

The Tim Ferriss Show Transcripts

Episode 71: Jon Favreau

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Tim Ferriss: Hello ladies and gents. This is Tim Ferriss, and welcome to another episode of the Tim Ferriss show, where I deconstruct world-class performers to figure out what makes them tick, and moreover, what are the tools, tricks, tactics, routines, books, whatever, secret snacks that you can replicate – that you can actually use in your daily life or in your career, or in your personal endeavors and your journey into life itself. Wow, that was profound. Anyway, my guest for this episode is just a tremendous, tremendous man. He is an actor, writer, director, and producer. His name is Jon Favreau. I've been hugely impressed by Jon, and we've had an opportunity to spend some time together. He is a man of many talents. He burst onto the acting scene with his role in *Rudy*. Then he established himself as a writer with the iconic cult hit *Swingers*, in which he starred, and many of you have seen it.

We have a lot of stories about *Swingers*, which I was surprised by, and I had done a lot of homework. Then Favreau made his feature film directorial debut with *Made*, which he also wrote and produced. His other directing credits include *Iron Man* and *Iron Man 2*, *Cowboys and Aliens*, *Elf*, and that was a real turning point for him. So he did get into that, and I did not know that he was involved with *Elf* before I really dug into it. *Zathura* and *Chef*, which he wrote, produced, directed, and starred in. And the way he approached making *Chef* was very, very fascinating. And as someone who's trying to create myself, in more than one way, I suppose – I'm creating books and podcasts, and now TV shows, and I have news coming related to that – I was very, very interested in how he approached doing *Chef*, which I fell in love with.

And that's actually how we ended up connecting. It was through *Chef*, and I went on Twitter, and then we connected. Had a short exchange on Twitter, and we also ended up investing in a couple of startup companies together. Okay. So lots of commas. This guy does everything. Some of his recent acting credits include *The Wolf of Wall Street* and *Identity Thief*, and he's done much, much more. He is currently directing the live action feature film that I'm dying to see, because I'm obsessed with *The Jungle Book*. This is

Disney's adaptation, which is set to be released in April 2016. So without further ado, I invite you into the mind and story, some of which are very funny – the stories of Jon Favreau.

Jon, welcome to the show.

Jon Favreau: Thank you.

Tim Ferriss: Thank you so much for taking the time. I've really been looking forward to this.

Jon Favreau: Oh, good.

Tim Ferriss: And I suppose we could start, perhaps, at the beginning. And one of these questions that I like to sometimes ask is what albums or bands you listened to in high school. What was your go-to music?

Jon Favreau: Wow. That's a really nice one. Let's see. I liked – the earliest music I listened to that I can remember actually having like an album of was – I remember the Animal House soundtrack of all the old music, like the '60s music, and then Billy Joel. I grew up in New York, so Billy Joel. And my first rock album I ever bought was Led Zeppelin. It was Led Zeppelin. I was in high school already. And then I was in high school in the '80s, so then you had like the Ramones around in New York, and Queens, where I'm from. So it was an interesting time. And then I – there was a little bit of overlap with CBGBs as I got older in high school, but that was more for the scene, because it was cool, rather than the music itself, which was I don't find myself listening to too much.

Tim Ferriss: I ended up getting into Billy Joel myself. I was – well, I was a Metallica sort of heavy metal head, and I got into Billy Joel because I was a bus boy and waited on him at one point –

Jon Favreau: Oh really?

Tim Ferriss: On Long Island, and he was the coolest –

Jon Favreau: Oh, that's nice.

Tim Ferriss: Guy I'd ever met. He would buy a cup of coffee and give me a 20 as a tip, which was a lot of money to me at the time.

Jon Favreau: Oh, that's great.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah.

Jon Favreau: That's a good thing to remember, by the way. That's pretty good. That's not – and in the greater scheme of things, he could probably afford it. But it made a big difference. Look at that.

Tim Ferriss: Huge impression.

Jon Favreau: I mean, he made a fan out of you.

Tim Ferriss: I still remember it to this day.

Jon Favreau: Just remember how – now we may not have the same exact frame of reference. What are you – I'm 48 years old.

Tim Ferriss: So I'm ten behind, roughly. I'm 37 right now. So that was a golden oldie. You were listening to the oldies.

