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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](https://www.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. Adam Scott is my first guest this week. He played the calzone-obsessed accountant turned political consultant, Ben Wyatt, on *Parks and Recreation*. On *Party Down*, he played the failed actor turned cater waiter, Henry. On *Big Little Lies*, Ed McKenzie. And in *Step Brothers*, the preposterously evil Derek. And if you're one of the many people watching the sci-fi dramedy *Severance*, you also know him as that show's protagonist, Mark. It's a terrific program; Adam is great in it. Its second season just kicked off on Apple TV+.

When he and I talked in 2022, *Severance* had just wrapped its first season. In case you haven't heard it, here's the premise.

It's set mostly at a company called Lumon Industries in a department where many of the workers have undergone a procedure called severance. When they get to Lumon, workers have no memory of their lives outside the office. And when they leave for the day, they remember nothing about what happened on the inside.

Scott and the crew had spent much of the most intense lockdown parts of the pandemic filming that first season, and you can feel that isolation and disorientation in the performers on screen. When the show starts, Mark S.—played by my guest Adam—has been working at Lumon for some time. In fact, he just got a promotion. And in this scene, he's training his first-ever new recruit. Helly R. Helly is, as you might imagine, a little disoriented.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Clip:

Helly (*Severance*): So, I'll never leave here.

Mark: I mean, you'll leave at five. Well, actually, they stagger our exits. So, 5:15. But it won't feel like it, not to this version of you, anyway.

Helly: Do I have a family?

Mark: You'll never know.

Helly: I have no choice.

Mark: Well, every time you find yourself here, it's because you chose to come back.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Jesse Thorn: Adam Scott, welcome back to *Bullseye*. It's nice to see you.

Adam Scott: Thank you. Thanks, Jesse. Good to see you, too.

Jesse Thorn: It's been—how's the last decade been for you? (*Laughs.*)

Adam Scott: It's been terrific! It's really gone by fast. It feels like we were just here together.

Jesse Thorn: (*Laughs.*) Congratulations on *Severance*. It's a really great show.

Adam Scott: Thanks, man.

Jesse Thorn: You know, you started your career with plenty of straight drama, but you have spent the last five or ten years doing a lot of comedy—serio-comic things, certainly, but a lot of comedy. Were you concerned at all at how not funny this part is?

(*Adam laughs.*)

And it's not to say it's entirely not funny. There's funny things in the show, but how deeply, non-jokily you would have to play everything.

Adam Scott: You know, I was kind of—after *Parks and Rec* ended, I was consciously seeking out something a little different and maybe less in a comedy space. I just wanted to try it again, 'cause that's what I always sort of (*chuckles*) thought of myself as. Like, a dramatic actor's kind of what I always envisioned myself as when I was a little kid, is that I would be like Harrison Ford or Robert De Niro or something like—those were my guys. You know?

But on the side, I was also deep into *Monty Python* and *Saturday Night Live* and stuff. It's just, for me, I thought I was gonna be like—that was the direction I always saw for myself. But then, you know—and I did, you know, mostly do like guest spots on hour-long dramas. And I did a lot of background work when I started out on all kinds of things. But then I kind of did that, and then I did this really dramatic HBO show.

And it just—you know, I could never find footing until— Or really, nothing really stuck, career-wise, for me. I wasn't getting the momentum that I was looking for. Now, looking back on it, I wasn't getting that at the time. You know, in order to keep yourself afloat in entertainment, I think you always have to be convincing yourself that everything's going great. But now, looking back, I was a little bit—you know, I was hopping from lily pad to lily pad job-wise and just sort of trying to paste something together.

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And it wasn't until I found comedy that something started to coalesce, career-wise, and something really started coming together, and it was *Step Brothers*. It was just a fluke I got that role.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Clip:

Dale (*Step Brothers*): Uh, what?

Robert: Dale, don't interrupt the man when he's telling a story.

Derek: No, no, no. It's fine, Robert. Um.

Dale: I was asking about the story! Fine.

Tommy: What's this guy's deal?

Derek: (*Sighs.*) I don't know, son. It's okay. (*Sighs.*) I'm sorry, now I forget where my story was going.

Robert: Goddamn it, Dale!

Derek: Listen, gang. Don't be mad at Dale for ruining the story. And possibly the evening. It's totally fine. I have a lot more stories.

Nancy: Derek, that you do. That you do!

(*They laugh.*)

Derek: I know. Guilty as charged! But the story!

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Adam Scott: That sort of kicked in this different direction for me. And like '07 is when that happened. So, then when *Parks* ended, I was looking to do maybe something a little more serious just to kind of get back to it a little bit. And it wasn't easy to do that, because—you know, by that point, I think I was thought of if anything as more of a comedic actor.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, you were adorkable.

Adam Scott: Adorkable. There you go. Thank you. That's the word that's always on the tip of my tongue. (*Inaudible*).

(*Jesse agrees.*)

And so, I auditioned for *Big Little Lies* and got that role, and it was—it was a really—Jean-Marc Vallée directed the first season of that. And that was a great way to kind of get back into more dramatic stuff, 'cause he's a really intense, incredible director. He sadly passed away just recently. It was awful. But what a terrific—I mean, just a brilliant director and lovely person. Anyway, that was sort of a foray back into more dramatic stuff.

