

[Transcript] No Such Thing As A Fish / 495: No Such Thing As A Peanut Hall of Fame

Hey everybody, Dan and Andy here, and we have two very exciting big announcements before this week's show starts.

That's right, the first one is that we are joined by a very special guest this week, and that is the incredible Neil Gaiman.

Yes, Neil Gaiman has done so much stuff, so he's written brilliant novels, he's written for the screen, Neverwhere, American Gods, Stardust.

He covered Good Omens with Terry Pratchett, he's done it all.

That's right, and it's not even just the books, you know, the TV work as well, the Sandman was converted into a show.

Doctor Who, his episodes are Doctor Who is some of the best episodes of the modern era.

And then, of course, Good Omens comes to Amazon Prime, and then they do a second series.

Despite the fact that Terry Pratchett has passed away, I was quite nervous.

It comes out, it is brilliant.

So the guy just continues to deliver extraordinary goods.

I binged it in one go, by the way.

I don't know if you've seen it, Andy, it's incredible.

And so, yeah, we're very excited because what was he going to talk about?

This mystical man.

Was it going to be ghosts?

Was it going to be graveyards?

Was it going to be the history of Norse gods?

What was it going to be?

Andy, what was it?

Bagels?

Bagels!

The man loves bagels, and he needed to tell us about it.

So that's why it's so exciting, because Neil is a thunder nerd just like us.

Anyway, that's announcement one.

Announcement number two, Andy.

The other huge announcement we've got is that we are going to be doing a live show really soon.

We're going to be at the London Podcast Festival on the 14th of September this year.

Now, it's sold out in the room, but there are still streaming tickets available.

And they're available for a few days after the show.

So if you buy a ticket, you can watch it at your convenience.

And there is a really good reason to buy a streaming ticket.

In fact, there are two reasons.

The first reason is that it's going to be our 500th show.

We've moved Roman numerals.

But the last one we had was C. Now we're doing D. This is amazing.

So that's the first big reason.

The second big reason is that we have a special guest.

Now, in all the months that we've been having special guests in Santa and went on maternity leave, our guests have been great.

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But there's one guest who we've been really excited to get.
And for this show, show 500, our special guest is Anna Tyshinski.
Yes, she's back.
Yes, we're so excited.
Anna will be joining us live on stage.
So if you want to be part of that party as we're surrounded in giant D balloons.
I'm so regretting letting Andy organize the balloons now.
You can do that by simply heading to know such thing as a fish dot com slash live.
You'll find a link to the live stream tickets for the London Podcast Festival.
That's where we'll be.
If you're a fish cordian, you can chat about it online with everyone else
as it goes out streaming live.
And let's make this into a massive party and a proper return for Anna Tyshinski.
Yeah, no such thing as official dot com slash live.
Get your tickets now.
That's it from us on with the show on with Mr.
Gaiman and his bagels.
Hello and welcome to another episode of No Such Thing as a Fish, a weekly podcast
coming to you this week from four undisclosed locations around the globe.
My name is Dan Schreiber, and I am sitting here with James Harkin,
Andrew Hunter Murray and Neil Gaiman.
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, and that is Neil.
My fact is that the bagel in the form that we know it only ever came to exist
through Polish antisemitism.
Now, I could have gone for something much more sort of easy to chat about with bagels,
like the fact that every year over 2000 people are taken to hospital
in America alone with bagel related injuries.
Neil, I got to pause you there.
I want to know what a bagel is, and I cannot think of anything less likely
to injure me than a bagel.
I feel like I would have to be misusing a bagel in some terrible way
in order that I would need to go to A&E with it.
I can tell you, Addy, it's cutting them open.
It's finger cuts from.
And quite often people try and cut them while they're still frozen.
I do that sometimes. I do that.
I try and crack.
Well, there you go.
There you go.
Well, there was a report 2008 bagel based injuries with the fifth most common
injury by knife reported to hospitals.
I read that, Dan.

But did you see that?

Did you see what the other four were?

Yeah. What were they?

OK, so the number one was chicken, chicken based cutting would get you in.

Number two, and I don't know if these are in the right order,

but the other the other three are potatoes, apples and onions.

And then you get the bagel.

Cheese comes afterwards.

The cheese is very safe to cut in America, though.

They don't really they just have to take it out of the plastic sheet, don't they?

Oh, yeah. Out.

There we go.

A bit of sledging for our American listeners about the quality of your cheese.

Nice try.

Apparently, it's so prominent that you would have these bagel based cuts

that someone went in and said the nurse looked at the cut and went,

were you cutting a bagel because the horizontal cut of the laying down

of the bagel would be similar to the cut.

These are all way more wholesome than my interpretation
of what you would end up in hospital with a bagel for.

So that's good. So good.

So sorry. Medieval Polish anti-semitism.

Let's get on to the real medieval Polish anti-semitism.

Because the initial way that a bagel was made is it was boiled.

And there were laws enacted in Poland

that forbade Jews from touching bread, baking bread in particular.

So when forbidden to bake bread,

they made their bread into essentially rings and started boiling them.

And that was where our bagel begins.

I got heavily into bagel making during lockdown
in the way that one does.

You know, I had my little pot of sourdough fermenting away

in the sideboard and three times a week, I would make my bagels

and just started getting into why you boil them.

OK. So the boiling water and then they rise.

They float to the top and then and only then

do you slam them into the oven.

And I'm assuming those original bagels were not even ovened.

I know that there were various sort of laws being enacted and lifted.

At one point, there was a very nice Polish

princely in Boleslaw in 1264, who actually pronounced the law

saying Jews may freely buy and sell and touch bread like Christians,
which was a kind of him.

I think I mean, when he does like Christians,

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I imagine there are still some restrictions on Christians just touching all the bread they like.

I mean, if I was running a bakery, I would not I would not want people no matter what their creed or denomination to come in and just touch the stuff.

