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

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

**Jesse Thorn:** It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. There aren't many animators more beloved than my next guest, Genndy Tartakovsky. Like, if you named five animated things you liked that came out in the last 25 years, I'll bet my bottom dollar at least one of them is something he made or worked on. There's just a few. *Dexter's Laboratory*, the *Hotel Transylvania* films, *Samurai Jack*, the *Powerpuff Girls*. I could go on. But I mean, at some point we gotta do a public radio show.

Tartakovsky grew up in the 1970s and '80s, which was not exactly a golden age of cartoons and animation. But the stuff he could find that he liked, he really, really liked. Disney classics, of course. Don Bluth movies like *The Land Before Time* and *American Tail*. Genndy started drawing obsessively; got a job on *Tiny Tune Adventures* in 1991, and never looked back. Now, dear listener, my guest, Genndy Tartakovsky has a brand-new animated film, one you should definitely not show to your children.

*Fixed* is an animated movie about dogs. The protagonist, Bull, is a bull terrier voiced by Adam Devine. And Bull is due to... get fixed. So, he and his dog friends go out on the town for one last wild night before—y'know.

*(Scissor snipping sound.)*

Yes, it is a raunchy movie, a horny movie. There are many, many butts in this movie—dog butts. It's very funny. It's also quite sweet. I'm thrilled to welcome Genndy Tartakovsky onto *Bullseye*. Let's get right into it.

**Transition:** Bright, chiming synth.

**Jesse Thorn:** Genndy Tartakovsky, welcome to *Bullseye*. I'm so happy to have you on the show.

**Genndy Tartakovsky:** Thank you for having me.

**Jesse Thorn:** So, as somebody who started his career as many animators do in animation for children, was there just a person deep inside you that wanted to draw really vulgar pictures of butts? *(Chuckles.)*

And I don't know what I can—I'm just gonna leave it at butts, for purposes of public radio. But I'm gonna say butts and their constituent parts.

**Genndy Tartakovsky:** Yes. No, actually! The funny part is I'm so like tame; like, my sense of humor—like, I like raunchy humor, but to a degree. Just like horror. Like, I don't like horror movies. I like thrillers, but not gory horror. And this was just something that was—I guess maybe since I became a dog owner, *(laughs)* I started to notice it more. And all the—you know, like I'll give my dogs voices and all that stuff. It started to come alive for me, I guess.

**Jesse Thorn:** Are there stories about dogs that you particularly enjoyed? Like, are you a big *Benji* guy?

**Genndy Tartakovsky:** No. No, I think I actually have a hard time even watching nature shows, 'cause I'm so sympathetic to it. So, as soon—*(laughs)*. Like, I remember we were watching this lion documentary, and it's super interesting. And then when the lion defeats another lion, he takes over its pride, and then he kills all the kids. And as soon as he started to do that, I'm like, “I can't watch this.” You know? So, it's like animals are—you know, we have so much sympathy for them and empathy that it's hard to watch.

**Jesse Thorn:** What about silly, joke animals? What about Sylvester and Tweedy or something?

**Genndy Tartakovsky:** Well, yeah, of course. I mean, cartoons, I'll watch all of it. And I have watched all of it. But real animals, when it's real life, then I get a little sensitive to it. But yeah. I mean, I grew up on Tex Avery and Warner Brothers, and all that stuff. So, it's—Even those old—I dunno if you ever watched *Little Rascals* in black and white, you know.

**Jesse Thorn:** I've seen *Little Rascals*.

**Genndy Tartakovsky:** Yeah. But when I grew up, that was—you know, those were reruns when we were growing up. And they used to have this show with monkeys as part of it sometime. *(Laughs.)* And they would dress chimpanzees and have 'em act out thrillers and crime dramas and all this stuff. And I just remember that as a kid being so strange.

**Jesse Thorn:** When I read about the stories—the life stories of animators—very often they're about middle and upper-middle class White dudes who were nerds. Because you have to have a certain amount of time on your hands and commitment to practice to make 100 pictures in a row or 500 pictures in a row, right? To say nothing of the drawing.

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And then they go off to Cal Arts, and then they get their job. And many of those people make incredible work. I'm not casting dispersions upon any of it.

I think your story—though it does involve a couple years at Cal Arts—is a really, really different one. First of all, let's talk about what it was.

(Genndy agrees with a chuckle.)

And then we'll talk about how you got the temerity to decide to do something as impractical as be an animator. But how old were you when you came to the United States?

**Genndy Tartakovsky:** So, I was seven. We immigrated from Russia. We settled at Columbus, Ohio first for a couple years, and then my dad couldn't get a lot of work there. So, then we moved to Chicago.

