

[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](https://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. Before I bring out my guest this week, I wanna present to you kind of a thought experiment. Imagine an actor: had his early break on some sitcoms in the late '70s, cut his teeth on Broadway, found what might be called a calling by taking on some outrageous voice roles. The bigger and sillier the cartoon character, the better. It's the 2020s. He's in his early 70s, and the parts he's getting are the kinds character actors dream about. An eccentric villainous lawyer in a horror drama; a quirky, culty, slightly lovable kidnapper in an indie comedy; cameos in shows like *What We Do in the Shadows*, *Kids in the Hall*, and *Mystery Science Theater 3000*. And most recently, a goofy sort of Geppetto-like grandpa in an epic, life-affirming drama.

Think about a resume like that, and where does your mind go? Maybe like a Richard Kind or a Stephen Root, Luis Guzmán? That's close. But as wonderful as all those actors are—and they are wonderful—none of them have done what my guest today has done. None of them are, or have ever been, Luke Skywalker.

**Music:** “Star Wars (*Main Title*)” by John Williams, the infamous opening track from the *Star Wars* text crawl. A bombastic, exciting orchestral piece.

**Jesse Thorn:** Yeah, that's right. I'm talking with Mark Hamill this week.

When Hamill agreed to take the lead role in *Star Wars*, it not only made his career; it defined him as one very particular thing in the eyes of fans, writers, and casting directors. And don't get me wrong. It is a part he will always be grateful to have gotten. But when you're a guy who's just as happy doing a voice for the Joker, always being Luke Skywalker is kind of a tough road to hoe. These days though, Hamill's dream to be the beloved character actor he knows he can be is closer than ever to reality.

Take *The Life of Chuck*, the aforementioned epic, life-affirming drama. It's based on a novella written by Stephen King. The story unfolds in three acts, each one chronicling a different part in the title character's life—only backwards, from that life's end to its beginning, more or less. Hamill shows up in the first act, which is the last of the three acts that we, the audience, see. He plays Albie, grandfather to a young Chuck. Chuck loves music

and dance and dreams of becoming a dancer. In this scene, Albie—who's an accountant—tries to bring him a little more down to earth.

**Transition:** A whooshing sound.

**Clip:**

**Albie (*The Life of Chuck*):** The world loves dancers. It truly does. But it needs accountants. So, there's much more demand, so there's much more opportunity. I know that might hurt, but it's the truth. Math is truth. It won't lie to you! It doesn't factor in your preferences. It's pure that way. Math can do a lot of things. Math can be odd, but it can't lie.

**Transition:** A whooshing sound.

**Jesse Thorn:** Mark Hamill, welcome to *Bullseye*. I'm so happy to have you on the show and so happy to get to talk to you.

**Mark Hamill:** Thanks for having me!

**Jesse Thorn:** I don't mean to go too hard too fast, but this movie is about really finding joy in the face of the inevitability of death. (*Chuckles.*)

**Mark Hamill:** Yeah, you could say that. It's certainly atypical for Stephen King. When people think of him, they think of *Pet Sematary*, and *The Shining*, and *Carrie*. And I mean, he's obviously one of the great suspense and horror writers. But people forget he did *The Body*; he did *Shawshank Redemption*; he did *Green Mile*.

I admit, I was a little surprised, because Mike Flanagan is also known for his more macabre side. I worked with him in *The Fall of the House of Usher*. So, when he said he had something for me and something based on a novella by Stephen King, I went, “Oh boy!” I'm expecting the, you know, spine-rattling horror epic of all time. And I was taken aback in a good way. I was set up in the wrong way, in a good way. And I hope people will—

[00:05:00]

Obviously, I want them to see the movie, but I would— The best way to see it is to see it cold. Don't read reviews; don't Google it. Just go. Trust me. It's unlike anything any of us have done and unlike anything I ever expect to do again. This is a once in a lifetime thing, and it's just filled with these wonderful actors. I mean, it's told like the novella. Act three, act two, act one. And I play Chuck's grandfather in act one only. There's so many wonderful performances. You know, obviously Tom Hiddleston is the main person, but everybody—

Karen Gillan and—oh gosh, Chiwetel Ejiofor, Carl Lumbley, Rahul Kohli. I was isolated from the rest of the cast, but what an idyllic setup. I mean, I play an accountant who's—you know, loves his family and— You know, in that imaginary world, I was very content.

**Jesse Thorn:** Did making *The Life of Chuck*, or even just reading *The Life of Chuck*, make you think about death or the world falling apart?

**Mark Hamill:** Of course! You can't help it. I'm 73 years old. I mean, it's impossible not to think about your mortality. And I never expected when I was younger to be working at this age. It just seems to me, “Ah, you know, there'll come a time where I should be spending more time—you know—confiscating kids' frisbees that come over the fence or wandering the beach with a metal detector.”

I have a really happy home life. I love my wife; I love my puppies. My three children live within a distance so they can visit whenever they want. So, you know. And I sort of lost the ambition. I didn't have the drive that I once had. And Mike Flanagan changed all that, because he was the first one—a role like Arthur Gordon Pym in *Fall of the House of Usher* would be routine in voiceover.

