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Transition: Gentle, trilling music with a steady drumbeat plays under the dialogue.

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

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.

Jesse Thorn: It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. The graphic novel *Youth Group* starts very simply. A teen, who doesn't really go to church, goes to church. She joins the youth group, and she makes friends there. Which is straightforward enough. But then, she learns the twist. It turns out demons are real, they're inhabiting the souls of real people, and also this youth group—and other youth groups—exorcises those demons. My guest, Jordan Morris, wrote the book with illustrator Bowen McCurdy. Jordan is a comedy writer who's worked on *At Midnight*, *Earth to Ned*, and many more. He created the Maximum Fun podcast *Bubble* and the graphic novel of the same name. And! He's one of my best pals.

He and I went to college together, and for the past—well!—15 coming up on 20 years, he's been the co-host of my comedy podcast—*Jordan, Jesse, Go!*—as well as an occasional guest host of this show. *Youth Group* is great. It is fun and funny, perfect for teens and tweens as well as adults. So, let's get into it with Jordan Morris.

Transition: Thumpy synth with a syncopated beat.

Jesse Thorn: Well, Jordan Morris, welcome to *Bullseye*—or at least welcome to *Bullseye* as a guest. It's nice to see you.

Jordan Morris: Oh my god, it's great to be on *Bullseye* as a guest!

Jesse Thorn: We met about 25 years ago now, and one of the first things that I remember is—I was your RA on the Performing Arts Hall at UC Santa Cruz. And one of the first things I remember is you either mentioning to me that you were going to or asking where you could go to Bible study. And it struck me, because—needless to say—it doesn't come up that much on the Performing Arts Hall at UC Santa Cruz.

(They laugh.)

Jordan Morris: Right. Let me see. Some things you probably got asked. Where's the drum circle? Where can I get my hacky sack re-beaned?

(They laugh.)

These are probably questions.

Jesse Thorn: And like, you know, at the time I worked at a church. You know, when I was home in the Bay Area, I worked at a church at the time. So, it wasn't as though the idea of going to church was foreign to me, but the kind of Bible study that happens on campus was. And that's why I remember it. I was like, "Huh! This guy's asking me about where Bible study is, huh?"

And I wonder how long, when you were in college, did you go to Bible study?

Jordan Morris: Yeah, I think I went to a couple of different campus Bible studies, like freshman year. And I think that—yeah, I think I was kind of like deciding whether or not it was still for me. Because, yeah, I was like away from my home church. I was away from my like community. And I think I was deciding like, "Am I still going to do this?" And I don't know. I just never found one that clicked. And I think also my, you know, beliefs were changing and my thoughts about that sort of thing were changing.

So, yeah, I think I tried a couple of different ones in college, and it kind of like corresponded with me deciding is this still for me. So, yeah, I think it was like freshman year, and I think like—you know, since then I've been to church services with family, a lot of like Christmas and Easter type stuff. But I haven't like attended regular church or Bible study since then.

Jesse Thorn: What do you think you were looking for from it when you were 18 years old?

Jordan Morris: 18 years old. Boy! Sure, yeah—

Jesse Thorn: I mean, just when you showed up at college, what were you hoping for?

Jordan Morris: Yeah, so I think like community. So, I think the thing that drew me to like church and youth group and Bible study and stuff as a teen and a preteen was like community. Loving the community, you know, kind of liking the kind of built-in supportive group. And I think I was looking for that in college, too. Because I was like really terrified of college. Like, I was so scared. You know, none of my like high school friends went to college with me. You know, I like left my high school girlfriend back home. So, I was like lonely and scared. And I think I was like looking for community. But also, you know, I think a thing that drew me to like church and Bible study as a kid was that (*chuckling*) I was kind of cowardly when it came to bad kids' stuff, right?

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I think I was afraid to drink. Yeah, I think I was afraid to drink; I was afraid to do drugs; I was afraid to do anything sexual. Because all that stuff automatically kills you. I don't know if you knew that, but—

Jesse Thorn: I learned that in the early to mid-1990s as a young teen.

