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

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

Music: “Huddle Formation” from the album *Thunder, Lightning, Strike* by The Go! Team—a fast, upbeat, peppy song. Music plays as Jesse speaks, then fades out.

Jesse Thorn: It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. When you see Jason Segel on screen, he usually plays more or less the same type of guy: somebody's best friend, maybe a down-on-his-luck leading man. Usually his characters are a little cornily sincere but very endearing. He got his start on screen in his late teens. He starred alongside James Franco and Seth Rogan on the short-lived cult TV show *Freaks and Geeks*. Jason played Nick Andopolis, a charming slacker from a Michigan suburb with dreams of becoming a rock star. From there, a bunch of other roles. *How I Met Your Mother*; *I Love You, Man*; *Knocked up*, just to name a handful.

He's also a brilliantly talented writer. He wrote and revived *The Muppets* for a new generation. His first writing gig was the feature film *Forgetting Sarah Marshall*. He also starred in that film. It's sort of a romantic comedy. In it, he played a struggling musician named Peter Bretter. The movie starts with a breakup ends... with musical about Dracula.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Clip:

Music: Dramatic piano.

Dracula (*Forgetting Sarah Marshall*): (*Singing.*)

And if I see Van Helsing,

I swear to the Lord, I will slay him!

(Sarah laughs in the background.)

(Dracula laughs in rhythm to the music.)

He'd take you from me,

But I swear I won't let it be so!

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Jesse Thorn: These days, you can catch Jason Segel on *Shrinking*. It's a comedy in which he plays a therapist who, while grieving the death of his wife, decides to take a new approach with his clients. Instead of withholding judgment, he offers it freely and gets very, very involved in the lives of those patients. What could possibly go wrong? The show's very funny. And also stars Jessica Williams and Harrison Ford as his colleagues. Yes, that Harrison Ford. Not like Harrison Ford III or something.

When Jason and I talked in 2020, he'd just created a very different show: *Dispatches From Elsewhere*. It followed the lives of a group of regular people who discover a hidden world. It is mysterious and also earnest and silly, like Jason. Jason created the show. He was also the star of the series. He played Peter a lonely and complacent man who's been slowly suffocating in the mundanity of his life. That all changes when he stumbles onto a life-changing opportunity offered by the Enigmatic Jejune Institute. But before all that, he's just Peter. In this clip, Peter's therapist confronts him on what he really hopes to get out of their sessions.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Clip:

Peter (*Shrinking*): (*Muted and somber.*) I guess I'm just settling into the idea that this is it. That this is what life is. I don't really have anything to say about that yet.

Therapist: You feel stuck.

Peter: I feel nothing, mostly. (*Beat.*) Maybe like a sense of loss, but I don't... know for what.

Therapist: (*Beat.*) Don't you think it's time you found out?

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Jesse Thorn: Jason Segel, welcome to *Bullseye*. It's so nice to have you on the show.

Jason Segel: Hey, thanks! I'm really excited to be here.

Jesse Thorn: I was thinking about the show as I was watching it last night and thinking, you know, you got your break in show business with adolescent emotional crises; kind of rose to

stardom on quarter-life emotional crises; and you're finally engaging with the midlife emotional crises.

Jason Segel: Yeah, that sounds right. And I think that in a lot of ways, all that's happened is—like, the same devices that I used to express those things that become slightly more sophisticated.

(They chuckle.)

You know, when I was 25, all I could manage was like the literal version of exposing yourself.

(They laugh.)

And now as I've gotten older, I've sort of delved into metaphor. Does that make sense?

Jesse Thorn: *(Recovering from laughter.)* It does make sense. I mean, you did very literally—I was taking a walk yesterday with my dog and listening to a conversation you had with Terry Gross on *Fresh Air* 10 or 12 years ago when the big Jason Segel news in the world was your private parts on movie screens.

