

*** This transcript is based on the original airing of the episode and may vary slightly from the updated audio.**

[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 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. My first guest this week is the kind of actor you see once and you never, ever forget his face. It's Walton Goggins. Maybe you saw him in *Justified* as Boyd Crowder. He got an Emmy nomination for that.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Clip:

Boyd (*Justified*): So, what—what was life like in Florida?

Speaker: Just as advertised, sunny and hot.

Boyd: You know, I just don't think I could take me a place so flat. You seen your daddy yet?

Speaker: No, not yet.

Boyd: Boy, he was a wild man back in his day, wasn't he? What was that scam he had going back in the early '90s? Stealing mining machinery, selling it to the Colombians, getting paid in cocaine? (*Chuckles.*) You remember that?

Speaker: Guess I was gone by then. How's your daddy?

Boyd: I suspect you know how my daddy is.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Jesse Thorn: Or maybe in the Tarantino movie *The Hateful Eight*, he was Sheriff Chris Mannix.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Clip:

Sheriff Mannix (*The Hateful Eight*): You got a letter from Abraham Lincoln.

Speaker: Yes.

Sheriff Mannix: The Abraham Lincoln?!

Speaker: Yes.

Sheriff Mannix: Abraham Lincoln, the president of the United States?

Speaker: Yes.

Sheriff Mannix: Of America?!

Speaker: Yes.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Jesse Thorn: Or in one of the Danny McBride/Jodie Hill joints. He starred on *Vice Principals* opposite McBride. And on *The Righteous Gemstones*, he plays Uncle Baby Billy.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Clip:

Music: Southern gospel music.

Baby Billy (*The Righteous Gemstones*): (*Singing.*) There will come a payday. Hallelujah, what a payday. There will come a payday someday, someday...

Jesse Thorn: His voice, his delivery, his eyes—(*sighs*) easily one of the top five most compelling performers on screen. For his latest project, Goggins is taking on two parts, sort of. It's a TV show called *Fallout*. It's based on the video game. Most of *Fallout* takes place 200 years after a massive nuclear war obliterated pretty much all life. Goggins plays the Ghoul—a zombie type gunslinger and bounty hunter. He isn't the worst bad guy in the wasteland, but he might be the meanest. He has no nose. His skin is grotesquely burnt by radioactivity. But he is also very handsome? Uh, we will get into that, I promise.

Goggins also plays Cooper Howard. Before the bombs fell, Howard was a beloved western actor and stuntman—like maybe Michael Landon from *Bonanza* or Gene Autry. Howard and the Ghoul are, as you might have guessed, the same person—more or less.

One quick note. So, one of the executive producers of *Fallout* is Jonathan Nolan. He also directed the first three episodes of the show. He co-created the show *Westworld* and has worked extensively as a writer with his brother, the director Christopher Nolan. Goggins calls him Jonah in the interview. Anyway. Here's a little bit from *Fallout*'s first episode. this features Goggins as Cooper Howard. He's at a kid's party in the Hollywood Hills. It is a beautiful sunny day, but it seems like everyone there has another thing on their minds, including Cooper's daughter.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Clip:

Cooper (*Fallout*): Well, back when I was in the Marines, they taught us that if they ever drop a really big bomb—they told us to hold up your thumb just like this. And if the cloud is smaller than your thumb, now you run for the hills.

Janey: And if it's bigger than your thumb?

(Somber music fades in.)

Cooper: And they told us not to bother running.

Janey: Do you think it's gonna happen?

Cooper: I certainly hope not. But us cowfolks, we take it as it comes, right?

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Jesse Thorn: Walton Goggins, welcome to *Bullseye*. I'm so happy to have you on the show. It's nice to see you.

Walton Goggins: Thank you very, very much for the invitation. I'm happy to be here.

Jesse Thorn: Had you ever played a character that wore this much makeup before?

Walton Goggins: *(Laughs.)* I only play characters that wear this much makeup. The answer to your question is once in my life. And it was for a movie that I did for a filmmaker that became a friend. And it was—we did it down in South Africa, and it was *Maze Runner*. The third *Maze Runner*. And I swore after that experience that I would never, ever, do anything quite like this again. Because it was—when I say traumatic—

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—the people that applied it were just so extraordinary, but the visual of it was so hard for me to stomach personally. And it was uncomfortable. The process of becoming this particular person was so uncomfortable that I thought, okay, well, I've done it once, and I don't need to do it again. And then my phone rang, and it was Jonathan Nolan.