Yeah, I think the theories were like well, the few various theories that are part across.

But like one of them is that obviously bread was used for communion by the Catholics. And so there was a worry that if the Jewish people were touching the bread, they might touch communion bread.

There was also at one stage.

The idea was that Jewish people were poisoning bread.

Basically, yeah, it was basically the anti-Semitism of, you know, the Jewish people are trying to kill us and they're going to do it through our bread.

You know what I mean? So and the biling could have been to show that it wasn't poisoned.

You know, if you buy or something, then that shows that there's no poison in there.

So that's one that's one theory as to why they're filed.

Right. That's so interesting.

Did you guys hear about the Begel Baker's local three three eight?

No, it sounds like a chat line, actually, but it's not.

It's the they were the they were the group of bakers in New York in the early 20th century, and they were all Jewish.

And if you wanted to get in, you had to be able to roll 832 bagels in an hour.

That was the one criteria for entry.

That's a lot.

I know they all had this special Begel muscle on the outside of their elbows, like just pointing to it on the screen.

You can see mine is not very well developed, but it's like it's like here.

So it's just above your elbow.

Or maybe just below, actually, right?

I think it's the one that's the same as if you open a lot of bottles of wine.

You get an incredibly strong muscle there.

Do you really? Mine is tiny.

You have a person who does that for you, Andy, don't you?

Yeah, I've got an incredibly strong shouting at the butler muscle, but not the.

No. And so they were they were crazy unionized.

You know, they had a really good careers, the great pay, great benefits.

You could take home 24 free bagels every day, every individual baker.

So you're laughing.

And if they didn't get good contracts, they would go on strike and the city would have a terrible bagel drought.

And then, sadly, bagels started to be machine made and they they all.

So when did they actually come up with machine making bagels?

I think it was the 50s. Yeah, it was the late 50s.

Yeah, it was a guy called Daniel Thompson, wasn't it?
And he came up with what he called an apparatus for making a tauroid.
But he did say in his patent that it was specifically for bagels
because people had tried to make bagels using doughnut machines,
but the dough was too too thick so it wouldn't work on the doughnut machine.
So this was an improvement.
And the one other thing that Daniel Thompson invented, this is so random,
he invented the first wheeled folding ping pong table.
So what two things to give the world like automatic bagels and the folding ping
pong table? Oh, what would you headline with on the headstone?
I'm not sure. Probably probably the automatic bagel.
I think so. Yeah, I'd go with the bagel because it's changed more lives.
So am I right in saying that a common filling for bagels is something called
cream cheese and locks? Has anyone heard that? Yeah, you are absolutely.
What's locks? Smoked salmon. Yeah, it's smoked salmon. Yeah, yeah.
The really interesting thing about this is that the word locks hasn't changed
in sound or meaning for 8000 years. Wow.
And in the English language, we think it's the oldest word
that if you got in a time machine and you went back 8000 years,
they wouldn't understand anything that you said, apart from if you asked for
some locks on your bagels might not have existed then.
But if you asked for some locks, they would know what you mean.
Isn't that amazing? And it's amazing.
It's a word that they use to kind of prove Proto Indo European, you know,
this old language that kind of spread out and all the different European
and West Asian languages come from, they worked that out by using this word
locks, because it comes in all Germanic in all sorts of different languages.
That's so cool.
This is bizarre. I have a link to Proto Indo European and bagels.
That is not the locks thing there, because I was looking up where the word
bagel comes from. And bagel comes from a Proto Indo European root,
which is BLEG, B-H-E-U-G, and it means to bend.
If something is so a bagel is bent into a circle, so there.
And BLEG also features in bow, you know, when you are the verb to bow,
it features in bow, like bow and arrow.
It features in bow, like the bow of a ship also bent, elbow.
Same. Yeah. And buxom also is the other word that derives gradually from BLEG.
So when you've got bagel's elbow, you're doubling up on the bow.
Yes. That's lovely.
I love the idea that it's 8000 years ago.
You're wandering around Proto Europe and somehow you're able to persuade
somebody to give you a round-ish piece of bread with smoked salmon on it.
Cream cheese, by the way. Yeah.
The most famous type in Britain, at least, and I think probably in America,

is made in which city?

Philadelphia.

I'm afraid not. It was invented in New York, but it was named Philadelphia because the Philadelphia area was so famous for making good dairy products that they wanted to name it after this area, but it was actually invented in New York.

All right. So now you're saying American cheese is good, James.

Interesting about face, we've gone on this podcast.

Just very quickly, just while we were talking about the words for bagel, what's quite surprising is that up until 1951, bagel wasn't really a known word outside of the Jewish communities in the major cities of America.

So it was in 1951 that when the New York Times was writing an article about the strike that was happening, that they actually had to provide a pronunciation guide to show it, so B-A-Y-G-L-E, just that's how this word that you're now reading is pronounced. It's quite amazing.

My mother, who is 89, whenever the subject of bagels comes up, as it doesn't as often as you'd expect, always gets a little bit aggrieved because she's like, it's not bagel, it's bagel.

I-I-G-L. And she says, and I know that because my mother's aunt and uncle, Rosie and Mick, owned the Johnny Isaacs Fish and Ship Shop in the East End. And outside the Fish and Ship Shop, there was the little old bagel lady.

And my mother is still slightly put out about the fact that the pronunciation has gone bagel because all of her childhood, they were bagels.

There's a book on the bagel that was written by a lady called Maria Velinska, and she finds an old pretzel tin and it's got bagel on it as a name.

And it turns out that there was a family in Poland called bagel, who were part of the Jewish baking community in pre-Nazi Krakow.

And she thinks, ah, is that where bagel first originated from as a term?

