

[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 is *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. I am willing to bet that you've seen a lot of Paul Walter Hauser lately. Let's take a look at these credits here.

*(Keyboard noises.)*

Let's see here. We got his early work—I, *Tonya* to *Da 5 Bloods*, the lead in Clint Eastwood's movie about *Richard Jewel*. There's that classic sketch from *I Think You Should Leave*.

**Transition:** A whooshing sound.

**Clip:**

**Jeff (*I Think You Should Leave*):** Grab the keys—

**Scott:** *(Frantically screaming the line as fast as possible.)* Grab the keys and get the freaking truck engine running. I'LL STOP YOU, JABRONIS!

**Transition:** A whooshing sound.

**Jesse Thorn:** And then there's the more recent stuff. He plays Liam Neeson's partner in the new *Naked Gun* movie. He plays Moleman in the *Fantastic Four*. He's also in big, upcoming movies like *Americana* and that biopic about Bruce Springsteen. As I said, there is a lot of Paul Walter Hauser these days. He is always great. The kid has—as they say—made it. The path that Hauser took to making it though is pretty unique and was pretty fraught.

Growing up in Michigan, he knew from an early age he wanted to act, maybe write, maybe get a job on *Saturday Night Live*. And by early age, I mean like 13. Hauser had his heroes too: Chris Farley, John Belushi, and Philip Seymour Hoffman. Three generational talents, all of whom died before they were 50. For a while, Hauser says he was on a similar trajectory. Like Farley, Hoffman, and Belushi, he was struggling with substance abuse and mental illness. Several times in the last decade-and-change, he was certain he'd lose it all: his career,

his marriage, maybe even his life. But Hauser, as you're about to hear, found his way through it. Let's get right into it. Without any further ado: me and Paul Walter Hauser.

**Transition:** Bright, chiming synth.

**Jesse Thorn:** Paul Walter Hauser, welcome to *Bullseye*. It's so nice to talk to you and get to meet you.

**Paul Walter Hauser:** Thanks, JT. Thanks for having me.

**Jesse Thorn:** By all means, call me JT. I invite you to.

**Paul Walter Hauser:** You got it, Jesse.

**Jesse Thorn:** (*Laughs.*) You get special dispensation, because as I understand it, you had a child like 36 hours ago or something?

**Paul Walter Hauser:** Yes. I personally gave birth to a great number of children. They're calling me the Octo Dad. Sunday night at 2:30 in the morning, my wife gave birth to our third and final child: a little girl named Isla Grace Hauser. And I went from that beautiful circus to come here and do this press tour for *Naked Gun* and a little bit of *Fantastic Four*.

**Jesse Thorn:** Are you out of your mind right now?

**Paul Walter Hauser:** Yeah, I'm in a pretty... a pretty fluid fugue state. For sure.

(*Jesse chuckles.*)

Like, I'm very—I'm constantly tired, but also grateful. I mean, life—between work and family—has been a little shockingly wonderful.

**Jesse Thorn:** It's not unusual that you would have a third child. It is unusual that you would be in two big movies almost at the same time that are being released almost at the same time.

**Paul Walter Hauser:** Yeah. We got *Fantastic four*, July 25. We have *Naked Gun*, August 1st. I did a Lionsgate film starring myself and Halsey and Sydney Sweeney, August 15<sup>th</sup>, called *Americana*, and then got the Springsteen movie in the autumn, in October.

**Jesse Thorn:** When you moved to Los Angeles, did you have a plan to get into showbusiness? Did you have an idea of how it worked when you dropped out of school and moved to Hollywood?

The reason that I ask is because you're from Saginaw, Michigan. Your father was a Lutheran minister. Your mother worked in similar fields, worked in schools, and so on and so forth.

[00:05:00]

It's about as far from knowing people in showbusiness or knowing how showbusiness works as it could be. And you didn't go to Julliard or Tisch and then, you know, graduate with your class, do Off-Broadway, and find an agent that way. You dropped out of regular college and moved to Los Angeles just... to go for it?

