

00:00:00	Music	Music	Gentle, trilling music with a steady drumbeat plays under the dialogue.
00:00:01	Promo	Promo	Speaker: <i>Bullseye with Jesse Thorn</i> is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR.
			<i>[Music fades out.]</i>
00:00:13	Jesse Thorn	Host	I'm Jesse Thorn. It's <i>Bullseye</i> .
00:00:15	Music	Music	"Huddle Formation" from the album <i>Thunder, Lightning, Strike</i> by The Go! Team. A fast, upbeat, peppy song. Music plays as Jesse speaks, then fades out.
00:00:22	Jesse	Host	So far in his career, Ben Schwartz has seen two big breaks. The first one came in 2010. He got a little part on the show <i>Parks and Recreation</i> . He played Jean-Ralphio Saperstein, an under-achieving club kid who personified both confidence and chaos.
			<i>[Music comes to an end.]</i>
			Within a couple years, Ben's character went from a beloved guest star to a genuine sensation. He is in gifs. He is in clips. Our production fellow, Jordan Kauwling, has told us he is a Tik Tok meme. And then, a couple of years ago, Ben got another big break—this time, it was an opportunity to play one of the most iconic fictional characters of all time: Sonic the Hedgehog. Yeah, that's right! Ben is starring alongside Jim Carrey and James Marsden in <i>Sonic the Hedgehog</i> —the new blockbuster that just hit theaters. It's truly the role of a lifetime. Or, perhaps, the spin-dash of a lifetime.
			In the film, Sonic comes to Earth—it's hard for me to say this next paragraph, because of shame at that last sentence I said. In the film, Sonic comes to Earth from another planet, arriving in a town in rural Montana, where James Marsden's character, Tom Wachowski, lives. Sonic shows up at Tom's home and startles him so badly that Tom accidentally shoots Sonic with a tranquilizer dart. Eventually, the two of them team up and Tom agrees to help Sonic find his rings and save the world from evil scientist, Dr. Robotnik—played by Jim Carrey. Let's hear a clip from <i>Sonic the Hedgehog</i>
			In this scene, Sonic and Tom are road tripping to San Francisco. They have a fight, and Sonic storms out of the car and is gone for a few seconds, when he realized he has no idea where he's going.
00:02:11	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:02:12	Clip	Clip	Music: Dramatic, suspenseful music plays softly in the background.
			Sonic: So, as I crashed into the cold, dark water of the Pacific, I realized a few things: A) I have no idea where I'm going. B) Salt-water stings. C) I shouldn't even be on this planet, right now, but I am! Why?! Because you shot me!
			Tom Wachowski: <i>[Dryly.]</i> I know.
			Sonic: <i>[Sucks in a deep breath and yells.]</i> You shot me!

Tom: Alright, I heard you the first time. You don't have to... pile it on, good grief.

Sonic: I'm wet! I'm cold! There's a fish on my head! And clearly, I'm not gonna be able to do this on my own!

[Wet, sloshing sound.]

Tom: *[Sighs.]* Alright, get in the truck.

[More wet, sloshing noises, louder.]

Sonic: Really?! You're gonna help me?!

Tom: *[Dejected.]* I guess it is a little bit my fault that all this is happening to you.

Sonic: *[Bright and smug.]* Not a little bit, entirely! It is entirely your fault!

Tom: Okay. It's entirely my fault. Are you coming?

Sonic: Yes.

[A zipping sound as Sonic uses his super speed to shake the water from himself. Thumping noises as he climbs into the car.]

Sonic: Road trip! Whoop, whoooooop!
Music swells and fades.

00:03:06 Sound Effect Transition

00:03:07 Jesse Host Ben Schwartz, welcome to *Bullseye*. It's nice to have you on the show.

00:03:09 Ben Schwartz Guest Thank you! Lovely to—lovely to hear your NPR voice, and lovely to see you, Jesse. How are you?

00:03:13 Jesse Host Uh, I'm well. Thank you.

00:03:15 Ben Guest *[Jesse agrees several times as Ben speaks.]*
Good. Can I tell you an easter egg? 'Cause you picked a clip that has an easter egg in it. If you don't mind.

So, this is—that clip, what you just did—that movie's with Jim Carrey, who plays Dr. Robotnik. I play Sonic the Hedgehog. And I stole the cadence. We seem similar ages? I may be a little bit older than you. But, *Dumb and Dumber*—there's a line where he goes—he's listing off things, then he goes, *[with a rising intonation]* "Our pet's heads are falling off!"

And I copied the cadence of, *[with a rising intonation]* "There's a fish on my head!" To match exactly Jim Carrey—or, not exactly, but Jim Carrey's cadence, in that.

00:03:45 Jesse Host Can I ask you a question? When—

00:03:46 Ben Guest *[Interrupting.]* Please, Jesse. And this is what it's about.

[Jesse laughs.]

We're here to ask each other questions. I'll ask you one, next.

00:03:50 Jesse Host Ben, did you audition for the part of Sonic the Hedgehog? Did you, like, have a meeting on it first? Where they ask you what your take on Sonic the Hedgehog is?

00:03:58 Ben Guest *[Jesse agrees enthusiastically several times as Ben talks.]*
See, now the clock is ticking. I'm—I came—I'm excited, because I feel like we're gonna get the hard-hitting questions on this, right? We're *Bullseyeing*, right now. We're doing it.

And actually, it's a cool process. I had a meeting with Tim Miller, who directed a movie called *Deadpool*. And he has a Prussian company called Blur. And beyond production, it does a lot of animation, a lot of CG and stuff like that. I had a meeting about a different thing, with him. And at the end of it, there were all these *Sonic* toys on something, and I was like, "Oh my god, I love *Sonic the Hedgehog!*"

And he's like, "Oh, we're—you know, we're gonna try to develop it. The next step is we're gonna make a test—a five-minute test video." Like, which is funny, because when people talked to me at the beginning, whenever I wanted to get anything across, like, "Why don't you just shoot it? Shoot it so you can show people what the show is." They did that, but for *Sonic*. And he's like, "Jeff Fowler, here—" who's a gentleman that worked at Blur right next to Tim. His desk was next to him. He goes, "Is gonna direct it. And we're actually looking for the voice of just someone to play it in the test."