**Transition:**

**Clip:**

**Verna: (*Fall of the House of Usher*):** Not you. You didn't partake. But you saw what they did.

**Pym:** I saw. A lot. We're a virus, I think. People, I mean.

**Verna:** Yeah. But you're so damn interesting.

**Transition:** A whooshing sound.

**Mark Hamill:** I was thrilled, and I jumped at the opportunity. And I love being just a supporting character in a large ensemble of wonderful actors. And I was already a fan of his from *The Haunting of Hill House*, *Haunting of Bly Manor*, and *Midnight Mass*. But yeah. I mean, even though you do think about life and the end of the world and on that sort of thing, it's so optimistic. And it's so, you know, positive; and I love the fact that it's not hitting you over the head with a message. They're telling this story, and you glean what you want from it, and you come out feeling so much better about yourself, about the world, about the inherent goodness in people. And I think, timing wise, it couldn't come at a better time when we're in a nation that's so divided and there's—you know—uncertainty and acrimony. And it's a dark, dark time in our history, and I think this film is positively therapeutic.

**Jesse Thorn:** It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. I'm here with Mark Hamill. He's starring in the new movie *The Life of Chuck*.

Did acting in this film remind you of something that you love about acting in the way that the protagonist of the film is animated by dancing?

**Mark Hamill:** Yes! It's fun to pretend to be other people.

**Jesse Thorn:** Did you always have that feeling about acting, or were there times when you didn't?

**Mark Hamill:** Very early on— Well, first of all, I was a television maniac. I loved TV; I loved old movies, the Marx Brothers, Laurel and Hardy. And I'd go to the library and read books about them, and I watched the Walt Disney show. One thing that really struck me, and this is—I didn't—I wasn't even first grade. This distinguished gentleman with white hair by the name of Clarence Nash steps up to the microphone and does Donald Duck!

[00:10:00]

It just blew me away. I guess, at that age— I mean, logically—obviously—some human being provides these voices, and it was before I knew who Mel Blanc was or Daws Butler or June Foray and all the greats. But I thought, “Wow, this guy goes to work, and he does Donald Duck.” My father was in the Navy, and I thought, “I want that job.” I did a terrible Donald Duck. But it made me think, “That's what I wanna do. I wanna do cartoon voices.” And I couldn't tell anyone. I was the middle of seven children, and I knew I would be subject to ridicule if I told them what I really wanted to do. But I really credit Walt Disney, because he would do these programs—The Making of *Toby Tyler*, The Making of *Darby O'Gill and the Little People*—obviously promotional shows for his movies. But it was the first time I saw how movies were made. I saw the camera crew and the wardrobe and hair and the caterers and all of it.

And I'm filing this all away in my head, 'cause I'm thinking, “If I can't be an actor, I could—I'm not a bad cook. I could cater a movie!” I didn't think like I had to be in the movie. I wanted to be near the movie. And that's the same way in school when I started auditioning for plays and so forth. If I didn't get a part, fine, I'd work props. I'd be in the lighting booth. I would be an usher. I would do promotional posters. I wanted to be near the show, if not in the show. It was my life. By the time I was really in junior high and high school and doing plays, I looked at—you know, from nine to three, it was just something you had to get through to get to the main reason you were there: rehearsal.

**Jesse Thorn:** Did you still feel that way in—you know, I'm picking this somewhat arbitrarily, but—like, 1989, right before your voice acting career took off, after you had struggled to figure out what your career was as Not Luke Skywalker. Did you still have that feeling?

**Mark Hamill:** Yeah. Well, one of the things was I thought— When you do something well in Hollywood, they want you to do that over and over and over again. So, I was getting sort

of bland, WASPy, uninteresting roles. And so, I went to Broadway. I knew that you could audition; there's open auditions, or your agent could get you auditions. And I auditioned to replace Peter Firth in *Amadeus*. And they told me, "We're working to get a green card for the actor that we've already offered it to. If he doesn't get the green card, you are the guy." And I know they weren't kidding around, 'cause they paid for me to stay in a hotel for several days, because it was imminent, the ruling.

Well, he did get his green card, and I was disappointed. But I knew if Sir Peter Hall approves of you, that's a step forward. And as it turned out, then they—the same—the producers of *Amadeus* also produced *The Elephant Man*. So, they put me in *Elephant Man*. That was my first Broadway show. And then I did the first national tour of *Amadeus*, and then they put me in the Broadway company. And I did, I don't know, six shows—seven if you include *Room Service* Off Broadway. That was directed by Alan Arkin. And everyone thought—the critics thought I was gonna be playing the naive playwright. "Poor Leo! Never been in the big city before!" But no, I was sleazy Gordon Miller. You know? I was, you know, just this grease ball, very dishonest producer. And I loved it. I mean, I got some great reviews, 'cause the critics were set up in the wrong way. They came expecting I was gonna be playing the playwright.

So, I knew I was moving in the right direction. But it was only when I auditioned and got the Joker in the *Batman* animated series that really turned my career around, 'cause nobody believed it was me!

