it was called,
which had been performed earlier,
furious with the review that was given,
and they were putting on this new performance.
What's interesting is I don't think
he knew that she was going to be there on that night.
He just happened to have the dog poo in his pocket.
No, which makes it more interesting if that's the case.
Come on, no, it can't be true.
You know, if you...

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Did he always have a dog with him, maybe?
Well, it was his dog's poo,
so I wonder if maybe he'd happen to have his dog with him at the time.
God, crikey.
I won't lie, there's some reviewers who I think would probably...
Wow.
Let's name names.
We'll bleep them out.
Oh, no, it's a confessional space.
You can say what you want.
But if I think there is a risk to that,
I will have to.
One of the...
So, the big...
I mean, there was a huge...
I guess you'd say a sort of soft power thing for lots of...
I mean, lots of very big Eastern European ballet companies,
especially Russian.
So, the Bolshoi Ballet is a very, very, very famous Russian ballet.
This is interesting.
Again, it's people who you wouldn't think were ballerinas, but were.
So, have you seen Die Hard?
Yes.
Oh, yes, I know about this.
Yeah, this is one of the henchmen in Die Hard.
It's Karl, the big blonde guy.
It gets shot.
No, it's his brother that gets shot.
Exactly.
Exactly.
He won Best Character in 1980.
I can't believe you don't remember this.
16 people, except at the end.
Karl, the huge blonde henchman, who's extremely tough.
He was a former principal lead dancer in the Bolshoi Ballet.
Okay.
Yeah.
Well, because I've been to see a Bolshoi in Moscow,
and the guys who do it, they're quite slim, but they're strong.
Like, they ask me so strong to do that.
They take a lot of strength.
Yeah, yeah.
And it also takes a lot of strength
to defect, which is what Alexander Gotanov did.

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Yeah, he was on tour in the USA.

Big thing of ballet defections.

Nuri...

Is it Rudolf Nuriiov?

Nishnikov.

Was it the other guy?

Rudolf Nuriiov defected at the airport.

He was about to go back to the Soviet Union.

He had his handlers from the KGB with him,

and he fled to the French police who were there at the airport.

Wow.

But he didn't do it like...

I don't think he did a cool move.

Like a putty.

Yeah, you'll never know.

I wish he had.

A Jordan leap.

Stop the podcast.

Hi, everyone.

I alone am here to tell you or to remind you about club fish.

Club fish is the place to go if you do not have enough
no-search things of fish in your life.

It's a place where you get bonus episodes.

We do shows where we chat about our mailbox.

We do meet the elf where you'll meet some younger members
of the QI team who will try to stump us
with their fiendish questions.

We'll have compilations on there.

In fact, the last one that we posted a couple of weeks ago
had clips from before Anna left.

So if you forgot what she sounds like,
you can go and listen to that.

Club fish is also the place to go
if you want to get ad-free episodes.

It's also the place to go if you want to hear
about our live shows first.

And there'll be all sorts of other things on there.

For instance, this week you will hear in the next 10 minutes,
we're going to give away an object,
and it will be given to a club fish member.

If you want to join club fish,

then the places to go are
no-searchthingsoffish.com slash apple

and no-searchthingsoffish.com forward slash patreon.

I know for a fact, if you join up through Apple,
you do get a short amount of time for free.
So you could theoretically maybe see if you like it,
or you could just binge all of our bonus content
and then unsubscribe.
We wouldn't think any less of you for doing it.
Anyway, that's enough pushing club fish.
We know that a lot of you are here
just for the free stuff, and that is absolutely fine too.
So we have one fact left.
It is my fact.
Hope you enjoy it on with the podcast.
Okay, it is time for our final fact of the show.
That is James.
Okay, my fact this week is that in 1997,
Mattel recalled one of its cabbage patch dolls
because it had started eating children.
I remember this.
Yeah, because I was really into cabbage patch kids.
And I remember that that particular toy
was going to be released in Australia.
And then when they got recalled in the States,
they never made it to Australia.
How interesting.
I'd never heard of it before.
But yeah, I mean, it's incredible.
And when I say eating children,
it was only bits of children it was eating.
It didn't manage a whole one.
It was a toy which had a mouth,
which you could feed food into.
And it had a rucksack at the back.
And then you would feed them a cookie or something,
and it would go through the body,
and then it would mysteriously arrive in the rucksack.
And that would be the game.
Genius.
But children started putting their fingers
into the mouths or the hair or whatever.
And there was really no way to stop it.
I don't think kids were deliberately putting their hair in them.
I think the hair was getting caught.
The hair was getting caught.
Imagine them putting their fingers in deliberately.