Jason Segel: *(Chuckles.)* Yeah. Well, to me it was like— Well, you know, it's actually interesting. I was sort of making a joke, but— So, one, that was me trying to lay myself bare. Like, how honest am I willing to be on screen? For a 24/25-year-old, that felt like full frontal nudity was the answer to that question. Like, “Look, I'll be totally—I'll lay bare onscreen.”

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But the other thing that I wanted to do with that moment—there was some artistic merit to it. In that one of the things I never liked about romantic comedies is that you know the inevitability of *(chuckles)*—the guy is gonna end up with the girl on the poster. That's what's gonna happen. And you know it, going in.

But I thought, when I was writing it, if I open this movie with full-front male nudity, from the lead, you're sort of forced to sit back and say, “I don't know what's gonna happen in this movie. Like, anything could happen.” And it sort of does, you know. It ends—we meet, like the inevitability, but also it ends with a lavish *Dracula* puppet musical, and another dose of full-frontal nudity. *(Chuckles.)* Those same sort of throw-you-off-guard techniques I try to use in *Dispatches*, where we open with a really, really uncomfortable moment. It's just the 40-year-old version of that.

(Jesse chuckles.)

And also, the whole show is an exercise of me trying to lay myself bare onscreen. And I try to do it for all the characters in a much more— You know, there are scarier things than being naked. That's like—I think, at my age, it's a little scarier to feel like, “Oh, I'm 40, and I have no idea what I'm doing.”

Jesse Thorn: Part of what I wondered about this show is that you had had a period of—you know, for an actor or a showbusiness person—generally, relative stability and security. I mean, you had some successes in films. But more than that you were the star of a long-running successful sitcom, which is pretty much the best job in show business, as far as jobs go. You know what I mean? (*Chuckles.*)

Jason Segel: Yeah. Yeah. No, it's hitting the lottery for sure.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, like it pays good, and it's regular. And if it's the kind of show—like *How I Met Your Mother*, the show that you were on—that is successful enough that it feels like a success most of the time, it's stable in a way that almost no other showbusiness work is. But you know, that ended eventually. And I wondered if you having had this job that everyone would reasonably tell you is the best job in show business—and having had, you know, artistic successes that were, you know, dream jobs; making a *Muppet* movie and stuff like that as well, during that time—whether when that ended, it led you to evaluate, “Uh-oh. What do I do with my calendar when I don't have a read through every Tuesday?” or whatever?

Jason Segel: (*Laughs.*) The crisis was bigger than what I do with my calendar. You know? Like—I mean, truly. It was a really interesting moment, because I think one of the things that you're forced to evaluate after— All of the things that you described are true about doing a job like that. So, then... then you're left with like a question. The stability continues. Like, you've made a bunch of money. You know? So, you don't now have to—you're not scared about paying your bills. And you get to choose what you wanna do next. And you're sort of faced with the question of, “Am I going to make choices about trying to stay famous or popular or any of those things? Or am I going to now use this amazing gift I've been given of stability to be brave and try stuff I've never tried?”

Try to be the same guy who ended *Forgetting Sarah Marshall* with a lavish *Dracula* puppet musical where I was like, “I don't know if this is gonna work, but I sure think it's cool. And I think other people might think it's cool. And let's try it and see what happens.” I guess— I don't know that artistic bravery is built on stability. You know what I mean? I think it's— there's a really great clip called “David Bowie, Advice to Artists”. It's like two and a half minutes long. You just google it. And he says that when you're operating out of your comfort zone, you're probably not making anything interesting. But if you walk a little bit further into the water, so your feet aren't touching the ground anymore, that's maybe when you're gonna be in some territory that might—I don't know—that might be art.

And, for me, I was—like, the whole time I was making *Dispatches from Elsewhere*, there was a little part of me that thought, “Oh! I mean, this might not work!” And that was really exciting!

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It was—it made me hungry to make sure I was really thinking about what I was trying to accomplish and how to execute it best.

Jesse Thorn: Were you afraid that it wouldn't work?

