

00:00:00	Music	Transition	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.
00:00:12	Music	Transition	<i>[Music fades out.]</i> “Huddle Formation” from the album <i>Thunder, Lightning, Strike</i> by The Go! Team.
00:00:19	Jesse Thorn	Host	It’s <i>Bullseye</i> . I’m Jesse Thorn. It started as a book or... books—a series of memoirs written under the pen name James Harriot. The first of them was called <i>All Creatures Great and Small</i> . They tell the story of a Scottish veterinarian who moves out to the English countryside, the Yorkshire Dales specifically. It’s set in the 1930s, between the wars. In every chapter, Harriot drives around the Dales in a junky old car from farm to farm, appointment to appointment. He treats horses, cows, dogs, and it’s a book with a special kind of magic. Through Harriot, you get to know the farmers: quiet, reserved, gentle. You take in the details of their homes and the landscape. That book, the whole series, are among my favorite reads. And they inspired several movies and in the 1970s and ‘80s, a TV series called <i>All Creatures Great and Small</i> on the BBC.
			Maybe you hadn’t heard of it over here in the States. It was a classic in the UK and a success on PBS. Today, there’s a brand-new series based on the book. It premiered on Channel 5 in the UK, last year, where it was a huge smash. It just made its debut on PBS, here in the US.
			Like the books and TV show before it, it is gentle, funny, and bursting with love. I was lucky enough to get to talk with Ben Vanstone, who created the new show. Like the previous iterations, <i>All Creatures Great and Small</i> focuses on Harriot, the veterinarian. In this scene, James is on his way to a job interview. He’s taken a bus out to the countryside and gotten off at the stop he was supposed to. Or at least, he <u>thinks</u> he’s gotten off at the stop he was supposed to. He’s basically standing at a dirt road intersection in an enormous, empty set of fields. And eventually, a man in a horse drawn cart comes by.
00:02:16	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:02:17	Clip	Clip	<i>[The clop of hooves.]</i>
			James Harriot (<i>All Creatures Great and Small</i>): Excuse me—this is Darrowby, isn’t it?
			Speaker: Darrowby? No, you want bus for Darrowby.
			James: The bus... for... Darrowby.
			Speaker: You don’t have to talk funny.
			James: When’s the next one? I need to be Darrowby before four?
00:02:35	Sound Effect	Transition	Speaker: <i>[Getting further away.]</i> No more busses ‘til tonight! Music swells and fades.

00:02:36	Jesse	Host	Ben, welcome to <i>Bullseye</i> . I'm so happy to have you on the show.
00:02:39	Ben Vanstone	Guest	Hi. Lovely to be here.
00:02:40	Jesse	Host	So, was your first introduction to <i>All Creatures Great and Small</i> the book series or the television show from the '70s and '80s?
00:02:48	Ben	Guest	Yeah, it was the television show, actually. I sort of grew up with it, late '80s. It was sort of a Sunday night staple viewing for our family. And I didn't actually read the books until I was asked to pitch for this project. But I remember the previous series with great fondness, actually.
00:03:06	Jesse	Host	What was your like cultural relationship to those stories when you were a kid?
00:03:12	Ben	Guest	Well, I grew up in the country. So, I was—it was far more relatable to me, having that background. But even so, the sort of—the world of the Yorkshire Dales and the people within it are a breed to themselves. So, it still seems quite alien to me too, in many respects. But no, I wasn't a sort of urbanite. So, I was used to being around cows and sheep and, you know, we would often sort of go on bike rides through the fields. So, I was a country boy at heart. But it was very different country where I grew up. It was sort of in Berkshire, which is a lot flatter and nowhere near as dramatic as the Dales. Or as interesting, actually.
00:03:56	Jesse	Host	It's funny, 'cause there are two settings that I think of when I think of <i>All Creatures Great and Small</i> . One is the physical setting of the Yorkshire Dales, which are—you know, not just whatever—English pastoral, but a very particular kind of English pastoral as you just described. But also, the temporal setting is really significant and not just because it's a period piece, but I feel like—you know, even in reading the books, there is always this specter. And the books are just as gentle as the television show, but there is always this specter of a world before the war and a world after the war—that these were stories written the—you know, I guess the first one—the first book came out in 1970. So, they're written in a—in a sort of comfortably post-war world about a pre-war world, primarily. And that is an even bigger deal in England than it is in the United States. And I wonder how you experienced that divide through your, you know, parents and grandparents.
00:05:07	Ben	Guest	I mean, I think that whenever my grandparents spoke about the war, growing up, it felt so remote and it seemed so far away—in the very distant past. But as I've sort of grown older, in many ways it seems closer, because you become aware of—the swathe of history's not that great between then and now. And, you know, my granddad, his father fought and died in the second world war and his father before him fought in the first world war. And so, it does—you do feel very connected to that. And I think that the thing about <i>All Creatures</i> , as well, is that you—there's a sort of—the shadow of the first world war, but the looming sort of specter of the second on the horizon, as well. So, there's sort of—there's a whole generation that's been marked by what's come before and a generation that will be by what's coming down the track. I think it's a really interesting pivot point in history for that reason.
00:06:12	Jesse	Host	There's also a tension that is just starting to emerge in your show, but sort of runs through the books, which is that—you know, I think if I was gonna mark a line of the past and modernity in the United States, it might be around 1900. And these stories are happening in the—in the '30s. But it really—many of the tensions for James