Jesse Thorn: What did you look like in the *Maze Runner* movie?

Walton Goggins: Oh god, it was—(*sighs*) I don't even know how to explain it. I mean, he didn't have a nose. You know, he didn't have a nose. And there were all of these crustaceans or whatever—these things on his face. It was pretty horrible. But it's a great trilogy, and it was nice to be a part of it. I was down there doing *Tomb Raider* at the time, and he said, “You know, we're doing this, and we're here. Will you come by and play with us for about five days?” And so I did it.

Jesse Thorn: Okay, so what about in this series? Did you anticipate what you were committing yourself to?

Walton Goggins: I didn't anticipate what I was committing myself to initially. I had a phone call with my agents that Jonathan Nolan wanted to talk to me about something, along with the writers Graham Wagner and Geneva Dworet-Robertson. And whenever you get a call like that, you know, you perk way up. I've been a fan of Jonas's for such a long time, like so many other people—starting with *Memento* and every film and TV show that he's been a part of since then. So, they told me it was for this property, *Fallout*. I didn't know anything about *Fallout*. My son is a gamer and a big fan of Bethesda. He plays *Skyrim*. My gaming ended with *Galaga*. Right? And I'm—

Jesse Thorn: I'm a *Skyrim* nut. I've wasted probably six months of my life in total playing *Skyrim*.

Walton Goggins: Right? And so—but that's the thing—

Jesse Thorn: I could be speaking in Spanish with you right now.

Walton Goggins: (*Laughs.*) But it is not wasting one's life, right? It is—I see the way that my son games, and I understand for him it is no different than me having a glass of wine at the end of the day. It's just a way for him to unwind, to segue from the student that he is at 13 years old now to his civilian life at home. And it's just a gateway that he needs to walk through. And I love that he loves it so much. That being said, I went on Wikipedia. I looked up—or whatever article I landed on when I Googled *Fallout*—and the description of the person or the game... I don't know how I came to this place. I couldn't find it now if I was forced to, but it was of this male vault dweller that was making his way to the surface. I think the guy had a name or something, but he was a hero.

And I thought, oh, wow! Somebody wants to talk to me about being the good guy right out of the gate! (*Laughs.*) That's a pretty good day for me. And lo and behold, we got on the Zoom with Jonah and Geneva and Graham. And two minutes into the conversation, looking at Jonathan Nolan's face, I just said, “I'm in, man. I'm in.”

And he said, “But don't you want to know who you're playing?”

And I said, “It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter. I'm sold American.”

He said, “Well, don't you want to read a script?”

And I said, “Yeah, well, sure. Yeah, I'll read the script, but I'm in. If you're doing this, I am in.”

And he said, “Okay, well, you're playing a bounty hunter who's been walking an irradiated hellscape for 200 years, and you don't have a nose.”

(Beat.) I said, “Maybe—maybe I should read these scripts. Should I read these scripts? Really?” And we continued the conversation. I did read both episode one and episode two and called them back immediately and said, “I absolutely have to be a part of this. This is some of the best writing I've read in a long time. And what an opportunity to play these two people.”

Jesse Thorn: We've got so much more with Walton Goggins still to come. Stay with us. It's *Bullseye* from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

Transition: Cheerful, chiming synth.

Jesse Thorn: Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. I'm here with Walton Goggins. He is an actor. You have seen him on *Justified*, *Vice Principals*, *The Shield*, and *The Righteous Gemstones*, as well as in movies like *The Hateful Eight* and *Django Unchained*. In his latest project, the TV show *Fallout*, he plays clean cut Western star Cooper Howard—

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—and the nightmarish ghoul that Howard becomes after a nuclear apocalypse. *Fallout* is streaming now on Prime Video. Let's get back into our conversation.

I have been reading Hal Needham's book, *Stuntman*.

Walton Goggins: Oh god, I want to read that.

Jesse Thorn: It's really fun. Yeah. Hal Needham, for those who don't know, was a legendary stunt director who also was a very successful film director, but was famous for working with Burt Reynolds on some of the biggest Burt Reynolds movies.

