00:00:00	Music	Transition	Gentle, trilling music with a steady drumbeat plays under the dialogue.
00:00:01	Promo	Promo	**Speaker**: *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR.

[Music fades out.] |
| 00:00:12 | Music | Transition | "Huddle Formation" from the album *Thunder, Lightning, Strike* by The Go! Team. |
| 00:00:19 | Jesse Thorn | Host | It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. So, the other night my family and I sat down for movie night. This is something you've probably done 100 times. You flip around through all the streaming choices. You land on a movie that you've maybe heard good things about but haven't seen and you try and convince the children that they wanna watch it. Anyway. That night, we all watched a movie called *Wolfwalkers*. It is a stunningly beautiful animated film. Cell animated, not 3D computer animated. It looks almost like a woodblock print. It's set in Ireland in the 17th century. The English have control over the country and in the town of Kilkenny, the crown is looking to cull the local wolf population.

The movie's protagonist is Robyn. She's moved to Kilkenny with her father, who's been charged with exterminating the wolves. Robyn wades into a world of conflicts—cities encroaching on forests, English Christian values clashing with Celtic traditions, colonizers and the colonized. In between these two worlds, Robyn discovers something magical: a group of people who can turn into wolves. The film is directed by Ross Stewart and Tomm Moore. Tomm is the co-founder of Cartoon Saloon, an Academy Award winning animation studio in Ireland. His previous two films, *Song of the Sea* and *The Secret of Kells*, are also spectacularly beautiful and—like *Wolfwalkers*—their stories and images are steeped in Irish folklore.

Anyway. *The Guardian* called *Wolfwalkers* a masterpiece. That feels right to me. Here's a clip from early on in the film. In this scene, Robyn is exploring the woods outside the walls of the city. She meets a girl who lives with the wolves, named Mabh. Mabh has the ability to turn her spirit into a wolf when she sleeps. This scene takes place after Mabh rescues Robyn from a violent encounter with the wolves. |
| 00:02:19 | Sound Effect | Transition | Music swells and fades. |
| 00:02:20 | Clip | Clip | **Robyn**: Saved me? You bit me!

Mabh: Well, you kicked me in the gob enough times!

Robyn: Well, you were attacking me!

Mabh: I was trying to get you out of that trap! And anyway, you came into <u>my</u> woods. *[Growls.]*

Robyn: Your woods? They're our woods! Your wolves are attacking the woodcutters. And the sheep!

Mabh: They should be staying closer to the town. And so should <u>you</u>, townie. |

00:02:39	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:02:40	Jesse	Host	Tomm Moore, Ross Stewart, welcome to *Bullseye*. I'm so happy to have you on the show.
00:02:44	Tomm	Guest	Thanks very much. Nice to be here. Yep.
00:02:46	Ross	Guest	Thanks for having us here.
00:02:48	Jesse	Host	So, I guess like—this is a very broad question, but it's basically like where do you get off? Like, how did you get the idea that you could start an animation studio and *[chuckling]* make feature films?
00:03:03	Tomm	Guest	It was just—it was just a youthful ambition, naivety and sort of—I don't know. Stupidity. *[Chuckles.]*
00:03:11	Jesse	Host	I feel like that list of things would justify starting a studio that like makes animation for television commercials or something. *[Chuckles.]* But, like, feature films is really next-level commitment.
00:03:23	Tomm	Guest	Yeah. I think—I was very inspired when I was in college by Richard Williams, who'd spent like 25 years in London making commercials so he could work on his feature film on the side. And I saw a documentary about it, when he was so passionate that, like, animation could be an art form. And so, I think there was a guy who was—that were quite earnest, as well. That we just felt that we could—if we had a studio, we could make our own projects and sort of see if we could push the artform. So, it was that. Yeah, it was—we were lucky as well. Like, that it kept going and that things aligned that we were able to have a studio in, like, the midlands of Ireland in the 19—late—early 2000s, I suppose. Yeah, it was just a confluence of good luck as well, though.

But yeah, and we never thought about it as being crazy ambitious. I think we just saw ourselves as kind of an extension of what we'd been as teenagers making, you know—making our own movies with Young Irish Film Makers here in Kilkenny, you know? |
00:04:17	Jesse	Host	Was feature films always the idea?
00:04:20	Tomm	Guest	Yeah. We had a—we set up the studio at the start. Literally with a Dick Williams type business plan where we felt we would spend half the week doing whatever it took to pay the bills and the rest of the week making our—making our feature film. And that's how naïve it was, you know.
00:04:36	Jesse	Host	I mean, what's interesting about that business plan is that it contains the supposition that you're—you can make double money in half the week. *[Laughs.]*
00:04:45	Tomm	Guest	*[Snorts a laugh.]* No, we lived on—we lived on—we lived on beans and toast. Ross'll tell you. Like, Ross had to build the desks for our studio, so we'd have desks to work on and it wasn't like we were making a lot of money, it was just sort of like we were willing to extend that college—art college experience a bit. Like, we did think we could make a feature in a year or two and then go on and get real jobs, but it just ended up snowballing. You know?
00:05:06	Ross	Guest	Yeah, I wonder if people had told us, like, how long—how long it would take to make the movie and all the pitfalls and everything, I wonder if we would have dived in with such kind of naivety. But yeah, like, I think also the fact that—as you mentioned—Young Irish Film Makers carry this kind of can-do attitude. Like, we—if we—we wanted to make a comic, so we just said, "Alright, well let's just make a comic." And, you know, like you could just go out and shoot a film with a camera whenever you wanted. So, there was this kind of like just fly by the seat of your pants kind of approach that we had

