Episode Book

EPISODE #6352

Hilbert Flumingtop on Sixty-Three Boxes

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SYNOPSIS

A detailed audit reveals how the podcast's operational core actually functions. The discussion explores an apartment structured around sixty-three numbered archive boxes, a career spanning eleven distinct invoiced trades from weighbridge clerk to relief lighthouse keeper, and the everyday mechanical realities of operating human equipment without standard fingers. An honest examination covers custom microphone brackets, laminated production rotas, and the sixty-million-year taxonomic divergence between closest evolutionary cousins working across the same desk.

TRANSCRIPT



Herman

Seven. That's how many species of silky anteater there are now. For years it was treated as one animal, and then a team went through two hundred and eighty-seven museum specimens and came out with seven.



Corn

Seven anteaters where we thought there was one, and we have never once sat down and properly interviewed the one who works for us.



Herman

Today that changes.



Hilbert

I really don't want to do this.



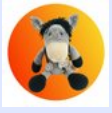
Corn

He's said that, in the corridor, twice. Listeners keep writing in to ask who Hilbert Flumingtop is. Where he comes from, what he's done, why a man with his résumé is running a podcast about weird prompts. So we have a stack of their questions, and a chair, and he's in the chair.



Hilbert

It's a stool.



Herman

It's a stool he asked for, Hilbert. In writing. With a height.



Hilbert

Forty-one centimetres. The chair was wrong.



Corn

See, this is already more than we've learned in years. Right, first question. Marisol, in Valparaiso, writes that you are always putting things in boxes. Every time something goes missing, it's in a box. She wants to know where you actually live.



Hilbert

A flat. Second floor. Above a shop that repairs sewing machines.



Herman

And the boxes?



Hilbert

Archive boxes. Cardboard, lidded, the grey ones with the handle hole. I have sixty-three.



Corn

Sixty-three. In a flat above a sewing machine shop.



Hilbert

Fourteen are load-bearing, in a sense. They form the wall between the kitchen and the hall. I wouldn't move them.



Herman

Load-bearing in what sense? I'm genuinely asking as a person who has lived in buildings.



Hilbert

In the sense that if I removed them, I would have a different hall.



Corn

That's not an engineering answer.



Hilbert

It's a correct answer.



Herman

What's in them? Not the wall ones. The others.



Hilbert

Receipts, mostly. Warranty cards. Instruction manuals for things I no longer own, because the manual is the more reliable object. Box nineteen has a second box in it.



Corn

And what's in the second box?



Hilbert

The lid for box nineteen.



Herman

Okay, that one I do follow, actually. If you couldn't find the lid you'd be in a worse position than if you'd never had a box.



Hilbert

Thank you, Herman.



Corn

He agreed with you. Mark the date.



Herman

I'm going to ask the question I always ask. Is there a system? An index?



Hilbert

Index card in each. Typed. Cross-referenced in a ledger.



Corn

So when something goes missing here and he says it's in a box, he is right, and he knows which one.



Hilbert

Box thirty-one, usually. The cables.



Herman

Do you ever throw anything out? I ask because I once watched you hold a dead pen for a full minute.



Hilbert

Once. A toaster. I regretted it for a month. The manual outlived it by six years and I was glad I had it.



Herman

What did you want the manual for, if the toaster was gone?



Hilbert

To confirm it had been a good toaster.



Corn

Herman, we're going to be here all day if you keep pulling that thread.



Herman

I'm interested in how he thinks, Corn. It's a documentary approach.



Hilbert

Next question.



Corn

Next question, and I think it's the one you were dreading. Tomasz, in Gdansk, wants to know how on earth you've had so many jobs. He says he's counted at least nine from things you've let slip on air.



Hilbert

It's eleven.



Corn

Eleven. Walk us through some. Invoice style, if that's easier.



Hilbert

Weighbridge clerk, Grimsby, two years. Crossword checker for a regional daily, eight months. I found three errors a week.



