

[Transcript] SmartLess / "Joaquin Phoenix"

Hey everybody, welcome! Do you love comedy? Do you love to laugh? We'll buckle up because you're gonna fucking cry your eyes out. Welcome to SmartLiz.

Hi everybody.

Oh, Sean, what a nice top you have on this morning.

Yeah.

What's it say? I can't read it.

It says SmartLiz.

It says Hayes on the back.

So Hayes 20, what does it say, 22 on the back?

26, 26.

26, that's your birth date, right?

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

So it's a SmartLiz shirt.

You can guess we're gonna get the freaking merch plug right at the top.

Yeah, right there. It's right there. I'm wearing it.

It's good to know that it's good to know that we make it in a double XL too.

Yeah, good for you.

You know what I mean? It's good.

You got both boobs stuck right in there.

Yeah, right. Bang, bang, pow, pow.

How's everybody feeling? Is everybody a little sleepy today?

Yeah, a little sleepy.

It's a little early.

I could feel that. I could feel that.

I, last, yesterday, I saw him in Tech Week.

Oh, well, this is probably gonna air after we open.

Well, what's Tech Week for? What are you talking about?

Are you doing a play in New York?

At the Tabasco?

At the Tabasco Theater.

It's so spicy this show, y'all.

You gotta go check it out.

That's stupid.

It's hot.

Anyway, the Bellasco Theater, David Bellasco was the owner, and this I just found out yesterday.

I couldn't wait to share it with you guys.

Actually, last night, because we're working like 12, 14-hour days, whatever it is.

Oh, that's hard.

Well, I don't know how many hours, but it's long hours.

So a lot of people work.

Seems like you do know.

Yeah.

And so the screw guy comes, because everybody has these stories,

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because there's an apartment on top of the theater.

Who now?

That, what's that?

Oh, the crew guy.

The crew guy, yeah.

The crew guy, there's an apartment on top of the theater.

There's another screw guy coming.

I'm like, oh, these guys got a screw guy.

All right.

What kind of?

I'm like, screw guy, please.

And they just send one over right away.

He's sending over the screw guy.

So the screw guy gets there.

Oh, speaking of which, that's Scotty.

Scotty got his cue.

You walked by just as I said, screw guy.

I like seeing Scotty go by, just shuffle by in shorts.

There you go.

So anyway.

Okay.

So there's crew guy told me about this story because it's supposed to be haunted and sometimes.

And so David Blasco, who owned the theater years and years and years ago, there's this apartment on top of the theater that's now abandoned and nothing's up there.

But he used to live there and there was an elevator shaft where he used to bring up, you know, lady friends over and over, right?

And so one of the ladies fell through the elevator shaft and died.

It's now like boarded up.

And people say, and they call her lady in blue.

Cause people say they can see her in the seats sometimes.

How do you fall through an elevator shaft?

I guess it was open and there was no elevator.

I guess.

I don't know.

Boy, there was an episode of LA law once.

I'm not making it up where the guys, I swear to God, it was on the,

I just saw a clip of it recently and they're having a conversation about the elevator door and this woman speaks really tersely to the guy.

She's like, so you better watch out, blah, blah, blah.

The elevator doors open.

She walks into the elevator shaft and falls, punches to her death.

And the guy was like, Oh my God, it was on TV.

And that writer's room is like, how are we going to,

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what are we going to do in this episode?
How are we going to, where is it open?
And she just falls through just like the lady in blue.
Yeah.
Have you hit fuck it yet on this, on this play?
So, I mean, it, it's a long run, right?
It's been taxing for Jason and both Jason and me.
I mean, so, but you haven't even started performances yet.
You've been, you've been whacking away at it for how long now.
You've already done it in Chicago for months and months and months.
Yeah.
Now, because it's so good and was so well received,
you take it to New York, to the, to the hot and spicy Tabasco,
and you, you're in rehearsals right now.
You haven't gotten to the point of like, it's enough.
Um, no, I mean, you, you, as a, as a,
You're discovering new things about it every day, right?
Yeah, you do kind of.
Surprise guest just mentioned, just, just, uh,
Yeah.
Just a message to us and said, this is really interesting.
Interesting.
Maybe we should just start.
Uh, I, I think he, it's a he has got comments on this too.
Should we get right to him?
Let's get right to him.
I mean, by the way, should we mention the plays open now?
Yeah.
I guess the plays open now by the time we work at the, at the,
at the Belasco.
Wait, what's it called?
What's the play called?
Okay.
And did I like it on opening night?
You would love it.
It's called good night.
Oscar.
Okay.
There it is.
All right.
There is after night and good night.
I didn't know is two words.
I thought it was one word.
And if you find yourself at the theater,

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watch out for a gaping shaft.

Oh boy.

Um, wait, I love that.

We got to put that on the Sean list.

So you thought good night was one word.

I did that.

Didn't you think it was one word?

Probably not.

Just like good morning.

Has good morning ever been one word?

You know what else listener?

Hang on.

Sean.

Sean was shocked to learn that, uh,

uh, John F. Kennedy was not shot in Washington, DC.

He was shot in Dallas.

I'm the last episode.

Yeah.

Cause it's, it's stunning to me.

You know what else listener is stunning about Sean?

He was really surprised that Beatles.

The group, the band.

No.

I'm not the only one that thought that didn't know it meant
beat on a drum.

BEAT.

Sean, I'm just noticing you're in your place in New York right
now.

And you guys, you're, you've been there for a month now,
but you don't, in the last couple of years,
you haven't spent a ton of time there.

No.

But in that back shelf there, did you guys go to
knick-knacks or us?

Load up on the knick-knacks?

It's a real Chatsky Haven.

Hey, knick-knack patty whack.

Look at your spider fern too up there on his own little,
nice though.

And that's been real well.

All right.

Quiet down.

Here comes a respectable guest.

All right.

