

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.
00:00:13	Jesse Thorn	Host	<i>[Music fades out.]</i> 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	It's a pretty simple premise, one that has served as the backbone for dozens of movies and TV shows. You get a spaceship. It leaves Earth. It gets lost. And then the people on board have to deal with the consequences. That's basically the premise of <i>Avenue 5</i> , a new comedy on HBO.

[Music ends with a chorus of cheers.]

It's a show set in a not-that-distant future. Space tourism is booming with cruises. And one of the cruise ships gets knocked off-course. A trip that was supposed to take eight weeks is now gonna take three years. Maybe longer. It's also troubling that they can't figure out exactly how long it's gonna take, now. So, what makes *Avenue 5* special, among all these lost-in-space shows? Well, it was created by Armando Iannucci, for one. Iannucci creates comedies about people in power and the broken systems over which they preside. In *Veep*, *In the Loop*, and *The Thick of It*, that meant image obsessed politicians and their handlers. In his movie, *The Death of Stalin*, it's the polit bureau scrambling for power after a longtime leader dies.

In *Avenue 5*—well, basically it's everyone. The Captain, played by Hugh Laurie—who literally doesn't know how his ships works. The vain, stupid space cruise company owner, played by Josh Gad. The entitled customers, who want free food credits to make up for the inconvenience of being lost in space. All of it very human, all of it super funny. One of my favorite characters on the show is Matt Spencer, who's the head of customer relations on the ship. He's played by my guest, Zach Woods. You might know Zach from *Silicon Valley*, where he played Jared, or *The Office*, where he played Gabe Lewis. On *Avenue 5*, Zach's character is—I mean, I don't wanna go overboard here, but he's kind of chaos in human form?

He is an ardent but cheerful nihilist. He doesn't really care about making things right with the ship's customers. And, as you're about to hear, he doesn't really mind that he's lost in space, either. Music swells and fades.

00:02:32	Sound Effect	Transition
00:02:33	Clip	Clip

Speaker 1: You know, if you don't start taking me seriously, everyone here is dead!

[Gasps from the crowd.]

Speaker 1: And you'll be first!

Speaker 2: *[Yelling in panic.]* What does that mean?!

Speaker 3: *[Inconsolable.]* I don't wanna die!

Matt Spencer: Right, right. What's any of it mean? This is fate! And it is freestyling with us. This is like jazz fate.

[Wailing from the crowd.]

Speaker 2: I hate jazz!

[Members of the crowd talk over each other.]

Speaker 4: And I hate fate.

Speaker 2: You got a point.

Speaker 5: *[Yelling.]* Hey! What are you so happy about?!

Matt: I'm a nihilist!

Speaker 5: No, you're not!

Matt: Whatever!

Speaker 5: *[Dejected and overwhelmed.]* Oh my god.

Matt: Everybody scream!

[Matt leads the crowd in loud screaming. His own screams mimic a kind of forced laughter.]

Music swells and fades.

00:03:00 Sound Effect Transition

00:03:01 Jesse Host

[They laugh.]

00:03:05 Zach Woods Guest Zach, welcome to *Bullseye*. It's nice to have you on the show. Thank you, I'm so excited.

00:03:06 Jesse Host

I was trying to figure out what this character's deal is. Because, in the first episode, I just assumed that he would be, you know, a supercilious customer service guy. That's sort of how it's set up, a little. And it immediately goes bananas.

[They laugh.]

How would you, as the world is turning upside-down—almost literally, on this spaceship—how would you characterize the way that your character, who is the boss of customer service for the spaceship, reacts?

00:03:42 Zach Guest

Well, the way I thought about it was—I think he's sort of like a friendly nihilist. He's someone who really doesn't believe in anything at all, except to try to be nice to people. And I think he's well intentioned, but I think his world view is so askew, that when he tries to be comforting to people in distressing situations, it makes them feel catastrophically worse. So, I think—like, yeah good

intentions, bad execution. I guess—I think when the, sort of, premise of the show was laid out to me, the idea that everybody would be so distressed by the fact that this space cruise is knocked off course and, you know, they're gonna be stuck in space for an indeterminate amount of time made sense. But I was also thinking, like—well, for what kind of person would that actually be a gift?

[Jesse laughs.]

And, as an anxious person in my real life, there's been times where when—when a crisis actually happens—it can kind of be soothing, in a way. Because my interior sense of the world is finally synchronized with my exterior experience of the world. *[Laughing.]* In other words, I've been expecting the catastrophe, so when the catastrophe comes, it's like, "Aah." The relaxation of harmony between expectation and event. And I think, for him, he's someone who always sort of thought, "This is all BS." Like, titles and clothes and... customer service. It's all kind of a paper-thin façade. So, when that is revealed through the ship being knocked off course, I think for him it's a relaxing exhalation.

