

## 12.9.24 Inside J!

[00:00:00] From the Alex Trebek stage at Sony Picture Studios, this is Inside Jeopardy!

**Michael Davies:** Wow, wow! Oh, there he is, some OG Johnny Gilbert, uh, on the axe. That signals, uh, a brand new episode of Inside Jeopardy! Your exclusive and official podcast destination for all things happening in the world of Jeopardy, uh, a. k. a.

The Jeopardy World. I'm Michael Davies, joined today by producer Sarah Foss.

**Sarah Foss:** Michael, great to see you. First time I've seen you in all video now that we have, uh, the podcast on YouTube.

**Michael Davies:** Yes, uh, transcontinentally, uh, I'm in Bridgehampton, New York. You're in Los Angeles. We wrapped up our season in JPT, um, Our year.

**Sarah Foss:** Our year.

**Michael Davies:** Yeah, our year. Amazing. We've

**Sarah Foss:** got more of season 41 to come.

**Michael Davies:** Yeah, we broke a record. Uh, I think this was a Jepa world record, 253. Uh, episodes of regular Jeopardy! shot this year. Um, original [00:01:00] recipe. 40 episodes of Pop Culture Jeopardy! 9 episodes of Masters. 13 episodes of Celebrity Jeopardy! Takes us to a total of 315 episodes.

Yes, we think could be give or take a few. I feel

**Sarah Foss:** like our math is pretty strong, but even if you give or take a few, it is a record. We shot 128 of those within a three month period. So we are just record breaking this year, Michael.

**Michael Davies:** Yeah. I have to credit the entire Uh, team and crew and especially the writers.

I think we wrote more than 25, 000 clues, uh, this year, which is an amazing work by across more than 4, 000 categories. That is the work that our writers and our researchers do to prepare all of that material. Everybody involved in

the, the editorial side of our show. But by the way, uh, post, I saw the producer, Megan, who does our post.

She looked exhausted at the end of your drinks, uh, across the road at the backyard. Sorry.

**Sarah Foss:** Backstage.

**Michael Davies:** [00:02:00] Across, yes, the backstage. Backyard is another bar I quite enjoy, um, but the backstage, she looked exhausted. Her whole team, I think, have edited so many shows. I mean, overall, I don't think we'll be making 315 again this year.

I think it was a product of a lot of different reasons. You know, we did loads of new work on the set. We got a brand new set, as you've now started to see in syndication. We had pop culture, which we're going to talk about in a second. We just so much jeopardy this year.

**Sarah Foss:** I don't know, Michael, I will never put it past you.

I feel like record breaking could happen year after year with you at the helm. And I'm here for it.

**Michael Davies:** Well, by the way, this is in addition, I made, I mean, who knows how many hours of good morning football for the NFL network and for syndication, how many hours of Watch What Happens Live with Andy Cohen, my Fat Joe talk show, my Olympic game with Alexandra Kimball.

And who

**Sarah Foss:** wants to be a millionaire! And who wants to

**Michael Davies:** be a millionaire, you're right! There was that, too. I mean, this was a TV year of multiple hours, but we are so fortunate to do what we do and work in this glorious business while it still [00:03:00] stands. Yes, Sarah. Okay, where are we? Where are we in JAQ? Take me

**Sarah Foss:** back.

In JPT, as you mentioned, we did kind of hit the record breaking year numbers with a bang because we had our tournament of champions last week. We had

our honors event and what a great group of champions we brought together. 21 just incredible personalities and great, great competition. I can't wait for people to see that.

**Michael Davies:** Yeah, this was a wonderful TOC. I would say without giving anything away, you know, felt different than other TOCs. Um, you know, generationally just felt, um, like there's sort of a changing of the guard, uh, in, in, in the Jeopardy! contestant pool. Really fascinating stuff. Some brilliant gameplay. Can't wait for you all to see it.

**Sarah Foss:** Yeah. And just competitive games across the board. Really fun to see. We're coming up on the cutoff in JAT for that TOC that we just recorded. So as these shows are starting to air, this is the [00:04:00] last week that Competitors could still earn a spot in that competition and tournament kind of structure.

Everyone else will be headed into our competition that will happen in 2026. That TOC, because this one will air in 2025. JPT, JAT, it's all, it's all kind of convulging together, but it's all good.

**Michael Davies:** A lot going on. Obviously, the second chance starts airing, I think, the week after Christmas in the United States.

