

Hi everybody, Andy here. Just a couple of very quick announcements before this week's show starts. The first is to say who our special guest is. If you've been listening to Fish for a little while, you may have heard her before because she is none other than the brilliant Rachel Parris. Rachel has done so many things. She's a member of Ostentatious, a great improvised comedy show. She's hosted The MASH Report. She's a musical comedian. She's toured the country with her brilliant shows. She's written a book called Advice from Strangers. There's nothing she can't do, and as you're about to hear, she was great on this show too, as she always is. The other thing to say is that we have just done a live show at the London Podcast Festival. Now, the show is in the past. There's no way of getting there by conventional means, but if you go to [knowsuchthingasoffish.com slash live](https://knowsuchthingasoffish.com/slash/live), you will be able to get a streaming ticket and watch the show in all its glory. And there is one extremely good reason to do that, which is that our special guest for this show is none other than Anna. Anna Tajinsky is back. She's come back for this show as you will hear. She was great, and you can buy the streaming tickets and see Anna's glorious fish return for the next week. Tickets are available to buy until the 21st of September, so treat yourself to that. Enjoy it. [Knowsuchthingasoffish.com slash live](https://knowsuchthingasoffish.com/slash/live). That's it from me, on with the show.

Hello, and welcome to another episode of Knowsuchthingasoffish, a weekly podcast this week coming to you live from the Soho Theatre!

My name is Dan Schreiber. I am sitting here with James Harkin, Andrew Hunter Murray, and Rachel Parris, and once again, we have gathered round 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 Rachel. My fact is Viking men dyed their hair blonde, wore makeup, and had grooming kits. You don't get, you don't imagine them jumping off the long boat with grooming kits. No. Also, I thought they were blonde already. No, some of them were blonde, but there was, I think now we know, there was a much greater prevalence of dark hair than was previously thought they weren't universally blonde. So what they did was they used lye to bleach their hair blonde. What we can't know is their intentions. It also was useful for cleaning it and stopping lice. So what we don't know is was it only for cleaning, or was it partly for vanity as well? But the idea of it being for vanity seems believable because we do know they were quite vain in other areas. The English certainly thought that they were very vain, the Vikings. There was a monk called John of Wallingford who said that the Danes cheated by washing. They made themselves too acceptable to English women by their elegant manners and the care of their person. That is cheating. That is cheating. How could we possibly compete with people who wash? Well, that's the way it seems to me because there was a guy called Ahmed Ibn Fadlan who was writing about the Vikings. He was from Baghdad, but he was probably in somewhere like Constantinople or whatever. And he wrote that every day they wash with the dirtiest and filthiest water there could be. They blow their nose, they spit, they do every filthy thing imaginable in that water, and then they wash with it. So it seemed like they were in this kind of in between of the people in the Middle East thought they were disgusting, but the people in Britain thought they were absolutely odd to try. That Arabic writer was one of the sources that he noted that they bleached their beards to a saffron yellow. He really had his eye on them, didn't he? A keen eye on them. I tell you what they didn't have. Maybe. Tables. What? Yeah, exactly.

Not such a catch now, are they? Idiots. I think that men with tables are cheating. They must have had tables. What? What did they play snooker on? Well, yeah. There's a guy called Neil Price who wrote a book called *Children of Ash and Elm*, all about the Viking mind. And he's also been a historical consultant on a few Viking movies. He was asked, we needed to have a banquet. And he said, I don't know if there were tables, because there's no record. There's no Viking tables left over. OK. So they just shot it cleverly to completely ignore the question of whether tables existed in the Viking world or not. That's so weird. What did they eat? What did they eat off? We don't know. The floor? This is an eminent Viking scholar, Neil Price. He's not willing to say. You know those little trays that have a padded cushion underneath? My wife uses them. On their knees. I actually don't know what those are. What are those? It's kind of like if you're watching TV and you bring your dinner in, it's a sort of little cushion and it's got a table on top of it. It makes so much sense that Andy doesn't even know what we're talking about. A tray? A new lap? I don't know what a tray is. I don't know what a lap is. Is your wife 95 years old then? What is this? There was a Viking called Lot the Unwashed. And that's more evidence that perhaps they were very clean, because why would they call him unwashed if it wasn't for the fact that everyone else washed normally? OK. He was described as a wise man and much given to manslaughter. Right. Wow. There's also a theory that they loved orange cats. All right. Yeah. So they loved cats anyway, which is quite an amazing thing. Every sort of expedition, they go on expeditions, every pillage that they went on, they would bring cats with them. And they brought cats for a number of reasons. A, they loved them. B, for any vermin that was on the boats, they could get rid of the mice and stop spreading disease. But the cats would escape once they get to these lands that they were going to. So there's been studies where they've looked at the DNA of a bunch of cats from that period that they found the bones of and so on. And they've discovered that it was basically just the Vikings just dropping cats off in all these places. Were they orange cats or had they died the cats with lye? They were immaculately brushed. On terms of how clean they were or how dirty they were, we thought we knew for ages how clean they were because there are churches in England which have Viking skin nailed to the doors. What? Macabre. At least four of them, they're called Daneskins. And I think the idea is that the churches made themselves look really hard by saying, you know, the Vikings came here and this is what they left behind. This is, you know, we saw them off. Anyway, they've tested them and they're almost all cow or donkey. They're just... I really don't think so. It's weird that because the thing we were talking before about how they had brown hair, a lot of them, we know that through DNA tests. And they've also checked it with modern-day people and they found that in the UK, each of us in the UK on average has got about 6% Viking DNA. But also that when they've looked at people who were buried in Scotland, they found a lot of people who were buried as if they're Vikings but didn't have any Viking DNA in them. And so they just kind of like self-identified as Vikings. And they just decided, well, even though I don't have any Viking heritage, I'm just going to be a Viking now. And they went with all of the culture and all of the everything. That's pretty cool, isn't it? Yeah, that is cool. Cosplay. Cosplaying. Very, very early cosplay. When the people are still there. I'm going to say, uncontroversially, that self-identifying is not the same as cosplay,

but well...

