

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.
00:00:20	Jesse Thorn	Host	It’s <i>Bullseye</i> . I’m Jesse Thorn. I’m excited about every interview we get to do on <i>Bullseye</i> , but I am especially excited to share with you this one. It’s with Dominique Fishback. She an actor. For the last ten years, she has been building up her resume with supporting roles. In 2018, she appeared in the David Simon miniseries <i>Show Me a Hero</i> . It was a breakthrough role for Fishback. She played Billie Rowan. Billie was a single mother growing up in a housing project in Yonkers. Fishback parlayed that into a regular role on <i>The Deuce</i> , another David Simon series. Then, she played Deborah Johnson in <i>Judas and the Black Messiah</i> —a drama based on the true story of Black panther Fred Hampton. That role earned her a BAFTA nomination among other accolades.

Fishback is terrific in all those supporting parts but make no mistake: the woman is a star, a fierce and brilliant presence on the screen. Disarming and vulnerable in one moment, terrifying in the next. And if you want proof, look no further than her latest project, *Swarm*. It’s a TV series created by Donald Glover and writer Janine Nabers. Dominique plays Dre. When the show begins, Dre is sharing an apartment with her foster sister, Marissa. The two of them are close. They’re the kind of sisters who share everything. That includes a love of Ni’Jah, a pop singer who’s very much like Beyonce.

Dre’s life unravels pretty quickly in *Swarm*. First, Marissa moves out. Then, she dies. Dre loses her apartment, her job, and before long her grief for Marissa and her obsession with Ni’Jah curdle into something much more disturbing. Disturbing and deadly. Like I said, I’m excited to share with you this interview. A quick warning, as you might have guessed, Dominique and I will talk about the show and the death and violence that it depicts. There are also some graphic descriptions of violence and loss Dominique encountered in her own life. So, if you or someone you’re listening to is sensitive to those kinds of things, we thought you should know.

Anyway, let’s kick things off with a little bit of *Swarm*’s pilot. Here, Dre is talking to Khalid, who’s dating her foster sister, Marissa. This is, of course, before Marissa has died. Everything is going great. They’re talking about what they have planned for Marissa’s birthday.

00:02:50	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:02:52	Clip	Clip	Music: Upbeat music.

Khalid (*Swarm*): Marissa’s birthday’s coming up. I wanna take her on a trip to Atlanta that weekend. I got a lot of partners out there. You should roll with us.

Dre: Can't. We're busy.

Khalid: Okay, busy how?

Dre: Ni'Jah's playing for her birthday. I got us Evolution Tour tickets.

Khalid: Oh, word!

[Cars honking.]

How? You broke.

Dre: It's Ni'Jah. You have to make sacrifices.

Music swells and fades.

00:03:21 Sound Effect Transition

00:03:22 Jesse Host

00:03:25 Dominique Guest

Fishback

00:03:26 Jesse Host

Dominique, welcome to *Bullseye*. It's nice to have you on the show.

Nice to be here. Thank you for having me.

Congratulations on your terrifying television program.

[They laugh and she thanks him.]

Deeply distressing television program!

[She agrees.]

Okay, so this is a stupid question that I bet is in every interview, and I apologize for that sincerely, but who do you stan?

00:03:47 Dominique Guest

Hm. Well, my answer's often that it's ironic that I'm playing the ultimate stan, because I didn't really do that. The first concert I ever seen was in 2018.

00:03:59 Jesse Host

So, what did you see in 2018?

00:04:01 Dominique Guest

Ironically, it was Jay-Z. It was 444. I played his mom in his music video for "Smile".

00:04:06 Jesse Host

So, were you in the music video first and then you went to the Jay-Z concert?

00:04:10 Dominique Guest

Yeah. I was in the music video first.

[Jesse laughs.]

In fact, it was interesting because—

00:04:14 Jesse Host

So, what you're saying is that you were not gonna go to any concerts without VIP passes.

[They laugh.]

That was the rule.

00:04:25 Dominique Guest

That's funny. I don't know! It was just ironic. And actually, it was a friend that invited me. It wasn't even like, "Oh, you wanna go to the Jay-Z concert 'cause you did the video?" It was like my friend was like, "Hey, I'm in town. I've got these tickets. You wanna just come?" I was like, oh! Sure! I just did the video; that'd be cool.