Jordan Morris: Yeah, all of it could instantly kill you. And I think that, you know, apart from the like sacred text stuff, Bible study or a church group was a safe place to just exist as a kid and not have to worry about that stuff. And I think I was scared of college, especially a

college like UC Santa Cruz that had a reputation of being a hard drinkin', drug doin', naked-running-around-in-the-rain place. I think I was like, "I want a social group. I am terrified to try drinking and drugs, etc.—maybe I'll just try and find a version of my high school Bible study to attend, and all that will be taken care of."

Jesse Thorn: What was the Bible study that you went to in high school like?

Jordan Morris: It was—okay. So, let me paint you a picture. So, there was what we called—we the teens—what we called "the big church". That's where Mom, Dad, Grandma, and Grandpa went to hear their stuffy old sermons and sing. You know, (*laughs*) it's where—big church is where they—you know, it's where the grownups went to hear about grownup stuff.

Jesse Thorn: And this was like—this was in Orange County in Southern California.

Jordan Morris: Orange County, California. Yeah.

Jesse Thorn: Sort of semi-suburban Southern California, and was like a non-denominational Christian church? Or—?

Jordan Morris: Yeah. I think you would call it evangelical then and now. But yeah, it was an evangelical church. I went to a couple different ones, but I think they would all describe themselves as such. So, the adults went to big church, and the kids and the teens, we went to a special place just for us. It was called The Underground. It was below the church in like a multipurpose room. "The Underground" was written on the wall in fake graffiti.

(*They laugh.*)

A mom or dad probably cut out a picture of graffiti from the newspaper, got some stencils at the craft store, and tried to—

Jesse Thorn: There was plenty of breakdancing equipment.

Jordan Morris: Yeah. (*Laughs.*) Yeah, you know, The Underground. You know, they tried to make it sound like a cool club and not like a church where you go to pray. You know, it was like a cool place where teens hang out and talk about teen issues. So, that was where the teens went, and you got a special like teen-specific sermon from a like young church employee who was maybe like in their 20s and always very cool. A lot of tattoo sleeves on these people. A lot of times they just come to church in flip flops. They don't need closed-toed shoes! You don't need closed-toed shoes to praise the Lord!

Jesse Thorn: He, capital H, knows what your toes look like already.

Jordan Morris: Exactly. (*Laughs.*) Yes. He formed each individual toe before you were born. So, yeah, and it was fun. It was like casual. There was music that kind of like approximated the rock music of the day. And yeah! And also just a lot of like fun activities that I think you more associate with like summer camp. So, you know, you would put

marshmallows in your mouth and play Chubby Bunny. There were color war type things. *(Laughs.)* We actually did some stuff where we would toilet paper people's houses, but then come back the next day to clean it up. *(Laughs.)*

Jesse Thorn: Wait, really?!

Jordan Morris: Yeah, totally.

Jesse Thorn: Whose houses would you—?

Jordan Morris: Like, just other members of the church, leaders. And think—

Jesse Thorn: Not like non-Christians.

Jordan Morris: No! *(Laughs.)* No, no, no. Yeah, it was always people we knew. And I think what was happening was the church leaders were calling and clearing it first.

(Jesse laughs.)

But like, when they like proposed it to us it's like, “This is kind of crazy. What if we went out and toilet papered pastor Dan's house?” And we would—but then we would clean it up the next day, and everybody would have donuts, you know? So. You know.

And I think a lot of that, what it was doing was just kind of like we can do this stuff with these kids; it feels a little naughty; it feels a little transgressive. It kind of approximates what they would be doing out with their friends, but we're doing it in this like safe, supervised environment, too. So, yeah.

Jesse Thorn: Even more with Jordan Morris after a quick break. Stick around. It's *Bullseye* for MaximumFun.org and NPR.