**Paul Walter Hauser:** I mean, it was way more... It's that, but you know—there's like so many hours logged that no one will ever know about except my early manager or my siblings and my parents and, you know, old-time friends. It's just when I was— Something happened around the time I was 12 years old where I saw—like, around 10/12 years old, I started watching movies that weren't just comedies. So, growing up it was mostly *Father of the Bride*, *Tommy Boy*, *Ace Ventura*, *Mrs. Doubtfire*. And suddenly I started watching *A Few Good Men* and *As Good As It Gets* and *Goodfellas* and *Heat*.

And you're just like, “Whoa. There's a whole world of these like performances. And I wanna be Chris Farley, but I also wanna be Jack Nicholson. How do I get to do all of it?” And then you find out about Philip Seymour Hoffman, and you go, “Oh, someone did do all of it.”

So, my dream was like, “Okay, I'm gonna go to Tisch School of the Arts and do standup and improv comedy, try to get on *Saturday Night Live*, leave *SNL*, try to get parts in TV and film and, then try to direct movies someday, like Rob Reiner.”

**Jesse Thorn:** And this isn't your dream when you're 19 or 20. This is your dream when you're 15 or 16.

**Paul Walter Hauser:** This was like between 12 and 16. So, I—(sigh) aw man, it's almost— It's a little emotional to talk about, partially—I'm also just so tired that I think my emotions are a little more easy to access when I'm tired. But I started making short films when I was 13/14 years old, a lot of like sketch comedy type stuff. My heroes at the time were like Will Ferrell and Johnny Knoxville. So, you can fill in the blanks of the infantile things we were probably making. But when I was 16, I started doing standup comedy at like churches and bars and schools and stuff wherever I could in Michigan. And I started writing screenplays, so I bought like Syd Field/Skip Press books at Barnes and Noble. I was class president two out of four years.

Like, I had the Max Fischer thing in *Rushmore* of like I was garbage in half my classes, but I've done every extracurricular, excelled at all these things. I'm doing standup and writing screenplays. There has to be a way to break into Hollywood. And I'm gonna go do nine different things in the hopes that one of them gets me in. So, it was really like I was playing the lotto table where you put a chip on each number. And I was like, “Let's see if one of these numbers hits.” And eventually, at the age of 22, I auditioned to be a background actor in a local movie with Jennifer Connolly and Ed Harris. It was called *Virginia*. Dustin Lance Black, who won the Oscar for writing *Milk*, was the writer-director.

And I just showed up, and I was just geeked to be on a movie set at all. And then I saw Lance Black and said, “Congrats on your Oscar win. I loved your speech. You know, as a Christian, I loved when you said, you know, ‘To the Youth of America, God does not hate you.’ That

was beautiful, and I wish more people were saying that.” And I paid him like a minute-long compliment, like a drive-by compliment, thinking like, “Oh, I’m so lucky I got to Lance-Black.”

And he goes, “What’s your name?” and wrote my name down and my number. And he goes, “I think there might be a part for you.”

So, I went back and auditioned twice, and I was number six on the call sheet and made like \$10,000 in a month in my home state of Michigan and moved to LA. It was the most surreal, dreamy, crazy thing, man.

**Jesse Thorn:** You also ended up back in Michigan after moving to LA.

**Paul Walter Hauser:** Yeah, I was in LA for about a year, and I booked *Community*, *It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia*, a pilot with Larry Charles. I had just done a movie with Aaron Paul, called *Adam*. And so, like I thought—like, I was killing it on paper, but I mismanaged my money, ‘cause I was so immature. I would like go to a coffee shop in LA on Cahuenga and just like spend \$28 a day sitting there eating, drinking coffee, and working on screenplays and stuff and doing the occasional audition or whatever. So, I was kind of just like—I had seen so much success so quickly. You’re talking two movies and three TV shows in the span of a year? Which is kind of unheard of. But I was a little cocky, and I sort of just thought I was fine. And then I ended up on my buddy— Matt Ryan.