			learned in Young Irish Film Makers. And I think it just carried through, because we set up the—like—Cartoon Saloon in the grounds—in the same building as Young Irish Film Makers. So, I don't know—that kind of aura was infectious.
00:05:51	Jesse	Host	When I was a kid, I would go every year—or actually, I think twice a year—to see this thing called the Spike and Mike Festival of Animation. It would come to the—to the Roxie Theater by my house, in San Francisco. We'd go see it and I—you know, Spike came on this show when I was still in college and he was just like a grizzly old punk rock guy with, like, a sidekick who was a—who was like a crust punk who was like *[chuckling]* 20. And they just barnstormed these compilations of independent animated films.

[Tomm affirms.]

But, you know, like it was one of the highlights of my childhood every time—every time it rolled though town. And I wonder if you guys, as kids in Ireland, had the opportunity to see stuff like that. Especially at the movie theaters, but even on television. |
| 00:06:46 | Tomm | Guest | Yeah, Channel 4—when I was kid, I didn't have all the channels, but the British channel, Channel 4, had a late-night thing called "Four-Mations". And they would just show crazy animation from all around the world. And that was like an education. And then, like—going back to Young Irish Film Makers, when I joined Young Irish Film Makers, some of the older kids there were already going to like film school and they would have passed around VHS tapes of, like, interesting, crazy—you know—Jan Švankmajer shorts. And—you know, so we saw some of those kind of more obscure things through hanging out with some older kids who were into, like, nerdy things like that. |
| 00:07:24 | Ross | Guest | It was—it was really only like in our teenage years when it kind of opened up, wasn't it Tomm?

[Tomm agrees several times as Ross speaks.]

Because I don't know—like, for any American listeners, they might not know, but in Ireland when we were kids there was literally two channels. And like the programming would only start sometimes at lunchtime. And they had such a low budget, they would show these eastern European cartoons of just like abstract shapes chasing each other around, because that's all they could afford. |
| 00:07:49 | Tomm | Guest | Do you remember there was that guy, *Foo-Foo* guy? Yeah. *[Chuckles.]* |
| 00:07:52 | Ross | Guest | *[Beleaguered.]* Oh, god, yeah. Yeah. Like, literally just because it was animated, you would watch it as a kid. Just because—it didn't—like, it didn't matter that it was so obscure and so random and everything. You would just watch it 'cause it was a cartoon. |
| 00:08:04 | Tomm | Guest | They were like analogies against, like, the Eastern Bloc trying to get free of communism and stuff, but it went over our heads because it was just a—like a weird, abstract cartoon. But I kind of—I kind of loved that we saw that stuff, because we weren't completely under the illusion that everything was Disney. You know?

[Ross agrees.] |

			I did way, way, way prefer, like Don Bluth Disney cartoons if I could get them, but I kind of watched *[laughing]* anything really.
00:08:30	Ross	Guest	Yeah, and there was—there was one time that, like, we only had the two channels and we discovered that if we got the aerial on our roof and pointed it in a certain direction that we might get—pick up, like, S4C from Wales.
00:08:44	Tomm	Guest	And then it would be in Welsh.
00:08:46	Ross	Guest	*[Laughing.]* Yeah, right. It would be in Welsh and the reception would be so bad and if the wind blew, it would go all staticky. But you could just barely make out a cartoon.
00:08:55	Tomm	Guest	And the excitement of it!
00:08:57	Ross	Guest	Yeah, you'd watch this static, hissy thing in Welsh just because it was a cartoon. *[Laughs.]*
00:09:01	Tomm	Guest	*SuperTed. SuperTed* in Welsh. There was like a Welsh cartoon about a superhero teddy bear. I remember watching through the static going, "Wow! Signals from another civilization! Wales!"

[They laugh.]

[Through laughter.] Sorry. |
| 00:09:16 | Jesse | Host | I mean, I imagine that if you grow up speaking English, that watching anything in Welsh feels like a broadcast from an alien planet.

[They laugh and agree.]

Welsh is such a language. *[Chuckles.]* Was any of the things that you were watching in English or was some of it in Irish? |
| 00:09:35 | Tomm | Guest | Yeah, some stuff was in Irish. There was, like, Irish language versions, which were kind of—kind of strange like of—like, *Batman: the Animated Series* and stuff. And when I think about that, that's kind of mad because it was like Gotham City, quintessentially New York, but everyone spoke Irish—with, like, west of Ireland fisherman accents. But yeah. And I think about—*SpongeBob* was in Irish when it came out, too. Obviously I was already in college when that happened, but I remember my son—he went to an all Irish speaking school, so some of our cartoons were some of the first cartoons that were actually Irish cartoons made in Irish for an Irish speaking—you know—channel.