Jason Segel: Yeah! Of course. Absolutely. The thing is that when you— I created it. And so, you have to believe more than anyone. Because, I mean, there's just a million “no”s along the way, anytime you're trying to make something. It's hard and it's expensive and all of these things. So, publicly, I'm just like, “Yes! I know. Trust me. Believe me.” But yeah. In my guts, I was definitely scared that it might not work. And I watched the ten episodes. It's the thing that I'm most proud of that I've done in a decade.

And there are some people for whom it won't work. Some people are going to, I think, die-hard love this show and think like, “Oh, this is what I've been looking for.” And then other people will think, “Oh, this is silly.”

And I don't know. I'm, like— I'm okay with that. I'm pretty excited about that, actually.

Jesse Thorn: What was the consequence that you were afraid of if it didn't work?

Jason Segel: The same thing everyone's afraid of: that people are gonna make fun of you. That's the culture that we live in is that if you try something earnestly and boldly, that you might be embarrassed. Somebody might embarrass you. Luckily, I don't seem to have a very highly developed sense of pride or shame around things like that.

(They chuckle.)

And I'm like— I'm happy to act as a surrogate *(laughs)* into those territories, you know?

Jesse Thorn: We got so much more to get into with Jason Segel. Stay with us. It's *Bullseye* from Maximum Fun and NPR.

Transition: Thumpy synth with light vocalizations.

Jesse Thorn: Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest, Jason Segel, is an actor and writer. He starred in the TV shows *Freaks and Geeks*, *How I Met Your Mother*, and *Undeclared*. He wrote and starred in the comedy *Forgetting Sarah Marshall* as well. These days you can catch him on the TV comedy *Shrinking*. Both seasons of that show are streaming now on Apple TV+. When he and I talked in 2020, he'd just created a mysterious drama series called *Dispatches From Elsewhere*. Let's get back into it.

I wanna play— So, the first thing that you did on television and the thing that established your career—you'd acted in a few films already when you were in high school, but the thing that really made your name and career was the television show *Freaks and Geeks*.

And on one of the DVDs, there was the, you know, camcorder footage of your audition for the part of Nick Andopolis, which you ended up playing.

Jason Segel: Oh, okay. I didn't know that.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah. Yeah.

(They chuckle.)

This is a scene that is him explaining to a girl he likes—

Jason Segel: Oh no.

Jesse Thorn: —about the drum set that he has in his basement.

Jason Segel: *(Sighing.)* Okay.

Jesse Thorn: And again, this is like—this is audio just from a prosumer video camera in the audition room.

Jason Segel: Got it. Am I improving this, does it sound like? Or is it scripted? I guess we'll find out.

Jesse Thorn: It sounds like you might be adding a little flair, but it sounds like it's scripted.

Jason Segel: Okay, okay.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Clip:

Nick Andopolis: Lindsey, I brought you here because, uh, I want—I wanna show you something.

Lindsey: *(Read by a casting director.)* What is it?

Nick: *(Takes a deep breath.)* Alright. Check it out. Uh... this is it. 14 mounted toms, 6 floor toms, 10 cow bells, 4 *(unclear)*, 5 snares, man, with rototom system. It's all mounted on the, uh, patented Ken Miller quad *(unclear)* on this system, man.

(Someone laughs.)

Lindsey: Wow, Nick! That is amazing!

Nick: Thanks. 6 more pieces and I'll have a better—I'll have a better kit than Neil Peart from Rush.

(They laugh.)

Okay?

Lindsey: Wow.

Nick: You see what I'm saying?

(Laughter.)

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Jesse Thorn: It's really sweet. You do a great job. You can see why you got the part.

Jason Segel: Yeah. I also hear—I hear Paul Feig. That's Paul Feig laughing, and he is being—that's being so generous. *(Laughing.)* You know what I mean? Like, I'm okay.

(Jesse laughs.)

It's not that funny. But he's really making me feel comfortable.