And I was like, "I would—if you need me, I'm here! I—" Whatever.

And they said, "Okay! Just so you know, if you do it—doesn't mean you're gonna be in the movie. You're just doing us a favor."

And I said, "I will gladly do that favor. I love this so much." Did it. They sold it to Paramount. Paramount went through its process of kind of trying to find who they wanted to play Sonic, and they kept coming back to the test, 'cause people loved the way I played it in the test. And I just lucked out in that, like, "Nobody's—let's just give it to Ben. Everybody loves the way he played it, there. Let's just give it to him." So, I got to be Sonic from that.

00:05:15 Jesse Host *[Ben agrees with Jesse several times as he talks.]*
I feel like people have a much more profound emotional relationship with Sonic the Hedgehog than any other comparable video game character. Especially in the iconic *Sonic the Hedgehog* games. Mostly what he does is run and jump.

00:05:31 Ben Guest He runs. He jumps.

00:05:32 Crosstalk Crosstalk **Ben:** If you wait too long, he taps his foot.

Jesse: He does a spin-dash. Yeah.

Ben: Spin-dash in that second one. Tails came long.

Jesse: He—

Ben: He wags his finger. He's got attitude, Jesse. He's got attitude.

Jesse: He does a—he does a thing where he’s kind of about to fall off of a thing and goes, *[wobbling]* “Wooooah!”

Ben: Yes!

00:05:43	Ben	Guest	We put that in the movie, too! There’s a scene where put that in the movie. We put a couple of easter eggs in the movie.
00:05:47	Jesse	Host	But it’s a—it’s a relatively simple character, and I think—and while it has been complicated and—
00:05:51	Ben	Guest	<i>[Interrupting, shocked.]</i> Simple?! Jesse, how <u>dare</u> you!
00:05:53	Jesse	Host	Uh, an archetypal character.
00:05:54	Ben	Guest	Thank you.
00:05:55	Jesse	Host	And while it has been complicated in the many games since those original <i>Sonic the Hedgehog</i> games, I think still—in many ways—it’s primarily a—you know, a platforming videogame character. Which is sort of a tabula rasa. But people have really profound relationships with Sonic the Hedgehog.
00:06:12	Ben	Guest	I think there’s a couple reasons for—one, I think you could probably find that relationship with—I say Mario (Mah-rio), but everybody says Mare-y—I—what, how do you say?
00:06:21	Jesse	Host	I say Mah-ry. I’d say <i>Super Mario</i> (Mah-rio).
00:06:23	Ben	Guest	I probably say <i>Mario</i> (Mah-rio) <i>Brothers</i> , and that’s why I get made fun of when I lived—I grew up in Riverdale. But when <i>Sonic</i> came out, it’s like, “Okay, what is Genesis gonna do to combat Nintendo’s Mare-io or Mah-rio?” And the way that that they said is like—‘cause it’s a side-scroller. It’s a side-scroller, and the cool thing is he can go fast and the faster you go, the boards become more—you know, manic and crazy and fill with, “Ooh!” But they wanted to give him attitude, because they felt like a lot of the characters in Nintendo didn’t have that. So, they gave him that, like, sass that if you wait too long, he gets upset or he shakes his finger at the top. Or, you know, he’s just like a cool—it’s like a cool character.
			So, I think a lot of kids, like—especially ‘cause there was like a war between, “What do you like?! Nintendo or Sega?” And that was their mascot. That was it, for them. That was their Mare-io or Mah-rio. And so, I think people pledged allegiance to that and just really connected with it.
00:07:11	Jesse	Host	What choices do you think you were making about who Sonic the Hedgehog is and what his deal is? Besides just that he’s fast.
00:07:20	Ben	Guest	And he is fast.
00:07:22	Jesse	Host	And you’re a fast talker.
00:07:23	Ben	Guest	I talk very fast, yeah. That doesn’t hurt at all, right? <i>[Purposefully changing pace.]</i> I’m gonna try to slow my cadence down for this. I wish I had a better NPR voice. I feel like I sound, like, Jewish no matter what I do. I sound like Mel Brookes no matter what I do.
			So, what I said—whenever I played the games, was—it’s—he’s really quick, he’s really fast. And they have that attitude. And the whole idea of when they were developing this game was that he had those things, and that’s what kind of made him stand out. So, okay, I’m gonna remember that. And then when I read the script, it was basically like—he was like a little kid. To me, it read like he was this little kid that always wanted to do these things, in his life, but always had to be in a cave and hide away. And finally, for the first time, he’s about to get out and do all these things. So, I said, If I can bring the excitement and the passion of, like, a little kid wanting

to do all this stuff and—[pitching his voice high] and in my voice! Like always make it like, “Aw!” [Returning to his regular speaking voice.] Like, even through the action, then I think that people will connect with the idea of what that is. And when they’re looking at the hedgehog, they’ll kind of still feel like they’re looking at that little kid. And then the emotional stuff can hit a little harder. And then the jokes can hit a little harder. And I think you can connect with the character a little bit more.

00:08:28 Jesse Host And I was like, if I can do that, I think I could succeed in kind of bringing, like you know, the—my version of what the voice could be. What was it like for you when the *Sonic the Hedgehog* trailer was released, and it became a thing on the internet that people were creeped out by Sonic the Hedgehog?

00:08:37 Ben Guest Should you explain to people on NPR what the internet is, or no?

00:08:40 Jesse Host [Laughs.] No, that’s okay. It’s—

00:08:41 Ben Guest They know it.

00:08:42 Jesse Host Yeah.

00:08:43 Ben Guest Okay. Um. So, most of my job is done after the movie’s done. So, they shot for many days—Jim Carrey, James Marsden, Tika Sumpter, Jeff Fowler, who directed it—and then they come over and I start doing a—I started doing VO before I even see video. And then I basically do my scenes opposite the video that they’re gonna use. Like—

00:09:00 Jesse Host ‘Cause they’re animating your character into a live action movie.