[Zach agrees several times as Jesse talks.]

00:05:10	Jesse	Host	I feel like your character is almost, like, backstroking through the chaos. Like, it's really a delight to him. Not out of malice, but in fact the opposite: that it's like, "Well, of course it's madness! Nothing has meaning! Everything is madness!" <i>[Laughs.]</i>
00:05:31	Zach	Guest	Yes, exactly. There's a Ru Paul quote that I really like, which is, "We're all born naked. The rest is just drag." And I think that's, like, a very resonant—that always resonated with me and I think would definitely resonate with character Matt, on <i>Avenue 5</i> . Because, right? There's just this—everyone pretends they're an adult, but there's <i>[laughing]</i> no adults! There's no structure! There's no, you know. I mean, it's all—the choreography is already so shabby, and no one knows it that well.
00:06:00	Jesse	Host	Did you have a career plan? There's this thing about actors where, when you study acting, they really—they really hit you hard with, like, "Make sure this is your passion."
00:06:13	Zach	Guest	I always hated that. When people are like, "If you can do anything else, do it." You know, you hear that. Like, people in acting conservatories say—the teacher will, you know, give them a long, hard, flinty stare and then say, "If you can do anything else, do it." It's like, I don't know! I don't think that's true! Like, <i>[laughing]</i> people can do all kinds of things! Like... I just think the idea that you have to be just, like, completely identified with this one, major part of your life, I think is kind of kooky and... I don't know. It just—it also is like making a certain amount of, like, bizarre emotional clarity a prerequisite for a creative life. And I think that's dopey. And a little self-important, too.

Like, I remember taking an acting class, once when I was 16, and *[laughing]* the teacher really said, "Look out the window. See those people down there? They don't have to be sensitive in the way that we're sensitive. They don't experience the world in the same way." It was like the worst acting advice in the world, which is, like, *[laughing]* erect an ego-based barrier between you and the people of the—the actual Earth! It was so crazy! So, um—yeah. Luckily, I

actually never planned to be an actor. I thought I was gonna be a musician, when I was a kid. I played trumpet. And then I got braces and I couldn't really play anymore. And it opened up all this free time, when I used to be practicing trumpet. 'Cause I would practice hours and hours.

And then I started taking improv classes, just sort of as a lark. And I really liked it. And I really wanted to just keep doing that. I remember, at The Upright Citizens Brigade Theatre—which, back when I started, was a very small, little theatre in Chelsea.

00:07:50 Jesse Host
00:07:51 Zach Guest

How old were you?

I was 16. I would take the train from Pennsylvania up to New York, and I had this sort of secret comedy life. I never told anyone I went to school with that I would do that, 'cause I liked having this—I don't know. *[Laughing.]* Shadow, you know? Shadow life as an improv person, in New York.

But Katie Dippold, who wrote *The Heat* and *Ghostbusters* and a bunch of things—she was also taking classes, then. And I remember having an IM conversation with her, where she was like, “What would your dream be? What would you wanna do, if you could do anything?”

And I was like, “I think I would wanna temp during the day, so that I could do improv at night.”

[They laugh.]

And I really meant it! It wasn't some bohemian, you know, affectation. *[Laughing.]* I really thought, “I just wanna do improv!” But then I started doing commercials to make money and then commercials led to an agent. An agent led to my first movie role. And things sort of snowballed in that way. But I think if I'd had designs to be an actor, I would have, sort of, talked myself out of it in a weird way, possibly.

00:08:51 Jesse Host

How long did it take you to get from where you lived, in Pennsylvania, to the UCB in Chelsea?

00:08:55 Zach Guest

It was about two hours, door to door. And I would take the New Jersey transit up and back, but because I was on a high school schedule, I would get back really late at night from doing shows. You know, I'd go out to Williamsburg. So, to get to Williamsburg's like—add another 45 minutes. And then I would get back, but I'd be waking up at six in the morning. So, I would drive home from the Hamilton Train Station, in the winter, with the windows down and I'd crank the AC and I would blast music, because I would be falling asleep. I'd be so tired from not sleeping! So, I'd just—oh, and I'd scream!

I mean, if you had—if somebody had seen me, it would have looked as psychotic as it was.

[Zach agrees several times as Jesse talks.]

00:09:40 Jesse Host

When you were 16 years old—

[Zach wheezes a laugh.]

—and you walked into... leaving aside the 101 class. The first class. Which is often, I think, full of advertising guys and people who heard it might be neat to take an improv class, and so on and so forth. God bless them all. But let's say, 201: the class you take after the first class, where everybody is at least moderately serious about doing improv. How many of the other people in your class were under 18?

