

[00:00:00] **Music:** Gentle, trilling music with a steady drumbeat plays under the dialogue.

[00:00:01] **Promo:** *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR.

[00:00:14] **Music:** “Huddle Formation” from the album *Thunder, Lightning, Strike* by The Go! Team—a fast, upbeat, peppy song. Music plays as Jesse speaks, then fades out.

[00:00:17] **Jesse Thorn:** It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. There is an art to the perfect prank. You don't wanna be too mean; you don't wanna hurt anyone. But some confusion, maybe a little anger. Sure, those are fine. My guest, Johnny Knoxville, is an expert prankster. He's been pranking people for decades. He's a true master of his craft. Knoxville has been the center of the *Jackass* universe for 23 years. *Jackass* is a group of—(chuckling) I guess we'd call them performers—who basically do the craziest stuff they can think of on camera. Sometimes they do something crazy in public and it's a prank. Sometimes they do something crazy to each other; that's for sure a prank. And a lot of times they just sign up to be tortured in some weird way, which maybe is a self-prank. I'm not sure.

The *Jackass* crew have done things like cover their entire body with bees—their entire body. They've gotten tattoos in off-road vehicles. Like, while they're driving off road. We're talking about 20+ years of Johnny Knoxville putting his body on the line, all the way through *Jackass Forever*, which was in movie theaters last year. Knoxville and his pals always married real danger to the strange and surreal. One time, one of them tied an end of a fishing line to a crooked tooth in his mouth, and then the other end to the bumper of a Lamborghini. (Chuckles.) I don't even like thinking about it, but there's something beautiful there. Anyway, it turns out that you can't really do that forever.

Knoxville almost died making *Jackass Forever*, like for real almost died. And so, he's had to face down what his life is and what his career is without the smashing and the crashing. And the answer for Johnny Knoxville was pranks. His new show is called *Prank Panel*. He's joined by his sometime *Jackass* colleague Eric Andre and Gabourey Sidibe, who brings both gleeful humor and the gravitas of her best actress nomination. Regular people come before this tripartite panel and pitch pranks on people they love—spouses and siblings and friends and coworkers. The pranks that the panel likes, they do—generally, after scripting it out and adding at least one giant explosion. I'm gonna play a clip from *Prank Panel*. But I do wanna let you know two things about the interview that will follow.

Number one, we are going to talk a lot about bodily harm, because it would be very hard to talk to Johnny Knoxville about his career without talking about bodily harm. Also, we taped this interview before the SAG/AFTRA strike. If you wanna support workers affected by that strike, you can go to EntertainmentCommunity.org. So, let's get into it. In this clip from the *Prank Panel*, the judges have just accepted a pitch from a guest named Susanna. She wants to prank her son, Nathan. He is terrified of clowns. The panel accepts the prank, and Johnny explains to Susanna what they have planned.

[00:03:34] **Transition:** Music swells and fades.

[00:03:35] **Promo:**

Johnny Knoxville: You look great!

Susanna: There we go!

Johnny Knoxville: Oh my goodness. That's—you're going to scare him so bad!

Susanna: Well, I still don't know how it's gonna go down. Like, am I supposed to go in the room? Or are we still figuring it out?

Johnny Knoxville: Well, I'll show you. The—we're going to like—in a few minutes, we're going to blow a light in the room to really scare him. And then, we're gonna have this painting fall over there, and there's gonna be blood behind it.

Susanna: Oh, (*censor beep*)!

Johnny Knoxville: It's really gonna scare him. And we have Josh the clown under the bed, and Josh is gonna jump out and go, “WAH!” and scare him and chase him out into the hall. And when he chases him out in the hall—that hallway, it's gonna be filled out of every room with clowns chasing him down the hallway into the elevator.

Susanna: (*Censor beep.*)

Johnny Knoxville: And he's going—they're gonna chase him downstairs, and you're gonna be on the first floor, and you're gonna do the final “BWAH!” to scare him. So, he's gonna be freaked out.

Susanna: Okay.

[00:04:22] **Transition:** Music swells and fades.

[00:04:23] **Jesse Thorn:** Johnny Knoxville, welcome to *Bullseye*.