[00:10:00]

My buddy Matt Ryan let me sleep on his couch, on his floor. And I was like, “This is untenable. Like, I just did like my fifth audition for *Bones* on Fox, and I can’t book a guest star, and I have no money.” So, I remember I took a girl out on a date at the ArcLight Hollywood and went out for sushi. It was like the last bit of money I had. Spent it. Walked home crying, and flew home to Saginaw, and worked at like a deli—in like a butcher shop in this deli—and then worked at a bowling alley. And then I was going nuts, and I couldn’t stay there. And I was like, “I need to make more money. This isn’t enough money for me to save money to go back to LA.”

And I was headed to Chicago to work at a Starbucks 40 hours a week while doing standup and taking classes at the IO Theater—the famed Improv Olympic—where people like Tina Fey and Chris Farley came from. And that, mmm, six months there was what kind of prepped me and primed me to go back to LA in January of 2013.

**Jesse Thorn:** Where were you at with drinking at that time?

**Paul Walter Hauser:** When I had turned 23, I was probably like 333 pounds, and I was drinking my face off, ingesting a lot of marijuana. I remember one of the first nights I was on the set of my movie, we wrapped, and I went and— I think I got drunk and my buddy got high, and then we had to drive like two miles back to the hotel. And I was so scared, driving like drunk. And at one point I went up on a curb just by accident, and then like nine seconds

later, a cop car zoomed past me. And it was like a—it felt like God waving at me going, “Hey, moron. I’m blessing you right now. Don’t screw this up.”

But I kind of had that attitude of just like having fun and not worrying about it. I kind of had this Chris Farley/Belushi type of thing where I liked being this big party guy. I thought that was like my identity, I suppose. So, around the time I go back to LA in 2013, I’m like 275 pounds. I’ve like lost some weight, and I’m not going as hard. And I’m trying to—I joined Orange Theory Fitness, I remember. And I was like, “I’m gonna try to get back in a healthy place.” And I was doing yoga on the system DDPY. And then I end up booking *I, Tonya*. And I see the picture of the real guy, and I’m like, “I need to put weight back on.”

So, I went—I put like 30/35 pounds back on for *I, Tonya*.

**Transition:** A whooshing sound.

**Clip:**

**Music:** Exciting, upbeat backing music.

**Shawn (*I, Tonya*):** I’ve been a co-op specialist in Switzerland and Europe. Hostage retrieval is my area of expertise. I’m telling you, man. We’re in and we’re out. Mind control may be necessary, which I’ve been practicing in Kenya, Korea. When traveling internationally, I’m as resourceful as a lizard. My skills have been honed by years of infiltrating underground organizations. So, we blend. And we disappear. And under no circumstances do we create or cause a scene.

**Jeff:** Tonya!

**Transition:** A whooshing sound.

**Paul Walter Hauser:** That was tough. It was worth it, 'cause I watch the movie now and I go, “Yeah dude, you gave it everything you could.”

**Jesse Thorn:** We’re gonna take a quick break. When we come back, we’ll finish up with Paul Walter Hauser. Stay with us. It’s *Bullseye* for [MaximumFun.org](https://MaximumFun.org) and NPR.

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**Transition:** Bright, chiming synth with a syncopated beat.

**Jesse Thorn:** Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I’m Jesse Thorn. My guest is the actor and professional wrestler Paul Walter Hauser. Hauser starred in the 2019 Clint Eastwood drama,

*Richard Jewel*. He's also appeared on TV comedies like *The Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt*, *The After Party*, and *I Think You Should Leave*. These days you can catch him in the movies *The Naked Gun* and *The Fantastic Four: First Steps*.

Let's get back into my conversation with Paul Walter Hauser.

[00:15:00]

I watched a testimony video with you and your wife where one of the things that your wife said was that she divorced you. That is a point in your life where you have no choice but to take stock, right?

