

[00:00:00]

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

**Promo:** *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* is a production of [MaximumFun.org](http://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. Look, I've been in what we call “the biz” for a long time. And if there's one thing that I know, it's that you have some crazy days. I mean, yesterday we all got up early and packed up my car and drove out to Palm Springs to interview a showbusiness legend, and then we all got date shakes! Maybe that's only like a little bit crazy. But sometimes we let our guests come onto the show and tell us about their own bonkers days at work in the entertainment industry. It's a segment called “The Craziest (*sensor beep*) of My Entire Career”.

Our guest, Mike Drucker, is a comedy writer and standup who just wrote the book *Good Game, No Rematch*. It's part memoir, part exploration of the history of videogames—a topic which Drucker knows like the back of his hand. And Drucker has some real stories. He's written for *Full Frontal with Samantha B*, *Bill Nye Saves the World*, *Adam Ruins Everything*, *Saturday Night Live*. As a standup, he's toured the country, played more venues than he can count. Lots of successes, lots of opportunities to see and experience wild stuff.

But for the craziest day of Mike Drucker's career? Well, it comes back to videogames. Sort of. Here's Mike.

**Mike Drucker:** I'm Mike Drucker, and this is the craziest (*sensor beep*) day of my entire career.

**Transition:** The high-energy, brassy musical opener for *Saturday Night Live*.

**Mike Drucker:** So, I'd been working at *Saturday Night Live* for about two years as a photo researcher/research assistant. And during that time I'd been writing a lot of jokes that were getting on Weekend Update. For a little while, they let you sort of pitch jokes, and if you were lucky or you kind of crack the code in whatever way, you could start to get jokes on the show, which was huge for me. It was a big deal. Honestly, getting a joke on that show the first time was one of the best moments of my life, but I had been doing it for about two years. And I had reached a point where I talked to one of the people there, and I was like, “Hey, I seem to be getting a lot of jokes on the show. Is there any chance I could do a packet or maybe apply for a job?”

And what a packet is, if you don't know, is sort of a set of writing instructions for the show, and it might be anything from “write us a page of monologue jokes, and give us some sketch ideas for something like *The Tonight Show*,” or it could just be “give us five sketches, two of

them commercial parodies for *Saturday Night Live*” or any combination of that. Or like, you know, “write us a short *John Oliver* segment.”

And the answer—they were very polite about it, but they were like, “You know, we don't know if you're ready yet.” Or like, “You know, we've had people ask in the past, and so we try to give it a little bit of a tail on that.” And they weren't rude about it, but it was a no. It was an, at least, “not now.”

*(Music ends.)*

**Sound Effect:** A game disk being inserted, followed by the playful percussion of the GameCube logo.

**Music:** Bright, plucky banjo music.

**Mike Drucker:** Coincidentally, I had been in talks with Nintendo about a job. Essentially, Nintendo was looking for a writer who could do comedy. They wanted an English language fluent person who knew comedy. 'Cause a lot of their writers were amazing, and still amazing, but a lot of them come from more like, you know, purple fantasy novel type backgrounds, where they're a little more interested in writing their epic story. Whereas I came from a standup and joke-writing background, where I was into the minutiae of like setup, punchline, setup, punchline.

And so, you know, this was during the off season of *SNL*. I was kind of in a frustrated state, so I applied. And I really didn't think I'd get this job at Nintendo. Including where I got to the first interview, and it was a phone interview. And I didn't blow it off. I took it seriously, but my tone in it was very much the tone of a man who did not think he'd get this job and not like a, “I'm not gonna get this job, so you can shove it,” but it was almost like, *(pleasantly)* “Man! It's just fun to talk to Nintendo! I'm so glad I got to meet you guys. Well, you'll never hire me. Have a good one!”

And somehow that actually helped me, because it turns out a lot of people who Nintendo reaches out to freak out. So, I both came in not expecting to get the job, but also the sense of like, “Don't be weird.” So, I didn't think I'd get it. I weirdly got another job interview where they flew me in. I took that one much more seriously. And then I got a job! And I became a localization writer at Nintendo of America.