**Jesse Thorn:** So, what do you remember about your life before the United States?

**Genndy Tartakovsky:** I remember—I have some memories, and they were all pretty good. Like, you know, we were—I wouldn't say wealthy, but we were very well off. And so, we had a nice apartment. And I remember like being on the train, and every stop had a police booth in it. Right? Where the—you know, the policeman watches over everything. I remember the winters a little bit. Not that much. You know, like a lot of stuff came once we immigrated over.

The big change in my life was when we came here, my dad bought a TV set. Right? Because when I was in Russia, there was one animated show. And it kind of basically translates to *Wait 'til I Get You Now*, about this little, cute female rabbit and this chain smoking (*chuckles*) I guess maybe horny wolf trying to eat her. So, it's their like *Tom & Jerry*, but Russian style. And it was super popular. And that was the only animated thing I think I'd seen until we moved here, and all of a sudden, you know, we plug in the TV. And it's Tex Avery, Warner Brothers, *Popeye*, Hanna-Barbera. It's everything. So, there's this explosion of animation.

**Jesse Thorn:** What do you remember turning on the TV and seeing?

**Genndy Tartakovsky:** I think probably the first thing was probably *Tom & Jerry*, I think. And then I found— You know, like back in those days there were blocks of shows, right? So, you come home from school, you turn on your secondary channel—like a Fox or something back then—and then they have all these reruns. You know? And it's funny, 'cause when I look back, I watched all the animation; and then once five o'clock came, it shifted into '70s sitcoms. So, then *Three's Company* was so amazing for me. (*Chuckles.*) Not all the innuendo, which I don't know if I got all of it at the time. But there's a lot of physical comedy. You know, John Ritter was amazing. And I feel like that, with cartoons, shaped my humor. You know, until I discovered movies.

**Jesse Thorn:** Did you speak any English when you came?

**Genndy Tartakovsky:** Uhh, no. I think I knew “cow”, “moon”, and one other word I forget. But we learned; we started to learn English in first grade.

**Jesse Thorn:** Was it just dumped you into a general class?

**Genndy Tartakovsky:** Yeah, you just go right in. There's no special treatment, and you just try to pick up as fast as you can. And that's the resilience of being a kid. You just—you learn the language so fast.

**Jesse Thorn:** It must have been scary though.

**Genndy Tartakovsky:** Yeah, and I think back then also there was all the communism hate. You know. So, we were called a commie and all these other things. And so, it was a lot of fights, and it was a little rough. It is what it is. Like, it's your childhood. And you know, I made friends. And I know one thing for me that was important was to assimilate. Like, I wanted to look American, I wanted to speak English, and I wanted to blend in, you know?

And I know my brother, he became friends with all the Russian folks. And so, he had a safety in that.

**Jesse Thorn:** And he was a little older than you, right?

**Genndy Tartakovsky:** Two years older, yeah. And so, he found safety for him and comfort. And for me, I just wanted to have American friends, speak without an accent—which took a while—and yeah. And it's—later on, like I think somewhere around *Samurai Jack*, there was some reporter that was doing an interview, and they did a psychoanalysis of me. And they go, “You know, all the shows you've done is about fitting in.”

And I was like, (*laughing*) “Oh yeah! I guess that's kind of true.”

**Jesse Thorn:** I watched this like featurette from one of the *Samurai Jack* DVDs about the story of your life. And of the things I was struck by in it was just you describing—I'm gonna say your sophomore year of high school? I think it was your sophomore year of high school—as like a moment when you figured out how to assimilate. That it was like, “Yeah, and then I got it!”

**Genndy Tartakovsky:** Right. Yeah. I mean, I think it was a slow process.

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But yeah, I think—I mean, I guess sophomore was— Freshman year/sophomore year, I was starting to get more comfortable with who I am. And like you were saying, you know, like nerds hiding to draw and stuff? I was the opposite of that. I played football, was semi-popular. I went out all the time. I worked. And I kept my passion for drawing and especially animation a secret. Because I feel like— I think maybe it's part of that fitting in. You don't want to be looked at as something that you're not or something—

I don't know. Like, there was something about going to a party Friday night, getting drunk, then waking up in the morning at seven to still watch Saturday morning cartoons religiously. You know? (*Chuckles.*) And I knew that was serious.

And actually, just this weekend I remembered a story that kind of defined my passion for animation. And there was this girl who I— This is probably more closer to junior, maybe senior year. And there was this girl who was very attractive, very not approachable. Right? And so, somehow I got the courage, and I asked her out, and she said yes. And so, we were gonna see a movie that weekend. And that weekend, *Land Before Time* came out.