Someone with a one-year-old child that that might happen.
But anyway, once you put any part of your body into this mouth,
you couldn't get it out.
Because behind the lips of the doll,
these two metal rollers, right?
And they only rolled one way.
Exactly.
And they had about 100 incidents reported in this Christmas time.
It started off just a few,
and then suddenly more and more and more people started saying,
yeah, my kids are being eaten by this doll.
Just legally, I did find a claim
by Mattel that these are all isolated incidents.
But that really raised a question of how many incidents
do they have to be stopped being isolated incidents?
There were about 100 isolated incidents.
Exactly.
Yeah.
I mean, they did sell many, many,
and probably at least hundreds of thousands of them.
They sold a lot of them.
And so it's a very low percentage of children
who got eaten by these dolls.
One is too many, isn't it?
It rather feels that way, yeah.
Oh, dear.
But yeah, cabbage patch kids.
They're incredible.
With these dolls, there's an extraordinary thing
that I never appreciated about cabbage patch dolls,
which is basically they're handmade to be,
each one is very different from,
like, not even the model,
there's obviously different models,
but within the models, each one has differences in it
because they are basically handcrafted.
They're all supposed to be kind of unique, I think.
Like, for instance, I got one.
Yes.
Oh, it's still in the box.
Well, I only bought it yesterday.
This is not one that eats children.
This is just a normal cabbage patch doll.
Wow.

Wow.

And as you can see, mine is called Leona Jade.

Oh, you've got, is it a ballerina?

Yeah, she has like a little birth certificate and adoption papers.

And the idea is that they're all unique pretty much.

And that was different as well, wasn't it?

That you didn't buy it, you didn't buy a doll, you adopted a doll.

You got the birth certificate.

Yeah.

Oh, I've got them.

I've got the birth certificates and everything.

Yeah, yeah.

I had one called Alice, who had, came with hair like products.

So you could style the hair.

It came with a little thing of hairspray.

So you could do its hair.

And I wasn't a doll kid.

Like, I didn't like Barbies or anything like that.

I was more into trolls.

But the cabbage patch kid, there was just something about it.

Did you know about the cute schema?

No.

The schema of cuteness.

So there was a study done by a university in Japan.

Of course, they would study cuteness.

And it was to look at the things that we respond to as humans to decide that something is cute.

So the forehead is normally quite large.

Big eyes.

The eyes are usually quite low on the forehead.

And sort of chunky short limbs and things.

And they believe that the reason that cabbage patch dolls became so popular and became like, because they didn't do anything.

Not like, you know, before all of these, the original ones didn't, they didn't do anything.

They didn't eat children.

They think that the reason they went so big is because it violates the cute schema.

So if you look at a cabbage patch doll, you'll notice that the eyes are actually quite small, quite close together.

And so there's elements about them that are considered grotesque.
But not enough.

I find, I don't, I don't, I find them a bit creepy.

And that's why, because it divides people
and people either think they're cute or creepy.

And so people would talk about them because people go,
oh, they're so cute.

And other people go, no, no, no, they're really creepy.

And as we know from just the media today,
if you can cause a divide in public opinion,
people will talk and debate and argue.

My wife won't let me take this home.

I bought it and she really doesn't like it.

It's just new.

Was it like an eBay purchase?

It's brand new.

No, I bought it.

So this was in a shop, right?

Yeah, yeah.

So does anyone want one?

Yeah, I'll have it, definitely.

Oh, sure.

I thought what we could give it away to one of our listeners.

Nice, nice idea.

Should we give it away to someone on Club Fish?

I'm pretty sure I just claimed it.

But yeah, no, of course, of course.

Yeah, you should always give away adopted children as supplies.

It's just be a double adoption.

Yeah, let's do that.

OK, we'll work out a competition.

The thing about the sort of the look of the freakish look
and so on, that led to one of the great myths
about cabbage patch kids that circulated in the 80s,
which reading this kind of makes me miss being a kid again
and falling for these amazing legends.

Dan, you still fall for these things.

Yeah, that's true.

That's true.

But the story was the reason they looked like that
was because President of America at the time,
Ronald Reagan, gave a directive to the makers of it
to show what we would look like following the survival
of a nuclear holocaust and to get us used to the idea

that we're going to look quite freakish
and it would be normalized by the time it happened.
We were sort of accepted as normal humans being like that.
And that went around for, yeah, it's such a great story.
But it's obviously not true.
But that's not really, remarkably, it's not true.
That's so funny.

I find everything about them a bit run.

Yeah.

Did you guys read about the Babyland General Hospital?

Yeah.

Was this one at some point?

Well, actually, it's mentioned on this box.

It says that there was a young boy called Xavier Roberts
who discovered a magical cabbage patch
and he built Babyland General Hospital where his children
now live and play until someone takes them home
to care for them and love them.