**Transition:** A whooshing noise.

**Clip:**

**Music:** Suspenseful orchestra music.

**Joker (*Batman: The Animated Series*):** It is true, Batsy. I know everything. And kind of like the kid who peeks in his Christmas presents, I must admit it's sadly anticlimactic. Behind all the stern and batarangs, you're just a little boy in a playsuit crying for mommy and daddy! (*Disdainfully.*) It'd be funny if it wasn't so pathetic. Oh, what the heck? I'll laugh anyway! (*Cackles.*)

**Transition:** A whooshing noise.

**Mark Hamill:** "That Mark Hamill?!" I mean, I'd have even actor friends saying, "Oh, come on. They treat your voice in some way. Right?"

[00:15:00]

And it's not easy. I mean, a kid will come up to you at the grocery store and say, *(in a nasal little kid voice)* “You're the Joker on the *Batman* cartoon?” I say yeah. “Can you do the voice for me?”

And you think—and you know, you can't whisper it in their ear. *(Dropping seamlessly into a loud Joker voice.)* You really gotta let it rip!

*(Laughs. Returning to his usual speaking voice.)* And you know, the kid would be delighted, but the grownups are all looking around going, “What's that middle aged man doing to that 9-year-old?”

But that really— You know, I had done voiceover, but the Joker specifically is what really opened up the floodgates. And the thing that's so great about voiceover is they don't care about what you look like. They cast with their ears, not their eyes. So, if you can match the visuals, you can play a—you know—a six-foot Italian bodyguard, whatever. You know, a 90-year-old Irish professor. I mean, I thought, “Where has this been all my life?” Because as much as I loved Broadway, you gotta be committed to doing eight a week. And this one, I thought, “Oh my god, this is like the lazy actor's dream!”

*(Jesse laughs.)*

You don't have to memorize your lines. You know, you read it off the page. You can come in looking like hell, 'cause they don't see you. And that's another thing. The fact that you're not being seen liberates you to make outrageous choices you wouldn't ordinarily make if you were on camera. So, I just loved it. I thought, “Geez, I don't care if I'm ever in a movie or on television ever again. I could do this for the rest of my life.” So, to have an unexpected third act like this was a godsend.

**Jesse Thorn:** We'll continue my conversation with Mark Hamill after a quick break. When we return, we will talk about his early experiences acting in *Star Wars* and, frankly, trying to make sense of what it was! It's *Bullseye* for [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org) and NPR.

## **Promo:**

**Music:** Bright, brassy music.

**Alex Schmidt:** Hello, this is Alex.

**Katie Goldin:** Hello, this is Katie.

**Alex:** We host *Secretly Incredibly Fascinating*, and this week we released our 250th episode.

**Katie Goldin:** *(Mimicking an echo.)* Two-hundred and fifty-tee-tee-tee...

**Alex:** (*Giggles.*) Every episode stands on its own.

**Katie:** And every episode is about a seemingly ordinary topic.

**Alex:** We reveal the history and the science of stuff like salt and clouds and your computer mouse.

**Katie:** And episode 250 is about the word hello.

**Alex:** Hello!

**Katie:** You know that word. You're ready to go.

**Alex:** So, let us say hello to you. Find *Secretly Incredibly Fascinating* at [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org).

(*Music fades out.*)

**Transition:** Thumpy synth with light vocalizations.

**Jesse Thorn:** Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest is Mark Hamill. He is, of course, Luke Skywalker from a pile of *Star Wars* movies! He is also an incredibly talented and prolific voice actor who's had dozens of roles in countless movies and TV shows—including *Batman*, *Garfield*, *Adventure Time*, and *Avatar: The Last Airbender*. You can hear and see him on the big screen these days. *The Life of Chuck*—a movie in which he stars—is playing in theaters now. Let's get back into our conversation.

When you were a teenager and a very young man, before *Star Wars*, did you know that you were pretty?

**Mark Hamill:** (*Laughs.*) Oh! I still don't think I'm—no. No, no, no.

**Jesse Thorn:** Mark? I hate to tell you; you're a lot less pretty than you were when you were 20 years old.

**Mark Hamill:** Why thank you. Thank you so much.

**Jesse Thorn:** You're very handsome. Don't worry.

**Mark Hamill:** Well, no, no. But the thing is, I don't know what my self-image was. And maybe that's why it's so appealing to play other characters. You don't have to take responsibility for yourself. Mostly, I think, “Oh my god, look at how young I look.” And in *Life of Chuck*, I said, “I can't believe how old I look.” It wasn't— You know, 'cause I whited

out my hair. I didn't wanna have to wear a wig. I whited out the mustache. The wardrobe people really help you just discover how this guy would dress. It wasn't until I put on the wire-rim glasses that I said, "Oh my god, I'm Geppetto."

**Jesse Thorn:** I watched a little bit of a western sitcom that you were in before *Star Wars*.

**Mark Hamill:** *Texas Wheelers*?

**Jesse Thorn:** Yeah, *Texas Wheelers*. You and Gary Busey. And it's a—

**Mark Hamill:** Yes. Jack Elam.

**Jesse Thorn:** Yeah, a single-camera sitcom. And it was really good. And one of the things that struck me as I was watching young Mark Hamill—I think you were clearing out a fireplace or something. You were doing some sort of western chore. You know what I mean?