Oh, shit. Yeah, thanks, Andy.

Well, we've had nine years of fun and it didn't mean it like that.

Can I tell you more about the grooming?

Oh, yeah, yeah.

Oh, come on.

The facial grooming. So they had quite a lot of different beauty tools. And this was men and women alike, including razors and tweezers and, as we've mentioned, combs. But they also had ear spoons, which I like.

No!

Yeah, so they knew, kind of before we did, that it's not a good idea to shove something in your ear and compact it. So they had little tiny ear scoops to scoop the wax out.

They have that in Mongolia as well.

Look at them.

Yeah, so a buddy of ours, Craig Glenday, Guinness World Records editor-in-chief, he went to Mongolia to meet the tallest man in the world. He was there to verify him as the tallest man. And when you go to a house, he went to the house and he said, before you come in, here's your spoon for your ears and you've got to clean your ears before you go into the house.

What?

Like, take your shoes off, clean your ears, come in.

I've got quite a few ear spoons.

Do you?

Yeah, yeah, I've got one that lights up. It's kind of cool.

Okay.

Hang on. How do you sit? How do you know?

Is it?

Is it?

It comes out your eyes.

It just shuts out that time.

Yeah.

No, yeah, so there was a thing in Japan quite a few years ago which was this kind of trend of, like, young people would spoon each other's ears.

What?

I've said it before and I was like, again, what a generation has aired up to.

This is before then, I reckon. It's quite a lot many years ago.

And there was this trend of selling ear spoons in Japan and I bought some because we were going to talk about it on QI.

Okay.

I just thought it would be kind of a cool thing to have.

What are they used for?

It's just, right, you're getting bits of wax out of your ears, right?

Yeah.

This is someone else.

But, yeah, you could do it yourself, but isn't it nicer if you just have someone lay their head on your lap and you just kind of spoon out the ear?

Oh, wow.

I feel like I've lost the room.

No, no, no. I think we're all fascinated. I want to know, like, if you're scared of, like, because a lot of people have a phobia about their ears, do you get to do that fun helicopter thing?

The airplane's going to come around in.

But for the ear?

It's coming in.

Yeah.

Choo choo.

Choo choo.

I don't know my vehicles at all.

Choo choo.

Here comes the helicopter.

Do you want to know what the last Viking attack on UK soil was?

Of course I do.

Well, obviously 10th century or 11th century.

2021.

2021.

Right.

This happened in a Scottish town called Kirkwood Bright, and it was when a replica longboat for a display knocked out the power supplies when it got tangled in an overhead power line.

The local energy network said only one customer had been affected, and the reenactment group's maritime officer apologised for the inconvenience and said, we are incredibly sorry for the disruption.

Oh, OK.

I think that was the last time.

I think I found some more legit modern Vikings than cosplay ones, which is Iceland has an elite police force, and they are known as the Viking Squad.

Cool.

That's their sort of unofficial name.

They're technically the special unit of the National Police Commissioner.

There's only about 46 of them in total, but the problem, well, it's not a problem.

Rather, there's no sort of official standard military in Iceland, so it defaults to them.

So if ever Iceland gets involved in a war, the Vikings are coming.

Oh no.

Viking Squad.

All 46 will be sent in.

What would you say to me, Andy, if I said Ergi, Agar, Rager?

I don't know what I'd say.

I mean, I'm saying what I would say, which is direct with Baffleman and mild upset.

That's fair enough.

What is it?

Is it like a Viking question?

It's more like a Viking insult, actually.

Oh.

Classic James.

Turned up, tried to do the good research, and I'm just getting insults.

What is it?

It's calling someone a coward in various different ways.

OK.

The thing is, these swowers were so derogatory that if someone called them to you, according to Icelandic lore, at least, you're allowed to kill them without paying any compensation.

Oh.

Just from any of these insulting words.

Those, was it three?

Yeah.

Ergi, Agar, Rager.

Don't you just compounded the offence?

I've got to do it twice now.

I've got a quiz question for you guys.

Oh yeah.

OK.

So there was once a Viking called Sigurd the Mighty, and he was killed by something that was attached to the side of him as he was riding on a horse.

OK.

So he has a sword there, and the horse flips him up, and the sword stabs him in the leg and severs an artery.

I'll go with not a sword, but a cheese knife.

Ah.

It was a posh Viking.

Yeah.

It was on its way to a tasting.

He's very excited about it.

I feel like it's not going to be swordy, because that seems too obvious.

Yeah.

So...

Boots.

Boots.

Yeah.

No.

So the answer is it was the decapitated head of Male Breaker, who was a sworn enemy of Sigurd.

OK.

Who he had killed, taken his head off his body, strapped it to the saddle of his horse, and as he was riding, the tooth of his enemy scratched his leg, and it got infected, and

it killed him.

This is the rumour.

It's all rumours.

I'm not sure if it's 1,200 years old, whether it's a rumour anymore, as in a rumour is kind of one level up from gossip, and I wouldn't say this is gossip, you know, this is kind of, you hear what happened to Sigurd, the mighty, oh my God.

I thought that was hot gossip.

Dan just heard this, like, from his neighbour, who heard it from a friend.