00:09:03 Ben Guest That’s exactly correct. The whole film was live action. Jim Carrey, everybody’s live action. I’m CG. And when I’m looking at it, it’s just drawings. It’s just sketches and it’s just, like, a post—it’s like pre-viz. It’s like, very—you know, rudimentary type things. I don’t know what he’s gonna look like. And so, the biggest thing was also—when we’re doing this, we were all like, “I hope anybody cares about *Sonic*. At all.”

So, before the trailer even comes out, we’re like, “I hope—” because I care about it deeply and Jeff and they’re—all these people really care. We had no idea if anybody would even care, when we released the trailer. So, the biggest thing we got out of that was that there is a passionate [laughing] fanbase. And it wasn’t even—it transcended that fanbase, because it got over 100 million views in a—in such a short amount of time that everybody was like, “Woah, woah, woah, woah. This is—this is—” First of all, it’s amazing, ‘cause so many people are watching, but also people care and have real points of view about what—like, if they didn’t like it or things they liked, things they didn’t like. They had exact things.

And then, I—just ‘cause I’m a nerd, I was watching, like, videos of people watching the trailer. Like, you know, and it was intense. And those had hundreds of thousands of views! And so, the biggest thing we got out of that was that there’s a lot of people that really care. Really care. And so, I think they saw that they needed to make some adjustments. And I’m very happy they did, because I love the way he looks, now. I think the way he looks now is the way, in my head when I was voicing him—that’s what I thought was gonna happen. So, it worked out.

00:10:26 Jesse Host Yeah, I thought it was really cool looking.

00:10:28 Ben Guest What are your thoughts?

00:10:29	Crosstalk	Crosstalk	<p>Jesse: I thought it looked great.</p> <p>Ben: As someone—as someone who actually breaks stuff like this down.</p> <p>Jesse: I thought it looked great.</p> <p>Ben: Alright, good.</p>
00:10:33	Jesse	Host	<p>And I was worried—you know, I was worried—you know, who knows what happens if they have to rush it or they don't have enough money to do it fully realized in a different way, when they already spent a bunch of money doing it the first way. And so on and so forth.</p>
00:10:45	Ben	Guest	<p>Well, that's the fear. What happens if we went through all that and it comes out and it looks like even more of something you didn't want? Especially 'cause then you put power into the fan's hands. And if we did it—not power into the fan's hands, but we show that we're listening. And if we did it and then the fans are like, "This is terrible! Like, aw, come on, guys!" You know what I mean? But they were—I will say, the fans have been very supportive of me, at the beginning.</p> <p>'Cause there've been a lot of voices that have played Sonic, and I was like, "I hope people—" I really wanted to make the fans proud, because I'm a nerd for this stuff, so I wanna—I wanna, you know, make the legacy live on. And so, they really enjoyed my voice, even in the first one. And then they really enjoyed the design in the second one. And now people are really paying attention, which is kind of amazing. And I think the movie came out great, 'cause there's—I think it's funny and I think the action works and I think all the emotion works. It's pretty remarkable for that type of movie. I'm pretty excited.</p>
00:11:35	Jesse	Host	<p><i>[Ben agrees several times as Jesse speaks.]</i> I wanna talk to you a little bit about <i>Parks and Recreation</i>. You had recurring role on that show. And I think it's fair to describe it as a—as a career-making recurring role. Which is, you know, for a—for a character that showed up a few times a year, it's about as memorable as it gets.</p>
00:11:52	Ben	Guest	That's very kind of you.
00:11:54	Jesse	Host	His name was Jean-Ralphio.
			<p><i>[Ben agrees.]</i></p> <p>And he was, in the small town of Pawnee, <i>[laughing]</i> an aspiring mover and shaker. <i>[Laughs.]</i></p>
00:12:04	Ben	Guest	I would say definitely aspiring mover and shaker. More shaking than moving, but definitely.
00:12:09	Jesse	Host	So, his best friend is named Tom, played by Aziz Ansari, and we're about to hear a clip where Tom has brought him in to interview for a job as an assistant to Ron Swanson.
00:12:19	Ben	Guest	This would be the first ever scene I did, and I want—before we listen to this, think about this: I came into this knowing that this was the only scene I'm doing. I did not know there was more, beyond this scene. And so, I did the scene. And so, right before we recorded it for real, we did a rehearsal of it. I did the rehearsal once.

Mike Schur came down—who's the creator of the show—and he came down. I did it once. I was very nervous. I did this exact scene you're gonna hear, which is very small. And then right after I did the first rehearsal, he came up to me and he goes, "We're gonna be bringing you back."

[Jesse chuckles softly in the background.]

And it was like—it was such an incredible moment, for me. And then when he left, it gave me confidence, also, to play a little bit more. 'Cause I was like, "Oh, I'm like—he already thinks I did okay. So, I didn't—" You know, 'cause the first time doing a character, there's a lot of pressure.

00:12:59	Jesse	Host	So, Ron is like a hyper-square curmudgeon.
00:13:04	Ben	Guest	Yes, he's anti-government.
00:13:05	Jesse	Host	Anti-government, meat-lover.

[Ben agrees.]

And your character, Jean-Ralphio, sweeps in with all the confidence in the world that he is the—
Could not be more of an opposite.

00:13:14	Ben	Guest
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[Jesse agrees.]

And if you watch the character arc of this character—my character, I slowly turn into a cartoon version of myself. So, like, this is when I was more grounded and then I started to do really crazy stuff.
Let's take a listen.

00:13:24	Jesse	Host
00:13:25	Sound Effect	Transition
00:13:26	Clip	Clip

Music swells and fades.

Ron Swanson: So, Jean-Ralphio.

Jean-Ralphio Saperstein: You got him right here. Leave a message after the beep.

Ron: Why do I want you as my assistant?

Jean-Ralphio: For starters, access to the illest clubs. And that's just for starters. I will work for you. I will be on you 24/7. I'll be like your family. I'm here when you get here in the morning. Sure enough, I'll be there tucking you into bed at night. Don't worry, it's not gay. Do we have questions?

[Beat.]

Tom Haverford: I think our only question is, uh, when can you start?

Jean-Ralphio: Right now! Let's do it!

Ron: *[Flat and calm.]* Thank you for coming in. We will talk.

Jean-Ralphio: Cool. I feel good about this. And, you know, you can hit me up on Facebook, anytime. Day or night. You know that, right?