[00:20:00]

I thought, "Here is the thing that got Mark Hamill *Star Wars*," which is this sort of like—this ability to live in this world so easily and comfortably while still sort of looking like a knife, you know what I mean? Like, you doing this chore came so breezy onscreen, and I'm like, "Oh, well that's the thing—that's the same thing that lets him be in a space farm and say space words and sound like a human being." (*Laughs.*)

**Mark Hamill:** Yeah. Well, it's interesting about *Texas Wheelers*. I was so enamored of that script; it was one of the best things I'd ever read. The *New York Times* eventually called it the finest bucolic comedy since *Tobacco Road*. I tested with—they set me first, and they tested me with various people to play the part that eventually went to Gary Busey. And they—I didn't have casting control, obviously. But they said, "What did you think of the other actors?" Tom Ligon was one.

I shouldn't name them. But my point is I said, "They're all fine actors, but I have to tell you that Gary Busey—I've never seen anything like it before. He's so authentically bucolic, right?" And he was—and still is—a complete original.

Now, fast forward to all these wonderful reviews. We got canceled after four episodes, and I had never been able to play a character that was funny who didn't think he was funny. He was serious and very much more like his father than he would want to admit—a braggart, a liar, thought he was a womanizer when he was clearly a virgin. So, it was rich, rich. And I was just devastated when that got canceled. And the irony is: had it run, I wouldn't have been available for *Star Wars*. Because it was '75, and we were canceled before the end of '75. And we filmed *Star Wars* in 1976.

**Jesse Thorn:** When you read *Star Wars*, it must have been hard to figure out what it was. I mean, on the page, *Star Wars* has to be— Like, I'm young enough that, you know, I saw all three *Star Wars* movies when they were rereleased in the mid-'80s as a 6-year-old or



something like that. So, it's always been in my head. But the tone is so odd! You know what I mean? (*Laughs.*) Like, you wouldn't be able to predict it, you know what I mean?

**Mark Hamill:** Yeah. Well, here's the thing. Here's the thing. The first audition was a dual audition. Brian De Palma and George Lucas. Brian for the film *Carrie*, and George for *Star Wars*. And they sat down, and they said, "Tell us a little bit—" Brian said, "Tell us a little bit about yourself." Which I did. You know. And after two or three minutes, they said, "Thank you very much." They never talked about either one of the movies. They were—it was what they call a cattle call, where they're weeding out people that are potential hires. And then my agent called, and they said, "Oh, they want you to screen test for *Star Wars*." And they sent me a seven- or eight-page scene and never the whole script. I didn't get the whole script until they gave me the part.

So, I'm reading this, and it was set on the Millennium Falcon. No Wookiee, just Han Solo approaching the Death Star. And I couldn't make heads or tails out of it! You know, I went to Harrison. I said, "You've worked with George on *American Graffiti*. Is this sort of like a parody of *Flash Gordon*?"

(*In a gruff Harrison Ford impression.*) "Hey, come on, let's just get it done and get outta here." So, he was no help.

Then I went to George. "George, this is like tongue-in-cheek, right? It's sort of like a send up or a Mel Brooksonian take on the old chapter serial place?"

And he said, "Ah, mm, well. Let's just do it, and we'll talk about it later." Translation: let's just do it, and we will never talk about it later. George doesn't like to talk about backstory or motivation. He's a movie director who comes alive in the editing room. He's not an actor's director. He casts so closely to the character that we just naturally react the way our characters are supposed to react. I mean, in other words, I was wide-eyed and innocent. Harrison was cool as school and cynical and sarcastic.

The day I met him—he did the screen test with me, as I told you. But the first day on set—I mean, I was just enamored of him completely.

[00:25:00]

We were those two characters. That's what he wanted. But I have to tell you, one—here's a line that's in the screen test. Thank god it's cut from the movie, but it'll give you an idea of how difficult it was to try and make the dialogue sound like it had just occurred to us, and spontaneously we had the response. Solo says something like, (*using his Harrison Ford impression*) "Okay, kid, I've held up my side of the bargain." We're at the Death Star, and we didn't realize what we were gonna be up against. "The first chance I get, I'm dropping you, the droids, and you can pay me later."

I say—and this is the actual line—"But we can't turn back. Fear is their greatest defense! I doubt that the actual security there is any greater than it was on Aquilae or Sullust. And what's there is most likely directed towards a large-scale assault!"

*(Jesse chuckles.)*

Huh?!

Now, I could break it down. “Fear is their greatest defense.” Yeah, we're intimidated by the size. “I doubt if the actual security there is any greater than it was on Aquilae or Sullust.” Two made up planets. “And what’s there is most likely directed towards a large-scale assault,” like an armada. Like, we can slip through, 'cause we're the size of a dime compared to the Death Star.

So, intellectually I could make sense of it. But now try and make it sound like it's an original thought that popped into your head. As Harrison once said to George about the dialogue, “Hey, you can write the *(censor beep)*, you just can't say it.”

*(They laugh.)*

I thought, boy, did he nail it. But I have to tell you, I— So, they call—you know, normally you have an idea of how you did at an audition.

“How did it go?”

“Oh, they laughed at the jokes, and a couple of people applauded at the end. It went really well,” or “Ehh, kind of lukewarm. I don't know. Maybe I'm not right for it.”

This one, they said, “How did it go?”