And, uh, you know, Carries right on through Champions Wildcard through the TOC. And when we come back in January, we're going to be getting ready for the JIT again. The return of the JIT.

**Sarah Foss:** Yes. Return of the JIT. And so we're going to take a couple weeks off on the pod. I think we all need a little break. So we will be back on January 6th to recap, you know, next week's games.

Anything you have missed in the meantime, talk about Second Chance. So don't worry. We'll have everything for you. After that, but really people right now are talking about pop culture. Jeopardy, of course, debuted [00:05:00] last week on Wednesday. The first three episodes dropped and I feel like there's been some, some hot takes, Michael.

**Michael Davies:** Oh, look, number one, it's, uh, I thank you to everybody who's watched and sent us such lovely comments. Um, it's done great. It's been, you know, charting for those who look at Amazon charts. It's been, um, charting, you know, from the moment it went out, it's been charting, you know, top three, top four on Amazon.

Uh, the social reaction has been huge. The number of streams has been massive. And just to, you know, once again, contextualize this for the, Um, for everyone listening, you know, I regard, you know, our, the, the existential threat to Jeopardy is that we exist only on broadcast television and broadcast television is while it's hanging on and doing better than I think most people expected.

Jeopardy is going to have to, over the next few years, transition at least part of its [00:06:00] business to streaming. And certainly in order to find younger viewers, in order to introduce You know, new audiences and other audiences to Jeopardy, people who do not, you know, have broadcast television or people who have cut the cord and left the availability for our audience.

We have to transition the show to streaming. Our first experiment in that is to take a new version of Jeopardy, pop culture Jeopardy, and take that to streaming. And I think as many people know, we're exploring the streaming opportunities for Jeopardy. The Monday through Friday show right now, uh, that would sort of exist in next day streaming.

So we're exploring those with, with, with, with multiple parties. But this is our first experiment and it seems to have done pretty well. The burning questions I think, uh, you're referring to mainly involve the music. I mean, I must say this was probably The most fun I had, um, at Jeopardy! this year was working with, um, our composers at Bleeding Fingers.

It's a Hans Zimmer company. [00:07:00] Um, they work on all of the re dos of our theme, have done for years. And working with them on the new theme for Pop Culture Jeopardy! You know, and this is, it's, this is tough work. Because the original theme of Jeopardy! is just so good. It's so perfect. Updating it, you can do so much more damage than you can help it.

And certainly when I came in, um, we were just doing JNCC, remember? The Jeopardy! National College Championships. And, Um, we'd written a whole new theme for that when I arrived and I listened to it and I was immediately like, Oh no, that's not Jeopardy. That's not the Jeopardy music. And so we clawed back, but even that theme in hindsight, I think I said to you at the time, I felt like it had just changed a bit too much.

that The feeling of the show and it didn't quite work. And particularly the think music I felt didn't work in the new theme. So when we looked at this, um, at the pop culture Jeopardy theme, the one thing that I [00:08:00] decided going in is we would not affect the think music because the think music is just so signature.

It's been the least amended piece of music in the entire Jeopardy library. I think what it is right now is just so perfect. I can't imagine improving upon it. Um, I'm never going to say never. But I sort of feel like the think music, the 30 second think music for Final Jeopardy sort of stays. The pop culture theme, what we went for, and you saw, you see the sort of, um, the sort of the fast sequence of logos at the beginning of the show of the Jeopardy logo.

We started off, and the question I posed to our graphics group internally and to the party company we used was, You know, what would a Basquiat logo for pop culture have been? What would a Keith Haring logo have been? What would a Warhol logo have been? Like, I wanted to explore all these different ideas of, of what artists would have done with pop culture.

They went a step further, the external company, and started looking at various brands that would sort of [00:09:00] exist within the world of pop culture and what would a Jeopardy logo look like in their treatment. Um, and, um, We frankly, early on, liked so many alternative logos that Nikki Battelli, who runs our, uh, social group and our internal graphics group and I said, well, what would it look like if we just put them all together?

And she had one of her people slam them all together very, very fast. They cut it to Plastic Bertrand, Sa Plante Pour Moi, if you know that, uh, classic of, uh, Belgian New Wave. And it was just so good. We realized immediately that that's what we were going to do in the opening sequence. We needed a piece of music that worked for that, that we could write.