There is another Krakow link, weirdly, and this is like the origin of the bagel, because there's a story that it came from the Siege of Vienna in 1683, when the Ottomans besieged Vienna and, you know, there was to celebrate the victory and the breaking of that siege, blah, blah, blah.

It's not true.

I mean, no, it's not true because at least 70 years before that, in Jewish Krakow, there was a statute saying you are allowed to give bagels to a woman who's given birth.

It was a kind of fertility thing.

It was a kind of if the woman's given birth, you give her a bagel, give the midwife a bagel, any women or girls who were present at the birth, they get a bagel too, you get a bagel, you get a bagel.

I think it's because it's ring shaped.

It sort of is a fertility thing.

Is it like what you were thinking about how you would end up in the emergency room, Sandy?

It's not far away from that place, it's pretty close.

Stop the podcast, stop the podcast.

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Just wanted to let you know we are sponsored this week by Canva for Teams.

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You know, Dan might be wanting to work with us on a, have you seen this Mongolian death worm presentation?

It would be easy for me to chip in and say helpful things like that doesn't exist.

And what are you doing, Dan?

But if I was actually on board with it, you can use all sorts of stuff with Canva for Teams and you can really collaborate brilliantly.

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It'll be a joyful experience for both of you.

OK, on with the show.

On with the podcast.

OK, it is time for fact number two, and that is James OK.

My fact this week is that it's actually not that bad to spend eternity pushing a boulder up a hill for it only to roll down again every time.

Sure.

That's how I perceive making this podcast.

Yeah, it's not that bad after all.

You know, it's like this is supposed to be this eternal punishment.

And, you know, it's kind of fine.

So this is Sisyphus and it's the great Greek mythology story, right?

Pushing a boulder up a hill, but can never make it up to the top as the punishment.

That's right.

You never hear him complaining, do you?

Or does he?

It's definitely a punishment from the God.

It is a punishment.

Look, this is something that I read, a study called Idolness aversion and a need for justifiable busyness, which was a study from 2010 from the University of Chicago,

University of Shanghai and a few other places, which I read about an improbable dot com run by our friends, that website.

And the idea is that now that humans don't have to spend the day just trying to survive and run away from lions and collect food and all that kind of stuff, we need to be kept busy in order to be happy.

And what they did was they did an experiment where people in a room and they had to do a survey and then at the end of the survey, they had to take the paper either to the front of the room or they had to walk 10 minutes to another place and put their paper there, right?

And in both places, they'll get some candy as a thanks for doing the survey.

Now, when they did that study, most people just went for the box, which was right next to them because why not?

It's right there.

But when they told them that in one of the places it'll be plain chocolate and the other place it'll be dark chocolate, more than 50 percent of them would start going the 10 minute walk and the 10 minute walk back rather than just doing the short one and then waiting for everyone to come back from wherever they've been.

So people would rather go and get the candy than sit around idly for 20 minutes waiting. And the weird thing is, no matter what you did, if you put the milk chocolate in one place and the dark chocolate in another or you swapped it around, people still make that walk.

And the idea is that people prefer to do something rather than sitting around doing nothing when they think they're going to get something for their efforts.

And it doesn't matter what the thing is that you think you're going to get for your efforts, you're going to do something.

Yeah, that's very clever experiment design, because otherwise it would have turned into a referendum on which is better, plain chocolate or dark chocolate.

That's an unintended consequence.

Yeah. And so what they thought was these people who did this study and they speculate about it in their paper is that people are just happier when they're given something to do.

And the Sisyphus, which they actually mentioned in the paper, the Sisyphus would be happier rolling the rock up and down the hill, or up the hill every single day, and then it goes to the bottom and he has to do it again and do it again and do it again.

He would be happier doing that than if he spent all of eternity just sitting around twiddling his thumb and doing nothing.

And that's the idea.

Yeah, I mean, they mention things in the paper that's written in the science paper where they say homeowners may increase the happiness of their idle housekeepers by letting in some mice and prompting the housekeepers to clean up.

Yeah, I did read that.

Yeah, governments may increase the happiness of idle citizens

by having them build bridges that are actually useless.

And then they put in practical examples where people have done this, where they've shown that by stopping the idleness, that happiness is hopefully increased.

And that's in airports.

And that is extending the distance between getting off the plane and the baggage carousel so that you don't just get straight there.

And then you're idly waiting for the bags to come out.

That's the idea is that at least you're walking to something and you're using up the time.

Don't know if that's true.

I think that one is apocryphal, isn't it?

Or not. It's not absolutely nailed on.

Because I think the claim is that Houston Airport did that

because they were getting loads of people complaining

because the plane landed a minute from the baggage carousel

and then they had to hang around waiting.

And then when they just switched the arrival gate and sent the bags

so that people had to walk for the eight minutes

basically before the bags got to the thing, then complaints dropped.

So, yeah, Sisyphus founded Corinth.

I've been to the hill which he pushed the rock up, supposedly.

Oh, really?

We're just on the outskirts of Corinth.

What, so did he complete the gig?

No, but it's like a story, isn't it?

Yeah, it's like a story.

So the people of Corinth say, oh, this is the hill.

Or the tall guy says, this is the hill which he did it.

Very cool.

So I've disgraced myself as a mythologist

and as somebody who's written books on mythology

and written stories set in mythological times

and even had Sisyphus as a character.

The one place in literature

he gets to stop rolling his rock is when Orpheus goes to the underworld

and sings and I've written that.

And I just realised I'd completely forgotten what he did to be punished to do that.

Is he one of the ones who accidentally did he feed the gods his son accidentally?

Was he one of those?

It was Zeus, wasn't it?

Yeah, he tricked Zeus.

He did it twice.

Basically, it was a second offence.