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We got to find out.
Listen, this family doesn't do this.
Okay.
He doesn't do it at all.
He's trying to keep quiet and do his work.
And while I haven't asked him, my bet is,
is that he's dreading this and that he's thrilled
that a full six minutes and 15 seconds are already over
without him having to talk.
My job is to make this as painless and breezy as possible.
And I need your help, man, because this is a Grammy
award-winning artist from Puerto Rico.
And he's got a black belt in karate.
Okay.
Most folks, however, know him as one of the best actors
of our generation.
So please say hello to actually one of the kindest,
warmest, friendliest, most humble fellas I know.
Let's welcome Joaquin Phoenix.
Oh my God.
Yeah.
Come on.
Wow.
There he is.
There he is.
Hey, good.
Hi, everybody.
Hi.
Wait, you're in a trailer, aren't you?
Are you in a trailer?
Yeah.
So I'm on set.
Oh.
Oh, for the Joker too.
Yeah.
So I'm listening to the Jenny.
You guys are on Jenny Power right now.
Exactly.
Oh, that's the generator.
So then this is your lunch hour?
No.
We're actually shooting kind of splits.
So, you know, we're going to start in a little bit.
So I just came up a little early.

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The beat from Beatles, is that really for beat?
Like jumps?
See, you dick.
Yes.
That's exactly right.
I always do a question on how to do with the beat poets.
Oh.
I didn't even think about that.
No, it has to do with the beat.
I thought it was the buzz.
Sean, real quick, because Joaquin mentioned it,
tell Tracy what splits are.
I have no idea.
Oh, bless him.
Bless him.
They don't do splits on Will and Grace.
No.
It's always a sensible, the best hours in all of showbiz.
It is the best.
So splits listener is when you start at noon and you end at
midnight as opposed to if you shoot for full nights,
you start when the sun goes down and you end when the sun comes
up.
Splits is kind of a half day, half night shoot.
Yeah, that's perfect.
Yeah, that's perfect.
Joaquin, I don't even know where to start, man.
I don't know you at all.
We've never met and I'm such a fan.
You're honestly, it's just, yeah.
And I guess let's do it kind of like how we always,
what I want to know was what was the first of all,
because you've done so many amazing characters and so many
great movies.
But what was the first, your first memory,
like your first job that you did?
First job I did was a guest starring spot on a TV show called
Seven Brides for Seven Brothers,
which my brother River starred in.
And they were shooting in Northern California.
And I think just by default, I think just because it was easy
to get somebody local, me and my sister played the small part
in the show.
And I think that was probably my first like significant job.

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The one time I worked with River, were you,
I think you were, were you not in it too?
Well, we did the thing about the Kennedys.
We played, we played like young Kennedys.
Yeah.
I barely remember.
I forget what it's called.
Anyway, it was like a movie of the week or something like that
about Robert F. Kennedy and his times.
Did you play one of the, because you were so small,
you probably couldn't even talk then or maybe just barely
because we were like, we were 10 or 11 or something like that.
Weren't we?
Yeah.
So I was six or seven.
No, I don't, I don't remember that.
I vaguely do now that you mentioned it.
It's like out in Massachusetts.
But I think the very first thing I did was, was that spot
in Seven Brides for Seven Brothers.
And then, and then so the, the, so the acting to you as I,
we're not going to, I'm not going to hammer you with your,
all your fricking method and all that stuff.
Cause I know you hate talking about that as, as, as do most.
I don't know what it is.
I know exactly.
It's just, well, that's what people ask me.
No, I like that.
I guess my question is when did you get a sense that,
that this acting thing might be a really comfortable thing for you
to do and not something that's going to be a lot of work,
you know, that it's not going to be like hammering nails.
I wouldn't say that it's very comfortable,
but I certainly don't, don't care about that.
I mean, I'm not,
I'm not looking for something that's comfortable.
I'm looking for a unique experience.
Yeah, you get it though.
But when you see like, like Joaquin,
when you, when you see an actor talk about their process
and we've all seen it and people get into it and they want to like focus.
First of all,
I remember doing this thing once and somebody was asking it like about,
so we were doing Bojack Horseman and I got kind of,

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I think I was kind of a dick,
but they were like asking about the process and I said,
why is everybody so obsessed with how the sausage is made?
Why can't they just enjoy the sausage, right?
Like it's not that interesting.
And, and, but, but then I see like, like, you know,
these actors who talk,
they spend a lot of time and you see them in these interviews
and they're talking about their process and stuff.
And I'm kind of like, okay, man,
like if you want, you want accolades for what you're doing
and you want us to applaud the way you did it,
like it seems a little self-serving.
You have to forgive like everybody when they're doing an interview.
That's true.
Because you're just like, it's impossible,
virtually impossible not to be an asshole when you're doing an interview.
At least for me, it's my experience.
I mean, everybody fucking sounds stupid.
That's true.
There's just not a good way to come across.
And oftentimes, like a lot of those quotes are from like,
when you've flown to go to like a film festival in Europe
and you're jet lagged and you have like a hundred interviews
and you start off just going like,
I'm not going to do any of that shit.
And within 30 minutes, you're just like,
whatever it takes, just get me the fuck out of here.
I'll say anything.
So like, yes, I read quotes with these interviews
and I go, what a twat.
And I go, I've done so much worse.
So I always feel like you have to give people like,
I think you're, I think you're, I'm with you on that.
And that's totally fair enough.
And yeah, like the interview and or junkie process is one of the worst
sort of that you feel your soul leaving your body
and you think like every word you say, you're like,
God, I hate myself so much for what I just said.
And you're trying to come up with different ways to answer
the same freaking question.
You end up backing into a dumb answer.
I think that what I meant was more that there are people,
it seems like they go out of their way to consistently talk about that.

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And you're like, okay, that's what I was referring to.

However, having said that.

Yeah.

I mean, maybe you, I don't know.

I always think like whatever it takes, whatever works for you.

Yeah.

It doesn't really matter.

And, and you know, I understand there are some, there are some roles that it feels like it requires you to, okay, for me, every time I work,

I know that I'm going to experience like an ungodly amount of humiliation.

It's just, it's just how it's going to go.

There's no way that I can get through it without being humiliated.

And I think that's part of like letting go in some ways.

Right.

Cause it's, it's kind of stupid.