**Transition:** A whooshing sound.

**Clip:**

**Music:** Bright, swelling orchestra music.

**Little Foot (*Land Before Time*):** Hm. Tree stars grow where there's lots of water. If we follow this water...

**Petri:** Hm! No green foods here. And I still hungry!

**Ducky:** (*Sadly.*) I'm still hungry too.

**Transition:** A whooshing sound.

**Genndy Tartakovsky:** So, I dunno if you remember *Land Before Time*. It's a Dom Bluth film. And it's a very for-kids film. But I was obsessed with animation, especially Dom Bluth because of *Dragon's Lair* mostly. Right? So, I asked her, "Well, can we go see this movie?"

And she's like, "Well, isn't it a kids' movie?"

I go, "Yeah, but I think they make it for everybody now." I was trying to, (*chuckles*) you know, work my way in.

So, she agreed. So, we go see the movie, we sit down, and it comes on. Right? And I'm just lost in the world—like, appreciating everything. It's beautiful. It's animated. And within 10/15 minutes—because it plays very young. 10/15 minutes, she kind of nudges me. She goes like, "C'mon, let's go see something else." Right?

And then I was torn. Like, I look at her; she was so attractive. Like, ooh! Then I look at the movie, and it's so beautiful. And then I go, "You know, I'm just gonna stay here." (*Laughs.*) And she left. She saw another movie, and then we kind of met up after. And that way I knew. It was like, wow; animation's that important to me.

**Jesse Thorn:** We've got so much more to get into with the legendary animator Genndy Tartakovsky. Stay with us. It's *Bullseye* from [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org) and NPR.

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

**Jesse Thorn:** It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. I'm talking with Genndy Tartakovsky. He's the creator of TV shows like *Samurai Jack*, *Dexter's Laboratory*, and the brand-new adult animated movie *Fixed*.

The time in the history of American animation that you are describing is a really kind of tenuous one. 'Cause you have some people making really artful animation for theaters, to some extent. But there's a lot of just true garbage on television. I mean, like I'm a little younger than you, but if I look at something that I watched as a child, before early 1990s—like, if I watch something that I watched as a child-child, it looks horrible, generally. Like, it looks like it barely is a television program, much less a good television program. Right?

*(Genndy agrees with a chuckle.)*

Like, there was a point where the people who were making things for Spike and Mike's Festivals of Animation started being allowed to make television shows, but that wasn't until I was like 13.

*(Genndy affirms.)*

And like, Disney was at its nadir, probably. Disney animation was at its nadir. Like, I mean, I was eight or six. I loved *The Great Mouse Detective* or whatever. Right? It's... it's no *Snow White*. And so, like really had to look to figure out what was good, unless you happened to be watching *Looney Toons*. *(Chuckles.)*

**Genndy Tartakovsky:** Yeah. And you're totally right. Like, '70s and '80s was the downfall of animation, right? Saturday morning was terrible. There was like a Mrs. Pacman show and—you know, all these things.

**Jesse Thorn:** I grew up with an MC Hammer show.

**Genndy Tartakovsky:** *(Chuckling.)* Yeah, exactly. Right.

**Jesse Thorn:** There was a show where Bo Jackson maybe could fly or something?!

**Genndy Tartakovsky:** Right. It was the *Superstars of Sports* shows. Yeah. And so, that was animation. And you know, back then Disney was about to get sold. That's how bad it was. So, all their movies flopped. And then all of a sudden in the late '80s—

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Not in TV yet, but in features, it was: *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?*, *An American Tail*—Don Bluth—and then *Little Mermaid*. Those three movies started to change the face of animation. And then in the '90s it was Nickelodeon and then Cartoon Network.

**Jesse Thorn:** How old were you when first wave was happening? That *An American Tail*, and *The Little Mermaid*?

**Genndy Tartakovsky:** So, I was like 16/17. You know, just about. So, I'm already—already decided. Because I used to see the Spike and Mike's and go to independent film festivals and deciding like, alright, well— Because also I'm in Chicago at this time, so there is no animation industry. So, I would see the movies and then decide, “Alright, well I can't get a job as an animator. But I'm just gonna make my own films and maybe find—maybe this could be my path.”

**Jesse Thorn:** That was about the same age that your father died, right?

**Genndy Tartakovsky:** Yeah. 16.

**Jesse Thorn:** So, that is a really intense set of things to be happening at the same time. I mean, I was thinking it's intense just to have this sort of revolution in film animation happening just as you become too old to not be embarrassed to go see *The Little Mermaid*. But to have that happen while your already-somewhat-tenuous home life is kind of coming apart at the edges...