00:10:20 Zach Guest

None.

00:10:21 Jesse Host

How did the other people feel about the—did they know you were a 16-year-old?

00:10:27 Zach Guest

Well, first of all, back then UCB was enough of a, sort of, underground thing that it actually wasn't that many advertising people. It was weirdos. It was like—it was a real bizarro collection. I remember, my first—in that 101, there was a guy who said—you know, you went around and said, "Okay, why are you taking the class?" at the beginning. And he said, "Uh, well. My ex is a comedian, and I have a deep hostility towards people who do comedy. And my therapist recommended I take this class."

[They laugh.]

00:11:01 Jesse Host

That was the first day of the first class! But when it came—
It was just—shows his knife.

00:11:02 Crosstalk Crosstalk

Zach: Yeah!

Jesse: Puts it away.

00:11:04 Zach Guest

Zach: It was the most ominous.

And he was kind of this, like, slightly shriveled guy. You know, he was not an imposing guy, but somehow that made him more scary, when he said that. You know, we went around the circle and everyone's saying why they came to the class, and then it came to me and I said... well, first of all, they say, "How did—what brought you to the class?" And I went, "Train."

[Jesse laughs.]

00:11:28 Jesse Host

And the improv teacher, Billy Merritt—who is like a lion of improv—
[Laughing.] I took a class from him, once!

00:11:30 Zach Guest

He's a sweetheart.

[Jesse agrees.]

He was so gentle with me. Like, later I was teaching classes. If someone had said that, I would have been like, "Alright! We're moving on." Like, but he was—he was like, "Okay, but what really brought you to the class?"

And I said, "Well, listen, I know I look like a child, but I have a glandular disorder and I'm actually in my late 40s." And everyone laughed like a pity laugh, which was generous. And then I went, "No. I'm serious." And then everyone got really quiet. And then I said, "Naaah! I'm just playing!" And then, again, there was like a—a diminished pity laugh. I was such a schmuck.

I was just, like, so horrible and I really owe so much to Billy Merritt for not—for having the compassion to be like, “Oh, this is an insecure 16-year-old trying, in vain, to be funny at the beginning of a comedy class.” But then, pretty quickly, I feel like I assimilated to the culture of that school. And by the second class, it was—it was really nice. I never felt like anyone was giving me the eye because I was kid. It was such a, sort of, motley crew, that I feel like if you were reasonably good at it, people were nice to you.

00:12:44 Jesse Host How old were you when you started doing shows there that weren’t associated with classes?

00:12:50 Zach Guest I think I was 17 or 18. It was right before I graduated high school. Yeah, I was on this improv team called Dillinger. After that, I was kind of cooked. I was like, “Okay, well. This is what I’m—I am gonna move to New York and I’m gonna do this.” And, yeah. That was that.

00:13:07 Jesse Host *[Zach agrees several times as Jesse talks.]*
That is something that people fight for! To get on one of those teams. Grown adults.

[Zach laughs.]

30-year-olds! 29-year-olds knifing each other over that, metaphorically. And you were *[laughing]* 17 and in high school!

00:13:36 Zach Guest When did you—did you, throughout high school, did you never invite high school people to one of your shows?

00:13:37 Jesse Host Never.

00:13:38 Zach Guest Not even one time?

Not even one time. I told one friend of mine that I was doing it, but—yeah, I don’t know. I think I felt... a little protective of that experience. Maybe I was just hoarding it for myself. Maybe I was—I liked the version of me in New York better than the version of me in Fairless Hills, Pennsylvania. And so, I sort of wanted to keep the one from contaminating the other, you know? I’m not exactly sure why I didn’t talk about it, but I never did.

00:14:10 Jesse Host What did your parents have to say about you taking a two-hour train ride, after school? I mean, honestly, I had read that you had done this as a teenager, and I just assumed that you were taking 11AM Saturday classes, exclusively.

[Zach chuckles.]

00:14:37 Zach Guest The fact that you were literally doing it after school and coming home after an eight o’clock show, on a two-hour long train ride, when you had school the next day is bananas!

Yeah, and often the shows were *[laughing]* later than that! I mean, one thing that was, I think, fairly specific about my upbringing is my parents sort of treated us all like little adults, from the time that we were pretty young. And I think that has its pros and cons, but one of the pros is that I felt pretty comfortable looking after myself. And I think they felt pretty comfortable sending me off into the *[laughs]*—into the New York City night.

I mean... um... you know, they really trusted me, and the truth is, like, I never did heroin or, you know, got into a fistfight. But, I’m just

saying like, I never got into, like, a bad situation. So, I don't know. It's interesting. Like, with all the helicopter kind of parenting, there's probably a middle ground between letting your kid be, like, driving home with the windows cracked and screaming and—you know—monitoring their every move and, like, moving to the town where they go to college. But I would rather be on the former end of the spectrum, rather than the latter.