Harriot are about the fact that he is entering an archaic world, even in the context of the 1930s.

[Ben agrees.]

And he, himself, is a modern man, but also a modern man in—you know, in the context of a modernity that is still revealing itself. Like, one of the things that happens in the books constantly is he says, “Well, we didn’t have this then.”

00:07:00 Ben Guest And it’s... the difficulty of that is that at the time that we are sort of showing on screen, he didn’t know that he would have it in the future, either. *[Chuckling.]* So, he’s sort of—

[Jesse agrees with a laugh.]

You—you can’t quite play it, because the book has that sort of retrospective tone and the knowledge of what comes after sort of really informs what he’s writing about in the time. But we have to very much sort of present the world as it was. But even then, Yorkshire and the sort of—the world that James goes to is out of time in a way from the—from the metropolitan settings that he’s sort of studied in and grown up in. And it’s still true today, actually. If you go to Yorkshire and those places in the Dales, there are places that feel that—like time has stood still and still feels slightly untouched and otherworldly. I mean, I think once you go inside those places, they’re—the truth is slightly different. They’ve all sort of got expensive paint and all been zhuzhed up very nicely and have Wi-Fi and the rest of it. But from the outside, they’re still those places that seem—yeah, just from another age.

00:08:16 Jesse Host The books and your show in particular are really fish-out-of-water stories.

[Ben agrees.]

They’re stories about an outsider. And you know, I noticed—for example—that you cast a conspicuously Scottish person to play the Edinburgh educated lead of your show. And, you know, the old show was wonderfully played by a Welshman. And I wonder like how you thought about conveying that kind of outside observer quality that James Harriot has in the context of a television show where you can’t just come out and say it.

00:08:58 Ben Guest Yeah, I mean, for the moment I sort of read the book and thought about approaching the show. I thought it had to start in Glasgow. It had to start with him—you know, I had an image which we—which we—isn’t quite the image that we captured, where we—because we don’t have sort of 1930s Glasgow to shoot. It was the—you know, originally when I first wrote it was that we sort of start on some green hills and as we sort of pan over them, we suddenly reveal a city. And we’re thrown—we’re not where we think we’re gonna be. We’re in this place actually where James comes from. Because I think you have to see what his grounding is before you can appreciate what the difference is. So, right from the outset, I was keen to make him Scottish and to show where he came from.

So, when we do land in the Dales—you know, we’re kind of with him. This is—this is a strange new world that we arrive in, too. So,

I—in a way, if we kind of just jump on in with James already there, we don't—we don't get to go on that journey with him to the Dales. That was something that I always wanted to sort of to show and capture. It—and it's something that's in the books as well. But it's in the prose of him sort of writing. You know, he describes where he came from and his background. But onscreen obviously we can't—we don't get to look into his thoughts. We don't get to just hear him say what his backstory was. So, it was always—for me—really so important to show those beginnings.

00:10:34 Jesse Host

One of the things that always struck me is that the fact that he is an outsider—especially in the books—allows him to so much more directly express his admiration for this place and its people.

[Ben agrees.]

You know. In a way that he *[chuckles]*—he, you know—he wouldn't be able to talk about it in those terms if he were, himself, from Yorkshire. But the fact that he is not allows him to kind of directly engage how beautiful he thinks this world is and how lucky he is—he feels to have been, you know, included in it.