**Genndy Tartakovsky:** Well, it was—it kind of goes back to what was happening to me as a kid. You know how I was saying I really wanted to blend in and fit, and so nobody noticed me? When my dad passed away, it's a very clear memory. When I went back to school, all of a sudden I'm in the center. Because “Oh, there's that kid that just lost his dad.” You know? And it was such a different feeling that I had to really deal with it. And it was funny how my career went from trying to blend in and not stand out to then completely standing out from the crowd and being—that everybody's looking at, you know, speaking in front of people all the time. And it was a big shift, you know. But that was the first time I just was so uncomfortable with being in the spotlight.

**Jesse Thorn:** What did you learn about yourself?

**Genndy Tartakovsky:** That I'm tough, emotionally. Very, very tough. And I think I can compartmentalize really well. You know, like it didn't break me completely, you know. Like, when my mom passed away when I was 22, and that almost broke me the same way. And then—but you just—you know, you put it here, and then you continue on. You know. And so, yeah.

So, I never—you know, you never— Trauma is such a crazy thing that you never know how you're truly gonna deal with it. And that was my first— You know, my first—I never had any pets, so I didn't deal with any of that. And that was one of the biggest things to happen.

**Jesse Thorn:** I feel like there is a toughness to Russian culture specifically. I think toughness is the right word.

**Genndy Tartakovsky:** Yeah. For sure. I think you're—you know, it's maybe old-fashioned. You know, my dad was hard. My mom was soft. (*Laughs.*) And that's it. You don't— You

fear your dad. You look for solace and warmth and comfort from your mom. And that was it. And pretty much everybody was like that.

**Jesse Thorn:** Why do you think you were specifically into animation and not into even—you know—making comics or making live action films? Like, adjacent art forms. What was it about animation specifically?

**Genndy Tartakovsky:** Well, it's funny. Like, we made kung fu films with my friends. (*Chuckles.*) You know, on Super 8. And that was fun.

**Jesse Thorn:** Who had the Super 8?

**Genndy Tartakovsky:** One of my friends. Yeah. So, we would go in the park. And you know, those are the days of Bruce Lee. So, you see a Bruce Lee movie; you walk out, and you gotta fight somebody, right? So, we would shoot movies. And then I always drew, but I wasn't very good. I loved comic books, but I thought, literally, "I could never, ever be this good that I could make a living at it."

But it's very hard to describe, because it's very unusual—right?—to go into animation, especially back then. But there was something about it that captured me. And the best way, when I analyze everything and when I think back, is I fell in love with movement and how much movement can evoke either a laugh or an emotion or something. And the—you know, we've all done flip books in our textbooks or something. And that illusion (*chuckling*) captured me, you know.

And when I started doing it— So, I went to Columbia College first. And I got this offer to do this job where there was a guy who was doing a multimedia play, right? In Chicago. And so, it would be a live action—you know, a normal play. And the guy all of a sudden starts talking to the screen.

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And the screen comes alive with my animation. So, I got to do it. It was only about a couple minutes. And so, I went and sat in the theater when that started. And my animation came up, and then people were laughing. And that was it. I was hooked. 'Cause now it's like I'm doing standup, but without having to be in front of the people. I could do it safely behind my drawings.

**Jesse Thorn:** It's like you were doing standup, only it required you to just sit there hour after hour, drawing very slightly different drawings over and over.

(*They laugh.*)

**Genndy Tartakovsky:** That's right. Yeah. And you know? And honestly, that part of it—? Like, everybody thinks like, "Oh, it's so tedious." I never feel that.



**Jesse Thorn:** Do you find that you're—you know, obviously you're not cell-by-cell drawing animation for a living anymore. But when you were doing it in school or when you were doing it for yourself, making flipbooks or whatever, was it a kind of flow state of thing? The changes are so incremental.

**Genndy Tartakovsky:** It is, and it isn't. Your first pass is very broad. And that's when you can draw. 'Cause you're talking about like—you know, animation is basically you draw one extreme. Like, say you grab a cup, and then you lift it. And those two drawings you would do, and that's pretty simple, and there's a bigger shift or a bigger change. And then you go back in, and then you put maybe five drawings in between. And that becomes a little tedious.

But because I loved animation so much, it was all such a joy and such a treat that my first job was actually inbetweening for *Looney Tunes* for the *Tiny Tunes*—that show from the early '90s. And I loved it. I didn't care. As long as—I'm drawing for a living. I think that was the amazing thing. And so, it never felt like— It never felt tedious or hard or just—it was a jo. And yeah. And then I just disappeared into it.

**Jesse Thorn:** I mean, as difficult as the circumstances were for you to become a true animation aficionado when the Harlem Globe Trotters had their own television program—

**Genndy Tartakovsky:** Yeah! I liked that one, by the way.

*(They laugh.)*

**Jesse Thorn:** Oh, they're very charming! They got a great theme song. Plus, those mysteries aren't gonna solve themselves.