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I think that was something where the gods get really annoyed with you.
So the first thing was that Zeus had run off with a woman
and Sisyphus had seen it happening and he snitched on Zeus.
And so Zeus decided, well, I'm going to strike you down with a thunderbolt.
And then he tried to cheat death by chaining death up
so that he couldn't take into the underworld.
And then a second time he tried to cheat death by saying that
he needed to go up to see his wife
because his wife hadn't done a proper funeral or something.
Yeah, yeah, he'd already instructed his wife.
He said to his wife, don't bury me.
Right, this is going to be great.
And then when he got to Hades, he said, oh, I haven't had a proper funeral.
So you need I need to go and punish my wife in a range of the proper funeral.
And then when he got back, he just reunited with his wife.
Yeah. And they said, well, if you're going to try and stop, you know, dying
and try and stop death in general, because he tried to stop death for the whole of the world.
They said, well, we're going to make death really, really shitty for you.
I got to say, it's one of the I think the punishments are really good in Greek myths.
I'd never heard of this one.
This is Ockness. Have you heard of Ockness?
I mean, maybe, Neil, you've written about Ockness.
I don't know. Tell me about Ockness.
So Ockness is punishment.
I actually don't know what the crime was, but he had to perpetually weave a rope out of straw.
But no matter how fast he wove the rope, the rope that he's already woven gets eaten by a donkey.
And I have to say, that sounds like a sort of holiday activity to me.
Yeah, you just have to weave some rope.
And you get to be friends with a donkey.
Well, it's not having your liver eaten every day.
Is it pecked out by a bird while you're changed to a rock?
It's very much like parking a fence level of punishment.
That's how much you like weaving, isn't it?
Well, that's true.
And there's always a thing of, oh, in life, he hated weaving.
So actually, yeah, that was his least favorite activity.
And yeah, there was Ixion, who was a murderer, killed his father-in-law,
the first man guilty of kinslaying in Greek mythology.
And he got bound to a burning wheel and his wheels spun across the heavens.
Oh, my goodness.
I would say definitely take the weaving ahead of that.
Exactly. Yeah. That's amazing.
I was trying to find out whether or not there are any modern examples
of someone trying to push something up a hill and finding it quite hard.

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Last year, 2022, a Colorado man attempted to ascend to the top of a 14,000 115 foot mountain called Pikes Peak on his hands and knees while trying to push a peanut to the top of the hill using his nose.

So so you can see footage of this.

He has a mask on his face where there's a sort of black spoon that's attached to the front of his nose.

He starts at the bottom.

He's got the peanut there.

He's brought multiple peanuts because it turns out he's not the first person to do this.

He's the fourth in Colorado history.

The first person to do it was in 1929.

And it took three weeks for that person to do.

But squirrels were stealing the peanuts.

And so the efforts were quite messed up.

So he has multiple peanuts that he took with him on this trip.

And it took him seven days.

But he got there. But is he going?

Is he going on hands and knees?

Yeah, hands and knees. Yeah.

Pushing him so painful.

Does he take the peanut back down afterwards?

That feels easier, doesn't it?

Yeah, kicking in the air.

Or is there a miniature can of three previous peanuts that have been there?

And he's just adding to it.

Oh, yeah, yeah, like a Hall of Fame.

It sounds like a weirdly so.

There must be more going on in Colorado.

If you're in Colorado and you're listening to this, please write it and tell us what else there is to do.

I have a couple more boredom things.

So there was a study in 2021

about what people are willing to do when they are bored and whether it changes people's perceptions of morality or what that, you know, what they're prepared to do.

This study found that if you ask people to watch a boring 20 minute long video, people are more willing to shred maggots in a grinder.

The scientists gave people a few maggots and they even named them.

They called them Toto, Tee-Fee and Kiki.

And they left people.

They said, look, I'm just going to pop out of the room

while you watch this video for 20 minutes, hear your Toto, Tee-Fee and Kiki.

Here's your grinder and what just have a great time.

No, way more people.

So they must have.

Sorry, Andy, they must have put the idea into their heads that the maggots can go into the grinder.

Surely if you leave someone with a maggot and a grinder, you're only you can only combine those things in one way.

And basically, so it wasn't it wasn't everyone by a long way, but 67 people who watched the very, very dull video.

Out of how many?

So that was the sorry, that was the title.

So 67 people watched this dull video of them, 12 dropped a maggot in.

And there was a obviously there was a control group when they got to watch an interesting documentary.

I don't know, maybe an Attenborough, maybe a Thiru, doesn't matter.

It was just one person out of 62.

Well, it makes a difference, actually, Andy,

if they're watching like a nature documentary,

then they might feel more empathetic towards the maggots.

But all they might feel empathetic towards the lions, you know, nature's grinder. That's it.

Yeah, anyway, you will be relieved to hear that no maggots were actually ground up.

It was a fake machine.

Oh, was it?

That's funny. I've seen one of those before.

And I did an escape room where I had to put my hand in a food processor to get the key, but obviously it was a fake one, but they didn't tell you.

It was a fake one and like you were willing to grind up your hand for the sake of getting a clue.

I was quite aware that we were in a controlled environment that they wouldn't let me do that.

They wouldn't let me mutilate myself.

So I was fairly certain that if there was a real food processor there, someone would come over the tannoy saying, don't do that.

You know, you may have an awful lot of one-handed men around here who were equally as certain.

I've done an escape room with you, James.

It doesn't surprise me in the least that you'd be willing to risk serious physical injury to get a personal best.

It's true.

Here's an interesting thing that I've been reading about.

And I don't know. It is quite complicated.

So let's see. Let's see where it goes.

But I was reading about neuroscience and there is a theory in neuroscience at the moment that the human brain is only built to solve one problem.

Oh, what is the best way to cut into this bagel?

I would be more. Yeah. What am I going to eat?

What am I going to eat next?

I see what you mean. Yeah.

I think all of these could be subcategories of what these neuroscientists are saying.

They reckon that your brain is created to make sure you don't have any surprises in your life. Oh, yeah.

