

World's Fairs

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Entertainment

Midnight Facts for Insomniacs

Podcast Transcript

(Note: transcript consists of
episode outline)

So this episode is what happens when I don't follow my own rules. I had said that I would limit the amount of time that a topic could be voted on in the discord, I was going to shut down the voting after a few days, because if two of the topics are neck and neck, at some point I have to call it and start researching one of them. Because if I don't, we get what happened this week. Which is that I get deep in to research for one specific subject, then I go back and check the poll and now the other one is ahead. And I panic. But in this case I checked back again the next day and they were tied, and I was like, ok, that's good enough, we're calling it. Both topics are winners. So this week we're doing the topic that was winning most of the time, and next week we're going to do the topic that briefly pulled ahead before the tie. Best of both worlds here. And that works for me,

because I was equally excited about both of these topics. The one for today I'm calling "World's Fairs: A Legacy of Weirdness and Innovation"

And let's start with the fact that there's no such thing as a world's fair. That's just an American term that we Yanks have traditionally used. The official title of a so-called world's fair is always some version of international exposition, like "world expo" or global exhibition, and the point is just what the name suggests: to exhibit the achievements of participating nations. I always imagine it's like each country is one of those colorful birds doing a mating dance, trying to bust out their flashiest moves to outperform all of the rival birds. Countries taking part in a world's fair are basically horny owls. Do owls have mating dances? But these expos are a big deal, with lots of money on the line, as we'll see. Many technological breakthroughs have been created for and/or first debuted at these International expositions. For instance, electrical sockets debuted at the 1904 St. Louis world's fair, and The Eiffel tower was built for Paris's Exposition Universelle in 1889. "Universalle" Sounds so fancy. "A royale with cheese." Even just the word "Exposition" sounds upscale and formal, but in America

we like to invoke the idea of a fair, it's more folksy. Like maybe there would be a pig auction or something.

Worlds fairs have only existed for a couple hundred years, but regular Fairs have been around since pretty much forever. The village fair was a periodic festival or party, celebrating harvests and religious holidays. There are also traveling fairs, like carnivals, and of course county fairs in the United States and the UK, typically small regional rural events showcasing livestock and agriculture. That's where you could bid on a pig if you're into that kind of thing.

The word "fair" itself typically implies a smallish gathering or celebration, which makes the concept of a worlds fair counterintuitive. The world is a big place, and a fair is a small one. But the name sort of makes sense from a historical perspective, because the first gatherings that we might think of as precursors to the modern world's fairs were in fact a lot smaller than they are now, and they weren't international, they were confined to one nation, usually they were a type of flag-waving patriotic celebration of the country itself. Prague held one in 1791, France had a series of them starting in 1798, but

exhibitions wouldn't go international until the 1800s. One common feature of world's fairs is the scale of construction...they typically involve giant pavilions for each country...it's kind of like Disneyland, how there's Tomorrowland and Frontierland and Toonland or whatever? Well at a world's fair there's like France-land and Canada-land and Greenland-land. I don't think Greenland has ever participated, it's actually part of Denmark, I just wanted to say Greenland land. But these pavilions and other structures housing the events can be very impressive. I don't know if you remember this, but back in the Darwin awards episode we talked about the crystal palace. Possibly one of my first big lies... The crystal palace is a big glass house and I claimed that it had eventually been destroyed by a guy with a wheelbarrow full of rocks. Well that Crystal Palace, located in Hyde Park London, was built to house the first true world's fair, and I hadn't actually seen it until this episode, and let me tell you, I would give a high 5 to anyone who could take that thing down with rocks. You'd need a catapult...or maybe a gigantic Angry Birds-style slingshot. This building was massive. You can take an online virtual tour, I'll link it in the show notes. Very cool. It's basically a cavernous elaborate greenhouse

the size of an airplane hanger made of iron and plate glass. At the time it was the building with the greatest surface-area of glass in the world. And one benefit of the all-glass design: because it was a transparent building, no lighting was required during the day, which saved on electricity costs. Caveat: the building was all glass except, presumably, for the area designated as the monkey closets—that was the nickname given to the first public toilets in England, installed in the crystal palace by plumber George Jennings. At least I'm assuming they weren't glass. That would give a whole new meaning to "public exhibition." Incidentally, the commonly-held belief that the toilet was invented by a man named Thomas crapper, thus spawning the word crap, is not true. Thomas Crapper was a real person but he was 14 at the time that George Jennings installed the first public toilets in England, and though he would go on to have a distinguished toilet-based career by founding a sanitation company, Crapper was clearly not the originator of the toilet. But that was certainly one of the crowning achievements of these international expositions and a completely useless Midnight Fact: the first modern public toilets were introduced at the first ever world's fair. So-called monkey closets cost one penny to use, and since no one