Jon Favreau: Right. He was still recording when I was listening to him.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, he was still – I mean, everyone – the hush came over all the wait staff when he came in.

Jon Favreau: Yes, in Long Island, especially.

Tim Ferriss: Oh, yeah. Absolutely. Out by Montauk. And the – I remember the waiter's name, Gavin. He was supposed to wait the table, and he said, "All right. I'm gonna do you a favor today, Ferriss. I'm gonna give you that table."

Jon Favreau: Because he knew you'd get broed out so hard with the –

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, exactly. What was your experience in high school? What was it like? Can you paint a picture?

Jon Favreau: High school was – let's see. I was – I had just gone to Bronx High School of Science, which was a public school that you had to take a test for in New York. It was a very good school. It had been around for a while. And the New York public school system was very good at the time. I think it still is. If you do well, you will never outgrow the public school system. There's always room for people who are – have – who acquire different education needs in every way. And I know my dad, who was a public school teacher, and I feel pretty strongly about that system. And especially having lived in other cities, too, that I really grew to appreciate it. And then the Bronx High School of Science was one of the flagship schools for – it was at Stuyvesant Brooklyn Tech. All of these free

schools. But I did have to commute all the way from Queens to the Bronx, so it was about an hour and a half each way.

But I was around other people who were more academically inclined. But I also met people from every different borough and all walks of life, because the one thing that unified us was that we all passed this test. And you'd have a lot of different socioeconomic backgrounds because, again, it was a free school. And so I had the good fortune of meeting the brightest from every community. So everybody that I met – if I met a kid from Harlem, he was a really smart kid from Brooklyn. If I met someone from Brooklyn, from Riverdale – so you really had all walks of life. I didn't realize it at the time, because I grew up in New York, so diversity was just something you grew up with, especially as you traveled through different boroughs. You just met new people from all over the place. Or if you worked in the city, you met people from everywhere. And that was a good experience too. You learn a little bit. I know you like to speak a lot of languages. You get to know how to curse in every language.

Tim Ferriss: I try. That's usually what you pick up first, yeah.

Jon Favreau: It's – you do. Greek, and yeah. In Spanish. So but it was – so you met a lot of great kids. But they were kind of nerdy kids. They weren't big on sports teams, things like that. The long commute time, lot of homework. So I – early on, the first thing from high school that I got into through that crowd was Dungeons and Dragons. That was something I was really into. Then I kind of outgrew that a bit, more socially than anything. But I always liked fantasy. I always liked that swords and sorcery stuff, and science fiction. And then I moved more into – because remember, I graduated in '84, so it was the early '80s. That's when also punk rock was kind of in its heyday, and there were a lot of clubs downtown that were going strong that you could go to.

So – and we were from all the different boroughs, so we were very comfortable going into Manhattan. That was kind of the central point for us. This was still in high school. Still in high school. Never really was a – the kids from the city, from Manhattan, were more the – a little bit more socially advanced, and could actually get into these clubs.

Tim Ferriss: A little edgier.

Jon Favreau: Yeah. We're from the – we're the bridge and tunnel crowd, so we didn't really end up in the nightlife too much. But you were

exposed to it, and you were going down to Greenwich Village, and hanging out in Washington Square Park. And also, that was a lot of when I got introduced to cinema, because it was pre-VCR. The only way you'd see a movie is if it was in a movie theater, if it was on television. And so I remember going to a lot of the revival houses. First with my dad, when I was younger, and then when I was in high school, going on my own down to like the Cinema Village. All around NYU, down there. There were a lot of great revival houses, and seeing the films of like Kurosawa, Scorsese. And just being introduced to a lot of stuff I would not otherwise have access to.

Tim Ferriss: Was there any particular film that was the inflection point for you wanting to focus on that craft yourself?