The briefing I gave to Bleeding Fingers was. I want to imagine that in the early 2000s, you'd formed an 80s, 90s cover band to interpret the Jeopardy music influenced by all of your favorite tracks from the 80s and 90s. So it's got this very sort of retro feel, but quite a self consciously retro feel as though this was done from a point in the [00:10:00] future, but there's a lot of synth.

That's a lot of, um. Uh, there's a lot of like cars in that there's a lot of sort of early police. There are a bunch of references. The only thing it doesn't have is a sax solo, which, by the way, I did consider at some point. But, um, yeah, it's got a lot of 80s, 90s feel, and I know people have really enjoyed that music.

I really enjoyed working on that. That's, I'm passionate about music. That was just, uh, it was a joy to work on with the Bleeding Fingers guys.

**Sarah Foss:** Yes. Hats off to you, Bleeding Fingers, producer Barry Jean Dorman, lots of hard work went into that, we know, and the results do not

disappoint. I think what also has been so great is to see the positive comments about Colin Jost.

As a Jeopardy host, uh, I have experienced all of the guest host days. I know I was probably the most hesitant, not anything against Colin, but just knowing that we had done this with so many people and just how hard it was. And here we were going to challenge Colin, not only with. coming in and [00:11:00] hosting, you know, a new format, a new game, something he had never done, but we were going to have him do it with nine players, you know, three times the amount of competitors.

It was a tall order and wow, he did not disappoint. I just had such an enjoyable time working with him and I so appreciate just the dedication he gave to coming into learning it, to getting it right, but then also putting his own spin on it that really makes pop culture its own thing.

**Michael Davies:** Yeah, look, we were very fortunate.

that I had been working with Colin on another project that's in development at NBC. And, you know, so I was getting to experience one, how, um, smart he was, how well he worked in a quiz, uh, sort of environment. And secondly, I got to know, um, how important Jeopardy was to him and how much he admired and respected the brand and respected Alex and Ken and had watched them so hard, you know, doing their work.

And thirdly, let's face it, that he does [00:12:00] live television every single week really helps him in preparation, helps him in the way that he works, helps him to cold read. I think he mentioned that in his article in his, um, Interview with the Ringers Claire McNair, but he came in and I had quite a lot of confidence that he was going to be good.

I must admit, even I didn't realize quite how good he was going to be and was very, very pleasantly surprised. And really it's the dedication he showed to it, the respect he showed to the game, to the brand, to the institution, to the contestants, to everybody who worked on the show, the staff and the crew and to Ken.

And um, all of those were just very, very important factors.

**Sarah Foss:** Another thing people are talking about is the difficulty of the material. I think people thought, Oh, pop culture jeopardy. It's just going to be a fluff piece. It is not.

**Michael Davies:** Well, it has to do two things. It, one, it has to be a more accessible form of jeopardy.

So it's got to, when the categories reveal and when the clues play, it's got to feel for, you know, non core Jeopardy viewers who are interested [00:13:00] in that canon. The people for whom, you know, medieval history and Renaissance art and Latin American geography just do not sing. It had to appeal to those people as well.

And, um, the material had to be accessible and it had to be Playalongable with, or with playalongable, um, because I don't want to end the end, end that sentence with a preposition. So we had to sort of find a fine line of one, making it accessible. And secondly, creating it across such a range that you can really look at the team that ends up winning this competition and be like, wow, all three members of that team, because we didn't want a game dominated by one person.

All three members of that team. Have displayed a range of knowledge across all forms of popular culture from multiple decades, from multiple genres, from multiple platforms, from multiple sources, in multiple media. Um, that is just truly impressive [00:14:00] knowledge and I think we got it pretty good. In season one, you know, we're going to continue to, to sort of look at that for season two and see ways in which we can improve that.

**Sarah Foss:** Yeah. Well, for, for the first time out, I think it's a pretty great, uh, first going one thing people also are talking about, you know, as much as they might've said, Oh, we were hoping for new thing, music. They were so happy that the voice of jeopardy, Johnny Gilbert is the one introducing these teams. And I know you didn't doubt that for a single moment, Michael.

**Michael Davies:** Well, look, as you know, um, as you remember from our interview with Johnny, uh, early this year, you know, Johnny's only done 9, 000 hours of Jeopardy and until he's done 10, 000, let's face it, he's, we, he, we don't really know how good he's going to be. So this was another opportunity to get him closer to 10, 000 hours.