Like, it wasn't even like I reached out and said can I go.

00:04:41 Jesse Host Had you been onset with him? Or—? ‘Cause you played his— young version of his mom in that video, right?

00:04:46 Dominique Guest Yeah, yeah, yeah. No, he didn’t come to set. And like, some people from Rock Nation came to set, but he didn’t. I ended up meeting him at the brunch like a couple of months later, at the Rock Nation brunch, meeting him there for the first time.

00:04:58 Jesse Host I like that they have a brunch. That’s lovely.

00:05:00 Dominique Guest Mm-hm. It is nice.

00:05:02 Jesse Host Well, let’s talk a little bit about Brooklyn. You’re from east New York originally, right?

[Dominique confirms.]

00:05:21 Dominique Guest I have not been to east New York, but from what I understand it’s pretty real there. What was your—even, you know, ten years ago when, you know, the world has quieted down from what it was 25 years ago. But what was your experience of growing up there? It’s kind of interesting, because for a really long time I just thought my childhood was reeeally, really great. You know. I played football in the street with the boys. I climbed fences with the boys, played basketball. I just—I had a good time. We played manhunt, so we would hide in abandoned buildings and things like that with friends. And then, there was like this church at the end of my block that me and my friends—we were like 10/11/12, we just decided to go to the church, ‘cause they were doing step. We had stepping and just like different things to keep us entertained. Like, it wasn’t even like our parents was like, “You’re gonna go!” It was just like something to do. So, we just kind of did that, ran around.

00:05:54 Jesse Host They had stepping at church? Stepping—I saw from your hand movement; you’re talking about the hambone kind of stepping. Not—

00:05:58 Dominique Guest Yeah, the stepping where you hit your legs and things like that and praise dancing and all that kind of stuff. So, it just gave us something to do. But I say in hindsight, when I look back, it was like I also went to a middle school where one of my classmates, her throat was slit from ear to ear. You know? And she died at 11 years old. Or getting caught in the middle of a shootout when I was 12 or seeing somebody get shot three times right in front of me before at like 10:30 in the morning. And so, once that happened—and I think that happened probably in like 2017/2018, I started realizing like, “Hm. I don’t know if this is normal. Like, I feel like I have PTSD, but I think—but I believed that PTSD is reserved for like war-torn countries or something, so maybe that’s not PTSD. And you know, everybody’s rapping about things like this in their songs and music, and it doesn’t feel like they’re bothered by it. So, is something wrong with me that I feel bothered? Or like feel like I can’t shake something?”

And that’s when I first started going to therapy. *[Chuckles.]* And I was like, “Oh, okay, yeah, your body—your brain kind of tries to save you and repress memories and things like that. But what I will say, I love my neighborhood and I love going back and I love—you know, I watched *Swarm* with them. I went back home for my birthday, which was the 22nd of March, and had my friends from high school and my neighborhood come and watch the show. I had a big birthday party. People from east New York came, and it’s

always big love. And so, it's sad to me that, you know, east New York gets a bad rep for those things, but really like the heart and soul and the love that the people have for each other is also really big and it's nothing like Brooklyn.

There is—we're so—we're always so excited to be from Brooklyn. Somebody said like the most cocky people are from New York.

[Laughs.]