**Paul Walter Hauser:** Yeah. I had actually filed for divorce like a week or two after separating. Like, it was like a thing where I was like, “I married the wrong person. I didn't know who I—” And part of that is a self-condemnation, by the way, is not trusting yourself. So, like if you think you're an idiot, then when you have a huge marital spat, and it throws everything into orbit, and you don't have any experience in relationships; you are kind of like—you blame yourself too, where you're like, “Oh, I'm an idiot. I should have known this. I should have—” So, then like you're hurting somebody else, but you're also putting the pain back on yourself and saying, “I did this.”

But yeah, I had filed for divorce and she—in her infinite grace and forgiveness—was like trying to stop me from going through with the divorce the whole time. Sending me pictures of my kid and telling me “we can work through this; let's go to counseling.”

I was trying to like justify all the work I had put into getting a divorce too, of like, “Well, I gotta get past the finish line.” And then the moment I got divorced and spent Christmas day with my family, I'm with all three of my siblings who all have their own kids, and I'm by myself. And my ex-wife and my kid are, you know, in Georgia, and I'm in Michigan. I'm like, “What the hell am I doing here?” It was like one of the last times I dealt with suicidal ideology was Christmas of 2021. And I was like, “Okay, clearly something's wrong if I went through all this work and now feel worse.” So, then I just—yeah, Zoloft, and some sleep aid, and self-therapy, and then marital counseling, and sobriety and the 12 Steps, and just making different choices for yourself. You do enough of that, you literally change your brain chemistry. Like, that's pretty profound over time.

So, when those spiderwebs/cobwebs started clearing up and you realize—when you have a kid or two kids, it's like you learn like, “Wow, I didn't know how selfish I was. I didn't know how bad things were until they cleared up.” And you get to kinda see the new you versus the recent you. By the way. So, sorry if it's—I'm like kind of venting at you a little bit. I kind of wish I was a little more emotionally modest with people, but I can't do that well.

**Jesse Thorn:** We're doing what we can do. I mean, having grown up with a dad who was in the 12 Steps—and I'm very familiar with the idea of letting go and letting God, and that is a very difficult thing to do.

**Paul Walter Hauser:** Surrendering is the best feeling ever when you really let yourself do it. But getting there is— It's like working out. You wake up, you go, “God, I don't wanna work out.” And then the second you're done working out, you're like, “God, I'm glad I did that.” Surrender's the exact same thing where it's like, mentally, you're like, “I can't S-U-Rrr-render.” And it's like, just spell it out, dude. Get there. Let yourself get there.

I had it last night at the *Fantastic Four* premiere. I literally had a moment where I'm like, “What am I doing here? Like, they like kind of cut half my scenes, and there's like—do I really make an impact to this movie? I want to be additive to the film. Am I even additive? Do I even matter in this film?” And then it was like—it was some bit of like insecurity and ego. And then I just had a moment of like, “Can you just sit here and look around and be happy that you just got to see Michael Giacchino do his *Fantastic Four* score in front of you in a theater?! You absolute idiot fool lucky person. You lottery winner idiot.”

And I just have moments like that where if I surrender and I'm grateful, everything's cool. But I do have to do the work to get there.

**Jesse Thorn:** Can I ask you what it's like to be in a gigantic Marvel movie? Like, when I say to be in it, I don't mean the experience of talking about it. I mean the experience of being on the set of a movie that's gonna cost, you know—whatever—\$150,000,000 or something like that.

**Paul Walter Hauser:** Well, my guess—and I don't have the numbers in front of me; I legit don't know. But my guess from my own business acumen is that they probably spent about \$150,000,000 on production, probably spent another \$150,000,000 on publicity and advertising. So, really it's about—you know, they break even around 300 mil is my guess. And that's a lot of pressure, but also like thank God for the fan base. I think breaking even isn't the issue. The hope is that we—you know, we make a lot of money and make an impact and with the audience. Because I do think there's Caped Crusader fatigue.

[00:20:00]

**Jesse Thorn:** I haven't seen the film yet as we record this, but my comedy partner saw it last night in a press screening.