[00:04:26] **Johnny Knoxville:** It's really tough to—thank you. It's really tough to follow a prank without, you know, video accompaniment.

[00:04:33] **Jesse Thorn:** Well, I mean, your exposition is so incredible there!

[00:04:36] **Johnny Knoxville:** Well, I'm excited, because it was actually a reversal prank, and she thought she was pranking her son who's scared of clowns. So, she's gonna be sitting next to me in the control room watching it on video. So, I was trying to tell her what she thought was gonna happen, but we had other things planned.

[00:04:57] **Jesse Thorn:** You're an executive producer of the show. This is in part your show. How did you think about what kind of prank plays on this show? How did you think about how you managed the tone?

[00:05:14] **Johnny Knoxville:** Um, well—you mean for network television?

[00:05:19] **Jesse Thorn:** Well, for network television and just in general. Like, you've made a huge career doing pranks, but you've also made a huge career doing pranks in a world where the rules are, “We're all good friends and we're pranking each other.” Right? Which is one kind of prank tone.

[00:05:37] **Johnny Knoxville:** But we also—there is a different tone when we're pranking the public on *Jackass* as opposed to when we're pranking the guys. Like, when I'm pranking the public, I don't like making the general public—I don't like gotcha pranks, where someone looks like an (*sensor beep*) or I don't like showing up the general public. You don't—I don't touch the general public, you know. But with the guys I can touch. I can just destroy them.

(*Jesse laughs.*)

So, it's totally different, and that—it holds over. We're pranking—even though it's pranking someone's loved one or coworker on the *Prank Panel*, I don't want—I don't wanna—it's not gotcha prank or making them look ridiculous or the butt of the joke. But I do like to confuse them. You know?

[00:06:32] **Jesse Thorn:** Confusing really seems like your passion in the—like with a lot of *Jackass* pranks or the pranks that are in *Bad Grandpa* or those kinds of things, like the thing that seems to animate you is what's the most ridiculous thing we can put on camera and in public?

[00:06:54] **Johnny Knoxville:** Yeah. You know, I grew up big fans of—a big fan of cartoons, especially with my stunts. They're cartoony by nature, but even some of the pranks, you know, like the giant hand in *Jackass 3D*, that was a cartoon. And I like, you know, Tremain and they're like, “You know, life isn't a cartoon!”

I'm like, I don't know!

[00:07:23] **Jesse Thorn:** What do you think constitutes success in a prank.

[00:07:27] **Johnny Knoxville:** Success in a prank is all based on the reaction you get. You can have a prank that the idea is just so-so, and if you get an out—like, for example in *Bad Grandpa*, that was a little scripted. The pranks were all real, but there was also—it was scripted, the story. And for the story, we needed a shot of me pulling in a diner and hitting this big ceramic pig. And the kid wasn't even in the car. We had a dummy for the kid, and that was the whole shot. I just pull into the diner, hit the pig, and then walk out, get out of the car, and walk in. There was no prank. Well, as soon as I pulled in, I hit the pig. This angry guest from the diner came out and started yelling at me, and it's one of my favorite pranks I've ever done, because he was so angry.

(*Jesse chuckles.*)

And I just—and it was perfect, because whatever I said would only make him angrier. And it got to the point where I could feel—I could tell he was going to hit me. And we can't have anyone hit us, because we don't want anyone to hurt their hand. You know? Then it's like it's not funny if the person we're pranking gets hurt.

[00:08:51] **Jesse Thorn:** Right.

[00:08:51] **Johnny Knoxville:** Um, I don't care personally about getting hit, but you know, we don't—tonally, it sinks us. So, I love playing the game of getting someone as mad as they possibly can be, and then taking them down, and then making them angry again, and taking them down. And that went on for 45 minutes of just me and that guy. It ended up in the movie too. So, and that was all based off the reaction.

[00:09:22] **Jesse Thorn:** Does it have to be a negative reaction?

[00:09:26] **Johnny Knoxville:** No, because if you confuse someone, that's not a negative reaction. Sometimes, people get angry. And depending on their anger, I can sometimes use that, you know, for comedy's sake. So, a lot of times it's not a negative reaction, but sometimes you can make a negative reaction work. It just depends.

[00:09:56] **Jesse Thorn:** What to you is the essential difference between a stunt and a prank?