Jesse Thorn: He's such a sweet man.

Jason Segel: Yes. He's such a sweet man.

Jesse Thorn: What I like about watching that audition clip is, you know, there are a few moments—and it's hard to hear in the audio of it, but you can see it very vividly in the video—you're playing to the house a little bit.

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There's a few moments where you kind of milk laughs.

(Jason agrees.)

But the overall vibe is that sort of deeply, almost painfully—

Jason Segel: Earnest.

Jesse Thorn: Earnest and sincere. And it's like watching the show—the version of that character that ended up on the show—but like before somebody said to you like, “Don't do any jokes at all.”

Jason Segel: Yeah, yeah.

Jesse Thorn: (*Laughing.*) You know what I mean?

Jason Segel: Well, that's the—yeah, that's the thing about auditioning, which is— What I never loved about it is that you're like—you're specifically trying to impress people. And to me, the real challenge of acting, I've learned as I've gotten older—and this is just from being around people who I think are really good at it and watching people who I really admire. The big challenge is, when the camera is looking at you, not to give in to trying to impress it. That, to me, is everything. It's like, “Are you willing to just be honest when the camera is asking you to do something? Don't do it.” Does that make sense?

Jesse Thorn: Yeah. I mean, it is a terrifying prospect.

Jason Segel: Yeah! (*Laughing.*) Because think about like, all of a sudden when someone even is just taking a picture with their camera phone, you do like this weird face—like, this smile that you don't do in life, or you do a weird pose. Like, you know, all of that instinct is going through you when the camera's on you, like, “I should be—this is forever! You know, I should be trying to impress whoever's watching this.”

And the people who I really, really admire who I watch are able to resist that impulse to show off.

Jesse Thorn: Was that a lesson that you had to learn as an 18-year-old or however old you were when you started making *Freaks and Geeks*?

Jason Segel: Yeah, I think that the big challenge that Judd presents you with is how honest are you willing to be on screen. And like, what is the most honest version of a teenage guy singing to his girl in the basement? Don't give me the sketch comedy version. Give me the painful one. You know, the one that makes you so uncomfortable, because you're like, “That's me.”

I've sort of taken that lesson throughout my career of just trying to do the most... (*sighs*) stripped-down version, maybe?

Jesse Thorn: You know, when I was listening to that interview from a decade or so ago that you did with Terry Gross, one of the things you talked about was that, at some point—I think on *Freaks and Geeks*—Judd Apatow told you that what was special about you as a performer was that you read as—I'm paraphrasing, but that you read as sweet enough you could really go really far toward the line of being creepy. And people would still accept it and be on your side.

Jason Segel: Yeah, it has been my sweet spot—(*chuckling*) unfortunately or fortunately, for better or for worse—is this fine line between charming and creepy, where like— I mean, there are parts in— This is just be being self-aware, but like there are parts in *Forgetting Sarah Marshall* that could veer into, “Oh, get away from this guy.” (*Laughs.*)

You know? Like, Mila Kunis should run.

Jesse Thorn: And in some ways, that is like in dialogue with romantic comedy, which is a genre that is about—that is substantially about guys that women should get away from. (*Laughs.*)

Jason Segel: Yeah! I think somehow (*suppressing laughter*) I managed to project some version of like, “Oh, he’ll—it’ll be fine. Like, no, give him a shot.” You know? Meanwhile, I’m like doing this lavish Dracula puppet musical in a weird voice and crying hysterically. But I guess—you know, for some reason, it seems like, “Oh, take care of that guy.”

Jesse Thorn: That lavish Dracula musical is maybe the signature moment of *Forgetting Sarah Marshall*, which is a great movie.

Jason Segel: Thanks.

Jesse Thorn: And I say that as somebody who hates Draculas.

Jason Segel: You hate—?! Wait, Draculas? Plural?

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, ‘cause they’re dangerous.

Jason Segel: You hate vampires. You hate vampires.