So, yeah. That was the third channel. We added a third channel eventually. And that was all Irish language. And they had some good cartoons. |
| 00:10:21 | Ross | Guest | We were already teenagers by that point, though. Yeah. |
| 00:10:24 | Tomm | Guest | Yeah. They had some good cartoons. Yeah. |
| 00:10:26 | Ross | Guest | The little weird cartoons that we saw with the shapes chasing each other around, they didn't even speak a language. They just made little sound effects.

[They mimic the noises—high, chiming beeps and whines. They laugh.] |
| 00:10:36 | Tomm | Guest | Oh, but—do you remember the *Max Spuds*? The *Max Spuds* and—there was some Irish cartoons. They were really basic. They were like kind of cut out like illustrations, as well. So. Yeah. And *Gregory Granoak*, which was a hedgehog made out of plasticine. Anyway, why are we talking about this? |

			[They laugh.]
00:10:53	Jesse	Host	So, your films—you've made this series of films about Irish folklore and what was your relationship with, like—you know, Irish folk culture when you were a kid? And also, just kind of identity—Irish identity? What did—what did that mean to you?
00:11:17	Tomm	Guest	It was less—it was less conscious, as a kid. But, like, my parents were from Northern Ireland and I spent a bit of time in Northern Ireland and it was like a point of pride for my uncles and aunts to learn Irish and wear a little fainne, to show that they were Irish. And that was also a signal in Northern Ireland that you were on the kind of Irish Nationalist side of the divide. You know? So, there was a political element too, that I wasn't conscious of as a kid. But then there was another aspect of it that I think there was, like, things like *Ten Minute Tales*, which was like Eddie Lenihan, who was a storyteller. And he was literally just like a man sitting in a chair telling stories on TV. But I used to really love those, just as much as the cartoons and stuff.
			So, thinking back on it, there was a consciousness, but it was—honestly, I think I way preferred American stuff. I thought it was—Japanese and American cartoons were really cool and I kind of aspired to be like an American kid more than an Irish kid when I was really young. It wasn't 'til I was teenager that I started to have any kind of sense of being proud of being Irish or being interested in what was different about Irish culture from, you know.
00:12:23	Ross	Guest	Even I'd say like a late teenager—'cause I think, like, as an Irish—Irish children are generally forced to learn Irish. They're forced to learn about myths and legends. They're forced to learn about a lot of stuff that is Irish and so you kind of resent that when you're—when you're forced to learn anything. And I think then when we were kids, we looked up to everything American, to everything from the UK. Like, 'cause it was foreign, it was new and exciting. And then—and then slowly, as you get to like your late teens and into your early 20s, you start to realize that the things—like, the things that you value about, maybe, your own culture. And you don't resent them anymore, because you're not forced to learn it.
			So, I remember getting really interested in myths and legends again when I was about 20 and 21 and I started learning Irish traditional music. I started learning—re-learning Irish again. And I don't know. It wasn't from a patriotic point of view, but it was just that I found a lot more meaning in it and I think I found a sense of self that I identified with these things that I maybe had been forced to learn, as a child. I had a renewed excitement about them.
00:13:32	Tomm	Guest	I think I was a bit younger, 'cause I remember being about 14 or 15 and—again, going back to Young Irish Film Makers, again—there was a whole series in the comics. I loved American comics and it was about Superman and he was gonna die and come back to life and all. And the guy who ran Young Irish Film Makers started talking to me about the whole idea of the monomyth and Joseph Campbell. And there was a VHS tape there of interviews with Joseph Campbell and I thought that was really interesting and I remember, at the time, starting to look again at, like, American mythology that I'd grown up with like *Star Wars* and superheroes.

And then seeing how they had threads that went back to European mythology and even, in particular, Irish mythology.

And there was this guy called Jim Fitzpatrick. He used to make these, like, picture books that were almost like superhero-style renderings of Irish mythology, and all the characters from Irish myth were kind of drawn as kind of badass rock stars and, like, all the goddesses were, like, sexy, '80s, '90s style girls and stuff. But he would do all the filagree in *The Book of Kells* style, all around the edges. And I remember really loving those books and thinking they were cool. And there was a comic called *Sláine*, which was about, like an Irish—kind of ancient Irish warrior. It was kind of a rip-off of Cú Chulainn, another Irish folk—and I—and the painting in it was amazing. It was a guy called Simon Bisley, and it was real—like— *Kerrang!* kind of heavy metal, cool version of Irish mythology.

So, at that—that was the stuff I liked, if I liked anything. And I was a bit of a strange geek who liked things like Clannad and Enya and stuff, music-wise.