Like what we do is stupid.

Yeah.

Yeah.

And like surrendering too.

It is embarrassing.

And like it's, it's really difficult to do some things because if, if you, if you actually step out for a second and you're like objective and you look at yourself, you just cringe it.

So it's so fucking embarrassing and stupid.

So sometimes I understand like you have to, I find that I have to like rush right into it and just go like, just humiliate me right now.

Make me feel like nothing.

And so that I'm willing to do this thing because if I really think about it, I'll just be so embarrassed that I won't be able to do it.

It's like the standup comic that goes out there on purpose and, and tries to bomb, you know, like to sort of rip off the bandaid and just like, I'm up here, I'm exposed, hear the jokes or here's the non-joke.

And that almost becomes a performance of just raw vulnerability and let's all get in it together.

I always find incredible.

Sean said, Sean, you mentioned like surrender.

There is that moment where you got to, where you do have to surrender.

Like I watch you do all these characters in these movies over the last number of years.

And I always, when I think about someone like you,

I think like there's a guy who's like sensitive to the material.

He's like, I would never want to be like, Hey man, how did you do this scene?

I'm like, he did a scene.

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How he did the scene.

You understood the material.

You took it in.

You were sensitive to it.

And then you just like worked with the material that you were given.

And that was your interpretation.

That was your collaboration with the material like full stop.

Right.

And it's also like, you know, journalists, critics, reporters, whatever, just kind of doing just enough of their job to get you to fill in the blank.

And so, you know, with no thought behind it, I can't stand that.

So how did you lose the weight for Joker?

Here he comes.

Sean, here he comes.

What about, do you remember your grow, your, when you were growing up, you guys lived a very sort of atypical adolescence like I did as well.

How much of it do you remember?

Do you remember what the policy was in your house about?

Well, devices didn't exist back then, but TV and, and that, or,

or was it the kind of house where go outside, find a rock,

find a stick and entertain yourself like it kind of was in my house?

Yeah, I don't think we really had a TV until, you know,

until it was probably 11 or 12 or something.

I don't know, maybe a bit younger, maybe because we'd been working by then,

but certainly when I was very young, I don't think there was even a TV in the house.

But we, we did, there were five of us, right?

So it's, it's easy to entertain yourself when there's five kids, right?

Same.

My dad was always really amazing at finding houses to rent that were always like, you know, in LA, you can live like we grew up in the, in the valley for a lot.

And there's, there's houses that are like, like government land, right?

There's just like mountain ranges, right?

Like if that's the backyards or suddenly you could go there.

And so that's what we enjoy doing, right?

Just playing games and using our imagination.

So that's what I remember.

And now a word from our sponsor.

Friends and loved ones feared he met his fate through bad luck and a group of hungry alligators leaving his young family behind.

Except that's not what happened at all.

And after 17 years, a kidnapping and the uncovering of a secret love triangle, the truth would finally be revealed.

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You can listen to Over My Dead Body early and add free on Wondery Plus.
Get started with your free trial at Wondery.com slash plus.
He's a suave billionaire owner of the Dallas Mavericks
and the sharkiest shark on Shark Tank.
Yes, I'm talking about Mr. Business himself, Mark Cuban.
And our smart list interview with him is available now four weeks early on Wondery Plus.
Mark unravels the secrets behind the phenomenal success
and recounts the magical moment when he became a member of the billionaire club.
Our interview with Mark Cuban was recorded live in Chicago
in front of thousands of our biggest fans from our smart list tour.
This is the seventh of 10 interviews with new episodes releasing every Thursday.
We're talking with celebrities and icons like the Great Wolf Feral,
Conan O'Brien, Kevin Hart, Jimmy Kimmel and so many more.
And it wouldn't be smartless if Scotty and I didn't take the opportunity
to pitch Mark Cuban our new idea.
Will we land a deal of a lifetime?
You'll have to listen to find out. We call that a tease in the biz.
You can listen to these episodes four weeks early and add free with Wondery Plus.
Find Wondery Plus on the Wondery app or on Apple Podcasts.
And now back to the show.
Forgive me. I don't know, Joaquin.
So you mentioned growing up in the valley.
So were you born in LA? Like that was...
No, born in Puerto Rico.
Oh, that was true.
Yeah, I was born in Puerto Rico.
Oh, really?
That was true.
Yeah, let's see.
I think first we lived in...
When we came to the station in Puerto Rico, we were in Florida.
And then my mother was college roommates with Penny Marshall.
Oh, Penny Marshall, yeah.
Oh, wow. Really?
Yeah.
And Laverne and Shirley was very popular at the time.
And my brother and sister, my older brother and sister, River and Rain,
my brother wanted to play guitar very young.
And they would perform at talent shows and stuff.
And they were winning these talent shows.
Oh, wow.
So I think they felt like this curiosity and natural progression
towards something in the entertainment field.
My parents didn't really have a lot of experience with it.

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I don't think they really knew,
but I think that it seemed that the kids had...
I don't know, I don't really want to say talent,
but whatever the fuck it was, right?
Yeah, yeah, yeah.
Some kind of creative spark.
Yeah.
And I think they wanted to support that.
And so my mom actually reached out to Penny Marshall
and said, we were thinking of coming to Los Angeles
and would you meet the kids?
And I think she said, don't.
Don't.
I'm out of here.
You can imagine somebody called you from your past.
If you went to college, it was like, hey,
these kids, we're going to come out and work
when you meet them.
And Penny's like, let me stop you there.
Yeah.
No way.
Please, please don't come out.
I think we packed up the next day.
And I went to LA.
And yeah.
That's fucking crazy.
So what were your parents doing at the time that they're...
I think you said Florida, like what was going on?
My dad did like manual labor.
Like he was like the groundskeeper for this wealthy man.
I think it was like a recording producer.
Can you remember his name?
And there was a, like a little guest house on the property
where we lived.
Wow.
And my dad took care of the grounds.
And my mom was raising us.
And then we went to Los Angeles.
My mom started working at NBC for this amazing casting
director named Joel Thurm.
Joel Thurm.
That's right.
At NBC.
And she worked there.