Jesse Thorn: I hate Draculas, yeah.

Jason Segel: No, (*laughing*) D-Dracula’s an individual. Vampires are the—

Jesse Thorn: It’s a type of guy... No, it’s a type of guy, and they have fangs.

Jason Segel: (*Laughs.*) Those are vampires! Dracula’s just one guy. Count Dracul.

Jesse Thorn: (*Beat.*) Yeah, he’s a Dracula.

Jason Segel: (*Giggles.*) Oh man. We’re gonna have to agree to disagree.

Jesse Thorn: So, it’s a beautiful movie. It’s one of my faves.

Jason Segel: Thanks.

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Jesse Thorn: And song at the end of it grew out of— In the film, it is this quixotic project that this guy has been working on, to write this very sincere and intense musical about Draculas. It is, at the end—

Jason Segel: (*Laughs.*) It's—(*giving up*) Yeah. Alright.

Jesse Thorn: S-sorry? No, go ahead.

Jason Segel: No, it's Dracula. It's just one Dracula.

Jesse Thorn: (*Pleasantly pretending to miss his point.*) No, you're right. The musical is just about the one. And so, like it occupies this strange space in the conclusion of the movie, which is like, if it's not good enough or earnest enough, it can't feel like a triumph for him to do it. But if it's too good and too earnest, it's not a triumph for him to do it unless it's so good that it's extraordinarily good. You know what I mean? Like, the triumph here is that he's doing it even though maybe it's not that good.

Jason Segel: Yeah. See, I think—so here's what I think the recipe is. And I think that this really plays into *Dispatches* as well, and I'm not trying to segue. I just think there's a parallel.

(*Jesse agrees.*)

That... I actually think that you can and must go full-earnest. Like, that is the real challenge, because that is where real discomfort lies. And then, where I agree with you is modulating how good something is. Right? Because that's what makes it funny. But the discomfort, I think, comes from... what if I present this to you—discomfort/magic—with no sense of irony? And so, that area is really, really interesting to me.

Muppets I did with no sense of irony. Like, I am not commenting on *The Muppets*. I'm—I love *The Muppets*. That's why I devoted two years as a grown man—right after *Forgetting Sarah Marshall*—to *The Muppets*. And there's something about that that is like, “Oh! Woah! That's like kind of... why?!” You know?

Jesse Thorn: I mean, that is also the nature of *The Muppets* is that *The Muppets* in a way like ironize these classic Hollywood tropes by approaching them sincerely, but also being puppets.

(*They laugh.*)

Jason Segel: Yeah! Yeah. Well, Draculas, yeah.

(*Jesse giggles.*)

I think that there's something about... hm. We're really uncomfortable when the other's shoe's not gonna drop. Like, we're waiting for it—as an audience, culturally. Maybe it goes back to that thing we were talking about, about that you're afraid of being made fun of, right? You're just... what if it's just nice? Or what if something is just beautiful? It's a very uncomfortable territory.

And so, in *Forgetting Sarah Marshall*, to watch this guy up there who really believes in this thing is uncomfortable. And I think that's really interesting. I think there's something about *Dispatches* that is very challenging, because I just mean it. Like, I think, “What if there was magic, and what if it required us to make it, and what if we started just making this world better by taking it into our own hands and using art and community and magic as an act of defiance? And I mean it, and I'm not making fun of it. Come join me.”

It's challenging. I found the real experiment that I'm— You know, this thing actually happened that I'm profiling in *Dispatches from Elsewhere* in San Francisco in like 2012, where this guy—this group—was the exact opposite of *Fight Club*. As opposed to handling this feeling of dissatisfaction with society by beating each other up, they chose to make magic (*chuckling*) in the secret of night. Like, this clandestine organization committed to beautification. And I found the whole thing like really challenging and uncomfortable.

When is someone gonna... make fun of you? Or when is someone gonna try to sell you something? Oh, they're not?!