00:15:05	Jesse	Host	*[Chuckles.]* Yeah, I think there's the list of—the list of like teenage Enya fans is a relatively short one. *[Laughs.]*
00:15:14	Tomm	Guest	Yeah. Yeah, I was definitely—I got told by—I got told by my school friends that the only people who owned Enya albums were people whose grandmothers had bought it for them accidentally thinking it was something cool that young people would listen to. And yet. *[Jesse laughs.]*
00:15:29	Ross	Guest	Aw. Poor Enya. Poor Enya.
00:15:31	Tomm	Guest	I loved Enya! I loved Enya.
00:15:32	Ross	Guest	You loved her cheekbones, I remember, in particular.
00:15:35	Tomm	Guest	I thought she was just the most beautiful Irish goddess. *[They laugh.]*
00:15:41	Jesse	Host	Ross, what do you think changed when you became an adult that you actually started to be interested in it? I mean, I'm looking at you over a sort of slightly sketchy internet connection and over your shoulder, there is a musical instrument that I cannot identify but looks like something you'd use to—
00:16:02	Ross	Guest	Oh, it's a mandolin.
00:16:04	Jesse	Host	Oh, is it a mandolin? *[Laughing.]* Okay.
00:16:06	Ross	Guest	Yeah, it's a mandolin. Yeah. But, no, what I—what I—what I play normally is like—I think it was a tin whistle and Bouzouki. Bouzouki is like a larger instrument than a mandolin and it's like a—it originally came from Greece, but it's used a lot in traditional music now. And I got the mandolin last Christmas to learn something smaller and the frets are too small for my fingers. I have these two chubby fingers that won't fit inside these frets. So, that's why it's hanging up on the wall, 'cause I can't play it with my big sausage fingers. *[Jesse chuckles.]* But—yeah, I don't know, the thing that changed in me was I think, like—I think it probably would have been there if it wasn't forced on me. You know? Like, I went to an Irish language college for a year in between primary and secondary school at the age of 11 and that

was a—quite an austere college and it was in a Guelph Docks area and you were punished if you were caught speaking English. You know, it was that kind of place. And *[chuckles]*—and also it was the kind of place that had corporal punishment. Like, every Friday there would be a line of kids waiting outside the headmaster's office to, like, get beaten, you know, with a stick. So, this was—this was a like a year or two after corporal punishment was actually banned in Ireland. And this school kept it going in this—in this college. I won't name it in case I get—

00:17:25	Tomm	Guest	Keeping the traditions alive! Keeping the traditions alive!

[They chuckle.]

00:17:27	Ross	Guest	Yeah. I won't name it in case I get sued, but yeah, they—like, so, with that kind of atmosphere, you could understand how kids would come out of that going, "Oh, man, I don't ever wanna speak Irish again." *[Laughs.]* It's because we associate it with all these bad memories. So, I think I probably would've had a love for it if it wasn't, you know, taught to us in that—in that same way. But then, I don't know if—I think, like, because we were—as I was saying, the—even the TV channels that we had were so limited, the exposure to comics was so limited, the exposure to everything was so limited because, you know, we were in a small town in rural Ireland. So, any little glimpse of, like, American culture, you would, like, grasp and hold onto and go, "Wow! This is something so new and so different!" And it's—and it's really special. And that's why I'm kind of jealous of, like, kids nowadays, where you can just go on the internet and you can see anything all across the world instantly. Like, we were the exact opposite of that. We were very, very closeted.

[Tomm agrees.]

And so, with anything American or anything foreign being so interesting, you kind of naturally shelve everything Irish as being like, "Oh, it's so boring and it's so—like, you know, passe and conservative." And so, I think it's a—it took me until my—probably my adult years to realize—to kind of flip that on its head and realize that actually Irish culture had a lot of depth and maybe, you know, just 'cause something was American, it wasn't automatically cool. You know. I started learning about like *[chuckling]* you know, how America's kind of—you know, like the kind of—the bad points of American history as well as the good. I used to look up to that culture without really knowing, you know, that within every culture there's good and bad sides. You know.

So, I think it just came with maturity that I started to realize—you know.

00:19:17	Tomm	Guest	Do you think, Ross, that there was a part of it was the Celtic Tiger? 'Cause I feel like—we graduated out of college in the late '90s, early 2000s and the country was riding high and I feel like—like, my son was quite young at the time, and I feel he grew up in a different Ireland that had a different attitude to itself. You know? That there was—you know, the Gaelic—the Irish language schools, they were all going—you know, there was just a pride that had come back. And I think in the '80s, Ireland was kind of depressed. Everyone was immigrating to England or America or Australia. And I think

there was just a sense that it was—it belonged to, like—I don't know, the civil war or something. This kind of Nationalism or this kind of, you know—so, you wanted to move past it. And it kind of got reinvented a bit.

Like, when I think about the Irish movies and stuff from that period, I feel like things started to become more positive rather than just always focusing on the church and the English and all the bad stuff. You know.

00:20:12	Jesse	Host	We'll have even more with Ross Stewart and Tomm Moore coming up. After the break, we'll talk about the animated films that inspired them. It's *Bullseye*, from MaximumFun.org and NPR.
00:20:24	Music	Transition	Twangy music.
00:20:25	Jesse	Host	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.

[Music fades out.]

00:21:04	Promo	Clip	*[Audio lightly distorted, as if coming from an old tape recorder.]*

Speaker 1: *[In an old-timey announcer voice.]* Maximum Fun is a network by and for cool popular people. But did you know it also has an offering designed to appeal to nerds?

Speaker 2: A show for nerds? On Maximum Fun? The devil you say?!