00:15:45 Jesse Host
00:15:49 Zach Guest

Were you also doing non-improv acting?

No, I wasn't doing—but I would go to Philadelphia, too, twice a week. So, it was like—'cause I was doing brass ensemble. I was still trying to play trumpet, 'cause I felt like it would help me get into college. So, *[laughing]* I go to New York for twice a week, and then Philadelphia twice a week. So, I spent a lot of time on trains. High school was, by far, the hardest I've ever worked in my entire life. Like, no competition. I would, like—everything subsequent to that has felt like a vacation. Like, it was so exhausting.

But I wasn't doing any other acting. It was just the improv stuff. Oh! I'm talking too much, probably, but—okay.

00:16:25 Crosstalk Crosstalk

Jesse: This is literally—

Jesse and Zach: *[In unison.]*—an interview.

Zach: Yeah.

00:16:29 Zach Guest

Jesse: You're being interviewed. Yeah.

[Laughs.] I did take this summer intensive acting class. And I remember, it was—this is *[laughing]* the same program where the—where the woman said the thing about, "You're basically better than the people below, on the street." There was another teacher who was talking about, like, substitutions. This guy drove a Harley to his, you know—and taught. He was one of these guys who lords over his kingdom of the acting class.

And I remember him talking about how he'd seen this movie about a town that had dragons. It was like a fantasy dragon movie. And how there was a line in it, where the hero says to the council, "Lucky be a village that has heroes, but pitiable be a village that needs them." Which I still don't really know what that means. It sounds like something, but I actually don't think it means anything. But he started talking about—*[breaks on a laugh]* he started talking about a news story he'd read about a middle eastern village where someone had been sentenced to be assaulted. And he started about this. It was one of the most grisly things I've ever heard in my life. So upsetting. And he starts talking about it and talking about it, and he's kind of working himself into a froth over this, like, actual—like—crime against humanity.

And then when he's worked himself into, like, a total froth, he goes, "*[Beat.]* Lucky be a village that has heroes! But pitiable be a village that needs them!" And at that moment, I was like, "This is sick!" Like, *[laughing]* "I want no part of this!" And I didn't come back to an acting class for, like, eight years.

00:18:03 Jesse Host

[Shocked.] Wow!

00:18:04 Zach Guest Yeah. Yeah, it was... *[laughs]* so screwed up! It was so weird that he chose such a—such a abjectly awful story and then combined it with the dumbest, like, dragon dialogue. Yeah. I didn't like it.

00:18:24 Jesse Host What was the first big part that you got?

00:18:27 Zach Guest The first big part I got was a movie called *In the Loop*, that Armando Iannucci—who made *Avenue 5* and *Veep* and all these different shows—cast me in. That was such an incredible experience, because it was shot in England, in this old army barracks. And it was with James Gandolfini. And I remember taking off from JFK and flying over New York, on the way to London. And just feeling, like, dizzy with gratitude. And then landing in London, and they put us up in this—I don't know how an independent movie could afford this, but we were in this, like, old Victorian hotel. And I would just wander around the streets of London crying, basically. Like, tears running down my face, because it was so—it was so beyond anything I had ever imagined for myself.

And James Gandolfini was this incredibly, like, soulful, supportive guy. He took us out to dinner and to shows and was just, like, such a host! And, you know, when he had nothing to gain from that. And, yeah. It was such a crazy feeling. And then, when I started getting—I got a job on *The Office*, after that, and at some point I realized, like—I don't really know what I'm doing! Like, I have no technique! I've never studied it, because I was freaked out by the dragon guy!

So, then I found this old acting coach—not old in years, but like, who I'd also met at that same program, who I actually loved. And I was like, "Can you help me learn how to act?! Because I'm getting these opportunities, and I feel like I don't know what I'm doing." So, any time that I wasn't working, I would fly to New York and we would do scenes from, like, Tennessee Williams plays, and I took, like, voice classes and Alexander Technique and all these different—I sort of made my own little patchwork conservatory. Because I just—it's going back to that feeling of fraudulence. I was just, like, "I need to have some sort of qualifications, here! Because otherwise I'm gonna totally... be horrible."

00:20:23 Jesse Host We'll hear the rest of my interview with Zach Wood when we come back from a quick break. Still to come: we'll talk about whether or not he feels comfortable working alongside real, professional actors now that he is—himself—a real, professional actor. It's *Bullseye*, from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

00:20:40 Promo Promo **Music:** Cheerful music.

