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You Need Nerves of Steel and a Bit of Science to Eat Fire



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Image: Thom Britton/Freak Show and Tell

The dragons on *Game of Thrones* may breathe fire, but it's not the kind of thing mere mortals should attempt—unless said mortal is Thom Britton, self-described fire-eating science clown with Freak Show and Tell (“Science+History+Insanity”). He explains the science behind eating fire in this new video of his performance at the International Science and Engineering Festival.

As *Mental Floss* points out, he's not really eating fire. But he is still popping a flaming torch into his mouth and snuffing it out—no mean feat.

Understanding the physics involved is crucial—namely, fire and hot air will travel upward—as is knowing better than to inhale in the middle of eating fire. Other than that, mostly it takes a lot of practice to develop sufficient skill and precision, with the help of a few tricks of the trade.

Britton definitely takes extra precautions, per his FAQ:

My costume (a suit) is treated with a 'fire-proofing' spray. It is a tailored, 3 piece, men's suit. No feathers, no ruffles, no fringe. The floor is covered with banjo cloth - this cloth is fire retardant (Click here to see the proof) and if I bring my backdrops, they are made of the same materials. There is a fire extinguisher on stage, in plain sight and 1-2 people offstage with a fire blanket.

And yes, he is insured for this.

Should any of you more foolhardy souls want to make like a Targaryen and try your hand at eating fire, Penn Jillette (one-half of magic duo Penn & Teller) has a few tips—plus some straight talk about the risks involved: “You shouldn't be doing this. It's dangerous and if you do everything right, you'll still get hurt.”

[Laughing Squid]

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