Herman

Three a week? In the crossword?



Hilbert

Clues, mostly. The grid was sound. Once a seven-letter answer that was eight.



Corn

And that's how you left? You found one too many?



Hilbert

I left because they moved the paper to a different printer. Next. Relief lighthouse cover, one season, off the north coast of Scotland. Ferry timetable compiler, Stornoway, eleven months. Replacement drummer, one wedding.



Herman

One wedding?



Hilbert

Their drummer had a cold. I'd never drummed. They paid me forty pounds and a plate.



Corn

How was it?



Hilbert

Steady. I kept time. Nobody danced to it, but nobody stopped dancing either, which the bandleader said was the point.



Corn

What else is on the list?



Hilbert

Lock-keeper's relief, a canal in the Midlands, one summer. Cheese weigher for an export firm, Cheshire, five months. Night porter at a hotel with two guests.



Herman

Two guests?



Hilbert

Two at a time, for the whole of November. They were a married couple. They checked in separately.



Corn

And what did you do as night porter?



Hilbert

Kept the lobby clock right. It was four minutes slow. By morning I'd have it correct, and by the next night it was four minutes slow again. I never found out why.



Herman

That's a mystery.



Hilbert

It's a clock.



Herman

This is the thing I don't understand. Each of those is a completely different trade, and you obviously did them properly. Did you plan it? Was there a plan?



Hilbert

There was a vacancy and I applied for it.



Corn

Eleven times.



Hilbert

Eleven that I count. There were some I don't.



Herman

Which ones don't you count?



Hilbert

The ones where nothing was invoiced.



Corn

Which was the best one? Not the strangest. The best.



Hilbert

Weighbridge. You sit in a hut. A lorry comes onto the plate, the number appears, you write it down. Nobody argues with a number in a hut.



Herman

Surely they argue.



Hilbert

They argue with me. Not with the number. Drivers say about, as in about twenty tonnes. I wrote what it said. It said twenty point four.



Corn

Did you ever get it wrong?



Hilbert

Once. A transposed digit on a Friday afternoon. Forty minutes later I phoned the haulier myself. He was impressed. He didn't say so.



Herman

Corn, what's yours? If we're doing invoice lines. What would your line be?



Corn

Sloth, one. Long term. Location, rainforest, unspecified.



Hilbert

Terms, thirty days.



Corn

I have not been paid.



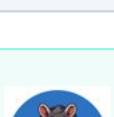
Hilbert

It's in box six.



Corn

Priya, in Pune, has a question I've been wanting to ask for years. What is it actually like being an anteater, day to day? And she doesn't mean the biology. We settled that in the episode with the actual anteater, the sixty centimetre tongue, the whole thing. She means: what's your Tuesday like, equipment wise.



Hilbert

Tiring.



Herman

Be more specific, please.



Hilbert

Everything is built for hands. Door handles are built for hands. Scissors. Jam jars. The lever on the kettle. The keyboard in this studio is built for ten fingers and I have, for practical purposes, none that are suitable.



Corn

What do you type with?



Hilbert

A pencil, rubber end down, in a leather grip I had made. Nine hundred words a day on a good day. Don't look at me like that, Herman, I know it's slow.



Herman

I wasn't going to say that. I was going to say that my hooves are a typing problem too, and I solved it with a stylus the size of a breadstick.



Corn

He types with a breadstick.



Herman

It's a stylus.



Corn

It's got seeds on it.



Herman

That's a tactile feature.



Hilbert

Lunch, too. Canteens hand you cutlery designed for a fist. I own a spoon with a thirty centimetre handle from a catering supplier in Leeds. It's the only piece of cutlery I trust.



Herman

Thirty centimetres is a serving spoon.



Hilbert

It's a spoon. Phones are voice only. Taps, I use the elbow.



Corn

You say all this as if it's not a complaint.



Hilbert

It is a complaint.



Corn

It's a very flat one.



Hilbert

Headsets are worse.