00:07:52	Jesse	Host	I was caught in a shootout when I was about that age. I think I was 13 or something like that.
00:07:58	Dominique	Guest	Where are you from?
00:07:59	Jesse	Host	I'm from San Francisco. And I remember the next day going down the stairs that had been behind me when I was heading out the other set of stairs in the station and seeing the big bloodstain on the stairs and being like, "Oh, right, yeah, somebody got shot yesterday when I was in this subway station, and someone was shooting." You know what I mean? Like, I didn't get like questioned by the cops or anything. It was a—you know, dozens of people in there.
00:08:31	Dominique	Guest	I was—yeah, I was an eyewitness to the thing, and I did not get questioned by cops. But I think I kind of blacked out anyway. I don't remember what that person looked like anyway. You know what I mean? Yeah, it was a wild experience though. And then, I kind of forgot like two months later, when I finally got to therapy. And I was like, "Oh yeah, I'm feeling worried about death and like I feel like I think about it like every day, and I don't really know why. And that's not normal, 'cause somebody else said they don't think about it at all.
			And then, she was like, "Well, why would you be thinking about that?" And I'm just like I really don't know. She was like, "You don't have any recollection of why that happened?" I'm like no. She like, "Okay, well, take the week and just kind of think about it, and then when you come back we can talk about it." So, I'm walking down the street. I'm like Dominique, why? Why do you think about death? Why? What'd you—? Why? And then, I had to be like, oh, you just saw somebody get shot and he died right in front of you! Like, and then that just—it blew my mind, because I was an adult at that time—20 something. So, it was like the fact that it happened two months ago, and I couldn't remember—like I really forgot. My brain worked so fast to repress it, that imagine the things that we experience when we're children that we just really repress. So, anyway.
00:09:38	Jesse	Host	Did you get into therapy because of that directly? Or—?
00:09:43	Dominique	Guest	I think I wanted—I always wanted to, but then every time I thought about it I was like, "Man, nothing big happened in my life." Like, you know, I had that something—I had to have something worth talking about, which is such a misconception. We all have something worth talking about. Even if we go there and we don't talk at all.
00:09:59	Jesse	Host	And also, to be fair, you had something worth talking about. Like, there's no— <i>[laughs]</i> like—
00:10:04	Dominique	Guest	But before the experience of seeing that.
00:10:05	Jesse	Host	Right, right, I see what you mean.
00:10:07	Dominique	Guest	Yeah, before the experience—so, that was the thing that catapulted me and was like no, you have to go. Let's just go. But before that, it was like, <i>[mumbling]</i> nothing—I don't have nothing really to talk

00:10:22	Jesse	Host	about. I get sad sometimes, but like that's normal. So, why do I have to go to therapy? You know what I mean?
00:10:24	Dominique	Guest	Did you go to high school in your neighborhood? I went to high school in Brownsville. So, it was a couple train stops away from my neighborhood, which was also not like—I didn't leave one area to go to like a better area. It all had economic educational challenges, violence, all of those things. But again, like the reason why I feel like I'm the actor I am today is because I spent more time in my neighborhood instead of going to a performing arts high school in the city. For high school, I ended up going in Brownsville. So, it allowed me to be closer to my people in the areas that I grew up in a little longer. So, now when I do play a character like Robin in <i>Project Power</i> , there is—you know, I've trained for theatre at Pace University. But also, there's a rawness that I could understand I think a little bit better because I was in it for longer.
00:11:18	Jesse	Host	We gotta go to a quick break. When we come back, even more with Dominique Fishback. Don't miss it. It's <i>Bullseye</i> , from MaximumFun.org and NPR.
00:11:28	Music	Transition	Chiming synth with a steady beat.
00:11:32	Jesse	Host	I'm Jesse Thorn. You're listening to <i>Bullseye</i> . My guest is actor Dominique Fishback. She's the star of the new TV show, <i>Swarm</i> . She's also an avid journal-er—not just for herself but occasionally for her characters.
00:11:52	Dominique	Guest	Did your mom start you journaling? How did you end up with the journaling? We would—when I was like ten, my mom definitely encouraged it. She said, "Dom, you wanna remember—you know, remember the things that you experience." And my mom also was like just very open. I could talk to her about everything. So, I never felt like if I write something, my mom's gonna read it and—you know, she—'cause I had kind of just—if I felt like I couldn't tell my mom something out my mouth, then I would write her a letter and then have her read it and I would watch her. <i>[Laughs.]</i>
00:12:17	Jesse	Host	What did you write a letter to her about? What's an example?
00:12:19	Dominique	Guest	I don't know. If I felt like, "Oh man, I like this boy and I kissed him, and now I don't know if that was good or bad." Like, I would do—like, you know, I would write things like that. I don't know. And she would—
00:12:27	Jesse	Host	Now, I wanna—I'm looking for a concrete example here. You're being vague. Let's hear a time—
00:12:33	Dominique	Guest	Well, it's a journal! It's a journal. So, journals are personal.
00:12:34	Jesse	Host	What's a time that you—what's a time that you— <i>[laughs]</i> you don't have to if you don't want to.
00:12:38	Dominique	Guest	I don't know. Yeah, I don't know. I mean, I can tell the story about when I was 12 and I had a crush on an actor from TV, and I wrote a letter saying like, just—I wish I had my phone. My phone isn't working right now for some reason. But I would write like, "Dear This Actor, I know you don't know me, but I think I'm the kind of girl that you'd like. I have a good personality, a nice smile. The only problem is, I'm 13 and you're 15." <i>[Laughs.]</i> "But I think that if you knew me, you'd like me. And anyway, love Your Biggest Fan." Right? And this was on December 22 nd , 2004, I wrote this letter. Then, December 22 nd , 2022, I actually ended up having lunch with the actor that I wrote this letter to. 18 years to the day. And I have the actual letter, because it was in one of those journals.