I think we just start presenting all of our facts as rumours and hot gossip.

Stop the podcast.

Stop the podcast.

Hi everyone, we'd like to let you know that this week we are sponsored by Squarespace.

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I mean, who doesn't need a fluid engine?

It's so back to the future, but you know, we're in the future now, we're in the year.

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That's right.

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So do that now and on with the show.

I was trying to think of more back to the future references.

Well, why do you think I was riffing for so long earlier?

I was trying to give you a padding time to find something.

Don't kiss your mum on with the podcast.

It is time for fact number two and that is James.

OK, my fact this week is that the fourth president of the United States once sent the third president of the United States a letter giving the precise measurement between a Weasel's anus and its vulva.

That actually is hot gossip.

That's exciting.

Sexy guy.

That's heat magazine circle of shame.

So they called it the Weasel's vulva rather than the circle of shame.

That's a better name for it.

So what's going?

What's going?

Well, just what I said, that's what happened for sure.

But this was basically we're talking Thomas Jefferson, your third president.

And he was in an argument with a French nobleman called Count George Louis Leclerc Buffon.

Buffon had never been to America, but he had a theory that America just come out of the ocean and it hadn't dried out yet.

And so all the animals and the plants were really struggling to live there and they were all like really small and weedy.

Now he told that to Jefferson and Jefferson was not very happy about it.

And so he decided that he was going to prove him wrong.

And so he sent his friends, one of whom was James Madison, who's the fourth president, to measure as many animals as they could.

And so what they did is they went out, find a load of American animals, including a weasel, and sent back all the precise measurements of all these animals.

And one of them was the distance, which I explained earlier.

Yeah.

And he was he was so pissed off that this guy had said this because he the insinuation was if any European animals went over there, they would sort of regress once they were there and just sort of shrivel and get smaller as the generations went on.

But the implication was also that American people would be like that as well.

So the American people would be much more small and insipid than Europeans.

And why?

Because it was damp.

Because it was damp.

Because it was...

I've got to say as well, as someone from the north, just because it's damp.

Buffon, who was a brilliant guy, I'm hoping to talk about him in a bit, but he was an amazing guy.

But he claimed that anywhere in North America, if you dug down by two feet, the ground would be frozen.

He was incorrect about this, hugely incorrect about it.

But it basically was this theory which they referred to as new world degeneracy. Kind of the idea was lots of old European countries, they're more aristocratically run. America was it like to think of itself as being founded on more egalitarian lines or more democratic lines and not needing a nobility class. And so they wanted to find scientific underpinning for that, that America was a kind of... Did they want to kind of cast aspersions on it so that people weren't attracted to going there?

Kind of.

This guy was just a bit of a curious cookie, right?

He sort of had lots of theories before, he had lots of theories about the age of the earth.

He just was building up these theories.

And it's just so great that Jefferson was so pissed off, and there was a lot going on at this time, and he was like, I need measurements of animals, and all these guys are about to change America.

They're suddenly out there measuring weasels, anises, devolvers, and the report came back and he presented it to Buffon and he said, look at it, our bears are 410 pounds, yours are 153 here in Europe, we've got 12 pound otters, your otters are terrible compared to our otters.

All this sort of stuff.

And he was like, and don't get me started on the moose.

Our moose are massive.

And he's like, Buffon was like, you can't have massive moose over there, surely not.

He was like, mate, it's huge.

Our moose are so big, your reindeers walk under them.

That's how big they are.

And he didn't believe him.

So then Jefferson writes back to the guys again and says, send me a fucking moose.

And they have to go out and find a moose and send it.

And they do.

They did.

Yeah.

And it was rubbish when it turned up.

Yeah.

Because it had been taking months to find it, dry it, skin it, debone it, whatever you do with the moose.

You know, you had to.

I have a lot of questions about how they measured the animals.

Did they anesthetize them?

And if so, did they have anesthetic?

I'm afraid they might have not always been alivey animals by the time they were.

Yeah.

Especially the weasels.

Oh, I feel very naive.

Yeah.

I'm like, how did they hold them nicely and safely while they measured from their anus to their vulva?

And a weasel as well, which will be quite...

Quite fidgety.

That, I have to say, you've just brought up a great time travel destination point.

Imagine going back in history, landing and watch Madison measuring the anus to vulva of a weasel.

The other thing is, Madison was famously very slight, wasn't he?

Oh, yeah.

His really, really smallest president there was.

He was five...

Are you about to speculate on the distance but from the anus?

Oh, wow.

Is that where you're going?

I wasn't going to go there.

Oh, right.

My mistake.

I mean, he could overpower a weasel.

He was a short guy, but he was...

And he could walk underneath a moose.

Interesting thing.

What a guy.

But it would have been funnier to see him wrestling with a weasel than a blinker, for instance, who's a big man, I would say.

That's true.

James Madison was five foot four and he weighed just under a hundred pounds.

It's about the same as Mila Kunis when she was in Black Swan, if that helps.

It does help.

Small.

Small.

Yeah.

Small guy.

Was he maybe the shortest president?

He was the shortest, but quite a bit.

Just by a few inches.

Yeah.

Although, he sounds like a great guy, too.

Oh, yeah.

I mean, all these people sound like really interesting guys, you know.

May I tell you something about...

More about Jefferson's letters?

Oh, yeah.

Oh, yeah.

[Transcript] No Such Thing As A Fish / 496: No Such Thing As Viking Snooker

So, in 1787, the same Thomas Jefferson wrote a letter to Peter Carr, his nephew, but he said, if you don't get married, do have affairs with women.

Oh, no.

Oh, my God.

Sorry, I'm getting my facts mixed up.