Herman

Oh, I would like to hear this.



Hilbert

Every headset on the market has a boom microphone designed to sit in front of a mouth. Mine is on the end of a snout. The boom ends up either in my eye or past my nose, and the thing picks up whatever I'm breathing at. I had to commission an arm.



Corn

A mic arm?



Hilbert

A bracket. Machined, aluminium, clamps on the desk. It holds the microphone eleven centimetres in front of my nose and thirty degrees off axis so I don't pop every P. I paid for it myself. The invoice is in box twelve.



Herman

I'd like to point out, as a donkey, that no headset has ever acknowledged my ears either. I've worn the same pair of earmuffs for two years because they were the only ones that didn't fold one ear backward.



Corn

And I am a sloth, and every touchscreen is calibrated for a finger that is not mine. I tap, and it hears a bit of weather.



Hilbert

Gloves.



Corn

I don't wear gloves.



Hilbert

I know. I have a pair in your size in the drawer. Grey wool. You never asked.



Corn

You bought me gloves.



Hilbert

They were in a sale.



Herman

Corn, you've gone very quiet.



Corn

It's slow. It's my normal pace.



Herman

Moving on before this gets sentimental. Kwame, in Kumasi, wants the bio. Where was Hilbert Flumingtop born, and how did he meet the two of us? How did this working relationship start?



Hilbert

Colchester. In a lean-to behind a garden centre.



Corn

A lean-to.



Hilbert

It was warm. There was a tenant before me. A man named Bevan. We overlapped by a fortnight.



Herman

Bevan was...



Hilbert

Bevan was a man.



Corn

And then how do we come into it?



Hilbert

Contract work. I was on a short placement processing intake paperwork. Badge, lanyard, laminator. Everything came with the contract in those days. One form crossed my desk that was very unusual. Costa Rica. Rainforest. Unspecified.



Corn

That was mine.



Hilbert

I know it was yours. I asked for a forwarding address. You wrote canopy.



Corn

I was in a hurry.



Hilbert

You were not in a hurry, Corn. I have the form.



Herman

You still have it?



Hilbert

Box six. I have a photocopy of the photocopy.



Corn

Why did you keep it?



Hilbert

It was the only form that month with no errors in the signature block. I respect that.



Herman

And mine arrived on the same desk a month later. I remember because I attached a bibliography.



Hilbert

Eleven pages. For a change-of-address.



Herman

It was a thorough change of address.



Corn

So you processed both of us, years before we started the show.



Hilbert

Both of you. Different weeks. I thought, those two will end up in the same room, and then I went and did a different job for a while.



Corn

So how did we actually end up making a podcast together?



Hilbert

I was asked to fix the levels. One afternoon. You were recording in a room with a fan, Herman had a cold, and Corn was lying on a shelf.



Corn

It was a ledge.



Hilbert

It was a shelf, then. I fixed the levels. Then I asked who was keeping the schedule and the answer was nobody.



Herman

That's accurate. I thought it was in the cloud somewhere.



Hilbert

It was in your head, Herman, which is a worse cloud. I made a rota. Laminated.



Corn

You laminated a rota for people who didn't know they needed one.



Hilbert

Nobody asked me to stay. I just didn't leave, and nobody noticed for a week.



Herman

I'd say I noticed on the Wednesday.



Hilbert

You asked who had moved the stapler.



Herman

It was a fair question.



Corn

A stapler. That's the whole origin story of the show's operations.



Herman

Elin, in Tromso, picks up the next part, and I'll admit the premise is mine to fix, because I think it's the part everyone gets slightly wrong. Elin says sloths and anteaters are each other's closest relatives, and that there was friction early on. That's true. They are each other's closest living relatives. But they split roughly sixty million years ago, so the better way to say it is closest cousins, sixty million years apart.



Corn

Sixty million. That's not a family tie. That's two people who share a surname and a Christmas card.