I said, “I have no idea. I have none. I just don't know.” One thing I did that was probably the right choice was I'm not gonna take it upon myself to mock the material or send it up. I'm gonna be as sincere as possible.

And even then, it wasn't like George says, “No, be sincere.” I just decided that on my own.

**Transition:** A whooshing sound.

**Clip:**

**Darth Vader** (*Star Wars VI: Return of the Jedi*) : The Emperor has been expecting you.

**Luke:** I know, Father.

**Darth Vader:** So, you have accepted the truth.

**Luke:** I've accepted the truth that you were once Anakin Skywalker, my father.

**Darth Vader:** That name no longer has any meaning for me.

**Luke:** It is the name of your true self. You've only forgotten. I know there is good in you. The emperor hasn't driven it from you fully. That was why you couldn't destroy me. That's why you won't bring me to your emperor now.

**Transition:** A whooshing sound.

**Jesse Thorn:** Mark, the thing that makes performances different and particularly difficult in my mind is—you know, if you're in a sci-fi thing, even if you're on a medical drama, there's a certain amount of kind of like “fire the photon torpedoes” that you can say. And it doesn't really matter what the words are as long as you say them with enough gravity. You know what I mean?

*(Mark agrees with a chuckle.)*

And like, there are plenty of actors who can muster that kind of gravity and just say the nonsense words. And that's fine. Like, it's great. But I think that your job in *Star Wars* was to do that, but without that gravity. Because you are a wide-eyed innocent who's trying to figure out what's going on around you. *(Laughs.)*

*(Mark agrees.)*

So, you have to be able to say, “Fire the photon torpedoes,” and you can't just yell it like an army general. You know what I mean?

**Mark Hamill:** Yeah, absolutely. And I tell you, when they called about two weeks after the audition and said, “They're sending the script. You got the part,” I went, “Oh my gosh!” And it had been a long time. It wasn't immediate. And I'll never forget reading that script for the first time. And based on the audition, I thought, “Well, Harrison's the leading man. I seem like the annoying sidekick.” You know? Like, the teenage sidekick. So, I thought when I read the title page, it said, “The Adventures of Luke Starkiller, as taken from the Journal of the Will of Saga number one, the Star Wars”.

And I thought—I couldn't remember who I played in the screen test. I said, “Oh, well, Harrison's Luke Starkiller.” So, I start reading, and very early on I went, “Oh my gosh, this is set through the eyes of this a teenager! I'm Luke Starkiller!”

[00:30:00]

And by the way, the reason I say Starkiller is because that name was kept so long that we shot the scene where I rescue the princess, and she says, “Aren't you a little short for a Stormtrooper?”

I go, “Huh? Oh, the mask.” And I take it off. We filmed, “I'm Luke Starkiller. I'm here to rescue you.”

Flash forward a couple weeks, and I go, “Wait a minute.” I looked at the call sheet. “We already did this scene. Why are we doing it again?”

“Well, George is changing your name.”

And I thought— George called it the most expensive low-budget movie ever made, so I figured they should go to a shot behind me and just redub the line off of my face. But no, he thought it was important to remove the helmet and say it.

I said, “What did they change my name to?”

And when they said Luke Skywalker, I thought, “Ugh! It sounds like Luke Flyswatter.” I was so used to Starkiller, which had a little macho in it, which I thought the character could use. And I said, “Why would they do that?”

“Well, they've done focus groups, and women ages 18 to 34 don't like—you know—the word kill.” I mean, they didn't like the word war in *Star Wars*. There was a contest on set, on the call board. You could rename the movie, was the idea, without using the word wars. And no one ever could think of a better title. But it seems funny at the time, 'cause when I read the script, I thought, “This isn't science fiction! This is a fairy tale! It's got a princess; it's got a wizard; it's got a space pirate. It's clearly not traditional science fiction in any way, shape, or form.” And it's funny! Oh my god, robots arguing over whose fault it is. I mean—and effortless feminism. The fact that the princess is totally unintimidated by Vader. You know, she's spitting right in his face. And then when she takes over her own rescue, she makes Han and Luke look like chumps. “You call this a rescue?” She grabs the guns away from us.

That's what I loved about it. 'Cause you know, it's like I say, effortlessly a feminist film in that she's no damsel in disguise. And god knows— I mean, Harrison came over first, and we hung out, and the last piece of the puzzle was Carrie Fisher. (*Laughs.*) I took her out to dinner so we could get to know each other. I mean, Guinness had done that for me, and I thought that was a great idea. You don't wanna meet on the first day of shooting. Anyway, I would take her out to dinner, and I just could not believe how facile a wit she had. And so cynical! She started telling me details about her mother, Debbie Reynolds, and her father, Eddie Fisher—you know, his addiction to this prescription pill, all this stuff where you're going, “Should I be hearing this?!”

(*Jesse laughs.*)

She was talking to me like she knew me for 30 years, not something you would reveal on the very first meeting like that. But she was one of a kind. And some of the most fun we had and

the fondest memories I have were the scenes where the three of us were all on the Death Star together, running around. It was just so much fun. Now, in the second film, we split up. I mean, I don't even get to keep C-3PO. R2 I get to keep, but there's a whole separate storyline. And Carrie and Harrison are still together. And I'd be on the lot and be walking in the opposite direction. They're going to one sound stage, I'm going to Dagobah, the swamp planet.