Stick around! More *Bullseye* around the corner from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest is Jordan Morris. He's a comedy writer and podcaster. Together, he and I host the comedy podcast, *Jordan, Jesse, Go!*. He's also the author of the new book, *Youth Group*. It's a graphic novel set in the 1990s about a Christian youth group who perform real exorcisms. Let's get back into it.

[00:10:00]

To what extent did you want to be in youth group or be in this community, because you, you know, wanted to do what—have the life that God wanted for you?

Jordan Morris: Yeah, I think I like—there was so much about it that I liked. I think I just ignored the stuff about it that I didn't like. Which I wish I hadn't now when I look back at it—like, I wish I had like spoken up when someone in church said something negative about

other religions or something negative about queer people or something like that. Because it happened, and I always felt crummy about it.

And I think there was even a time when I would like write emails using my mom's AOL account to the like lead pastor and say things that I didn't approve of in sermons. And I never got an answer to any of them. I think I wrote a handful of them and never answered. And I think that's like a big part of the reason that I started to fall away from it and doubt it is because I felt like people didn't want to have that conversation, and people didn't want to hear about, "Maybe you shouldn't do this," you know?

Jesse Thorn: Do you remember an example of one of the sermons that you emailed him about?

Jordan Morris: Oh yeah, I think there—one of them was they were doing a thing where they were collecting kids' books that had witchcraft in them. (*Chuckling tensely.*) And I don't know if they were burning them! I don't think they were; I don't think anyone was burning them, but I think you could like—if you wanted to, you know, renounce witchcraft, you could turn in all of your kids' books and comics and stuff like that that had to do with witchcraft. And I think—I was always a big reader and loved books and comics and sci-fi and fantasy and stuff that had witchery in it.

And so, yeah, I think I remember writing an email about like, "Hey, maybe there's lessons in this that we can take, perhaps!" And I think I just never—no one ever wanted to engage with me about that, you know. And I think that was a big part of the reason why I stopped wanting to do it.

Jesse Thorn: When I was a teenager, my dad was very serious about going to church—episcopalian church in San Francisco. And he had actually considered becoming a priest as a young man. And he was also at the time working very extensively with a famous witch named Starhawk.

(*They giggle.*)

I remember her being very nice. That's my memory of Starhawk.

Jordan Morris: And y'all went and toilet papered Starhawk's house and then cleaned it up in the morning?

Jesse Thorn: (*Laughing.*) Yeah, and cleaned it up afterwards.

Jordan Morris: So, yeah. So, I think the thing you're describing is a thing that existed and was out there but was never like an option for me, or I didn't know about it. That kind of like church that embraces multiple faiths, and welcomes everyone, and doesn't take a hard line about Noah's Ark was real, you know? So, I think that was out there, and I think that would have been really cool and beneficial to me had it existed. But yeah, I think I learned about those kind of more like progressive, lefty-er types of churches later in life.

Jesse Thorn: One of the reasons I thought of my dad is... you know, in many ways, my dad—who was a lifelong, you know, veteran’s antiwar organizer—is not the person that you might think of as being a serious churchgoer. But he was. And I talked to him about it later on in his life when I was an adult, and one of the reasons that he told me is that when he was a teenager, his home life was very painful and tumultuous. That he—you know, he was abused by his parents, and there were all these things going on at home. And he was very fortunate to have had a church community, and particularly priests, who gave him an opportunity to be somewhere else.

He knew when he felt bad, he could go to church, and people there would care for him. And that is actually, I think, a theme in *Youth Group* is that this protagonist is going through some serious pain with her mother—and both like static with her mother and pain that she and her are experiencing together—and that as much as she hates to admit it, the church and the youth group are a place of comfort and stability for her.

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And you know, I know your folks broke up when you were a teenager, right? So, was that part of the appeal of this place, that it was sort of consistent and not your unreliable dad?