00:13:29	Jesse	Host	I started a journal when I was ten. Yeah. I think it's okay for us to say that it was Jaleel White, Urkel from <i>Family Matters</i> .
00:13:35	Dominique	Guest	[<i>Laughing.</i>] That's funny.
00:13:36	Jesse	Host	He's a very handsome man. [<i>Chuckles.</i>] Did you tell this actor that you—?
00:13:44	Dominique	Guest	I sure did. At the lunch, I was like, "You're not gonna believe this, but I wrote a letter on this day 18 years ago. And I'm not gonna read you the content of it." And then, I ended up seeing him again recently. And so, I was like, "You know what? I'll read it to you." I read it to him. [<i>Laughs.</i>] Your face is so funny. He was pretty cool about it.
00:14:03	Jesse	Host	Did you like print it out and bring it with you?
00:14:05	Dominique	Guest	No, 'cause I took a—'cause I was so shocked that I found it in this journal that I took a picture on my phone of the actual written letter from the journal. So, I had a picture of it. So, I was like, "Oh! I'll read this to you."
00:14:19	Jesse	Host	Were you always secure writing in a journal? Did that always feel safe and comfortable to you?
00:14:25	Dominique	Guest	Yes. And probably more comfortable than actually speaking the things out loud. I learned—I was talking to a friend about vulnerability and how everybody's vulnerability's different. So, I can go on a stage and talk to like 150—like a 150, 300, whatever people and say, "Oh yeah, I was scared about doing <i>Swarm</i> because of X, Y, Z. I didn't want you guys—I want you guys to like it!" Like, you know, I'm not afraid of saying what I'm afraid of, personally. But intimate, one-on-one relationships—like, me having to tell a guy that I like him, and I don't know if he likes me? [<i>Puffs.</i>] Oh, I will—I'll be cool as a cucumber! I'm not saying nothing. I'll sit there smiling like, "Mm." You wouldn't know! You wouldn't know a thing.
00:15:02	Jesse	Host	You're not passing him a letter?
00:15:04	Dominique	Guest	Uuh, well, once I get a little comfortable, then I definitely write letters and I read them. Write to them, like, "I'm gonna read this to you."
00:15:11	Jesse	Host	I love it.
			[<i>Dominique laughs.</i>]
00:15:16	Dominique	Guest	Do you journal about your characters? Yes. But for Dre, for <i>Swarm</i> , I didn't journal as her. I journaled for myself more.
00:15:22	Jesse	Host	Okay, wait, so I said about. Do you journal—you journal <u>as</u> your characters?
00:15:25	Dominique	Guest	Oh, I journal as my characters. Yeah. I journal as my characters. Started that when I was doing <i>Show Me a Hero</i> . And then, Darlene on <i>The Deuce</i> . And then, really for Deborah Johnson in <i>Judas and the Black Messiah</i> , because she was actually a poet. And I asked Shaka, the director/writer, if I could have a journal that she carries around. So, the journal that she has in the movie is just one that I just wanted her to carry because she was a poet, and I wanted something that said that she had a life outside of just being in love with the chairman or being a Panther. Like, I wanted it to say like even if we don't know all the content in this journal, we know that she's having thoughts about something, and she cares enough about it outside of what we get to see.

00:16:07 Jesse Host It's a—I mean, it's a manifestation of the fact that she has a life that isn't depicted onscreen. Like, it's a way to depict onscreen that she has a life offscreen.