Jon Favreau: I didn't want to do it till much later. Like it was never a realistic option for me. So all the way through high school, college, it was never something that I thought I would do. It wasn't till I was 22 that I actually decided to try in earnest to get into the entertainment. But I always enjoyed acting, and I always loved movies. And I was an usher, actually, during high school, at an old ex-vaudeville house, the RKO Keith's in Flushing. And as an usher, you got to see movies over and over again. And it was still – the architecture, the projection room, all of it really felt like something out of a time machine. So I was exposed to that side of the movie business first. And it was really cool. I liked it. I like movies. It was an old, rundown theater. It's not there anymore. But it was really wonderful seeing the – you kind of could see the history of it if you looked behind the curtain. Because first it was an old vaudeville palace, and then it started showing films, and then eventually it got broken up into a triplex. So you had this beautiful, elegant, Moore-ish style – just again, the movie palaces of the vaudeville era, and the post-vaudeville era broken down into the multiplexes that didn't have a lot of personality back in the '80s. I guess the '70s started that. But it still had some of the gloss of it, and some of the beauty. And but of course there were still the dressing rooms from the vaudeville days, and there were sub-basements, and you went behind the screen in the big theater, and you saw all the ropes and rigging from its live theater days. So it was kind of nice, and there was a sense of nostalgia, but it was also just overrun by mice, and it wasn't – just, it wasn't well maintained. So there was sadness to it. So there was – and I have a nostalgic feel towards the movie business even from before I was around because I was exposed to all that stuff. And of course, all the movies keep the legacy alive as well. And that was part of the fun part about coming out here, even when I was just auditioning

for the first time for bit parts. You would audition on the lot. You would go, you'd get a drive on, and then you'd be walking around like the Fox lot, see the New York streets, or Warner Brothers, and see all the back lots as you're walking from your parking to the appointment. And you just felt so lucky to be in the business. You were like; I'm somehow connected to this industry. And even though we were just like the guy sweeping up after the parade, we still were – what? And give up showbiz? Even the guy shoveling after the elephant, it feels like he's part of the show. And I was that guy.

Tim Ferriss: And you dropped out of college. Is that right?

Jon Favreau: I did, yeah. It was – well, misleading, because I took –

Tim Ferriss: You took a lot of credits.

Jon Favreau: I left to go to – I got a job offer. I got a job offer to work –

Tim Ferriss: What was the job?

Jon Favreau: On Wall Street.

Tim Ferriss: Got it.

Jon Favreau: For a friend's dad who needed to hire an assistant. And I worked there for a year. And it wasn't a great fit for me. But I had not been a great student in college. I'd gone to a very academically oriented high school, as I said, and then I was on the waiting list for Cooper Union to go to school for engineering. Cooper Union's a great school in Greenwich Village that is – it's all scholarship. It would have been a great fit for me, and again, my family was – my dad was a teacher, so there wasn't a lot – we didn't have a lot of dough for a private education. But the idea of Cooper Union, I would have gotten a great opportunity. Waiting list, never got called up. I ended up going to Queens College, which was a city school. Good school, too. And but never really found my footing, what I wanted to do. Was more interested in what was going on socially at school rather than academically. I didn't really have a major. I didn't find myself excelling. I got by, but I didn't excel. And then after I'd worked for a year and went back to school, then I got dean's list straight As, because that year of working in the real world really seasoned me a bit, and it got me – I think matured me a bit. And then after I was back in school, and back on the dean's list, that's when I went cross country, and that's when I

discovered people doing improvisation in Chicago, and decided I wanted to join that circus. And that's when I dropped out.

Tim Ferriss: Got it. And the – when you came back and were more seasoned, and hit the dean's list, was that because of the structure of working in the adult world, or was it because you saw the benefits of focus rewarded in, say, a company, or what?

Jon Favreau: Well, kind of the opposite of that. I felt that you – at school, if you worked at all, it got recognized. Every once in a while, an asshole teacher that busted my ass, and the guy's still giving me bad grades, but that's like a rarity. Usually if you're not doing good in school, you don't like the teacher. You're not coming halfway. You're not doing your job. But if you do your work, you'll get an A. And there's something real egalitarian about that, whereas in the workspace, you're expected to bust your ass, and rarely do you get recognized for the work you do. Because somebody else is either – they're either oblivious because they're so hung up on what they're dealing with, your boss, or somebody else is – there's weird office politics, or you're just – it's just expected of you to do your work. So it felt like a whiff of reality, of the real world, where it's not revolving around you. Whereas in school, even if you're part of a big lecture hall, at the end of the day, it's about you. You're paying money to be there. They're gonna give you a grade based on the work you do. And it's focused around how you absorb and fit the work, and how you fit into the system.