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And my dad took care of us to care the kids.
And we met Joel.
By the way, let me stop you there just for one second.
So Joel Thurm, for the listener and for you guys,
if you guys, Sean, you may have met him,
but maybe he was gone by then.
This was the office where when you were going in to do a
network test, which for the listener,
that's the last step before you get a series as an actor.
And when you get a series, you're,
you're employed for years and years.
And it's like when in the lottery and it's a high stakes
thing.
So that last audition, that last meeting in that office is
Joel Thurm's office.
So Joaquin's mom was, was on his desk.
She was sitting at the desk right there where you're sitting
waiting, just like dying with anxiety right before you're
supposed to go in there.
And it was like, to me, it's carved into my memory,
that office, that little, that lobby,
that section right there was where most of my anxiety
started.
So you're saying Joaquin's mom is so massive.
No, no, but she was this ray of sunshine.
And she would, every time I'd run into her,
we'd have a very nice warm hug and smile.
I love that.
You know, that, yeah, she's,
Wait.
So Joaquin, so, so everybody was, everybody was in it.
Everybody was kind of in it or around it.
Yeah.
Yeah.
And so we would, we would go and visit and Joel was always
just so sweet.
Like we would, he would just set up, set us up in his office
and we would watch.
That's probably where I remember really being exposed to like
TV and, and shows, TV shows was in Joel's office because we
would watch all the reruns.
And we had every tape of every NBC show.
That's so cool.
Wow.

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And, and it was just like the best time going there.
And yeah, and I think we tried to do, I think he actually
arranged for us to do a, like some recording,
like a test to see if we could do like a show as a family.
Right.

It was like, try to do something.
Like a partridge family or something.

I guess.

Like that.

And, and yes, he introduced us to Iris Burton,
who was like the child actor agent.

Yeah.

And the only one that would take all five of us.
Because we'd met other agents.

It was a package deal.

And they'd be like, I'll take those two.

I'll take that.

She was like, I'll take them all.

Wow.

Wow.

And so, and so you're, you're, you're interested in acting
didn't really come as much from watching TV or watching movies
because you guys didn't do a ton of that when you were growing
up in the house.

It was, it kind of came from once you moved to Los Angeles
and you started to get this initial exposure to it.

Yeah.

I mean, I think it just was an extension of the games that we
played.

Like my dad was a fucking ham.

Yeah.

Like he would do these skits like all the time.

And again, because we didn't have TV,
we just basically did like plays.

So we would just make up these, these kind of scenarios
and play them out, play dress up and shit like that.

So I think it just was an extension of that.

And then I remember being on set.

The energy on a set is like unmatched.

It's incredible.

Right.

There's just like a hundred people that are all like brilliant
in their own specific kind of craft.

Yeah.

Right.

And you've brought people that it's like incredible what everyone does.

Right.

And there's such a everyone in the best case scenario.

One's really excited about what they're doing and they work really hard to kind of create this world.

And that's a really interesting energy and it's fucking fun as a kid.

You know, it's like, it's so exciting to be on set.

So there was something that was just really enjoyable about it.

And then I remember the first scene that that we did in this TV show and seven brothers and one of the characters, Peter Horton was the actor.

And we had been friends with them, you know, because we'd been there on set.

And so they were in the scene with him and he's meant to get into a fight with the boyfriend of the woman that played our mother and they get in this like fight and they're rolling around the ground.

And like 10, 8 year old shit felt very real.

Right.

And he was like our friends.

We were worried about him.

And I remember being like overcome with this emotion of what was happening.

And I distinctly remember like, like physically buzzing from it.

And it was such a powerful feeling because it wasn't real.

It was safe.

But like I like had this feeling course through my body.

And I was like, I want more of that.

Yeah.

It was so fucking exciting.

And nothing has ever given me that that feeling.

Like you're obviously safe because you're doing multiple takes.

It's not then the world's a fucking movie, but it can feel so dangerous.

You know, you feel like so much pressure because you're committing something and it's, it's going to be, it's going to be around forever.

Yeah.

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And there's something that just feels like really exciting about that to me still.

That's so interesting.

Hey, Joaquin, did you do any, any comedy?

You're always funny in what you do.

Even if it's a drama, you'll find the comedy.

But no, like a pure, have you ever done like a pure again?

Forgive me.

Have you done like a pure, pure comedy?

I remember, I remember seeing you in, in To Die For.

And I thought that was darkly funny.

Darkly funny.

Yeah.

Oh yeah.

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

To Die For with Nicole Kidman.

Yep.

I love that.

That was, I think in the nineties, right?

Was that, was that a great experience?

It was a great experience.

Yeah.

Well, I hadn't, the last film, the last acting that I'd done was when I was, I don't know, 14 or 15 in a movie called Parenthood.

And then I, we moved out of Los Angeles, we moved to Florida.

And, and I, I basically given up acting.

Yeah, I didn't think that I was, I was going to act again.

And then I, then I, my brother really encouraged me to start acting again.

And he was actually going to make a film and he wanted me to play his, his brother.

And I think that kind of sparked my renewed interest in it.

And then, yeah, to Die For came up.

I remember going and auditioning for it.

I, I read that script and I instantly had an idea of, of what I thought the character was and went audition for it.

And I was always really fortunate that the directors that I, I worked with, a lot of them just didn't have ego and weren't desperate to like micromanage and control and really encouraged me to, to bring my ideas to it and to, to discover it.

I remember it really started with Ron Howard on, on

Parenthood.

And I was surprised at, at how curious he was about my thoughts and feelings about the character.

So I just, I didn't know that that was allowed.

And, and Gus was, you know, the same thing where I remember him just saying like, it doesn't, it doesn't matter.

Like things don't have to go right.

Like whatever happens is a part of it and it's okay.

So don't worry about like any kind of rules in some ways.

And there's a thing that you learn as a kid that you're supposed to pride yourself on, which is like hitting the mark and finding your light and knowing your lines.

And I think that all of that stuff is like really dangerous because it just like leads to things being flat.