00:16:15 Dominique Guest Yes. And that was important to me. And then, you know, the poem that's in the movie, it wasn't in the script when I first read it. And I said, "I think—you know, I think we missed an opportunity because the first thing she asked Chairman is 'do you like poetry?' and the Panthers are very poetic people. But we don't—we don't actually see it in the movie."

He was like, "I think you're right. Do you wanna take a shot at that poem?" And so, I ended up writing a poem. And so, because I had the poem, it was like I wrote poems for like the first time she kissed Chairman Fred, all of these poems is in this book that we never get to—that never sees the light of day, but it's there. So, I really journaled as that character. And then, when it came to Dre, psychologically I couldn't follow her on the page. So, I thought it was more important that I journal for myself and identify anything that like gave me pause or made me afraid. And if it did that, then I wrote it out and saw why. If it was my own feelings, then I could address it. If it was because I thought society was gonna feel a way or think weird or whatever, then that was something else that I had to also address.

00:17:20 Jesse Host In *Swarm*, your character's—you know—best friend and foster sister is—has a—has a sort of split with your character that immediately leads to her death. Not as a, you know, cause and effect, but is immediately by your character's friend and foster sister's death. That disjuncture sort of tears apart your character's life. And you sit before me as a non-serial killer. Fingers crossed. Um.

[They chuckle.]

But I wonder how you relate to someone that has had—you know, she has a very narrow life. And to lose like the one thing that's something, how do you relate to that amount of—you know—losing your mooring?

00:18:29 Dominique Guest Yeah. I think the first time that I experienced like a loss that really shook me was in 2012, when my grandmother died. Because I felt the weight of the word "mother" in "grandmother". I didn't feel that before, 'cause I had both my parents. My mom raised me. I grew up in a house with my grandmother, as well, my aunt, and my cousins. But I think I didn't realize the weight of the word "mother" in "grandmother" until she was gone. And that really like—it broke my heart that she wasn't there anymore. And she was like the glue, and my mom was one of seven. I'm one of 19 grandkids. We always went to Christmas in Long Island. But now that she's gone, like we're not really doing that as much.

And then, in 2020, my aunt—who I also grew up in a house with—she passed away from cancer. And that was also a really just, uh—it kind of—it kind of destroyed me. It actually, uh—it kind of catapulted me into my own little spiritual awakening, because I was having an existential crisis, being like, "Why are we here?" You know? Like—and because at this point, I had done *Judas*. I had done these different films, and I had put—growing up, I had put

everything towards this. Like, “I’m gonna make it. I’m gonna do all these things and then I’ll feel better. I won’t feel sad.” Or whatever it was that I put, since I was a kid, in my mind that this would give me. Losing my aunt, it was like—she like passed away like a month after *Project Power* came out. And I was like, “Man, I don’t—I don’t know about this. Like, what’s the point? Like, I’m—here I am trying to be a better person. I’ve been trying to do these things. I’ve been growing in this way. I’ve been forgiving family members for this and that and friends and opening myself up to like what it means to actually be loved. And then, I—like we lose this person, and it just feels so gut wrenching, and I feel so lost.”

But when you hit like a spiritual rock bottom like that, I think that was what let me know the expansiveness of God and the universe and really why are we here and the time that we have while we’re here. So, I think for Dre, I think that’s probably similar—the fact of like—but it just—it didn’t turn out the way it turned out for me, because I do come from a big family. I do come from a lot of support. And it didn’t turn out for her that way, because she had no one. Even when she went to the funeral, it was like you don’t belong here. So, what does she do? Man.

00:21:01 Jesse Host You don’t have to answer any personal questions you don’t want to, so don’t worry about it if there’s anything that’s weird. When did your aunt die compared to covid?

00:21:12 Dominique Guest Covid was like March of 2020. So, she died in September 2020, and it was cancer.

00:21:19 Jesse Host Did she have to be in the hospital a lot?