[The sounds of a futuristic engine revving.]

Speaker 1: It's true! It's called *The Greatest Generation* and they review episodes of a television program for nerds, called Star Trek. They've reviewed *TNG*, *DS9*, and are now reviewing *Voyager*.

Speaker 2: Hey, *Star Trek*! My daughter enjoys that program.

Speaker 1: Well if she enjoys that and she enjoys humor of the flatulent variety, might I recommend she subscribe to *The Greatest Generation*?

Speaker 2: Hey, are you calling my kid a nerd?! Why, I oughta—!

Speaker 1: Welp, gotta go! *[Footsteps as he hurries away.]* Become a friend of DeSoto by subscribing to *The Greatest Generation* on MaximumFun.org today!

00:21:52	Promo	Clip	**Music**: Light, chiming music.

Speaker: The news is about more than what just happened. You need to know why it happened, who made it happen, how it's felt in the communities you care about. NPR's daily news podcast, *Consider This*, gives you all of that with context, backstory, and

analysis on a single topic every weekday. It's not just information, it's what the news means. *Consider This* from NPR.

[Music ends.]

00:22:12	Jesse	Host	Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. If you're just joining us, my guests are animators Ross Stewart and Tomm Moore. Their new film, *Wolfwalkers*, is set in early modern Ireland. It's a film steeped in folklore about colonialism and our relationship with nature. It is also spectacularly beautiful and very exciting. I can't recommend it highly enough. Tomm Moore, the co-director, also co-founded the animation studio Cartoon Saloon and directed the Academy Award nominated movies *Song of the Sea* and *Secret of Kells*. Let's get back into it. Were there any sequences or moments in big, hand-drawn animated films—Bluth movies or Disney movies—that made an impact on you that you think about?
00:23:03	Tomm	Guest	Yeah. When I was a kid, I went to a birthday party in a friend's house and they put on *The Secret of Nimh* for his younger sister and her friends to kind of keep them out of the way and we were all being—like, we were either eight or nine or whatever, so we were a bit cooler. And I watched—I was just mesmerized. I watched the bit where she goes in, to the owl, you know. She goes in through the kind of—it's like a cave, but it's just a tree, and she's going in, to the owl. There's cobwebs and the owl's eyes was glowing and I was just blown away by that. I remember turning 'round and some of my older friends were like, *[mockingly]* "Aah! He's watching cartoons with the babies!" But I just loved that. And I remember—I'll always remember being pretty terrified of it and thinking it was amazingly—like, it was another—it was like something that I hadn't really seen, because it had all the bells and whistles and I was used to, like, a lot cheaper, kind of, TV animation or Czech shorts or something like that. So, I hadn't really seen anything like that. And even the Disney cartoons at the time, they were really cool. Like, I love them now, but I remember thinking—seeing stuff like *Robin Hood* and *The Jungle Book*, you know—it was very, you know, pared back where the Bluth movie and particularly that sequence in *Secret of Nimh* was like, you know, glowing eyes, lots of sparkles, lots of special effects and light and shade and everything. And for a kid, that was just like, "What!? What is this?!"
00:24:17	Ross	Guest	Yeah, *Robin Hood* was the first film I ever saw in the cinema. I think I went with my—with my parents, maybe? But yeah, like *The Jungle Book* and that era with *101 Dalmatians* and that—that era, I think, has—was always so impressive and, funnily enough, like we looked at that for *Wolfwalkers* inspiration as well and it still is so impressive. Like, it just has this kind of timeless beauty to it that, like—you know, it was beautiful back then when it was first released and now, like, whatever—50 years later, it's still beautiful. Probably 100 years, it'll still be. You know.
00:24:51	Tomm	Guest	I think they're really tasteful. When I look at them now, I can see—like *The Aristocats* and *101 Dalmatians* and that whole era were kind of like—they were quite design-y compared to other Disney movies. And where Bluth was trying to go back to the kind of Rococo production values of *Pinocchio* and stuff, that era I way prefer now. And I—well, I loved them as a kid, but I think they stand

			the test of time because they just rely on some really good kind of graphic design almost.
00:25:18	Jesse	Host	Yeah, I think—I feel like people associate modernism with a kind of coldness, but I think those Disney movies are more modern in their aesthetics but also in the service of warmth in a really, like—*Robin Hood* and *The Jungle Book* are two of the most, like, pleasant worlds to be in of any of those Disney films.
00:25:43	Tomm	Guest	I think the character animation was the main point them, as well. Like, they were designed—especially *101 Dalmatians*, like it's beautifully designed. And it has a story, but their stories are more like a little hook for lots of great character moments. It was just like—you know, a sequence of cool character moments and the plot was like a hook to allow the animators to go crazy on the design. Especially *101 Dalmatians*. I mean, that is so stylish. So classy and kind of effortlessly. And I guess the guys were at the top of their game, but they were still young enough to be kind of influenced by what was going on with Saul Bass and UPA and everything. You know?
00:26:18	Ross	Guest	Yeah, the concept art for *101 Dalmatians* is especially beautiful. It has this lovely kind of jazzy feel to it. But I'd say *The Jungle Book* story was more just a sequence of events that just allowed some great moments.
00:26:29	Tomm	Guest	Yeah. That's it. Yeah.
00:26:32	Ross	Guest	Like, the story of *101 Dalmatians* at least had, like—you know, a definite plot and—
00:26:37	Tomm	Guest	A climax and—yeah.
00:26:39	Ross	Guest	Yeah. But *Jungle Book* when you watch it now, it's like—that's why I think it's such a perfect stoner movie, 'cause it's just—you're just drifting along and just, like, meeting these characters, these great songs. And then it's like, "Hey! It's finished now! That's nice."
00:26:51	Tomm	Guest	And it's not gonna wreck your head like *Fantasia*, 'cause you're like watching *Fantasia* and especially if you're watching it as a stoner kid, and you're like, "This is cool." And then all of the sudden you get into all this *[censored]* "Night on Bald Mountain" and gets really scary you're like, "Oh noooo, man!"