And basically everything you do, everything that your brain does is trying to stop that from happening.

And that's the reason why people like routine, because they know that there's not going to be any surprises and it'll be the same all the time.

But it also, in theory, explains people being curious and people inventing you things, because what you're doing is you're slightly pushing the boundaries so you can test it and so that your brain doesn't get surprised if anything beyond those boundaries happens.

And I just find that a really interesting idea that, you know, this incredibly complicated thing in your head is only really trying to do one thing.

But it just everything else feeds from that.

I feel like what about?

Well, so what I mean, I feel like I like to be surprised by works of art, like a book or a film. I will like a surprise.

But to be fair, I only like a surprise within certain parameters.

Yeah. So if I'm going to see Mission Impossible 7,

there is a set number of things which I'm prepared to adore.

But if they introduce like a time travel, yeah, yeah, yeah, I will be unpleasantly surprised by that.

It's like the idea that what you want when you're seeing a film is for it all to end in the way that you wanted it to, but not in the way you were expecting.

That's nice. Yeah.

You need surprise parameters because at the moment where you can literally call off every beat in a film by the numbers, you start looking around for maggots to grind.

Whenever I watch an episode of the Big Bang Theory, the maggot toll is absolutely astronomical by the end of the 20 minutes.

It's been a while since you had a got the Big Bang Theory, Andy.

That's a call back.

We were trying to surprise our listeners, but within, like, people know my limited range of references.

And that's one that's half our listeners.

You've just offended.

I was I was on the Big Bang Theory.

I was a guest star.

I played Neil Gaiman. Oh, wow.

I didn't mean that episode, obviously.

That's the one where no maggots went were hard in watching this episode.

What were you doing on it?

It was an episode about a comet and it begins with the gang up on the roof looking at the stars and one of them gets a note saying, oh, my God, Neil Gaiman was in my shop and he tweeted about it.

And they're all sort of vaguely baffled, because obviously they would have known.

And then you cut to me in the shop, trying to join their conversation and being rudely rebuffed and insulted.

Nice. It's kind of fun.

I like I now have this peculiar tiny career of playing versions of Neil Gaiman in shows of which the best one of all is still The Simpsons,

because I got to be an evil, murdering book thief who couldn't eat.

It turns out couldn't even read and poisoned somebody in the final moment.

So it was kind of kind of I like him best.

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

My fact is that beekeeping was only legalized in Minneapolis in 2009.

I knew this.

I knew this because I was a beekeeper a little way out of Minneapolis.

I lived at the time in Little Town, an hour's drive from Minneapolis.

And I would have sad, nervous,

many apologons come over to my house

and gaze longingly at my bees and explain that.

Right. You weren't in the band zone.

You were far enough out of the city there.

I was far enough out.

I was I was far enough away that my bees were entirely legal bees.

What would happen, Neil, what would happen if your bees flew over the state lines, as it were, into anti bee territory?

Great point.

I think nobody would actually have, you know, put little trackers on them to find out.

But actually, I believe bees have a maximum five mile radius.

So I think my bees would have been OK

unless I decided to drive them to Minneapolis just for a day out.

Come on bees, we're going to see the world.

I will show you the sights of Minneapolis.

I'll show you Minneapolis and Paul Airport.

I will show you all these exciting things.

Well, yeah, it was really strict.

I think it was because it was an urban environment, basically.

It was saying, you know, look, this is a built up area.

You can't have just hundreds of thousands of bees around the place.

Yeah. And even when they legalized it,

you had to get permission from 80 percent of property owners within two hundred and fifty feet of your home.

Wow. That's a lot.

And if you live somewhere with apartments, you could you might have to ask a hundred different people's permission.

Yeah. And, you know, get 80 of them to sign off on it.

I think I slightly loosened up a bit.

I suppose if you live in an apartment in a tower block, you probably don't have much room for bees anyway.

No, I think that's true.

And also, it's it's a bit it might be a bit cruel if you don't have the flowers, the flower space, because you can't just keep bees in a, you know, in a box.

You can keep them in a box.

Well, I mean, you do keep them in a box.

Sorry, you have to, in fact.

Right. That's kind of the rule.

I was reading about Utah, the Beehive State.

And in Utah, it is illegal to keep bees unless you have government permission.

You need a license, basically.

So just not any old person can have can have bees in Utah either.

But their state emblem is the Beehive.

You might have seen it on the Utah flags and stuff.

It's like that sort of it's like a skip.

Is that what it's called a skip?

It's called a skip.

They were made of woven straw.

They'd weave straw together and circle it.

And that was what bees were in until Mr.

Langstroth came along and invented the modern hive.

Yeah. And these modern hives, they have, like, things that you can pull out. Is that right?

They do.

The biggest problem with the initial bee skips was that you had to destroy the skip to get to the honey.

So they didn't have openings.

And what Langstroth came up with was hives with removable slats, exploiting the concept of bee space.

OK, so bee space.

Can I can I just be boring for a moment?

I love bee space.

I'd be put those maggots away.

So the way that bees work is bees are kind of like people in rooms.

[Transcript] No Such Thing As A Fish / 495: No Such Thing As A Peanut Hall of Fame

If a bee sees something that is room size for a bee, which is to say more than twice the size of a bee or twice the size of one bee climbing over another bee, it will try and fill it with comb.

If it sees something much smaller, it will seal it off.

However, if you get your bee space right, a bee will regard your bee space as a corridor and not build comb and so on and so forth.

So Langstroth's genius was to figure out bee space, figured out the exact size and shape of one of these was pretty cool hives that you put the slats in.

But it was basically unpatentable.

The moment he had discovered it and figured it out, every farmer with nails and a tape measure could build their own hives.

And so his discovery caught on immediately and hugely.

But he was not a happy man.

Yeah, he seems an interesting guy.