[00:10:00] **Johnny Knoxville:** I don't go to the hospital on pranks. Uh, I end up in the hospital on stunts. You know, it's just—a stunt is where I'm putting—

[00:10:10] **Jesse Thorn:** I mean, the pranks that you've done are often like really physical. Like it's not just stuff that happens on candid camera. Often, it involves something crazy happening that could actually be dangerous.

[00:10:23] **Johnny Knoxville:** Sure. Well, if it's on the—if it's directed at the guys, yeah. Sometimes people have, you know, gotten hurt when we're doing pranks on the cast, but we try to gauge it—what's reasonable. And not that—I don't know if we're the greatest judges of what's reasonable, but stunts are just me physically putting it on the line. And pranks are something different. You know, you're going for more direct laughs with a prank. A stunt can be funny, or it can be like, “Oh, no. I hope he's okay.” It can be shocking. A stunt can be a number of things, but pranks, hopefully they're funny.

[00:11:19] **Jesse Thorn:** Do you get enough of the excitement that you get from doing something really stupid and dangerous from putting on a grand prank, where in the end you don't wanna make anybody feel too, too bad?

[00:11:38] **Johnny Knoxville:** Absolutely, because a stunt—I mean, you gotta have the crew there to, you know, capture it and set it up. And—but that's seems to be, to me, a more intimate affair. Pulling off a prank, everyone—there are 80 to 90 people that have been working on that prank for weeks. And to finally pull it off, everyone has to be at their best. And to pull it off, it's pretty—it's really exciting. It's very exciting. You know, you just wanna go around and hug people afterwards. It's a different feeling than a stunt, because if a stunt—

a lot of times if a stunt goes really good—i.e., bad—they whisk you away in the back of a car or ambulance. So.

[00:12:51] **Jesse Thorn:** But I mean, you've done, like—you've done that once and then done it again many times. You know what I mean?

[00:12:58] **Johnny Knoxville:** Done which?

[00:13:00] **Jesse Thorn:** Like done—you've done a—you've done something that led you to be whisked away.

[00:13:04] **Johnny Knoxville:** Oh, sure.

[00:13:05] **Jesse Thorn:** And like Steve-O was on this show, your colleague in *Jackass*.

[00:13:10] **Johnny Knoxville:** Yes, my colleague. (*Imitating Steve-O.*) Yeah, dude!

[00:13:12] **Jesse Thorn:** You know, he'll very sincerely sort of meet you in the eyes and say—I don't remember if it was in so many words, but like he's just like, “Yes, I will do anything to have people pay attention to it.” And my greatest pleasure is to think of the greatest of that. Right? And—

[00:13:36] **Johnny Knoxville:** Everything but bungee jumping. But go ahead and finish your story. I'll tell you.

[00:13:38] **Jesse Thorn:** (*Laughs.*) And look, you're a performer. You're an actor. You know, you moved to LA to be in show business. I'm not suggesting that, you know, getting attention isn't part of the interest for you of what you're doing. But the impression that I get hearing you talk about or reading you talk about doing the big *Jackass* stunts is that it is like almost a physical need. Like, it is like the feeling that you get from putting yourself in insane danger, doing something crazy with a goal in mind, where pulling it off mean—potentially means, as you said, sometimes something going good means it went horribly. That experience is what's exciting to you. Like, getting the footage is what means that you did it right. But I don't get the impression that the main thing is showing off.

[00:14:48] **Johnny Knoxville:** Nnno, but I mean, there is that aspect. I'm not doing it in a vacuum. I'm doing it in front of a camera. And—but I do think that the whole process with the outcome figured into it—which you don't know how it's gonna come out. You kind of slip into magical thinking and, you know, get overly optimistic. Which, you know a half (*sensor beep*) overly optimistic stunt man is, you know—it's pretty entertaining to watch. I did, I think, lose the plot. And I didn't—yeah, I lost the plot. I got a little addicted to it. Um, yeah. And yeah, I don't know how to explain it. I just—I was more concerned with the outcome of the footage than I was with how it was gonna come out for me. Yeah. So, but with that said, I'm not sitting here crying about it.

I just—it's something I went through and something I did to myself, and I realized that, you know, it wasn't—may not have been the healthiest thing, in hindsight, but I'm doing okay. You know?