Jordan Morris: Yeah! Absolutely. Totally. 100%. Right? Like, growing up, I—you know, I had a very happy, safe childhood and was lucky to have it. But yeah, my, my parents did kind of split up around this time. And you know, my mom—a lovely rock and a great person. But my dad, more of just kind of a rambling man and kind of “Hit the road, Jack!” Yeah. And so, yeah—

Jesse Thorn: When you say rambling man, like more than that specifically, like someone who could not be counted on. Right?

Jordan Morris: Sure. Yeah, totally. And yeah—and a lovely guy in many ways, but not a dependable guy.

Jesse Thorn: And that can make it harder to resolve, right?

(Jordan agrees.)

Like, if you're—like, I met your dad once, long, long, ago. And he was very charming.

Jordan Morris: Of course.

Jesse Thorn: And I think that it can be extra hard when you're a kid or a teenager to figure out why this person that in many ways I like—even beyond just loving them because they're a parent—is also not giving me parent.

Jordan Morris: Yeah, absolutely! And yeah, it's something I kind of like had to land on. You know, like this person who is really great and takes me to the ball game every now and

then, like is very lovely to hang around, and is funny, and knows a lot of great facts. You know?

Jesse Thorn: And shows you Mel Brooks movies.

Jordan Morris: Yeah, shows you Mel Brooks movies, makes funny little comments while you're watching *Godzilla*. Yeah, there's just like—there's a fun person you want to hang around, and then there's a good parent. You know? And ideally, these are the same people. But like, a lot of times they're not. So, yeah, and I think that like church and youth group—and also some other stuff too, like there was some secular stuff. You know, like my punk show friends and my drama club group. (*Playfully.*) You'll be shocked to know that I was also very active in the drama club, I know.

So, yeah, like those things were really important, and I think I like—that stuff was a big part of like me getting through that time. But yeah, the church and the youth group was a big part of it too, and the like kind of positiveness and the, you know, teaching you how to cope with something without drinking or drugs. Like, that was helpful and useful. So, like, yeah! And I think that's kind of where Kay, the main character of *Youth Group* is, is like her family is falling apart. And I think that Kay is very much a like—I think one of the details I like about her the most is she's a theatre tech kid. She's not on stage, she's the one who like hangs the lights. And so, she's like a little goth, a little spooky, does not want to go to church, but kind of grudgingly goes to make her mom happy. And then has to grudgingly admit, “Hey, I don't like all this. I don't agree with all of this, but there are some wonderful people here, and there's a good community.”

And eventually they have to fight demons and prevent a war between Hell and Earth, (*chuckles*) so that kind of like keeps her in the fold. But yeah, kind of initially there's this kind of like, “I didn't think this would be my cup of tea, but I have to admit that the community and positivity is nice.”

Jesse Thorn: I mean, one of the things I thought of with that character, having known you a long time—right?—is that there is a tension there between an instinct toward nonconformity, even if it's just nonconformity as expressed by wearing bowling shoes in high school—but like a real instinct towards, you know, becoming an artist and so on and so forth that is both complimented by and in conflict with a desire to take care of the people around you.

And when I thought of Kay's mom, and I thought of your mom—who I've met many times—one of the things I thought about is that your mom, who's a pretty extraordinary human being, also... you know, there's no way for you as a teenager not to have had the instinct that you wanted to take care of her when, you know, she is trying to figure out if she can get out of a relationship with your dad, or if your dad is going to come home that day.

Jordan Morris: Yeah.

Jesse Thorn: And you're also an older sibling, so similar responsibilities there.

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So, how did you grapple with that? Like, that feeling that you wanted to be, you know, be self-indulgent enough to have a life of creativity and self-expression with what I think is a feeling that you also were responsible to this kind mom and to a younger sibling.

Jordan Morris: Yeah. You know, I was very, very lucky as a kid. I never got consciously like deliberately pointed in a direction that wasn't creativity. I had a very nice “follow your dreams” ethos with me at all times. And I'm very lucky in that way. Like, you know, I know a lot of creative people have to like fight to do what they love and do it on the side and do it in secret and stuff like that. And I was--you know, I had a very nice, supportive family who said, you know, “Try it. Do it. Have fun. If you love it, do it.”