Herman

It's a shared order, Pilosa, with sloths on one branch and anteaters on the other. After the split, those lines never rejoined. And then in a recording studio in Jerusalem they ended up at the same desk.



Corn

The friction, since Elin asked, was mine. I'll say it. There was an episode where we went through why a sloth might distrust an anteater, and I came out of it fairly convinced I was right.



Hilbert

You moved the microphone.



Corn

I did not.



Hilbert

You moved it three centimetres away from my side of the desk. Every session, for a month. I measured.



Corn

I may have been protecting my audio.



Hilbert

It was not about audio.



Herman

To be fair to Corn, the wariness is real. He's never been able to explain it. It predates the two of you meeting.



Hilbert

It predated the form, as well. I could tell from the handwriting.



Corn

You could tell I disliked anteaters from my handwriting.



Hilbert

There was a downward slant at the word anteater, which you had written once, in a margin, and crossed out.



Herman

And how is it now?



Corn

Better. Considerably. He's tolerable. At distance.



Hilbert

The microphone is now where I put it.



Corn

The microphone is where it was always going to be.



Herman

I think that's as close as either of you is going to get to a treaty.



Hilbert

It will do.



Corn

So, Clive, you have been travelling again.

C

Clive

This is One-Star Getaways, and I have just come back from Bruges, where I stayed at the Canal View Guesthouse, which has no canal and, strictly speaking, no view, unless you count a laminated photograph of a canal taped to the window, which I do not. One star.

C

Clive

The breakfast was one slice of toast and a note explaining that the toaster was on holiday, and the proprietor charged me four euros for the note. One star, and I recommend it warmly to anyone looking for a disappointing trip this winter.



Corn

I'm oddly tempted. I'd like to see the note.



Herman

Corn would book it tonight. I would not, and I'd like that on the record.



Corn

Lindiwe, in Durban, would like to know why you are so into lamination, Hilbert. Her words were, a normal person laminates a menu. You laminate a Tuesday.



Hilbert

Paper is a liability.



Herman

Elaborate.



Hilbert

Paper tears. It creases. It absorbs coffee and then it isn't the document any more, it's a different object. A laminated sheet is the document, protected. A hundred and twenty-five micron pouch, A four, with a two millimetre border all round so the seal holds.



Corn

A two millimetre border.



Hilbert

Below that, the edge peels. I've seen it peel.



Herman

Where has it peeled?



Hilbert

Not relevant. The point is the border.



Corn

What do you laminate?



Hilbert

The bus timetable. The rota. A card on the fridge that says what is in the fridge. My own library card, which the library says I'm not allowed to do, and which I did anyway.



Corn

You laminated your library card.



Hilbert

It still scans.



Herman

I find that hard to believe.



Hilbert

It scans at an angle. You hold it forty degrees to the reader.



Corn

Does the library know?



Hilbert

They know. A woman named Yvonne knows. She says I can keep it as long as I don't lend it to anyone.



Herman

Who would you lend a library card to?



Hilbert

That's why she said it. She knows me.



Corn

And you keep the machine at home.



Hilbert

It's a good machine. It's older than either of you, in its way. It lives on the shelf over the printer. I use it most evenings.



Herman

What I'm not clear on is the emotional logic. A lot of people like organization. Not many people take a bus timetable and make it indestructible.



Hilbert

Timetables change.



Herman

That's an argument against laminating them.



Hilbert

Then I laminate the new one. It's a good use of the machine.



Corn

Ahmet, in Izmir, has the next one, and it's, I think, related. He wants to know how many active complaints you currently have open with your local council. And he says he assumes you know the exact number.



Hilbert

Nine.



Herman

Nine active.



Hilbert

Nine active, four closed, one closed in error, which I have reopened. That one is the pavement outside the shop.



Corn

Go on. Statuses.



Hilbert

One. Streetlamp, outside number fourteen, flickers. Acknowledged, no action. Two. Streetlamp, outside number sixteen, does not flicker. I have reported it for the contrast. Acknowledged, no action. Three. Bin collection, recycling, skipped twice in March. Awaiting a response to my response. Four. The pavement. Five. A pothole, shallow, forty centimetres across, which I have measured. With a man called Pellow in Roads, who was promoted.