Tom: Take care, buddy.

Jean-Ralphio: Boom!

Tom: So, what do you think of your new assistant?

Ron: I wanna punch you in the face so bad, right now.
Music swells and fades.

00:14:06 Sound Effect Transition

00:14:07 Jesse Host *[They both laugh.]* He's great.

00:14:10 Ben Guest That was it! That was my whole—that was all that I thought it was gonna be.

00:14:13 Jesse Host Did you have a feeling about—'cause Jean-Ralphio—

00:14:17 Ben Guest I love how French you make him sound.

[Jesse laughs.]

[With a French flourish.] Jean-Ralphio says...

00:14:21 Jesse Host He is—I mean, like, basically morally abhorrent. He's probably a bad person.

00:14:27 Ben Guest He—you know what, I always played him—and—which, Amy had a great response to, I always played him that he always thought he was nailing it. He never thought he did anything wrong. He always thought he was killing it! Anybody watching his life would think that every step along the way, he's nailed it out of the park. And then Amy said, "Even when he, like, does something bad, it's like when a puppy pees on the carpet and you're like, *[with mild disappointment]* 'Oh, Jean-Ralphio!'" Like, you can never get mad at him, because he's never trying to be mean or be mean to anybody. He's just trying to—he thinks he's doing everything perfectly.

00:14:57 Jesse Host Yeah, like ultimately, he's more foolish than he is evil.

00:15:00 Ben Guest 100%, yeah.

00:15:01 Jesse Host It—let's—I wanna hear some more Jean-Ralphio, I'm gonna be honest with you.

00:15:04 Ben Guest Oh, great!

00:15:05 Jesse Host So, this scene is—

00:15:07 Ben Guest *[Laughing.]* It's just gonna be scenes from *Parks!*

00:15:08 Jesse Host Yeah, exactly. This scene is called—from an episode called "One Last Ride". It's the last workday for all the employees in Pawnee.

00:15:17 Ben Guest I have no idea what this is gonna be!

00:15:18 Jesse Host And Amy Poehler and—whose character's name is Leslie Knope—and Aziz Ansari, as Tom, are walking the halls on one last mission when they cross paths with Jean-Ralphio.

00:15:29 Ben Guest This is the end of the whole show, right?

[Jesse confirms.]

Or, this is—yeah. This is there at the end of the whole thing.

00:15:32 Jesse Host And Jean-Ralphio, by the way, has been in a wheelchair due to an injury that he is faking.

00:15:37 Ben Guest *[Laughing.]* Is that in this scene?!

00:15:38 Sound Effect Transition Music swells and fades.

00:15:39 Clip Clip **Jean-Ralphio:** You're leaving? For truth? I am gonna miss you so much.

Leslie Knope: What's going on? You're not injured?

Jean-Ralphio: Uuuh, yeah. I'm injured. I got a terminal case of Get Me to the Front of the Line at Six Flags!

Jean-Ralphio and Tom: *[Yelling in unison.]* Shaaaa-boosh!

Jean-Ralphio: *[Blows out a breath and then sings.]* It's a winter wonderlaaand! *[Laughs and then gets suddenly serious.]* I'm gonna be so sad to see you go. Will you do me one, final kindness? Will you pretend to be my wife for an insurance scam? But then we fall in love for real!? Also, can I have a pair of your gym socks? And don't worry, it's not for anything weird. It's just a fetish I have. Music swells and fades.

00:16:13 Sound Effect Transition

00:16:14 Ben Guest *[They laugh.]*

00:16:19 Jesse Host What a way to go!
[Laughing.] What was it like to live as a human man—

[Ben wheezes into laughter.]

00:16:29 Ben Guest —while occupying the imaginations of millions of Americans, as Jean-Ralphio?
It was very, uh—you're very right to say that was the first thing that kind of broke me out. I'd done a lot stuff at UCB and I'd done a little stuff elsewhere, but at the beginning, it wasn't as big of a deal, but then—'cause remember, *Parks* didn't have huge ratings. Everybody was watching *The Office* and some people watched *Parks* afterwards, but every year—at the end of the year—it was a maybe if we were gonna get picked up again. Every year. And it wasn't until, like, the last couple seasons where people really were paying attention. And then Netflix, man! This—there's a whole new version of people—of also kids! Like, I'll have young kids come up to me!

But at the height of when it was out, I was younger, and I'd be performing a lot. And you go to bars after shows, and a lot of people would come up to me in bars and sing in my ear. Like, put their hands—in the show, when I would sing as the character, I'd put my hand to my face and sing. And they would do the same thing, with me. Like, singing “the worst” or “technically I'm homeless”. And it's very cute. And they always thought they were the first people ever to do it.

[They chuckle.]

00:17:28 Jesse Host But the drunker people were, the more I would get sung at.
00:17:30 Ben Guest How did you get yourself into *Star Wars*?
Which one?

00:17:31 Jesse Host *[Ben agrees several times as Jesse speaks.]*
Well, you're—you are a stormtrooper at one point, and you also made noises that became the sounds that the robot BB—the droid BB-8, that's—

00:17:42 Ben Guest Thank you.

00:17:43 Jesse Host Uh, I wanna be specific with my language, here.
00:17:44 Ben Guest Thank you, please. Yeah.
00:17:46 Jesse Host Did you just, like, show up at *Star Wars*? Knock on the door?
00:17:49 Ben Guest Yeah, I googled “*Star Wars*”. “*Star Wars*, where film?”

[They laugh.]

And just walked in.

[Jesse cackles loudly and continues to lose it as Ben talks.]

It was crazy! You know how easy it is?! That anybody could do that. Anybody could have done it. Uh, they were doing Episode 7. I had done a TV show with JJ Abrams, called *Under Covers*. And that went really well, and then I started a—him and wrote some stuff together. And then we wrote this animated thing together that we haven’t released yet, but we did, like, all these little things together and we’ve become friends and stuff like that. And then he got the 7 job, and he went to do 7—Episode 7, *Force Awakens*. That was when they brought back the whole franchise.

And then Harrison Ford hurt himself. Do you remember when Harrison Ford—something went on his foot and he broke his—I believe it was broke his foot, or something like that?