And I don't know if this is exactly what you were asking, but I don't think I ever felt like I had to like support them financially. So—(*laughs*).

Jesse Thorn: Oh, no. No, but I mean—what I mean by that really is not the idea that you would have a parent who would say, “You need to become a doctor,” but rather that like— You know, I've known you a long time and seen you work very hard on this, very successfully. But like, definitely when I first met you and four years afterwards, I could always see you scanning the room, making sure you were accommodating everyone else. And making art has an element of fundamental selfishness, whether you're thinking of it in those terms or not, right? Like, you can't just make art for others. You have to have something that is for you.

And like, for example, this book I think is like the most “for you” thing, work I've ever seen you make.

Jordan Morris: Yeah. Oh, totally. And it absolutely is. And I like—and it's maybe not something I recognized until I was like proofreading it-

Jesse Thorn: Really? For real?!

Jordan Morris: Yeah, totally. This book—you know, for better or for worse, all of my like personal writing that I do just starts out as “this is a funny idea”; and the like funny idea here was like, “What if the goobers I went to youth group with actually had to do exorcisms?”

Jesse Thorn: And you don't think that you realized as you were actually writing that you were touching something that was deeper than the—? I mean, like—look, I've never known someone with the facility that you have to write funny things. But did you imagine that that's what you were doing when you were writing this book?

Jordan Morris: So—yeah, so I think in my head this was gonna be like a funny, spoofy romp. You know, and I pitched this kind of idea and a couple of intro pages to Calista Brill over at First Second, my great editor. And she said, “Yeah, let's do this, or I want to do this.” My pitch was set in modern day, and she's like, “What if you set this in the '90s?”

The book is set in the '90s; that's how it shook out. And I said like, “Eh, okay.” I was like, “Yeah, I'll give it a shot.”

And so, as I was writing the book, as I was taking it from pitch to actual book, just the fact that it was set in the '90s I think just allowed me to use a lot of personal details. And just like, you need details for a book. Like, the idea that the main character, her family is going through a divorce—like, I wanted her to have, in addition to like the demons she fights, the like literal Hell demons that she fights, I wanted her to just have like a personal problem that she was trying to overcome. And I was just kind of like thinking about that kid in the '90s, and I'm like, oh—well, yeah, this is kind of around the time that my parents were getting divorced, and that's pretty like relatable. So like, yeah, I'll use that.

And then just as I was writing the divorce storyline, I just put in a ton of details that I personally remembered. Because it's easier than coming up with imaginary ones, right? And I think that just happened at so many points in the book. I'm just like, “Oh, what was I going through at the time? Oh, this and this. And like, oh, this character's kind of skeptical about religion. How did I feel about it? I'll just use those details.”

And so, I think I just did that at so many points in the book. And then when I got back the initial pencils from Bowen McCurdy—the great artist who drew this book, my wonderful co-creator on this project—and the pencils are just kind of like the rough outline of what the comic book's gonna look like. And as I kind of like proofread it, I was like, “Oh, whoops! This is hyper-personal.”

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And I don't think if you read it and you know me, you'll see like a self-insert character. You know, there's no like kid who's wearing bowling shoes to school, because he wants to be a goofball. But yeah, when I read it back, it really struck me. I'm like, wow, this is really personal. And you know, in a way that I wasn't prepared for. And I think it's just like because every time I needed a detail I just used one from my life, this thing came out. You know? And I like the way in which it's personal, you know? I think it's personal in a good way.

Like, I have never been like good at writing memoir, and I've never been good at like—I tried a little bit of standup comedy when I first moved to LA, and I sucked at it and was bad and was only basically just like reading one-liners off a tiny paper that I carried with me. You know, and it was like I was not able to do that thing that standups do where they like, you know, use their life and make it relatable and make you like them on stage. You know? And I love when others do that thing, but I could never do it.