But like, as difficult a time as it is to like really appreciate an artform through *Heathcliff*, you also had the advantage of starting your career at a time when even television animation was being completely revolutionized, quality-wise. I mean, you mentioned *Tiny Tunes*. Like, *Tiny Tunes* is legitimately good and funny.

You worked on *Batman: The Animated Series*, which is the first thing that I remember seeing on television in animation that I thought was beautiful. I was like, “Wow, what a gorgeous show.” And I was 13—12/13/14 or whatever. Like, I wasn't eight.

And in film, the same thing was happening with Disney. You know, they were actually making good movies. Like, that is a really exciting time to get dropped into that world.

**Genndy Tartakovsky:** Yeah, and we were— So, I was at—I finished Cal Arts in '92. So, that's when *Batman* was already going. And it was—you could, I think—I'm trying to remember back then, did we sense a shift? For sure in features, right? That was already happening from *Rodger Rabbit*, so we were just four years out from that.

So, it's feeling the effects of it. Disney is figuring out. So, those were the Jeffrey Katzenberg days, Michael Eisner. So, they were starting to build back their empire. And TV— Nickelodeon started their shows, and *Ren & Stimpy* came out, which was big for us. And so,

yeah. So, now just the quality started to shift, you know. And *Looney Tunes*—I mean, *Tiny Tunes* was the beginning of that as well. You know. But we were critical of *Tiny Tunes*, 'cause I was such a *Looney Tunes* nerd that, for me, I know what I want it to be. And *Tiny Tunes* wasn't quite that. Right? But I can—looking back at it, I can definitely see the quality got so much better than anything before it.

**Transition:** A whooshing sound.

**Clip:**

**Granny (*Tiny Toons*):** Using Plastic's method of bi-fractal computation, give me the minimum number of quantified pixels needed on a bilateral view screen.

**Speaker:** (*Gasps.*) I'm dead! (*A crash.*)

**Daffy:** Oh gee, Granny! Gimme a break! It's Friday afternoon! Class is almost over!

**Granny:** Your answer, please! (*Laughs.*)

**Daffy:** But Granny! It's 2:59!

**Granny:** 259? Oh! (*Delighted giggle.*) That's absolutely correct!

**Daffy:** (*Interrupting his own crying.*) Huh?

(*School bell rings.*)

**Transition:** A whooshing sound.

**Jesse Thorn:** I think that, as an animator, you're probably looking at *Tiny Tunes* and thinking, “Gosh, every one of those *Looney Tunes* cartoons is a gorgeous work of art, in addition to being really funny.”

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Whereas the primary innovation of *Tiny Tunes* was that it was funny where shows had not been funny. Like, it's a pretty unremarkable-looking show. It looks perfectly fine, but like it's no, you know, *Coyote vs Roadrunner* and the like breathtaking vistas and stuff.

**Genndy Tartakovsky:** Yeah, absolutely. And it was also because it was, you know, Steven Spielberg, and then he gave him this thing—it's always gotta be full animation, which is

completely the wrong direction. But it's got the right heart in it, and they spent money on it. And so, it was all—

**Jesse Thorn:** What does that mean, “it's always gotta be full animation”?

**Genndy Tartakovsky:** Well, *(laughs)* he said that the characters always have to be moving, which is wrong. You know, when you look at *Looney Tunes*—the old ones—they're held half the time. Right? And when they move, they move correctly and properly when they have to move.

**Jesse Thorn:** And that's like a combination of wanting to be the focus of the audience, but also to not have to spend money on animating everything that's onscreen.

**Genndy Tartakovsky:** Well, back then it wasn't about the money; it was more about the time. So, I guess it equals money. But it was the way the direction— And each director was different. Like Bob Clampett, his stuff moved crazily and more. Chuck Jones, because he drew so well, he wanted them to follow all the drawings and move when it has to move properly. But he could see the drawing is so strong and the timing that the humor can come from just a still drawing. So, that was the thing.

So, like for me, I don't care how much something moves. Like, a lot of people are obsessed with fluidity, right? How fluid something animation is. And I don't care. It has to express your idea, communicate your idea, and it's just the style you pick—how fluid or not fluid it is. And so, we got really obsessed with that, and it doesn't matter.

**Jesse Thorn:** I was 15 or whatever, and I remember what it was like that *Ren & Stimpy*, this completely insane thing that I had seen in Spike and Mike shows—which was like a traveling animation omnibus—was on children's television. Or that, you know, *Doug* had real, sort of melancholic feelings in it that would never have appeared in the show where Wayne Gretzky and Bo Jackson fight crime.

*(They laugh.)*

You know what I mean? And you ended up at the vanguard of that change, because you got a television show of what had been your demo reel when you were 23 or whatever!