In the work space, you're a cog, and you can figure out how to move your way up, but it's not incumbent upon them to recognize you. You have to make your own way. So it felt like a very – a much – it felt like I was going back to a kinder, gentler situation when I went back to school, where I put in the same work I would've on Wall Street, and then I was getting straight As. So it felt good. But I also felt in another way that it let some of the air out of the balloon, that I got a whiff of what real life was.

Tim Ferriss: What was waiting in the wings?

Jon Favreau: And it was kind of scary that it was like, okay. Now I'm gonna work 50 weeks a year to get two weeks off. And I'm gonna live in those two weeks. Because pretty much everything happening during the week, you're either recovering over the weekends, or you're – everything's about getting ready for work, I just came home from work, decompressing, and just getting back on the horse the next day. And especially in Manhattan, where you're – I

was commuting from the boroughs also. And then I had gone cross country, and seen how everybody was living, and I had –

Tim Ferriss: What sparked that cross country trip?

Jon Favreau: I think it was that I had worked for a year, right? And I had saved up enough money for a motorcycle, and that was sort of a fantasy to go – you watch like Easy Rider.

Tim Ferriss: Easy Rider, I was just gonna say.

Jon Favreau: Well that's the thing. Oh man. And so I went cross country, and there was a motorcycle rally in Sturgis, South Dakota, that happened to be lining up with when I wasn't in school, or something. I don't even remember if I still in – was in school. It's going back many years now, in the '80s. But I remember saying, oh, let me go check this out. And then once I was all the way in South Dakota, the girl I was dating at the time was in San Francisco, and it looked close on the map. And I was like, let me just –

Tim Ferriss: You're like, it's only three and a half inches.

Jon Favreau: I'll never be closer. And that's back when – I was just thinking about this the other day. It was back before you could just go online and get a map. Like you had to belong to like the Triple AAA and Triptych something, where they would send you maps with highlighters showing you the routes. So you had this map that was like folded up in your saddlebag, and you would look at it. It really was like the Old West, and you're like on horseback going cross country. And it was such a long, harrowing trip. And I remember how many people in the country look like they weren't enjoying themselves, the way they live. And some people were having a great time. But like there seemed to be a lot of variety in the way people lived, and the lifestyles people had. And I think also having grown up in a big city, I didn't realize what rural America was like, and really how big the country was, and how much variety there was.

And also the other thing was how personable people are. And here was on a motorcycle, and I was young, and I was not user friendly. I didn't have the Buckminster Fuller banker look. I was a guy climbing all – covered with dust, and young, and New York plates on my bike, and people were really cool to me. Like people really – when – if I broke down, people helped me out. I helped other people out You sort of develop a sense of how you fit into the

world, and how it's not about you. You're one little piece of the whole thing. And you start to appreciate how big the world is, and that you have to figure out how to fit into that. Whereas I think your whole life, especially the way I was brought up, it's more about how does it fit into my world? So it's that perspective that I think we all continue to struggle with as we get older, how we fit into this whole thing. How this whole – it's not fair feeling is one that you feel a lot more when you're young than when you're older.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah. There's something magical about motorcycles, too, and being part of the environment, as opposed to inside the bubble that is the chastity of the car.

Jon Favreau: Yeah. Would not recommend it, by the way. Very dangerous. I'm not – my buddy is in a wheelchair now who introduced me to it. It fits in really well with your sense of invulnerability that comes at that age. Not something I would do. I thought if I could afford one I would. So let me just say to the people listening out there, I don't want to turn this into something where I'm proselytizing for it, because it's not something that I do anymore, but it was definitely a bit of a transcendent experience that you're flying, and you are so vulnerable, and so much – you're just taking it in in a much different way. It's like a ride.

Tim Ferriss: So I'm gonna love to ask you about Chicago. The motorcycle, also just a side note for folks, I totaled a bike, and at that point sold it because I had a friend get – fantastic rider. Had a car run a red light, hit him at an intersection, and cut off one of his legs. And when your body is the bumper – my mom actually calls motorcycles donor cycles, because she's been a PT for 30 plus years.