And then, yeah, *Severance* was that, plus it was sort of a role that I had always wanted to play. It was like when I read it, I thought if I'm able to actually land this—at least for me—it's going to be what I've been earning all of this time, all these 20-some-odd years in this town is getting to the point where I get to actually play a role like this.

Jesse Thorn: Watching *Severance*—you know, it has a really intense aesthetic and tone that is—you know, by design, kind of sad and alienating. And I couldn't help but think about you performing on this show when covid was new and—you know—you were away from home. Like, the idea that you would leave this intense, alienating world—and I'm sure you had (*chuckles*), you know, donuts in between takes and everything. But like, even just looking at the walls must have been a little intense. And then, come home, and instead of like coming home to your family, come home to not being able to leave an apartment or a hotel room or something.

Adam Scott: Yeah. That was a big part of it, was the sort of strangeness of the world around us and the atmosphere we brought in with us. It was—we started shooting the day after the presidential election of 2020, and so we were right smack in the middle of pre-vaccine pandemic in New York. And my family's in LA. And so, yeah. I was by myself—I was either by myself in an apartment, in a van on the way to the Bronx where we shot the show, or on the set. Which, as you said, is a vast (*chuckles*) kind of alienating atmosphere of its own. And then between takes—you know, the crew all have masks on. And between takes we have to get our masks and our shields back on, and either sit there or go to a dressing room where you have to, you know, close the door. And then you can take your—so you're either by yourself or on camera with the other actors. Other than that, you are all suited up with stuff all over your face.

Just six months before I left for New York, my mom had passed away, right before lockdown started. So, it was this sort of intense time for my family and for me. She passed away, and we immediately went into lockdown. So, the blow of that happening was really cushioned by my family.

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You know, like everyone, we went through lockdown together and had family dinners and movie nights and tried to just keep ourselves as busy as possible. And all the positive things that went with that—all the time you get to actually spend with your family, with two kids and my wife, all that stuff was great. But once I landed in New York and like closed the door to that apartment, I was like, “Oh... okay. I haven’t really figured this out, yet.”

I realized in that moment that I hadn’t properly grieved yet. I had all this love in my life at home that really helped cushion the blow, like I said. And I guess it was the time I was gonna have to really confront these feelings. And so, yeah. I was in the apartment or on set, and that’s where I ended up doing a lot my grieving and confronting that grief and how to sort of move on and carry on.

Jesse Thorn: Did you get to have a funeral for your mom?

Adam Scott: We did just this past December, finally. You know. We had a few false starts, you know. A lot of our friends and a lot of members of our family are older, and so we wanted to make sure it was safe. And this past December, it was right before omicron really had landed. And I think if we did it a week later, we would’ve had to cancel. So, we did right at the right time. And as far as I know, we didn’t have any infections or anything spread at the gathering. It was outside. It was great.

And it was great to finally do it a little more than a year and a half after she passed away. Getting to finally do that. And like a lot of people are going through that, trying to figure out when to—when to have that moment where you can all come together. I think it’s—I think it’s really important. And it ended up being incredibly important for all of us.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, I lost a very beloved aunt right before the pandemic, and—you know—her service was supposed to be like the week of lockdown, week after, something like that. And you know, we postponed it. And it was like—it was a big thing; she had like asked me to pick all the music for her.

Adam Scott: (*Sadly.*) Aww. I’m sorry.

Jesse Thorn: And you know, we just never did it. And it doesn’t occur to you how important it is.

(*Adam agrees.*)

Or for that matter, how hard it is to get back up that head of steam, to like—the goal of that funeral in a way is to, you know, have an anchor for engaging with the fact that you lost someone.

Adam Scott: That's right. That's right. And to—yeah, like you said, have an anchor, but also to have an anchor together that you can all grab onto and pay tribute together. And I think it's never too late. I found doing it a year and a half later ended up being this sort of mixed blessing, in that here we are a year and a half later, and we're able to all pay tribute to this great person. Whereas if we did it two weeks after she had passed—here we are a year and a half later, we would've all—

It just kind of elongated her time here in a way. Which sounds a little silly, and I'm not maybe properly articulating it. But there was something kind of great about it, where we were tipping our hat—kind of makes you realize that for those dearly departed in our lives, maybe it's something we should do every year is get together and talk about how great this person is and how much you miss them. Because we all have these busy lives and you—you know.

Jesse Thorn: So, how did it feel to be in that hotel room or, you know, furnished apartment that somebody rented for you and like just your connection to the outside world is, you know, video conferences and food deliveries and a guy who comes with a van to take you to set every day?

Adam Scott: It was weird, and it was—you know, and we—you know, like any set in those times, we had a few different shutdowns. And I got covid in February of '21 before vaccines. And I got hit pretty hard with it and had to stay in the apartment for two weeks or whatever. But we also had some scares onset, so you'd have to lockdown and had to scrap plans for my family to come out for Thanksgiving and—

So, there were a couple of three-month chunks where I didn't see them in person, and that was hard. But I think I had it a lot easier than a lot of people did during that time, obviously. And it all kind of felt of one with the show, looking back. It was weirdly appropriate for what we were shooting.