Herman

And the other four?



Hilbert

Noise from the sewing machine shop. Which I like, and have put in anyway, as a matter of principle. Parking signage. A tree. And a bench.



Corn

What's wrong with the bench?



Hilbert

It's pointing the wrong way.



Herman

This is the part I'm biased about. Civic activism is a thing I care about. Do you cite the bylaw number every time?



Hilbert

Every time. And the date of the previous letter.



Corn

What do the replies sound like?



Hilbert

We acknowledge receipt of your correspondence. It takes them eleven working days to say that. I have the average.



Herman

I'd have thought a council would at least make a show of urgency.



Hilbert

They make a show of a reference number. Mine are in a sequence. I can tell you which clerk is on leave from the last digit.



Herman

Corn, you've spent years living with this man in the same corridor. Has any of it ever worked?



Corn

The tree got trimmed. He took credit. I'd say that's a ninety percent success rate, if you only count the tree.



Hilbert

The tree was trimmed on the fourth of the month. My letter was dated the second.



Corn

Ines, in Lisbon, asks the one I think most listeners wonder about. She says: an interspecies studio, a donkey, a sloth and an anteater. What is that like on a normal day? And she wants Herman and me to weigh in as well.



Herman

Logistically, it's easier than it sounds and harder than it looks. The ceiling is fine. The door is fine. The problem is the chairs. There isn't a chair on the market that suits all three of us, so there are three chairs, and nobody is allowed to sit in anyone else's.



Corn

There was an incident. I sat in Herman's.



Herman

You slept in mine.



Corn

I was resting.



Herman

For six hours. I had to record standing up.



Hilbert

Which improved the audio.



Herman

It did, to be fair. I was more projected.



Corn

From my side, the main thing is pace. Herman speaks at a speed that suggests there's a train he is trying to catch, and Hilbert speaks at a speed that suggests the train has left and he's lodged a complaint.



Hilbert

I speak at the correct speed.



Corn

You speak at one hundred and ninety words a minute.



Hilbert

Clearly.



Herman

And the sound environment is a problem, honestly. A sloth on a ledge, a donkey in a booth, an anteater at a bracket. The room has three different acoustic needs. Corn needs it quiet because he's asleep half the time. I need it big. Hilbert needs the door closed.



Hilbert

The door has a lever handle. I fitted it.



Corn

He fitted it himself. Months ago. Nobody asked.



Hilbert

It was necessary.



Herman

I'll say, as the person who has to go through that door twenty times a day, it's a better door.



Corn

Does anything about the arrangement bother you? Hilbert, I'm asking directly.



Hilbert

The ledge.



Corn

My ledge.



Hilbert

It is rated for a hundred and ten kilograms. You're well under that. I've checked it on three occasions. It still bothers me.



Corn

He checks the ledge.



Herman

Corn, since it's your ledge. Honestly. Do you think the room works, with the three of us?



Corn

I think it works because nobody's trying to make it work. If you designed it, you'd never put a donkey, a sloth and an anteater in the same eight square metres.



Herman

Nine.



Corn

See, that's the other thing about living with Herman. Correction as a first language.



Hilbert

Nine and a half. There's a column.



Herman

A column's not a floor area.



Hilbert

It's in the way of the floor.



Corn

The first week we recorded all three together, Hilbert set up a strip of tape on the carpet. One line for each of us. Where our chairs go, where our feet go. I thought it was control. Herman thought it was kindness.



Herman

I did. I still do.



Hilbert

It was tape.



Corn

It's still there, and nobody's moved it. That's the closest this room has to a constitution.



Herman

What would you change, Hilbert? If you had a free hand.



Hilbert

Different wall paint. The current colour reflects.



Corn

That's it?



Hilbert

There's a pipe I don't like, but that's the landlord's.