[They laugh.] |
00:27:11	Jesse	Host	So, the reason I ask about your relationship with Irishness—besides that *Wolfwalkers* is the third film from your studio that's based in Irish folklore—is that *Wolfwalkers* is a story about English occupation. Was it always going to be a story about English occupation?
00:27:32	Tomm	Guest	Yeah. I think the two basic ideas that we came up with—and we had a very short story meeting to come up with it—were we wanted to explore, you know, this species destruction that's coming with that kind of attitude that you can just wipe out a species in order to tame the country. So, that was really the—like, that was the core. Like, I think—I think the two ideas of using the wolves of Ossory when speaking about the effect that the Cromwellian invasion had on Irish culture by changing the landscape and species so drastically—I think that was—would you say, Ross, that was early at the start?
00:28:10	Ross	Guest	Yeah! Definitely. I think like we were looking at—you know, like the perfect kind of backdrop or the perfect era to set this in and it was very clear that, like, the Cromwellian invasion was perfect in that way, 'cause it had this huge environmental destruction. But I think if

			you're gonna set any story in Ireland at any time between, like, 1100 and the early 1900s, it's gonna be against a backdrop of English occupation, unfortunately. Like—you know?
00:28:34	Tomm	Guest	I said—do you remember my idea that the three movies are the three 'D's of Ireland? "Da Church. Duh-pression. And D'English."

[They laugh.]

00:28:49	Jesse	Host	I wanna talk about the aesthetics of *Wolfwalkers*. So, there's sort of two worlds in the film. One is the town, which is fortified. You know. It's got big walls and is—you know, itself almost prison-like. And the forest, which is—you know, there's like a little no man's land and then there's a forest. And they look very different. Could you describe the ways that you represent the town and the ways that you represent the forest, just visually?
00:29:28	Ross	Guest	Well, I suppose, when Tomm and myself were coming up with the story, we—we're both, you know, visual artists primarily. So, like when we come up with stories, we're immediately thinking of, like, epic moments and illustrating them as soon as possible. You know? So, we were putting pen to paper as we were coming up with the initial ideas of the story and I think, from a—from an art direction and from a visual development point of view, we were both very much on the same page that we would do everything we could possibly do to reinforce the idea that this little kid is under—you know—lock and key and under orders and there are so may rules and they're not allowed to do what they—what they want to do. So, really, the town should be almost like a cage to them.

And we'd play around with perspective. We'd, like—you know, make it like a maze. We'd avoid showing the sky if we could. Like, always make it seem like—that he or she is trapped by buildings and trapped by the rules of the Lord Protector. And then, of course, when they go out into the forest it has to be the polar opposite. It has to be, like, a really, really open, deep place. You know, and lots of curved lines to kind of emphasize this energy that flows through the landscape, whereas the city is quite dead and cold and austere. The forest is alive and kind of brimming with energy and a real, like, lush, opulent place.

So, like, Tomm and myself would've started that visual development alongside the script for a couple of years. But then we got amazing concept artists like Cyril Pedrosa and Emily Hughes and then our scene illustration team onboard. And they, like, consistently upped the game each time. Every time we got a new artist in, they would bring new ideas and fresh ideas and I think, like, what you see onscreen is the result of, like—you know, many, many artists contributing to that visual language. |
| 00:31:21 | Tomm | Guest | Yeah. It was very collaborative, but I think we were pretty clear from the start, like, the kind of—you know, we're very like—after three movies now, or two at the time, we kind of had learned a lot about how visual language could be used and I think really early on, on *Secret of Kells*, before we got into production, we were just trying out stuff 'cause it looked cool. And over the years we've been focusing more and more, "How can we use all the tricks and tips from, you know, illustration, comic books, or whatever to help the narrative?" |