And I just sort of— It was nostalgic, 'cause I thought, “Oh, it'll never be the same again.” But I was so bowled over by that character of Yoda—and Frank Oz. Just, what a—he's still one of my best friends to this day. And so cerebral. And I thought that was very clever, 'cause talking about religion makes people uncomfortable. When you have something called the Force, you know, it stands in for religion. It is spiritual, but you can take it as far or as shallowly as you like. It's up to the audience. But I thought the second film was deeper and more cerebral than the first one, for sure.

**Jesse Thorn:** I love the original three *Star Wars* movies, but I think my favorite *Star Wars* movie might be *The Last Jedi*, which is in a lot of ways your movie, I think. You are one of a bunch of main characters in the film, but it's about this character that you created. You and—

**Mark Hamill:** I was gonna say, I complained to George.

[00:35:00]

‘Cause I thought, the way things were going, where I had the black glove over the hand that I lost, that the third one was gonna be about Luke struggling to decide whether to go to the dark side or not. So, I was still in that dark mode. And he reminded me, and he said, “Mark, it's a fairytale for children.” He didn't say fairytale. He said, “This is a film for kids. And we can't have that.” That's why he would never kill any of the main characters. He wouldn't kill Han Solo or Princess Leia or Luke. You know? And I've never forgotten that. He made it for children. And I was using my adult brain to wanna go into a much darker place.

'Cause I said, “Oh, come on. I mean, the Ewoks—I love the idea of this little, primitive race bringing down the technologically advanced empire. But you know, it's so—I don't know. I think you're trying to corner the teddy bear market or something.” But again, you know, you have to trust George always. He was our mentor, and nobody knows *Star Wars* better than he does.

**Jesse Thorn:** We've got much more to get into with Mark Hamill. After a break in just a minute: does he go back to rewatch his old movies? And if he does, how does he feel about it? It's *Bullseye* from [MaximumFun.org](https://www.maximumfun.org) and NPR.

**Promo:**

**Ben Harrison:** Hi, is this Brennan?

**Brennan:** This is Brennan.

**Ben:** This is Ben Harrison. I'm the host of *The Greatest Generation* and *Greatest Trek*, along with my buddy Adam, on Maximum Fun. I am calling because you, Brennan, have been named Maximum Fun's member of the month!

**Brennan:** Oh my god, I'm so honored to be the MaxFun member of the month.

**Ben:** As member of the month, you'll be getting a gift card to the MaxFun store, a special member of the month bumper sticker, and a special priority parking spot at the MaxFun headquarters in Los Angeles, California, just for you. That's a perk that I don't even get as a host of shows on the network.

**Brennan:** This all sounds fantastic. I'm gonna have to figure out a way to use that parking spot before the end of the month.

**Ben:** Brennan, you have to do it just to rub it in my face alone. Have a great day, and live long and prosper. (*Laughs.*) I don't know how to do this!

**Brennan:** That works. I will do my best to live long and prosper.

**Speaker:** Become a Maximum Fun member now at [MaximumFun.org/join](https://MaximumFun.org/join).

**Transition:** Thumpy synth with a syncopated beat.

**Jesse Thorn:** Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. I'm talking with Mark Hamill. He, of course, played Luke Skywalker in the many *Star Wars* movies. These days, you can catch him in *The Life of Chuck*, a three-part epic science fiction drama based on a novella by Stephen King. That movie is out now in theaters.

In *The Last Jedi*, Luke Skywalker has sort of exiled himself. And from what I understand, that was uncomfortable for you when you read it.

**Mark Hamill:** Well, here's the thing—and I'd love to clear this up. Ryan Johnson is one of the most gifted directors I've ever worked with. He's amiable. He's fun on set. He's smart. He made a great movie. I think the staging of the standoff between Kylo Ren—Adam Driver—and I at the end is so well staged. You know, the foreshadowing that I'm not really there. Adam wipes the snow away, and you see the red planet beneath. I wipe the snow, and it's just snow. I mean, that's so subtle. I loved *Knives Out* and *Brick* and *Looper*. He is one of my favorite directors! And the fact that I went public with my dissatisfaction with the motivation for Luke becoming a suicidal hermit might have colored things in a way that maybe I should have kept that to myself.

But I kept saying to Ryan, “This would just make Luke double down even—”

He said, “Well, your whole—you know, your class at the Jedi Academy were wiped out.”

**Transition:** A whooshing sound.

**Clip:**

**Music:** Dramatic and ominous background music.

**Luke:** And he turned on me.

*(Screams and chaos.)*

He must have thought I was dead. When I came to, the temple was burning. He had vanished with a handful of my students and slaughtered the rest. Leia blamed Snoke, but it was me. I failed.

[00:40:00]

Because I was Luke Skywalker, Jedi master.

**Transition:** A whooshing sound.

**Mark Hamill:** I said, “Ryan, I saw entire planets wiped out! If anything, Luke doubles down, and it hardens his resolve in the face of adversity.” So, that’s all. I said, “Can I make up my own backstory of why he is the way he is? I don’t want to just say that, you know, I bumped my head, and I have brain damage.”