Hang on.

No, can I erase that on the tape?

Who's doing the tape?

The gossip is about to turn to slander.

Right.

Benjamin Franklin, not Jefferson.

Benjamin Franklin advised a young man to have sex with older women, not younger women.

Okay.

So, he really set out all of the reasons why better conversation, more...

I hope someone's going to worry for all of these, more even-tempered, rather darkly, no risk of children, accidentally, more sexually-experienced.

You'll love this if there's any older women in the crowd.

I am loving this one.

He said, you might as well, because if covering all above with a basket, and regarding only what is below the girdle, it's impossible of two women to know an old one from a young one.

Wow.

Covering all above with a basket, his final reason was that, eighthly and lastly, they're so grateful.

Wow.

Thanks, Ben Franklin.

Well, you can see why I married my 90-year-old wife now.

It wasn't just for the pillow talk.

Wow.

That's quite something, Franklin.

Yeah.

Yeah.

Wow.

Who's got a basket that big?

Like a laundry basket.

I imagined a laundry basket.

Oh, yeah.

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

I could probably fit myself, my entire self, in my laundry basket.

Sorry.

I'm boastful.

I'd have to tuck, but tuck myself up, sorry, just for the take.

Jesus Christ.

We're all here, I think.

We can all hear what you're saying.

I refuse to believe that.

Can I talk about either Madison or Buffon?

Yes, please.

Yes, please.

Talk about anything else.

OK, let's talk about just a couple more things on Madison, because we were talking about Buffon.

He was a very significant president who gets kind of a bit overlooked, because he was what forth in the running orders.

So, you know, everyone knows about George Washington and John Adams and blah, blah, blah.

Madison was president during the War of 1812, which is when the British invaded and taught the White House.

And he had to flee.

At the time, he was actually in residence at the time.

He was the last person alive who signed the Constitution, which is quite something for some years.

And he died in 1836, who was 85 years old at the time.

And it was late June, right?

Late June, he's dying.

He's 85.

And his doctor says, you know what we could do?

We could give you some crazy drugs that will keep you alive until the 4th of July, which is Independence Day.

Oh, yeah.

Because at that point, three previous presidents had all died on the 4th of July.

And the doctor basically said, want to make it four?

We can, you know.

Yeah, yeah.

Did he not think, why don't you just keep giving me those crazy drugs for longer than that?

Well, yes, that is a really good point.

I think they were kind of very last resort stimulus things.

But he, to his great credit, said, you know what?

I'm OK.

When I die, I die.

And he died on the 28th of June.

Yeah.

But his doctor was the same one as took care of Jefferson, who did die on the 4th of July.

So maybe they did die on the 4th of July.

Well, I don't know.

They might have done it better as well.

I tell you the thing, because I think this relates to what you took about Jefferson that

I accidentally started earlier.

Oh, yeah.

And this is about Thomas Jefferson now.

In 1787, he was writing to his nephew.

And I just found it interesting what you're talking about, signing the Constitution and what Americans think of themselves.

And that Jefferson was actually pretty much a skeptic, really interrogated the Bible and believed in constantly questioning what's said in the Bible.

And he said, shake off all the fears and servile prejudices under which weak minds are servily crouched.

In other words, saying that his nephew shouldn't be afraid to question the text of the Bible.

And he even questioned the existence of God saying, question with boldness even the existence of a God.

Because if there be one, he must approve of the homage of reason rather than that of blindfolded fear.

So that's quite cool.

Yeah.

And thirdly, get yourself a really big wicker basket and that's all we're going to do with that.

Buffon did that as well, didn't he?

He was, he was, they were all enlightenment people, weren't they?

And they were questioning what was in the Bible and stuff like that.

Buffon was kind of the Aristotle of his day in that he hoovered up a huge amount of information and turned it into, I think it was 44 volumes, the work he produced, it was absolutely mega.

His another experiment he did, he wanted to see how old the earth was at the time, quite controversial to say it would be more than several thousand years old.

So he heated up balls of iron until they were white hot, right?

And then he saw how long they took to cool down.

And then he just scaled up to the size of the earth and said, well, that must be how long the earth took to cool down.

Oh, right.

After it was a ball of molten iron, it's a good idea.

He assessed 75,000 years, obviously flat wrong, but privately, privately, he thought it was more like three million, which is also still several orders of magnitude wrong, but he's getting there.

It's getting closer.

Yeah.

And he partly went with the lower number because he thought it would be more acceptable to the church and he had to preface it with an introduction saying, obviously, this is just a crazy thought experiment I've done, but he was still doing the work.

And, you know, the interest, the important thing is that he was questioning these things that have been passed down.

Yeah.

Exactly.

Yeah.

It sounds like Pliny, like saying Aristotle, but he's, yeah, he's got it's an encyclopedia plant.

Pliny is the one I meant.

Sorry.

Pliny is the one I meant.

Pliny is the one that you meant.

Yeah.

Yeah.

Yeah.

Just sort of like it would.

I reckon if I'd lived in that time, even with the kind of modern day intelligence that I have.

Please.

What?

What's the end of that sentence?

Well, I definitely would have, like, been like, he's right.

Yeah.

Like, I just would have.

Sorry.

Just are you saying if you, if you were teleported back now, having done this podcast for nine years.

Yeah.

And we've talked about Pliny and how wrong he was about everything, like how, like, like women have four teeth and all these mad claims he made.

Yeah.

You'd be like, cool.

Sounds legit.

Yeah.

Okay.

I think you could be Pliny.

I would dethrone Pliny if I were you.

If you end up in this crazy situation, I would do it.