			So, I think we were trying to be—use everything that hand-drawn animation could do to be as expressive as possible for the characters and what was going on for the characters rather than just pure, like, kind of world-building 'cause it looked cool. You kind of had to have this like logical kind of meaning to it or something.
00:32:08	Ross	Guest	Yeah, maybe when we came out of college at the very start we would've been just trying out cool things 'cause it looked cool, but—whereas, in *Wolfwalkers*, we wanted everything to serve the story and the mood as much as possible.
00:32:20	Jesse	Host	One of the things that struck me about the way the film looks is that there are sequences that play—you know—visually almost as two-dimensionally as, you know, a shadow puppet or something. And there are sequences that have a sense—a sense of three dimensionality and depth that, you know, you almost never see in hand-drawn animation, where usually it's a—you know, a character in the foreground moving across a static background. So, tell me a little bit about what kind of choices you make and how you make the choices about, you know, the way… the metaphorical camera works when you're drawing the pictures? You know? The way you represent depth of field and flatness and, you know, the sense of space onscreen.
00:33:22	Tomm	Guest	Yeah, there's a certain amount of it that you can preplan and discuss. And we make charts. Like, there's a guy—Bruce Block—who wrote a book called *Visual Story* and he discusses, you know, how much—and animation is freer to do this than any other medium—how deep do you want the canvas to be at one point, how flat do you want it to be? How much shape language do you want to use? But there is another aspect of it that's a bit like—you know—dancing about architecture to talk about. So, a lot of it is like visual experimentation with each other and making—Ross and I would make, like, little director's brief notes for the story boarders with a lot of ideas. That could be just location, tone and mood, what the characters are feeling. It could also be these kind of design ideas.
			So, broadly speaking, we wanted to play with that two-and-a-half-D, forced kind of almost Escher-like perspective in the woodcut—the woodcut style of the town and in the forest we wanted to go deeper and looser with the brushstrokes. And then for the wolf-vision when you're actually seeing the world through the eyes of the wolves, we wanted that to be a rollercoaster ride that we hadn't really done before. So, we knew that had to have that access. That had to be moving through space in a—you know, like the speeder bikes in *Return of the Jedi* or something. You know? It had to be like really dynamic and exciting.
			So, those were broadly—I mean, it doesn't—like, saying all that is one thing. Actually, figuring out how it would look onscreen really came from kind of a workshop feeling with a lot of the artists just trying different stuff out and us saying, "Yeah, that feels right for that moment. You know.
00:34:52	Jesse	Host	There are sequences in the film where we see things through the eyes of the wolves. I mean, it's a movie about a kid who transforms into a wolf.
00:35:01	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:35:02	Clip	Clip	**Music**: "Running with the Wolves" by Aurora.

Mabh: Can you smell me?

Robyn: Of course. Everybody can.

Mabh: *[Giggles.]* Well. Close your eyes.

[Music takes on a surreal, otherworldly quality as a vocalist cuts in.]

Mabh: You don't need your eyes to see when you can hear every little thing that moves… and your paws can hear through the earth.

Music: *But don't you know we're stronger now. My heart still beats and my skin still feels…*

Mabh: And you have four legs now! You can run really fast and jump so high!

Music: *And my mind still fears. But we're running out of time…*

Robyn: Hey! Wait for me!

Time	Source	Type	Content
			Mabh: Keep your nose down! Be a wolf!
00:35:43	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:35:44	Jesse	Host	I was like completely transported by them. They're so extraordinary because they—you know—without being really literal, they kind of represent the way a wolf experiences the world, you know, in terms of—you know, a narrowed color palette and, you know, seeing through smell and all—and almost seeing through the relationship to the other wolves in the pack. And it's like sort of abstract and, like I said, I was totally mesmerized by it. And then later, when I was thinking back on it, I was like, "Wow. It would have been so easy for that to be corny and lame. *[They chuckle.]* And *[laughing]* like I wonder if you're like—if you're taking as big a bite of the apple as that, is there a part of you that's like, "Oh man, if we draw smells… we could really step in it." *[Laughs.]*
00:36:32	Tomm	Guest	Yeeeah. I don't know. I think—I think we both—we had a lot of faith. Like, we had great collaborators like Evan McNamara, who took on those sequences. He kind of knew what we were going for and we had done a test pretty early on. Even concept art, I don't think we ever were afraid of drawing smells. I guess cartoons or just *Pepé Le Pew* or whatever, it's just okay. *[Chuckles.]* But—
00:36:53	Ross	Guest	But I—but it's a good point, though, because if it had ended up like a *Pepé Le Pew* type thing, it would have completely—it would have caused the audience to laugh instead of, like, be transported. So, it is a gamble I think. Like, you know, any time you have a vision for what you might want to end up onscreen, you are taking a gamble that, like, you've got it *[chucking]*—hopefully you've got it right. And like the worst thing would be for your audience to start laughing in the wrong places. And I think like we both had experiences—smaller experiences—of that on *Secret of Kells*.

[Tomm agrees.]

And to a lesser extent, in the *Song of the Sea*. The first time you sit down with your audience and you're watching the audience more than the film and you're watching, you know, if they laugh in the right places. And inevitably, there will be a few things where they laugh in the wrong places and you kind of cringe at that.

00:37:42	Jesse	Host	I feel like the technology really informs what's on the screen as well. I've—like, I have young kids and have watched so many both good and bad animated movies in the past five years or so and one of the things that struck me, particularly about computer animated movies, is often the computer animated movies from 15 and 20 years ago look better than the ones from now. They obviously look… you know, lower tech. They look blockier and they are, you know—the water looks weirder. But sometimes I'll watch a big studio computer animated film even now and I kind of think, like—I feel like they put all this stuff on the screen because… they just could make as many little guys to be in the background as they wanted. *[Chuckles.]*

[They agree several times.]