Ramtin Arablouei: Astrology is as old as civilization itself. And today, it's easier to access than ever before, thanks to the internet and smartphones.

Rund Abdelfatah: This week on *Throughline*: how astrology almost went extinct and made a remarkable comeback.

Ramtin: *Throughline*, from NPR—the podcast where we go back in time—

Rund: —to understand the present.

00:21:01	Promo	Promo	<p><i>[Music fades out.]</i> Music: Classical orchestral music.</p> <p>John Hodgman: Hey, everyone! It's I, John Hodgman of the <i>Judge John Hodgman</i> podcast.</p> <p>Elliott Kalan: And I, Elliott Kalan of the <i>Flop House</i> podcast.</p> <p>John: And we've made a whole new podcast! A 12-episode special miniseries called <i>I, Podius</i>. In which we recap, discuss, and explore the very famous 1976 BBC miniseries about Ancient Rome called <i>I, Claudius</i>! We've got incredible guests such as Gillian Jacobs, Paul F. Tompkins, as well as star of <i>I, Claudius</i> Sir Patrick Stewart! And his son! Non-Sir Daniel Stewart.</p> <p>Elliott: Don't worry, Dan, you'll get there someday.</p> <p>John: <i>I, Podius</i> is the name of the show! Every week from MaximumFun.org for only 12 weeks. Get 'em at MaximumFun.org, or wherever you get your podcasts.</p>
00:21:47	Jesse	Host	<p><i>[Music fades out.]</i> It's <i>Bullseye</i>. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest, Zach Woods, stars alongside Hugh Laurie on the TV show <i>Avenue 5</i>. It's airing now, on HBO.</p> <p>I wanna play a funny clip from your first movie, <i>In the Loop</i>—which is such a great movie. Written and directed by the guy who created the show that you're currently on, Armando Iannucci, it's a spinoff of a similarly great television show called <i>The Thick of It</i>. And your character is named Chad. He is a junior staffer at the State Department—the United States State Department. And in this scene, he is confronting a political advisor who's named Liza, played by Anna Chlumsky, and she wrote a paper condemning the government's buildup to war, that is now making the rounds at various government offices. And Chad is giving her the business over it.</p>
00:22:39	Sound Effect	Transition	<p>Music swells and fades.</p>
00:22:40	Clip	Clip	<p>Liza: Hey.</p> <p>Chad: Hey, I just want to say congratulations. Your paper got a major citation. You must be psyched that Karen brought it up.</p> <p>Liza: Yeah, well that was—you know—her call. Not mine.</p> <p>Chad: Yes. You couldn't write a paper that clashes more violently with the current climate than the one you wrote if you were trying. And it seems like you almost were trying.</p> <p>Liza: <i>[Objecting with an attempt at humor.]</i> I wasn't trying! Believe me.</p> <p>Chad: Okay. You're like the woman from <i>The Omen</i>. You've given birth to a demon, and now it's gonna kill you.</p>

Liza: You probably identify with the kid from *The Omen*, right?

Chad: Ooh!

00:23:07 Clip Clip

Liza: So, you're an only child, aren't you?

Chad: I gotta say, I—I don't understand how my parents' limited reproductive ability reflects badly on me. I'm the sperm that made it. So. *[Chuckles.]*

Speaker: Liza.

Liza: I'm being called by our boss.

Chad: Oh, okay! Retreat!

Liza: Thank you.

Chad: See you later.

Liza: Yeah! Have fun with yourself.

00:23:22 Sound Effect Transition

Chad: Okay, have fun with your career kryptonite. Music swells and fades.

00:23:23 Zach Guest

[They laugh.] Jesus.

00:23:25 Jesse Host

[Jesse really struggles to get it together.]

You—you have been given a lot of parts where your job is to gently mutter something horrible.

00:23:36 Zach Guest

[Cackles.] That's very funny. Yeah, I guess that's true. Yeah.

00:23:43 Jesse Host

I would say, like, two late motifs in your career—besides, of course, being hilarious. A very gifted actor, and so forth. Are you—your job, being a guy with soulful eyes, who therefore can say horrible things...

[Zach laughs.]

And also, people saying mean things to you on camera about *[laughing]* how you look.

[They both laugh. Zach really loses it.]

00:24:11 Zach Guest

Those two are, like, what ties your whole career together.

Sure! Exactly! Those—that's—those are my, uh... those are the two horses pulling my cart.

[They dissolve into laughter again.]

00:24:20 Jesse Host

[Zach agrees several times as Jesse speaks.]

One of the things I liked about your character on *Silicon Valley*—besides that he is so... deeply invested in taking care of everyone around him, despite apparently being a sort of venal business bro—is that, over the years that the show existed, you would just reveal horrific traumas casually. *[Laughs.]* Just, little—like, "I know what it's like to only be able to save half your family," I think you said at one point? If I'm remembering correctly.