[00:16:35] **Jesse Thorn:** Your “I'm doing okay” facial expression was like one side of your mouth up a little, one side of your mouth—(*trails off.*)

[00:16:42] **Johnny Knoxville:** Well, I was looking at you, and your face is so somber, and I was like, “Oh no.” So, I was reacting to that!

(*Laughs.*)

[00:16:52] **Jesse Thorn:** It's okay for my face to be somber! This is National Public Radio, dude. It's okay to be sincere on my show. You're allowed to. I encourage it sometimes even.

More still to come with Johnny Knoxville after a quick break. Stay with us. It's *Bullseye* from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

[00:17:14] **Promo:**

Music: Fast-paced synth.

Yucky Jessica: (*Rachel McElroy doing a rasping, whiny voice.*) I am Yucky Jessica.

Chuck Crudsworth: (*Griffin McElroy doing a gravely, nasal voice.*) I'm Chuck Crudsworth.

Yucky Jessica: And this is—

Jessica & Chuck: *Terrible!*

Chuck Crudsworth: A podcast where we talk about things we hate that are awful!

Yucky Jessica: Today, we're discussing *Wonderful!*, a podcast on the Maximum Fun network?

Chuck Crudsworth: Hosts Rachel and Griffin McElroy, a real-life married couple—

Yucky Jessica: Yuuuck!

Chuck Crudsworth: —discuss a wide range of topics: music, video games, poetry, snacks!

Yucky Jessica: But I hate all that stuff!

Chuck Crudsworth: I know you do, Yucky Jessica!

Yucky Jessica: It comes out every Wednesday, the worst day of the week, wherever you download your podcasts.

Chuck Crudsworth: For our next topic, we're talking Fiona, the baby hippo from the Cincinnati Zoo.

(Music ends.)

Yucky Jessica: I hate this little hippo!

[00:17:57] **Transition:** Thumpy synth with light vocalizations.

[00:18:01] **Jesse Thorn:** I'm Jesse Thorn. You're listening to *Bullseye*. My guest is the expert prankster and performer, Johnny Knoxville. His new show is the *Prank Panel*. Let's get back into our conversation.

It feels to me like the footage piece of it is—it gives you a way to say that you won, and you did it while also—(*chuckling*) while also suffering horribly, you know what I mean? Like, you can have some—you know, some nun suffering, some self-flagellation, you know, some—but you can also have that “it worked” feeling.

[00:18:47] **Johnny Knoxville:** Well, if it worked, we're probably gonna do the stunt again. (*Chuckles.*) But if it failed, we got it. Also, I would—when we're shooting, I would become obsessed with shooting, to the point where on a couple films they had to have like, you know, like an intervention to get me to stop. Because I didn't wanna stop. I'm a little obsessive.

[00:19:14] **Jesse Thorn:** Like, you didn't want to stop performing?

[00:19:15] **Johnny Knoxville:** Shooting.

[00:19:16] **Jesse Thorn:** Doing stuff in front of the camera.

[00:19:20] **Johnny Knoxville:** Yeah, shooting. On the second film, like we'd shoot five days a week.

[00:19:23] **Jesse Thorn:** Like, here's another idea, here's another thing. Yeah.

[00:19:25] **Johnny Knoxville:** And then I'm like, “I wanna—I want to get a couple guys with a camera, and I wanna go shoot things this weekend.” And they would just literally film me running into stop signs all weekend.

[00:19:41] **Jesse Thorn:** I would imagine that one of the hardest parts of doing that job is that in order to go in the pen with the bull—literally or metaphorically, right?—you have to enter that state that you described, which is like this kind of weird optimism, sort of self-

denial, sort of like weird a little hyped up, “let's go, let's go”, the possibilities are endless, ideas are good kind of state. And not only is that just like hard to get out of in general, especially if getting horribly hurt means that you did a good job.

[00:20:25] **Johnny Knoxville:** Yes. Because it becomes your outlook at that point. You just—once you get into that state, for me, it was hard to get out of that state. It was hard to turn it off. Yeah, it's the damnedest thing.

