

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.
00:00:13	Music	Transition	<i>[Music fades out.]</i> “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.
00:00:18	Jesse Thorn	Host	It’s <i>Bullseye</i> , I’m Jesse Thorn. Odds are, if you know Sarah, it’s for her part on <i>Succession</i> . Sarah plays Siobhan Roy. To her friends and family, Shiv. Shiv, like what you’d stick into an enemy’s back. <i>Succession</i> is about the Roy family. They own a giant conservative media conglomerate called Waystar Royco. The family’s patriarch, Logan Roy, is getting older and he can’t run the company forever. So, who will take over and what is that person willing to do for the job? Or will Logan just—you know—blow the whole thing up out of spite?
			Like all the characters on <i>Succession</i> , Shiv is complicated. She’s cunning and fragile, selfish, vulnerable, principled—not too principled. Sometimes she sits above the fray, letting her brothers squabble over the family business. Other times, she’s right in the thick of the fight. Snook has won a Golden Globe for her role as Shiv. She’s also earned a few Emmy nominations.
			Our correspondent, Linda Holmes—who’s the terrific host of NPR’s <i>Pop Culture Happy Hour</i> —talked with Sarah in 2020 about what it’s like to play one of the most fascinating, complex, confounding characters on TV today. Let’s listen to a clip from <i>Succession</i> . Like I said earlier, Shiv spends most of the first season kind of above the fray, distancing herself from the company. But then, at the beginning of season two, her dad offers <i>her</i> the top job. Let’s listen.
00:01:56	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:01:57	Clip	Clip	Shiv Roy (<i>Succession</i>): Dad, <i>[chuckling]</i> I don’t think so!
			Logan Roy: Really? Because if there’s really no hope of you coming in, I’d rather cash out.
			Shiv: Look, if this is the way that we’re having this conversation anyway, then yeah. Fine! Sell.
			Logan: Fine. I’ll do it. Right now. I’ll tweet! The markets’ll move and that’ll be that. You don’t care if I sell?
00:02:26	Sound Effect	Transition	Shiv: <i>[Beat.]</i> Yes. Music swells and fades.
00:02:28	Linda Holmes	Host	Sarah Snook, welcome to <i>Bullseye</i> !
00:02:31	Sarah Snook	Guest	<i>[Chuckles.]</i> Hi! Thanks for having me.
00:02:33	Linda	Host	What a great clip. I wanna come back to that scene in a little bit, but I wanted just to take a moment for people who are currently shocked to find out that you are Australian and in Australia—

00:02:43 Sarah Guest Oh, yeah! Yeah. *[Exaggerating her accent.]* You know, g'day mate!
00:02:46 Linda Host Yeeeah! Well, you know, maybe the rest of the cast for your next season can just come to you and it can be the—it can be the Australian season.

[Sarah laughs and agrees.]

And they'll go to a big ranch. It'll be an American television version of Australia, so it'll have all the koalas and kangaroos and all that good stuff.

00:03:03 Sarah Guest Yeah! And all, like—every Australian actor in it, completely.

[Linda laughs.]

Like, just as a random person at the café. Like, Margo Robbie just lives down there and *[chuckling]* Russell Crowe is the owner of the ranch and they're all mates.

00:03:16 Linda Host Well, let's talk a little bit about Shiv. Did you go through—for people who aren't familiar with Shiv, her name is Siobhan, but she's always called Shiv—except, perhaps, by her father.

[Sarah chuckles.]

Named after a knife—which is not terrible subtle, but great, I think. Personally.

00:03:30 Sarah Guest *[Laughing.]* Yeah. Yeah. When we first got together, during the pilot, we were like—we were like, "Oh, wow! We didn't realize it's like Roman, Shiv—"

00:03:39 Linda Host Connor.

00:03:40 Sarah Guest Yeah. Con. Connor. Shiv. Siobhan. Roman.

00:03:43 Linda Host Kendall.