00:24:58	Zach	Guest	<p>Yeah, I mean I really like—the character I played on <i>The Office</i> was this guy named Gabe, and I felt like the joke of Gabe was that, like, he’s all ego. He’s so fragile that everything becomes an exercise in ego, and everything is a chance for him to either lose or gain respect. And after playing that, I was kind of, like, interested in the opposite joke—which is, like, “What if there was someone who was born with, like, an almost pathological lack of ego? Where all they care about is other people.” And the joke of Jared, I think, is sort of—of the character on <i>Silicon Valley</i>—is like, “Yeah, what if you—what if you were just born missing that piece?”</p> <p>If that were true, even times people had treated you <u>really, really</u> viciously, you would just have a sort of <i>[laughing]</i> bemused reaction to it! You would never—there was something I said... Oh, I think in the finale, I said something about, like, “I had a foster mother who thought I was a demon, and she tried to kill me—” Or, no, no. “I had a foster mother who thought I was a devil and wanted to kill me. I think it was really traumatic for her.”</p> <p><i>[They laugh.]</i></p>
00:26:02	Jesse	Host	<p>I thought that was such a great line they wrote. I’m gonna play a clip of my guest, Zach Wood’s, character Jared, on <i>Silicon Valley</i>. This is from the sixth season of the show, and basically—you know—we talked about how generally calm and deferential he is, as he deals with the man-children that constitute this startup company. But in this scene, we hear Richard—who’s the company’s founder—pushing Jared one step too far.</p>
00:26:29	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:26:30	Clip	Clip	<p>Jared: I outta knock your teeth out. You <i>[censored]</i> me in my <i>[censored]</i>.</p> <p>Richard: <i>[Panicked.]</i> I—I—I—I—I—I—</p> <p><i>[The sound of furniture being shoved out of the way.]</i></p> <p>Richard: I—I didn’t mean anything!</p> <p>Jared: I was debased! <i>[Shouting.]</i> You think I’m scared to catch a case, on some bull<i>[censored]?!?</i></p> <p>Richard: I—I—I’m, sorry, Jared! I—I didn’t mean it! Okay? I—I’m sorry, Courtney, I didn’t mean it!</p> <p>Jared: <i>[Furious.]</i> You keep her name out of your skanky, little mouth! You little, little <i>[censored]!</i></p> <p>Richard: Hey, hey, look! This is a place of business—oh!</p>
00:26:51	Sound Effect	Transition	<p>Speaker 2: Oh my god! Don’t shoot me! Music swells and fades.</p>
00:26:52	Jesse	Host	<p><i>[They chuckle.]</i></p> <p>He grabs a BB-gun!</p>

00:26:56 Crosstalk Crosstalk **Zach:** A pink BB-gun.

00:26:58 Zach Guest **Jesse:** *[Laughing.]* It's a pink BB-gun. Yeeeah. That was fun to shoot. The scene. But I guess, also, the BB-Gun.

[Jesse stumbles into startled laughter.]

But it was—we were shooting a—we were—we were—that was *[laughing]* truly no pun intended! I realized as I was saying it. Um. That was fun, because I started—I always thought that Jared had some sort of relationship to the penal system. Like, at different times I would improvise that, like, I spent most Mother's Days at San Quentin, 'cause my mom was incarcerated. Or, like, my grandmother, I think, was in San Quentin. I don't know if that ever even made it into the show. But I just thought Jared would be very conversant in prison slang, so before we—we were on set, shooting that scene, and between takes I was, like, looking up prison slang.

00:27:56 Jesse Host There was one where it's like, "You wanna dance on the blacktop?" Which I think means, just like, fight. There's all these, like, *[laughing]* slang from incarcerated people, that I tried to integrate 'cause I thought he probably learned those from his grandma. I have to say, I had to stop watching *Silicon Valley*, because it gave me too much business anxiety.

00:28:01 Zach Guest That's funny.

00:28:02 Jesse Host But I think it also gave me some kind of cultural anxiety? And I wonder what it was like for you to be on that show for so long—it's a wonderful show.

00:28:12 Zach Guest Thanks.

00:28:13 Jesse Host To be on that show for so long, in that polar fleece vest, living in the space in between people admiring tech business people and people... hating the consequences of tech business people.