He also, like, it's really weird because he was very obsessed with how American animals were very, not superior, just wanted to make the point that they were, they were not weak and they.

So this is Jefferson.

Sorry.

Back to Jefferson that there were bigger, there were bigger animals, the otter was bigger and so on.

But he did also love European animals and he brought dogs back to Virginia, a shepherd dog.

And interestingly, it's a kind of dog that historians can't quite agree on of what it was.

So he was in Paris.

He went out miles into a storm one night to try and find one because he'd heard rumors of where one was and he eventually found a pregnant one and he brought it back to Virginia and he was so excited and he was breeding these dogs and then something, and again, it's slightly murky, what happened just went wrong and he got rid of the dogs and he had all his dogs executed and he just turned into someone who hated dogs for the rest of his life.

Executed is a strong word.

Well, it's the right word.

I mean, the vet doesn't come in and say I'm going to have to execute your dog.

Sorry.

We've assembled the firing squad and, well, sorry, I didn't fluff it up for you.

Yeah, no, so what happened is he had all of them moved to a farm where they had wonderful lives.

Of course, we'll blindfold your goldfish, Mrs Prescott.

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

My fact this week is that during the Second World War, Steinway parachuted pianos into battlefields.

So this was a morale thing where they thought we need to make this a bit more cheery, this whole World War Two thing.

And why not get a bunch of, because music is such a great thing to raise spirits and so on.

And at this point, Steinway was put under restrictions by the government because they couldn't use lots of medals.

And so during the war effort, they were making coffins, unfortunately, but they were also making random bits and pieces.

And then they hit upon the idea of making a portable piano, a tall standing piano, that they could just parachute out of planes into battlefields and 3,000 were dropped off over the course of the war, landed safely.

And there's so many stories of these pianos being played by the troops as they were gathering around.

It's a lovely idea, but you know that some arseholes banging out Wonderwall at 3 a.m.

It's always that guy.

Yeah, so they were known as victory verticals and they weren't just used for parachuting into the battlefield.

They were put into submarines as well, which is a really interesting thing, because in order to get them into a submarine, you need the submarine not to be shut first as in entirely encased.

Not build.

Yeah, it's like during the building process, you have to put it in.

And so once they're in, they're stuck in there and going forward just a bit, there is a ship which called the USS Thomas Edison, which is the only submarine rather, which has an actual Steinway, like a proper grand piano style Steinway.

And they can't take it out.

It's been, it was in there for 22 years.

Imagine being on a submarine with a guy who's brought his like grade one book.

I'm going to be learning actually for the next nine months.

These are victory verticals.

They just sound so cool and they're so interesting.

They were painted O, D, G, I, Olive, Drab, Government Issue, because they were painted dark green and they could, they had no legs because that might not survive the parachute drop.

And the history of Steinway during the war is so mad because Steinway was a German American company.

Founders were German, still had a factory in Germany, had a factory in New York as well, and both sides demanded different things of Steinway.

So in Germany, they were suspected of being a Jewish company and they had to deny that and, you know, sort of prove that they weren't.

And in America, they were suspected of being Nazis because they were called Steinway.

So they had this terrible time and they had to hang American flags all over their buildings, kind of show that we are, you know, we're patriotic.

And this is the weird thing.

Both separate halves of the company made planes, wooden planes for the war effort, for the side they were in.

Oh, my God.

So the German Steinways were making decoy planes to be bombed.

The American Steinways were making gliders, which were real planes, but they were wood, they were very light and feels like both sides could have gotten together and just said, you know what?

Let's just cross this line out of the.

Completely disregard this.

Yeah.

And so they made these incredibly powerful gliders because gliders were an incredibly amazing tool for getting past enemy defenses and landing soldiers.

So the first one they built, they tested, they loaded it with a ton of stuff and then it got towed behind another plane because that's how you get a glider somewhere.

It got towed three and a half thousand miles from Montreal to Britain in one day.

And this was just the test flight to see if the gliders worked and it contained vaccines to Russia, uh, military equipment for the free French parts for some bomber planes and a bunch of bananas for the pilot's family in London.

Very sweet.

Yeah.

And they made, they made over a thousand during the war, these gliders, the American Steinways.

Yeah.

That's amazing.

Very weird.

These pianos, obviously, because it's a war, you don't have all of the stuff that you can

normally make pianos out of, right?

So they use a lot less metal that you get in a normal piano instead of the copper strings.

They use soft iron strings instead of ivory keys that they couldn't get.

They use cellulite.

And the thing is with cellulite is if you bang it, it explodes, which must have been, you know, if you're really doing a proper, right, not enough sort of slam on your keys.

It takes a whole new meaning to a banger on the piano.

Do you know the White House has a Steinway?

Did they?

Yeah.

And it is tiny.

It's about, it's like this big.

What?

But James Madison used to play it, didn't he?

It's a really tiny Steinway.

Wait, we should say for the people at home, you were doing like a sort of six inch high.

Yeah, I do know what I am, what it looked like, a massive idiot.

But you know when you have a scale, and I just can't remember how to pronounce the scale, but it's one.

Piano scale?

No, not the piano scale, the size scale.

So it's one.

One, two.

To seven.

Yeah.

So it's one to seven.

So it's a seventh to size.

Yeah, exactly.

That's a good way of saying it.

So it's a seventh to the size of a proper Steinway.

And good thing you nearly look like an idiot there, Dan.

But you sort of swear.

So that's bigger than that then, because the Steinway's massive.

Yeah.

So what, couple of feet?

Couple of feet each way.

Yeah.

Maybe.

Yeah.

Pretty cool.

Again, I was doing the hand size, knowing that the audience at home couldn't see what I was doing, so.