Jon Favreau: That's right. Brain injuries with perfect organs.

Tim Ferriss: So – and it's not the rider. It's the people around you. And under the right circumstances, it's great. But the way – I'm very fortunate that I made it out intact because it's bad odds.

Jon Favreau: You're playing slots. It's not the best game.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah. It has nothing to do with how good you are as a rider, like you said. So dialing back the clock a little ways. So – and I won't spend too much time on this, but I was a runt up until about sixth grade. I got the living hell beat out of me all the time. And D&D was my refuge.

Jon Favreau: Oh yeah? Okay.

Tim Ferriss: So I still have all of my modules. I'm one of those guys.

Jon Favreau: I'm completely self-conscious about the fact that I played. It takes a lot for me to talk freely like this about it. I feel a weird shame for some reason.

Tim Ferriss: Why do you feel shame about it?

Jon Favreau: I don't know.

Tim Ferriss: Because I feel this – I kind of wear it as a badge of honor, in a way, because I run into so many people who also had that shared experience.

Jon Favreau: Well, I think I've grown into it. Like I think I'm accepting of it now. But it was such a way I had defined myself for the first few years, like for like a freshman and sophomore year in high school. And that was like what – and then when I didn't do it anymore, you're so quick to say – because I find that there's nothing more embarrassing than whatever the last phase you just went through was. And I continue to feel that way. Thank god my life is not – all the things and ways you embarrass yourself, all the haircuts you've had, the ways that you've dressed, the music that you listened to –

Tim Ferriss: I used to have a rat tail for years.

Jon Favreau: Growing up – exactly. And now I'm of the age where for the children's generation of this age, that's all gonna be well-documented, and very hard to escape.

Tim Ferriss: Right.

Jon Favreau: Every single Facebook picture you've put up will be there on some level. So but you're right. I think that there was tremendous value in it. I have an affection for it. I remember too much of it. It really took up a lot of my brain space when I was around that age, whatever, 15 or 14. I forget what age I was playing. But it also created a set of – I think it encouraged a set of skills that is not that unlike filmmaking. Because you're telling a story, and the people who are experiencing that story – especially if you're like a dungeon master. You're telling the story in a way that where the

people who are participating, who've signed on, are experiencing it in a very subjective way.

And there appears to be a certain level of spontaneity or free will, and there is, built into it. But you're creating a context and a world and an experience that's very specifically curated. So you're guaranteeing a sort of experience regardless of what they do within it. And I think when you're watching movies, the illusion is that you're subjectively experiencing the film as an individual, and you're kind of making those decisions in a de facto way through the character that you're following the film through. If a character in a film ever makes a decision that the audience doesn't feel that they agree with, it changes the experience. It becomes like a horror movie, where don't go in that room! It becomes a much different type of experience. Or if you're watching a character that's not – that you're watching because they're an antihero. When you're watching Travis Bickle is a different experience than most films, because most films, you're going to walk through it experiencing things that the characters do. They're gonna do a smarter version, usually, of something you would've done, and they're gonna be facing a lot of consequences. And you're rooting for them, because you and them are kind of riding next to – you're the copilot of the protagonist. And in roleplaying games, there's – it's a similar experience, but a different medium.

Tim Ferriss: Were you – did you have a particular race of preference? Were you a dwarf? An elf?

Jon Favreau: I liked all those. I didn't like the elves so much. I liked the dwarves. I liked the hobbits.

Tim Ferriss: I was always a grey elf.

Jon Favreau: Were you? That makes sense for you. I don't remember, what's the gray? Is the gray different from –

Tim Ferriss: I just liked the –

Jon Favreau: Those wood ones?

Tim Ferriss: Yeah. There were also – I think it was the [inaudible] elf. Those were the dark elves.

Jon Favreau: There was the dark ones.

Tim Ferriss: They were the –

Jon Favreau: I remember more from the Tolkien stuff now. It sort of replaced it. Because I was –

Tim Ferriss: They do blend together, but.