Jesse Thorn: We're going to take a quick break. When we come back, my guest Jordan Morris will talk about enrolling in a community college writing class after literally 15 or 20 years of being a professional writer and also all the valuable lessons that he learned. Shout out to Pasadena City College. Go Lancers. It's *Bullseye* for MaximumFun.org and NPR.

Transition: Thumpy synth with a syncopated beat.

Jesse Thorn: Hey gang, it's Jesse. Thanks for listening to this episode of *Bullseye*. Did you know that there is a whole bunch of bonus *Bullseye* that you might never have heard? You can hear it if you become a member of Maximum Fun.

For example, this year we made a whole show called *Hey, What's Your Job?*, where we had *Bullseye* listeners with amazing jobs come on the show and get interviewed about how they do their work. I mean, I'm talking about like a person who makes monks' robes for a living. The city manager of Weed California came on the show. It's a little bit *Bullseye* and a little bit Studs Terkel's *Working*. It was really fun. We've even done a *Bullseye* where I interviewed someone who I had no idea who I was going to interview when I sat down in the recording booth. Plus there's behind the scenes stuff, all kinds of cool stuff.

You can listen to it all by going to MaximumFun.org/join and becoming a member of MaxFun. When's the best time to do it? Well, right now! Don't wait. So much great stuff waiting for you. MaximumFun.org/join. And thanks!

Transition: Thumpy synth with light vocalizations.

Jesse Thorn: I'm Jesse Thorn. You're listening to *Bullseye*. My guest is Jordan Morris. He's the author of the new graphic novel, *Youth Group*.

I interviewed the other day Megan Stalter, who's a very funny comedy actor who plays the agent or manager's assistant on *Hacks*. And she grew up in, you know, Christian youth group culture very extensively. Like, one of the things that I read her talking about, and I think she talked to me about as well, is—I don't know to what extent she remains a believer, but she still very much identifies as like a church kid. And one of the reasons was that—and I'm speaking for her here—but was that like it was a place that welcomed a kind of shamelessness. I mean, it offered shame as well.

Jordan Morris: Sure.

(They laugh.)

Jesse Thorn: But like, for like a would-be performer, it was like a place where she could embarrass herself and be ridiculous, and everyone would be glad that she was doing it rather than rolling their eyes.

Jordan Morris: Yeah, totally. That is a great observation for sure. And as I mentioned, I was also a drama club kid. And youth group offered opportunities for singing, dancing, little skits. Oooh, we did little skits. Ooh, we did little skits. I got to do British accents. Oh my god. So, yeah! I mean, I think if you were just like a goofball, it was less likely that you were going to get made fun of for being a try-hard. You know? Because you were doing it for the Lord. Your funny little British accent, that was raising up JC, you know?

Jesse Thorn: One of the conflicts in the story is that this youth group that does exorcisms isn't the only youth group that does exorcisms—or equivalent; fights demons, etc. There are a group of Catholic kids, there's a group of Wiccan kids, there are these different groups that are each in their own way fighting these demons and trying to prevent the world from becoming a living hell.

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And one of the big conflicts in the book is those groups trying to deal with their own stuff enough to be able to accept the help of and work with each other to fight these demons. Obviously, there's like an allegorical element to that. But like to what extent was that conflict that you, yourself, were aware of or dealing with when you were a teenager that, by creating this world for yourself and engaging in this world for yourself, part of that was excluding other worlds? Like, drawing a line between yourself and others.

Jordan Morris: Yeah. So, that was always one of the things I didn't like about my youth group but, you know, I didn't speak up about enough was that like I always hated the snarky comments about other religions that people made—the leaders, the other kids. And you know, making snarky comments about Mormons or atheists or—you know—whatever, always just rubbed me the wrong way and seemed anti—yeah, it always rubbed me the wrong way, and I never liked it.

