

Back when I used to hang out at my grandma's house after school, because all our parents went to work and we didn't have anyone at home to watch over us, we used to do whatever we could to not be bored.

We watched a lot of Speed Racer and Fat Albert, we played Rock Band and Guitar Hero. We were on WarioWare all the time. It was the era of the Wii, the DS, and bringing out the old Nintendo 64 that I made myself very dizzy on.

We were playing outside and getting nearly hit by cars.

We were kids of both the consol and the blacktop.

This was pre-easy access to social media. Sure we had MySpace, Friendster, Facebook, and Twitter but this was when you had to tweet on your computer or send a text to tweet. It was basically the early days of all of these things and admittedly close to the death of MySpace but most importantly – this was when the internet could still fool you quickly and easily.

Today I'm gonna talk to you about Peter Answers, a game to spook your friends that also was probably the start of a lot of people's interest in the occult *and* writing scripts.

Now, Ben – do you know what Peter Answers is?

[pause]

Let's walk through how it initially goes:

The perfect scenario goes like this: you get on the website¹ with a friend and you tell them, this website can answer any of your questions, personal or general, just whatever questions you have. You start typing "Peter please answer the following question" in the "petition" section and then you put your question in the "question" section. As soon as you hit "?" you get your answer². Bam! Easy!

Ben, let's do one together right now: I'm gonna ask the following: "Behind BEN, what is hanging on the wall?"

Let's see the answer and what Peter knows.

Mystifying right? With some caveats though! Let's ask it another question, this time – something only BEN would know.

Did I get the answer right?

¹ [Peter Answers](#)

² [How to play Peter Answers](#)

Yep, this is where the caveats come in. But before we have a chat about that, let's look at why this 'game' was even created and what its intentions are.

To best understand what Peter Answers is, let's hit up the website itself³. The apparent intent and reasoning behind Peter Answers is to show people that we shouldn't immediately believe in things at first glance. At the presentation of something mystical, we shouldn't immediately believe, but we should try and poke at it to understand what we're experiencing.

After all, the initial use of the website is to ask a question that you think no one will know and then get an answer that proves otherwise. Shouldn't that be something you immediately question?

Basically if you ask a website what colour bra you're wearing right now, it shouldn't be able to immediately tell you that you're wearing a Bali 36B cup in brown with the hooks fraying a little bit because you're wearing a bra that you've had since you were in 8th grade. You should be a little shocked and confused and *then* wonder how the hell it got that answer.

Then again, this was *pre* all of these surveillance concerns about what sorts of things companies know about you simply because you recently visited Archiveofourown and read a fic that had the tags "consentacles" on it and then you immediately went to Bad Dragon and got yourself a little gift. You, maybe, currently have concerns about tracking across websites and having Siri or Cortana or Alexa hearing that you're somehow mildly into... you know, consensual tentacle porn.

But you probably didn't think about any of that when you were posting on those MySpace Bulletin boards about your first pet, first teacher, first school, first pet, middle name, and everything.

Yep, go ahead, freak out just a little bit, maybe you've been giving the world your security answers to passwords for a very long time – woo!

Ben, just for a moment, did you ever think about your digital footprint from the second you got on the internet and what it could glean from you right now?

[pause]

Anyway, so you're probably now understanding that Peter Answers is a game that basically tricks your friends into believing that this website knows everything about them.

But how? Let's look at the mechanics of this apparent secretive as hell website from the point of view of TechSpirited, a website "dedicated to providing information and leads for jobs in the information technology space"⁴. You're welcome for that Ad Read TechSpirited!

³ [Objective of Peter Answers](#)

⁴ <https://techspirited.com/about>

So, according to TechSpirited Peter Answers really keeps all this behind lock and key “without having access to the web server files”⁵.

I recommend reading the article that I am gonna basically summarise into laypeople’s terms, especially if you’re a tech person who writes scripts or programs. I kind of know how to do that but uh, just at work and nowhere else.