Like when everybody is just like hitting their marks and we know what's going to happen, take after take, you just like, it's just human nature.

Like inevitably you just follow it, fall onto something being like just wrote.

And I think it lacks like an energy and excitement.

And we're in this like unique position where you can do multiple takes.

So why not take advantage of it?

And, you know, let it be something different each time within reason.

And, and, and those are things that, that I, I learned from my early experiences, like it's, it's okay.

I think because films are so expensive and there's so many moving parts, we like to try to control it as much as possible.

Where do you, where do you sit on that?

Cause I battle with this as an actor and also as a director sometimes about, you know, how much you should just sort of pay attention to the natural thing of it or how much you should adhere to the technical specifics of that particular shot.

For instance, let's say the camera angle is really tight on you and you're, and you're sitting down and in the middle of the line, you have to stand up.

And because you're in a real tight shot, the cameraman asks you to stand up kind of slowly.

Don't shoot up.

Cause if you shoot up, I lose you in the camera.

I can't, I can't keep up with you.

And so they ask you to kind of come up with, sometimes they

call it a groucho.

You kind of come up kind of slow, like in a hunch, but certain actors, myself, at sometimes I'll be like, well, no, I got to shoot up cause I'm pissed off.

Like, so either widen your shot or just anticipate, well, how much do you, like, are there times when you're a little bit more cooperative with that than other times?

I mean, I find myself in that sometimes I just, I can't do it as a director.

Sometimes I'll hesitate and even asking an actor to do it, but the shot might be, might really need it.

Where do you, where do you sit with all that stuff, the, the combination between the technical and the, the natural in, in what you do?

I guess it depends.

I mean, every, every film is, is different.

There's not really one, one way of approaching it.

And there are times where I think it makes sense that the other night we were, we were shooting and camera was behind me and I was moving towards the other actor.

And just from years of doing it, I, I knew to like widen out a little bit, to like favor the right side so that it was clear on them.

And I remember as I was doing it, I was so ashamed.

You were accommodating.

I hated myself so much.

And I was like, this means that I'm not in the fucking moment because I'm aware the cameras there.

And then afterwards they were like, can you widen out a little bit?

I was like, oh, I thought I was already widening out as much as I was comfortable with.

And I was fucking embarrassed.

And now you asked me to do it more.

It's kind of our job though, isn't it?

I mean, it's not part of it though.

Like when you're doing theater, right, Sean, like you don't have to accommodate the other part of the process, which is the camera or the lighting or stuff.

Like when we're doing movies or television, that is part of it.

A lot more elements.

And I feel bad for pushing back on that as an actor.

Like my performance needs to stay pure.

And I don't even want to know about the cameras.

[Transcript] SmartLess / "Joaquin Phoenix"

But at every point of it, it is.

Like if you're doing, if you're doing the show, Sean, I imagine like you're always thinking about don't upstage, make sure, right?

Yeah.

All the time you're always play out.

You have to play out.

And also there's faces staring at you.

But it's distracting, right, Joaquin?

Like it knocks you out of it.

This big monologue as, as, uh, Oscar Levant.

And then you're doing this moment at the same time you're thinking like, fuck, can everybody hear me in the back row?

I'm sure you have those moments, right?

Yeah.

Yeah.

For sure.

Yeah.

It's terrifying.

But Joaquin, it distracts you out of the performance though.

Yes.

Well, I think the job is to be as, as true to the moment as possible.

And sometimes that's easier than other times for whatever reason.

Um, I just sometimes I watch like basketball players and it's just like going in for them.

Um, and other times it seems like they're really working at it and focusing.

It's just one of those things.

Like sometimes you're in the flow and there's nothing, those are the best moments when somebody can be making noise off camera talking and you're not distracted by it.

Like you could throw anything at you and you're just in it.

Right.

Cause you're just in the, in the flow.

Um, and then there's other times where it's a bit more difficult.

There's, it feels like it's so artificial, everything that's happening.

And I guess the job in some ways is to try to make it feel as organic as possible.

Um, and sometimes that's easier than other times.

So I think if you're in it and you're in one of those moments, it's like, yeah, I can, I can make that adjustment.

It's not, it's not getting in the way.

And there's other times where they go like, no, you, you have to adjust the camera because I'm not, I can't, I can't do this.

[Transcript] SmartLess / "Joaquin Phoenix"

Um, I don't really know why that, that happens.

It's that level.

It's that thing you started talking about, about that level of discomfort and embarrassment of like, I have to kind of commit to this thing and to really commit to it is kind of embarrassing.

It's just weird as shit.

And you're making that hard for me.

But yeah.

Yeah.

That's what I want to talk about because all, you know, what I'm doing in this play is a big swing for the fences.

It's like, this is embarrassing as all, all hell.

Like I'm playing somebody that's nothing like me at all.

Yeah.

And then, and then I see you Joaquin play, do that over and over again.

I'm like, gosh, how in the world do you get past that feeling of, you know, humility and then-

Of leaving yourself so, so fully.

Yeah, believing yourself like over and over and over again.

It's just kind of fascinating.

I wonder if, is our, the director, I would imagine is a, is a big, big part of it, right?

I mean, you've worked with so many incredible directors that so clearly have part in the term of vision and clear, you know, leadership.

No, I'm not going to part in the term.

I'm not going to fucking do it.

But is that, is that a big, big part of it for you when you're considering what to do next?

Is it, is it, is it as much about the director as it is about the part or is it, is it more so?

I mean, the director is it.

Yeah.

Kind of that, that simple, right?

Because everything ultimately runs through them.

Yeah.

Even if they, they're choosing the cinematographer and the editor, everyone that they're working with, they're ultimately saying yes or no to which take is being used.

Right.

Especially because, you know, I, I like to, to do, to approach each take differently sometimes.

There's a lot of choices that the director has.

And so you have to really trust them that they're going to make the right choices.

[Transcript] SmartLess / "Joaquin Phoenix"

Because sometimes I will do things that may not be right for the scene.

And I'll, I'll, I'll know that.

I'll know that this is probably not the right approach for the scene.