Jon Favreau: They do. Well, yeah. Or very close. But I liked the hobbits because I read the book *The Hobbit* before I ever played the game. It was an important book to me. And I always liked – I kind of relate to that character because he just wants to be comfortable, and living in like the nice environment, but then is drawn out into the adventure, and then returns. It's very Joseph Campbell, that reluctant hero. And I think that that's a good metaphor for – what I've experienced is that – I've never jumped into the stuff. I guess maybe there's been a little bit of boredom and unrest earlier in my life, but generally, I kinda like – I like things kind of boring. But then every once in a while, I just – there's a little bit of that adventure blood in me that forces me out of it. I think we're different people from reading, and knowing –

Tim Ferriss: You have more self-preservation instinct, I think, because –

Jon Favreau: It's either that, or it's complacency, or something. But I do it kind of in spite of who I am as opposed to because I have this wanderlust, and I can't sit still. I just get bored sometimes, and I want variety, or I get – something captures my fancy, and I get really curious and want to try something new. I'm an only child. I tend to do it more for me, I find, than to show other people. I tend to be very solitary on that front.

Tim Ferriss: What is the itch that you're scratching with that that novelty satisfies, do you think?

Jon Favreau: I don't know. I think it's different as I get older, because now it becomes about what impressions I had from younger in life, and things on that checklist of – you know how people buy the car that they never could afford later, or they date the girl they couldn't date? There's a sense of somehow working on your score card. But for me, it's like I want – as I get older especially, it's like I wanted to try to sculpt. And I started –

Tim Ferriss: Sculpt, literally.

Jon Favreau: Yeah. I literally like sculpting, and I'm lucky that I work with such talented people of all different diverse skill sets in the movie business, that when I want to sculpt, I talk to somebody who's an

expert sculptor, and they put together a little package for me of – and a list of tools I need, and the next thing you know, without a lot of wasted time, I’m sculpting. I always drew, and I always would sculpt a little bit here and there, whatever, if I was in like a class, or playing with the kid’s Play Do, and daddy was always good at making –

Tim Ferriss: Step aside, kid. Let me show you how it’s done.

Jon Favreau: Well, yeah. You get a lot of – when you go parent teacher day, or whatever, the kids would bring dad to school, or whatever that thing is when daddy could make something cool out of Play Do, he’d get –

[Crosstalk]

Tim Ferriss: Some street cred.

Jon Favreau: Yeah.

Tim Ferriss: So what material were you or are you using?

Jon Favreau: On that? Chevant.

Tim Ferriss: Chevant.

Jon Favreau: Something called chevant, which is one of those, I think it’s petroleum-based or wax-based clays that doesn’t dry. And you have to heat up to get it to be viable.

Tim Ferriss: So you get these blocks that look kind of like plastic explosives, I guess.

Jon Favreau: Yeah, kind of.

Tim Ferriss: I know what you’re talking about, yeah.

Jon Favreau: And it was developed, I think, for the automotive industry, so you get some really nice textures out of it. And it’s just fun to do because you’re doing better than you thought you could.

Tim Ferriss: Now why sculpture as opposed to – I wanted to be a color penciller for almost ten years, so I did a lot of illustration. Why sculpture as opposed to something else, like watercolors, or?

Jon Favreau: Oh, because – I don't know. There's something fun. I did it – because you could give it to people. It's like a thing, a substantial thing that you have, or you could display, or you could give, or cast into a metal, or – I don't know. It just seemed kinda cool. I was messing around on the set of *Jungle Book* with – we had block of wax because there's a sequence where we have big beehives that we had to cast, and we had to cast it out of wax so it interacted in a way that was realistic. And so we had blocks and blocks of beeswax around. And so while I was on the set, on the many hours sitting at the – in the director's chair, I had a block of wax sitting there for about a month. And then the next thing you know, I asked for something to carve it with it – carve it with, and I got like some little carving tools. The next thing you know, I was carving a bear, and the next you know, it's like I pull over all these artists that are working on this, and say, well, what's – how should I – well, the bear's ears are a little far back. Move this a little farther – and so I was getting pointers. And everybody who would pass by would go, oh, look! It looks like a bear! So it's a little bit, oh, what a good boy am I, and something of to see at this age, honestly, it's like I'm very happy to be working in the field that I am. I feel like I'm learning constantly. But I understand why I think like Nick Nulty, I heard like loves glass blowing. Like I get it. I get why that's exactly the type of thing to be doing. And I did – actually, my experience was with cooking, with – I read your book, by the way. I know I've told you this, but let me tell you this on the podcast.