00:03:44 Sarah Guest You know, that's like angry—but think—and Kendall, like "Kendall. Kendall. Ken. Ooh, knowledge. Like wisdom." *[Laughs.]* I don't know if that was on purpose, but—

00:03:53 Linda Host It's a great—it's a great set of names. Did you—did you go through a kind of a normal audition process, for Shiv?

00:04:00 Sarah Guest Uuum. Somewhat, yes. I got the—self-taped from Australia. And so, I put something down with my friend, at home, and was very reticent to do so because I thought—you know, it was out of my league and out of possibility of me getting it. So, I'm—you know, endlessly grateful *[laughing]* to my friend for making me put the tape down. But then, yeah. They asked if I would come over to do a final self-tape. Sorry, final screentest in the states and... yeah. Did it that way.

00:04:35 Linda Host Why didn't you think you would get it?!

00:04:37 Sarah Guest 'Cause—ugh, I'm just so not—I'm—me, personally, as Sarah, is so far from Shiv Roy, that I was in this, "I don't know how to expand myself to fit that. I don't know what that infinite wealth kind of person is like. I don't know if I like that person. I don't—" Yeah, it just wasn't in my—I didn't feel like it was comfortably in my wheelhouse. I was just being chicken, you know.

[Linda affirms with a laugh.]

Just grow up, Sarah.

00:05:10 Jesse Host It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. We're listening to Linda Holmes' interview with Sarah Snook. Snook plays Shiv on HBO's *Succession*.

00:05:19 Linda Host In the first season, it often seemed like Shiv was the most normal of her siblings. She's got her brother, Kendall, who is kind of a collapsing mess in the first season. Her bother, Roman, is a—just kind of a dirtball, in a lot of ways. Just really a—really, really kind of a dirtball.

[Sarah agrees several times.]

And her brother, Connor, is a weirdo living out in the desert. And she sot of seems like the most healthy person. She's in politics instead of business. What is it like to be in an ensemble where you're maybe playing the closest thing to a normal, healthy, person with all these very... big, kind of nutty things going on all around?

00:06:02 Sarah Guest *[Linda agrees several times as Sarah talks.]*
It was difficult at first, because like, in comedy, you have the—kind of, the buffoon, and then the kind of, quote/unquote, like, “the straight guy”. Like the person—the fall guy. The person who's—well, not the fall guy. He's the person—well, they're the person who... they remain the audience's in, I guess. The touchstone. And I felt like, sometimes, I had to be that. And yet wanted to be able to lean into or hide behind comedy, or all the sort of like—the character points that they had that felt bigger, that they had to obviously fill and make realistic, but I didn't feel like I had that. So, I wondered what my point was, *[laughing]* I guess. “I want what you're doing, there.”

00:06:54 Linda Host And then realized that there is—so much about Shiv is observation and watching and being in that kind of feline thing going on in the corner. Just, like, waiting to pounce at the right point.
Yeah. And she was—she did always have going for her, I think, in terms of—particularly in terms of comedy—her marriage.

[Sarah laughs.]

00:07:14 Sarah Guest ‘Cause you can't talk about—you can't talk about Shiv and not talk about Tom. Shiv's husband is... how do we describe Tom? Played by the great Matthew MacFadyen. How we play—how do we describe Tom?
Well, Tom is a sycophantic little gnat, in a way. *[Laughing.]* Like, he's just—he's this—he's—there's so much about him that is slimy and wormy and small. And yet, it's in the outward casing of Matthew MacFadyen—which is charming, handsome, beautiful, strong, tall. Like, all those kinds of leading man qualities, and yet the character is the opposite, in some ways. Which I love. Because he's just such a—you know, he's a brilliant actor and, for him, getting a chance to play something so different from what he usually would be cast in or could play, you know, quite easily. Yeah, it's a lot more interesting to sink your teeth into.

And Tom—I think—I think one of the clearest things that occurred to us in second season was that obviously Tom is a bully, because he

bullies Greg. And then—okay, well bullies usually are being bullied by someone else, at home. Okay. Well, that’s probably Shiv.

[Linda laughs.]