[00:20:47] **Jesse Thorn:** Right. Because I mean, if you turn it off, you gotta figure out how to turn it back on again. It's like—

[00:20:50] **Johnny Knoxville:** And that's—yeah, it's hard.

[00:20:52] **Jesse Thorn:** That's the weekend. That's the reason you can't have a weekend. You know what I mean?

[00:20:55] **Johnny Knoxville:** So, think I went for years, years in that state. And yeah. I'm just coming down now. I hope.

[00:21:09] **Jesse Thorn:** I mean, you must have had people that you love tell you to stop before.

[00:21:12] **Johnny Knoxville:** You know, sure. But I wouldn't—I couldn't hear it. I remember the first thing I did was for *Big Brother*, one of the first things—probably the first thing. I tested self-defense equipment on myself. And—

[00:21:30] **Jesse Thorn:** *Big Brother Magazine*.

[00:21:31] **Johnny Knoxville:** Yeah, *Big Brother Magazine*. I'm sorry. And you know, I got pepper sprayed, stun gun. I shot myself in the chest with a bulletproof vest, and my sister came to town from Tennessee. And I was really happy with the footage, and I'm like, “Lynn, look at this!” And she didn't like it at all. And I wasn't expecting that, but I should have been. Because basically she's just watching her little brother hurt himself. And especially with the gun, if the—that could have ended terribly. And I'm like, okay, I get that. But at the time, I wasn't, you know. And through the years, people did try to get me to stop. Uh, but I wasn't ready. Yeah. I'm not sure that I even thought that I could have. But the last concussion I got with the bull in *Jackass Forever*, it stuck with me like no concussion before. It scrambled my brains for months. It took me—six months, it was bad. A year, it took me to feel like myself again.

And thank god, because usually after a head injury, after a year is—whatever place you're at after a year is where you're gonna be. So, I had to go on antidepressants. My brain was just playing tricks on me, and it got worse and worse. Like first month, you know, foggy. Second month, still foggy. My cognitive skills were—I took some tests. They were not good. But the fourth and fifth it was just—it was just all bad. So, I'm like, yeah, maybe, uh—maybe I did the thing. Maybe I've done my time and I have—I don't have anything to prove. I have kids. So maybe, uh, you know, it was time.

[00:24:06] **Jesse Thorn:** I imagine that part of it is that, you know, your career is so intimately tied to this group of people that you love. And you've seen every kind of outcome happen in that group of people. You know, we talked about Steve-O. Like Steve-O had very serious addiction problems that he really seems to have engaged really head on. You know, you had a colleague fired from the last movie, because he was struggling so bad, just was not able to be healthy in work. You had—one of your collaborators died a decade ago, now. And you also, I'm sure just had people that were doing okay and wanted to work too. You know what I mean? Like, every possible kind of outcome, and it's all tied into this like—the group of you together. (*Chuckles.*) You know what I mean? So, everybody is like weirdly responsible to everyone else.

[00:25:14] **Johnny Knoxville:** Yes. Yeah. And I feel that, you know, when we haven't done a movie in a while, the guys have always—they're wanting to do another, but it was me who I'm like, "I don't—I don't see it right now." I didn't know if we would, but every now and then they get frustrated, and I get a big group email, and a few of 'em are really laying into me. And I can't—and as uncomfortable as that is, I can't let that affect my decision to do another one. 'Cause if I'm doing it for that reason, because everyone's on me, that's not the right reason. I can't succumb to that. I love the guys; they're my family. But to do what we do, you have to really want to do it. You can't go into a stunt halfway wanting to do it, 'cause that's when someone gets really injured. And you're probably gonna get hurt anyway, but you have to totally commit. And I only feel like that every so often. So.

[00:26:46] **Jesse Thorn:** I'm like a fan of *Jackass*, like I really enjoy it.

(*Johnny thanks him.*)

And when I heard you say that you don't wanna go into it for the wrong reason, I literally had the thought trying to figure out in my head "What is the right reason to do this?" (*Chuckles.*) I was like, "I'm not sure. I don't know if I know what the right reason is to—"

[00:27:10] **Johnny Knoxville:** I do love me and the guys and now girls together—all together as a group. 'Cause it's something I created with my friends. These people weren't strangers, and it's very special to me. And the reaction and laughter that we can bring to people means a lot to me. So, the right reason for me was whenever I got that feeling I couldn't get out of my head of like—'cause I was always—I always write ideas. I still write ideas, and just mail 'em to myself. But when I get that itch, I'm like, I gotta—let's go. I have to do this now. We have to shoot these ideas.