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Jesse Thorn: It must have been weird too that like, you know, here you are in showbusiness where you—I mean, this is always true as an actor, but it was certainly true over the last couple of years that like you're working, and thank goodness. You know, there's plenty of people who weren't working, especially people who had to do showbusiness things that weren't happening. But like you're working in the most weird, awkward, and difficult circumstances—you know, for an actor that's shooting onset, anyway—that you could possibly be. And you must have just been there like, “Well, here I am in my dream part, and it means that I have to sit alone in this apartment, not see my family for months at a time, and like live with the death of my mother and these creepy blank walls.

Adam Scott: Yeah. Yeah. That's what I kind of kept in mind all along. 'Cause this is literally what I've always wanted. It's the kind of show I would run to as an audience member. It's exactly the kind of thing I've loved watching since I was a kid. It's—and I love doing it. It

was so fun. Once we were there on set, it was so exciting and fun. And Ben is the best person to work with, 'cause I—you know, from the time I first—I went straight there from the airport, just 'cause I wanted to see these sets in person that Ben had just been texting me photos of for months.

And walking in there and seeing these incredible, beautiful sets that our production designer, Jeremy, designed, I kind of—right then and there—realized like I'm just going to surrender. Because I've always—I always have this sort of third eye on my performances that's—you know, depending on the director, I always kind of try and keep track of what I'm doing and try and self-edit or keep track of what I've done and what I want to do—just kind of take-wise, like, “What did I do three takes ago? What did I do—?” I try and cover the board and make sure I'm running the gamut here. Or holding back and not doing this. If I'm worried the director will use something that I think wouldn't work, trying to resist—there's all sorts of things that you can kind of keep track of in your head that ultimately can injure your performance, particularly if you're somewhat self-conscious or trying to keep an eye on your performance.

And once I walked onto that set and saw how grand and meticulous this all was going to need to be in order to work, and the shots they had in mind—Jessica Lee Gagné, the cinematographer, is really brilliant. I just decided then and there that like there's no one I trust more than Ben and his taste and his work. So, I'm just going to get rid of that third eye or that—whatever you wanna call it and just trust him completely, and just dive in headfirst and not look back.

And I'm so glad I did, 'cause he's someone you can trust. And it was a completely different experience just focusing 100% on the task at hand and not trying to self-edit or keep a director's eye on myself and just focusing on one scene at a time, chipping away at the big mountain in front of us.

Jesse Thorn: Even more still to get into with Adam Scott after the break. We'll be back in just a minute. It's *Bullseye* from [MaximumFun.org](https://www.maximumfun.org) and NPR.

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Transition: Thumpy synth with light vocalizations.

Jesse Thorn: Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. I'm talking with Adam Scott. He is, of course, the star of *Severance*. That show's second season is airing now on Apple TV+. If you happen to be one of the 15 people who have not seen the show yet, it is a brilliant, dark sort of science fiction series. It's set in a workplace where many employees have had their memories surgically divided between work and home. You can stream *Severance* now on Apple TV+. Adam Scott and I talked in 2022. Let's get back into our conversation.

I watched a clip of you on the television program *Boy Meets World*. And I don't know how old you were in this—maybe 23 or something. And the hair on your—you looked so pretty!

Adam Scott: Did I have a lot of hair? A lot of hair action?

Jesse Thorn: You still have a lot of hair action at all times. You—

Adam Scott: Reams. (*Chuckles.*)

Jesse Thorn: You were like—your character was like in the high school in like a—in fact—

Adam Scott: A cool guy!

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, well, cool guy. But like, the one that I was—like, gangster guy. It was a gangster plot, where you were running some kind of extortion ring.

(*Adam confirms.*)

And in fact, I'm gonna play it. Because I'm talking about it, I'm gonna play a clip from it.

Adam Scott: Oh boy.

Jesse Thorn: Your character's name was Griff, and was a cool guy/bully type. And in this episode, you and another character named Frankie have gotten some contraband. We'll hear about the contraband for Eric Matthews.

Adam Scott: Cocaine? Were we dealing cocaine at the school, on *Boy Meets World*?!

Jesse Thorn: No! Mushrooms. (*Chuckles.*)

Adam Scott: Oh, okay, right. No, that makes sense. I'm sorry.

Jesse Thorn: (*Chuckling.*) Come on. You wouldn't—your character wouldn't do that!

(*Adam agrees.*)

Not on network television!

Adam Scott: It was all shrooms and crank back then.

Jesse Thorn: Let's take a listen. Let's take a listen.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Clip:

Griff (*Boy Meets World*): Matthews! You looking like college material.

Eric: Yeah, here's your money.

Griff: Let's see.

Frankie: Can I pat him down?

Griff: Maybe later, Frankie.

Frankie: (*Dejectedly.*) Okay.

(*The audience laughs.*)

Griff: I believe you'll find it flawless.

Eric: Ah, Feeny's stationery.

Griff: White as snow! Ready for any college recommendation you care to write yourself.

Frankie: Now can I pat him down?

(*The audience laughs.*)

Griff: Frankie, I'm doing business here.

Frankie: Fiiine.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Adam Scott: You can see why people were laughing so much. Those are really good jokes.