00:28:33 Zach Guest Yeeeah. I think that's—and, sort of, over the lifetime of the show, the public sentiment towards tech, I think, really shifted! I think, at the beginning, it was sort of like, "Oh, these guys are silly with their, like, ping-pong tables at work." And by the end, it was like, "Oh, these people have, like, pulled at the thread of democracy and unraveled it." I mean, that was, like, a fascinating—and one thing I really liked about the final season, is I thought the writers did a good job of making it a little bit darker! And not just being like, "Look at these kooky nerds with all their money!" And being kind of like—

What was it that—was it Facebook who had the slogan, "Move fast and break things?"

[Jesse confirms.]

I heard an interview with Mike Judge, actually, where he was saying, like, "That's a lot less cute after they moved fast and broke things." And I thought that was a really good point. One of the writers on the show was talking about—I thought this was so interesting. He said, "A lot of the tech innovations have been by socially maladjusted people covering their blind spots." So, in other words, he was saying, like, Mark Zuckerberg had a hard time making friends, so he created Facebook. You know, by—I think he

said the people in Google felt like no one else was smart enough, so they created Google. There are all of these apps that are basically the assistive devices for people who are socially inept, in some way. But that, now, they've become monetized and have proliferated in such a way that we are now living in the coping strategies of a few nerds, is the way he described it, I believed.

Which, I thought that was such an interesting idea. It's like we're all using their equipment, whether or not we needed it. And then I think our muscles—some of those muscles are atrophying, because we're using this assistive device for a skill that we might have had in the first place, to begin with. Right? Does that make sense?

00:30:19 Jesse Host

Yeah. I mean, I think that Mike Judge—as a creator—like, I really loved his movie *Extract*.

[Zach agrees.]

Which may be his least... remembered movie. A really great one. And, of course, *Office Space* had this very undercurrent of despair. And, like, terror at being caught in systems. You know? Social systems and economic systems, both. Like, just this kind of dread at the *[laughing]* heart of the...

00:30:50 Zach Guest

Well, he said something early on, when we were making the show, that I thought was really interesting. Which is that he had—before he made *Office Space*, he had an office job which he hated. But he felt lucky to have it, which made him feel even worse. In other words, he didn't think he was too good for it. He thought, "I'm lucky to have this job and I hate it. So, what do I do with that?"

[Laughing.] And I thought that was such an interesting thing. It wasn't that he thought he was better.

You know, and also I think that's the thing about a satire that I like: it's the opposite of that acting teacher looking down at the people saying we're deeper than them. I think Mike doesn't feel better than the people he satirizes. It's not scornful! I feel like the, sort of, point of view of a lot of the stuff he's made is, kind of, "Aren't we all ridiculous? And aren't these systems depressing?" *[Laughs.]* You know? And I think that's a—that's a form of satire I can get on board for more than the, sort of, puritanical stuff.

00:31:43 Jesse Host

So, your first film role was on a set with Armando Iannucci.

[Zach confirms.]

And he has a very unusual way of doing things. For folks who don't know his work, he also made *Veep*, for HBO. And he's the creator of *Avenue 5*, which is the show that you're on, now. And he's also made several wonderful movies and some great TV shows, in England. How would you describe what he does to make a show?

00:32:13 Zach Guest

Well, first of all, the process is extremely collaborative in a way that's really nice—where you'll get a script, but it's sort of a preliminary document. And it's already really funny, because he has this whole comedy mafia of these writers like Tony Roach and he worked with Jesse Armstrong and Simon Blackwell and all these different people. So, you'll get this massive script and from that, you'll go into rehearsal. And you'll play with it and you'll improvise,

and you'll talk. Then they'll do another script that incorporates some of that stuff.

He describes it as, like, making a chicken stock—where you pour in all of these ingredients and then you boil it down, and then you pour in even more ingredients and then you boil it down. So, it's sort of a reduction that happens over time until you've got the stuff that eventually makes it—

00:32:56 Jesse Host
00:32:59 Zach Guest

It's just a long list of creative profanities. *[Laughs.]*

Yes! Exactly! *[Chuckles.]* Then he just skims off the obscenity, and that's—that's that. But then you shoot, and the way he shoots is very actor-friendly in that, like, there's no marks. Like... probably people listening know what marks are, but—

00:33:13 Jesse Host

It's like when there is a shot that needs to be composed or when there is lighting that needs to focus attention in a certain place, an actor has to stand in a particular place at a particular moment for that to happen. And that will literally often be marked on the floor with tape. And that's a—that's what a mark is.

00:33:32 Zach Guest

Yeah, someone told me if you watch old Spencer Tracey movies, he does this kind of like—like, sort of, folksy, soulful thing where he, like, has his hands in his pockets and'll look down, and it's, like, a very charming idiosyncrasy of his. But someone told me that's just him trying to find his mark, so that he's—*[laughs]* he's in focus!

[Jesse laughs and agrees.]