**Genndy Tartakovsky:** Yeah, 22. Yeah. And we—you know, we were still young. So, when we did *Dexter*, I was 25 starting. *(Clears throat.)* Excuse me.

**Jesse Thorn:** This is *Dexter's Laboratory*.

**Genndy Tartakovsky:** *Dexter's Laboratory*, yeah. And we wouldn't even propose to think that way, that we were at the start of something so exciting, and we're the—you know, we're the revolutionaries starting it. And—

**Jesse Thorn:** But you must have been able to tell that a year previously you had been working on a Hanna-Barbera show called *Two Dumb Dogs*.

**Genndy Tartakovsky:** (*Chuckling.*) *Two Stupid Dogs*, yeah.

**Jesse Thorn:** *Two Stupid Dogs*. And then you were like, “We get to make our own TV show?!”

**Genndy Tartakovsky:** It was—honestly, we were excited, and the opportunity was so rare. There's no creators back then that were in their 20s. You know, everybody's in their 40s. At least. Right? And so, it's so hard. There's so much pressure. How do you make it? We're all the same ages, and we all went to school together—a lot of us—and all of a sudden, now you're the boss. Right? So, I have to manage all of that as well.

And yeah. And so, you don't think about— You just think about “how can I make a great show?” We definitely felt— 'Cause other of our friends started shows as well, so we felt there was a shifting for sure. And the opportunities were starting to come. So, that was definitely a part of it. But what we were doing? That it was gonna last? We had no idea.

**Jesse Thorn:** When you were making *Dexter's Laboratory*, were you getting feedback from Cartoon Network about what it could or should be?

**Genndy Tartakovsky:** No. The executives we worked with were amazing. And they were on the same journey as us. And we believed that if it makes us laugh, it'll make other people laugh and be entertaining.

**Transition:** A whooshing sound.

**Clip:**

**Dad (*Dexter's Lab*):** Mom and I think you don't get enough outdoor exercise. Sooo!

(*Fantastical musical stinger.*)

We bought you a bike!

**Dexter:** Thank you, Mom and Dad. But I don't play outside. (*Slams the door.*)

(*Beat.*)

**Music:** Melancholy piano.

**Dexter:** But what about air pollution and the hole in the ozone and all of that dangerous traffic?! And sudden weather changes!

**Dad:** Now Dexter, just hop on! And you can go play with your sister.

**DeeDee:** (*Twinkling sounds.*) It's fun to play outside!

**Dexter:** I'm a scientist! My place is in the lab!

**DeeDee:** You're just scared!

[00:30:00]

**Dexter:** I'm not scared!

**Transition:** A whooshing sound.

**Jesse Thorn:** Cartoon Network started as just a dumping ground for stuff that the corporate overlords already owned, right? Like, it was just like, "Well, we have all these cartoons that we own. We should have a channel that plays them." (*Chuckles.*)

**Genndy Tartakovsky:** Yeah, well that's the brilliant thing. Ted Turner would buy libraries; so he bought movie libraries—right? TCM. And then he bought animation libraries, which became Cartoon Network. And then because it was successful— And basically, what people were watching were *Tom & Jerry* and *Scooby-Doo*. Those were the two biggest shows on the network forever. Even after *Dexter* started, (*laughs*) I think it took us two years to beat them in the ratings. That's how crazy good they were.

And so, they decided like, "Oh my god, we have this channel. It's successful. People are watching. Let's start doing original cartoons. So, yeah. So, they were—so, the executives were—they were fans of animation. That was the big thing. Right? And then they really supported us in what we were doing.

**Jesse Thorn:** How did you decide to go from *Dexter's Laboratory*—a very successful, in many ways kind of like— I hesitate to call it a traditional children's comedy animated show, but like a pretty straightforward one; like, a wonderful one—into making like— You know, *Samurai Jack* is a full-on action show that was not like the few action shows that had been on television in like '80s.

(*Genndy confirms.*)

You know? It is like a completely different objective, even. Like, what did you go in and tell them!?

*(They chuckle.)*

“I wanna make a show that's not really funny”?

**Genndy Tartakovsky:** So, there was a number of things that happened. Basically, I—liking action, being a fan of action—I was the biggest critic of anything action in animation. As well as movies.

**Jesse Thorn:** What didn't you like about it?

**Genndy Tartakovsky:** There was no action. So, even anime back then, there was 20 minutes of talking and two minutes of incredible action animation. Right?

**Jesse Thorn:** Was that because it was a lot cheaper to animate people's heads nodding up and down than it was to—?

**Genndy Tartakovsky:** Absolutely. Yeah. It's all—and it's super hard to do. And yeah. And in our—in the TV system especially, you know, we're not animating it. Somebody overseas is animating it. And so, it's just impossible to do. So, even a show as good as *Batman*, where it had great stories and characters, some of the episodes, the action didn't live up to what I wanted. It was great, but I wanted more.