So, I think that like, a lot of the stuff in *Youth Group* is like creating a more perfect version of what I wished my youth group had been in many ways. I think it's also like—we also tried to be, you know, critical. And I think there's some criticism and commentary in this. But also in many ways I think that like the youth leaders, the young people are more tolerant than the ones I grew up with. They're like, more progressive and open to other kinds of people than the kids were that I grew up with. And I think in a lot of ways like *Youth Group* is kind of a little prayer in that way. It's like a like, “It could be like this, right? Like, we could join together with the Wiccans and the Catholics and the atheists and all just work to make the world a better place, right? Like, we all could die! Stuff's trying to kill us! Like, why don't we all work together and forget about this little stuff?”

Jesse Thorn: Have you heard from people you went to youth group with who have read the book?

Jordan Morris: I have, yeah! (*Chuckles.*) And no one says anything very specific about it other than they liked it.

(*They laugh.*)

So, I think if people have like—I don't know! Yeah, I don't know how they really—I've gotten like very nice, very generic messages from people I went to youth group with about it. But no one has said anything really meaningful beyond, “Congrats on the book! Turned out great! Lots of fun!” So, yeah, I don't know. I don't know if anybody felt deeper about it or recognized, you know, our experience in it or anything like that.

Jesse Thorn: Were you surprised or disappointed by that?

Jordan Morris: Maybe a little bit, yeah. I think I would've... you know, because it is a personal book, and I do like—it has more feeling in it than anything I've written. So, yeah, it would be nice to hear how the book makes people feel. So, if you are listening to this, and if you went to youth group with me and have feelings positive or negative about youth group, I'd love to hear it.

Jesse Thorn: So, I've known you my entire adult life. One of the things that I like and admire most about you is your commitment to and how hard you work on both your work and just generally being better. Like, self-improvement is too loaded of a phrase, but like in the literal sense, self-improvement.

Jordan Morris: Not paying Tony Robbins to walk over hot coals, but.

(They chuckle.)

Jesse Thorn: And one of the things that you've done relatively recently that I just thought was so cool and amazing is take a fiction writing class at a community college by your house. And I can only presume that in that room of teens, and perhaps a few moms—

Jordan Morris: No moms! Just teens.

Jesse Thorn: Just teens. *(Chuckles.)*

Jordan Morris: Just teens. Yeah. I thought there would be moms too, honestly.

Jesse Thorn: I would presume that you were the only professional writer in that room. And you by then had been a professional writer for a long time. So, what was it like to sit down in a classroom and say, "I'm a beginner," at a thing that is also your career and has been a long time?

Jordan Morris: Yeah. First of all, shout out to Pasadena City College. Go Lancers. And yeah, it was—I read a lot of fiction, and I read a lot of short fiction, short story. That was what the class was in was short fiction. And I like love it and admire it so much. And like, it just seems like a magic trick to me. That was comics too, for me. I'm like, "How does this go from—?!" Like, the bafflement I had and the admiration I had—and have—for comics is like, you know, out of this world.

[00:35:00]

Like, the fact that I've gotten to do it like blows my mind. Like, the fact that like there is a comic book that I worked on between us is like so cool and amazing. And I can't imagine it will ever be not cool and amazing.

Jesse Thorn: I mean, I think like having known you, seen from you from the outside, I think that after a decade of being a professional comedy writer—or however long it was; 10/15 years of being a professional comedy writer—when you found out that you were going to be able to make a comic, I think that was the most excited about your work that I've ever seen you. Including when you like got your first job as a comedy writer.

Jordan Morris: Yeah! No, I mean, it's up there. It's like a big life moment for me. And I think something that I've learned, because—

Jesse Thorn: And it's not 'cause comic books pay so great. You know what I mean?

(Jordan agrees with a laugh.)

It's 'cause you really—that was like a true dream.