**Music:** Buzzy 8-bit videogame music.

**Mike Drucker:** A localization writer is someone who works with a translator to make sure that a game, or a movie, or a manga, or whatever makes sense in another language. And I don't just mean translation. You know, little things like idioms or phrases or inside cultural jokes. So, it was a really, really fun collaborative process. The important thing for the story you need to know is: when I was hired, Nintendo had just secured a new headquarters.

[00:05:00]

They had built a brand-new high-tech headquarters exactly next to their old headquarters. And if you look in old, old game magazines or books, Nintendo's old headquarters are like dark, cubicle-filled hallways. There's like no windows. It's almost creepy inside.

**Music:** Dreamy, orchestral music.

**Mike Drucker:** And their new building looks like if you made an Apple store into an office building. Like, it smells nice when you walk in. It's like all, you know, wood and glass, but in a way that's not too modernist. I've called it the Kingdom of Heaven, and I really do believe it is. Like, when you walk in, you're like, "Oh, this is Nintendo." Whereas their old building, you'd walk in, and you'd be like, "Oh, this was a tech company founded in 1980."

And so, they were planning to demolish the old building to make space for a soccer field for the employees. But before that, they said, "Alright everybody, we've cleared out the old building. Everything's gone. And we're gonna do a fun event. Optional! Optional. But company-wide fun event in this building. And it's going to be a paintball game."

**Music:** High intensity, combat-scene style synth.

**Mike Drucker:** We are going to play paintball in the old, abandoned building. And I was new at this company! You know, and I'd never played paintball before, but I was like, "I wanna fit in. I really wanna show that I'm like a team player here." And you know, I had never seen the inside of the old Nintendo building in person. It was already shut down by the time I'd started at the company. So, outside of some old magazine pictures, like this was my one chance to see where like a lot of my childhood was made, or at least marketed. So, I signed up for it, and we get there, and there's a lot of people.

**Sound Effect:** Laser blasts.

**Mike Drucker:** And so, you know, they give us all armor and guns, and they sort of split us up into teams. And so, the game starts, and I'm kind of pumping myself up. I'm on this team; I don't really know anybody on my team, 'cause they kind of like—you know, "Put on your mask, and then you go this way, you go this way, you go this way." So, you know, you get ready, and you're crouching. And I've never done paintball shooting either, so like I'm wearing this armor that's a little uncomfortable.

**Sound Effect:** Armor straining squeaks.

**Mike Drucker:** It's like squeaking as I kneel, and I'm trying to be cool about it. I'm like, "What's the optimal position for me to stop the onslaught of the red team?" Or whatever. So, I'm in position; I'm a little nervous. And immediately, they play the sound, or they say go—I forget what it was. There was like some signal that it was like "Begin!"

**Sound Effect:** 8-bit *Mario Kart* style countdown beeps.

**Music:** High speed, thumpy, upbeat synth.

**Mike Drucker:** And immediately—you could say within a millisecond of that go, I was hit in the nether regions. Like, a direct hit. And I wasn't just hit in the nether—"regions" makes it sound like it's a space. Imagine like in the nether regions, the worst space you could hit with a paintball, and that is exactly where that paintball landed. Because we had body armor, but—

**Sound Effect:** Armor stretching and crunching. Muted automatic gunfire sounds.

**Mike Drucker:** But if you've seen cheap body armor, it basically covers your chest down to right below your stomach and your legs up to the thighs. (*Laughing.*) And it hit me so hard! Like, I fell over onto the floor. And since it was just the beginning of the game, it was super chaotic. So, like—you know, no one was stumbling over me. I wasn't getting more hurt. But like, you know, people weren't really paying attention. Like, one person tried to help, but then they started getting shot at, and they started firing back.

**Sound Effect:** Incoherent shouts.

(*All noise cuts out.*)

**Mike Drucker:** And again, this is a small, dark, and closed space. It was literally like if a paintball match started in an office, because that's what it was. And so, I'm crawling across the floor, and I found a large cardboard box.

**Sound Effect:** Box opening noise followed by the sound of it dragging along the floor in bursts.

**Mike Drucker:** And (*laughing*) much like Solid Snake in *Metal Gear Solid*, I hid in the box. I was like, (*laughing*) "I'm not gonna do this anymore!" Because I wasn't even mad. It wasn't like I was like going to pick up my paintball gun and be like, "Alright, you M-F'ers. I'm going after you now!" It was like, (*blubbery laughter*) "I—why did I do this!? This was such a mistake!"