So, then we did *Dexter's Lab*, then we did *Powerpuff Girls*. And through all of those, there's a lot of action. Right? It's comedic action, but it's still like our—you know, trying—exercising that muscle. How good can we do it? But because we're not taking it seriously, we have jokes in it, but you're still feeling action. Right?

So, then comes—almost done with *Powerpuff*, and I'm like, “What am I gonna do next?” And then I thought, “Well, I gotta stop complaining about it and just do it. The network loves me. We have a great relationship.” So, then I thought, “Well, I've loved samurais since I was like 10.” And I go, “Well, you know, how am I gonna do a samurai? I can't cut heads off or anything.”

*(They chuckle.)*

I can't do it without the violence.

*(Jesse laughs.)*

And I go, “Oh! Wait, we can do—what if I cut robots? That's okay!” And instead of blood, it's oil. So, that was the first element. “Oh, okay, got it. And then I gotta get him to the future.”

**Transition:** A whooshing sound.

**Clip:**

**Aku (*Samurai Jack*):** Before the final blow was struck, I tore open a portal in time and flung him into the future, where my evil is law! Now the fool seeks to return to the past and undo the future that is Aku.

*(Sci-fi noises.)*

**Music:** “Samurai Jack Theme” by will.i.am.

*Gotta get back, back to the past*

*Samurai Jack*

*(watch out)*

*Gotta get back, back to the past*

*Samurai Jack*

*(Jack, Jack, Jack, Jack)*

**Transition:** A whooshing sound.

**Genndy Tartakovsky:** So, that was my inspiration. And then basically, I met with Michael Lazzo, who was my boss. And we had a great relationship. And he's like, “What do you wanna do next?”

And the way I pitched it to him over dinner is I said, “Black versus white over red. And it's a samurai.” And I pitched him the loose story.

And he was like, “That sounds great. Let's do it.” And that was it. And then I started just going into this new style, more visual storytelling, more adult. There's still humor in it. We didn't go all the way. But yeah. But a lot of episodes are much more dramatic, and I started to try to figure that out.

**Jesse Thorn:** We're gonna take a break. When we return, we will talk more with Genndy Tartakovsky about his very dumb, very vulgar, very funny movie, *Fixed*. It's *Bullseye* from [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org) and NPR.

[00:35:00]

**Promo:**

**Music:** Funky, upbeat banjo music.

**Dan McCoy:** *The Flop House* is a podcast where we watch a bad movie, and then we talk about it.

**Elliott Kalan:** Robert Shaw in *Jaws*, and they're trying to figure out how to get rid of the ghoulies. And he scratches his nails and goes, "I'll get you, ghoulie."

**Dan:** He's just standing above the toilet with a harpoon. No, I was just looking forward to you going through the other ways in which *Wild Wild West* is historically inaccurate.

**Stuart Wellington:** You know how much movies cost nowadays?! When you add in your popped corn, and your bagel bites, and your cheese curders.

**Elliott:** Sure. You can't go wrong with a Henry Cavill mustache. Here at Henry Cavill Mustaches, the only supplier!

*(They laugh.)*

**Narrator:** *The Flop House*. New episodes every Saturday. Find it at [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org).

*(Music fades out.)*

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

**Jesse Thorn:** Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. I'm talking with Genndy Tartakovsky. He's the creator of TV shows like *Samurai Jack*, *Dexter's Laboratory*, and more. He wrote and directed the adult animated film *Fixed*, which is streaming now on Netflix. It's a very funny, very raunchy movie that is mostly about horny dogs. Let's get back into our conversation.

*Fixed* is 2D animated. It's obviously not— You know, computers are deeply involved in 2D animation in 2025 for many, many reasons. But it's a flat animation style. First of all, why did you choose that? And what is the difference between doing it that way and doing it in computer-rendered 3D animation?

**Genndy Tartakovsky:** So, first of all, it's my favorite style, of course—you know, from everything that I've done and everything that I love. I love hand-drawn. There's something about it that will never compare to CG, because it's your personal touch. You know? In CG, you're moving a puppet, basically. Right? So, that's the beginning of it. It's just what I love.



Then we're making something kind of audacious and raunchy, right? So, for a while when I couldn't sell it, I go, "Well, maybe I'm fighting process. Let me just embrace the CG, 'cause that's what everybody's buying. I'll embrace the CG and try to sell it as a CG thing."