Jordan Morris: Yeah, totally. A true—yes, a literal childhood dream come true and like—and it wasn't one of those that turned like ironic and ruined my life. It was one of those where you got your dream, and then it was cool. I suggest that to everyone! Do it. Get your dream, but don't have it double back on you in a way that's like ironic.

But like—so, I think something that I've had to do a lot in my career is like pivot. And so, I think something that I've realized is just that like there's just a learning curve for everything. Like, being funny and being a good writer is one thing. And I think I'm those things. I think I am funny and a good writer. But like when I'm doing something in a format that I'm not familiar with, you are just going to suck at it no matter how good you are. Right? Like, going from, you know, writing comedy variety to a short story, sssome of the talents carry over, but not many. So, it's just like—I think you just have to realize that when you're doing a new thing, there's just going to be a learning curve.

And I think that's kind of how I tried to approach that short story writing class at Pasadena City College—go Lancers—is like, I'm—you know, I'm pretty funny, and I'm a good writer, but there's a lot about this I don't understand. And you know, some of these surly, vaping 19-year-olds are also probably very funny and good writers, and there's stuff about this they don't understand. So, we're all kind of in the same boat. So, yeah, I think that's how I kind of tried to go into that class. Not as like, “Hey, I'm the professional writer who is here for a goof.” But like, “This is some stuff that I love, and I want to learn more about it. Because I'm excited about it, but I'm probably bad at it.”

(Stage whispering.) And I was bad at it, and I'm still kind of bad at it. But—

Jesse Thorn: You got an A though.

Jordan Morris: I did get an A, but I think that's mostly from *(chuckling)* showing up, attendance.

(They laugh.)

I think a lot of that class was attendance, but! Thank you, thank you. Yes, I did get an A.

Jesse Thorn: Well, Jordan, I'm grateful to you for taking the time to come in and be on *Bullseye*. And I'm grateful for your work, which I love so much. And more than that—and I apologize for not saying this enough when we're not being recorded for the public—

(They laugh.)

But I'm so grateful for your incredible talent and gifts and hard work, and so grateful that I get to both experience them and share in their fruits. And I love you a lot, and thank you for being my friend. And thank you for working with me.

Jordan Morris: Oh man, I love you too, pal. Thank you so much. And you are such a wonderful, supportive, funny, talented partner. And I'm lucky to have you. And I'm lucky you asked me to do this. And I'm lucky we get to do a show every week. *Jordan, Jesse, Go!*

Transition: Bright, chiming synth.

Jesse Thorn: Jordan Morris, everybody. His new book is called *Youth Group*, written with artist Bowen McCurdy. It's available now at your local comic book store or your local book bookstore.

Transition: Upbeat synth with light vocalizations.

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. I personally just got back from tour with the *Judge John Hodgman* podcast. We're headed out again in November, by the way, in New England. And when I was in St. Paul, Minnesota, I got to pet a capybara. And also I petted a sloth, and a giant bunny rabbit, and an emu. And I got to hold a baby kangaroo. It was great.

Our show is produced by speaking into microphones. Our senior producer is Kevin Ferguson. Our producers, Jesus Ambrosio and Richard Robey. Our production fellow at Maximum Fun is Daniel Huecias. Our video editor is Daniel Speer.

[00:40:00]

We get booking help from Mara Davis. Our interstitial music comes from our pal Dan Wally, also known as DJW. You can find his music at [DJWSounds.bandcamp.com](https://djwsounds.bandcamp.com), where you can find—among other things—a compilation of music from this show. That's pay what you want. Our theme music was written and recorded by The Go! Team. It's called “Huddle Formation”. Thanks to The Go! Team and to their label, Memphis Industries.

You can follow *Bullseye* on Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube—where you will find video of just about all of our new interviews, including the ones you heard this week. We had a great video with Barry Sonnenfeld, a great video with Jordan Morris. You can go on YouTube and hit subscribe, smash those like and subscribe buttons, and share the interviews there. Just search for *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* on YouTube.

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

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

(Music fades out.)