had seen these before, I feel like there were a lot of disappointed patrons..."I was led to believe there would be monkeys in this closet. This appears to just be a toilet. I demand a refund." BTW this explains why the term "spending a penny" would become common British slang for using the restroom. I had assumed that the penny was a metaphorical term referring to what you spent, aka deposited in the room, but I was wrong. More about the crystal palace (I did a deep dive on this place, it's pretty fascinating): It was modular, meaning it was constructed in segments that could be stacked, moved, and relocated. The building covered a total area of 18 acres, it really was an innovative and awe-inspiring structure. It also leaked like a sieve. When it rained, water poured through from over 1000 of the building's metal-and-glass joints, and attempts to seal the leaks with putty were unappealing and mostly ineffective. Kind of undercuts the grandeur when you're basically holding the place together with wads of chewing gum. Still an impressive building, though. You just would have wanted to visit on a sunny day. The structure was big enough to contain a number of elm trees, which became a problem when sparrows nested there, and it was impossible to shoot the sparrows because, you

know, glass. The solution in that case was to bring in sparrowhawks, and we've been down this road before with China and the four pests problem. This never ends well. You bring in spiders to catch the flies, you bring in birds to catch the spiders, and eventually it's Jurassic park.

So the event that the crystal palace was built for, The first world's fair, was officially known as the "*Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations*," or just the great exhibition for short, and took place in 1851. It was the brainchild of queen Victoria's husband Prince Albert, most famous for being the namesake of a horrific genital piercing that he supposedly created to pin down his gigantic penis so that it wouldn't show in trousers. That is 100% an urban legend, there's no evidence that Prince Albert was particularly endowed, nor that he took such drastic measures to tame his unruly member—this is the Richard-Gere's-hamster myth of piercings—but it makes for a good story.

Anyway, the exhibition was inspired by—and in some ways a response to—the French industrial exhibition of 1844. But Rather than just showcasing the technology of one nation, Prince Albert proposed inviting foreign countries to participate and encouraging the world to watch. Here's the

explanation from the official Hyde Park government website in the UK: "To try and bring everyone together, while also taking a chance to show off just how great Britain was, Prince Albert organised what would come to be known as the first World's Fair. He invited countries from around the world to bring their own exhibits, to encourage trade and establish British superiority." Come show off all your achievements so that we can belittle them in public. We're giving you the opportunity to be flexed on in front of the entire world. you're welcome.

The exhibition was a resounding success, and result in a deluge of positive publicity. Of the approximately 6 million people who eventually attended—which was literally a third of the British population at the time—notable attendees include Charles Darwin, Charles Dickens, various other Charleses, probably, the scientist Michael Faraday, and Karl Marx, who reportedly described the world's fair as a vulgar celebration of capitalism. Rude. No one made you go. Marx was super offended by this fair that he chose to attend, knowing full well what it was. What did he think he was getting? "This is not a Donkey Show! I paid for an obscene, exploitive sex act, but instead I've been subjected to a celebration of modern technology!"

He continued, "maybe even worse, the exhibition stands as a shameful example of false advertising. There are no monkeys in these closets."

He reportedly said, "I was disappointed but I did, however, enjoy relieving myself in a glass room." Karl Marx, famous exhibitionist and scat fetishist and donkey show enthusiast. I'm really going hard on Karl Marx here. You didn't know he was into scat? One communist one cup. Famous viral... engraving...from the 1800s.

That inaugural World's Fair was sponsored by Schweppes, a company based in Geneva Switzerland and creator of the first ever soft drinks, popular before the cola wars took over. And of course now owned by Coca-Cola.

There were some 13,000 items displayed at the fair, and every participating country had their own particular highlights. India displayed the "Mountain of light," at the time the worlds largest known diamond. That was a very popular exhibit, although I don't really know how that qualifies as a national achievement. It's just a big ass rock you found. But OK

The New Zealand exhibit featured handcrafted items made by the native Maori people.