Who was it?

Who was it for?

Well, it's for the White House, and it's a replica of a Steinway that they did actually have, and which has now been moved into a museum.

So this guy, who's an artist who created it, spent 16 years basically conceiving, creating, building it, and making sure that it functions exactly like a Steinway of regular size.

And even to the point, this is how sort of obsessed he was about doing it, that when he was making the actual pieces themselves, because there's so many pieces, there's something like 12,000 pieces that go into a Steinway.

He even made tiny versions of the machines that make the bigger pieces to then make the tiny pieces from in order to produce a Steinway.

You're looking very skeptical here, Rachel.

At some point, you have to ask, why?

Why not just make a Steinway?

It's easier to play.

Yeah.

You'd have to play this one with little chopstick fingers, you know, with little, like, sticks.

Oh, that'd be great, though.

When you play the chopsticks, yeah.

Yeah.

No, that exists.

That is fascinating.

You know that thing of getting your piano dropped on your head?

In cartoons.

In cartoons.

Yeah.

There is a place in the world where that happens for real every year.

What?

What do you mean?

MIT, the American University, they have a tradition every year, the piano drop, where they drop a piano off the roof.

But not onto someone's head.

Yes, onto someone's head.

It's whoever comes last in the class each year is, you'd say, executed, I guess, by...

No, they don't.

They're really, really careful about it, obviously.

But since 1972, they had this broken piano.

They wanted to get rid of it somehow.

It's just a bunch of students at this point, and they wanted to push it out of their window because that'd be crazy and fun of their students.

And then they read the rules, and they found out, oh, you can't throw things out of your window.

But then, because they're students, they read the rules really closely, and they found out there's no rule against pushing it off the roof, just out of your window.

That's not allowed.

But off the roof, not in the rules.

So they did it, and half a century on now, they are still doing it.
And they're very tight on security, and they, you know, everyone closes their windows, and they in fact do even more than that in terms of security.
Yeah.
And sometimes they fill it with sweets or confetti.
Yeah.
And they stopped during COVID, didn't they?
And then they started again last year.
I guess the piano was full of COVID.
I'm sorry.
They filled it with sweets, like a sort of pinionioata.
Oh, there we go.
Pianionianata.
It almost works.
It almost works.
And we should say it's always a broken piano.
It's never them just trashing a functioning piano.
It's always a broken piano that can't be mended.
OK.
Yeah, yeah.
This is kind of a common thing in America, isn't it?
Or relatively common.
Not as common as McDonald's.
What, chugging pianos off a roof?
Yeah, dropping pianos.
You kind of, once you start Googling it, you're like, well, this happens way more often than I thought.
Really?
So the first one I think that I found anyway was in 1968.
And what happened was there were two musicians, and they were driving a van, and there was a piano in the back of it.
And the piano actually accidentally fell out.
And they thought it kind of made quite a nice sound.
And they thought, well, what if we did that, but we dropped it from a helicopter?
It would make an even better sound.
And so as a benefit for a radio station, they decided to drop this piano from a helicopter.
And yeah, they did it.
And they got 3,000 people there.
They all paid to watch.
At one stage, a dog ran directly underneath the piano and sort of yapped around.
And the guy on the microphone said, asked everyone to whistle.

And so everyone in the area whistled,
and then the dog sort of went, oh, what's that?
And ran off again.
Yeah, OK.
I don't know how that works, but that's what happened.
And they dropped the piano, and it made a big old noise,
but not nearly as nice a noise as they wanted.
It turned out that it didn't sound that good,
but they made a lot of money anyway.
That sounds like something men would do.
Isn't it?
I don't want a stereotype, but it sounds like...
So they dropped it a tiny amount, and it made a magical sound.
And then instead of going, that was nice.
Let's do that again, or do something really creative.
They were like, let's drop it from a fucking helicopter
so that it does a massive smash.
And of course, that doesn't make as good a sound.
Like, of course.
I was just thinking, I wonder if we could do that.
Stop the podcast.
Stop the podcast.
Hey, everyone.
This week's episode of Fish is sponsored by ExpressVPN.
Hey, Dan.
When you're on the internet,
you visit lots of websites, right?
All the time, James.
That's kind of my thing.
Yeah.
Well, I knew that because I am an internet service provider,
and I can see what websites you visited.
Really?
Well, no, part of that was just whimsy.
Uh-huh.
But it is true that if I was an ISP,
I would be able to see the websites that you've been to.
Oh, dear God.
You never think about that, but that's obviously true,
and that's quite scary.
Well, there is a way to stop that from happening,
and the way to stop that is to get a VPN.
A VPN is a thing which creates a little tunnel
between you and those naughty, naughty websites

you, Dan Shriver, have been visiting.
They're not naughty websites.
It's just going to be a bit weird when we find out
90% of my search history is looking for Ben Elton memorabilia.
Like, that's what I'm worried about.
My cool factor.
The lucky thing is it will be able to see
what you've been searching for.
It'll only be able to see if you actually got
onto those Ben Elton websites.
And they are great, and I have.
Yeah, express VPN.
I mean, it can be used for protection purposes.
It can also be used to bypass international use of Netflix
for movies and TV shows that aren't available
in your own country, but you found out is available
in, say, America or Australia.
You can re-root your location geographically
so that your computer thinks that you're in that country
and you get access to all that stuff.
Absolutely.
So if you want to watch the 1982 Ben Elton stand-up special,
but it's only available in North Macedonia,
then go today to [expressvpn.com slash fish](https://expressvpn.com/slash/fish).
That's [expwepn.com slash fish](https://expwepn.com/slash/fish).
And when you do that, you can get an extra three months
three on your one-year package.
That's right.
Head to [expressvpn.com slash fish](https://expressvpn.com/slash/fish),
and you will get an extra three months free
with a one-year package.
So worth doing.
Get on it now and enjoy Mr. Elton's work.
OK, on with the podcast.
On with the show.
We do need to move on to our final fact.
It is time for our final fact of the show, and that is Andy.
My fact is that when filming E.T.,
Steven Spielberg kept E.T.'s puppeteers on the clock
at lunchtime so that six-year-old Drew Barrymore
could eat with him so she kept believing he was real.
It's such a nice fact.
She asked for a scarf for him to keep him warm
because he's got this very thin neck as an E.E.T.