He said, “Yeah, do whatever you want.”

So, I made up a much, much darker backstory that I thought could justify him being that way. You wanna hear what it was?

**Jesse Thorn:** Spill it, Hamill!

**Mark Hamill:** *(Laughs.)* I thought, “What could make someone give up a devotion to what is basically a religious entity, to give up being a Jedi?” Well, the love of a woman. So, he falls in love with a woman. He gives up being a Jedi; they have a child together. At some point, the child—as a toddler—picks up an unattended lightsaber, pushes the button, and is killed instantly. The wife is so full of grief, she kills herself. I thought that would be— 'Cause I think about—I hear these horrible stories about these children that find unattended guns and so forth and wind up dead. And I thought that resonated with me so deeply that that could

possibly— But he didn't have the time to tell a backstory like that, I'm guessing. He just wanted a brief thing to explain it.

And to me, it didn't justify it. That said— And I told him this. “Despite the fact that I disagree with your choices for Luke, I'm gonna do everything within my power to make your screenplay work as best that I can.” And the only thing unfortunate about that is I've heard comments from fans who think that I somehow dislike Ryan Johnson, and nothing could be further from the truth. And by the way, that story about my made-up backstory, I've never told that before. That's an exclusive for you, Jesse.

**Jesse Thorn:** First of all, thank you. You know I thrive on exclusives.

**Mark Hamill:** Good.

**Jesse Thorn:** I'm all about breaking news. I'm a real reporter.

**Mark Hamill:** I believe it.

**Jesse Thorn:** Not a dope that interviews artists on the weekends. *(Laughs.)*

**Mark Hamill:** Well, you've convinced me.

**Jesse Thorn:** I mean, I have to say, I found his story in that film really moving in a way that—even as a guy who really likes *Star Wars*, that kind of being moved by a film was not something I had gotten from *Star Wars* in the past. And there was something wonderful about watching you as a lonely person enduring a of crisis of faith—not just a crisis of faith of the religion of the film, of the Force and being a Jedi, but just to wonder whether you have your own place in the world, like whether your life is meaningful. You know?

**Mark Hamill:** Right. Well, yeah. I agree.

**Jesse Thorn:** Also, I liked those like those like space walrus type guys.

**Transition:** A whooshing sound.

**Clip:**

*(Animal braying. Milking noises.)*

**Transition:** A whooshing sound.



**Mark Hamill:** There's something for everybody, isn't there? Yes, yes. Yeah.

**Jesse Thorn:** I love those guys! (*Giggles.*)

Oh man, I never knew that my favorite part of *Star Wars* would be a guy milking a space walrus. But here we are!

**Mark Hamill:** Well, there you go! Yes. And I—here's the two examples of something that you drank in the movie that it couldn't be further from the truth. In North Africa, in the first one when we were doing all the scenes in Tatooine, there was blue milk. And they took blue food coloring, and they have something in a triangular carton called Long Life Milk. It doesn't have to be refrigerated. People take it on camping trips and so forth. But I said—and I took a sip, and it was ghastly. Sweet and oily and gag-inducing. But I said, “If they're gonna put blue milk in front of me, you bet I'm gonna drink it on camera.” So, that's one of the reasons I have confidence that I'm a good actor, 'cause I took a swig and made no faces.

[00:45:00]

I acted like, “Mm. Delicious.” Flash forward to milking what you call the space walrus. It was coconut milk, and it was delicious, and it was refreshing and really, really good.

(*They laugh.*)

So, there you are. I have to tell you, Jesse, there are people now—'cause I watched each movie when they came out, but I don't go back and watch them again. In fact, when you talked about the re-release, Lucas Films said, “George has tweaked the films, and he's gonna release them on the 20th anniversary.”

I said, “Oh good. Send me a copy.”

When my kids heard that I wasn't gonna go and see them, they said, “Are you crazy? We've gotta see 'em!”

I said, “You've watched those movies countless times, way more than I have!” They'd have sleepovers, and they'd watch all three on videotape.

They said, “Yeah, Dad, but we've never seen them in the theater.”

I went, “Oh, of course.” On a giant screen. The communal experience of seeing them with an audience is crucial. State-of-the-art sound, all of that. So, I saw each one again in 1997. But again, I haven't seen them since. I haven't seen the sequels. I saw them when they came out, but I don't go back, and I don't read the novels. And the kids play the games, and there's all this ancillary material that's out there for the true fans. I don't— You know, I do the job; I get the job done, and then I move on.

And so, I have these kids coming up and asking me questions like, “When you were on the planet of Kashyyyk, the Wookie planet—”

I go, “Wait a minute, did we go to the Wookie planet in the—”

“No, no, I'm talking about *Splinter of the Mind's Eye* by Alan Dean Foster.”

I said, “Oh, I'm sorry, I haven't read that.”

I just did a sketch on *Colbert* last night where he's playing a super fan who references—I can't even remember. The Uma—? Some character that's only in a video game, and he goes—and he describes the character. I'm saying, “I have no idea who that is.”

And he describes the character in detail, and he goes, “And it's in”—and he names the game—“so, it's canon!”