The United States submitted Cyrus McCormick's steam-powered reaping machine, a harvester which would massively increase the

productivity of farming.

As for England, they really went all out. Among the British exhibitions was an early version of a fax machine. Notable for being one of the most annoying devices in history, rendered thankfully obsolete by the internet. We still supposedly have a fax machine at my office, I have no idea where it is, but the phone number for it is on my business cards. If you sent me a fax, I never responded, and that's exactly what you deserved. It's so crazy when you call a number today and get that fax machine sound. It's like calling history. Also at the event, there was the debut of the world's first voting machine.

Another exhibit: the tempest prognosticator, a machine that would provide an alert in the event of an approaching storm. This machine was composed of 12 leeches placed in bottles inside a barometer, and when the atmospheric pressure changed due to an approaching storm, the leeches would become agitated and attempt to climb out of the bottles, thus triggering a tiny hammer which would strike a bell. In case you were worried about the welfare of the leeches, the leech containers were placed in a circle inside the machine, so that the leeches could look at each other, to counteract "the affliction of solitary

confinement." I'm an animal lover, but even I'm like...really? Is life in a glass vial tolerable because you can see other animals who are also suffering in glass vials? And I have a lot of questions. Did you have to feed the leeches, just like attach them to your arm once a week for an hour? If a storm hits and The alarm hadn't gone off it's like, "who was supposed to feed the leeches? Dammit Duncan. Don't lie to me, show me your arm." Supposedly this machine actually sort of worked, but for some reason it didn't catch on. We may never know why. Seems so practical.

One of the most controversial exhibits was by Charles Hobbes, a lock salesman who used the opportunity to showcase the recently invented Parautoptic lock, and he demonstrated its superiority to its rivals by easily picking two of the most popular locks in England at the time. It took him just a few minutes to defeat these supposedly unpickable locks, and it created a great scandal. All of the rich British people at the fair were like, excuse me, I need to be getting home. I have to relocate some items.

Various publications claimed that the lock Hobbes was selling as an alternative, the Parautoptic lock, was itself picked soon after by American lock maker named Linus Yale. So in conclusion, thank god we now keep all of our money in

digital form on the 100% secure internet. No. My point is that safety is an illusion. Just go old school and bury all of your valuables in your yard. And then tell me where you live.

As we discussed in the Darwin awards episode, the home of the first world's fair, the crystal palace, was eventually destroyed by fire, which is somewhat counterintuitive as this was a building made of glass and iron. But the floor and many of the exhibits and office areas were constructed of wood. So there's not much left to commemorate the first world's fair. Not a single leach survived. But we'll always have the fax machine to remember it fondly by.

Regardless, the great exhibition in Hyde Park was an international sensation, and inspired a gold's rush of world's fairs or expos or international exhibitions or whatever you want to call them. There is actually a governing body that authorizes these expositions. The bureau internationale de expositions was created in 1928 and recognizes four distinct types of expos: specialized expos, world expos, horticultural expos, And the Milan triennial, which as you might imagine takes place in Milan Italy every three years. The most recent

version, the 23rd Milan triennial was scheduled to run from May 2020 to November 2022. Oops. The theme for the exposition was "Unknown unknowns: what we don't know we don't know." Prophetic. Now they know. They fucked around and found out. Do you know where that quote comes from? It was instantly recognizable to me, There's this famous Donald Rumsfeld quote, he was George Bush's Secretary of Defense and when trying to justify the decision to invade Iraq he said, "As we know, there are known knowns; there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; that is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns—the ones we don't know we don't know." When in doubt, obfuscate. This is a tangent, but hey, Midnight Fact. If you didn't know, now you know.

So let's talk about some of the notable inventions and landmarks that have been developed for—or debuted at—World's Fairs. In addition to the Eiffel tower, which was built for the 1899 exhibition universelle in Paris, the space needle in Seattle was also the product of a world's fair.

Specifically, the 1962 worlds fair produced the 600-foot-tall flying saucer on a tower—or "pancake on a spear"—that now hosts a scenic

rotating restaurant and occasional suicide leaps...there have been at least three since its construction.