Right.

And that sounds like just a bit of corporate guff.

Actually, it's a real place.

So he kind of, well, I'm sure we'll get on with the history
of how they were originated.

But in 1978, I think he opened up,
and I think it was a former medical facility,
he opened up Babyland General Hospital
and you could go there as a punter
and they held live births at the hospital.

And there was a write-up on Slate.

Okay, every half hour or so,
an employee dressed as a doctor or nurse
gets on the PA and announces there is a code green.

That means that mother cabbage is in labor.

And it's time to head to the magical crystal tree
to watch a baby being born.

The birthing process lasts under three minutes.

Not realistic.

A nurse in scrubs and latex gloves stands among the cabbages
and tells the crowd that mother cabbage has dilated
the full 10 leaves apart.

That's such a gag for the parents.

I really am.

Like, she's like, no idea.

The parents are going to be like, oh, I see what they're saying.

As the crystal, well, there are more,
there are more very specific parent gags.
As the crystals at the base of the tree begin to glow,
the nurse gives the cabbage a shot of imagicillin
and announces she will be performing an esiotomy,
a pesiotomy gag there, as opposed to a C-section,
which stands for cabbage section.
The nurse gently spreads the cabbage leaves,
reaches in her gloved hands,
and slowly pulls out a naked doll.
The kids in the crowd, murmur, gasp and applaud.
Wow.
People say that's creepy.
I would love to see that.
The whole story was one of the reasons,
the other reasons they became so popular,
because it, rather than just being a doll,
it was this whole, you're buying into the mythos.
Yeah.
Like, you're actually adopting a thing.
You know, the parents would be like,
oh, that's a really cute idea.
And oh, oh, my kid could adopt a doll and stuff.
And so, yeah, and it worked.
That's amazing.
It really did work, because they were absolutely massive.
They were.
When they first went out, when was that going to be in like the 80s?
Early 80s, yeah.
And there was riots when people were trying to get them in shops
and I was reading some newspaper articles from the time
about these riots that were happening in the States.
The Citizen's Voice newspaper, this was in Pennsylvania.
One pregnant woman bit another patron and knocked his hat off.
I think she was just trying to eat a cookie, but then got caught.
Another woman was punched in the face by a female shopper.
One woman chased a man through a parking lot, calling him an SOB.
The Simi Valley staff from California said one woman was swinging
a baseball bat wildly at other women to get one of these dolls.
And it wasn't even the last doll in the shop that she was getting, apparently.
Because all of these dolls are slightly different from each other.
She'd seen one that she particularly wanted,
and she just didn't want anyone else to go near them.
So she was swinging the baseball bats.

And in 2008, Four Kids Entertainment Inc.,
who at the time owned the license for these,
they released a special edition of the dolls to commemorate the riots.

Oh wow, that's awesome.

And did it come with riots?

No, it was just like riot gear.

They've become slightly different over the years.

The one that I've got here is a bit more
finally and a bit more toy-like than the originals.

The ones that they did to commemorate,
they were more close to the originals, basically.

You can see, since becoming a parent and understanding
the Christmas rush to get toys,

you can understand why movies like Jingle All the Way
are so Arnold Schwarzenegger's most relatable movie.

That was all about a toy.

Have you not seen it?

The most relatable movie?

Absolutely.

That's just, I never think of all of them.

More than Cold and the Barbarian.

Yeah, yeah.

Even more than Conan Deen and Julia.

Even more than Terminator, yeah.

It's more than, can we go on and call Terminator 3 Rise of the Machines?

No, not that one, sorry.

Quite relatable.

So Xavier Roberts, the person who invented,
he's mentioned on the side of the box and correct in your...

Controversial.

Highly controversial.

21-year-old art student when he first notices
that there is a German technique of needle molding
and he sees a lady called Martha Nelson
who is making these doll babies
and he goes, oh, that looks really interesting.

She has adoption papers for the babies.

She has original names for the babies.

He goes off, changes the technique ever so slightly,
but it was very much lifted from what this woman was doing
and then he kind of went off and ran with it
and got all the credit for creating this new style of doll.

Yeah, because basically she made this doll, right?

She was selling them to him because he owned a gift shop

and then he wanted to up the price.

She refused and so refused to give him any more dolls
so he said, well, I'm just going to make them myself then.

Basically, that's what happened.

Did he want to mass produce them a bit more?

He did, yeah.

And then the official website says
that he was into needle molding
and that he learned quilting skills from his mother
and all that kind of stuff, but it seems very much...

It does, yeah.

So what we're saying is that the side of the box here
where it says that the bunny bees...

We're saying they're not involved at all.