Um, no, I mean, Johnny is Jeopardy. He's synonymous with Jeopardy. Why wouldn't we have Johnny do it? Like who else, uh, could possibly do it? and did a fantastic job. I just want to [00:15:00] shout out the writers and researchers again, the passion that they showed for this. We brought in some new writers as well, we had some new voices working with our existing group of writers and

researchers, and just how they attacked this and made it still Jeopardy, even though it was pop culture Jeopardy, I think was really, really impressive.

**Sarah Foss:** Well, we've got three more knockout games that you'll be able to see on Wednesday. So we want to let you know which teams will be playing first up. We have, it's a she thing and knockout game for Brenna Dacey, Ashley Kuba, Aaron Bagwell. We've got South Shore squad, Daniel Walsh, Amy Keyes, Jack Nix, and Generation XYZ.

Cause each of them represents a different generation. Anita Chu, Brian Chu, and Kylie Akiyama.

**Michael Davies:** Yeah, if I, if I shout loudly from where I'm sitting, the South Shore squad could probably hear me, uh, a little bit, uh, down island from where I am right now. In Knockout Game 5, we have, What is South Dakota? Emily Denkin, uh, Chris Hartman, [00:16:00] and Asher Denkin, uh, the sidekicks.

That's Thea Rice, Julian, uh Axelrod and Emily Riggs, and the stage names, Ryan Feeney, Rocky Granum, and Kemi Aiko.

**Sarah Foss:** Yeah, in Knockout Game 6, it's Beauty and the Beasts, Brendan McKenna, Gabrielle DeMasi, Chris Tajian, and then we have The Leg Ladies with two Gs in leg. I thought this might have been a reference to the old pantyhose, but no.

Their last names are all lag. We have Ellie, Julie, and Maddie. And finally, Sparkle Stop Motion, Leni Halpern, Dan Hacker, and Brittany Mosley. Well, what do you think, Michael? Should we talk about a few highlights from last week's knockout games in PCJ? As the kids are calling it.

**Michael Davies:** Absolutely great games. And they're just, I just watched them again.

So they're fresh in my mind.

**Sarah Foss:** Well, we saw the Queen City kids, little pocket monsters and personality hires advanced to the quarterfinals. We got to hear Johnny Gilbert do a film thespian category. Whenever you can hear him quote, inglorious bastards, it's a great day. [00:17:00] And this was something, you know, Colin was instructed to per you and kind of to reference a format of days gone by.



He was asked to use the first name of the team and then the team member, and this allowed for a hilarious moment. Take a listen.

**Ken Jennings:** Queen Darcy, you have the board. Not the first time I've been called queen. It's the name! I just slipped back to Trump. Oh

**Michael Davies:** my god. Uh, yes, Queen's Darcy. This is sort of a throwback to College Bowl, to the old University Challenge, which I, uh, grew up watching.

Um, and yes, when he abbreviated it to Queen Darcy, it gave us that great moment.

**Sarah Foss:** It was just perfect. And a lot of people have been wondering, how does Colin know who to call on? You know, there's three team members and of course he's supposed to call on the team member within the team who had the last correct response.

We did update his screen so that he could look down and see who that was. But I was also the voice he never wanted in his head telling him who those people were over and over again. [00:18:00] So.

**Michael Davies:** Queen Darcy, Queen Darcy, Queen Darcy.

**Sarah Foss:** Exactly. All right. Well, let's head back into last week's syndicated shows. Now on Monday, we kicked off the week with returning champ, Susan going up against Evan and Mike.

Evan gained an early lead and never looked back nearly running away with it. But then Mike was able to stay in contention with a five thousand dollar correct daily double final, though, was a triple stumper. And Evan comes away with the win.

**Michael Davies:** Yeah, Evan ran the anagrammed occupations category. Many fans, they're always in awe about how quickly our contestants can, uh, respond to these kind of clues.

**Sarah Foss:** In the postgame, Evan says they credit their Jeopardy! success to playing a lot of rhythm video games, saying that it got them used to pressing a button at a particular time, and Evan was going totally on it. Off of sound, just in the zone.

**Michael Davies:** Yeah, that's really an interesting point. We are seeing buzzer speeds increase.

You know, we really are seeing a faster reaction time in general. And I think [00:19:00] one of the reasons maybe for younger players, it's about playing a certain kind of video game, uh, which is reactive. Uh, to what's going on on the screen, um, and the sort of the order, you know, the audio cues of Ken finishing the clue.