Jesse Thorn: Those gags are good. There was a good joke at the end of that scene—I don't remember what it was, but I remember thinking, "Oh, that's a good joke! Good job, *Boy Meets World*."

Adams Scott: A couple things: Frankie there is played by Ethan Suplee, the great Ethan Suplee. And Frankie, now, is the name of my daughter. I wonder if that's where that came from. Do you think?

Jesse Thorn: I have a child named Frankie!

Adam Scott: Oh, you do?

Jesse Thorn: Yeah. Named after that character from the show.

Adam Scott: Is she—that's—it's—if I had a penny for every person who named their child after Ethan Suplee's character in *Boy Meets World*.

Jesse Thorn: (*Laughing.*) Sure! Anyway, as I was watching that, I was thinking maybe the reason that Adam Scott worked at poverty levels for the first ten years of his career was because he had to age from a nine-and-a-half to an eight-and-a-half, because he was too pretty to be funny at the beginning. (*Chuckles.*) And so, you had to get into comedy-handsome territory.

Adam Scott: Interesting!

Jesse Thorn: That was my theory. Before you could fly—

Adam Scott: That's certainly a flattering a theory.

Jesse Thorn: (*Chuckles.*) Yeah, well, you're a lot more handsome than I am!

Adam Scott: I think that— That's not true. I think that—I remember Griffin—'cause it was—Griff Hawkins was the name of the character. And I'm pretty sure it's because Ethan Hawke was such a big deal. 'Cause it was right around *Reality Bites*. That's where Hawkins comes from. Anyway.

Um, yeah, I think it was more due to me being terrible at auditioning and super nervous on sets. Which is why it took me many, many years to get any traction whatsoever.

Jesse Thorn: Can I play a clip of you in *Star Trek: First Contact*?

(*Adam confirms.*)

Did you like get a call from your agent that said, "Do you wanna audition for *Star Trek: First Contact*?"

Adam Scott: Yes. And I did audition for *Star Trek: First Contact* for a much larger role. And I forget what role it was in that movie, but I—

Jesse Thorn: Picard.

Adam Scott: It was—*(laughing)* it was for Jean-Luc Picard. I didn't get it, so they offered me this, which was like—

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I remember being done before noon one day, and Jonathan Frakes was directing—who was just a lovely, really fun guy. And I didn't understand anything that I was saying or doing, but it was what it is.

Jesse Thorn:

Well, in this scene, Worf—the Klingon who's friends with Jean-Luc Picard—he's the captain of a ship called the USS Defiant—a spaceship.

(Adam confirms.)

And you're on the bridge there with him. And they're fighting the Borgs.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Clip:

(A cacophony of beeping alerts, sci-fi sound effects, and collision noises.)

Music: Dramatic, orchestral music.

Worf (*Star Trek: First Contact*): Report!

Helm Officer: Main power's offline! We've lost shields and our weapons are gone!

(A bang. The music swells.)

Worf: Perhaps today is a good day to die! PREPARE FOR RAMMING SPEED!

Helm Officer: Sir, there's another starship coming in! *(Beeping.)* It's the Enterprise!

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Jesse Thorn: I feel like this is why—to me, if I was an actor this would be like my like “this is why I became an actor” moment. And it’s not ‘cause I love *Star Trek*. I’m fine with *Star Trek*, but I’m not a big *Star Trek* person. But like, it just would be so fun to be like, (*yelling*) “The shields are at fourrr! Beh! Bah! Ahh!” (*Laughs.*)

Adam Scott: Yeah, it was. And people are like right off camera like shaking the set, and there’s smoke and stuff falling, and I had like a cut on my forehead or something. It was pretty cool. And I had all this like fake sweat on me. I don’t—I never understood though, are we fighting the Enterprise? We wouldn’t be, right?

Jesse Thorn: No! The Enterprise is coming to help you!

Adam Scott: To save us.

Jesse Thorn: I haven’t seen *Star Trek: First Contact*.

Adam Scott: You never saw it?

Jesse Thorn: If this was about *Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home*, I could give you an exegesis here. But—

Adam Scott: That’s the one William Shatner directed.

Jesse Thorn: Uh, I believe—no, I believe that Leonard Nimoy directed it.

Adam Scott: Leonard Nimoy directed *Search for Spock*. I think *Voyage Home* was the Jesus-y one that William Shatner did.

Jesse Thorn: No, that’s five or six.

Adam Scott: Oh, it is? Okay.

Jesse Thorn: *Voyage Home* is the one with the whales. It’s the San Francisco one.

Adam Scott: Oh! It is! That’s right! That was a huuuge hit.

(*Jesse agrees.*)

I remember that being a big—that was a—yeah, that was right in the middle of like, “Let’s save the whales. Let’s do this.” And it was like right on brand mid-’80s.

Jesse Thorn: Sulu goes, “San Francisco. I was born here.”

Adam Scott: He does?

Jesse Thorn: Yeah. Tingles up and down my—this San-Francisco-native spine at age seven, watching that.

Adam Scott: Santa Cruz right here! So.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah. What a dream.

Adam Scott: I've gotta see that one again.

Jesse Thorn: You're like, "The Monterey Bay Aquarium!?! I live in the Monterey Bay area!"