00:39:09	Ross	Guest	Like they had 700 little guy animators and a computer that could animate 700 little guys, so every screen has 700 guys in the background. And in a film like *Wolfwalkers*, like, you can have—you know—only a certain number of things on the screen and it forces you to make choices about the design of every frame that I feel like get punted sometimes in even good big computer animated movies. We had like a definite example of that one time when we were—when we were having these backgrounds in the forest and the comp team—the compositing team had an option to add in, like, leaves—you know, dropping down from the trees and like this kind of dust and haze in the air and like they—you know, with—they worked on Nuke. So, Nuke could do all that stuff. And so, they did a couple of test scenes of all these things—all these particles and everything like that and, like, it looked—it looked cool, but it didn't suit the whole aesthetic of *Wolfwalkers* that we were going for: this kind of storybook aesthetic. So, we—in the end, we got them to take out everything except maybe one or two little leaves dropping down. And we depended on the sound design to create the whole atmosphere of a forest in the background.

So, really, I think like—it's like what you say, if we had put all of the bells and whistles in there in the background, it would've—it would've completely jarred with the whole storybook aesthetic of *Wolfwalkers*. You know? So, really, like the visual—the visual style that you aim for at the start of the project kind of is the thing that should steer all of those decisions. So, yeah. We don't have 700 little guys in the backgrounds.

00:40:20	Jesse	Host	Your studio has made a series of spectacularly beautiful and artistically successful films, in my opinion. I'm not asking you to stipulate to that. And—
00:40:32	Tomm	Guest	We agree. *[Chuckles.]*
00:40:33	Jesse	Host	I wonder—thank you. *[Laughs.]* And I wonder if you still have to live with the pressure that, you know, if one of the movies doesn't work—whether you will ever be able to put the pieces back together to continue in your—you know? *[Laughing.]* Chosen career in life.

			[Thumping sounds in the background.]
00:41:01	Tomm	Guest	Yeah. Yeah, we could have to get those real jobs eventually. Yeah. If we break—I know, we didn't want to break the good streak.
			I hear drums.
00:41:10	Jesse	Host	That's my daughter dancing immediately above my office.
00:41:15	Tomm	Guest	Awesome.
00:41:16	Ross	Guest	*[Chuckles.]* I suppose that at times we've even had that pressure, like when we were making *Wolfwalkers*, if this—if this, like—if *Wolfwalkers* doesn't get nominated for an Oscar, I suppose we'd be the first to break that streak of Oscar nominated features from Cartoon Saloon. So, fingers crossed, you know?
00:41:34	Tomm	Guest	*[Desperately.]* So, don't break the streak, Academy voters!
			[They laugh.]
			Yeah. No, that—I think—I think we have a good—I think we'd have a little bit of, like, professional armor or resilience now, because we have built up the studio to the point where there's a decent amount of projects going through that—like, it used to be really sink or swim. Like, we lived or died based on each project and the company was always kind of teetering on the edge of going bust from project to project. We're now—I think we kind of have gotten to a healthy point where we've three big projects on the go at the same time. And that gives us a little bit more leg room to be a bit more experimental in the kind of flagship stuff that we do and kind of push it out a little bit, because at least we have—you know—some TV shows and stuff in production that hopefully will carry the studio through if the features don't work.
			But I think we have to be careful as well not to get too afraid and become, like, kind of caricatures of ourselves, repeating ourselves for fear of going in the wrong direction. I think it's good to stay brave and try different stuff and trust different directors and stuff to keep the studio kind of interesting.
00:42:41	Jesse	Host	Well, Tomm and Ross, I really appreciate you taking this time to come on the show and thanks for the movie, which is really an extraordinary achievement. And I mean, it as fantastic, fantastic movie and I really mean that.
00:42:53	Tomm	Guest	Aw, thank you so much. That means a lot.
00:42:55	Ross	Guest	Thank you very much!
00:42:57	Jesse	Host	Tomm Moore and Ross Stewart. As I have been saying, *Wolfwalkers* is an absolutely spectacular movie. Look, I'm not the kind of guy who tells grownups to watch animated movies, because they're art too or whatever, but if you have children you will love this movie. And if you do not have children, you will love this movie.
00:43:18	Music	Transition	Relaxed music.
00:43:21	Jesse	Host	That's the end of another episode of *Bullseye. Bullseye* is created in the homes of me and the staff of Maximum Fun, in and around greater Los Angeles, California—where my son, this week, figured out that do get his car to do the loop-the-loop, he's gotta make the track a little shorter.
			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. Our interstitial music is by Dan Wally, also known as DJW. Our theme song is by The Go! Team. Thanks very much to them and to their label, Memphis Industries, for sharing it with us.
00:44:09	Promo	Promo	You can also keep up with the show on Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. We post all our interviews there. And I think that's about it. Just remember: all great radio host have a signature signoff. **Speaker**: *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR. *[Music fades out.]*