Alright. Well, we’ll forgive—we’ll forgive Tom because he’s being bullied by Shiv. And then you’re like, “Well, Shiv’s being bullied by Logan, really. So, we’ll forgive—we’ll forgive Shiv that.” And then it just goes up the chain. Everyone needs to be nice to each other! But that’s not good TV. *[Laughs.]*

00:08:32 Jesse Host

Even more with *Succession*’s Sarah Snook still to come. It’s *Bullseye*, from [MaximumFun.org](https://www.maximumfun.org) and NPR.

00:08:40 Music Transition

Thumpy synth with light vocalizations.

00:08:45 Jesse Host

Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I’m Jesse Thorn. We’re listening back to Linda Holmes’ interview with Sarah Snook from 2020. Sarah plays Shiv on the TV drama *Succession*. The show is currently in its fourth and final season on HBO.

00:09:01 Linda Host

There’s always a delight, to me, in finding out that people I think of as really good, like, wonderful dramatic actors are that funny.

[Sarah agrees.]

Because Tom—Tom, to me, is such a—he’s such a funny character, and I think Shiv—again, you know—often it’s not explicit that she’s explicitly hilarious in these scenes with Tom, but the scenes are wonderfully funny.

00:09:23 Sarah Guest

Yeah. Yeah, for sure. And so much about the writers—they calibrate that relationship so well, in that it has to still—yes, it is funny and yes it is kind of like, “Whyyy is Shiv with Tom?” But it still has to be real. Like, we still have to believe—though it’s unbelievable, we still have to believe it somehow.

00:09:42 Linda Host

Right, for sure. So, when we talk about comedy—I don’t know if Australian audiences are like this at all, but American audiences are often kind of obsessed with the idea that actors improvise everything and kind of obsessed with the idea that if it seems natural and funny and conversational, the actors must have made it up on the spot.

[Sarah hums in affirmation.]

00:10:09 Sarah Guest

But as I understand it, you do do some improvising on *Succession*. We do. We do, but it would be a great disservice and an untruth to say that it’s not written supremely well. You know? *[Laughs.]* Like.

[Linda agrees.]

Those writers work for months and then we come in and say, *[in a buffoonish voice]* “Yeah, we’ll just improvise a lot.”

And Ryan is like, *[quietly]* “Oh my goosh. No, you don’t.” We do, but—

00:10:26 Linda Host

Where do you do—where do you do the most of that kind of work?

00:10:30 Sarah Guest

It seems to be book enders. Like, so for instance, if we ended a scene and there was, like, the hellos that would happen at the beginning of a dinner, all of that—the writers are not gonna write

that in, sort of, very, very specific moments. Because that's the thing that fills the atmosphere around.

[Linda agrees.]

Yes, there might be an amazing line that Kieran says, because he's a very funny man. He might say something that's outrageous that *[laughs]* just makes sense for Roman to have said, then, and that might make the edit. But, you know, you're using all the colors from the—from the palette. You have to kind of fill the outside details, as well. And, you know, the writers create this really tight scaffolding that then you can launch around, I guess. And if improvising comes from it, it's only because they gave you the clues of where to go in the first place.

00:11:20 Linda Host

So, Shiv's first season kind of builds up to her wedding which is this very kind of beautiful, theoretically wonderful, special, elegant affair.

[Sarah agrees several times as Linda continues.]

And then, you leave Shiv and when we come back they've—they have, among other things, really changed the visual presentation of Shiv, between seasons. They gave you the haircut heard round the world, I think.

[Sarah laughs.]

To the kind of—the sleek bob of the professionally tough woman and changed the wardrobe a lot. Did that change what it felt like to be Shiv?

00:12:04 Sarah Guest

Definitely. Definitely. And that's sort of, the confluence of the writing focusing more on what Shiv's—sort of, ambitious side within the family structure.

00:12:12 Linda Host

Well yes, there is—there is the writing. There is the writing, too.

[Sarah agrees with a laugh.]