I don't know if that's true or not, but anyway. Armando doesn't have any marks. And there's no real blocking, and you can go wherever you want, and you can say whatever you want. At least, when we were shooting *In the Loop*, you know—television's structured a little differently, but we would do these looong takes where we'd play around and improvise. And at one point a camera guy—I remember sort of whispering to me, like, *[quietly]* "Hey, would you mind just, like, kind of hugging the desk, there?"

And Armando came in and was like, "No! No! No." You know. It was a very, sort of like, free-swim feeling to the whole thing. It's a weird introduction to shooting, because shooting has very little to do with that, actually. It's—yeah. It's much more formal.

00:34:22 Jesse Host

I can only imagine what the transition from that to—even, I mean, look, *The Office* has—had an aesthetic that was different from most American television shows, but nonetheless, if you're shooting any single camera television program, there's just a lot to get through in a week! 'Cause you're—got a week to make an episode! And for that reason, I'm sure everything has to be pretty on-target.

00:34:51 Zach Guest

Yeah! Although, I've been lucky in that I've just, sort of, leap-frogged from, like, show to show to show where they're extremely receptive. I've—I haven't been on any, kind of like, autocratic—like, auteur shows. I mean, a lot of—like, I think Armando or Mike Judge or Alec Berg, those people are auteurs in a sense, but they don't carry themselves like that. Which is a relief and a gift. Because no one would ever—I would never question them. If Armando was like, "You have to hit this mark and say this line and be this—" You know. It's like, well—I saw *Death of Stalin*, I'm not gonna argue with you. You know?

[Jesse chuckles.]

Like, you're—these are—you're really talented! Like—but they're, um, receptive! And I've found, over my fairly short career that I... that confidence correlates with collaborativeness. That people who know that they're good feel less clingy about control. Because they understand that their taste is the ultimate, sort of, filter through which everything is run. And so, they're interested and they're curious. And the people who I feel are, sort of, either less experienced or less confident are the ones who rule with an iron fist. And I think the results are worse.

00:36:01 Jesse Host

Do you, at this point in your career, feel comfortable belonging in the room?

00:36:07 Zach Guest

[Beat.] Yeah? In a certain way. That's a good question. Feel comfortable belonging in the room—you mean, in the sense that, like, I don't just feel like I snuck in through the back door? I guess I still feel like I snuck in through the back door, but I guess now I feel like most people snuck in through the back door. It's [laughing] not that I have—it's not that I have greater faith in my own merit, it's that I have less faith in—in others. No, that's not true. I think... I think I'm a little more comfortable with "good enough". Which is not to say phoning it in or not trying really hard. I just think it's not really about me.

It's a little—you know, one of the things—I even think about this, like—I was talking to somebody about this with dating, once. And I was saying, like, when you're in your, like, early 20s, dating is excruciating. Because every time you go on a date, you're audition for your self-worth. It's like—am I loveable? Am I loveable? No?! Oh god. Yes?! YEAH! You know? And it's like—and nothing can sustain that weight. I mean, it's so freighted with consequence. You know. But... as you get older, and as you learn who you actually are... it kind of just becomes an interesting... way of connecting with other people. And you don't feel like all your money is on, you know, lucky number eight.

And I feel that creatively, too. I just feel—I don't know. Maybe, like, my self-worth is a little bit more distributed, now. So. I don't know.

[Jesse cackles.]

00:37:36 Jesse Host

Yeah.

Well, Zach, thank you very much for coming and being on the show. It was very nice to meet you and get to talk to you.

00:37:41 Zach Guest

Thank you. I'm like a huge fan of this show. I absolutely love listening to it, and I was so touched that you would have me on!

00:37:49 Jesse Host

Zach Woods! *Avenue 5* is super, super, super funny. Its debut season is airing right now, on HBO. I have really been loving it. Go check it out. And! It just got picked up for a second season. So, you know. Watch season one now, and then watch that one—you know—in whatever. A year or whatever.

Also, can I just say if you have not seen the movie *In the Loop*, which was Zach's feature film debut, and was written and directed by the creator of *Avenue 5*—Armando Iannucci—I genuinely think it

00:38:30 Music Music
00:38:32 Jesse Host

is one of the five or so best comedies of the last 15 years. It is so brilliant. So hilarious. So, watch *In the Loop*, too.

Jazzy transition music.

That's the end of another episode of *Bullseye*. *Bullseye* 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 *Avenue 5*.

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...Armando Iannucci? We've had more than one of them. He is always brilliant and insightful. And he is the creator—yes, that's right, the creator—of the television show *Avenue 5*.

Okay, that's about it. Just remember: all great radio hosts have a signature sign off.

00:39:50 Promo Promo

Speaker: *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR.

[Music fades out.]