00:18:29 Jesse Host
00:18:31 Ben Guest

Yeah, I think that’s right. Or his ankle.
Yeah, something. And then JJ called me and he’s like, “Hey, I’m coming back to LA.” ‘Cause they had to take some time off. So, he said, “There’s a new droid that I’m making for this.”

And I said, “It is like—it’s like an R2-D2? Is it like that type of—”

And he goes, “No, we’re gonna make it kind of—it’s gonna be different. I’ll show you—I just drew a picture of him. I’ll show it to you when *[laughs]* I—I have a picture of, like, how I envision him. I’ll show it to you when I come to LA. But I want this droid, instead of just having beeps and boops—which, you know, of course it’ll have that, but I want you to feel the—I want you to feel, like, comedic moments from him. I want you to feel when he’s hurt. I want you to feel when he’s happy. Would you want to do the voice for him?”

And I was like—I remember my heart was going crazy. I don’t think I’ve ever told this story before. And I was like, “Oh my god, yes of course!”

He was like, “I gotta come home for a couple weeks for this thing—the injury thing—so, I’ll show you it then. And how about we record some lines for the droid?”

And that’s how—that’s how it started. So, it really started with—I went into Bad Robot, afterwards. He showed me actual footage. I was one of the first people ever to see—I remember, also, he was writing—he was rewriting maybe 7 at the time, and he was in, like, a mall next to his office. And he goes, “Oh, are you going to see the scenes?”

And I go, “Here?! At the mall!? Are you gonna show me—?” ‘Cause he had it on the iPad, that only—the only thing that iPad could do was probably show, like—not iPad, it was like, you know, one of those things. And I was like, “Are you serious?!”

And he goes, “Nobody cares. Nobody’s gonna look.” And he was totally right! But people would have lost their minds if they looked! *[Laughing.]* He was showing me scenes from *Star Wars*! Before, like, they had even finished filming it! And we were sitting down in, like, the middle of a mall and people were walking by and nobody knew it was him. And I was—I could not believe I was so lucky that I was getting to see scenes before anybody else. And he goes, “What do you think? Let’s think of some dialogue that BB-8 could say.”

00:20:11 Ben

Guest

We went back to the office. We recorded actual words, and he said, “We’ll give it to ILM.” Industrial Light Magic. “And they will turn the words into beeps and boops. But I want you to, you know—I want your this! You’re happy or sad, or dadada, and all those things ‘cause I want—I want them to feel that and turn it into that.”

So, he gave them that stuff and when we got it back, you could kind of feel that it was a human saying words turning into that. So, then we tried a synthesizer and we tried a synthesizer and I did that and all these other things. And we’re getting really close, and then I booked a movie and I had to go. I left. And then he got Bill Hader, who’s a genius, a lot of stuff, to come in. Bill did the synthesizer a little bit more. And then I think JJ literally found, like, an app. I honestly think he just found an app and that’s how he did it. But the two things that happened was that they built a library of kind of, like, our stuff. But I think JJ figured out how to, like, do it.

But the biggest thing I heard from the editors was that they used my lines of dialogue to help edit the film together. ‘Cause now they know what BB-8 would be saying. They had no idea, before. And so, I would improvise lines, JJ would write lines, we would go back and forth. And they used that to cut the movie. So, there’s like versions of the film that have me talking, like—you know, like this. And it was huge. And then—so that was one. The other one was I was literally in his office writing. And he goes, “Do you wanna be a stormtrooper?”

I go, “Huh!?”

[They laugh.]

He goes, “You wanna be a stormtrooper?”

I go, “Yeah, yeah, of course. Yeah. Yes, of course I do.”

He goes, “Okay, put this on. You’re an extra in this next scene.” And so, I had this incredible connection to *Star Wars*, even though you don’t see my face ever, that has been—I feel so lucky, ‘cause my name’s in the credits and any—like, I—the first time I saw it in the credits, I almost cried. It’s, like, so emotional. ‘Cause the crawl is the same crawl you’ve seen since you’ve been a kid. Uh, so it’s—it was very crazy. That is—that is the most—I’m sorry that I rambled

too much. I apologize, Jesse. But that was that whole *Star Wars* thing.

00:21:54 Jesse Host My interview with Ben Schwartz wraps up in a minute. After a quick break, tone shift! I'll ask Ben, a very funny guy, what he's most afraid of. And he has to give me a sincere answer. It's *Bullseye*, from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

00:22:09 Promo Promo **Music:** Relaxed music plays.

Speaker: Listen to *Planet Money* for all kinds of weird and interesting stories that just happen to teach you a bit about money and the economy and how the world works. *Planet Money*, from NPR. Subscribe now.

00:22:24 Promo Promo **Music:** Relaxing ukulele music.

Manolo Moreno: Hey, you've reached *Dr. Gameshow*. Leave your message after the beep.

[Music stops.]

[Beep!]

Sara: Hi. This is Sara, and I'd like to tell you about *Dr. Gameshow*. *Dr. Gameshow* is a band of geniuses, or nerds, or brilliant artists, or kids, or some combination of all of those who get together to make a show like no other that's family-friendly. It's an interactive call-in gameshow podcast.

When I found *Dr. Gameshow*, I found joy. I told my friends and family that if they weren't listening, they were wasting joy. I sent them the episodes that made me laugh until I cried, played it for them in the car. They laugh, too! Laugh their butts off. But they still don't listen on their own, so they're wasting joy. And I keep looking for someone to understand me. Maybe it's you! Give *Dr. Gameshow* a listen and find joy.

[Beep!]

[Music resumes.]

Jo Firestone: Listen to [Dr. Gameshow](http://Dr.Gameshow) on Maximum Fun. New episodes every other Wednesday.

[Music fades out.]

00:23:13 Jesse Host Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest is Ben Schwartz. He played Jean-Ralphio on the TV show *Parks and Recreation*. You might have also heard his voice on *BoJack Horseman*, on *Animals*, or as Sonic—the hero animal in the new movie, *Sonic the Hedgehog*.

You play the character Sonic the Hedgehog in the movie *Sonic the Hedgehog*.

00:23:35 Ben Guest Thank you.

00:23:36 Crosstalk Crosstalk **Jesse:** Um, you're welcome.