I feel that, to me, is a good bellwether of what I need to be doing. Like, I have to get it out of my system. Because it becomes all consuming. So, yeah. That when it's go time.

[00:28:26] **Jesse Thorn:** Is it possible that that is the wrong reason to do it?

[00:28:32] **Johnny Knoxville:** No, I don't think so. No. Whenever the desire is there and the inspiration is there and the energy is just boiling over, that's when it's time. Because I know we're all together, and I know what we can do, and what we've done, and I think we can do it again. And I know that it also, when we do, it creates like a tidal wave of positivity in everyone's life. Our guys, like—as we just discussed—have—all of us have suffered through

things and are—you know, some are suffering through things, but I think people come to the table with certain things. Some of those things, we're gonna come up with or without us together. And some of the things were hastened along by all of us together. But at the end of the day, *Jackass* is what we do.

[00:29:49] **Jesse Thorn:** I've been in the fringes of comedy for a long time.

[00:29:54] **Johnny Knoxville:** Me too.

(They chuckle.)

[00:29:55] **Jesse Thorn:** Well, what I was gonna say is like I really don't think there is anything that—I mean, not even *30 Rock* or *Cheers* or something. *Airplane*—that comedy people I know agree on as universally and enthusiastically as *Jackass*.

[00:30:23] **Johnny Knoxville:** Aw, thank you.

[00:30:27] **Jesse Thorn:** And it must be funny to like be in this position where—at least within this—you know, plenty of opinions. Opinions vary across the breadth of this great nation on *Jackass* still, but within this community, almost universal reverence. And you've done it by doing like the weirdest, most self-destructive *(chuckling—like, and just coming up with the most creative nightmares to endure! You're like, “Couldn't I just have written that one joke where Alec Baldwin says, ‘Never go with a hippie to a second location’?”*

(They laugh.)

[00:31:13] **Johnny Knoxville:** Ah, yeah. It's an odd path, but it's the path I took, and we took. And honestly, I don't think I knew how to do it the other way. I found a way to do comedy from a point of view that I not only, you know, had inside of me, but I felt like I can do this. I see a way in, you know? I would've loved to have written for *Your Show of Shows*, you know, and sat next to Mel Brooks and Larry Gelbart and, you know, Carl Reiner. And—but *(sighs)* this is my version of funny.

[00:32:17] **Jesse Thorn:** Do you feel good about that?

[00:32:19] **Johnny Knoxville:** Yeah, yeah. I mean, they all weren't hits. Not everything we ever—but overall, yeah. I'm proud of what we did and what we could do again if, you know, we ever got the feeling.

[00:32:34] **Jesse Thorn:** If you can figure out what the version of it is that doesn't involve your head at all.

[00:32:40] **Johnny Knoxville:** Well, I would just have to be—I could do pranks and be more behind the scenes, like Tremain, you know. Because he was always the coach, and I was the player coach, and I guess you'd have two coaches.

[00:32:57] **Jesse Thorn:** Just switch it to all prank call format.

(Johnny laughs.)

Just nothing but prank calls.

[00:33:04] **Johnny Knoxville:** Yeah. Oh, reminds me of my teen years.

[00:33:07] **Jesse Thorn:** Stick around. More *Bullseye* around the corner from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

[00:33:14] **Promo:**

Music: Fun, percussive music.

Manolo Moreno: Hey, when you listen to podcasts, it really just comes down to whether or not you like the sound of everyone's voices. My voice is one of the sounds you'll hear on the podcast *Dr. Gameshow*. And this is the voice of co-host and fearless leader, Jo Firestone.

Jo Firestone: This is a podcast where we play games submitted by listeners, and we play them with callers over Zoom we've never spoken to in our lives.

(Manolo laughs.)

So, that is basically the concept of this show. Pretty chill.

Manolo Moreno: So, take it or leave it, bucko. And here's what some of the listeners have to say.

Speaker 1: It's funny, wholesome, and it never fails to make me smile.