Walton Goggins: *Hooper*.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, *Hooper* and—what's the most—? *Smokey and the Bandit*! So, in this Hal Needham book, it's like the first half of it—first two thirds of it are about his career before even becoming a director, or much of it is about his career before even becoming a stunt

director, when he was just a stuntman. And it's incredible stories. And one of the things that becomes really vividly clear—it's also very true in *Hooper*, actually—is that the main thing—There were two main things that they had to do. Like, if I think of a stuntman, I think of explosions, cars, things like that. Until 1980, the two main things a stuntman needed to do was, number one: fall off of things.

Walton Goggins: Absolutely. But safely.

Jesse Thorn: That was the top. How far can you fall off of things? Number two is horse stuff. So, you do some horse stuff. And look, your character is a western star—or is a Western star in the before the apocalypse world.

Walton Goggins: Yes, absolutely.

Jesse Thorn: So, I wondered if you had any horse skills.

Walton Goggins: I've been riding a horse since I was six years old.

Jesse Thorn: Continuously? (*Chuckling.*) Or have you taken breaks?

Walton Goggins: I've taken breaks in the sense that I don't own a horse—right?—but I—

Jesse Thorn: Okay. And you go to the bathroom and stuff.

Walton Goggins: I can ride, and I'm a good rider. I'm a great rider. My mother was a barrel racer, in Georgia, in Warm Springs where she's from. So, she grew up on horses.

Jesse Thorn: What's a barrel racer?

Walton Goggins: A person who takes a horse around a barrel in a ring and is timed for her skills. She was also a bit of a trick rider. She could stand up on a horse and hang off the side saddle and all the rest of it. She was a very good horse person. We never—I owned a horse, I don't know, when I was in—mother got a horse from a friend of ours, just kind of keeping it in this barn we had when I was like 11 or something like that. And we had it for about three months, four months, something like that. And it was one of the greatest periods in my life being at home, because I would—you know, I grew up in a little small town just outside of Atlanta, Georgia, and I would take the bus to school. And it's a public school, and come back, and get off the bus, and walk straight to the barn. And there was the horse. And I would get on him and just ride him through my neighborhood. And it was so freeing. Like, what a beautiful experience.

So, I have been writing for a very long time to answer your question. And not only that, my son—who is 13 now—we got him into riding equestrian. You know, he's a properly trained equestrian disciple, if you will. And he's been writing for about five years, and he's a baller. He's even a better—he's a better rider than I am. And he rides English. Obviously, he can ride Western, but he rides English. And he's a jumper. And now he does some time to—kind of

races up where we live now. And the fact that we can share that together is—I just—it's quality time of the highest order. We just talk without talking and enjoy the beauty of this world, you know, from the back of a horse. It's extremely romantic, man—the whole vibe. And I've ridden horses in every country I've ever worked in. On a day off, I'll go find a barn and jump on.

Jesse Thorn: A crazy thing about Los Angeles, to me, as a guy from San Francisco is—and this has never stopped blowing my mind about Los Angeles—is here we are in America's second largest city, one of the biggest cities in the world. And I live in a very urban neighborhood in Northeast Los Angeles. And three minutes down the road is horses (*chuckling*) that are allowed to just trot around like it's normal.

Walton Goggins: Yeah! It's—my son, I won't say the name of his barn—

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But it's in Atwater Village, and it's right on the wash, like a lot of these things are. And most of these barns were used and are still used, I would imagine—but for the old studio system, right? For all the Westerns that they made. They needed to keep them in town. I mean, they all went up to Santa Clarita or like out in the desert and things of that nature. But most of these barns have their origins tied to Hollywood back in the 1920s. They've been around a really long time. And yeah, it is a big part of the history of Los Angeles, and there are trails obviously all over.

I started riding when I got here. Not at a barn, I just went to a place that you could rent a horse for an hour, and I would just go out by myself. And it was in the north North Valley. And just went all the time. If I didn't go once a week, I went once every two weeks. And it was just a great day to spend time in nature and with your thoughts.

I saw a photo—there's a famous photo, coming through the—you know, I guess it was the path that ultimately became like the 5 freeway or whatever, kind of making that turn into downtown Los Angeles over by Dodger Stadium. It's a famous bridge there. I don't remember if it was—it wasn't paved at the time. And it was chock full of, you know, some cars for sure, but mostly horses. You know, (*chuckling*) a lot of horses kind of coming through there, making their way, I guess, to downtown. But it's a—you know, being such a fan of Los Angeles and especially old photos of LA, that blew my mind the first time I saw it.