Adam Scott: Oh, my dad is a marine biologist in Santa Cruz. So, we got to go to the Monterey Bay Aquarium before it opened and like walk around and check it out.

(Jesse whistles.)

It was a big deal.

Jesse Thorn: Hold hands with an otter?

Adam Scott: Y-you can't touch the otters, Jesse.

Jesse Thorn: You can't touch the—even if your dad is a marine biologist?

Adam Scott: No, no, no, no, no. You'd contaminate their environment. You can't do that.

Jesse Thorn: Did you know they have favorite rocks?

Adam Scott: Really? Otters?

Jesse Thorn: Yeah. Otters have favorite rocks to use to open up their clams that they eat.

Adam Scott: Oooh, like ones they carry with them for years?

(Jesse confirms.)

That's pretty adorable.

Jesse Thorn: I don't know about years. I don't wanna get letters from marine biologists like your dad. *(Chuckles.)* If your dad's listening.

Adam Scott: I'll get a call immediately after listening to this interview.

Jesse Thorn: Listening right now on KUSP.

Adam Scott: That's right, KUSP.

Jesse Thorn: Writing an angry letter.

(Adam agrees and they chuckle.)

All I wanna do, Adam—and this what happened ten years ago—

Adam Scott: *(Interrupting.)* Is have some fun?

Jesse Thorn: And I have a feeling I'm not the only one. All I wanna do with you on this show is just talk about Santa Cruz stuff, but I am gonna ask you—because you grew up in Santa Cruz, California, south of San Francisco.

(Adam confirms.)

And I have great fondness for Santa Cruz. It's where I went to college and where I started this program.

Adam Scott: Oh, you went to UCSC. Cool.

Jesse Thorn: Moderately! And, uh—*(chuckles)* but I did hear that you worked at the Santa Cruz beach boardwalk.

(Adam confirms.)

What was your job at the Santa Cruz beach boardwalk?

Adam Scott: I worked at Marini's, which is the candy store that's been there since—I don't know—the 1940s, I guess?

Jesse Thorn: Is it the one that has the taffy pulling machine in the front window?

Adam Scott: I was a—what they call a candy boy.

(Jesse laughs with delight.)

I was there and my—

Jesse Thorn: I'm sorry, who's "they" here?

Adam Scott: You know. The collective.

Jesse Thorn: Passers by?

Adam Scott: No, the Marini's, uh—

Jesse Thorn: (*Laughing.*) The city council?

Adam Scott: —literati called them the candy boys. And that's what you sort of aspired to be if you're male, and you start working at Marini's in 1986 or whenever I started working there. And I—so, I had to work my way up to candy boy. I started washing dishes.

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And then—I think I started working there when I was like 12 or 13? And worked there 'til I was like 16. And I did. I made taffy from scratch. Just like, 50 pounds of sugar and corn syrup and then whatever flavoring. And I couldn't eat or smell artificial watermelon flavoring—like watermelon candy or gum? After working there, I couldn't come near it for years.

Jesse Thorn: You had—look. The literature about Adam Scott's youth in Santa Cruz is limited.

(*Adam chuckles and confirms several times as Jesse continues.*)

However, I identified two top categories of a Santa Cruz teen in that literature. One was that you had a Grateful Dead period. And one was that it—I wanna say it was water polo, that you played water polo. Is that the sport?

(*Adam confirms.*)

So, these are the two—these are two of the Santa Cruz-iest activities you could have. You have a full-on, bro'd-out water sport, and then you have—

Adam Scott: A full-on bro'd-out music obsession?

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, wearing whatever the predecessor to Polar fleece is, in both contexts.

Adam Scott: (*Chuckles.*) That's right. You can bring your Polar fleece to either activity.

(*Jesse agrees with a laugh.*)

It works equally well. Uh, you know, I believe there was quite a bit of overlap there. I was able to keep both of those balls in the air, so to speak. I was a Dead-head by day and water polo player by other day.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah. Mid-afternoon.

Adam Scott: Mid-afternoon. (*Chuckles.*) Yeah. I was never a very good water polo player. It's really hard. It's really brutal. But to this day, I can—if you put me in a pool, I can paddle with my arms up out of the water for as long as you need me to, 'cause I know the kind of eggbeater trick that they use in water polo. That's about all I took away from it.

Jesse Thorn: We did a lot of timeline processing when you came into the studio trying to figure out how long ago it was that you had last been on the show. And we were pretty sure that it was to promote *Party Down*, a show that ran a few years on Starz many years ago, and was critically acclaimed to the extent it was critically noticed.

(*They chuckle.*)

And we were discussing what a great source of guests it was for this show, simply because I don't think anyone else was calling Starz. No one else had found the phone number. So, thank you to Starz in 2010 or whenever that was.

But Adam, you recently filmed a new season of the show alongside almost all of the cast. Where did that fit into your pandemic timeline? Like, when did you fly away to visit ten years previous? (*Chuckles.*)

Adam Scott: Wait, what?

Jesse Thorn: Like, when in the last couple of years did you go and shoot this thing like to go like—?

Adam Scott: Oh! Like, time machine back to—? Yeah. It really was time-machine-like for all of us. It was really weird and terrific. We did it January through March this past year, right in the heart of omicron. So, it was tough. We had some starts and stops and almost had to stop altogether, because there were some positive cases here and there, and it was just becoming so expensive to start and stop again. And you know, *Party Down*'s not like this giant show.