I don't know, it's— I think there's something really interesting there.

Jesse Thorn: When you do your Dracula song in public, which you do on occasion, you know the audience finds it hilarious, because it's from a movie that was very funny. It requires you to commit pretty fully emotionally to the song.

(*Jason confirms.*)

And it's a song you wrote.

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Do you ever want to just be like, “Hey, can we just do this one straight, guys?” Like, to the crowd? (*Laughs.*)

Jason Segel: Yeah, do you know why—you know why that all works, ultimately, in *Forgetting Sarah Marshall*? Or why it's interesting for me to sing? Because I didn't write it for *Forgetting Sarah Marshall*. I wrote it when I was out of work from 22 to 25, trying to figure out what to do with my career. And I believed that I had cracked it! (*Laughing.*) That what I was gonna do was write a lavish *Dracula* puppet musical, and it was going to be like really, really successful.

(Giggles.) And I believed it to my core! And I wrote it! I wrote the thing! And I went and I played it for Judd. And he listened respectfully and then said, “You can’t ever show this to anybody. Ever.”

(They chuckle.)

He was very protective of me! And then it was later, when I got to put it into a comedy, that it made sense. But the reason it works is because, when I sing it, it’s true that I believed that that thing was really great. *(Beat.)* Like, I still do! I think it’s great.

Jesse Thorn: That's the part that I'm getting at here is I know that if you work that hard on something that means as much to you as those Dracula songs meant, that even with the benefit of the 15 or 20 years that have passed since and the knowledge that it was a great, you know, capper on a movie you made that was a comedy, and it was a comic capper, you still have to be up there with a part of you being like, “But guys, it is a pretty good song! I wrote it!”

Jason Segel: Yes. Yeah.

Jesse Thorn: “It’s a good song. It's really about how hard it is to be—!” *(Laughs.)*

Jason Segel: Yeah. Yes. I mean, 100%, yeah. I have some level of self-awareness that *(chuckling)* what feels vital to me feels funny to others.

(They laugh.)

Jesse Thorn: We’ll be back in just a second. It's *Bullseye* from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

Promo:

Ella Hubber: Alright, we're over 70 episodes into our show, *Let’s Learn Everything*. So, let's do a quick progress check. Have we learned about quantum physics?

Tom Lum: Yes, episode 59.

(Pencil scratching.)

Ella: We haven't learned about the history of gossip yet, have we?

Caroline Roper: Yes, we have! Same episode, actually.

Ella: Have we talked to Tom Scott about his love of roller coasters?

Caroline & Tom: (*In unison.*) Episode 64.

Ella: So, how close are we to learning everything?

Caroline: Bad news. We still haven't learned everything yet.

Ella: Awww!

Tom: WE'RE RUINED!

Music: Playful synth fades in.

Ella: No, no, no! It's good news as well. There is still a lot to learn!

(*They cheer.*)

I'm Dr. Ella Hubber.

Tom: I'm Regular Tom Lum.

Caroline: I'm Caroline Roper, and on *Let's Learn Everything*, we learn about science and a bit of everything else, too.

Ella: And although we haven't learned everything yet, I've got a pretty good feeling about this next episode.

Tom: Join us every other Thursday on Maximum Fun.

(*Music ends.*)

Transition: Thumpy synth with a syncopated beat.

Jesse Thorn: I'm Jesse Thorn. You're listening to *Bullseye*. I'm talking with Jason Segel.

So, when you're making *Dispatches From Elsewhere*, how do you manage the funniness? There is some funniness in the show. But how do you manage the funniness so that— Because the earnestness of *Dispatches From Elsewhere* is real. And it's yours. Like, personally as a human being and artist, you're not presenting it as, “Isn't it funny that I really believe this?” Much less, “Isn't it funny that this is dumb?”

(*Jason agrees.*)

So, how do you manage the tone? Like, was that something you had to figure out in writing and making it?