00:21:21 Dominique Guest She did, and every time we thought that she wasn’t gonna make it, she kept pulling through. So, even the fact that—I started looking at it as—‘cause, you know—alright. Like, the first time I was on TV, the day before that—the day after that, my grandma died. And I felt like—and then, when I flew out to go to New Orleans to film *Project Power* with Jamie Foxx and Joseph Gordon Levitt, this woman who was like a second mom to me, she died the same day I had to fly out. So, I started—I was like I don’t wanna take this idea, dang, something good happened, then something bad’s gonna happen. I don’t wanna take that as my narrative. I just will take the fact that I get to live big dreams. Because I could not live big dreams and these sad things could happen, or I could live big dreams and these sad things could happen too.

So, my—I got to see like *Project Power* like three times with my aunt before she passed away. And so, I got to say, “Alright, well, at least she got to see me on TV.” She got to see her niece that she grew up—that grew up with her in Brooklyn saying ‘I wanna be an actor’, and she watched all of it happen, came to my theatre—my plays. She got to see it, so could be happy about that. But yeah, it was in—it was September.

00:22:28 Jesse Host Did you get to see her the way that you would’ve liked to?

00:22:31 Dominique Guest Yeah, you know, the Friday—so, I think she passed away on a Saturday. And that Friday, I was like, “Man, I’m gonna go see my aunt.” And I took my cousin with me, one of my other cousins. I was like, “Come on. Let’s just go see her.” And went to see her. She was like not really talking that much, and I kissed her on her cheek, and I was talking about this boy that I liked. And she said, “Oh, you really like him, huh?” I was like yeah. I was like—you know, I was

just telling her, trying to have girl talk with her. And she said, “That’s—” She was like, “That’s nice.” And she always said this thing to us like, “I love you too much. *[Sing-song.]* I love you too much.” That’s how she used to say it. So, I just kept saying that to her.

And then, when we were leaving, I looked back at her, and she was looking at me like a long time. Like, taking me in. I’m about to cry, probably. Like, really taking me in. And I kept being like, “Man, maybe I should go back.” And I think I had a mask on too. I was like, “Maybe I wish I would’ve like pulled the mask down and kissed her on the cheek or something.” But I kissed her with the mask on, on her cheek. But I was like, “Maybe I should’ve just did that.” Because what was covid gonna do at this point? Like, you know what I mean? But I just kept—and I said alright—like it was almost like an energetic, I had to tear myself away from leaving that room. And went about my day with my cousin, and then like five, seven, something like that in the morning, my mom called me and told me my aunt passed away.

00:23:51 Jesse Host

So, I literally saw her the day before. When my grandmother passed away, I went there with my wife and my dad to Orange County where she lived. And I remember it was the night before she died. She was in bed. And we didn’t know that was gonna die. She was in the hospital, but— And my dad wasn’t there, and I remember her asking me where my dad was. And I said, “Oh, you know, I think he went to the movies.”

And she looked at me and she said, “He does love going to the movies.” And *[chuckles]* that was like that moment of talking about a boy you like. You know? It was just a moment of seeing each other.

[Dominique agrees softly.]

00:24:46 Dominique Guest

I’m glad you got to have that experience. Me too. Thank you. ‘Cause I can also be very hard on myself. I mean, I also got an experience with my grandmother too that I was happy about. ‘Cause it was like one morning I woke up and I was like, “Hey, was I good granddaughter? Sometimes I was angry with my grandma. Like, does she know that I love her?” And I’m like crying.

And my mom comes in the room, and she’s like, “Just see her tomorrow, Dom, before you got to school.” I was in college at the time, and I was going to rehearsals, and I was just moving, and she was in the nursing home after she lived with us for a while. And I have a poem about that that’s on YouTube. It’s called “The Guilty One”. But I went to see her, and before I got in the room, I said, “What’s cooking good looking?” That’s what she used to always say. And I could just see from the corner she like perked up. And she was like so happy to see me. We played Rummikub. She loves that game. We played that, and then after a while—and I was gonna apologize for the times that I felt like I had an attitude, but I got so nervous and so scared to say that. And so, I was like, “Okay, Grandma. I gotta go.” And I started walking to the door, and I was like, Dom, if you don’t say it, you’re gonna regret it your whole life.

So, I said, “Grandma, I’m sorry if I was mean or wasn’t a good granddaughter. I’m sorry if I ever hurt your feelings.”