And actually, they did adjust it.
They adjusted the whole filming for the children.
They shot the film in chronological order,
in order of the script, which never happens
because, you know, you're saving money here,
and you shoot these two scenes here,
but it meant the children really kind of believed it more.
You know, they were going back into the same world
day after day, so it is kind of magical what they did.
So I watched a bunch of interviews this morning.
Drew Barrymore has her own chat show,
and there was the 40th anniversary of E.T. not too long ago,
and so all the cast members came back on to chat about it.
And so she kept saying, you know,
I knew it was definitely a fake thing,
and they were all going, absolutely.
And so what the thing was is that she was,
during the breaks, during lunch, they'd sort of go,
where's Drew? And Drew would just be sitting there,
just going, so what do you think about...
And she was just chatting to this static model
that was sitting there.
The mother, who I believe her real name's Dee Dee,
she went over to Steven Spielberg and said,
I think she really believes that he's real.
We should possibly do something about that.
So Steven then hired two people who were part of the animatronic side.
That was their job to basically sit there
and just have the eyes roll whenever she said an anecdote
and stuff like that.
And she keeps denying it, but every single cast member says,
no, you flat out believed that E.T. was real
when you were five, six, however she was.
And he was amazing.
So my sons and I have just started watching it again
because they've just discovered it,
and you can buy these toys at the moment,
which is just a reminder of what E.T. looks like for everyone.
E.T. it is.
That's James Jesus.
Have you even seen E.T.? Have you seen the movie?
Maybe.
Does that know what happens?
Well, no.

Deliberately winding people up.
Deliberately winding down up.
I have seen E.T.
It's about three or four years old.
Nice, right.
So I don't remember anything about it.
I believed it was all real.
Yeah, he looked so real, and that's the thing.
The animatronic side of things were extraordinary.
So if E.T. was static, just standing and doing the scene,
there was like 120 different things
that could happen to E.T. in that point.
If he was using his hands,
there was a woman who was a mime
who would be laying underneath E.T.
who had E.T. glove hands on,
and she would be doing all the movements
while someone else was doing the voices and so on.
Then you had three actors.
One was a child
who didn't have any legs.
He was part of the main cast.
He became their best friends.
When E.T. is walking through the kitchen,
he was the one who,
walking on his hands inside the E.T. suit,
was slamming into the fridge
and falling over and stuff.
So there were so many different elements
that went into this one character.
Do you know that the company
that could have made E.T. was Columbia, right?
And they said no to it.
Like idiots.
Because it was the biggest film of all time.
Did they say no?
They ran surveys on it,
and the marketing department said,
it's got limited commercial appeal.
So it went to Universal, right?
And then Columbia had originally worked on it,
so they got, I think, 5% of the net profits.
One executive from Columbia said,
that year, the year it came out,

was on E.T.,
where they got 5% of the net profits,
than on any of their own actual films.
It was so huge.
It really was.
It was monstrous, you know.
Which is mad, because Spielberg's massive at this point.
He's just made Indiana Jones.
He's made Indiana Jones.
He's made Close Encounters of a Third Kind.
He's made Jaws.
But this was meant to be his small film
in between big films.
And then it turns into the biggest film he's ever made.
I think it's a good question.
Harrison Ford was in E.T.
Was he?
Yeah, he got cut.
But they filmed it.
He was Eliot's principal,
school principal,
and it ended up on the cutting room floor.
That's ballsy directing as well.
That's why Spielberg's a genius.
Oh, thank you, Harrison.
That doesn't really work.
Why did he cut him? I guess he was too famous.
Just for time, I suppose.
It would have been mega-distracting
to see Indiana Jones in the middle of the E.T. film.
Yeah, it's post-Indiana Jones, right?
Yeah, it was the next film.
It would be odd, yeah.
Henry Thomas, who's the kid who plays Eliot.
Which, just for anyone here and anyone listening,
if you haven't seen it,
there is a clip online of him auditioning
for the role of Eliot.
It's one of the most heartwarming things ever, right?
So awful and sad and beautiful.
Yeah, it's when the military are coming
to try and take E.T. away from him.
He's just got a shot of him crying,
going, but I don't want to give him up.