So, luckily we were able to finish, and it was so much fun. And the cast is all there pretty much. And Jennifer Garner is a cast member this season. Tyrel Jackson Williams and Zoë Chao are also onboard. It's a really great season. I can't wait for people to see it.

Jesse Thorn: Did the lot of you have to like have a big meeting to decide to do this? Because there's a lot of—it's a big cast. Lizzy Caplan is the only main person who didn't return. She's got a lot of other TV commitments.

(*Adam confirms.*)

Those contracts can be restrictive. But like, (*chuckles*) you know. Jane Lynch doesn't need this job! She was on the biggest sitcom in America for five years. She's made in the shade.

Adam Scott: Yeah, it was really difficult to find a time when everyone could do it. That's why, when Lizzy wasn't available, we ended up going forward, because we weren't sure we were gonna get who we could ever again. 'Cause it was—it just happened to work for this one six-week block. And so, yeah. It was hard. This is a very busy group of people. But yeah, we're really lucky we got everyone for as long as we did. I think we'd all been wanting to do something over the years.

[00:35:00]

I remember early on, there was almost a movie? Like, around 2010, '11. Something like that. Like pretty soon after the show ended.

We were actually getting in the realm of getting that going, and then it sort of fell apart. And I think in retrospect, that may have been—*(sighs)*. I just feel like part of the brilliance of just the idea of *Party Down* that Rob and Dan and John and Paul came up with in the first place was the one-party per episode conceit. And with a movie, you sort of lose that, and you have to build—you know—a three act structure and are we gonna go home with the caterers? And that sort of punctures the idea of the show where we're just at a party every episode. So, it's sort of—

Jesse Thorn: The show's about a group of cater waiters.

Adam Scott: Sure. That kind of down-on-their-luck Hollywood—aspirants? Is that a medication, or is that?

Jesse Thorn: You're absolutely correct.

Adam Scott: And yeah, so we're cater waiters, and you go from party to party with us.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Clip:

(The mumble of a crowd in the background.)

Casey (*Party Down*): So, do you act?

Henry: *(Clicks teeth.)* Do I look familiar?

Casey: You do.

Henry: Mm-hm.

Casey: And you smoke parliaments.

Henry: Mm. I dabbled. Are you a...?

Casey: A professional waiter? I'm not. No. No. I'm a comedian.

Henry: Oh.

Casey: Yeah, I figured that my natural hilariousness would've tipped you off by now.

Henry: (*Chuckles weakly.*) Right. Right. Right.

Casey: Wait a—were you the—were you that guy...?

Henry: (*Beat.*) Yes, I was.

Casey: You were! You were totally that guy! That is bananas! I remember that!

Henry: Yeah.

Casey: I remember you!

Henry: Yeeeah!

Casey: What are you doing working here?

Henry: (*Dryly.*) Well, do you remember me from anything else?

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Adam Scott: So, a movie would've kind of altered that. So, it's great that we ended up just doing another season of the show. I think it serves the show much better than a movie would have.

Jesse Thorn: I have never stopped thinking about this time that Kerri Kenny-Silver, of *The State* and many other wonderful things, was on the show. And I was talking to her about when she was on *The State*, which was a wonderful MTV sketch comedy show. And she was like, "Yeah, while *The State* was on" there were so many of them—there were like 11 members of *The State*, I think, or 12. And MTV paid so poorly that they all had to have jobs while they were making the show.

(*Adam "wow"s.*)

And she was a cater waiter. And while *The State* was on TV, she got a job (*chuckling*) catering a Viacom party.

Adam Scott: Oh my god.

Jesse Thorn: And she like served canapés to like the head of MTV.

Adam Scott: Her bosses.

Jesse Thorn: And the chairperson of Viacom. And just like, “God, I hope they don’t recognize me as the star of one of their shows.” (*Laughs.*)

Adam Scott: Oh my god. I remember I really needed an acting job really, really bad. And I got an audition for something, and drove over, and got to the waiting room, and hadn’t even really focused in on what it was, just kind of worked on the sides—the script pages they had given me. And while in the waiting room, I looked at the title, and it was called like *Hellfire* or something—or *Inferno* or something like that.

And I realized while I was there that it was—or no, I realized before I went to the audition that it was a *Hellraiser* movie that I would be auditioning for. And so, I went there and sat in the waiting room hoping they wouldn’t recognize me from being in a previous *Hellraiser* movie.

(*Jesse laughs.*)

Just hoping they would hire me without putting it together. I did not get that job.

Jesse Thorn: (*Laughs.*) There’s like that guy that’s in charge of keeping all the *Star Wars* stuff straight.

(*Adam agrees.*)

But for the *Hellraiser* universe.

Adam Scott: There’s no one. So. I was hoping there wouldn’t be anyone. Maybe there is.

Jesse Thorn: (*Laughs.*) There’s a guy in the room. He’s like, “Sorry. No.”

Adam Scott: “We can’t use you again.”

Jesse Thorn: “You’re right here in the show bible.”

Adam Scott: “You were Jacque in *Hellraiser: Bloodline*. We clearly can’t.”