00:12:18 Sarah Guest

In addition to the hair and pants. *[Laughs.]*

No, but the embodiment—which, the, you know hair and—hair and costume knew. So, they wanted to make sure that that was being reflected, visually. And that—as an actor, that helps enormously, because you feel like you're really sitting inside the character, then. It's not... not so much of a bridge to cross or—between you. When you—I mean, I feel like Shiv is one of those people who—she's a box-ticker. You know, she's sort of got her five-year plan, her ten-year plan. Her three-month plan. *[Laughs.]* Like, weekly planner. And all the goals that she's gonna achieve, within that. And box-ticking, in a way, is like, "Right, find the—find the person who in some ways, yes, looks good on paper, but also looks good in photographs to marry. Yes, he's a bit of a *[censored]*, but I can control him and he'll never—" You know.

I think Logan's very accurate in seven when he says, "You'll marry a man fathoms beneath you because you're afraid to fail." That's—oof. That cuts deep.

[Linda agrees.]

There's a truth that, but it doesn't mean they don't love each other and have a—have a way in which they relate that is—that is meaningful, between them. Yeah. And then once the wedding's done, it's like, "Right." *[Laughs, struggling for words briefly.]* "Moving on. Done."

00:13:35 Jesse Host

It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. Sarah Snook, our guest, plays Shiv on HBO's *Succession*. She's being interviewed by our correspondent, Linda Holmes.

00:13:46 Linda Host

We come here—back to the clip that we played at the top of the show, in which Shiv is offered the opportunity to take over the company by her father. If you believe him, she's being offered the chance to take over the company. If you don't believe him—which, I never believe him, then it's something—something else entirely is happening. But she really kind of jumps in and says, "Yes, I wanna do this." Whereas, in the first season—as we talked about—she had kind of been in politics, she didn't seem—she seemed like she was trying to kind of stay away from the family business. Did you feel like that was a big... change for her? Or do you think the seeds of that, as you understood that character, were always present for her to want to then reach out and be part of the company?

00:14:30 Sarah Guest

Yeah, I think it's both, to be honest. I think we're really good, as humans, at deceiving ourselves. Like, the things that we can hide from ourselves, even in plain sight. Like, you can know something about yourself or know something about what you want, but not really admit it to yourself until it's right there in front of you. And if you don't take this chance now, then it'll never happen again. I think her—in terms of her ambition of politics—yes, that's real and yes that's the thing that she had wanted to do and needed to do to prove her own worth to herself as well as to her family. But the moment that it gets offered that she could beat her brothers, she could be at the top of the family—like, she could—there's an optics side of being in the that family, and at the top of that family, in the CEO sort of position, that is never gonna be unseen by *[laughing]* Shiv, the—you know, her entire life. Like, back as a seven-year-old, as a—as a ten-year-old growing up. It would be, "That's the thing to aim for, but if I don't think I'm gonna get there, I'm not gonna reduce myself by aiming for it and failing. I'm gonna go somewhere else."

[Linda agrees several times as Sarah continues.]

And that's, like... I love that. And—you know, Jesse said in the first season, there's a scene that came up and he was like—I went up to him, afterward, and was like, "Do you think that Shiv wants, like—this doesn't even make sense. Doesn't Shiv want to be the top dog? Like, top job, top dog kind of thing?"

And he goes, "No, I don't I think so."

[Laughs.] Huh. And he may well have known what he wanted to do for season two, but that's genius to tell me that, because—because it hides it from myself, even. There's no, like, "I'm playing, like, you know, an eyebrow going up here." Or doing something like that. It's—like, it's sooo hidden in prismatic kind of form. Like we are, as humans, doing that. That when it comes out it's just—yeah.