The Chicago 1893 worlds columbian exposition, in honor of the 400th anniversary of Columbus sailing the ocean blue, which actually happened in 1492 and thus the rhyme but whatever, was a notable fair for both its triumphs and cluster fucks. Well-known products and items introduced at the fair include the dishwasher, and slightly less ambitious but equally ubiquitous: Juicy Fruit Gum, Cream of Wheat, Cracker Jacks, Shredded Wheat Cereal, and Pabst Blue Ribbon beer. The Chicago worlds fair was famous, or I should say notorious, for a couple other reasons as well: HH Holmes famously built his death hotel as a tourist trap in the most literal sense of the word specifically to ensnare out-of-towners attending the event. We will cover him eventually, I guarantee it. Also, William Cody (aka buffalo bill) had petitioned to host his wild West show at the fair and was rejected, so as a cowboy-style middle finger he set up his racist tent directly nearby. Officially known as *Buffalo Bill's Wild West and Congress of Rough Riders of the World*, it was basically a parade of stereotypes and tropes, Native Americans and

Indians and Mongols and Turks in their "authentic" attire, and the show featured supposed reenactments and dramatic portrayals of Indian attacks on heroic white villages etc.. The Wild West show proved to be tremendously popular and siphoned money and visitors from the world's fair, and the whole situation ended up being a massive money-losing fiasco for the fair's investors until June, when steel magnate George Washington Gale Ferris Jr. delivered the first ever Ferris wheel to the event. The giant wheel carrying seated tourists in a vertigo-inspiring circle was intended to be a tourist attraction to rival the Eiffel tower. Mmm. Really? I don't think many people have made it their life's goal to visit the big wheel of rotating seats in Chicago, but it did make a crap ton of money and saved the fair; the wheel could hold up to 2,150 people at a time, and at \$.50 a ride it cost twice as much as a ticket to the fair itself. Maybe more importantly the Ferris wheel made its mark on the world by becoming a staple attraction of other fairs worldwide. Mostly the county variety.

More notable firsts:

The 1904 St. Louis World's Fair introduced the world to x-rays, invented by William Conrad Roentgen. Likewise, the universal

fastener company debuted a product called the "clasp locker" at the Chicago worlds fair in 1893. Any idea what that might be? It would eventually become known as the "Separable fastener," but today we refer to it as the zipper.

An early version of FaceTime, called the "picture phone" by AT&T, debuted at the New York World's Fair in 1964. This was an amazing story, bell labs basically created the Internet before the Internet, and then gave up on it because it was too clunky and expensive. The first patent for a video calling device was actually filed in 1932 in Germany, and video calling booths were set up to connect Nuremberg, Hamburg and Munich. We might have had video phones in the first half of the twenties century but then something in the late 1930s happened and got in the way, it's not coming to me right now but I'm sure I'll think of it. Some mildly inconvenient event that affected Germany... I'm drawing a blank. After the war, American phone company Bell Labs adopted the project and created a pretty amazing device: it featured a 5 x 5" screen, bigger than an iPhone, but the resolution was... Not great. Still, the infrastructure required to transmit video data was basically the same as the Internet we have today, it was like an early version of

broadband and they demonstrated it successfully at the worlds fair, but demand for the product never materialized, maybe because in 1964-money the service cost about \$150 a minute. That's a lot to shell out to view a grainy image of your grandma's forehead or ear. It's hard enough to facetime with relatives NOW, and people were even less tech savvy back then and I'm sure it was a total disaster.

At that same world's fair, RCA debuted color television; The radio corporation of America set up a pavilion in which fairgoers would be filmed and their images projected in color on tv screens that they could view in real time. It's so weird to imagine an era when 99% of people had never seen themselves on a screen. They got to feel like TV stars for a brief moment before realizing that the camera adds 10 pounds, and then immediately noticing in detail all of their physical flaws and coming to the realization that they could never be a TV star, and they left emotionally crushed, and thus insecurities and body dysmorphia were born. And now we have Instagram. Thanks, World's Fair!

Speaking of screens, The first ever touchscreen debuted at the Knoxville Tennessee worlds fair in 1982, invented by Dr. Samuel hurst,

and there'd be no iPhone without that breakthrough. That was the same fair that introduced the world to a truly innovative and world changing product: cherry Coke. Coke actually developed a bunch of different flavors for the worlds fair, and even today you can find variations like vanilla and lime and raspberry and orange overseas, but cherry proved to be the most popular at the fair, and history was made.

Not every product introduced at the worlds fair was a hit, and not every fair was a success. Let's talk about some of the more notorious face-palms and misfires.