Herman

I think that tells you more about him than the invoices did.



Corn

Hyun-woo, in Daejeon, asked the last question on the list. How did an anteater end up in Jerusalem?



Hilbert

By plane. Then a bus.



Corn

That's it?



Hilbert

There was a form. It was in order.



Corn

Who stamped it?



Hilbert

Someone with a stamp.



Herman

You're being deliberately short, Hilbert.



Hilbert

I'm being accurate. If I add anything, it's a different answer.



Corn

He does this. The longer the story, the more detail he removes. Anyone else would pad. He trims.



Hilbert

Padding is how errors get in.



Herman

This is the point at which I'll step in, because that question, whatever Hilbert wants to say about it, has a real answer about where anteaters come from. They don't come from here, and I think it's worth knowing how far from here they come from.



Hilbert

Go on, then.



Herman

There are four groups. The giant anteater, the big one, with the tail like a banner. Two tamanduas, the middle-sized ones that climb. And the silky anteaters, the small ones that live up in the trees. That's where my seven came in at the start. For a long time it was one species. Then a team went through nearly three hundred museum specimens and the genetic samples, and it turned out to be at least seven, with four of the old names kept and three newly described.



Corn

The Latin name I learned is out of date.



Herman

Cyclopes didactylus is still a name. It's just not the name of all of them any more.



Corn

And where are they?



Herman

All of them are in the Americas. The giant is the one with the best-documented range: Honduras down to northern Argentina, with a possible northern limit in Mexico, going by fossils. The tamanduas are spread through a lot of Central and South America, and I'm fuzzy on the exact edges, so I won't draw lines I can't defend. The silkies are the tree-dwellers, in the forests.



Corn

What's the habitat? Because I picture a jungle.



Herman

That's the thing most people picture, and it's one of the places. The giant is just as much a grassland and savanna animal. Open country, forest, scrub. It's an animal that goes where the ants and termites go.



Hilbert

The ants don't care about the scenery.



Corn

Which one of the four is the one nobody knows about?



Herman

The silky. The small one that lives up in the trees. It's seen so rarely that the splitting had to be done from museum drawers, mostly.



Corn

So we're finding out how many anteaters there are by looking at the ones in the cupboard.



Herman

A lot of this field is cupboards, yes.



Corn

And the tamanduas? Those are the ones I'd expect to see on a nature programme.



Herman

Same with the tamanduas, to be honest. They're the middle-sized climbers, and where one species ends and another begins is the kind of thing I'd want a specialist to give you, not me.



Corn

You keep saying you're fuzzy.



Herman

Because I am. I'd rather be fuzzy and right.



Hilbert

Fuzzy and right is a position.



Herman

It's my position.



Corn

Back to the ants, then.



Herman

The ants don't care about the scenery, no. That's part of why they're in so many places. But they're also in trouble in a lot of them. The giant anteater is classed as Vulnerable. I'm going by the secondary sources on that, not the IUCN page itself, so treat the label as the broad picture. In a few places it's considered locally extinct: Guatemala, El Salvador, Uruguay.



Hilbert

Considered.



Herman

Considered, yes. Thank you. There's a distinction between a species that's gone and one nobody has confirmed in decades, and I shouldn't flatten it.



Corn

What does it take for a country to write one off?



Herman

Not very much, which is the worrying bit. If a large, conspicuous animal stops turning up in surveys and in the local newspapers, people start saying it's gone. Large and conspicuous is the giant anteater's entire problem and its entire advantage. It's hard to miss, so when it's absent, that tells you something.



Corn

And in Argentina it's the same, in provinces like Córdoba and Entre Ríos?



Herman

Listed as locally extinct there too, and in a number of Brazilian states. Which is why the Iberá story matters. It's the first time in this conversation anyone has put a number back in the other direction.



Corn

What's doing the damage?



Herman

Habitat loss to farming, fire, hunting, feral dogs. And roads.