00:11:15 Ben Guest

Yeah, I think that's true. I think it's true for all of us. Right? I think we take for granted the things we have around us and it's only when sort of people from the outside turn up and say how special it is that you kind of realize that. It's my—it's my experience living in London. I've—don't think I've ever done any of the tourist attractions or been around or seen the things which people who are not from London go and see and then they describe it to me and I kinda go, "Yeah. That is kind of extraordinary." But I've not actually it, because it's on our doorstep. So, having that perspective I think is really important to appreciate it.

00:11:52 Jesse Host

So, tell me how you cast the protagonist of your show and end up with somebody for whom this is their first professional screen credit?

00:12:02 Ben Guest

Uh, great casting director, Beverley Keogh. From the outset, we wanted James to be a fresh face—someone new, just like the character is. You know, in—you know, he's new to the Dales. We wanted to find someone that didn't necessarily have a lot of sort of track record behind them. We wanted him to be new to the audience as well as to the—to the—to the Dales, within the show. The—and then we just got incredibly lucky. We auditioned loads of different people for the part, saw lots of tapes. And Nick—it's funny, though. Nick just jumped out the screen straight away. It's kind of—I—we kind of knew it was him from very, very early on. And we still had to go through the process of, you know, you have a shortlist, and you whittle that down and then you send it around to everyone. But me and the other execs, we kind of looked at one of his first reels and were just like, "That's him. He's brilliant." And yeah. Thankfully, we—he hasn't proved us wrong. He's been fantastic.

But it's the same with Rachel who played Helen. I remember, I—that was the first tape I saw of possible Helens. And right then and there I was like, "Well, this is—she is absolutely perfect." And I thought that she would be great with Nick. And the other casting was slightly different. With Callum, he'd obviously done *The Durrells* and a couple of other things, but wasn't—yeah, I think he's done four seasons of *The Durrells*, so pretty seasoned. But still very

young. So, yeah. That—we brought this whole sort of breadth of experience, especially with Sam and Anna. But we got very lucky with all of them. They are a fantastic little family, actually. And when you watch the show, I really think you can feel how much they're enjoying playing with each other and getting on and it's—it really is true. They formed a wonderful little ensemble. It was—it was great to watch.

00:14:26 Jesse Host Do you have a favorite animal that you've worked with on the show so far?
00:14:28 Ben Guest *[Chuckles.]* I—uuuh, I mean—I—personally, I've not got to—
00:14:33 Jesse Host I mean, literally—I'm gonna be honest with you, Ben. I have on my notes here a question that I wrote and it's the only question that I wrote out all the way and it's, "Do you have a favorite cow?"

[Ben cackles.]

00:14:48 Ben Guest But I decided to broaden it to animal.
Yeah, I—*[laughing]* do I have a favorite cow? Unfortunately, I don't actually get to be near the animals very much. So, I've not interacted with them. On screen, I've got a—I've got a big soft spot for Clive the bull.

00:15:03 Jesse Host He's beautiful! I watched that episode last night with my wife and I literally remarked out loud—and I don't feel this way about bovines ordinarily—I was like, "What a beeeautiful animal!"

00:15:16 Ben Guest He is. Yeah, he is incredible. He's—and he's also very good-natured. Almost too good-natured that we kind of wanted to get a little bit more scariness from him and we're kind of like—he's just very cute and sweet! And you know, do we believe that he's that scary? But he is an incredible animal and I remember when it was wet, they were blow-drying him to make sure he looked perfect and it was—he's a—he's a sort of a high-class bull. Yeah. I—yeah, I won't say what happens to him, but he continues through the show, so you'll see him again.

00:15:53 Jesse Host We'll wrap up with Ben Vanstone in just a minute. Stick around. It's *Bullseye*, from [MaximumFun.org](https://www.maximumfun.org) and NPR.

00:16:01 Music Transition Bright, cheerful music.

00:16:02 Jesse Promo This message comes from NPR sponsor NerdWallet: a personal finance website and app that helps people make smarter money moves. Have new money goals this year? Whether you want to use credit card points to plan a family vacation abroad—once it's safe—or take advantage of low mortgage rates to refinance and save for your child's education, NerdWallet is the best place to shop financial products to help make your 2021 money goals happen. Discover and compare the smartest credit cards, mortgage lenders, and more at [NerdWallet.com](https://www.nerdwallet.com).