But basically there’s a series of instructions in the script that lead to a set of results. Simply: if no “.” = keys equal what you press; if yes “.” = keys begin to return the phrase, letter by letter.

When you’re typing in the petition section, just hitting a random set of keys returns the same exact things - you hit g f y k - you get g f y k. However, when you enter “.” the ASP returns instead the phrase “Peter please answer the following question” no matter what you type. Hitting g f y k this time returns P E T E and so on with whatever you’re typing.

So, when I was typing “Peter please answer the following question” in the above test I had with Ben, I first hit the “.” key and then began to type the answer, which is: [first answer to what’s behind Ben]. Then I put in the question and at “?” It gave me an answer. In the second question, because I didn’t know the answer - I basically just typed out admitting that I didn’t know what was going on.

Now, what’s the fun in all of this? Why do we want to trick our friends? Why do people want to know the future? What’s the deal with airplane food?

Let’s look at trickery first:

Why do we fuck around with people?

[PAUSE]

Ben, a question for you – did you ever play pranks or get pranked on as a young person or even now?

[ANSWER FROM BEN]

I have to admit the only prank ever played on me might actually have been a real cruel joke instead? When I was younger, I had older cousins who were kind of that messy and mean that you were as a kid and you grew out of b/c that was petty kids stuff. I was fairly new to the country at this time and a bit naive and young and I remember basically getting pantsed for all hell in front of a couple of my other cousins and getting so embarrassed that I hid in the upstairs bathroom until my parents could come pick us up from our grandmas.

Cruel but everyone in that scenario is a decent adult now, even myself.

⁵ [How Does Peter Answers Work - Tech Spirited](#)

Now here's another question, Ben – why do you think people play pranks?

But, no answer needed from you, just dwell on it for now and see if any of the following reasons could be the same as what you're thinking of right now!

Camaraderie (Pappas, Marsh)

Stephanie Pappas helpfully puts together some of the reasons why people love a good prank, so let's go through them quickly.

The act of playing or planning a prank can create a sense of camaraderie amongst people participating in the prank⁶. If you're playing a prank as a group, there's a sense of togetherness in doing something like this. Think of senior pranks – everyone in the senior class takes some part in it, whether it be planning, taking part in, or helping to keep it a secret. This creates a sense of togetherness amongst people in the prank. You and your friends playing a prank on someone brings you together in the planning and also the semi-illicit nature of the whole thing.

Playing a prank is also a helpful release of emotions⁷. The actual prank itself can bring out happiness, laughter, and other emotions. Think of revenge centric pranks – this helps release pent up emotions that fueled your revenge. Your sibling ate your burger even if you wrote your name on it? Next time, you're gonna leave a burger hanging around and it'll have some disgusting ass flavours for your sibling to discover. Revenge, done. Emotions, released. You and your class are having feelings of senioritis? What better way to feel like you're actually doing something by planning a class prank on your school!

Pranks also evoke just an absolute sense of hilarity – simply put⁸. Your sibling eating that absolutely rotten hamburger and getting their comeuppance is fucking hilarious. Seeing the look on your teachers/faculty's faces when they see that lawn mowed giant eggplant emoji on the football field? Fucking priceless. More specifically, the surprise in someone's face as they get pranked is what's hilarious here. They expect a perfectly normal time and look at what's happened to them – chaos.

These three things are common in the reasons why people play pranks, so this is what you will see for the most part and I hope this lined up with what you thought when I first asked you why people played pranks!

Fun (Carey); Division of jokes/pranks (Hoffman)

Let's turn to our bestie Benedict Carey for some additional info. Did you know that in 2008, most of the research into pranks were focused on mean-spirited pranks? Carey helpfully reminds that even with most of the study being focused on the fucked up stuff, most folks play harmless

⁶ [April Fools' Day! Why People Love Pranks | Live Science](#)

⁷ #6

⁸ #6

pranks – salt for sugar, switching keys, and other casual shit. This is pretty obvious, but this basically means that there are levels of pranks/jokes. If you consider some of the stuff discussed in Pappas' article, you might then see that the severity or the level of the prank can play into those categories, making them either more of one or the other.