00:16:21	Linda	Host	Yeah, 'cause you don't—he wouldn't want you to be playing to it too much, 'cause that's why it surprises suckers like me. 'Cause you're surprised by it when she does it.
00:16:30	Sarah	Guest	<i>[Laughing.]</i> And suckers like me! So, when he says it it's like— <i>[gasps]</i> . And you have to follow what the scene says, and it seems that she's into this. Sooo, alright. I guess we're going there! Make it make sense.
00:16:44	Jesse	Host	We'll wrap up with Sarah Snook in just a minute. Stay with us. It's <i>Bullseye</i> , from MaximumFun.org and NPR.
00:16:52	Promo	Clip	<i>[Animal noises.]</i>

Music: Cheerful, upbeat music.

Alexis B. Preston: Are you tired of being picked on for only wanting to talk about your cat at parties?

Ella McLeod: Do you feel as though your friends don't understand the depth of love you have for your guinea pig?

Alexis: When you look around a room of people, do you wonder if they know sloths only have to eat one leaf a month?

Ella: Have you ever dumped someone for saying they're just not an animal person?

Alexis: Us too.

Ella: She's Alexis B. Preston.

Alexis: She's Ella McLeod.

Ella: And we host *Comfort Creatures*, the show where you can't talk about your pets too much, animal trivia is our love language, and dragons are just as real as dinosaurs.

Alexis: Tune into *Comfort Creatures* every Thursday on Maximum Fun.

[Music fades out.]

00:17:30	Music	Transition	Thumpy synth with light vocalizations.
00:17:33	Jesse	Host	It's <i>Bullseye</i> . I'm Jesse Thorn. We're listening to Linda Holmes's interview with Sarah Snook. Snook plays Shiv on HBO's <i>Succession</i> .
00:17:43	Linda	Guest	I wanna talk about the last episode of the second season, which is of course where we left these characters. Family empire in crisis, the patriarch—Logan—was looking for someone who could publicly take the fall. He referred to that lovingly as a skull to wave.

[Sarah chuckles.]

And potentially could wind up in the—in legal trouble. The family goes off on a yacht. They have maybe the world's worst brunch where they discuss at length who is gonna be this—

00:18:07	Sarah	Guest	<i>[Delighted.]</i> I love that scene.
00:18:08	Linda	Host	This—this—oh, god, me too. I call it the Roy Family Murder Breakfast. Um. The blood sacrifice. There's this moment when

Shiv's brother, Roman, suggests that they give up Tom. And Shiv sort of goes along, saying—right in front of her husband—that he does make a—kind of a compelling patsy. And they don't really reach a decision at that time, but later—when Shiv and Tom are alone, he tells her that because of that conversation, as well as for some other reasons, he's not feeling very confident about their marriage. And she's just devastated. And to me, that's such a curious combination of scenes, 'cause she's so cold to him at the murder breakfast! And then she's so wounded that he seems to be unhappy. How do you interpret that—a turn like that, between that pair of scenes? 'Cause I know you can either think about it in terms of, "I want to get it with the writer's intent, to be going on with Shiv." Or you can think about it in terms of, "What do I think, as the actor who knows Shiv perhaps the best, thinks is going on with Shiv?"

Is it both? Is it more one than the other? 'Cause to me, that's a really—I spent a lot of time trying to figure out what was going on with Shiv.

00:19:22 Sarah Guest

[Laughs brightly.] I think that what I really like about how the writers create, is that nothing is ever binary or set in stone. It's all very greyscale in a lot of ways. There's—there's potential for it to go one way or the other, or for things to be two things at once. And through Shiv, in that, I think—again, she's so deceptive to herself, even, that she can be so unfeeling and unkind and then be struck by a real moment, by a real vulnerability from her husband that cracks her open again and goes, "Hey, hey, hey, hey, hey—remember you're human? Remember he—you know, not everything is a game. Not everything is transactional. Not everything is, you know, in pursuit of a goal, like you've been taught. Remember that these are—you're two humans in a marriage."

And there's, I think—that, for me, made me realize how much she needs him, but how much that scares her and how well she's able to hide that from herself. I think hearing that she does make somebody so unhappy that *[laughing]* they could leave is so, like... ugh. I mean, I don't think she's ever been dumped, you know? I don't think she's—I think she's that woman who's never been dumped. And if she was, she would say that well, she's been cheating on him for years. Like, weeks. You know, like, she would—

[Linda agrees.]