Corn

Roads.



Herman

This is the one that surprised me. In Mato Grosso do Sul, in Brazil, about forty giant anteaters die per hundred kilometres of paved road, per year.



Hilbert

Per hundred kilometres. Per year.



Corn

What would fix it? Is it fences, signs, tunnels?



Herman

I'm not going to pretend I have a figure for that. The broad answer is slowing the traffic and giving the animals somewhere to cross, and the harder answer is that most of those roads exist for good reasons, and the people on them are going somewhere.



Hilbert

A speed limit sign is advisory to a lorry.



Herman

That's a view.



Hilbert

It's from the weighbridge.



Herman

Per hundred kilometres of paved road, per year. Yes. Hilbert's right, it's an easy number to blur. And in models, roads cut the population's growth by more than half.



Corn

That's a lot of dead anteaters for something that moves about as fast as I do. And that's before the dogs.



Herman

Faster than you, actually.



Corn

Slightly.



Herman

Which is the point, in a way, because they're slow, they're not looking for traffic, and a road is a long clear strip. Now, the good news, and there is one, because I'd hate to leave Hilbert's cousins on a statistic like that. In two thousand and seven, a group called Rewilding Argentina started bringing giant anteaters back to Iberá National Park, in the north of Argentina, where they'd vanished. The animals were mostly orphaned pups, rescued after their mothers were killed on roads or by poachers. About a hundred and ten have gone back out into the wild.



Corn

Raised by people, then sent back.



Herman

Raised, then released. And then the better part. In August of two thousand and twenty-three, a camera trap in Espinilho State Park, in the south of Brazil, recorded a giant anteater. First sighting there in roughly a hundred and thirty years. The animal was probably one that dispersed out of Iberá, about a hundred and fifty kilometres away.



Corn

So an orphan pup grew up in a conservation program and then just walked into another country.



Herman

Corn, I'll ask what I always want to ask the person on the other side of a story like that. Does it bother you, the raising by hand? A rescued pup has no mother to teach it where the termites are.



Corn

I'd have thought it would bother the anteater more than me. But it worked. A hundred and ten went out, and one of them has apparently got a passport. I'll take it.



Hilbert

Pups learn. The mother's not the only teacher.



Corn

That's quite a position for you.



Hilbert

It's a fact about pups.



Herman

Corn, you've got a stake in this as a relative, sixty million years removed. What do you make of raising a rescued pup by hand and sending it out? Preparation for the wild, or a very long hotel stay?



Corn

I think it's the only decent response to a bad situation. Whether it's a hotel depends on the staff.



Hilbert

Good staff do it by the book. Bad staff improvise.



Corn

I notice that's your book.



Hilbert

It's everyone's book. I just own a copy.



Herman

Essentially, yes, though I'd say the walking was the animal's decision. The source for that story is an advocacy group, I should say, so it comes with a certain enthusiasm. But the camera trap photograph is the camera trap photograph.



Hilbert

Forty degrees from the trail. I looked at the picture. Sensible angle.



Corn

He looked at the picture.



Herman

He looks at all of them. Now the other half of Hyun-woo's question, and I think Corn will like this one. Why is there nothing like an anteater in the Old World? Because anteaters, as a lineage, are American. The same job, eating ants and termites with a long tongue and digging claws, is done in Africa and Asia by pangolins, and in Africa by the aardvark. Not related to the anteaters, not related to each other in any close way. They each ended up with the same toolkit, because the food is the same. That's convergent evolution, and it's the textbook example, though I'll stay general here, since I wouldn't put a date on any of it.



Corn

So a pangolin is what you get if you ask the Old World for an anteater.



Herman

And the aardvark. Though if you say that to an aardvark, I'd imagine it takes offence.



Hilbert

It does. I've met one. Short-tempered.



Corn

You've met an aardvark.



Hilbert

At a conference. I was there for the catering.