Abbie Hoffman, who you might know from *Steal this Book*, the Flower Power Movement, or the Chicago Seven⁹, helpfully has done a breakdown of the kinds of jokes/pranks that might exist out there. As I list them, think of some that could fit in these criterias and consider where Peter Answers might fall into!

Good jokes. Not the kind that Ben and I make. Different good jokes. These are jokes/pranks that you might see a lot of on social media (though to be fair all of these jokes exist, these are just the ones I seek out cause I'm an infant cry baby). Pretending that there's a huge mess in a classroom only for it to be a birthday party for a faculty member? Saying you're sending someone some mail and having them open a letter full of cash (can you send cash over mail?). Basically these are the kinds of jokes/pranks that have a positive sort of outcome for that person.

Neutral Jokes. These are the casual pranks that I mentioned above. These are your jokes that don't hurt anyone and make anyone feel like absolute garbage. Easy! You switch something out, you turn something off, or you hide something. Clean, pristine. No skin off anyone's pretty pretty nose.

Then we have bad Jokes. These are harmful sorts of jokes/pranks. If you recall the prank played on me as a kid, you and I might consider that as a Bad Joke, no matter how I feel about it now. Consider this – that's forced semi-nudity on a young person to embarrass them in front of various family members. That's a bad bad joke, eh?

This article posits hazings or *degradation ceremonies* as some examples of 'bad jokes'. If you think back on Harold Garfinkel's *degradation ceremonies*¹⁰, you might remember that this is an act that basically lowers a persons' stature in a groups' hierarchy. If we then add on Erving Goffman's *dramaturgy*, in the context of all the unique scripts we follow every day in our roles as siblings, friends, partners, employees, etc. A degradation ceremony might then dictate your place in the social hierarchy and your prescribed script because of the role you're playing¹¹. Ben, bestie you'll be familiar with this as I remember on a previous episode, we discussed rites of passage. Anything to add that I might have skipped over?

I originally had those three in a different order but it's different now cos I want a smooth transition into the harmful/negative aspects of pranks/jokes that you may have gleaned from the bad jokes section.

⁹ [Abbie Hoffman - Wikipedia](#)

¹⁰ [degradation ceremony definition | Open Education Sociology Dictionary](#)

¹¹ The Blackwell Dictionary of Sociology | Allan G. Johnson

As you can probably tell now, pranks can create a whole bunch of messes (even in the lightest ways)! Like maybe creating in/out groups, shout out to William Graham Sumner¹², by way of camaraderie? Yikes!

Dominance (Dr. Giselinde Kuipers)

Pranks can be played in order to show dominance or superiority over a person¹³. This can be fine I guess, sometimes, but this can take a turn for the bad if it is in order to establish the fact that you're better or somehow smarter than the person you're playing a prank on. The act of playing a prank requires someone to be the butt of the joke. The nature of the joke can make that a perfectly fine role, however, it can also create a sense of superiority for the person or group who planned it out. You're better because you never would have fallen for it. You're better because you did something that someone fell for. You're head honcho, the boss baby, whatever!

Camaraderie? That can also get a little dark, according to Foklorist Moira Marsh¹⁴! Say, you're a group intending to play a prank on one of your friends. The dark turn depends on the prank. You and friend A, B, and C pretend that you're in trouble at Chili's and you need friend D to come and get you. This can either go well (there's actually a surprise party there for friend D) or you give friend D an address to a strange location, jack their car, and leave them for shame at the parking lot only to walk back home.