(*They laugh.*)

Jesse Thorn: We'll wrap up with Adam Scott after a quick break. When we return, will Adam Scott let me hold hands with the otters at the Monterey Bay Aquarium? He should! And I'll tell him why. I use my platform for good. It's *Bullseye* for MaximumFun.org and NPR.

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[00:40:00]

Promo:

Jeremy Bent: Hey everybody, I'm Jeremy.

Oskar Montoya: I'm Oskar.

Dimitry Pompée: I'm Dimitry.

Jeremy: And we are the *Eurovangelists*.

Oskar: For a weekly podcast spreading the word of the Eurovision Song Contest, the most important music competition in the world.

Jeremy: Maybe you already heard Glen Weldon of NPR's *Pop Culture Happy Hour* talk up our coverage of this year's contest, but what do we talk about in the off season?

Dimitry: The rest of Eurovision, duh. There are nearly seven decades of pop music history to cover.

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Dimitry: Plus, all the gorillas and bread-baking grandmas that make Eurovision so special.

Jeremy: Check out *Eurovangelists*—available everywhere you get podcasts—and you could be a Eurovangelist too!

Oskar: Ooh, I wanna be one.

Jeremy: You already are, it's that easy.

Oskar: Oh, okay. Cool.

Transition: Thumpy synth with light vocalizations.

Jesse Thorn: It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. I'm talking with Adam Scott.

Are we gonna get back to you playing pinch-faced jerks? Because that's one of my favorite Adam Scott lanes. This was more an early career lane. *Step Brothers*, I think, enabled it.

(Adam agrees several times as Jesse continues.)

I would say probably *Torque* is its top—which was a kind of *Fast and the Furious* homage/parody.

Adam Scott: Satire? Yeah.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah. *(Laughing.)* Slash—yeah, it really lives in an uncanny valley between satire and celebration.

Adam Scott: There really is no movie quite like *Torque*, is there?

Jesse Thorn: *Torque* is really something! And like, it's a motorcycle movie in the spirit of the *Fast and the Furious*, but a little crazier.

(Adam agrees.)

You know, the *Fast and the Furious* movies have come to really embrace their craziness over the past decade or so. But pretty bonkers. I remember there was a tortoise that's really important. Like, a tortoise-eye view shot at one point. I might be—

Adam Scott: Oh! I think the motorcycles go by in the desert, and the tortoise like watches them go by or something? Yeah.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, that sounds right to me. And you're like—what are you, an FBI agent? Is that right?

(Adam confirms.)

You're great in that movie.

Adam Scott: Oh, thanks.

Jesse Thorn: *(Laughing.)* I'm not gonna lie! As much as everybody loves to talk about how great Adam Scott is in *Step Brothers*—and it's true—*Torque*, that the under—

Adam Scott: You're a *Torque* guy.

Jesse Thorn: I'm a *Torque* man all the way. I noticed that my producer pulled a clip from *Torque*. I did not ask for this, but I'm gonna play it. So, there's a big highway chase with like a stock car—like a NASCAR car, and like a Porsche, and all the motorcycles, all the different motorcycles. And like any FBI agent, you don't get access to those vehicles. You drive the classic FBI vehicle, which is a hummer.

(Adam agrees.)

You're driving an FBI-issued hummer.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Clip:

Music: High octane, exciting music.

Heather: This is crazy! We can call backup!

McPherson: If you don't like my driving, Heather—

(A loud crash.)

Then freaking get out and hitch!

(A motor revs, and they both let out blood curdling screams, getting further and further away before a horrible, shattering, crunching, crash.)

McPherson: *(Flatly.)* Thank god for air bags.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Jesse Thorn: Heyyy!

Adam Scott: Oh, goodness gracious.

Jesse Thorn: I kind of think, Adam, you got something you can use in the future. "Don't like my driving? Freaking—"

Jesse & Adam: “Get out and hitch.”

Adam Scott: I think, if I’m not mistaken, the “thank god for air bags” was added in ADR, because I survived that. And they wanted to justify me surviving that crash. (*Laughs.*)

Jesse Thorn: It wasn’t—it didn’t come from a punch up session? That wasn’t like something (*inaudible*) or Patton Oswalt suggested?

Adam Scott: Oh man, I don’t know.

Jesse Thorn: “He should say—but what if he said, ‘thank god for airbags’? That would be—”

Adam Scott: “It might be funny if he just said, ‘thank god for airbags’.” Oh boy.

Jesse Thorn: “Where do I get my check?” (*Laughing.*) You say, “Just from the woman at the front—or?”

(*They laugh.*)

“‘Cause I did the ‘thank god for airbags thing’, so my work here is done.”

Adam Scott: “That’s worth something, isn’t it?”

Jesse Thorn: (*Laughs.*) But I do think that antagonists—you’ve been too sweet for too long.

(*Adam agrees.*)

Even on *Severance*, where your character outside of the world of the company is pretty dissolute, I think just straight up evil is—a return to straight up evil is something you should be ready for.

Adam Scott: It’s super fun. And I don’t know where it comes from. I remember Mike Schur really loved it, and so he wrote this character in *The Good Place* that’s just a demon for me to play. And that was super fun, too.