Speaker 2: I just started listening, and I'm already binging it. I haven't laughed as hard in ages. I wish I discovered it sooner.

Manolo Moreno: You can find *Dr. Gameshow* on MaximumFun.org.

(Music ends.)

[00:33:59] **Transition:** Thumpy synth with light vocalizations.

[00:34:03] **Jesse Thorn:** Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. If you're just joining us, I'm talking with Johnny Knoxville. He's the co-host of the new reality show, the *Prank Panel*. It's about pranks. Everyday people come in, pitch ideas to a celebrity panel, and from

there the panel decides if it's a prank that they would like to perform. Then, they punch it up and they let it rip in real life. Let's get into the rest of our conversation.

Do you think you could be happy being an entertainer where—look, I'm not gonna ask you to say anything about this of yourself. I say: you're handsome and charismatic enough—

[00:34:40] **Johnny Knoxville:** Oh, come on!

[00:34:42] **Jesse Thorn:** —to Mario Lopez off into the sunset if you wanted to.

(Johnny laughs.)

You know what I mean? Like, you could literally just say, “Uh, look, I made a long career of being Johnny Knoxville, to the point where I'm now pretty famous. I can use that plus these entertainment skills and gifts I have to just do something simple.” Do you think that you could do entertainment things that don't involve danger or suffering?

[00:35:15] **Johnny Knoxville:** I can do entertainment...

[00:35:19] **Jesse Thorn:** Like, you can—like, when I say can you, what I'm saying is you can. Like, you're capable, in my opinion, as the head of show business.

[00:35:27] **Johnny Knoxville:** The president of show business?

[00:35:28] **Jesse Thorn:** Yeah. I think you're fully capable of doing those things. My question to you is: can you, for yourself—can you be comfortable and happy and feel like a productive artist or whatever it is that you need to be alive and do your thing if there's no danger or suffering?

[00:35:51] **Johnny Knoxville:** Um, I like to be challenged. Right? And I think even with pranks, there's danger involved. Any number of things can go wrong. I just think I need to be challenged, and I don't think that I'm able to just phone it in the rest of a career.

[00:36:21] **Jesse Thorn:** What could possibly challenge you though the way literal, imminent physical danger and suffering challenge you? *(Chuckles.)*

[00:36:33] **Johnny Knoxville:** Um, failure is a challenge. Whether you're making a documentary or, you know, a scripted film... that's a challenge. Like, you have people that are working for you, and you want this thing to continue and be successful. You have people relying on you. You wanna make something as great as it could be. And whatever I do, like whether it's been successful or not, I take it inside me and want—you know, and really—I guess, you know, coming back to obsession. I get obsessed with wanting it to succeed. So, I think, yes, I can do away—I've wrapped my head around like I'm not gonna do the bigger stunts anymore where I'm going. I can't get another concussion. Smaller stunts, I'm okay with. You know, I don't care about my wrist or ankle so much, but I know what you're saying. I don't—I don't see me phoning it in.

[00:37:59] **Jesse Thorn:** Even if—seriously—Terrence Malick calls you tomorrow and he says, “We’re making *Thin Red Line II*. I need you to be at the center of it.” That’s a challenge. That’s as big an artistic challenge as there could be. Right?

(Johnny agrees.)

But for someone whose career has been built on confronting literal death, it’s a different scale of challenge! *(Laughing.)* You know what I mean?

[00:38:34] **Johnny Knoxville:** Right. Yeah. No, I understand what you’re saying. Um.

[00:38:37] **Jesse Thorn:** Like, the fear of—I mean, you’re talking about the challenge of like you have people in your employee that you don’t want to disappoint, or you don’t wanna be embarrassed; you don’t wanna do a bad job. Are those challenges able to sustain you, where previously in place you had: I go on camera and almost die?

[00:39:02] **Johnny Knoxville:** I don’t want to disappoint the people I’m working with, and I don’t want to disappoint myself. I am very hard on myself, so I have no problem with motivation. And my life’s not so—say my life’s not on the line anymore. That’s a good thing. And as weird as that is to say I do miss it.

[00:39:37] **Jesse Thorn:** I don’t believe for a moment that you have a problem with motivation. You’re obviously intensely motivated to make work and make art. I guess what I’m wondering is about security, satisfaction, you know, stability. You know, those things?