Ben: Thank you very much.

00:23:37 Jesse Host *[Ben agrees several times as Jesse speaks.]*
It's a popular character with a really passionate fanbase, that's been developed over decades, alongside the broadening *Sonic the Hedgehog* mythos. And, you know, something that happens a lot in fan culture, is people take works that they really care about and apply them to parts of their own lives, through the creation of sort of parallel art.

00:24:00 Ben Guest Okay. Do you have such art to show me?
00:24:03 Jesse Host So, I have some art to show you, and it will be—
00:24:04 Ben Guest *[Interrupting with extreme excitement.]* Do you really?!
00:24:05 Jesse Host Because—yeah, and because it's a radio show, I will—like, I'll just give you some of the art that's been created around Sonic. Maybe you could just describe it.

00:24:14 Crosstalk Crosstalk *[Ben agrees.]*
Jesse: And just tell me about how it feels.

Ben: I have not seen this—and to be fair, I haven't really seen, uh—

Jesse: I haven't seen this! I mean, this is—

Ben: Oh, great.

Jesse: I had, you know—I have some video game enthusiasts on my staff, here.

Ben: Great.

Jesse: Breaking news: nerds work at podcasting company.

00:24:27 Jesse Host **Ben:** *[Jokingly dismissive.]* No way!
I know. But they had a really good time picking out some of their favorite works of Sonic fan art. So, here's one.

00:24:35 Ben Guest Okay, what are we *[breaks into a low chuckle]*—okay, uh, I'm gonna explain it to you. It is Sonic the Hedgehog, but this is a beefy man. This is a beefy hedgehog.

00:24:44 Jesse Host He's kinda yolked.
00:24:45 Ben Guest He's yolked. A great term, yolked. Big legs, big stomach, everything. And the text underneath says, "You cannot run from your fears." Um, my assumption is that's a take on, maybe, that first poster that came out? The first poster that came out, it looked like Sonic had beefy legs, but this is just a gentleman that hits. The Gym.

00:25:13 Jesse Host This. Is. Sonic—this is the version of Sonic that is, like, doing two-a-days, really working on his tan, *[chuckles]* and his hair. But he's smiling.

00:25:19 Ben Guest You can also, I think, in this picture feel how much Sonic means to people, that he is inspirational in that way.

00:25:26 Jesse Host Thank you, Jesse. Yeah. He's very inspirational. Uh, follow your dreams. It says you cannot run from your fears, but I would say follow your dreams.
00:25:27 Ben Guest Okay.
This is 1 of 1000—he has 1000 pictures in front of him. Here comes another one. This is... *[breaks on a laugh]* This is a smurf. This is a smurf that has—that's dressed like Sonic the Hedgehog. Uuuh...

00:25:40 Jesse Host *[Ben agrees multiple times as Jesse speaks.]*
So, do you think that the—you know Sonic the Hedgehog has a famous, sort of, mane of quills. And the smurf, in that picture, has that. Do you—when you say he's dressed as Sonic the Hedgehog, is that like a hat?

00:25:53 Ben Guest Uh—see, now, this is a great question. Because, if you—and, by the way, if we really wanna get into it, what's underneath those smurf hats?

00:26:00 Jesse Host *[Huffs out a breath of air.]* Littler smurf?
00:26:01 Ben Guest You think that every smurf has—Jesse.
00:26:03 Crosstalk Crosstalk **Jesse:** Yeah, it's like a...

Ben: *[Worried.]* Jesse.

Jesse: Russian nesting doll.

Ben: Jesse.

00:26:06 Jesse Host Yes, sir.
00:26:07 Ben Guest You're telling me that throughout—throughout—when the property was invented—

[Jesse agrees.]

All smurfs have had tiny smurfs underneath their hat? That nobody's revealed?

00:26:16 Jesse Host It's an easter egg.
00:26:17 Ben Guest Jesse!
00:26:18 Jesse Host Yeah.
00:26:19 Ben Guest Jesse! For years?! This is—smurfs have been around for decades.
00:26:23 Jesse Host Probably 40 years.
00:26:24 Ben Guest And the whole—so, the biggest thing—so, the biggest thing about smurfs is that they don't talk about the tiny smurf in their head? That's what the—that's what smurfs are about?!

00:26:31 Jesse Host Well, have you heard of subtext?
00:26:33 Ben Guest Yeah, of course.
00:26:34 Jesse Host Well, that's what's happening, there.
00:26:35 Ben Guest But that's beyond subtext!
00:26:36 Crosstalk Crosstalk **Jesse:** No, this is—

Ben: That's not a little secret that they have!
00:26:38 Jesse Host This is a river burbling under the surface, just as there's water underneath our feet right now.
00:26:44 Crosstalk Crosstalk **Ben:** You would have to go pretty deep where we are, this moment.

Jesse: There's a river of truth underneath smurfs.

Ben: *[Makes a disgusted sound.]*

Jesse: And floating down that river's—

Ben: Your nose is bleeding.

Jesse: —smaller—

Ben: Your nose is bleeding while you're saying this.

00:26:54 Ben Guest Jesse: —smaller smurfs.
 00:26:58 Jesse Host So, okay. So, I guess—let me read—let me—
 00:26:59 Ben Guest That's why the hats are so soft.
 00:27:08 Jesse Guest Let me describe the picture again. So, here it's a smurf with a
 00:27:09 Ben Guest bigger Sonic hat, holding a tinier smurf. Oh, I got a question, Jesse.
 00:27:10 Crosstalk Crosstalk *[Laughing.]* Yeah?
 Is the tinier smurf wearing a hat?
Ben: Is this *[inaudible]*?

Jesse: I don't know, it seems likely to me, yeah. Well—when was the last time—

Ben: *[Incensed.]* So—so—no! Stop! Jesse, stop!

Jesse: When was the last—when was the last smurf you saw that didn't have a hat on, Ben?

Ben: Jesse! So, I gotta ask a question.