[00:45:00]

I think I’ve just always liked—like, I remember—you know, as a kid, *Ghostbusters* was like my favorite movie for a while. And I just loved William Atherton in that movie. I just thought he was sooo—such a (*censored*) and so awesome. I don’t know. I’ve just always thought (*censored*)holes are really, really entertaining and funny.

Jesse Thorn: You get back to Santa Cruz sometimes?

Adam Scott: Yeah! I try to get up a couple times a year at least.

Jesse Thorn: I feel like you gotta be one of the top Santa Cruzians at this point. You and Glenallen Hill.

(Adam echoes the name.)

Used to play outfield for the Cubs, and then John Orr.

Adam Scott: There are—I think there are a few over the—I think Neil Young used to live in the Santa Cruz mountains. That certainly eclipses me by a mile.

Jesse Thorn: What are we talking about? Felton? Ben Lomond?

Adam Scott: Yeah, something—he has a ranch somewhere out there. We'd play at The Catalyst sometimes.

(Jesse affirms excitedly.)

Yeah, The Catalyst.

Jesse Thorn: That's the dream, right? Get up on that too tall stage?

Adam Scott: It is quite tall. I remember seeing Henry Rollins there, and it was like looking—

Jesse Thorn: Very uncomfortable.

Adam Scott: I remember one night there were the all-ages shows we would go to in high school. And one night, Dinosaur Jr. was playing there, and Nirvana was opening, and that was the one night I was like, "You know what? I'm gonna pass. I'm just gonna stay."

(Jesse laughs.)

So, that was my chance.

Jesse Thorn: Did you wanna get out of Santa Cruz?

Adam Scott: By the time I was 18, yeah.

Jesse Thorn: It's so nice!

Adam Scott: It is. It's beautiful. And now, going back, I'm always—I always just never wanna leave when we go back. And my daughter loves it too. And it would be great to spend more time up there. Yeah, it's a beautiful—it's the perfect little town. I love it so much.

Jesse Thorn: But here you are in show business.

Adam Scott: I know. In Los Angeles. Which I also really—I love Los Angeles. But—and Santa Cruz is not that far away, but it's far enough where I can't just go up there every—when my mom was sick, I was going up a couple times a week. But with family and everything, it's—yeah, I think it would be great to go up and, you know, stay for a few weeks at a time. But it's just not practical.

Jesse Thorn: I don't know if your dad's still kicking around.

Adam Scott: He is, yeah. Yeah.

Jesse Thorn: Do you think he could get us into the Monterey Bay Aquarium early?

Adam Scott: I bet he could pull some strings.

Jesse Thorn: *(Softly.)* That'd be awesome.

Adam Scott: Get us some backstage passes.

Jesse Thorn: Can I—

Adam Scott: Just don't touch the otters.

Jesse Thorn: Can I hold hands with an otter?

Adam Scott: Jesse, don't touch the otters.

Jesse Thorn: They have little—they got little hands that they use to open their clams with rocks.

Adam Scott: Yeah, they have apposable thumbs.

Jesse Thorn: You know, they got favorite rocks. So, I'd love to hold hands with an otter.

Adam Scott: Yeah, I know, I've heard about the rocks. Everyone knows about the rocks. You can't touch them.

Jesse Thorn: They're not river otters.

Adam Scott: No, they're not river otters. This is the Monterey Bay Aquarium. So, they're ocean otters. O-O's. The double O's.

(They laugh.)

Jesse Thorn: The legendary double O's!

Adam Scott: The legendary double O's. (*Chuckles.*)

Jesse Thorn: Adam Scott, I sure am grateful to you for coming back and being on *Bullseye*. It's really nice to see you.

Adam Scott: Likewise. Thanks, Jesse. Thanks for having me.

Jesse Thorn: Adam Scott. Always great to see that guy. Catch him on *Severance* on Apple TV+. And if you haven't seen *Party Down*, you should watch that. All three seasons are streaming in various places, and you will love that program. I promise.

Transition: High energy, funky synth.

Jesse Thorn: That's the end of another episode of *Bullseye*. Our show is created from the homes of me and the staff of Maximum Fun—as well as at Maximum Fun HQ, overlooking beautiful MacArthur Park in Los Angeles, California. Our thanks this week to everybody who has checked in with us and offered support to us and our friends in Southern California over the past few weeks as our region has started to recover from the devastating fires. We really appreciate it. And thanks especially to everybody who's given to support charities who are working to support that recovery.

Our show is produced by speaking into microphones. Our senior producer is Kevin Ferguson. Our producers are Jesus Ambrosio and Richard Robey. Our production fellow at Maximum Fun is Daniel Huecias. Our video producer is Daniel Speer. We get booking help from Mara Davis. Our interstitial music comes from our friend Dan Wally, aka DJW. You can find his music at DWJsounds.bandcamp.com. Our theme music was written and recorded by The Go! Team. It's called "Huddle Formation". Thanks to The Go! Team, and thanks to their label, Memphis Industries.

You can follow *Bullseye* on Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, where you will find video from almost all of our interviews. Please go there, and smash those subscribe and like buttons. Tell that algorithm—share something. Tell that algorithm that it should tell people about *Bullseye* and NPR.

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

[00:50:00]

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

(*Music fades out.*)

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