So he was a he was a pastor and he was going over to one of his parish members and he noticed that they had a bowl of comb honey.

And he thought, wow, this is pretty tasty.

This is pretty amazing.

He said, where did you get it from?

And he was led to the attic where he was shown near an open window.

There was a hive there and he just immediately went, this is what I want to be doing.

This makes me happy because he was suffering from bouts to depression.

There's quotes from him saying that he would ask for his books to be hidden away from him because even the letter B, seeing the letter B would just make him miss his own bees and go into a sadness while he couldn't leave the house.

Yeah, so he was he was deeply happy.

But I mean, happy Earth Day to you.

But quite an extraordinary character when you read into a story.

And those those hives now, a lot of states, you have to use those, don't you?

You can't use the old skeptics.

You have to use these ones.

So I'm thinking of the like the filing cabinet where you were hanging cabinet exactly like that first, that beehive or the filing cabinet?

Because I feel like they've nicked from each other.

One is based on the other surely.

Interesting. I don't know that, actually.

Filing cabinet early 20th century.

I know. I mean, these beehives sound like they were early 20th century.

Great.

[Transcript] No Such Thing As A Fish / 495: No Such Thing As A Peanut Hall of Fame

Unless there's guy was 1851 is one.

Oh, I think beehives first.

Yeah. Wow.

So maybe the filing cabinet has borrowed from nature's filing cabinet, the beehive, which is not nature's because it was invented by a human.

Yes. Yes.

Well, that in itself is thought provoking, I think.

Invented by a human, but exploiting this 60 million year old insect who

Yeah, that's so cool.

is astoundingly, you know, I mean, things like the use of the hexagon

because it's the most efficient use of wax and stuff in there.

Yeah. I get I get all all excited about bees.

Did you get did you get stung much?

Obviously, I'm sure you had all the beekeeping kit when you were when you were doing it.

I got stung about four or five times

during the course of the six or seven years that I was actively beekeeping.

I kind of like that.

I felt like everybody should have a hobby that could kill them.

And mostly it would be my own fault.

And it got a little more stressful.

One day I got stung and all of a sudden my hand blew up like an inflated rubber glove and my breathing went to one key.

And I went, oh, this is that this is that anaphylactic shock thing.

This is actually it's now happening.

It's been primed.

So I had to go and buy EpiPens for keeping just in case, but did not get stung after that.

Very recently, a beekeeper who had a very distinguished job of looking after the queen's bees was given the task of having to tell the bees that the queen had died.

And this is an old tradition of when there's a notable death within a family that owns hives, that the bees need to be informed and you need to put black ribbon on the outside of the hive and so on in order to show that there's mourning.

But so the queen has had for the last 15 years of her life, John Chapel, who was the official palace beekeeper.

And that was his job to do, except for some reason.

He had no idea that that was a tradition.

So on the day that the queen passes away, an email

pings up in his email box saying from the head gardener, have you told the bees?

And he must have thought that was a very poor taste.

That joke. Yeah, exactly.

But so yeah, so he just he had to go around and he had to tell the bees.

He had to say the line, the mistress is dead, but don't you go?

Your master will be a good master to you.

And that was how he broke the news to the to the Queen's bees that she was gone.

It was a tradition.

You tell the bees not just of deaths, but important family news.
There's even a Kipling poem about it. Right.
Did you tell the bees stuff, Neil?
Did you just pop down and was there a benchmark of the kind of news
that you would impart and then stuff is they won't be interested in?
There's two small, smaller deal.
You know, I would never tell them to sort of casual internet gossip
because I figure bees are above that kind of thing.
I would tell, you know, I love the idea of being part of the beekeeper tradition.
So there were definitely a couple of times when I would tell these things
and I just go down to the hives and say, right, my son is engaged.
Can I just quickly say one or two things that are illegal in Minneapolis?
So I've checked this for sure.
I've checked in the in the code.
This definitely exists in Minnesota law.
So this is the whole of the state of Minnesota.
No person shall operate, run or participate in a contest game
or other like activity in which a pig greased, oiled or otherwise is released
and wherein the object is the capture of the pig
or in which a chicken or turkey is released or thrown into the air
and wherein the object is to capture the chicken or the turkey.
Some laws, it feels like some laws are made out of basic principles, right?
Like stealing or murdering or whatever.
And it feels like some laws are created in response to specific incidents
which have gone badly wrong.
And you're saying this might be the latter.
I think it might be. Yeah.
Yeah. So pig greased pig chasing is explicitly illegal in Minnesota.
And if you go on the Internet, you'll see a lot of people saying
that it's illegal to cross the Minnesota, Wisconsin border with a duck on your head.
Apparently, this isn't true.
And it's because there was a thing called cotton duck
and cotton duck was the type of woven cotton fabric
which comes from the Dutch for linen, which is duck.
And cotton duck is a specific thing
and you weren't allowed to cross the border with that because it was,
you know, they were trying to help the cotton makers.
And so they said you couldn't do that.
But people mistook it to think that you couldn't cross the border with a duck on your head.
I love those sort of industry specific things.
I remember talking to old people in Wisconsin while I was out there
and they were saying that when they were young, margarine could not be yellow.
They were there were local laws that only butter was allowed to be yellow.
But that they would sell margarine.

And I don't know if this is true or not.

They would sell margarine with little yellow coloring things so you could mix it together and have a yellowish thing to put on your bread.

That's so funny.

Yeah, because they wanted to protect the butter makers in Wisconsin, right?

And that's exactly because I think margarine comes from the Greek for pearl, like the name Margaret does, because it had to be pearl colored in the olden days.

That is very cool. I didn't know that. Me neither.

I can also tell you that it's no longer illegal to have a dirty threshing machine or to impersonate a straw inspector in Minnesota, but that they have been true in the last hundred years.

Impersonate a straw inspector.