**Paul Walter Hauser:** Who's your comedy partner?

**Jesse Thorn:** His name's Jordan Morris. I texted him. I said, “Tell me about Paul Walter Hauser as Moleman in *Fantastic Four*, the movie.”

And he said, “He is one of the most fun parts of the movie, and you could really tell he understood the assignment.”

**Paul Walter Hauser:** (*Chuckles happily.*) Oh, that's cool.

**Jesse Thorn:** That was—and that is a particular part of being in a film like this, that you have to understand the assignment, right? Like, you have to be able to capture a very specific tone

that is a weird combination of grounded/not grounded, comic/serious. Like, a lot of different things are going on in those movies. (*Laughs.*)

**Paul Walter Hauser:** Very much so. Yeah. I think when you're like the lead of something, you almost are the assignment. And then when you're supporting, you kind of have to understand the assignment. And I think in both *Naked Gun* and *Fantastic Four* and the Springsteen movie—I'm one of the leads of *Americana*, but the other three big studio films I did, it's really me supporting Liam Neeson, me supporting Vanessa Kirby, and me supporting Jeremy Allen White. And with that, you do kind of—you put more of your creativity and ego aside, and you really have to just hone in on what is really the most important thing here. It's not about me creatively expressing myself to the nth degree. It's about trying to nail it very, very quickly.

**Jesse Thorn:** So, when you're being Moleman, and you have squinty-eye glasses on—I mean, they're like goggles. They're sort of like goggles with little windows.

**Paul Walter Hauser:** Yeah. They're like industrial factory-looking goggles or something.

**Jesse Thorn:** Yeah. Like what you would wear to do something really bright, but in 1930.

(*Paul agrees.*)

When you are doing that, what choices do you make (*chuckling*) to support the tone of the film? Like, do you come up with an “as if” in your mind for “me having an army of mole-oids is as if—”?

**Paul Walter Hauser:** Well, no, you know what? They really supported us with a great amount of background performers and a lot of like visual sets. Like, it wasn't that— You know, I talked to Sebastian Stan and some of my buddies who have done Marvel stuff, and a lot of the stories they tell are very kind of underwhelming, where it's like, “I'm in front of a green screen. I look left. I like mutter one word, and I run out.” And it's like—it sounds horrible. This is very much the opposite. I felt like I was getting to really play.

It felt like the school of like *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids*, where it's like, “Wow, we made all this? It's not digitized? Like, we get to find the giant oatmeal cream pie and the giant ant?” You know? So, I had fun with that aspect of it. And as far as the goggles, I just kept petitioning Matt Jackman—our wonderful director—I just kept saying, “The eyes of the windows of the soul. And I'm a small part of this film. I get that we gotta do the goggles, but it would really mean a lot to me if we could omit them as often as possible. 'Cause otherwise it's just—you may as well get any actor to do this. It doesn't have to be me. You can save some headaches and money by grabbing anybody for the visual.” But—

**Jesse Thorn:** So, you lift 'em up to your forehead? Is that the compromise there?

**Paul Walter Hauser:** A little bit of that, yeah. But it's like half-and-half throughout the film. I think you see me both ways.



**Jesse Thorn:** *Naked Gun* is a similar challenge, tonally. I'm obsessed with that world. We had Zucker-Abrahams-Zucker on the show a year or two ago, and I've probably watched *Police Squad* all the way through probably four or five times.

What is the challenge of living in a world where ridiculous things are happening around you at all times, and you have to nail jokes without smiling or winking or trying to impress the audience at all?

**Paul Walter Hauser:** Honestly, it's pretty easy, 'cause it requires less of you. I'm used to—on a show like *Cobra Kai* or *The After Party* on Apple TV, I need to be more of a comedy machine. This really just required me to play off of Liam and, once again, support him. And so, I watched the—I haven't even seen the *Police Squad* show actually. Isn't it only like six episodes?