No, I think one really weird thing about this doll,
I mean, there's a lot of weird things about this doll,
but supposedly there's a guy called Xavier
and he runs a hospital that looks after these cabbage babies
until they're adopted, right?

That's the guy we're talking about, Xavier Roberts, right?

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

But if you look at any of these things, he signed all the buttocks.

James is just showing us the doll's butt.

If you look at the bum of the doll,
his signature is on the bum.

Really?

And I think that's kind of a weird thing
for someone running a hospital to do to their babies.

Well, it's like those surgeons, isn't it?

You know, there's surgeons, sometimes they get in trouble
because there are a few surgeons who've got in trouble
for burning their initials on a patient's liver,
you know, mid-operation.

And then it turns out you've just, you know,
and it's kind of, I guess it's a fun joke.

But that's effectively what Xavier appears to have done
on all these ties.

Well, maybe you signed them with Penn
and they went off and got it tattooed afterwards.

Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Could have been their own decision, you're right.

In 2020, bringing in trolls, my favourites,
there was one, it was called the Poppy and Sing doll, I think,
and basically she had a little button on her tummy

that you would press her and she'd be like,
Ray, let's do a song or something.
But she also had a button underneath her
so that when she sat down, she would say other things.
But that happened to be right, right in the crotch,
like right, right in the gusset.
It was where that button was located.
And most of the sounds that she made
when you pressed that were gasping.
And her going, oh, and yeah, like it's just sound effects.
So there was a petition to recall it
by a lot of furious parents
who said that it would be grooming children.
Oh my God, wow, we've got room on this doll for two buttons.
Okay, we've got the tummy one.
Great, belly button, brilliant.
Can anyone think of where we should put the other button?
You know, the hand.
There was also a Play-Doh, had a Play-Doh,
Mountain Cake Mountain, sorry,
the play set that came out recently for Christmas.
But the extruder, you know, it looks like a syringe
that you would put the Play-Doh in
to do the icing on the cake is incredibly phallic.
Like it felt like enough that it definitely wasn't a mistake.
Children won't understand, but you know.
Is there like the equivalent of beat deafness
where you're just phallic and sexual in your window?
In your window blindness.
To bias and arrest of development,
where you just don't understand all those innuendos.
Yeah, exactly.
I hosted a Makeaway Takeaway on CITV,
which obviously went so well,
they decided to close the channel.
And that was an arts and craft show.
It was really, really fun,
but the amount of times they had to stop filming
because they'd go,
it's looking a bit phallic,
like anything that you would make.
Anything, like, because anything you make,
there's usually a moment
where you have to make something

that's sort of like sausage shaped.
It feels like that might be your problem.
If everything you make is looking a bit phallic.
She's doing it again.
I'm like, close the channel.
Close it, shut it down.
It's like closing counters of the third kind
with mashed potatoes.
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 have said
over the course of this podcast,
we can be found on our Twitter accounts.
I'm on at Shriverland, James.
At James Harkin.
Andy.
At Andrew Hunter M.
And Beck.
At Beck Hill comedian,
or Beach Hill comedian,
if you spell it wrong.
Actually, no, you spell it the same,
but you just pronounce it differently.
Yeah, or you can go to our group account,
which is at no such thing,
or why not email us on podcast at qi.com.
You can also find all of our previous episodes
up on our website,
no such thing as a fish.com.
But why bother listening to our podcast
when there's a far superior one out there
called The Problem Squad
by our guest with us today, Beck Hill,
and also one of our very close buddies,
Mathematician Matt Parker, amazing guy.
Beck, give us a quick rundown of the podcast.
Our listeners send us problems,
and we solve them.
Matt solves them, and I help.
Are they maths problems or personal problems?
Most of the ones that Matt answers are maths ones,
and the ones that I solve are usually personal or creative.

[Transcript] No Such Thing As A Fish / 485: No Such Thing As Ballet On A Staircase

Right.

Yeah, like how big a burger can you fit into your mouth?

Nice, cool.

And how's it going?

It's doing well.

It's doing well, but we have set our sights on...

We're trying to surpass you guys in terms of positive reviews.

So we're on 2,000 five-star reviews on Spotify at the moment.

You guys are on 11,000.

So we've set our sights on trying to beat you.

We've told people not to then give you less than five stars.

You've just told them to not vote for you at all.

Give us five stars.

Okay, cool. That's a backhanded compliment, isn't it?

I've got a problem I'm going to be writing into your show with, Beck.

All right, we'll do check it out.

Also, Beck's brilliant kids' books, Horror Heights.

They're amazing.

The third one's coming out very, very soon.

Just come out.

Just come out.

Dead ringer.

Dead ringer.

Check that out as well.

And come back next week for another episode of the 2-Star Reviewed.

No such thing as a fish.

We'll see you then.

Goodbye.