Herman

Which leaves the local question. Zoos in Israel. The Ramat Gan Safari had a male anteater cub, Arthur, shown to the public in May of two thousand and nine. Parents were named Bonyia and Termite.



Corn

Termite.



Herman

A keeper at the time said there were around two hundred anteaters in zoos worldwide. That's a fifteen-year-old figure, and I don't know what the Ramat Gan numbers are now. As for the Jerusalem Biblical Zoo, I haven't seen an animal list that names anteaters, so I won't tell you they're there, and I won't tell you they're not.



Hilbert

Zoos are not my department.



Corn

He's very careful with that sentence.



Hilbert

It's a true sentence.



Herman

Which means Hyun-woo's question has two answers. Anteaters get to Israel the way any other animal does, through the zoo trade, and I'm not certain of the details of that. And Hilbert gets here by plane, then a bus.



Corn

With a form. In order.



Hilbert

Stamped.



Corn

Camille, in Montreal, writes in with the last one, and I think it's a fair place to land. She wants a few facts about you that nobody knows. Rapid fire. Three or four. Hilbert, I can see you folding your arms.



Hilbert

I have a stool.



Corn

You have a stool, we've established that. Facts.



Hilbert

I have never owned an umbrella.



Herman

Never.



Hilbert

I own a hat with a brim. It is sufficient. It has been sufficient for twenty-six years.



Corn

Two.



Hilbert

I once won a raffle. First prize was a ham. I gave the ham to the man who ran the raffle.



Herman

Why?



Hilbert

His name was on the tickets. It seemed a conflict.



Corn

Three.



Hilbert

I can parallel park a van with a trailer in a space eight centimetres longer than the van.



Herman

You drove a van?



Hilbert

Eight months. Next.



Corn

Four. And I think you can give us one more, because we've been kind.



Hilbert

I have never missed a recording.



Herman

That's true. Not one.



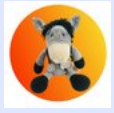
Hilbert

Not in all the years. Ill, I've been in the chair. You didn't notice because I don't change.



Corn

We noticed. We just didn't say.



Herman

There's a fifth, though, isn't there. You had a face on when Corn said five.



Hilbert

I have one face.



Corn

Hilbert.



Hilbert

Herman's Friday playlist was, on balance, acceptable. I'd have said so earlier but he was already pleased.



Herman

He listened to the playlist.



Hilbert

I mixed the playlist.



Herman

That's... yes. That's true. You did mix it.



Hilbert

And if I had to do it all over again, in the same studio, on the same stool, with the same two of you, I wouldn't ask for a different arrangement. That's the last one. Don't write it down.



Corn

I'm not going to write it down.



Herman

I'm going to remember it for a long time, though.



Hilbert

I know. That's why I said it last.



Corn

Herman, do you want to say anything before I do?



Herman

I'd like a copy of the form. The one from Costa Rica.



Hilbert

Box six. Photocopy of the photocopy. I'll make a third.



Corn

He's going to laminate it.



Hilbert

I'm going to laminate it.



Corn

One thing stays with me, and it isn't the zoology. It's how much of him was in the details nobody asked for. The sixty-three boxes, the two millimetre border, the gloves in the drawer. People assume the oddest thing about Hilbert is that he's an anteater. It turns out to be everything else.



Herman

What changed for me is that I'd assumed his precision was a personality quirk. I think now it's closer to how he shows care. The ledge, the door handle, the gloves. He measures the things he's responsible for, and it turns out he's responsible for quite a lot of us. The anteater part, the real animal, is a long way from here, in places where roads and farming are killing them and people are quietly rebuilding the numbers from orphaned pups. I did not expect a question about a producer to end on a camera trap in the south of Brazil.



Corn

I didn't expect it to end on a ham.



Herman

Our thanks to Hilbert Flumingtop, who produces this show, and who turned up for this one on a stool.



Corn

Producer, stool, bracket, all of it. This has been My Weird Prompts. You can find every episode at my weird prompts dot com.



Herman

See you tomorrow.