**Jesse Thorn:** Yeah. It's so funny. It's so funny. It is so funny!

**Paul Walter Hauser:** Yeah, I need to go back and watch it. But I have—obviously, I've seen like *Airplane!*. I've seen the original three *Naked Guns* and some other Leslie Nielsen fare. And I just—I studied George Kennedy and what he was doing. Like, he's making choices, but they're subtle. And it's very much about like—it's almost like having a relative slip into dementia, where like you still show the same amount of respect and adherence to them and even occasional deference, but then you're also like—you have to be aware that like they're not of sound mind. So, there's like—I'm kind of doing that with Liam the whole film. And that's easy to play. It's fun, you know? It's weird for me to be the straight man.

[00:25:00]

And so, like it was—the onus is on me to try to make it vaguely interesting while still keeping it together.

**Jesse Thorn:** I mean, often they say the comedy is in the reaction, not the action. And the straight man's job is to give the color to what's happening with the person making the joke. Right? Like, their reaction is what fills in what that joke means. You know what I mean?

**Paul Walter Hauser:** Sure. Yeah. And it's also a shared experience with the audience. 'Cause it's like the audience's perspective, but you can't laugh like they do. So, there is like something weirdly intimate about that analytical side of like, “I'm with you on this, but I can't be you in this moment.”

**Jesse Thorn:** What's the stupidest joke that you had to participate in in the upcoming film, *The Naked Gun*?

**Paul Walter Hauser:** In the upcoming film, *The Naked Gun*, the most ridiculous joke I was a part of (*laughs*) would be— It would probably be me having to stand there while Liam Neeson is saying that the Janet Jackson Super Bowl was the reason he was so mad that he arrested an entire crew at McDonald's restaurant.

(Jesse laughs.)

That got me going, and so did this chili dog bit with Busta Rhymes, where he's trying to show police cam footage, and it just shows him eating chili dogs before noon—chili dogs and coffee. And he basically has like a personal downward spiral moment because of these chili dogs. And that was— It was one of those things where you can't think about what you're doing. You have to really like play it straight with severity, 'cause if you actually think about what's being said, you'll lose it.

**Jesse Thorn:** We've even more with Paul Walter Hauser coming up after a quick break. When we return, we will talk about his other labor of love: professional wrestling. It's *Bullseye* for [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org) and NPR.

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(Music ends.)

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

**Jesse Thorn:** It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. I'm talking with the actor Paul Walter Hauser.

I watched one of your wrestling matches. You have a sideline as a professional wrestler.

**Paul Walter Hauser:** I do. No side hustles. Just another hustle. Yeah.

**Jesse Thorn:** Yeah, okay. You have a corollary career in professional wrestling. It was a great match. It was a lot of fun. And one of the things—

**Paul Walter Hauser:** Wait, which one did you watch?

**Jesse Thorn:** Well, I'll tell you the specific that was really intense, is you're outside of the ring. This is a match where the—you know, the peak of the performance of the show, of the competition, is you laying a guy down on a door and then jumping from the stands onto the guy on the door. The door is like leaning against the stands on the ground outside the ring.

**Paul Walter Hauser:** Yeah. A lot of things can go wrong there.

**Jesse Thorn:** Yeah. Breaking the door in half. And that was—you know, it's a great trick. It was impressive. *(Chuckles.)* But it wasn't the thing that struck me the most. The thing that struck me the most was, as you're stalking around the ring, doing wrestling hype moves—you know, like “Oh, we're really gonna go for it now,” somebody hands you a beer. And...

**Paul Walter Hauser:** Oh yeah. *(Laughs.)* On the stage, yeah.

**Jesse Thorn:** Yeah. And you are in full wrestling hype mode and holding this beer bottle. And you just go, “I! AM! SOBERRR!” *(Laughs.)* And like, the crowd loses it!

**Transition:** A whooshing sound.

**Clip:**

**Announcer 1:** And we've both been on that stage. That's solid wood. There's no give to that—

**Paul Walter Hauser:** I! AM! SOBER!

*(The audience cheers.)*

**Announcer 1:** Oh, nice. Nice.

**Announcer 2:** Good man. Good man.

**Announcer 1:** We love to see that.

**Transition:** A whooshing sound.

[00:30:00]

**Paul Walter Hauser:** Yeah, they liked it. Yeah.

**Jesse Thorn:** They were into it! But like, that's not something (*laughing*) you hear from someone in tights very often. Someone who's just jumped off a top rope.