She would find a way to get the power back, and in that it's so exposing and so simple. Like, "I—the happy I'd feel—but the sad I'd feel without you is, you know, worse than the—is not as bad as the sad I feel with you." Ouch.

00:21:01 Linda Guest

I want to, before we let you go, I want to talk about one more—I wanna play one more clip, which is also Shiv and Logan. This is after, as we just talked about, the—Shiv is very cold to Tom but then she feels very bad about Tom potentially wanting to leave her and she has a conversation with her father, because he is still throwing around the idea of potentially having Tom be the—I don't know. The one who takes the fall. And Shiv, here, is absolutely at a crossroads and she talks about what they're gonna do with Logan—played, of course, by the great Brian Cox. Let's go to the clip.

00:21:41	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:21:42	Clip	Clip	Shiv: <i>[Cautiously.]</i> I just... think that, uh, Tom doesn't deserve it. And uh, it doesn't work for the rest of the world. I don't.
			Logan: So. What do you think?
			Shiv: Uuh...
			Logan: It's the sort of tough choice people need to be able to make—people who would be very senior people.
			Shiv: I can't choose, Dad.
			Logan: No. No. <i>[Sighs.]</i>
			Shiv: Just not, uh... <i>[whispers]</i> just not Tom.
00:22:37	Sound Effects	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:22:38	Linda	Host	Ugh! Ah!
00:22:41	Sarah	Guest	<i>[Chuckles.]</i> I mean... ooh, it's so baaad. 'Cause he's really directly asking her to be less human in order to be successful in business.
			<i>[Linda agrees several times.]</i>
			I would hope that society, as a general rule, is moving to being more human, in—to be successful in business. I mean, for instance, like—or in policy and government. Jacinda Ardern, her approach to this moment right now would be, I would say, more human and more sort of understanding of humanity, society, that kind—you know, being... maternal has been thrown around, in that sort of sense. That—and what is the outcome? There's been a lot more safety. There's been a lot more sort of, "Okay. Let's get back into—return to work faster." I would hope that <i>[laughing]</i> businesses start moving towards that. But this is, like—there, this is direct evidence in—coming from Logan Roy, of how otherwise business has operated in—you know, for the last however many years.
00:23:31	Linda	Host	Well, Sarah Snook, this has been sooo much fun!
			<i>[Sarah laughs.]</i>
			<i>Succession</i> is available—HBO, HBO Max, all of your streaming options. You can buy it. You can rent it. You gotta catch up with it. It's a lot of fun. <i>Succession</i> . Sarah Snook, thank you so much.
00:23:44	Sarah	Guest	Thank you! Thanks for having me.
00:23:46	Jesse	Host	Sarah Snook, interviewed by our friend Linda Holmes. The fourth and final season of <i>Succession</i> is airing on HBO right now. Our thanks to Linda for conducting that interview. Linda, of course, is one of the hosts of NPR's <i>Pop Culture Happy Hour</i> . You should definitely listen to that. Wonderful podcast. She is also a novelist. Her most recent novel is called <i>Flying Solo</i> .
00:24:13	Music	Transition	Upbeat synth piano.
00:24:16	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. In my producer, Richard Robey's,

apartment right now, he says somebody is almost certainly doing cartwheels upstairs.

Our show is produced by speaking into microphones. Our senior producer is Kevin Ferguson. Our producers, Jesus Ambrosio and Richard Robey. Our production fellows at Maximum Fun are Tabatha Myers and Bryanna Paz. We get booking help from Mara Davis. Our interstitial music is composed and provided to us by DJW, also known as Dan Wally. Our theme song is by The Go! Team. It's called "Huddle Formation". Thanks to The Go! Team. Thanks to their label, Memphis Industries.

Bullseye is on YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook. Find us in those places. Follow us. We will share with you our interviews. I think that's about it. Just remember: all great radio hosts have a signature signoff.

00:25:15 Promo Promo

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

[Music fades out.]