Jesse Thorn: What about the old lasso? You do some trick roping right at the top. Is that a computer-generated trick rope?

Walton Goggins: Oh, you know what? You know, I'm not giving anything away by saying that I did not acquire a lifetime skill in the six months that we just, you know, had before we started filming. It is the easiest and the hardest thing ever to do. I think it's a steep, steep, steep learning curve that once you get it, then you get it, and you'll never forget it. It's just the way that the loop on the rope slides down and the way that you flick your wrist. And you constantly have to move the rope. You can't just hold the rope with your fingers; you have to twirl the rope as it goes around. And so, I had tried. I got the trick rope; I did the whole thing.

I tried for like three months, really. And it usually ended with “(censor beep) this, man! Bring out the computer, man! This is horrible!”

So, that day—the scene that you played to begin this interview—was the very first day I was Cooper Howard. The first day I had been on set without being in the makeup of the Ghoul and the very first day that I got the trick down. I actually did it that day with a wonderful rope guy that they brought in to be my double. And then this great old cowboy from LA who kind of came in. And I have it on film, and it's like, “Oh my god, I'm doing it! Look at this! Jonah! Look at this! I got it, man!”

It's like, “Yeah, that's great, Walton, but you're still not going to do it in the shot.”

(Jesse laughs.)

“Okay, man. That's cool.”

Jesse Thorn: I have a question about the look of the Ghoul. So, obviously your character in *Fallout* is one character in two very different time periods and two very different forms, right? A fading western star before the apocalypse, and hundreds of years later after the apocalypse, a zombie ghoul version of that fading western star—who is the same person, but is also separated from the person he was before, sort of grasping at the memory of the person he was before.

Walton Goggins: Separated through experience and exposure to an irradiated wasteland that has fostered—and through necessity—some of the worst behavior that human beings could possibly do to each other. You know, it's horrific kind of what happened over the course of those 200 years.

Jesse Thorn: So, Walton, you're a very handsome man.

Walton Goggins: Hey, that's very—hey, what a—wait a minute. Are you—? Hey, that's nice of you to say! Wow. I don't get that often!

Jesse Thorn: You're a very handsome man. The character of the Ghoul is grotesquely disfigured with no nose and horrific radiation burns across his face and so on and so forth.

[00:20:00]

Also, *(inaudible)* maybe he's even handsomer than Walton Goggin?! *(Laughs.)*

Walton Goggins: I agree with you. That I absolutely agree with you.

Jesse Thorn: I was like, did they have a big production meeting and say, “What's the most grotesque thing we can do that also makes Walton look handsome?”

Walton Goggins: *(Sighs.)* There were conversations about this, you know, really early on and looking at some of these drawings that Vincent Van Dyke had done—one of the best special effects makeup people in the world. And he designed the piece. My buddy Jake Garber applied it, who's also one of the best in the world at what he does. And looking at these drawings, it's like, okay, well, what do we really—what do we want to do? And what is the goal here? Jonah led the conversation, and I participated in it quite a bit with Geneva and Graham. And we all said, led by Jonah, “Look, I want—I don't want to hide your face, man. I want people to know that it's you. And I just want you to be able to do your thing without thinking about feeling insecure under a layer of prosthetics.”

Over the course of this conversation and these months of kind of planning, we did—I think there were marching orders at some point, because we saw how it was kind of taking shape. It's like, you know, let's—we want him to be handsome *(chuckling)* in a rugged, irradiated sort of way. You know, even though he doesn't have a nose. A lot of that has to do with his personality, but there are—you know, there's a story that is told on his face, and we wanted the audience to lean into this experience and want to question and want to know what his life has been like, what it was like before the bombs dropped and over these last 200 years, and why is he still alive? And what is he looking for? And if you had an audience turned off visually by that visual experience—well, that would be harder to obtain, you know.

And so, that's really kind of—we did have those marching orders. That was with intention that we did that. We just had no idea that it was going to be received that way by a lot of the people that have watched it. The Goul being a sex symbol *(chuckling)* was a very big surprise, although he is cool. Cool goes a long way.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, he's a cool guy.

(Walton agrees.)

He's got cool cowboy, bad-A vibes.

Walton Goggins: Yeah, he's got swagger for sure.