The 1931 fair in Paris was particularly cringeworthy. It was colonialism-themed, essentially a celebration of the plunder of Asian and African countries. It has been described as a classic "human zoo" situation, in which so-called natives were shipped in from their home countries and placed in heavily stereotyped human-sized dioramas and encouraged to act as much like caricatures as possible to the delight of fair visitors.

The bleak and exploitive nature of this fair did not go unnoticed in its day; an offshoot of the Soviet communist party actually staged a nearby "counterprogramming" event, titled "truth on the colonies,"

built to expose the exploitation of foreign nations by the colonial powers. While The Paris colonial exposition attracted some 9 million visitors over its eight month span, the competing communist fair attracted a total of around 5000 in that timeframe. Slight discrepancy. Just like 3 orders of magnitude, no big deal. Apparently Europeans found the idea of watching foreign natives pretending to enjoy their subjugation more appealing than paying for a guilt-trip. A well deserved one, but people rarely want to face their conscience for a fee. No one is paying for a flogging. Come visit Disney's newest park, "Shameland," and face the truth of your culpability. It's the saddest place on earth.

We've talked about the worlds fair in New York in the 1960s, but there was also one in New York back in 1939 that showcased its own crop of world changing breakthroughs, like the 7 foot tall smoking robot elektro. Created by the Westinghouse company, Ektro was accompanied by a robot dog named sparko, who was capable of sitting and begging, kind of. None of these advertised abilities involve anything we would think of today as true robotics. Boston dynamics this was not. No black mirror vibes here, this is purely old Hollywood. To deliver commands to the robot you would

pick up the telephone handset installed in its chest, and deliver a series of prepared statements. "As described on the History of Computers website...Each command word set up vibrations that were converted into electrical impulses, which in turn operated the relays controlling 11 motors. A series of correctly spaced words determined each movement Elektro was to make." Obviously elektro couldn't interpret the actual meaning of words, and to be fair, neither can Siri like 60% of the time. But to say that elektro was rudimentary was an understatement, each word was converted into a flash of light and elektro performed actions based on the number of light flashes. So it didn't matter what you said, it all came down to how many words you used. Elektro could also supposedly walk, and if you watch videos of this thing, it was pretty ballsy of Westinghouse to make that claim. Props for sheer audacity. The robot had rollers on its feet and would slide around while sort of repeatedly bending a knee, it was... unconvincing. Elektro could speak 700 prerecorded words thanks to a series of old-school record players embedded in its body. Like, actual turntables. Telephone relays and electric motors allowed the robot to convert commands into basic actions, like turning on the small

bellows in its mouth to “smoke” a cigarette. I love how when humans get to play God we immediately program our worst impulses into our creations. “This robot can clean your house, toss a baseball with the kids, and gradually destroy itself via substance abuse. It’s so lifelike! Our newest model humanoid robot is self-powered, autonomous, and racked with self-hatred.” (Play clip). My favorite part is that Elektro’s voice was all halting and stereotypically robotlike. These were just pre-recorded messages, the dude who made them could have rapped them or scatted. So feeble. Surprisingly, it turned out there wasn’t a huge demand for a telephone-chested smoking robot. That would be tough to market, too, because “smoking robot” sounds like it’s broken. If your robot is smoking, unplug it immediately. Elektro was quickly retired and is now on display at the Mansfield memorial museum in Ohio, where it is billed as the “oldest surviving American robot in the world.” We’re playing fast and loose with the definition of the word “surviving” here, but ok. He’s “surviving” the same way wax museum statues are surviving. Or taxidermy. “This thousand year old woolly mammoth survives today in the museum of natural history.”

Another oddity: the previously

referenced New York World's Fair of 1964 featured a working jet pack invented by Bell Aerosystems, known as the Bell rocket belt. It used 5 gallons of concentrated, explosive hydrogen peroxide to achieve its lift, and the peroxide nozzles could be tilted for steering, it was actually very maneuverable, I have to admit it's really cool looking in video. The rocket could stay aloft for a total of exactly 21 seconds. So you could use it to, I don't know, hop over a puddle, or fly to the top of a building...a modestly sized building, and then take the stairs back down. Bell rockets have been occasionally unretired for use at Disneyland and in various movies like the 1965 James Bond film Thunderball, and even Olympic ceremonies. The cameos are...brief. Around 21 seconds, to be exact. It's very fun to watch for a very short time.