But I'll do it partially just to, just to change things up, just to put me in this place where I don't really know what's going to happen.

It suddenly just opens it up, the possibilities.

And there are times you go, fuck, I hope they don't use that one.

Right.

Or if they use a little piece of that with, with one that's, with a take that's more sort of normal, then it makes you look like a shit actor.

So you really have to trust the, the ingredients that the director's going to use downstream when he's cooking things together or she.

Yeah.

Or it made you look like a genius.

Yeah.

Yeah.

Exactly.

Or if you use a little piece of something and, and you're like, oh, that was actually from an earlier part in the scene.

That wasn't even my reaction for that line.

Right.

But that's like, that's great editing.

So yeah, the, the filmmakers, everything.

Yeah.

You're so reliant on the taste of a director.

Todd Phillips certainly has it in spades.

And you're, you're, you're the film that's coming out right now.

But Ari Aster, he seems like a guy is, is just, just overflowing with genius.

That trailer is stunning.

I can't wait to see that film.

This is called Bo is afraid.

Bo is afraid.

How was making that because for, for, for the listener, it's a, if you haven't seen the trailer, it's a correct or wrong, you're walking it.

It's about a guy going to see his mom and the, the sort of the, the fear and sort of dream scape or nightmare scape inside of his head as he approaches that event is where this film kind of takes us.

Is that a shitty enough explanation of it?

Yeah, sounds good.

That's just what I gathered from the trailer.

But it's so, so it's very sort of fantastical.

And I don't know.

It's sort of Spike Jon stuff and Charlie Kaufman stuff.

And this seems in that, in that world.

[Transcript] SmartLess / "Joaquin Phoenix"

And just another great example of that type of filmmaking.
I'm so excited to see it.
Did you love doing it?
I did love doing it.
I have just great admiration for Ari and his, his approach.
And you're very early on, I realized like how perceptive and observant he was.
And sometimes there are some scenes where you think like, okay, why, I can get away with it.
Like, I can have no choice, but I have to act through this, right?
Because this would be very difficult to maintain this for like six hours.
Right.
So inevitably there's going to be a wide shot.
And I'm going to be acting in this one at the, at the end of the day, you know.
And that happens if you once wanted something you really want to avoid.
And it's horrible, but sometimes you're just so fucking tired.
And you can't do it.
And again, the voice creeps in just going, this is stupid.
What are you doing?
Stop taking this seriously.
Go home.
And so you have to fight that voice off.
But it's very difficult if, if the filmmaker has that same voice and is also going like, hey, let's just come on and wrap this up.
And I knew very early on that Ari was not that filmmaker.
Right, right.
And so I think that we, we were just constantly pushing each other to, to commit to it as, as much as possible.
And so there was no, there was no kind of like, oh, let's, let's cheat in this wide shot.
And we did one wide shot that was like, it's so ridiculously wide.
And it's such a brief moment, but I had to like, I wanted to like collapse in the take.
And I couldn't just like, drop to my knees.
I just was like, I was like, this is just ridiculous.
It's not like too melodramatic or something.
Drop to my knees.
And, and it was, and it was, it's stupid looking back on it.
I was like, I could have just dropped my knees and nobody would have known the difference.
But I just, I just felt like I was, I was cheating if I, if I did that.
Wow.
I love how honest you are about that.
By the way, Jason, you asked him the question like, how was it making it?
And then you like took a moment to really, so often people are like, yeah, it was great.
No, he's all honesty.
I love it.
No, it's fucking great.
And it reminds me, Sean, how many late nights have you been like, we're not, it's getting too late

[Transcript] SmartLess / "Joaquin Phoenix"

and you just got to drop to your knees.
I mean, it's gotta be countless.
I don't need a reason.
I don't need the motivation.
It gets me to sleep early.
And we will be right back.
And now back to the show.
Well, I can, I was just thinking about years ago, I remember when Amy, my ex-wife was still on SNL and you came, I remember you came to SNL and you were shooting.
You were with Casey Affleck and you guys were shooting.
I'm still here.
Yeah.
Yeah.
It's so cool.
Talk to me a little bit about that, man.
Yeah, I was actually thinking about that today.
I don't know why.
I was remembering actually being going to SNL because there was an actor that I ran into in the hallway and I can't remember who it was or I just don't want to say.
And I was kind of like doing my shit for that movie.
And she's somebody that I worked with and she's very shocked and concerned.
And I remember like to look on her face, I so desperately wanted to tell her like, it's okay.
She's a thing.
So we like made this commitment that we weren't going to tell anybody that it wasn't real.
So listener, this thing that he's talking about, I'm still here.
This was a documentary about Joaquin quitting acting and becoming a rap star.
Wait, I want to hear Joaquin tell it.
Right, that in a nutshell.
Everybody thought it was real.
No reason to think it wasn't real.
And everyone was trying to be very sensitive.
Well, except that I was like 35 saying I'm retiring from acting to be a rapper.
But that's what made it so electric is because everyone wanted to be really sensitive to, oh my God, what a tragic mistake this young actor is making.
I can just tell you that at SNL that night that I was there, you were there.
It was like late 2008, I think.
I think Archie had just been born and you were like, and I remember you were walking in, you guys were shooting stuff.
And then I forget where the band was and you guys came down onto the floor on 8H and you guys were shooting it.
And I remember everybody in the cast was like, what's going on?
What is happening?
You really had everybody fooled and like, yeah.
But you know, it wasn't to fool other people.

[Transcript] SmartLess / "Joaquin Phoenix"

What we discovered is the moment somebody knew what was going on that it wasn't real, I became terrible.

I started being really hammy and like winking at the camera.

And I think the whole trip was to try to get it to feel as real as possible.

And so the only way that it felt real was when other people believed it was happening and it forced me to try to play it as believably as possible.

And so that's why we just didn't want to tell anybody because the moment, because there were some friends that was like actor friends that I would do some scenes with.

And they, because they knew me so well, they figured it out.

And I would inevitably just really start overdoing it, just really kind of hamming it up.