So, we designed one of the characters with all the things that are attached to them. And then when you're designing it in 3D in CG and you're putting the discoloration of the color that would be there, each individual hair—it's disgusting. (*Chuckles.*) Right? When you caricature something, you can still make it kind of charming and appealing, right? Or you can control the level of grossness a lot more with a drawing than when you're really trying to mimic something three-dimensional.

And so, as soon as we saw it, it became less funny and more just ew. Right? And so, we got away from it pretty quickly. Right? So, that was— And really, the caricature of it all is what I wanted. And the farther away we get from real life, the more caricature it is. And it's different. And there's certain advantages that you still have with the computer camera and all that stuff. But for me, it's still that love of the drawing, the handcrafted feel of it all that's the most unique.

**Jesse Thorn:** (*Very seriously.*) And also, to some extent, I imagine it really helped you with the process of designing the butt holes.

**Genndy Tartakovsky:** Yes. Yes. They're a circle with an asterisk. How simple can you get?

(*They laugh.*)

**Jesse Thorn:** Was there—did you ever get a note from any of the several people that were in charge of this movie in various ways regarding the number of buttocks you could have on screen in the runtime?

**Genndy Tartakovsky:** We had, in our very first screening. So, I started storyboarding. And I tried not to think about it. I tried just like— It's all about delivering the—communicating the idea. Right? And setting up the jokes properly, all that stuff.

And so, I didn't— And I know it's rated R, so I don't have to hold back. I can just do what feels right. So, we put up our first act just in storyboards. Right? So, nothing moved, and for the executives. And we had a screening, and it was— You know, everybody was laughing, and it was successful. And then we finished, and they go, "Wow, there are so many butts and other things in it."

(*Jesse snickers.*)

And then we had a half an hour discussion. "Is it too much? Is it too little? Like, what are we at?" Because we are in uncharted territory, you know? And then I said, "Look, it feels right. Maybe I can dial back. As long as it doesn't feel gratuitous." Right? And for me, I always thought after the first sequence that you're gonna—it's gonna be shocking. Like, you're like, "Whoa! What am I watching here?!" Right? Because there's a familiarity about the

animation, but certainly not the subject matter. And so, once that first sequence is over, then you kind of settle in. And you go, “Okay, the whole movie's gonna be kind of like this.”

**Jesse Thorn:** One of the dogs in the movie intersex.

[00:40:00]

Which—I have transgender kids, and my hackles get raised whenever anything about gender non-conformity shows up in popular media. Right? I'm ready for it to be *The Hangover 2* and be something that is really hurtful. This character is treated so respectfully; is played by River Gallo, who's an intersex actor; and is the sort of secondary romantic lead of the movie. I mean, the romance in this movie is often quite explicit. It's not— There's no exception in this case. *(Laughs.)*

But why go there? And how did you figure out how to do it in a way that would not be hurtful when, obviously, this is like place where you could easily take a wrong step and really hurt people?

**Genndy Tartakovsky:** Well, it's— For me, sometimes exclusion is a form of *(searching for the word)* like... exclusion. *(Chuckles at himself.)* Right? And so, in this movie, we're kind of making fun of everything in a way. Right? In a loving way. Right? Not trying to be hurtful. And so—

**Jesse Thorn:** There's almost—there's really nothing mean in the movie. There's a lot of vulgarity, but no meanness.

**Genndy Tartakovsky:** Thank you. Yeah. And that's definitely the way we are and the way we wanted to film to feel. And nothing mean-spirited. Right? The characters have conflict, obviously. But anyways. So, then we wanted to—it felt right to put something in. It's definitely in the zeitgeist. It's, you know, being talked about. It's part of our lives. You know. And so, we thought that this was working right. And River loved it, right? So, that was great. And so, it felt just— Because it—I think, I guess it comes from the right place. It's okay.

**Jesse Thorn:** Well, Genndy, thank you so much for talking to me. And it was really nice to get to talk to you.

**Genndy Tartakovsky:** Thank you for talking to me. It was much more deeper than I thought we'd go. *(Laughs.)*

**Jesse Thorn:** Genndy Tartakovsky. You can check out *Fixed* on Netflix now.

**Transition:** Bright, upbeat 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 at our office, everyone is really

excited that when the Dodgers win you get this code to get free Chinese fast food from a Chinese fast food chain restaurant. And the Dodgers have had a little wind streak. Of course, I'm a Giants fan, so... I have nothing but contempt for that restaurant and the Dodgers.

Our senior producer on *Bullseye* is Kevin Ferguson. Our producers are Jesus Ambrosio and Richard Robey. Our production fellow at Maximum Fun, Hannah Moroz. Our video producer, Daniel Speers. 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://www.djwsounds.bandcamp.com).

[00:40:00]

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 can find video from just about all our interviews—including the ones that you heard this week. While you're there, smash those like and subscribe buttons, baby!

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.)*