Tim Ferriss: I appreciate that.

Jon Favreau: The Four-Hour Chef. When I was preparing to do *Chef*, I was watching –

Tim Ferriss: Which blew my mind. I've said it to you, and I've said it on the Internets, but we're gonna dig into that. Lovely movie.

Jon Favreau: Thank you. It was a great movie. An important film for me, because it just – it allowed me to deal with themes that I felt were important, but also, it gave me the excuse to learn from great chefs, and work in the kitchens of great chefs to prepare for acting in the film. And I loved cooking, and I loved – and I never – Roy Cho, the chef who really was my partner in this, as he was preparing me, when we first started, he said, “You'll – a chef – when a chef,” because he was telling me these things to teach me, but also to understand insight as I told the story to make the film one that he and the community would like. He said, “When a chef sees a bag of shallots, they get excited because they're gonna get to peel all

the shallots.” And – which I thought was – it was confusing at first, but then after going through the culinary training and everything, it’s true. There’s something very meditative about preparing your *mise en place*. Because you’re dealing with sharp implements, and you have to get it perfect, and you can’t hurt yourself, and you can’t really do anything but this thing. But it doesn’t require all of your brain at the same time. And so you get into this really cool zone where you – everything’s so thoughtful that you’re doing. And by the time you actually prepare a meal with all of these *mise* that you prepare, that you get ready, there’s a tendency to be very tuned in to what you’re tasting, or what you’re presenting to your guests. Because they know the work. They’ve been watching you put work into it. And so the mindfulness that it implies, and demands in its preparation, but it also asks of the people who you’re sharing it with, it creates a nexus point of all the people, the way you’re all sharing a common experience at one moment, which is something I’ve grown to appreciate. And it’s a very elusive dynamic. As a dad, it’s very – being very present as you spend time with your kids, making sure you’re not checking your emails when you’re tucking the kids in, it’s – and with friends, and as a husband, there’s – it’s not something I did effortlessly a decade ago. And it’s something I’ve grown into. And I find that people, as they mature, they start to value that more. And so everything I look to do, whether it’s sculpture or – I would be a glass blower. I would love to play with that. It seems fascinating. Or any of these hobby type things, or the cooking, is all about being very present in that moment, and it’s a good counterbalance to the intensity with which I approach the work that I do.

Tim Ferriss: I think the word mindfulness is so appropriate for cooking. And I’ve found that what used to create so much stress, such a stress response in me, which was preparing food, has now become, like you said, almost this meditative practice, where I could meditate in the mornings, and I tend to do that, but I also find that if I just make food, make dinner, two or three times a week, and you have these knives, so you have to be present state aware, it has a tremendous decompressing effect. Are there any particular ingredients that you’re playing with these days, or anything that you’re –

Jon Favreau: Well, I like – ever since I made *Chef* and met Aaron Franklin down in Austin, I’ve been, over and over again, refining my smoked brisket, the Central Texas South smoked brisket. And to me, that’s like alchemy. There’s a certain amount of technique in the trimming, and in the way you – but mostly it’s about leaving it alone. It’s almost like baking in that way, like it’s chemistry. And

changing little factors, but taking whatever it is, 14 hours, to see how it turns out, they're something really rewarding about that. And it's also a flavor that people don't get anywhere else. So when you do it right, and people get to taste it, it's kind of a fun thing to share, because it's special. And it's only good for a short amount of time too. It's like –

Tim Ferriss: It's like coffee.