Jason Segel: I think that the approach that I take in general for comedy is: I am you. So, what would it be like for any average Joe to be thrust into this crazy circumstance? I hold a fundamental belief that we are generally hopeful, even if we're embarrassed to say it, and that we want the best for each other.

And so, I have to like have an act of faith that that's true. And for people who it's not true, they probably won't like the show. But I think a lot of people feel like they would like to feel hopeful.

Jesse Thorn: You have such a special cast in the show. And I'm often hesitant to ask like, "Where did you get these people from, and how did you get them to be on your show?"

[00:30:00]

But I am gonna do that because of how special the cast is.

Jason Segel: Oh, cool. I did not discover Sally Field.

Jesse Thorn: The show—

(They laugh.)

No, that's true. She was discovered by a community of nuns who could fly, I believe.

Jason Segel: Yeah, she was well established. Sally Field, I just begged. I mean, I told her—I mean, and I'm not even joking. Like, I got her to take a meeting with me. I had written that part as a love letter to my mom. You know, I wanted to draw four different main characters who were in moments of existential crisis, life transitions, a sense of something being missing. And I wanted to draw four really distinct characters from each other, so that in each episode I challenge you. I say, "Think of this character as you." I think at the beginning we'll all pick the character that we most see ourselves in, and I'm hoping that by the end of this series—my goal is that you see yourself in all of them.

Jesse Thorn: When you say see yourself, you mean at the beginning maybe literally. Like, I'm a straight, White dude. I'm gonna identify with the Segel character. And you know, you have people at different points in their lives and from different cultural contexts in the story.

(Jason confirms.)

And like, the first episode being about your character, you think, "Well, congratulations on presenting a 40-year-old, directionless, straight, White man as an everyman." *(Laughs.)*

Jason Segel: Yeah, we start easy. Yeah. *(Laughs.)*

Jesse Thorn: The innovations of 1824 media have been absorbed. But then you immediately jump into asking the same thing of the audience with the other characters.

So, Sally Field, had you just like watched *Smokey and the Bandit* or something? I watched *Smokey and the Bandit* recently, and she's so good in it! Oh my god! She's so funny and great.

Jason Segel: Yeah. No, she's unbelievable. Yeah, it's unbelievable. And I felt like the story I wanted to tell for that character was of someone who had dedicated their life—committed their identity to one thing, two things: being a wife and mother. And now, with 20 years left of their life, realizing those two kind of fundamental things they associated themselves with were no longer relevant to what was happening in their lives. Who am I now? What am I, if I'm not an active mother and active wife, and I have 20 years left? What do I do?

And I just knew she would be perfect for it, and she is. And I got really lucky. I'll be thankful to Sally forever for doing the show.

Jesse Thorn: What about André Benjamin, who is in the show and— You know, he worked as an actor in the past, broadly, but relatively less in the last decade or so. So like, did you have to fly down to Atlanta and beg him?

Jason Segel: You know what? All I was told was that there was no way I was gonna get André. And I really wanted André. Bad. I felt like—even when you just listen to Outkast... I know it's an entirely different medium and genre, but this guy was bringing themes back from the realm of metaphor into our reality. You know? And that's very much what's happening in *Dispatch*, is I just felt like—I had a hunch that this would align with his taste. But I just kept being told that it would be impossible. But we got the script to him, and really quickly he and I got on the phone, and he said, "I'm all in." And I tried to pitch him more, and he said, "I don't think you heard me. I'm all in!"

(Jesse laughs.)

And it was—I think that André and I ended up being— I mean, this is the premise of the show, but I think André and I ended up being way, way, way more similar than we could have ever anticipated in terms of some of the questions that we were asking ourselves. We're of similar ages. We both had success and then kind of got older and were posed with the question of, like, "How do I... how do these creative impulses age up? You know, as I'm getting older, what do they become?"