You, A, B, and C have a sense of camaraderie now but in the process of doing so - you've ostracised D. Think of Hazing ceremonies – they can create a sense of camaraderie amongst the group but in the process of hazing, you create an “other” (the newbies) and you single them out.

So, lads, be careful what kind of pranks you're out there playing on people. Go ahead, jump out of that bush, but make sure you're not scaring someone with a heart condition!

What do you think Peter Answers falls into with all of the categories and information I've just given you? You might consider the intentions of the person playing the prank. If I trick someone and play around with them for a few questions to only set them right at the end, that might be a neutral joke. If I do it and reveal that I've actually got 100\$ waiting for someone at the end of the prank, that's a good joke. If I play Peter Answers on someone without the intent of telling them the truth and then making a mockery out of them while others watch, that's a Bad Joke.

Let's pause for a second and let the folks at home sit on that information first and let's chat about something else.

Secrets. Why do people like secrets? But also at the same time, why are people intrigued by things that claim to know all about them?

¹² #11

¹³ [The joy of April Fools' Day: Why your brain enjoys pranking \(and being pranked\) | Salon.com](#)

¹⁴ #12

This is one of the main draws of Peter Answers, for me. When you tell someone all about it for the first time, you basically probably say something like this: “hey, you wanna see this cool thing I just found out about?” and then maybe they say yes and you walk them through the concept – this thing knows everything. Go ahead, ask it a question.

Why are we so into that shit?

Ben, do you have an idea why?

[PAUSE FOR ANSWER]

Well, this is the part that gets funky for me. I wasn’t sure how to answer this question so I turned to my friends. Now, this will be a small sample size cause it was way too late for me to do this because I’ve been going through some right whack shit personally, so I leaned on my trusty besties. But next time, I’m going ham on participation type questions. I’m interviewing, baybee¹⁵.

Here are the questions I asked:

- Are you into or have you played quizzes/games that claim to know things about you?
- If yes, why do you think you play those games?
- If no, why not?

First, I asked the most easily available person to me. My brother, the producer behind all of the music you hear on I Scream, You Meme: Jegerfranc. Who revealed to me several months ago but I never shared on the pod that Jegerfranc is actually pronounced like the Norwegian way. Shout out to my years of that language for my degree that I never considered or don’t even remember at all any more! Yay!

My brother is not a very into the paranormal or weird stuff kind of guy. He leaves the room if his partner and I discuss scary stuff. He doesn’t like it when I play my scary shows too much. He asked me to cover up the Junji Ito books that Ben gave me prior to him moving. He’s just that kind of guy.

His answer is a definitive “no.” He is not into these things. He doesn’t care about them, he doesn’t wanna know. He’s not into that sort of “I know you/I can see your future” kind of thing.

So, nil for that.

Now, for everyone else...

I’m gonna go through the two quick ones first, from M and S.

¹⁵ Transcript and submission of answers available upon request. Email iscreamyourneme@gmail.com for more information.

M said that they don't usually play these kinds of things and that they're not things that M actively seeks out so that's another "not for me".

S hasn't really taken them because it freaks her out a little. She said "I have no idea what intention the person had while making it [sic]". For her, the best thing to do is to just not mess with that energy.

For the lengthy answers, we will now turn to C and F.

Let's start with C, someone who constantly beats my ass on iMessage games and is a fairly decent sport until hubris hits them right in the face.

C plays these sorts of games/quizzes up to now from elementary school. One of the sites they mentioned is "quizzilla", which was a quiz hosting site. They say that they put "zero stock into 95% of online quizzes and games". It's more of a little thing that you do with your friends and post online for fun. It's a good way to keep your mind occupied.

One other example they gave is going on buzzfeed or uquiz! This one I'm fairly familiar with because I think this one is more freely crowd sourced and you can make all sorts of quizzes that you wouldn't see on buzzfeed. The last two quizzes I took on uquiz was like "Which Taika universe character are you?" and I think I got the shit head dad from Boy and then a "Which OFMD Character are you" type quiz where I got Spanish Jackie stan, Geraldo coded – which will mean something to OFMD viewers. If you want to know, I did take an actual quiz - which character are you one and I got Jim Jimenez.