Yet another banger from the 1964 New York fair, underwater hotels. The General Motors Corporation offered their solution for land overcrowding with of a "suboceanic resort" which took the form of tiny pods shaped like flying saucers stapled to the bottom of the ocean. Also commonly known as, "my worst nightmare." thanks I hate it. We won't revisit my neuroses. Two additional facts about that New York world's fair before we dispense

with it completely, The "it's a small world" ride from Disneyland debuted there before being relocated to Southern California, and also the natural gas industry reserved an entire pavilion to showcase recent and upcoming innovations. The pavilion was called the "festival of gas." I feel like both of those are rides you'd find at Shameland, the saddest place on earth. "It's a small world" is a nightmare, I hate that ride, all those creepy singing puppets or whatever, I'd prefer the festival of gas. Maybe it's like laughing gas, you never know. That could be fun.

Some More quick ones:

Philadelphia's centennial exposition of 1876 featured the hand of the Statue of Liberty, not the entire statue but just the hand holding the torch, it was basically a sneak preview of the larger work in progress taking place in France. So you could gaze on the majesty of a woman's severed hand. HH Holmes would've enjoyed that exhibit. Too bad he wasn't in Philly. You could also sample, most likely for the first time, a banana; the fruit had been only recently introduced to America and was initially served with a knife and fork. Bananas-eaters were dignified back then, not like us savages of today. Also, The Philadelphia exposition featured

such common sense items as powdered root beer, and the "portable bathtub." it was constructed of "rubberized cloth" and doubled as a suitcase. *"Be it known that I, ETHELBERT WATTS, of Philadelphia, in the county of Philadelphia and State of Pennsylvania, have invented a certain new and useful Convertible ...Bath-Tub. The object of my invention is to provide a...valise, traveling-bag, or other equivalent article used for the transportation of clothing, which shall be convertible into a bath-tub, so as to afford travelers in places where such conveniences are wanting the luxury or comfort of bodily ablution."*

You might mock old Ethelbert Watts, but I looked it up, you can buy an inflatable bathtub online today. I will provide a link to the "portable standalone bathtub by the Sitinia company, no idea why they aren't a household name. It is normally \$500, but you can get it right now on sale for 299, it's a steal. Along with all of the awesome descriptions of the benefits of this product, "BOOSTS POSITIVE HEALTH - Due to its small and compact size, all of the water inside our large foldable tub stays concentrated on one specific area of the body. This causes all of the muscles to relax and release the

tension within minutes." I'm not sure exactly what that means, it sounds sexual, but I guess you can put in like one limb at a time. It actually looks pretty big, it's made of collapsible plastic. They do not list the weight anywhere on the site, but portable might be a stretch. But it's really a crime that this thing hasn't taken off. If you order now, you can have yours within 2 to 5 weeks. You're only a month away from transportable ablution.

So before we go, I feel like I should bring up the fact that I've attended one of these fairs. As a little kid in the circus I actually attended the last world's fair held in North America, expo 86 in Vancouver Canada. The official name was The world exposition on transportation and communication, and the theme was "transportation and communication: world in motion – world in touch." Slightly clunky, but OK. The event was budgeted for Canadian \$78 million, but expenses ended up totaling over C\$800 million, and Canada lost over 300 million on the deal. But that doesn't include the money that flowed into the local economy from tourists, which was in the billions. One notorious factoid from that final North American world's fair: anticipating a massive influx of money and tourists, in the lead-up

to the event Vancouver hotels evicted over a thousand low income residents, giving practically zero notice. In some cases residents were given a week or less to move. Our circus stayed in tents, so I don't have to feel guilty about ousting anyone, but still. Not great. These expos are very similar to Olympic ceremonies, countries host them for publicity and they can bring an influx of tourism but they also are massive drains on resources and hugely disruptive. The ROI is debatable.