**Sarah Foss:** Yeah, we heard that from Victoria, that that was her main way of studying was really doing these rhythm games. So I think people are saying, Hey, if it works for Victoria, maybe it can work for me too.

**Michael Davies:** Okay, on Tuesday, Evan returned to face Stevie and Luca. Evan once again got out to an early lead, but Stevie caught fire in double jeopardy to take the lead, which he managed to carry into final after Evan dropped 4,000 on the last daily double.

Another triple stumper final, and Stevie won. With an unconventional, minimal wager, got the win.

**Sarah Foss:** Yeah, Evan went on Reddit to talk about this because they said, if you want to know one of the wildest emotional deltas I've ever experienced, it was the five or so seconds between when Ken revealed that Stevie was incorrect.

Oh my [00:20:00] gosh, did I just pull this off? And then when they revealed his small wager, no, I definitely did not. Congrats to Stevie. Playing Jeopardy was an incredible adventure, and I would do it again in a heartbeat. I can't imagine what those seconds are like for the contestants, Michael. We, of course, we have it all in front of us.

We've already lived the drama during the 30 seconds when they are making, you know, their responses during the think music. So we've, we're there. We're settled. We know, but they don't know. And it really, I can't imagine what that's like.

**Michael Davies:** Yeah, one of my observations, uh, on Jeopardy is, uh, both our producers and our viewers are really good at making their Jeopardy wagers in hindsight.

**Sarah Foss:** That is something I have learned as well. Well, Ken did speak with Stevie after his first win and talked about that final Jeopardy wager.

**Ken Jennings:** Stevie, well done. I want to talk about the wager and final really quick. Uh, you playing some kind of eight dimensional chess there? Did you have, did you have a wagering theory?

I was hoping you'd ask this.

It was my order number at lunch yesterday.[00:21:00]

**Ken Jennings:** What you're saying is that if the line had been longer and you had a four digit order number, Evan would be a two day Jeopardy! champion, is that right? Could be. Are you going to keep betting numbers that appear to you, uh, just in real life? You know, we'll see what happens. I'm just winging it. So far it's working.

You're a Jeopardy! champion, Stevie. Congratulations. Thank you.

**Sarah Foss:** Could have been the biggest success that's ever come out of the Sony commissary, I have to say.

**Michael Davies:** I love it. It's an excellent commissary.

**Sarah Foss:** It is. Well, moving on to Wednesday's game where Stevie went up against Kimberly and Gloria. With 24 correct responses, Stevie was on a roll and captured a runaway win.

**Michael Davies:** Stevie, uh, ran the movie creatures category, including the Daily Double. Ken, uh, as we've heard quite a

lot recently,

**Michael Davies:** uh, did his Yoda impression. We hear that, uh, we, we've heard that on a few versions of the show, as well as on the [00:22:00] 400, uh, clue. I'm not going to do it myself. You're

**Sarah Foss:** not? I was so expecting that.

Okay, I'll do it. On Dagobah, this green creature tells a neophyte with a ship stuck in the muck. Size matters not.

**Michael Davies:** Okay. The only part of the impression of that clue that you need to do as Yoda is just size matters not, by the way. But I appreciate the entire thing. If that was in fact Yoda that you were doing, nobody knows.

**Sarah Foss:** I don't know, but my husband tells me I speak like Yoda all the time, but I think that's just my inability to say things in the correct order. So I've gotten some practice, apparently. Let's hear how Stevie was hearing after that or feeling after that dominant win.

**Ken Jennings:** Was zero your order number at breakfast?

Because that's exciting. Right to the front of the line. Yeah. Hey, you know, congratulations. That was a great game. Thank you. How did that feel? Oh, it felt very good. Very, very good. Winning on Jeopardy, good feeling? Yeah, you know. It's pretty good. It's pretty good. And I never did it in a bolo tie, you know, [00:23:00] so you're having an experience.

I've never even attempted. I know.

Wow.

**Ken Jennings:** It's a pretty good look. Is that, is

that kind of your thing? Thank you. I mean, so, um, it kind of became my thing. So I won this bolo tie. Me and my friend Khalil, uh, played trivia in Brooklyn, uh, and third place gets a prize from the owner of the trivia company's closet.

And so I, we won third place that time. And so I've worn it, I wore it, it looked good. I've worn it to weddings and now twice on Jeopardy's.