And so we just discovered like very early on that when I, if somebody thought that it was real, it just made me embarrassed and scared.

And then I would just kind of be more internal with it and I think more believable.

So then just don't tell anyone, right?

Yeah. And it was awkward and uncomfortable.

And this girl, this actress that was there, she emailed me like a couple of these later.

And she just said like, I know what you're doing.

And I actually was so relieved because I was so embarrassed about it.

Did you respond? Did you confirm?

I did not. I did not.

Yeah.

By the way, I tried to, I tried to do this thing with this guy, Bob, this writer yesterday on set.

And we were like, it's April Fools and we're like, and I don't do April Fools.

But I was like, he was like, just pretend to fire me in front of the crew.

And I was like, okay.

And then so we got later in the day and I'd sort of forgotten about it.

And then he walked out and then we started this argument and it got really awkward.

But I had to commit to it because in the middle of it, I'm like, fuck.

And it felt so like sort of status wise, I felt shitty.

Like an asshole.

Yeah.

And I hated that feeling.

And I was like, why don't you get the fuck out?

Well, why do you even bother showing up?

If you're going to just pitch me shitty jokes and get the fuck out.

And I started going like that.

Anyway, we sort of got to the end of it.

And I finally said April Fools after a few minutes and the fucking crew, it got really quiet and it wasn't fun.

No.

And made them all feel like comfortable.

It fucking sucked.

Wait, how did that all end up?

I don't remember how that all finished up.

[Transcript] SmartLess / "Joaquin Phoenix"

When did the curtain come down on all of that?

Was it on the release of it?

Yeah, on the release.

And at that point, we'd been shooting for like two years, I think, or a year and a half or something.

And I had been so looking forward to this moment of saying like it wasn't real.

Because it had just been so uncomfortable.

And I just had avoided so many friends because I just didn't know how to kind of like keep up the rules.

And then so, and I can't remember how we kind of, you know, released it and said, oh, it wasn't real. Nobody believed us.

They suddenly thought like, oh yeah, of course, now after you fucked your career, you're trying to say that this is like this spoof.

Oh, they thought you like had regrets and come back.

No way.

And so I was like, oh, I fucking can't, can't win.

But then you showed them what was up, what you came back with the master, right?

Wasn't that, wasn't that what followed?

Well, that was, yeah, I mean, the thing is, is that as a product of this, of this, of I'm still here, I think at that point, a lot of people that maybe would consider hiring me were like, even if it's not real, you have to be kind of fucking nuts to do this.

So he's probably, probably not something you want to work with anyways.

And I remember my, my options.

A PTA was like, bring it on.

Yeah.

The options at the time were just left a lot to be desired in terms of work.

And I remember really at one point just really being desperate and feeling like, well, I actually really fucked myself.

And I can't, I can't get a, get a job.

And I was really considering doing this, this movie that was a terrible movie.

I knew it was terrible, but I was like, I just have to get back and show people that this wasn't fucking real.

And I almost did it.

And actually my, my, my agent, Boomer, who was actually, he was the assistant of my original agent, Patrick Weitzel.

And he'd started working with me.

At first I was like, oh, this fucking bait and switch.

Like I'm working with your assistant now.

And then I remember talking to Boomer and I was saying, look, man, I'm just, I'm lost.

I'm desperate.

It's the first time in my life, like I don't feel like I know what, what to do.

And I'm asking for advice.

I've never done that.

You know, I always really have a strong sense of like what I want to do.

And he was like, do you have to do this movie?

[Transcript] SmartLess / "Joaquin Phoenix"

I said, what do you mean?
Does it matter to you?
And I was like, no.
He goes, well, then why are you doing it?
And I really needed that at that moment.
Like I just, I felt so fucking lost and confused.
And it was really, it was a really important moment for me.
And so I said no to the movie.
And, and then a couple of months later, Amanda Demi reached out to me and she said, hey, Paul's trying to get in touch with you.
No way.
And he sent the script over.
And I remember looking, you know, through the script and there was Freddie and master.
And I was like halfway through and I was like, was no way.
He's calling me for one of those parts.
You know, so I called him.
I said, what, what character am I supposed to read?
Cause I figured it was like something that pops up, you know, for a couple of scenes.
And he was like Freddie.
And I didn't even finish the script.
And I had to prevent myself from saying like, yes, right there.
So it's halfway through.
And I was like, just fuck.
Yeah.
I couldn't believe that he wanted me for that film.
That's so cool.
Well, that's, that's, before we let you go, I want to ask you just real quickly about Napoleon.
And it's one of the movies I'm looking most forward to seeing coming up.
It seems like that was a really robust shoot.
I mean, period and Ridley Scott and that subject matter.
I mean, was it as epic as it sounds like?
What can you tell us about that, if anything?
Yeah, it was.
It was a fucking massive production.
The amazing thing about Ridley is he's like overseeing this massive machine,
just like hundreds of extras, eight cameras, you know, these huge locations.
And he can just pivot like that.
He could arrive on set and make a discovery in the moment and feel like the scene is maybe leading in like a new direction.
And he's just fine.
Like he will adjust, he will adjust the camera.
He will adjust to the performance.
Like if there's something that feels honest and real and like a worthwhile exploration.
He'll turn a steamer ship around, right?

[Transcript] SmartLess / "Joaquin Phoenix"

And it's so impressive to me because, yeah, I mean, I don't know how much we were spending a day, but it was, it was a lot.

And I had a great experience with him, you know, all those years ago on Gladiator.

And so I just was always, always wanted to work with him again.

That's so cool.

You know, I know we're going to let you go because you're going to get back.

But, you know, hearing you talk, I've never met you.

I know you probably hate this, but I'm a huge fan of yours.

And you are an inspiration to me and tons of other actors.

So much respect for you.

I know you hate that because it feels false, but it's not.

But you're married.

You have a baby boy of purpose with animal rights activism.

You have a great career.

You have all this stuff going on in your life.

Are you able to sit back and just kind of absorb all that?

Or do you have a defense mechanism where you're just like, no, I got to, I just, I know everything's great.

I just got to keep going.