Another Low point for expo 86: both the American and Soviet pavilions—the premier exhibits for those countries—were epic examples of poor timing. The theme chosen for the American pavilion was “a celebration of space travel.” Of course the theme was selected and the pavilion constructed in advance, so it was too late to make any changes when, four months before expo 86 opened, the space shuttle challenger exploded 73 seconds into its flight, killing all 7 of the astronauts on board. It was the worst disaster in NASA's history. The casualties included Christa McAuliffe, a high school social studies teacher who had been selected from over 11,000 applicants as winner of the “teacher in space project.” It was a publicity stunt; McAuliffe was touted as the

first "ordinary person" to be sent to space, and it riveted the nation. The nation was equally riveted by the image of the shuttle incinerating like a Roman candle. The teacher never made it to space, the disaster occurred at only 46,000 feet, while the official boundary representing space, that threshold where scientist have decided the vacuum of space begins, known as the Kármán line, starts at 330,000 feet. The disaster was horrific and traumatizing for America as a whole, and certainly for my third grade class that was watching it live. I remember Teachers quickly switched off the tvs and the rest of the day was...awkward.

So not to be outdone, the Soviet pavilion was in equally poor taste. It was a celebration of the Soviet union's nuclear program. Do you have any guess as to what happened six days before the expo opened in April of 1986? Does the word Chernobyl ring a bell? less than a week before the USSR opened a giant pavilion celebrating its nuclear program, There was a catastrophic meltdown at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant in Ukraine. Can you imagine having to work at that pavilion? Hopefully no tourists even bothered to show up. Like best case scenario is tumbleweeds. Worst case scenario is actually having to interact with human beings and keep a smile on

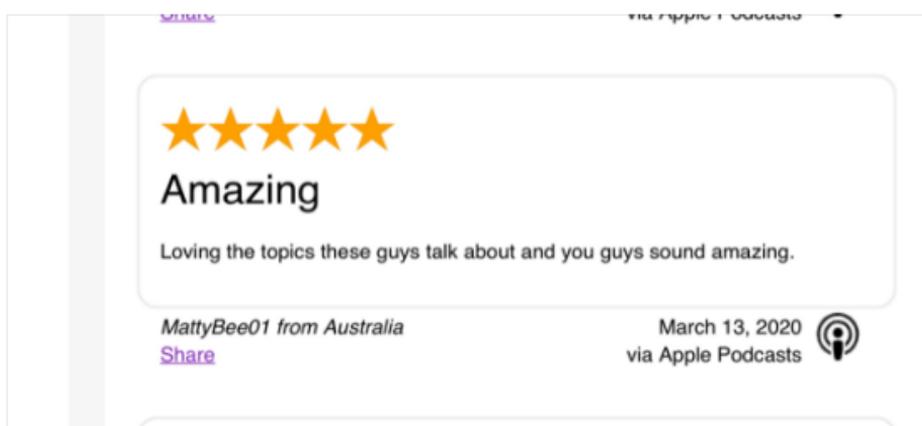
your face and hype up the benefits of nuclear energy as irradiated ash rains down on children and puppies and shit.

So that was World's Fairs, and I want to give a shoutout to my new research minion, llama trauma from the Discord volunteered to help take a little bit of the burden off of yours truly and make my life a bit easier. So give her some love in the discord. I'm really enjoying this new release schedule btw, I feel like I can dive deep into these topics lately and actually do them justice. Episodes have been longer and more in depth. Speaking of upcoming research and episodes, I'm going to have surgery next week, I don't think it's going to affect the show although it is for a deviated septum so I might sound different for the next month or so, and I probably can't record next week, but we're in the process of pre-recording a couple of episodes before surgery so I don't think there will be any interruption in the release schedule. But if there is, it just means I died. During surgery. Could happen. You never know.

We have a new patron to shout out, a midnight maniac, the highest tier, thank you to bakbak1310. I'm always fascinated by peoples

usernames. Sounds like an African antelope or something. We went on Safari, we saw a herd of bakkaks.

A quick review this week from the vault, a blast from the past, we have some new ones to get to but I don't want to neglect Insomniacs who have been with us from the beginning, this one was from March 2020, waaay back when the world didn't really know what we were all in for. How innocent and naïve we all were back then.



That was sweet. Even the reviews sounded innocent and hopeful back then. I'm betting six months later MattyBee01 was like fuck the World, fuck quarantine, fuck your podcast. But right then we were all still blissfully ignorant.

It was pre-masks, pre-vaccines, back when we all agreed it was probably a good idea to stay home for the common good and we felt like we were all in it together and we believed it would probably be over soon. We were idiots. Total fools. I wish I could reach back through Time and collectively smack the

world, grab humanity by their lapels and give them the Charlton Heston treatment "Damn you! God damn you all to hell!" I blame everyone."

<https://everything-everywhere.com/the-history-of-world-fairs/>

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