Finally, comedy clubs around Minnesota.

With the classic straw inspector impersonations.

Thank God.

Stop the podcast. Stop the podcast.

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It's so good, highly recommended.

Give it a go. OK, back to the show on with the podcast.

OK, it is time for a final fact of the show.

And that is my fact.

[Transcript] No Such Thing As A Fish / 495: No Such Thing As A Peanut Hall of Fame

My fact this week is that the author, Douglas Adams, once put his back out while buttering a slice of bread. So this is a fact that comes directly from the creator of QI and is a friend of Neil Gaiman's Mr. John Lloyd. He a long time ago wrote the forward to a biography of Douglas Adams by a guy called M.J. Simpson. And in the forward, he just talks about his sort of day to day life and famously within the circle of friends, he was always mocked for the fact of once putting his back out. Do we know was it was he really buttering the bread in extremely ostentatious way or something or heavy knife, thick, cold butter? Oh, yeah. It was it was just literally he was just standing there, probably whistling. I don't know, Neil, have you got any insight? Douglas was gloriously accident prone. I remember him once telling me about breaking his nose with his own knees playing rugby. I think as a small boy about the time that he first bought a fancy car with hitchhiker money. He bought a Porsche and on the way home from the showroom, going round Marble Arch, he managed to total his Porsche. And I remember once turning up at some incredibly fancy event for hitchhikers, it had sold a million copies or something like that. And his publisher, Pan, presented Douglas very proudly with a book on mushrooms. And I said, Douglas, why are you now holding a huge book on mushrooms? And it turned out that he'd gone to France for a gastronomic thing the week before. And on day one had eaten the kind of mushroom that you were not meant to eat and had not eaten anything else for the following five days. I once read that if you go to France and you go to any pharmacist, they can tell you if a mushroom is poisonous or not. No. As in they're all trained for it. That's what I read once. I've never tried it. We must try it. We must all try it. We must gather mushrooms and march into French pharmacies. In American pharmacies, I'm not completely convinced they will be able to identify it as a mushroom. What is that thing? So, you, I mean, we should just quickly say that, Neil, you wrote a biography on Douglas Adams. You knew him, right? It was your, I think, second book that you'd written, nonfiction book called Don't Panic. I did. It was called Don't Panic, the Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy Companion. And it also contained a lot of biographical stuff about Douglas, because there's only so much you can say about hitchhikers. And I got to know Douglas relatively well. But always from a sort of position of you are a fancy author

and I am a small journalist who first interviewed you when he was 22.

So he was definitely the grown up.

He was so impressive to me.

He had all of these amazing careers, like being a bodyguard for the Saudi royal family.

I said, what did that job entail?

He said, well, basically it entailed standing around in a hotel corridor, going out occasionally to bring back enormous quantities of McDonald's and planning to run away if anybody with a gun showed up.

Oh, I found a set.

I found a kind of related fact on that, which is so Hitchhikers Guide was turned into a TV series, wasn't it?

Quite soon after it was a radio series and then a book, it was a telly series.

And one of the guys who plays a bodyguard in the TV series of Hitchhikers is Dave Prouse, a.k.a. Darth Vader.

No, really? He's in it.

Yeah. Wow.

I have no idea if it's a speaking role or not.

It's been a long time since I saw the series, but that's so interesting.

I imagine it's not. I know.

So it was Douglas Adams, very tall, Neil.

That's what I read about him.

He was. He was very tall.

He was about six foot five, six foot six ish.

I remember him saying that when he discovered how tall John Cleese and Graham Chapman were, he decided that he had all the qualifications necessary for comedy.

The reason I ask is because tall people are very susceptible to back injuries.

That's why I was reading about there's a few like mechanical reasons for that.

But one of the reasons is basically the world is just made for averagely heighted people.

And so they always have to squeeze themselves into various places.

But I read that he was six feet tall by the time he was 12 years old, Douglas Adams, right?

That would be only three inches shorter than the record tallest 12 year old in the UK.

That's so cool.

Did you find the trousers shorts thing, James?

No, I was great.

So he was at school.

He he was in shorts like all the rest of the boys in his year.

And I think that was a point where he was going to go after being able to wear trousers with the rest of his year.

But unfortunately, at exactly the year that everyone went to trousers, he discovered his school, Taylor, had no trousers in his size

because he was so much taller than everyone else that they just couldn't fit him.
So for this key four weeks of his life, he was the only boy in his year wearing shorts.
And that obviously is psychologically scarring,
especially if you're so much taller than everyone else.
I can't believe you had a school, Taylor.
In my school, they used to just set fire to the bottom of your trousers.
I know it does say something about.
Do you remember there's a bit of QI, isn't there?
Where Stephen talks about his school prep school, Taylor, being called Gorringe.
And it rhymes with orange.
I was I was looking in today.
I thought I knew quite a lot about sort of the cultural impact
that hitchhikers had on the world.
And there were so many elements of hitchhikers that you'll find in pop culture.
So Radiohead had a song which was called Paranoid Android,
which was named after Marvin the Paranoid Android.
You had the fact that 42 is just the answer to the meaning of life question.
People know that sort of generally.
But I didn't realize that things like in the X-Files,
Fox Mulder lived in apartment 42, which Chris Carter said was a direct nod to hitchhikers.
You've got Coldplay, whose very first song on their debut album was called Don't Panic.
And they also have a song called 42, which again is a direct link.
The Alan Telescope Array, which is a it's a telescope
which is looking for extraterrestrial intelligence.
The antenna has 42 antennas paying tribute.
Like it really is seeded everywhere.
They must have been going for around 40.
They weren't going to have to and thought, well, let's add another 40
just to make it the right number.
That's true. Absolutely. Yeah.
I love the way that the hitchhikers has kind of weirdly penetrated the culture.
But I also love that those little bits of hitchhikers that have changed with time.
Like there's there's that line in the opening of hitchhikers
about how human beings were so primitive
that they thought that digital watches were a pretty neat thing.
And in 1978, we thought that digital watches were a neat thing.
We thought that digital watches were miracles.
We had we had the power of science suddenly appearing on our wrist
and it had numbers.
He still thinks this, I think.
So I just want to say that a watch that functions on a wafer of
silicon is amazing that it counts the, you know, however many thousands.
The piece of electric effect, handy.
That's what I'm saying. I mean, yeah, sure.