[00:40:03] **Johnny Knoxville:** No, I’m the most—I now, as I sit before you, I am the best version of myself that I’ve ever been. I’m the healthiest I’ve ever been. In my line of work doing what I had to do, I wasn’t in a healthy mindset, right? So, not only am I the healthiest I’ve ever been; I am proud of that. I take pride in that. I am putting the pride I took putting my life on the line—I’m putting that in a trunk and putting it up in the attic, ‘cause that doesn’t serve me now. It doesn’t serve my kids or my family, and I’m okay with that, you know? Of course, I’m okay with that.

[00:41:04] **Jesse Thorn:** When I’m preparing for one of these interviews, I read like—I’ll read, you know—if they’re available, I’ll read 20 or 30 or 40 profiles or longform interviews with the person that I’m gonna talk to. And one of the late motifs in the ones over the past five/seven years with you was this kind of like character moment slash running gag, somewhere in between, which was you saying, “Well, I’ve been in therapy for quite some time, but I make sure not to have my therapist address whatever it is that makes me need to do this.” *(Chuckles.)*

[00:41:45] **Johnny Knoxville:** Yeah. I wasn’t joking either!

[00:41:47] **Jesse Thorn:** Do you feel like you can or have asked your therapist, “Maybe we can work on what leads me to dance around in front of a bull?”

[00:41:59] **Johnny Knoxville:** No, that's been discussed, you know. We're now into the nitty gritty. *(Laughs.)* It's time. You know, you might look at it and go, “Well, it's tough to get the toothpaste back in the tube.” But, um... I don't feel that way. I feel like I can have a brand-new day moving forward and be in the moment, have—you know, care about my self-worth and where I get esteem, give myself a break. You can't beat yourself up. You can. You can. It's tough.

[00:42:53] **Jesse Thorn:** And in your case, you can literally, for example, shoot your own self in the chest.

[00:43:01] **Johnny Knoxville:** *(Laughs.)* And have a great career! Or a career. “Great” is presumptuous. But um, yeah, it's just the mentally and emotionally beating yourself up. That's what gets you. And sometimes physical, kids. *(Laughs.)*

[00:43:20] **Jesse Thorn:** Well, I'm so grateful for your time and for your incredible work. And—

[00:43:24] **Johnny Knoxville:** Oh, thank you.

[00:43:24] **Jesse Thorn:** I think you deserve to give yourself all the breaks you can manage. I think it will only make you stronger! Don't worry.

[00:43:31] **Johnny Knoxville:** *(Laughs.)* Thank you.

[00:43:32] **Transition:** Warped, chiming synth.

[00:43:37] **Jesse Thorn:** Johnny Knoxville. His new show is called the *Prank Panel*. You can check it out, streaming now. The pranks are bonkers. The latest *Jackass* movie was called *Jackass Forever*. It is both stomach churning and genuinely amazing. You can rent or buy that pretty much anywhere.

(Music fades out.)

[00:44:01] **Transition:** Pleasant synth with a syncopated beat.

[00:44:07] **Jesse Thorn:** That's the end of another episode of *Bullseye*. *Bullseye* is created from the homes of me and the staff of Maximum Fun, in and around greater Los Angeles, California. At my house, another giant branch fell out of this tree on the sidewalk out front. Anyway, it's a beautiful tree.

The show is produced by speaking into microphones. Our senior producer is Kevin Ferguson. Our producers are Jesus Ambrosio and Richard Robey. You think I'm old? This is what I talk about. I have my own radio show. I'm just complaining about this tree. Our production fellow at Maximum Fun is Bryanna Paz. We get booking help from Mara Davis. Our interstitial music is by DJW, the great Dan Wally. Dan is on Instagram, [@DJWSounds](#), and he posts almost every morning. He'll post a new beat with a little video that he made for it. It's like his

like morning practice, and it's so cool. So, you should go follow Dan on Instagram. [@DJWSounds](#). Our theme song is called “Huddle Formation”, written and recorded by The Go! Team. Thanks to The Go! Team. Thanks to their label, Memphis Industries.

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

[00:45:22] **Promo:** *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* is a production of [MaximumFun.org](#) and is distributed by NPR.