**Ken Jennings:** It accidentally became your thing. Yeah, it felt appropriate with the trivia,

you

**Ken Jennings:** know,

angle.

**Ken Jennings:** So you were okay wearing something you wore to finish third in trivia on Jeopardy.

It worked out. It worked out.

**Michael Davies:** Stevie has a number of unconventional choices that seem to have worked out for him on Jeopardy. But on Thursday, We saw Stevie, Dave and Lisa battle it out. It was an evenly matched game all the way through until Dave went on a tear in double jeopardy. And thanks to a 7, 000 daily double, he earned a runaway win.

**Sarah Foss:** And now a quick word from our [00:24:00] sponsor.

**Sam Buttrey:** When you think about businesses that are selling through the roof like Heinz and Mattel, sure, you probably think about a great product, but an often overlooked secret is actually the businesses behind the business that make it possible. Well, the secret's out.

Businesses that want to grow, Grow with Shopify. Nobody does selling better than Shopify. So upgrade your business and get the same checkout Heinz and Mattel use. Sign up for your 1 per month trial period at [shopify.com slash jeopardy](https://shopify.com/jeopardy) all lower case. Go to [shopify.com slash jeopardy](https://shopify.com/jeopardy) to upgrade your selling today.

[Shopify dot com slash jeopardy](https://shopify.com/jeopardy).

**Sarah Foss:** And now back to inside jeopardy. Well, for Friday, we closed out the week with Dave, Zach, and Aaron. This was a well played game by all three players, but it was Dave who managed to maintain the lead heading into final where he was correct and he enters the weekend as a jeopardy champion.

Who will not be eligible for this year's [00:25:00] postseason.

**Michael Davies:** Wow. Uh, you really do have to be able to bend time and imagine it, uh, to work at Jeopardy and trying to figure out all this stuff. Congratulations. Maybe you are Yoda, uh, Sarah, maybe your husband has a point.

**Sarah Foss:** Yeah. I don't think he means it in a positive way, but I appreciate that.

Well, let's give everyone kind of that final roundup now that we have ended the And, you know, completed the qualifying period officially in JAT. Let's just talk about who's in these tournaments. So for Champions Wildcard, uh, we have

an order of appearance. Marco Ceric, two wins. Jay Fisher, three wins. Davey Morrison, two wins.

Will Weiss, Aiden Orzek, Jen Feldman. Eamon Campbell, Joey DeSena, all with two wins. Evan Dory with that impressive one game winning 29, 200. Paul Clawson, Mayhal Shaw with two wins. Adam Hirsch with a 29, 000 single game winning. And then we have our new Stevie Ruiz. He goes out, but he is coming back for [00:26:00] champions wild card with two wins.

The final two spots to fill out the field of 15. We'll go to our second chance winners from week one. And week two, we'll have two weeks of second chance coming up. Michael, tell us about the TOC field.

**Michael Davies:** What a field. Adriana Harmeier, uh, with those 15, um, consecutive game wins. Wonderful work. Isaac Hirsch with nine, Drew Basile, uh, with seven.

Those are the three top seeds. Then we have Alison Betts, Amy Hummel, Mark Fitzpatrick, and Greg Jolin with five. Grant DeYoung, Amar Kerkurdi, uh, Ryan Manton, Will Wallace with four wins. Lucas Partridge, Weki Irenilla, Alison Gross, Will Stewart, Nilesh Vengimori, David Erb, Rishabh Wapalapati, uh, Kevin Laskowski, uh, with three.

Champions wildcard winner and the champions wildcard finalist. first runner up, Sarah.

**Sarah Foss:** That's right. Because Lisa Ann Walter is so busy with Abbott Elementary and couldn't be with us as our Celebrity Jeopardy! Champion, the person who is the first runner [00:27:00] up in Champions Wildcard, which you will see in the upcoming weeks, that person is going to get a spot in the Tournament of Champions and we will have Lisa Ann back as soon as she will have us.

Hopefully she'll be a little less busy. We don't want to wish anything against Abbott Elementary, but hopefully Lisa Ann We'll be with us for next year's TOC. Well, Michael, we're missing out on our man about town this week, but we couldn't leave our listeners hanging without a, but wait, there's more. So Sam did record a segment for us.

Let's take a listen.

**Sam Buttrey:** Hi, I'm all alone here in the podcast studio. I managed to lock myself in. It's like three 30 in the morning. And I just figured out how to turn all this equipment on. So, you know, while I'm here, I thought we could talk about the 400 clue in Wednesday's show in the Midwest category. So bring it.