I just got to keep going to challenge myself the next thing.

Or can you really sit back and absorb all the great things that have happened to you?

As you get older, it all becomes easier.

I'm fully cognizant of what a charmed life I have.

It has exceeded my expectations or my greatest dreams.

I'm so fucking grateful for what I have, the family and friends that I have and the opportunity for work.

I never imagined it would be like this and it has been so fulfilling.

So I really do appreciate it and value the opportunity that I've had.

But I still want more experiences.

I just love making films.

I love collaborating with people.

It's like so exciting to talk about makeup and hair.

You're sitting around with all these people that are really good at what they do.

And you get to kind of like create something together.

It's just an incredible opportunity.

I love that you said that because you said it before too when you were talking about all the people on set.

And I don't think people appreciate enough.

And I love that you said it.

And I always think about it.

Everybody on set, no matter what their job is, everybody is a filmmaker.

Everybody is part of the process in that way.

And too often people get...

You see people who sort of...

[Transcript] SmartLess / "Joaquin Phoenix"

I don't know, they don't spend the time and energy and they sort of disregard those people.
It's like, mother fucker, every single person here is making this film together.
There's nobody there that doesn't have to be there.
It's something a lot of people don't realize.
Walk your incredible at it.
Please keep going.
We'll take twice as much.
But I know you got a kid to raise and Rooney to hang out with.
She's awesome too.
Please say hi to her.
She found us our dog.
We've got a brand new dog.
She found us our dog, our dog Gary.
He's a real cutie.
We love you and thank you.
And say hi to Todd and Larry and have a great day of work.
I hope this has been okay.
I feel like it was...
No dude, it's been awesome.
You've been very, very generous.
Wait, before you go, how do you get into Joker?
No.
See, we ended up talking about the process and nobody got hurt.
No, but in a good way.
Thank you, man.
Thank you for taking the time.
I know you're about to start work.
Very nice of you to do this, buddy.
Very nice.
No, thank you guys.
Honestly, it was painless.
Painless.
Kind of.
We'll take it.
When you're done, hurry home and we'll talk some more.
Okay, great.
Thank you all so much.
Thank you.
Have a good day.
See you, man.
Bye walk.
Bye.
Man.
Amazing.

[Transcript] SmartLess / "Joaquin Phoenix"

No, that's a...

This is an artist.

This is an actor.

This is an artist.

And did you know him, Jason, for a long time?

Yes, now we don't spend every day with one another by any stretch, but we've known each other for a long time.

We've got some very close mutual friends and he's a guy I would love to talk further with, deeply with, at length with, but as you can tell, he doesn't really enjoy talking about the stuff that we're all fascinated with about him, you know, and that's probably why he's so goddamn good at what he does is because maybe he just doesn't care to look at, you know, how the magic trick is done.

He just, it's something he's great at.

It's something that he enjoys.

That's what I was getting at and I put in, he was like, no, no, no, you know, I forgive those people for, you know, talking about the process.

What I meant more about the people who go out of their way, they're like, look at my process.

Right.

It's so difficult what I do.

That's what I meant.

Like when they offer it first.

Yeah.

Yeah.

When they offer it first and they're like, my whole thing, my whole identity is wrapped around how I do it and I want everybody to know and to think that and be impressed by my process, which he is like further, that couldn't be further removed from that.

He's like, man, I don't want to tell you any of it.

He's also one of those actors.

I love watching and trying to understand what that character must be thinking.

Like he's a very internal actor and you kind of, if I knew what he was thinking and I knew how he was doing it, or if I knew that much about him, if he did a bunch of press and all that stuff, it'd be hard for me to buy him being somebody else.

So I kind of liked that he's mysterious.

When you watch him do like, like I was thinking the last thing I saw him in was Joker and you watch him in that performance.

Amazing.

Yeah.

Incredible.

You know, millions of people love it.

Some people don't.

Whatever you think that when you watch him, he's so compelling, Jason, like you say, because you're like, what is he?

He's so inhabiting it in those moments and he has these moments where he take and you're

watching and you're thinking like exactly that.

What is he thinking?

How is he?

Where is he now?

Where it says he's more into the work than all of the other stuff.

But he's also, I don't know.

I mean, if it sounds so fucking natural to say, but he manages to do something that I love when I watch actors is their ability to communicate vulnerability and humanness and flaws and elements of being broken because we're all broken.

We're all vulnerable, but we all learn these different, you know, skins of trying to like hide it.

And he is so courageous just as a person who was talking about making a fool out of himself of being kind of warts and all like, look at all my flaws and he finds those in every character because that's all part of it, I suppose, is just being not fully put together, you know, with his characters.

He's only the, he's only the second, but he is only the second guest we've had who is Kylan Siggs during the interview.

Oh yeah.

Who was, Sean Penn was the other one, right?

Yeah.

Yeah.

Kylan Siggs.

You haven't smoked yet during an interview, have you?

No, I did when I was in London, remember?

I was recording from London.

I did a couple of times.

So that was, what was that called if you smoke a cigarette over there?

Oh, crushing.

It's not crushing, but it's crushing.

Don't say it.

Don't say it.

We'll have to lift it.

We know what you're going to say.

Teases Sean.

Don't say it.

I was just curious.

I don't know what it's called.

Sean, you're trying to bait him into a cancellation.

Are you looking to recast, are you looking for a new third?

No, you can crush some fags over here.

Wait, Sean.

Oh, Jesus, Sean, for fuck's sake, what is wrong with you?

Well, I'm talking about what would the term be, what would the term be, though, speaking of which, if you liked men and you liked women, yeah, you'd be, oh, that you'd be, bye, guys.

[Transcript] SmartLess / "Joaquin Phoenix"

We haven't done this to straight up, bye.

Yeah.

Oh, I know.

Smart.

Smart.

Smart.

Smart.

Smart.

Smart.

Smart.

Smart.

Smart.

SmartLess is 100% organic and artisanly handcrafted by Bennett Barbaco, Michael Grant Terry, and Rob Amjarf.

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[Transcript] SmartLess / "Joaquin Phoenix"

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