[00:35:00]

So, that's how André happened. Eve, I had a casting call. Eve came in and auditioned. And from the moment she read, it was very much like when Russell Brand auditioned for *Forgetting Sarah Marshall*. I was just like, "Oh. This is it. And I rewrite everything for this amazing actress." And uh...

Jesse Thorn: She really is. Her name's Eve Lindley. I think it might be, in the episodes that I saw, the strongest performance on the show in an incredibly strong cast.

Jason Segel: You know, I asked of my actors to really use the opportunity to express things they wanted to express about where they are in their lives. And Eve took that to heart. And just... her performance is fearless.

Jesse Thorn: I was wondering, as I was watching it— She's a trans woman, and I wondered if you were casting for someone trans or whether—and the fact that she's trans plays into the episodes I saw somewhat but isn't the central question of them. And I wondered whether you were casting for someone trans or whether, when you saw her audition, you worked that part of her life around to make sense in the context of the show.

Jason Segel: Yeah, the part was written for a trans woman. I was really interested in telling a really beautiful love story between Peter and Simone and not making Simone's gender identity her defining characteristic. Because I don't make Peter's gender identity his defining characteristic. Or André, or Sally. And I tried to do that same idea with each character.

What we are— You know, we're in this moment where we're told to like categorize and label. And it's no wonder we all feel such separation from each other. And so, one of the things that was interesting to me in terms of the visual diversity of the cast is then to not make what your instinctive, primary observation about them be what their storyline is about. I wanted to treat all of the characters as fully-rounded human beings.

Jesse Thorn: You also have Richard E. Grant in the show, and he plays the shadowy figure who both narrates the show and is leading whatever the game/mystery/drama/magical-experience-that-the-characters-are-going-through are going through. He is maybe best known for his work in a very deeply beloved cult comedy called *Withnail and I*. Though he was also pretty spectacular— He's been spectacular in many things, but he was very spectacular in— Oh, good gosh. What was the movie in which he was with Melissa McCarthy that came out two years ago?

Jason Segel: Yeah, it has “sorry” in the title. I'm losing it now too.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah. It was a very good movie, and he is spectacularly good in it. And like, how do you cast for “enigmatic figure”?

Jason Segel: Heh. Yeah. Well. I had the benefit of the real... originator of that “role”, quote/unquote—the Octavio Coleman Esquire—from the real experiment. So, I did have some image in my mind of what I was looking for. *Withnail and I* is one of my big influences, as an actor. I think his performance in that is as good as a performance can be. And so, he was the first person I met with for it. He was the first person cast in the show, I believe. Um... I sat down with him, and he asked me a lot of personal questions about what the show was about, why I wanted to do it. And... he signed on pretty quickly, too.

I got really, really lucky. You know, when I talk about the show—even when it—when it didn't exist yet and was just an idea, it's something that I really, really believe in. And I think

that that probably come across when you're describing to an actor what you hope to accomplish.

Jesse Thorn: I think you might've missed your calling. You should be selling encyclopedias or something. You're a closer.

Jason Segel: I don't believe in them! I don't believe in encyclopedias!

(They laugh.)

Encyclopedias are for Draculas, bro.

Jesse Thorn: Oh wow! This is big news!

(They laugh.)

[00:40:00]

You know how to close an interview on a bang! Holy cow!

Jason Segel, I'm so grateful to you for taking the time to be on *Bullseye*. I'm glad to get to talk to you, and I'm so glad for all your wonderful work.

Jason Segel: Oh, thanks man. I had a real blast. This was a great conversation.

Jesse Thorn: Jason Segel, folks, from 2020. The show we talked about, *Dispatches From Elsewhere*, is streaming now on Prime video. It's definitely worth watching. You can catch him in his new show, *Shrinking*, on Apple TV+.

Transition: Bright, cheerful 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. Here in Los Angeles, it is too hot. That's my update. What's going on around here? Too hot. It's like 1,000 degrees outside and has been for like 10 days. I hate it. I'm from San Francisco.

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.

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

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

(Music fades out.)