[Transcript] No Such Thing As A Fish / 495: No Such Thing As A Peanut Hall of Fame

The Swiss guys can make the cogs very small.
But it's not the same as vibrating silicon.
I mean, I think actually, I think it was a red misfire for Adams.
And I think you should be calling it out.
Can I tell you guys about the so obviously hitchhikers was his first book
and he'd amazingly become friends with all five members of Monty Python.
And, you know, he'd even appeared
in the latest series of Python as a couple of times and wrote for it.
He was one of the credits and he was only a few.
I mean, he was only a few years out of school and university.
Like it was amazingly fast to be meeting kind of comedy giants like that.
Anyway, on on his first book, he got quotes from all five
of the main members of Monty Python.
John Cleese said, really entertaining and fun.
Terry Jones then said, much funnier than anything John Cleese has ever written.
Graham Chapman then said, I know for a fact that John Cleese hasn't read it.
Eric Idle wrote, who is John Cleese?
And then Michael Palin wrote, really entertaining and fun.
So good. That's really good.
I was reading through the Oxford English Dictionary to see if Douglas Adams
has been the first citation of any words.
And as far as I can see, there is only one word
that he was the first person to ever say, according to the OED, of course,
which is, you know, it's just what they found.
Do you want to have a guess or?
Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.
First of all, I can tell you, you won't guess, but you could have a go anyway.
Is it Slotty Bartfast?
That's not a dictionary name.
Yeah, Golger Frinschen isn't going to be in there anyway.
Frude, a frude is a word from Hitchhiker's Deadline.
Hoopy. Hoopy.
Hoopy, yeah.
Oh, yeah. No, it's actually not from Hitchhiker's.
It's from a comic relief Christmas book that he wrote in 1986.
And the word is Todger.
Oh, yeah.
He's the first person in print to use the word Todger, according to the OED.
Wow, that's mega.
And before that, the word was Tadger.
People used to refer to their penises as Tadgers,
possibly a northern dialect for like a tadpole or something.
But he was the one who turned it from Tadger to Todger.
Want to be amazing if one day all of his legacy is forgotten,

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all his books and just the one citation sitting in the dictionary is all we know him for.
But the Todger guy.
That will one day happen.
There's one thing, one of the big mysteries of Douglas's career for a lot of people is what what is behind the number 42?
How did he come to the number?
I remember John Lloyd sort of saying that they were in a garage together and they were just going, oh, what number should we use?
But supposedly Stephen Fry says that he's the only person that Douglas ever told what the meaning was to and he's going to take it to his grave.
He's never going to say what it is.
So there was a kind of meaning behind it.
But 42 would always pop up in interesting places.
And before Douglas passed away, the Hubble telescope was trying to find the defining parameter of the expanding universe.
And it got identified as 42.
And for Douglas, that was just like, look at it.
Look at the synchronicity that I've managed to come up with this number, which is the the speed of the expanding universe.
So that's the only time that we've got a sort of hint of Douglas's interest in it having meaning. But otherwise, no one knows.
But I wonder if a drunken evening between you and Stephen Neal has led to the reveal.
I've never heard anything from Stephen.
I remember asking Douglas my theory, you know, when I was a 22 year old, asking him for the first time, I suggested that it might have been from Alice in Wonderland's Rule 42, all persons more than two miles high must leave the court.
And Douglas talked about how traumatized he was by Alice in Wonderland and how terrifying he found it when he read it.
But what Douglas said to me was that he was trying to find a number that didn't sound funny, prosaic, not terribly interesting.
37 sounds like it's the kind of number that has interesting things going on.
42, it's not prime.
It's not even an odd number.
It wasn't interesting.
It didn't have anything about it that was interesting, you know, because I think he tried a few in the forties and settled on 42 as a punchline.
It's a punchline to the answer to the great question of life, the universe and everything is.
And a computer has been cogitating on this for millennia.
And now it gives the answer and the answer is 42.
And it needed to be a letdown in every way to be funny.
And 121 sounds like there's something going on with it.
42 sounds like what?
That's not the answer.

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But then the universe is a wonderful place and it accommodates us.

And once 42 was was let loose in the universe,

I'm sure the universe has been running with it ever since.

OK, that is it.

That is all of our facts.

Thank you so much for listening.

If you'd like to get in contact with any of us about the things

that we've said over the course of this podcast, we can all be found on our Twitter account.

So I'm on at Shriverland, Andy at Andrew Hunter, James at James Harkin and Neil.

I'm at Neil himself, but I'm on Twitter less and less and less.

So I'm probably much more likely to be Neil himself at Threads or Neil Dash

Game and at Tumblr or over at Blue Sky as soon as the rest of the world

gets their invitations and it becomes a giant party.

Nice. OK. Yeah.

All right. Well, let's all head over to that party with Neil.

And you can get us otherwise on at no such thing or you can go to our Instagram account, which is no such thing as a fish, or you can go to our website.

No such thing as a fish.com.

All of our previous episodes are up there.

But most importantly, make sure you head over to Amazon Prime

because the return of Good Omens is here.

Good Omens 2, written by Neil Gaiman himself.

Make sure to check out that entire series.

I've heard previews response.

It sounds absolutely incredible.

So really exciting.

Do watch that.

And otherwise, come back next week for another episode with us.

We'll see you then. Goodbye.