C at the end of this stated that, for the ones that claim to know a lot about them, they "take what matches or causes [them] to think more and leave what doesn't". One interesting thing is that they said they do the same for ASTROLOGY, MBTI, TAROT, and others like it.

Let's now go to F who is a psychologist in training, which is going to spice this all up.

F has played these kinds of quizzes/games b/c of the quiz trend – familiar, eh? F is just like C because it was started up by a sort of social thing. Your friends played it and shared their stuff, so you want to be a part of it too. Think back on the above stuff I discussed re: camaraderie and in/out group, interesting right?

F also has made a couple of quizzes too, I won't mention cos F is a big name in a fandom. But I have seen them and they're cool too! F goes into a lot of things that I'm gonna save for a different day because they go into the lack of validity of personality tests and how we as a society love to group people and pretend that there's only 16 types of people in the world. Additionally, I want to say that the MBTI thing? Ass! You can't really repeat the results, it doesn't take into account that you can lie, there's no sort of scientific backing to it, whatever. Potential strain of Eugenics in it as well! Personality tests, whoo!

I am now going to conduct a live interview with one of my absolute fave people in the world: Ben! Now it's your time to answer the following:

- Are you into or have you played quizzes/games that claim to know things about you?
- If yes, why do you think you play those games?
- If no, why not?

[LIVE DISCUSSION]

Now, for you folks at home, here's the interactive part for you! What are your answers to those questions? Hit us up at iscreamyourneme@gmail.com and let me know. Maybe I'll do an expanded look into this as a follow up!

If you're interested in my answers:

- I do play them! I love them!
- I play them cos they're genuinely funny when they claim I'm one thing or another. Sometimes, it gives me characters I do think of as similar to me and it does make me rethink characters when someone gives me a person I don't like or have never thought of. One of the best ones I ever took is the Strengths Finder for work. I think that *that* one at least is more favourable than MBTI to me b/c its a combination of themes as opposed to like a 16 groups of people kind of thing. I can find faults in it but so far it's the one I liked the most.

But let's go back... What can we learn from all of these things that folks have told me? What makes Peter Answers a hit and something attractive? Outside of the jokes and pranking aspect of it, I think that for me what seems to make it attractive is the wonder that something you're unfamiliar with claims to know all sorts of things about you! When someone approaches you with the concept of the thing and goes through with it, you're in awe - why does this thing know what it does?

When you're done with it though, it's a bit of an egg on the face, eh? You believed too easily that something could know so much about you and you may have not questioned it at all. You just went with it!

This concept is actually something that Peter Answers' creator examines on its information page¹⁶.

Francisco says that this was born out of a need to investigate the beliefs that he held growing up, sourced from people all around him (whether it be religious or something else). Once he started really examining these things he "felt free" from all of it and became someone who questions everything and doesn't take everything face value.

¹⁶ <https://www.peter-virtual-tarot.com/objective.htm>

The site says the following thing:

Since the beginning of the history of humanity, mankind tried [sic] to find an explanation for each phenomenon. Each time that explanation was far from their rational understanding, a new myth, legend, belief and even religion was born.

With the pass [sic] of the centuries, many of these enigmas started to be revealed by science. Even then, there were people that didn't want to see the truth, and kept being loyal to their beliefs.

He asks you, with Peter Answers, if we are truly free if we keep subscribing to beliefs without question. Are we hanging onto our chains, which aren't even necessarily closed and tying us down, if we don't investigate everything around us?

Francisco asks you, next time someone tells you "Do you want to play a game?" maybe, you turn away from that man on a tricycle and that teen with a creepy face and an open laptop. Set yourself free from that quiz that says it knows everything about you. Do it. Free your mind and the rest will follow.