Jesse Thorn: He does what he wants, like Kris Kristofferson or something like that. Like a real—

Walton Goggins: It's funny, we talked, I talked about Kris Kristofferson. It's like what if—could we do a Kris Kristofferson if he had been on a bender? *(Laughs.)* You know? And—

Jesse Thorn: Like, Kris Kristofferson is—

Walton Goggins: He's the sexiest man.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah! And he's not pretty at all, but there's a reason why he is one of the greatest sex symbols and is—because he's got it!

Walton Goggins: He's got it. He's got it inside and outside, up and down. He is just a very, very, very sexy man.

Jesse Thorn: I watched you on the *Seth Meyers Show*. And it was great. Seth Meyers always does a great job. Thanks for coming on *Bullseye*, Seth Meyers.

Walton Goggins: He does a great job. And he's such a—I've seen his standup.

Jesse Thorn: He's really funny.

Walton Goggins: God, he's funny.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, but I think he does a really nice job of talking to people like human beings when he's setting up anecdotes.

You showed a picture of your father where he looked like—and this is—have you ever heard of a pearly king?

Walton Goggins: I've never heard of a pearly king.

Jesse Thorn: Okay. So, in London cockney culture, there's these pearly kings and queens, and they raise money for charity by making these black suits that are covered in mother of pearl buttons—like, completely covered in mother of pearl buttons, hats and the whole nine yards, everything covered in— So, it's almost like a—it's almost like a... You know, it looks like a—they look like halfway between a, you know, a vaquero, and it's like plate mail also.

Walton Goggins: Like a peacock. A weird—you're peacocking.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah. The wildest, most incredible thing you've ever seen. Right? And as I saw this picture of your dad, I was like, this is like the western equivalent of that.

(They laugh.)

And look, as far as I know—I don't know where your father is from, but you're from Georgia. You're not a westerner.

[00:25:00]

Walton Goggins: I'm not a westerner. Nope.

Jesse Thorn: So, this is a truly... this was truly wild. And it was in service of an anecdote about him giving out autographed pictures of himself unbidden. But—

Walton Goggins: And autographed pictures of me that he had signed. *(Laughs.)*

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, autographed by him.

Walton Goggins: That he had forged!

Jesse Thorn: Picture of you, autographed by him.

(Walton laughs.)

And that is a very—that was very fun and cute and a great talk show anecdote. But the whole time I was like, wait, what?!

Walton Goggins: Well, you know, okay. This is—maybe your audience can relate to this. Lord knows I can. My father is—I have a lot of interesting, authentic characters that were in my life and are in my life, but were in my life early on. And my father is one of them. One of many of them. But this show is not about that. We could talk ad nauseum about the people that have come through my life and the things that I have taken from them as observing their behavior. And they have informed who I am as a person, and I have regurgitated them in different opportunities that I've had to play people. But my father was always a character. And—

Jesse Thorn: Was he always that big? I mean, like I'm not talking about physically big, but was his—yeah, was it always that grand?

Walton Goggins: His personality was that big? Yeah, it's pretty grand. Yeah. He can light up a room for sure. He walks in, and you know that Sandy Goggins is in the room. He also has—when I was a young man, growing up—you know, like a kid—he had style and flair and a Corvette that, you know, was leased. Or all the rest of it. He just had this thing that he wanted to be. And he was into design and antiques. I grew up—like, whenever I was with him, which wasn't that often, we would go antiquing. And inevitably he would find a phone booth that Larry Gatlin owned! *(Turning up the southern twang.)* “Son, we're gonna go up and get this phone booth that was in Pigeon Forge. I need you to come up there and help me bring it down.”

Jesse Thorn: This example is too specific to not be real. *(Chuckles.)*

Walton Goggins: Yeah, no, it is real. All of it. It's still in his house today. Many, many things. So, he was this guy. About 20 years ago, 25/27 years ago, he came out to see me in New Mexico. And it was his first time in New Mexico. No, maybe we had stopped. No, we'd stopped in Santa Fe. We drove across country one time. And he was so taken with the flavors of this place and the people and the dress that—I think for my father, he felt at home for the first time in his life. Like, that's who he is in his soul. He is that guy. He wants to be a cowboy, you know, like in that, world. And I think the land spoke to him. I think the food spoke to him. I think the people spoke to him.