[Music fades out.]

00:16:38 Promo Clip **Music:** Light, rhythmic keyboard over drums plays in background.

Tre'vell Anderson: Hey there, beautiful people! Did you hear that good, good news?

Jarrett Hill: Something about the baby Jesus?

Tre'vell: Mm! He's coming back!

Jarrett: Or—do you mean—

[Tre'vell laughs.]

Jarrett: —the fact that Apple Podcasts has named *FANTI* one of the best shows of 2020?

Tre'vell: I mean, we already knew that we was hot stuff, but a little external validation never hurts. Okay?

Jarrett: *[Through laughter]* Hosted by me, writer and journalist Jarrett Hill.

Tre'vell: And me, the ebony enchantress myself—

[Jarrett laughs.]

Tre'vell: —Tre'vell Anderson.

Jarrett: *FANTI* is your home for complex conversations about the grey areas in our lives; the people, places, and things we're huge fans of but got some anti feelings toward.

Tre'vell: You name it, we *FANTI* it. Nobody's off-limits.

Jarrett: Check us out every Thursday on MaximumFun.org or wherever you get your slay-worthy audio.

[Music ends.]

00:17:24 Promo Clip

Music: Upbeat synth music.

Maddie Sofia: If you're into science but you need a break from the corona virus, NPR *Shortwave* has your back, whether we're talking about how scientists measure Mount Everest or spiders that hang out underwater, we promise you'll have fun and learn something! Subscribe to *Shortwave*, the daily science podcast from NPR.

00:17:46 Jesse Host

[Music fades out.]

It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest, Ben Vanstone, is the creator and showrunner of the British TV show *All Creatures Great and Small*. It's a 1930s period drama set in the English countryside. It follows the Scottish veterinarian James Harriot. The show is based on the series of books and the 1978 TV show of the same name. Let's get back into our conversation.

All Creatures Great and Small is about five main characters: James Harriot, the—you know—the protagonist, the two brothers who are in his veterinary practice or in the veterinary practice for which he works, his wife-to-be and eventually wife, Helen, and Mrs. Hall—who's the housekeeper of the house in which they all live. And in both the books and the original television show, both Mrs. Hall and Helen are warm and radiant presences, but not much else beyond

that—as characters. You know. Mrs. Hall is there to explain Siegfried, the older brother, and why everyone likes him and also to put him in his place once in a while with a side-eye remark. And Helen is there to be the paragon of—the paragon of wifely virtue, basically.

You seem to have made a choice to do something else with those characters, in your show. Why did you make that choice and what did you choose?

00:19:27 Ben Guest

I mean, I think I made the choice—you know, half the—half the population of the world is female [*chuckling*] and they deserve stories and for their characters to be fully fleshed out. I think that in the book, it's—because so much is internal and from James's perspective, it is very much about the men and what the men are doing in their veterinary practice. And he doesn't write so much about, you know, the women because he is mainly focused on treating the animals. When we're presenting a television series, we are—it's not like the book where, you know, the audience don't get to see all the rest of the world. It's—we've gotta show it and these characters are there and they're part of the narrative journey and story. So, we—I always, right from the outset, felt that we needed to make sure that we give those characters a real agency and their own sort of place in our world, because they deserve it.

And it would actually be sort of to the detriment to the—to the men in the story as well if they—if they—if James has a full, rounded character but Helen just appears as a sort of... a sort of a bauble on the side or just like this sort of—as you say, the embodiment of womanhood. It sort of robs him of sort of central conflicts for his journeys. So, it's—so, to have a balanced narrative, you have to make sure you flesh out all the characters in that world. And so, that was very important, very important to me from the outset and will continue to be throughout. Especially because it can feel like a very sort of a—sort of male-dominated world, in the veterinary practice itself. Yeah, it was really important to all of us making the show that we—that we did that, and we honored those characters.

00:21:29 Jesse Host

What's your responsibility to the real human beings that you're representing onscreen? The fact that these were actual people who actually lived and have, you know, family members still—?

00:21:41 Ben Guest

Yeah, it's huge. And to be honest with you, it's the most nerve-racking part of it, for me. Because we worked very closely with Alf Wight's children, Rosie and Jim. Who—

00:21:55 Jesse Host

Alf Wight being the real name of James Harriot. James Harriot was a penname.