Jesse: Ben, when was the last smurf you saw that didn't have a hat on? Riddle me this!
 00:27:21 Ben Guest Baldy Smurf!
 00:27:22 Jesse Host *[Beat.]* That's not a smurf.
 00:27:23 Ben Guest Can I ask you a question?
 00:27:24 Jesse Host *[Softly.]* Yeah.
 00:27:25 Ben Guest And this is gonna destroy me, 'cause I think I know the answer.
 00:27:27 Jesse Host Okay.
 00:27:29 Ben Guest *[Whispering.]* What's under—what's underneath that tiny smurf's hat?
 00:27:31 Jesse Host Do you really want me to say the answer to this?!
 00:27:33 Ben Guest *[Softly.]* Jesse, I need you to tell me.
 00:27:35 Jesse Host Ben, you look worried! And I don't know if I should say the answer to this.
 00:27:37 Ben Guest Jesse. Jesse. This is my last day before retirement.
 00:27:40 Jesse Host So, there's a big—there's a big—*[stammering]* well, they're not big. But a—a smallish, regular smurf. Right?
 00:27:47 Crosstalk Crosstalk **Ben:** We'll call it a regular smurf.

Jesse: He's got a white, peaked hat.

Ben: Underneath that hat, we've established—

Jesse: There's a smaller smurf.

Ben: Tinier smurf.
 00:27:52 Ben Guest And that tinier smurf, you're saying, is wearing?
 00:27:54 Jesse Host Also, a peaked hat.
 00:27:55 Ben Guest I gotta ask you a question, Jesse. What's underneath the hat? This is, like, the moment of, "What's in the box?" in 7.
 00:28:00 Crosstalk Crosstalk **Jesse:** *[Quiet and smug.]* There's another smurf in there, buddy.

Ben: *[Resigned.]* There's another smurf. Next picture please.

Jesse: Okay.

00:28:06 Ben Guest *[The sound of paper shuffling.]*
 Alright, this is a classic, uh—*[laughing and stammering]* it's a classic—it's a classic—it's a classic turkey, but this turkey has four legs holding itself up.

[Jesse giggles in the background.]

Got a very colorful tail. And the head is a zombie Sonic, and it has just eaten—there's blood coming out of its mouth. I mean, I don't know—which subreddit did you find these on? And you haven't even given credit to the artist. NPR is pretty good about that stuff. No credit to the artist.

00:28:36 Jesse Host So, basically it's a four-legged, colorful-backed turkey.
 00:28:39 Ben Guest Can I ask if this might be the NBC peacock?
 00:28:40 Jesse Host Oh, is it?
 Well, I don't know! The tail is rainbow colored, like the NBC peacock.

00:28:42 Ben Guest It has—it's true, it has the rainbow color like an NBC peacock. And Sonic is just—he is just out of it, man.

00:28:49 Jesse Host *[Laughing.]* His head—his eyes are very bloodshot.
 00:28:51 Ben Guest Very bloodshot eyes and he's got blood just draining out of his mouth. Like, he just—he just killed. He just killed. Ugh.

00:28:58 Jesse Host And I—
 00:28:59 Ben Guest This has to be the last one, right?
 00:29:00 Jesse Host The body of the turkey is... a pale, sort of Caucasian skin color.
 00:29:05 Crosstalk Crosstalk **Ben:** Yeah, and you would call it—

Jesse: It appears to be—

00:29:09 Jesse Host **Ben:** You would call it sexy, right? *[Beat.]* Jesse?
 00:29:11 Ben Guest It's certainly represented to be sexy.
 00:29:14 Jesse Host I'm asking you what you think of this turkey body.
 00:29:15 Ben Guest Are you asking if I'm aroused by it?
 I'm not asking if you're aroused, 'cause you—you're sitting cross-legged with two hands over your crotch. I can never tell. My question is this: Jesse, do you think this is a sexy turkey?

00:29:25 Jesse Host *[Beat.]* I mean, if it had a regular turkey head, yes.
 00:29:28 Ben Guest *[Laughing softly.]* Great.
 00:29:29 Jesse Host But I'm not into that.

[Beat.]

Uh, one last—one last one, here.

00:29:34 Ben Guest *[Interrupting.]* Do you think your audience is liking this part?
 00:29:36 Jesse Host I don't know. We'll find out in the edit, won't we?
 00:29:39 Ben Guest Oh, you're gonna erase it? *[Beat.]* Alright, this is a classic. This is a classic. Alright, you know that episode—*[laughing]* you know that episode of *The Simpsons* where Homer gets 3D? It was like the first time you see, like, *The Simpsons* in 3D?

[Jesse laughs.]

00:29:51 Jesse Host Remember that Halloween episode?
[Through extremely strained laughter.] Yes! That's exactly what that looks like!

00:29:54 Ben Guest This is exactly what that looks like. So, it looks like Sonic, but a swordfish Sonic in big women's heels, in that exact version of Homer.

00:30:01 Jesse Host He also has the look—he has the look of a—from a—maybe a film from the '60s.

00:30:07 Crosstalk Crosstalk **Ben:** Yeeeah, like a David Lynch movie!

Jesse: Where an old—where an old man is missing his teeth!?

Ben: Yep.

00:30:11 Jesse Host And he's going like, *[humming a loud, toothless noise]* mam-mam-mam-mam-mam.

00:30:13 Ben Guest Can you give me what the text would be, below this?

00:30:15 Jesse Host "Wooow." There's—his legs have a real—

00:30:19 Ben Guest Can—is there a website where someone could go to look at these?

00:30:21 Jesse Host Yeah, they can look at our—on our website, at MaximumFun.org.

00:30:24 Crosstalk Crosstalk **Jesse:** We'll be sure to post them.

Ben: Yes, so go to MaximumFun.org, 'cause this one—

00:30:27 Jesse Host This one, I'm—I'm gonna call this one, based on the shape and color of the legs, I'm gonna call it Red Light District.

00:30:33 Ben Guest Okay. Yeah. It's a—it's—it's, ugh.

00:30:40 Jesse Host Ben, I'm really glad that I could share with you the incredible life that this character has.

[Jesse agrees several times as Ben talks.]

00:30:46 Ben Guest I mean it's... with—through our—we learn about ourselves, don't we? I think we both learned a lot about ourselves. Art can be a reflection of yourself.

00:30:54 Jesse Host That's true. Or others!

00:30:55 Ben Guest Thanks!