And so, as for the next—you know, slowly, gradually at first, but over the last 25 years, he has become that version of himself, even though he doesn't live out there. I think his spirit lives out there. You know, his mind lives out there. And so, to see a person at that stage in

their life reflect in their dress code who they are spiritually I think is so cool. It's just—yeah, have at it, man. Do and be whoever you are. That's what I—that's how I feel about everyone. You just be you.

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

Promo:

Music: Gentle, quiet acoustic guitar.

John Moe: (*Softly.*) Hello, sleepy heads. *Sleeping with Celebrities* is your podcast pillow pal. We talk to remarkable people about unremarkable topics, all to help you slow down your brain and drift off to sleep. For instance, we have the remarkable Neil Gaiman.

Neil Gaiman: I'd always had a vague interest in live-culture food preparation.

John Moe: *Sleeping With Celebrities*, hosted by me—John Moe—on MaximumFun.org or wherever you get your podcasts. Night, night.

(*Music fades out.*)

Transition: Thumpy synth with light vocalizations.

Jesse Thorn: It's *Bullseye*, I'm Jesse Thorn. I'm talking with the actor Walton Goggins. You've seen him in TV shows by Danny McBride, movies by Quentin Tarantino, and in the new series *Fallout*.

[00:30:00]

I want to ask you a question about being from Georgia. You left as a teenager to move to Los Angeles, right? You were like 19 or something?

Walton Goggins: 19, yeah.

Jesse Thorn: Do you modulate your accent in your day-to-day life?

Walton Goggins: Well, do you hear the way that I'm talking now? I'm not—do I sound Southern to you in this conversation?

Jesse Thorn: I mean, uh—

Walton Goggins: There are a hint of it there?

Jesse Thorn: You do more than I do. (*Laughs.*)

Walton Goggins: Yes. Fair enough, fair enough. I mean, when I moved to Los Angeles at 19 years old, I got into class. And the teachers that I studied with—you know, the first teacher said to me—

Jesse Thorn: Acting class.

Walton Goggins: Acting class, correct. The first teacher said, “Okay, you need to read this book over and over again and lose that accent.” It was Shakespeare’s sonnets. “And you need to work harder than—” He said, “You don’t have the looks. So, you need to work harder than everybody in the room.”

And I just took him at his word. (*Chuckles.*) And I said, okay, I need to work harder than everybody in the room. I need to read this Shakespeare sonnet book over and over again. And I had a valet parking company at the time. When I first moved out to LA, I started this company, and I would sit there after parking the cars, and I would just read these sonnets over and over and over and over and over and over and over and over again. And eventually, I started to lose my accent to a point where I could get away with a—when I say a mid-Atlantic, it just wasn’t so pronounced. My Southern accent wasn’t so pronounced. And I’ve played a number of roles where, to my ear, I don’t have a twang. But I suppose to another person’s ear who is not from the south, there might still be a hint there.

But it’s nothing for me to turn it on. And I quite like the sound of it. (*Chuckles.*) You know, I think it’s so whimsical and sing-songy. And the modulation of a Southern accent is just so pleasant to listen to.

Jesse Thorn: That’s the truth. I think in show business as an actor, there aren’t a lot of folks with southern accents who get to play characters who are incidentally southern. It happens sometimes. But I think a lot of times, if somebody is going to have a southern accent on screen, it’s because they’re being capital ‘S’ Southern in some kind of grand, imaginary way. And that’s one of the like few opportunities, you know? Like, you’re going to end up playing a—whatever the stereotypes are. A racist, a dumb guy.

Walton Goggins: But I think that’s the same for—but I think you’re absolutely right. And that stereotype was perpetuated for a really long time. I’m so far outside of that box, you know, 30 years into my career. I don’t have that chip on my shoulder anymore. But—

Jesse Thorn: But like you couldn’t have done, for example, your character on *Justified*—which is like, frankly, one of my favorite TV performances of ever, of anything.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Clip:

Boyd: How come you didn’t wanna blow up that church?

Speaker: I told you. Didn’t want them to ID my car.

Body: I got to thinking that maybe you had an aversion to hurting people.

Speaker: (*Chuckles.*) Hell no.

Boyd: I also got to thinking that building under construction might just be the kind of innocuous target. You know that means? That means harmless.

Speaker: Huh?

Boyd: Might just be the kind of harmless target that the Federal Bureau of Imperialism might be willing to sacrifice in order to get somebody deep in the movement.

Speaker: You think I'm a snitch?!