I mean, the *Colbert* writers got that so right. 'Cause I routinely meet people that know way more about *Star Wars* than I do. And I feel badly sometimes, because I say, “You know, I have to admit, I have no idea what you're talking about. I've never heard of what you just said.”

**Jesse Thorn:** I'm Jesse Thorn. You're listening to *Bullseye*. My guest is Mark Hamill. He's one of the stars of *The Life of Chuck*, *Batman: The Animated Series*, *Fall of the House of Usher*, and of course, a film series called *Star Wars*.

What are you most a nerd of?

**Mark Hamill:** Oh boy. When I was little, I saw the black and white *King Kong*. I was probably in second grade. It was on the *Million Dollar Movie* when we were living in Queens, and I saw it on a Monday, and it was the first movie that made me cry my eyes out. I just thought it was so tragic that they killed Kong, and I loved the dinosaurs! I had never seen—you know, I didn't know how they did it! And you couldn't go to the internet and just Google. I went to the library and looked up microfiche of reviews of *King Kong* in the *New York Times*. I was writing down “Willis O'Brien, special effects; model maker, Marcel Delgado,” and I was obsessed.

And I thought, “I wanna be—I want my job to be going to work and make a tyrannosaurus fight with a giant ape. I don't know if I have the skills, but I could be an assistant. I could—” I was so determined to be in and around television, movies, and theatre. That was my obsession. And that was it. I mean, Walt Disney would do shows where they showed you how—the making of, whatever, *Darbyo Giland the Little People*, the making of *The Shaggy Dog*. And you saw the camera crew, and you saw the makeup people, and you saw the wardrobe and all of it. And I was fascinated. It was like a tutorial. That was my schooling, is demystifying how movies were made. And the more I saw, the more I said, “You know what? Even if I fail as an actor, I'm not a bad cook. I could always cater a movie.”

**Jesse Thorn:** Mark, when you're at home now, as a man in your early 70s, do you still sit down in your easy chair and read a book about Ray Harryhausen or whatever?

**Mark Hamill:** Obsessed with Ray Harryhausen. I loved him. I'm so—I think I've read about pretty much everything I can.

[00:50:00]

So, right now I'm reading Stephen King's *On Writing*, which I highly recommend, because it's almost like hanging out with Stephen King who's talking about the process, where he gets his ideas, just the process of writing. Which is fascinating, 'cause he's not on talk shows a lot. I met him briefly, but we weren't able to talk that much, 'cause I just sat next to him at the premiere of *The Life of Chuck* at the Toronto Film Festival. It's fascinating. And I read political books, although at some point it gets so painful. I thought, "I've gotta go back and read something that's entirely fiction." 'Cause I don't wanna be reminded about where we are right now. But yeah, I haven't lost interest in learning, and I love, love, love reading.

**Jesse Thorn:** Are you prepared for your own passing?

**Mark Hamill:** I don't know. (*Chuckling.*) You know, it's—you know, it's all gotta come sometimes. 'Cause people will say, you know, "Is it horrible to be 73?"

I say, "Well, it's better than the alternative: not being 73." And I'm still enjoying myself. I mean, my idea of what I would be like at 73 when I was in my 20s was, I don't know, in a wheelchair or with a cane or something. Your mind doesn't age; it's your body that starts showing you that it's harder to go upstairs and doing all these things. But you know, it's just a natural part of life. I mean, obviously I'd love to go to sleep and not wake up rather than being devoured by a shark, but what are you gonna do? That's life.

**Jesse Thorn:** Thank you so much for talking to me, Mark. It was really nice to get to talk to you.

**Mark Hamill:** Nice talking to you. And like I say, I hope everyone sees *The Life of Chuck*, because there's never been anything like it. And I doubt if there'll be anything like it again. Certainly not in my lifetime.

**Jesse Thorn:** Mark Hamill, everyone. You can watch him right now in *The Life of Chuck*. If you wanna see one of my favorite cameos he has ever done, he has a great part in season two of *What We Do in the Shadows* as a character named Jim the Vampire. Can't recommend it enough. Absolutely iconic.

**Transition:** Bright, playful synth.

**Jesse Thorn:** That's the end of another episode of *Bullseye*. *Bullseye*, 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. This morning on my way into the

office, I drove past the Westlake Home Depot where there was a tent set up, and some of our neighbors were working to protect those of our neighbors who are seeking day labor there.

The 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 Hannah Moroz. Our video producer is Daniel Speer. We get booking help from Mara Davis. Our interstitial music comes from our friend, Dan Wally—also known as DJW. You can find his music at [DJWsounds.bandcamp.com](https://djsounds.bandcamp.com). Our theme music was written and recorded by The Go! Team. That is called “Huddle Formation”. Thanks to The Go! Team; thanks to their label, Memphis Industries. Special thanks this week to our friend Jacob Derwin at Technica House in New York City for recording our interview with Mark Hamill.

You can follow *Bullseye* on Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, where you'll find video from just about all of our interviews—including the ones you heard this week. Why not send the video of our interview with the great Mark Hamill to a *Star Wars* fan in your life? Which is to say 70% of the people in your life, if they are people in America. Okay, 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](https://MaximumFun.org) and is distributed by NPR.

*(Music fades out.)*