00:30:56 Jesse Host Ben, I appreciate you taking all this time to be on *Bullseye*. It was really great to get to talk to you.

00:31:00 Ben Guest What a joy! Do you have one final question?

00:31:03 Jesse Host Well, I already showed you these Sonics!

00:31:05 Ben Guest I know, but I want one—I want one, classic Jesse question.

00:31:09 Jesse Host What are you most afraid of? Sincerely, you can't make *[censored]* answer.

00:31:14 Ben Guest *[Sucks in a long breath.]* Um, I think the thing that I've been most afraid of throughout my life is probably death. I think that scares me the most. When I was kid—and not—I wrote a movie about it, that hopefully I might be able to direct, this year. But the thing that scared me the most—I remember, when I was a kid, my mom would shut off the light and it would be totally dark, and I would be so afraid that that's it. That's what happens when you die. It's that everything is there and then it's just the lights—but this, when I was a kid, I thought I could still hear... I'm just there and nothing's happening. And I used to—I used to get so scared that I would get emotional or I couldn't go to sleep.

And that's kind of followed me through. Death has always been something that really scares me. I'm getting better with it, but like, as I get older—I have some friends that passed away. And then people I looked up to—Gary Shandling was a big influence on me, and lovely and always kind to me. And when he passed away—and I find myself, much like you I work very often, I find myself really

thinking about him and stuff like that when I'm doing nothing. When I'm in the shower. When my brain has to shut off. And all those things come rushing in. But death has always been something that has followed me, that I'm scared of. Or interested in. Or—like—a curious, "What do you think happens?"

00:32:28	Jesse	Host	So, Jesse, what do you think happens when you pass away?
00:32:31	Ben	Guest	Nothing, and it makes me feel physically sick to think about it.
00:32:33	Jesse	Host	How do you explain it to your children?
			I haven't talked to my kids about it, but I'm afraid to. I actually just lost my godfather.
00:32:38	Ben	Guest	Oh, no.
00:32:39	Jesse	Host	And when I was a kid, when I was seven or eight, I had kind of <i>[laughing]</i> an existential crisis. You know. I think it was substantially a fear of death. But also, just a distrust of my subjective experience. Like, I just—you know—I just had a general, ineffable feeling of—
00:33:03	Crosstalk	Crosstalk	Ben: Well, was it a—what happened to initiate that? What was the catalyst that made that come—
			Jesse: What is... Nothing. Nothing. Nothing.
			Ben: It had—I mean, something sure had built up—
			Jesse: No.
			Ben: Wow.
			Jesse: It was just a fear of, like, what if my understanding of the world is not real, or what if this is—you know. It was very vague, but huge.
			Ben: Yep!
00:33:21	Ben	Guest	<i>[Jesse agrees several times as Ben talks.]</i> But I think the vagueness is what makes it terrifying. That is the biggest thing. And I think that's—you know, where religion is very helpful for people and stuff like that. It's that the big questions that we have no answers for—it's terrifying and could torment you. It tormented you as a child! I'm very curious to—I always wonder how one explains it to children, but death is a big one for me.
00:33:41	Jesse	Host	The thing that I remember was calling my godfather, who was—
00:33:45	Ben	Guest	This is when you were an adult, or back then?
00:33:46	Jesse	Host	This is when I was a kid. When I—he was a general practitioner, but he had also been a psychiatrist. But my mother just trusted him very much. And calling him and kind of thinking that he would give me an answer. You know what I mean?
00:34:03	Ben	Guest	Sure! Of course!
00:34:05	Jesse	Host	<i>[Ben agrees several times as Jesse speaks.]</i> And he didn't. Because there isn't an answer. I mean, there may be an answer if you're a person of faith. And I don't—I don't think he was, and I wasn't then and am not now. But if you're a person of faith, that could be an answer for you. But otherwise, there isn't really an answer for that question. And yeah.
00:34:24	Ben	Guest	That's, uuuh, the biggest reason why I wrote that movie, because I love the idea that I'm writing a movie about something that no one

			can tell me if it's right or wrong. I love that idea. There's no fact checking on what happens when you pass away. So, I can write this and who knows, you know what I mean?
00:34:37	Jesse	Host	Well, Ben, I really appreciate the time you've taken to be on <i>Bullseye</i> .
00:34:41	Ben	Guest	Thank you for having me, Jesse.
00:34:42	Jesse	Host	Thank you, Ben.

Ben Schwartz. *Sonic the Hedgehog* is playing literally everywhere, but you don't have to hear it from me. I heard it from my kids. I bet if you have kids, you heard it from them. We didn't get to talk about it much—Ben is also starring in another new movie. A coming of age dramedy called *Standing Up Falling Down*, where he plays alongside Billy Crystal. You can see that, now, in select theaters. And his two-man improv act with Thomas Middleditch, another brilliantly hilarious television actor who you might know from *Silicon Valley*, has been made into three Netflix specials—which will come to that service soon.

00:35:20	Music	Music	Jazzy music plays.
00:35:22	Jesse	Host	That's the end of another episode of <i>Bullseye</i> . <i>Bullseye</i> produced at MaximumFun.org world headquarters, overlooking MacArthur Park in beautiful Los Angeles, California—where our resident bird nerd, Kevin Ferguson, has noticed that the winter migratory birds have arrived: including Northern shovelers, ring-necked ducks, and pied-billed grebes. Pied-billed grebes, coincidentally, are the bad guys on <i>Avenue 5</i> .

The show is produced by speaking into microphones. Our producer is Kevin Ferguson: the guy who made me say the phrase *[articulating]* "pied-billed grebes". Jesus Ambrosio is our associate producer. We get help from Casey O'Brien. Our production fellow is Jordan Kauwling. Our interstitial music is by Dan Wally, also known as DJW. Our theme song is by The Go! Team. Thanks to them and their label, Memphis Industries, for letting us use it.

And one last thing—we have recorded a lot of interviews on *Bullseye*, over the years. Why not check out an interview with... *Parks and Recreation* star, Nick Offerman? That's a hilarious and insightful one.

00:36:32	Promo	Promo	Okay, that's about it. Just remember: all great radio hosts have a signature sign off. Speaker: <i>Bullseye with Jesse Thorn</i> is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR.
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[Music fades out.]