**Paul Walter Hauser:** (*Sighs.*) There's something—especially after getting sober—it's like being rigorously honest, being overly honest is nice, because you don't have to remember your lies. You don't have to remember anything. You can just be the same person around everyone. So, like the same person I am in front of my wife and kids is who I'm in front of Kevin Feige at a Marvel event. So, with them—yeah, it's like very much a thing of “I'm performing,” but like everybody knows like I'm still me. And I think there's something fun about that.

I have fun being myself, also because I don't hate myself anymore. So, you seeing that moment or any—or you know, me when I won some acting award, and I'm like doing like a spoken word, hip-hop thing, it's like—it's me just having fun, you know?

**Jesse Thorn:** So, one of the most important skills of the professional wrestler is what they call the promo. Could you describe what a promo is?

**Paul Walter Hauser:** A promo is, essentially you're—for those not inundated, it's like you're trying to tell a short film style story of your mountain that you, the wrestler, are trying to climb or the adversary that is in the way of the mountain you're trying to climb. So, promo for me in Hollywood would be something like, “Miles Teller, I see what's going on. You are the absolute depiction of Hollywood star. Tall, good looking, but not too good looking. You still look like a real person. And yeah, you had the *Whiplash* moment, and you stuck around, and you did your boxing film. You did your war movie. They didn't really pan out, but then you came back! And you aligned yourself with a true icon in Tom Cruise, *Top Gun* Maverick. It was exactly what we had hoped it was. But here's my question for you, Miles Teller! After all the jet fuel has calmed down and the planes have landed, are you still a movie star? Do you really have what it takes to get in the ring—known as a studio space—with me? I'll see you at the Warner Brothers lots, and we will find out who truly is number one on the call sheet.”

That's like what a promo would be like in Hollywood.

**Jesse Thorn:** Would you be willing to offer a promo for Paul Walter Hauser appearing on National Public Radio?

**Paul Walter Hauser:** Yes, but I gotta do it in a southern accent. I gotta kind of make it like old school wrestling in the '80s.

(*Jesse agrees excitedly.*)

Some guy with a beer gut, huh? And a sour face.

“Hey, there. This is Paul Walter Hauser. Yes, the man with three names for each of his acclaims: father/husband, wrestler, and movie star. I'm coming to a theater near you. But

before I do! I am gonna have the best discussion I've ever had. You can forget the Kimmels, Fallons and Eisens. I'm talking to JT! Jesse Thorpe, here on NPR. WHOO! Come on down!"

**Jesse Thorn:** That's a lot of fun.

**Paul Walter Hauser:** Yeah, that would be that.

**Jesse Thorn:** We should book more wrestlers to hype up our NPR show.

**Paul Walter Hauser:** You have such a gentle, placid voice. It would be—

**Jesse Thorn:** Terry Gross doesn't have this.

**Paul Walter Hauser:** It'd be great to bring on more disgruntled, muscle-bound people.

**Jesse Thorn:** I should probably have a promo-off with Terry Gross. She's scared though.

**Paul Walter Hauser:** "You put the Gross in Terry Gross." You gotta find your way in. Yeah, you gotta pre-write it.

**Jesse Thorn:** I gotta find my angle. What mountain am I climbing?

**Paul Walter Hauser:** *(Chuckling.)* What mountain am I climbing? I'm trying to be the new voice of NPR.

**Jesse Thorn:** Paul, you are a genuine movie star. I mean, I'm sitting across the table from Moleman! The real Moleman.

**Paul Walter Hauser:** *(Snorts a laugh.)* This feels facetious. This— I don't know if this feels genuine.

**Jesse Thorn:** *(Laughs.)* No, not at all. My wife probably feels that way when I tell her I love her. It's just my manner of speech, Paul.