And she was like, [*clicks teeth*]—I don’t know if I can curse on here, ‘cause—okay, she goes, “[*Clicks teeth.*] I ain’t pay your [*censored*] no mind.” [*Laughs.*] You know? And then she just hugged me and kept kissing me on my cheek and saying she loved me, she loved me, she loved me. And my grandma wasn’t that affectionate. And that was her way of being like, “Girl, like you’re think about something I’m not even thinking about.” Even if she was thinking about it, she let me—she gave me peace. She gave me peace with that. [*Chuckles.*]

00:26:14	Jesse	Host	That’s—[<i>chuckles</i>] that’s a tremendous thing for a grandma to say!
00:26:19	Dominique	Guest	Yeah. That—
00:26:20	Jesse	Host	“I got 19 grandkids. You think you’re the—?”
00:26:23	Dominique	Guest	Yeah, exactly. Right? That’s so funny. But I got that moment, and she was kissing me and saying I love you; I love you; I love you. And so, I’m happy that—and that’s why I think when I write these letters to people, whether it’s a guy I like or a friend or whatever, I try to say what’s really on my heart, because I don’t wanna have any regrets. Like, did I not say I love them? Did I not tell them how much I love them or how much they helped me grow or much they made me a better person or how much they make me smile? I really try to do that, because I don’t wanna have any regrets.
00:26:52	Jesse	Host	We’ll finish up with Dominique Fishback after a quick break. Until now, she’d played mostly sweet, sympathetic roles. Her part in <i>Swarm</i> , though, is a departure. We’ll talk about what that change was like. It’s <i>Bullseye</i> , from MaximumFun.org and NPR.
00:27:09	Promo	Clip	[<i>Sci-fi beeping.</i>]

Music: Dramatic, warbling synth.

Ben Harrison: I’m sure you’ve noticed how giant corporations are controlling more and more about what we consume, whether it’s our food, our news, or even the shows we enjoy.

Adam Pranica: *The Greatest Generation* is a show that stands up to *Big Star Trek* and says, “No.”

[*Record scratch. Music shifts to an upbeat tone.*]

We can laugh about costumes that fit too tightly in the groin area.

Ben: We can make a *Star Trek* podcast that’s basically only about that!

Adam: *The Greatest Generation*, the show for free and independent thinkers about *Star Trek*.

Ben: And the groins of different costumes.

Adam: Reviewing every episode in order.

Ben: So, subscribe to *The Greatest Generation* on MaximumFun.org. You’ll be doing your part in telling the *Star Trek* industrial complex that they can’t control your miiiind!

00:27:54 00:27:58	Music Jesse	Transition Host	<p><i>[Sci-fi beeping. Music ends.]</i></p> <p>Thumpy rock music.</p> <p>Welcome back to <i>Bullseye</i>. I am Jesse Thorn. My guest is Dominique Fishback. She's an actor who's appeared in critically acclaimed movies and TV shows like <i>Judas and the Black Messiah</i>, <i>Show Me a Hero</i>, and <i>The Deuce</i>. She's also the star of a new show called <i>Swarm</i>. Fishback plays the central character, Dre. She's obsessed with a pop singer named Ni'Jah. And that obsession goes to a dark and violent place. The show's streaming right now on Amazon Prime. Let's get back into the rest of my interview with Dominique Fishback.</p>
00:28:59	Dominique	Guest	<p>Why did you wanna be the deeply damaged and terrifying serial killer on the show when you could've been the best friend/sister that loves her and smiles in a pretty way that makes her feel warm inside?</p> <p>Because I felt like—because like I love—I love acting. It's also hard. You leave your family for a really long time. 17-hour days sometimes. You do all of this stuff. You wake up every day when you don't wanna go sometimes, and you just do it. And so, I—at that point, I was like, "Man, you know, I did some—I did <i>Transformers</i>. I did <i>Judas and the Black Messiah</i>. Like, what do I do that makes me wanna wake up and feel like I'm challenging myself as an actor? Like, I wanna have a challenge." And when this opportunity came, I thought about Charlese Theron in <i>Monster</i>. I thought about <i>Boys Don't Cry</i>. I thought about Meryl Streep in <i>Sophie's Choice</i>. You know, who wants to play the mother who has to choose between her children, and she does? You know? But those are defining moments for people in their career.</p> <p>I wanted to not catch up to myself as an actor. I didn't wanna get bored with myself. I didn't wanna be—I didn't wanna predict what I was gonna do next, let alone what everybody else was gonna predict that I was gonna do next. I wanted to keep my own self on my toes. And I wanted to—I wanted to see how far from myself I could actually get. And I struggle with the idea of what it means to be light. You know? 'Cause I wanna do light work. I wanna have God in the things that I do. So, what does that mean? But you come to a world and it's full of duality—good and bad, dark and light, and like when we try to spiritually bypass things, that's when we mess up. We can't spiritually bypass that there's darkness here too. You know?</p> <p>And so, I wanted to say if I'm gonna be light, am I only gonna be light in the things that's easy to identify as light? Or am I gonna bring light to the things that we ignore? Because you know, maybe we'll think about people differently when we see somebody who's—who we perceive as odd in the corner somewhere. You know? Like, 'cause if we're being honest, the whole pilot she wants to be left alone. She's not bothering anybody. The boyfriend is picking at her. "Come on, cherry pie. Oh, you this? Oh, you that?" Like, even in the second episode, the strippers they're like, "Oh, weirdo!" Like, they just—she's minding her business! You keep picking. Why? Or that idea of being on social media and forgetting that there's other</p>