Boyd: All I know is you don't have any tattoos. You keep rubbing that head like you don't think that head's gonna grow back.

Speaker: You think I'm a snitch because I rub my head?!

Boyd: I mean, you understand where I'm coming from, right?

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Jesse Thorn: You couldn't have done that character without the accent, because the song of it is like essential. That's central.

Walton Goggins: Well, it's from Kentucky, isn't it? Right? So, you're not gonna speak with a Brooklyn accent coming from Kentucky. I think it would have been very difficult, you know. But look, boxes are built for everyone. If you're so lucky early on in your career to get into a box, be grateful for it. At least you're working, and you're in a box. You'll get out of that box if you want to. If you work hard enough when those opportunities kind of present themselves and you don't have—there's no ego involved and look for those opportunities. Someone—you know, an Italian from New York, an actor that's an Italian from New York, they're gonna play a mobster.

You know, everybody has their thing. I mean, somebody from California with blonde hair is gonna smoke dope early on in their career or they're going to have a (*censor beep*) surfboard in their hand. I just happen to be southern and so, you know, that was the—

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—that's the box that I was in. And so—but everybody has, you know, something to lament on that level. And now I just don't think about it so much. And I think, you know, I'm so grateful that I—at least I came from a region that warranted stories being written about it. And I had the opportunity up at bat, you know. I had the opportunity to work, even if I failed.

You know, at least I had the chance to go to work. And I would imagine that if you spoke to any actor that comes from a region in America, of which we all do, that they're grateful to have been given the opportunity to service a stereotype until they don't have to do that anymore.

Jesse Thorn: One of the things that I loved about the *Fallout* show is, in *Fallout*—both the game and the show exist in a kind of hyper-real world. And Kevin, my producer, texted me a few weeks ago, before I'd seen the show. And he said, “Oh, the *Fallout* show is really good.”

And I texted him back like, “Oh, really?” I had a hard time imagining it in the TV show, ‘cause the game's kind of glib. And I thought, well, when I see this TV show, maybe it'll just be cute and funny. And it is funny, but it's not cute in that way particularly. And it's also not like... it doesn't undercut—the idea is not “look how small and real we can play this ridiculous thing”. You know, the opposite of it being cute and glib. It is a very sincere hyper-reality. And your character, most of all. Like, there's a guy running around in a robot suit, shooting lasers and stuff. Not lasers. I don't think—they have projectiles in *Fallout*, but you know what I'm talking about. There is a robot suit.

But like your character is like an imaginary version of midcentury America transformed into an imaginary version of the future, right? And that's something that I feel like is really special to your gifts. Do you know what I mean? Just like your character on *Justified* made real a kind of insane grand eloquence and made it feel as honest and grounded and homey as it could possibly be, like your job on this show is to ride around in a cowboy hat with zombie makeup on. Do that justice—like, do the ridiculousness and bigness of that justice while also being an actual character. (*Chuckles.*)

Walton Goggins: Yeah, I mean, I guess so. You know, I don't look at it that way, but if that's how you look at it.

Jesse Thorn: How do you look at it?

Walton Goggins: Well, I look at it as a person that was living in a Pax Americana world, as if the 1950s had reached its potential. You know, there were so many things wrong with this country, obviously, in the 1950s. But there was a.. it was a—we were on the way to something that we thought was illuminated, illuminating, right? And a more illuminated, evolved kind of world. And this retro futuristic 1950s—again, the timeline is different in the *Fallout* universe. It was as if we were on our way to reaching this potential that we had. And the bombs were dropped, and the world changed. I play this guy, Cooper Howard. And to me, I don't look at it as a video game. I don't look at it as playing someone in the 1950s.

I look at it as a real human being. Cooper Howard existed. He made these movies. Are there winks at the audience? Sure, but I'm not doing them. You know? When people are funny—and to me, the funniest version of people is when they're not winking at the audience, but they're actually believing what it is that they're saying. And so, I believe that he had a wife. I believe that he made these movies. I believe that he loved his child. I believe that he came from, you know... I have a place that he came from in America. I won't share it with you, but that he made his way out to—

Jesse Thorn: I'll say it! Newport, Rhode Island. I'll just say it. I'll just say it out loud.

Walton Goggins: That's exactly right. Yes, that is it. That's exactly it.

Jesse Thorn: Yep, guessed it in one.