00:21:59 Ben Guest

Yeah. So, James Harriot was actually Alf Wight and his nom de plume is James Harriot. Their children, Rosie and Jim, are quite rightly very protective of their father's legacy. And also, just a great window into his life and fonts of knowledge. So, it was—you know, you kind of feel that you've gotta be really authentic to the characters that their father created, because they were based on real people that quite often Jim and Rosie knew. So, yeah. It was a—it's a fine balancing act to make sure that you're fleshing the characters out in a way that is respectful and true to who they were. So, we consulted Rosie and Jim throughout and—yeah. I—on the whole, I think they're really happy with this. But that was—that, for me, is the, um—the kind of greatest burden of it. I mean, I think

whenever you—whenever you work on a treasured piece of literature such as this that’s so incredibly well-known, you do—you do feel that weight of responsibility and yeah. Just grateful if people enjoy it and don’t hate you for it.

[They laugh.]

00:23:10	Jesse	Host	Can you give me an example of a piece of context or an insight that those living family members gave you and your fellow writers that informed the first season of the show?
00:23:25	Ben	Guest	Yeah. I mean, I think it was—with Siegfried, it’s kind of—it’s hard to get inside his head. And because as a—as a writer, you’re constantly getting—I think at times you get too caught up in logic. You’re always sort of looking for the logical through line for a character to show their motivation. It’s the sort of—the foundation of writing any character. And with Siegfried, there were times when he does just turn on a sixpence and it isn’t entirely understandable or that you can draw a sort of a real cause and effect. And there was one story that Jim told me about the real person who Siegfried is based on, which kind of unlocked him for me, which was he said he was having a dinner party at the house and Donald—who’s the name of the real person who Siegfried is based on—was desperate for everyone to leave. But they wouldn’t and they wouldn’t take the hint and they wouldn’t go, and they just kept staying and staying after he wanted them to go. So, eventually he pulled out a shotgun and blew a hole in the wall.

[Jesse lets out a startled laugh.]

And yelled at them to get out of his house. And it was kind of like, “Huh.” They were like, “Yeah, that really happened.” And they said that this was—and—‘cause the house that they grew up in and this story’s based on still exists. And I was in the house with Rosie and Jim and they said, “Yeah, this the wall here. And we used to hide the big hole with a picture.” And *[chuckles]*—and once you were sort of—once somebody tells you that story about the person that character’s based on, it kind of releases you a little bit. You’re suddenly like, *[chuckling]* “Wow—I could—we could do anything. We could—he did that?!” And that, for me, was like a real sort of unlock moment for Siegfried. And in this series, we don’t get anywhere near to Siegfried doing anything as extraordinary as that. But it really cracked the character open for me, that this was the sort of person he was.

00:25:43	Jesse	Host	So, yeah. That was probably the one that stands out most. I’m so grateful to you for taking all this time to come on our show and I’m grateful for your wonderful adaptation of this wonderful work. It’s really great, Ben. Thank you.
00:25:53	Ben	Guest	Thank you. Really enjoyed it. And yeah, stay safe everyone. And I hope you enjoy the show.
00:25:59	Jesse	Host	Ben Vanstone. The new episodes of <i>All Creatures Great and Small</i> are airing now on PBS. You can also stream them using the PBS app.
00:26:08	Music	Transition	Laid back, bright music.
00:26:11	Jesse	Host	That’s the end of another episode of <i>Bullseye</i> . <i>Bullseye</i> , created from the homes of me and the staff of Maximum Fun, in and around greater Los Angeles, California. Here in northeast LA, where I live, I

put together an entire 8-foot trampoline by myself and then realized that the net that goes around it, the safety net, was slightly crooked and that meant that I would have to take the entire thing apart and put it back together again.

Our show is produced by speaking into microphones. Our producer is Kevin Ferguson. Jesus Ambrosio and Jordan Kauwling are our associate producers. We get help from Casey O'Brien and Kristen Bennett. Our interstitial music is by Dan Wally, also known as DJW. Our theme song is by The Go! Team. Thanks to them and to their label, Memphis Industries, for sharing it with us. You can also keep up with the show on Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. We post our interviews on all of those platforms.

And I think that's about it. Just remember: all great radio hosts have a signature signoff.

00:27:10 Promo Promo

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

[Music fades out.]