people on the other end of the comments that we make. Like, we're actually human beings.

So, we'll say, "I don't like this. Why her face look like that? Why her hair—? Why—? *[Babbling.]*" It's all of these things that we're saying, forgetting that there's people on the other side of things like we said. And so, Dre is kind of like—she's the—she's like the Grim Reaper. She's like the pull up queen. She's like the person who goes, "You said this thing. You're held accountable for the things that you say." And so, I just wanted to like—I don't know, lend my artistry to something like that. I was in an interview once, and this guy was like, "Man, *[stammering]* I felt weird because I felt like I did care about her some, even though she was doing these terrible things." And it's like I could've played her with no humanity at all. I could've not made her as sad as she was when her friend died, not as sad as she was when she had to kill a certain person in another episode. Like, but no! She actually has feelings. She does have feelings! And so, I just wanted to bring a different idea to it, energetically I guess.

00:32:09 Jesse Host Well, I sure am grateful to you for taking this time to talk to me and for your incredible work.

[She thanks him.]

00:32:20 Dominique Guest Yeah, you're really gifted. And thanks for taking the time. Of course. I appreciate that. I appreciate being able to have like a conversation. You know. You'll do like a short interview for a magazine or something. You get these little things. But to have actually a conversation, I've never gotten to talk about my grandmother or my aunt. And it was really special to connect with you that way and to talk about those things. And maybe this conversation'll help somebody else that's dealing with that. So, I do appreciate you having the space to like allow that to flow.

00:32:47 Jesse Host Thank you very much. Was that actor Frankie Muniz?

[Dominique laughs.]

00:32:52 Dominique Guest From *Malcolm in the Middle*?

00:32:55 Jesse Host No, it wasn't. *[Laughs.]*

Dominique Fishback. You can catch her in *Swarm* right now. It is on Amazon Prime. Boy, is she fantastic in it. She's just great!

00:33:04 Music Transition Upbeat, jazzy music.

00:33:06 Jesse Host That's the end of another episode of *Bullseye*. *Bullseye*, created from the homes of me and the staff of Maximum Fun, in and around greater Los Angeles, California. Outside my house, the black asphalt has gone light grey because the great city of Los Angeles has painted it with some kind of heat reflective material, so it doesn't operate as a heat sink. It's gonna cool down my street this summer. I'm very excited about it. Thank you, city of Los Angeles.

Our show is produced by speaking into microphones. Our senior producer is Kevin Ferguson. Our producers are 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 them and Memphis Industries, their label, for sharing it with us.

You can find *Bullseye* on all your social media platforms: YouTube, Twitter, Facebook. Follow us in those places. We will share with you our interviews. Hopefully, you can share them with others. I think that's about it. Just remember: all great radio hosts have a signature signoff.

00:34:18 Promo Promo

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

[Music fades out.]