*(Paul giggles.)*

You're the real Moleman. You're a movie star. You have become an actual professional wrestler, which I'm sure is what was a central pillar of what you dreamed you could be when you were 13 years old.

**Paul Walter Hauser:** 1,000%.

**Jesse Thorn:** You have three children. You announced to me that your third child was your third and final child. So, your journey through having new children is now complete.

**Paul Walter Hauser:** Yes! Yeah. I gotta stop. I'm playing chicken with God right now. I'm just like— “You, popping out too many kids.”

**Jesse Thorn:** That is a lot of things.

[00:35:00]

And you've been sober for some time now. Do you think that you can find that slow down and chill out? Do you think you can let go and let God?

**Paul Walter Hauser:** *(Beat.)* Put it this way. I had a moment recently. I was with a Hollywood agency called CAA. And my agent left and took a job somewhere else. And that had happened twice, and I was like, “Eh, it's time for a fresh start. I'm gonna try something else.”

I went and signed with— I had done a movie with Matt Damon and Wahlberg in the last couple years. I hit them up and was like, “What's it like over there?” And they spoke glowingly. So, I went to WME, their competitor. And when it happened, I was like, “What are all the things I didn't like about the last experience?” And there were a lot of good things. CAA did a lot for me, don't get me wrong. But what were the things I didn't like, and how could I—you know—change the game up a little bit for myself?

And one of the things I said I would start doing is: don't pester people about your next job. If you claim to be this big Jesus guy, and you talk your talk all the time about God—which I do, and it's genuine—you have to also live it. From how you treat people to how you treat yourself. And one of the things I've done my whole life is come from this poverty mindset that believes I will never work again. I'm going to fail my wife and kids. We're gonna have to downsize and move out of the house we're not even owning, but renting, and I am literally gonna teach acting at a college in the next five years. Like, the other shoe dropping on my throat and it being like deserved punishment or karma or something is never far from my mind.

So, to slow down and get off the sort of self-induced treadmill, I am taking purposeful, intentional steps to say like, “The job will just come. The job will just come. I don't have to chase. I should do less chasing. I can just hang out.”

And that feels really good. And I try to find ways of doing that with my kids, where I love cooking, making them dinner, I love putting them in the swimming pool, tossing them around and teaching them how to swim. I love reading them books and chasing them and wrestling with them on our new couch. And when I do that stuff, I'm most fulfilled, because I know my heart's in the right place. I'm not thinking about things I don't need to think about. And I'm assuming the position of grace. Which religious or not, we all at some point need to assume the position of grace.

**Jesse Thorn:** Well, Paul, thank you so much for taking the time to talk to me.

**Paul Walter Hauser:** Thanks for having me, man!

**Jesse Thorn:** Paul Walter Hauser. As we mentioned, you can catch him in *The Naked Gun* and *The Fantastic Four: First Steps*. He's great in both of them. This interview, like all of our interviews, was recorded in its entirety on video as well as audio. We have a very fun, very silly bonus segment that we recorded with Paul Walter Hauser, where we ask him to pick the animal with whom he would want to do a tag team wrestling match. You can find both of those things on the *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* YouTube page.

**Transition:** Bright, chiming synth.

**Jesse Thorn:** That's the end of another episode of *Bullseye*. *Bullseye* is created in 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. Down the street from our office this week at the home improvement store, a guy pretending to be a contractor drove a box truck full of ICE agents into the parking lot where they spilled out of the back and then detained around 15 of our neighbors. DHS said that in arresting what looked on the video like some day laborers and a woman selling cut fruit, they were targeting the international crime syndicate MS-13. To which I say, “Huh.”

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 Hannah Moroz. Our video producer is Daniel Speer. We get booking help on *Bullseye* 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://djwsounds.bandcamp.com). Our theme music was written and recorded by The Go! Team. It's called “Huddle Formation”. Thanks to The Go! Team. Thanks to their label, Memphis Industries, for providing it to us.

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.

And 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.)*

[00:40:00]

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