He's mine. It's really touching, really, really touching.
It's the best bit at the end where you just hear Spielberg
off-screen go, you got the job, kid.
It's wonderful in that moment.
That's the thing that got it.
But he arrived for his audition with a bullwhip
because he loved Indiana Jones so much.
So he came as Indiana Jones.
He didn't ever try to attack E.T. with it, though.
Yeah!
Yeah, no.
I was reading a biography of Spielberg,
E.T., which I might just share with you all if that's all right.
There's a scientist who becomes friends with E.T.,
if you remember that,
and a friend of Eliot's
and helps E.T. to get home.
And all the way through the film, he has a bunch of keys
hanging from his belt, right?
That's a key detail of him.
And also Eliot's parents are divorced,
and it's a film about loneliness and being a child
and being alone and finding a friend.
And it's really touching,
and Spielberg himself was from
his parents got divorced,
and this is the interpretation from a critic
called Andrew Serres
about the scientist who befriends Eliot.
Spielberg, in the final sequence,
subtly implies a romantic pairing
of keys, that's the scientist,
with Eliot's mother.
And he puts them in shots together, but he doesn't spell it out.
He doesn't have any dialogue, he just shows them together
and lets you draw your own implications.
Serres then writes,
only children and Freudians can make the crucial connections
between the telltale keys
fondled near the crotch of the potential father figure
and
the displaced phallus represented
by E.T. himself.
Actually,

looking at a model of E.T. here,
I can't see that, I think.
Blimey, James.
Think you need to see a doctor, buddy.
Yeah, isn't that
the most insane thing you've ever heard?
Yeah.
I need to think about this.
Are they suggesting the keys
are like unlocking
something?
Is that what it is?
Well, I think the keys are the penis,
but also E.T. is the penis.
But that's what I mean, if the keys can't be the penis,
can they? If E.T. is the penis.
Well, I think for Freudians, a lot of it is the penis.
Unless they're talking about the scientist.
Do you see what I mean? If I was back in time,
I'm immediately bored into this Freudian thing.
I think your crowd with the Agora in ancient Greece
are saying, sorry, what's the E.T. thing again?
That's a...
Drew Barrymore.
I'm a massive fan of Drew Barrymore's.
And she comes from
a dynasty of actors and producers and so on.
She even Spielberg is her godfather.
It's that kind of thing, right?
And there's a story about her grandfather
who was called John Barrymore.
And when he died,
he used to play poker
with a lot of other actors.
Earl Flynn, who was the
Aussie-turned-American actor,
a squash-buckling guy.
W.C. Fields seemed to be one of the greatest
silent comedians of all time.
And there was another person who was seen as an anarchist
that was their group, the four of them.
Earl Flynn went to the morgue,
stole John Barrymore,
brought him to the house

and they all had one last game of poker together.
No.

Yeah, David Niven writes about this in his book
and Drew Barrymore was asked about it
and she confirmed that within the family
that this absolutely is true.

So they brought him there, sat him at the table,
played their game of poker,
and then they returned him to the morgue
when they were done.

And Drew says she's even heard rumors
that the movie Weekend of Burnies
is based on the kidnapping
of the dead body of John Barrymore.

Wow. Yeah, pretty cool, eh?
Good fact.

Just, can I say, if I die,
I would love to be on one final episode
of No Such Thing as a Fish.

You'll be there ongoing.

We'll just have you permanently.

No, no, exactly.

The Voice of E.T.

This was a woman called Pat Welsh.

She'd been on a safari

and her photos

had gotten mixed up with someone

and eventually 20 years later

she got the film back

and she went to get it developed

and when she was getting it developed

she started speaking to the guy

and one of the people who was there was Ben Burt

who was the sound engineer

and he heard her voice

and went, you would be perfect for my alien.

And she'd done a little bit of stuff

before. She'd been like a soap opera actress

on the radio and stuff

but she hadn't really done very much

but she just had the perfect, she'd smoked a lot

and she had that kind of...

Yeah, exactly.

But he took that but he also added

an extra load of stuff.
So he took her voice but added some raccoons,
some sea otters,
some horses
and an old cinema professor from USC.
Oh, and his wife
breathing when she had a cold.
So he took all these things
and mixed them together with her voice
to make the ET voice.
There's a great story that I heard
recently, I was really lucky
I met a hero recently, Dan Akroyd
and he was telling me that when he was doing
Temple of Doom, because
Dan Akroyd is in Temple of Doom.
What? Yeah, in Indiana Jones is in Temple of Doom.
He plays the ball, doesn't he? The big ball.
Oh, fuck that.
So, it's an
uncredited role in the movie
but you'll all remember the scene
possibly. At the very beginning of Temple of Doom
there's the big fight with Lao Chi
inside the Chinese restaurant
and in order to get away, they go into
a small plane and
he closes the door and he says, nice try, Lao Chi
and he closes the door and it says Lao Chi's name on it
so you know he's in trouble.
Someone is talking to him to get him
into the plane as they're walking down the runway
that is Dan Akroyd.
So, when you watch that again, it's Dan Akroyd.
So, he was on set with them
and he needed to get back to the set of Ghostbusters
which they were filming at the time.
So, he said, Stephen, I'm going to head off.
He needed to get there quick. He saw a bicycle
just hanging around. No.
Gets the bicycle, it's got a basket in the front.
It goes up. And he flew in the side.
No, Annie!
No, but it later transpired

and what he'd taken was Elliot's bike.
I don't want to get all Freudian
and I don't really know much about this movie
but is he gets into a big wicker basket, does he?
The thing is with
extra terrestrials, as long as the basket's big enough
you can't tell the difference.
That is it. That is all of our facts.
Thank you so much for listening.
We would like to get in contact with any of us
about the things that we've said over the course of this podcast.
We can be found on our Twitter accounts.
I'm on at Shriverland, James.
At James Harkin.
Andy.
At Andrew Hunter M.
And Rach.
At Rachel Parris.
Yep, and I know it's not called Twitter
but I'm not going to say the new fucking stupid name.
Or you can get us on our group account
which is at no such thing.
Or you can go to our website,
nosuchthingasafish.com.
All of our previous episodes are up there.
Please check them out.
Otherwise come back next week.
We'll be back with another episode.
Thank you so much Soho Theatre
for staying this late with us.
We really appreciate it.
We'll see you again.
Goodbye!