**Ken Jennings:** Uh, Midwest's 400. The black tailed type of this rodent can live in Midwest towns of more than 100 acres with thousands of individual [00:28:00] members.

**Sam Buttrey:** Those are prairie dog towns. There are a lot of rodents in this world, more than 2, 000 species, ranging from the capybara of South America, which can go over 100 pounds, down to two pygmy species that are only a few inches long, not counting the tails. But the prairie dog is probably the coolest of the rodents, which is kind of like being the tallest garden gnome.

You know, it's cool. But really, in context, there are several species of prairie dogs, but let's talk about the black tailed prairie dog that Ken was mentioning. First of all, its Latin species name, *Ludovicianus*, is a reference to Louis of Meriwether, Louis. Their expedition was the first time that prairie dogs were collected for science.

Second, they're obviously not dogs, but they get their name from the dog like noise that they sometimes make. In fact, they have one of the most complicated sets of vocalizations of any animals. They have at least 11 vocalizations, and supposedly one call can signal not just there's a human coming, but there's [00:29:00] a tall human coming, and they're wearing blue.

Hmm. Different calls can identify different predators as well. There's also a complex social organization with these tight knit family groups. Some males, when reaching maturity, move to other families, while females will be bonded in the group for life. Now, the towns are the most amazing part. These are immense warrens of tunnels and chambers underground.

The towns are divided into wards and the wards are divided into families and the chambers even have different purposes. Some are close to the ground. We think maybe those are for listening for predators. Maybe other chambers might be for use as nurseries or for sleeping. While the families are close knit, one family might fight with the next.

So in short, between the millions of inhabitants and the very complicated social structure, a prairie dog town is exactly like New York City, except that the underground tunnels are somehow cleaner. No hate mail, New York, that's just

a joke. And the towns can be [00:30:00] big, as big as a hundred acres, although they vary in size.

Before humans restricted their range, the biggest prairie dog town ever, at least according to a guy named Vernon Bailey, back in the early 1900s, was supposedly 25, 000 square miles and held 400 million prairie dogs. Prairie dogs fit in well with the native flora and fauna, but sadly, Prairie dogs in modern agriculture don't always get along.

The animals eat a lot of vegetation and the burrows can be a hazard to cows and horses. We'll see what happens. But in the meantime, check out a prairie dog town near you, unless you're tall and wearing blue, then they will totally see you coming. And if I don't get out of here in 24 hours, somebody call Ken Jennings.

He'll know what to do.

**Michael Davies:** Wow. Uh, but that's more than I ever thought I wanted to know about prairie dogs. But there you go.

**Sarah Foss:** We can confirm that Buttry has left the building, if you were worried. Okay, moving on to this week's host, Chad. An audience member asked Ken,

**Ken Jennings:** what inspired you to try out for the show?

I'd been a [00:31:00] huge fan of the show as a kid, but I'd never really been serious about trying out. For some reason, it never occurred to me that, yeah, you could just try out for the show, Ken. People do that. People must, or the show wouldn't exist. But when I did Quiz Bowl in college, I started to meet friends and people on other teams who would routinely try out for quiz shows.

And sometimes I would turn on the TV and I would see somebody I knew on Millionaire, or Jeopardy, or Winn Benstein's Money. And I was like, oh, like, these people don't appear here, you know? It's not just like Pasadena Homemakers appearing on Match Game or something like, people actually have to try out.

And so, the next time I was in LA, I, I called Jeopardy to see if they were doing tryouts.

**Michael Davies:** That gives me partial responsibility for Ken Jennings because of Millionaire and Win Ben Stein's Money, two of my shows.



**Sarah Foss:** There you go. And just think, the next Ken Jennings could be out there. not knowing that you can actually try out for the show.

Maybe they're listening to the pod and this could be the moment where you're responsible for them as well. Well, you never know. Let's

**Michael Davies:** hope so. We want to inspire the young. Okay, Sarah, that's it for today's [00:32:00] show. Uh, you and Sam are going to be back next week for our final pod of 2024. Hard to believe. I'm sure it's going to be a banger.

**Sarah Foss:** You know it will be. It'll be a banger. Take care.

**Ken Jennings:** We're so glad you're here. Stick around and click that subscribe button so you see all our latest videos.

Transcribed by <https://otter.ai>