Walton Goggins: But he—you know, he's made his way to Hollywood, and he was—you know, a stuntman. He was a horse guy.

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And one day—I mean, he was just an affable—had a lot of charisma and just people were gravitated towards him. They liked hanging out with Cooper Howard. He was just a cool guy and a very dependable, pragmatic, jovial guy. And one day an actor didn't show up, and the director just said at the craft service table, “Coop, here's a few lines. Why don't you jump in there and say this?” That happens all the time in this town. And he did. And then he was pretty good at it.

And another director said, “Coop, you know, say this.” And then eventually he kept getting these bigger and bigger roles just because he had this kind of gift, if you will. And his stunt buddies started giving him (*censor beep*) about having his own trailer and all the rest of it. And before you know it, he's starring in a B western, and it does really, really well. And he becomes that guy. And then he has—and you have to see the show to understand exactly what happens, but the bomb's fallen. And then the Ghoul is not some zombie that's running around like rabid. I could never think of it that way. I think of him as a person who survived the apocalypse. And I thought about, if not every year, you know, certainly his life right after those bombs dropped and be specific about what it is that he experienced to get to a place where, 200 years later, he has a sardonic sense of humor. And he's indignant and cynical and is looking for something. And that he's a real person, you know.

Or why else would I do it? I mean, I wouldn't do this for a living if I didn't approach it that way.

Jesse Thorn: Plus, not many of us get the chance to see ourselves on screen without a nose.

Walton Goggins: (*Laughs.*) Yeah, that's true. Not many of us do.

Jesse Thorn: Do you wear like ping pong balls on your nose?

Walton Goggins: I do not wear ping pong balls on my nose. I have my nose is my nose, and they paint white dots on it. Yeah.

Jesse Thorn: Oh, okay. It would be better if it was ping pong balls though, right?

Walton Goggins: I don't think so.

Jesse Thorn: No, it wouldn't? Okay.

Walton Goggins: No, it would distract the person that I'm working with.

Jesse Thorn: I thought of you this morning as I was preparing for this interview, because I was cruising around on Reddit. And I ran into this question in this—there's a subreddit called Ask Los Angeles. And I wanted to put this question to you, because I thought you would have a unique perspective on it.

Walton Goggins: Oh, interesting. Okay.

Jesse Thorn: “Am I still supposed to tip the valet guys if my hotel charges \$60 a night for mandatory valet parking? Or does the high fee mean they get paid enough as is and won't be angry if I don't tip?”

Walton Goggins: You tip the valet parker. They don't get any of that money. You tip them, because they're working hard.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, now we're talking. Take it from former valet parker—

Walton Goggins: From a pro!

Jesse Thorn: Former valet parking entrepreneur, Walton Goggins.

Walton Goggins: Exactly.

Jesse Thorn: Tip your valet!

Walton Goggins: That's right.

Jesse Thorn: Walton, I sure appreciate the time that you took to talk to me. It was really nice to get to talk to you. It's a total dream. We've been hoping to have you on the show for years, and we're really glad you came in.

Walton Goggins: Thank you so very much for the time, man. Really, I enjoyed this conversation immensely.

Jesse Thorn: Walton Goggins, catch him in *Fallout*. That's on Prime. He's currently shooting the next season of *White Lotus* as well. We've all been waiting for Goggins in paradise.

Transition: Bright, cheerful synth.

Jesse Thorn: That's the end of another episode of *Bullseye*. *Bullseye* is created from the homes of me and the staff of Maximum Fun, in and around Greater Los Angeles, California. Here in LA, we all piled into Richard Robey's car, drove to LAist for a live interview with

Paul Scheer that you'll hear coming up on the show. Our thanks to the folks at LAist, KPCC in Pasadena, California, for hosting us at their Crawford Family Forum.

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, Daniel Huecias. We get booking help from Mara Davis. Our interstitial music is by DJW, also known as Dan Wally. I'm Dan Wally. Our theme song is called "Huddle Formation", written and recorded by The Go! Team. Thanks to them. Thanks to their label, Memphis Industries.

Bullseye is on Instagram, [@BullseyeWithJesseThorn](#). You can see behind the scenes pictures and videos and all kinds of neat stuff. We're also on Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook. And I think that's about it. Just remember, all great radio hosts have a signature sign off.

Promo: *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* is a production of [MaximumFun.org](#) and is distributed by NPR.

(Music fades out.)