**Music:** Tense battle music.

**Sound Effect:** Gunfire, cardboard box shuffling.

**Mike Drucker:** And so, I'm hiding in this box, listening to like a fake paintball war going on. And again, like I've never been in a paintball fight, and I've never been in actual war. So, I'm just hearing like screaming and the sounds of shots and people like hitting walls and falling.

**Sound Effect:** Miscellaneous squalling.

**Mike Drucker:** And the whole time, I'm just like in this box being like, "I work at Nintendo of America, and I'm in a box, afraid." And eventually, whatever sound ended it.

**Sound Effect:** A beep and a robotic "Finished".

**Mike Drucker:** And I have no idea what team won. I can guarantee you it was not the one that I was on. Because if I started off bad, I'm sure a few other people did too.

*(Music fades out.)*

I think one of the reasons that we did this was Nintendo is a company that—and I know a lot of companies say this, but Nintendo is really a company that does feel like a family in my experience there. They really took care of their employees. On what I might call the slight downside to that was that they loved group activities. And I really do believe that paintball was their fun idea. They were like, “What's a more fun way to have people get to walk through the halls again than turning it into like a cool, aggressive game?”

[00:10:00]

And it was this weird, unforgettable moment where I had started my dream job. Of everything I've done in my career, I feel like that is the thing that would impress me as a child the most. The thing that would embarrass me as a child the most is the fact that I got like shot in the groin at Nintendo. And also, like afterwards, I wasn't like walking well! I was definitely limping. And so, people were like, “Oh, hey, you okay? Like, you get shot in the leg?”

And I was like, *(laughing)* “Uh, yeah! Sure! I got shot in the—leg. We'll just say leg for now.”

Eventually, of course, I did tell some of my colleagues that this happened. Because they remembered it as a super fun day. So, when it came up, it'd be like, *(fondly)* “Ah, you guys remember when we had that amazing paintball match?”

And I'd be like, “Yeah, I, uh, kind of—uh, had my chances of having children destroyed that day. And it wasn't for emotional reasons.” *(Laughs.)*

So, eventually I told them, and they were all like, “Oh my god, I'm so sorry!”

And I'm like, “No, it's fine. I don't think it was any of you. And if it was, good shot!”

**Music:** Funky 8-bit videogame music.

**Mike Drucker:** I think there's a couple lessons to glean from this match. On a smaller scale, I think it's that if I'm ever in a paintball fight to start in a crouch position. You know, to not really just have the worst parts of my body exposed to fire. You know, and also like—it's not like I hadn't turned pain into comedy before that. I'd been doing comedy a while, and that's part of how I got the job. But it was really a fun and painful lesson in how to turn pain into fun.

**Jesse Thorn:** Mike Drucker on the craziest day of his entire career: the time he was shot by a paintball gun in the worst place you could possibly get shot by a paintball gun. Mike's book is

called *Good Game, No Rematch*. Mike is one of the funniest guys out there and truly insightful about the world of games. Go pick that up at your local bookstore or at [Bookshop.org](http://Bookshop.org).

**Transition:** Bright, chiming synth.

**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—as well as at Maximum Fun HQ, overlooking beautiful MacArthur Park in Los Angeles, California. As I record this, it's my birthday. I'm headed over to Eagle Rock to try a new pie place. We'll see.

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, Hannah Moroz. Our video producer, Daniel Speer. Booking help from Mara Davis.

Our interstitial music comes from our good friend, Mr. Dan Wally, also known as DJW. You can find his music at [DJWsounds.bandcamp.com](http://DJWsounds.bandcamp.com). Our theme music was written and recorded by The Go! Team. The song is called “Huddle Formation”. Thanks to The Go! Team. Thanks to their label, Memphis Industries.

Special thanks this week to the gang at NPR New York for recording our interview with Mike Drucker.

You can follow *Bullseye* on Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, where you will find video from just about all our interviews—including the ones that you heard this week. And I'm just gonna say that one more time: please follow *Bullseye* on Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. Check out video from our past interviews and future interviews. And it's a lot of fun there on the internet. You probably heard about it. I call it the Information Superhighway.

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](http://MaximumFun.org) and is distributed by NPR.

*(Music fades out.)*