Jon Favreau: And then it kind of goes away. And then I like that. I like simple pasta dishes, very simple ones. Like there's a pasta, Scarpeta, the restaurant Scarpeta makes a really good pasta that's just in a tomato sauce that you could find online the recipe for. But making the pasta from scratch, infusing the oil, starting the tomato sauce from Roma tomatoes that you blanch and peel and slow cook and mash down into a sauce, and then mixing it with the infused olive oil. And then cooking that with the pasta water, and getting the right texture. And again, it's amazing, but it's only good for just a few minutes. And then with the pasta dishes it's great, because you pull together a group of people who are interested in doing it. Like it's a great thing to do if the family's on vacation someplace, or you're over at a relative's house. Especially because I have less and less things to talk about, because my contacts are so different from everybody else's, that if we talk about movies, it's not – I'm thinking about other things than the people talking to me are thinking about. And there's so little overlap with most people that I meet that cooking is great because it creates this context where everybody is on equal footing, and everybody has a different skill set and it becomes a real task that you have to be – you're interdependent with, and – I find I have endless patience to spend time with people that I don't know very well if you're working on a really intimate cooking project. And then at the end, we all serve it together, and we really feel like we fought a war together. It's a great bonding thing. I'm working on a kitchen at my house that's geared toward having like groups of people cook that feels more like a restaurant style.

Tim Ferriss: Big tabletops?

Jon Favreau: Yeah. And all like open shelving, and everything that you'd see – beautiful in the way a restaurant's beautiful. Not beautiful for a house, but the people who like to cook, it's like the perfect – like a lab. And it's fun because you're all gathered around, and I did it – my experience – the first time I did it like that was at the Skywalker Ranch, which was where we mixed the sound for a few movies. I've been working with them, I think, since *Iron Man*.

But for those of you who don't know, it's like a 5,000-acre ranch in Northern California in Marin that George Lucas put together, and oversaw the architecture for. And it started off as just a sound facility. Very high – it looks very low-tech. It looks like a winery, almost. But beautiful rolling hills with cattle grazing. A Victorian house on the hill where he does his editing, and where he uses his own bass. And other technical buildings that have cropped up around it. And it's state of the art mixing facility, sound facility, recording stages. So it's this very strange – and then a bunkhouse with themed rooms for the people who work there. Because you stay there when you work there, because it's so remote. And so each room is themed for either a director or a writer, and let's see. You have like the John Ford room. That's Western themed. The Akira Kurosawa room, Dorothy Parker room. And so you stay there, and during the day, there are restaurants that are open on the facility. At night, everything closes down, but there's a commercial kitchen in the common area, and a walk-in fridge. And so as we were making *Chef*, you're looking at these scenes over and over again, listening to the crackling of the frying food, and the pasta, and the olive oil, and the garlic simmering, and your mouth's watering all day. And each night, we would pick another recipe from the movie, and all of us, me and the editors, the sound crew, we'd all get together, and we'd cook together at night, and we'd cook all the dishes from the movie. And it was so much fun, because here we were in the middle of nowhere, really, in a very remote spot, and just together, the fireplace going, and all of us cooking together, and then you sit down for the meal, and you sleep good, and then we hit it the next morning. And we would do the next reel.

Tim Ferriss: Sounds like a hell of a routine. That sounds amazing.

Jon Favreau: It was great. It was really wonderful. So that's why I want to see if I can try to capture some of that at home.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah. The – one thing that's always struck me about a well-designed kitchen is just the elegance and the economy of movement that it provides for a chef, where they're never reaching too far for everything. I mean, you have everything in its place, right? The *mise en place*. And how quickly a good line cook, a chef, can work if they have all their items in the right place.

Jon Favreau: Yeah, it's true. It's interesting because I did – part of the training I did was working – first I went to some pretty accelerated culinary training that Roy sent me to, off with a French, to get the context before I ever entered a professional kitchen. And so I went

through all my mother's sauces, and my knife cuts, and basically an overview of what the first year of culinary students would deal with. Then I got to come into his kitchens. He has a few different restaurants and food trucks, too, and I spent time floating from restaurant to restaurant. First they let me like prep cook. So I was picking parsley, and you know what I mean?

Tim Ferriss: I've done that. I grew basil. They're like, you're holding up my station, Ferriss! I'm like, oh god.

Jon Favreau: Yeah. Like that's all they're gonna trust you with. And it's so like labor-intensive. And so you finally do that. And then eventually I worked my way up to the hot line. And on the hot line, then I started working – and then I worked the – pretty – about midway through, I started working on one of his Kogi trucks. And it reminded me – because there, you're in tight quarters too. It reminded me very much of bartending, which is what I did to make a living in college, and after college when I moved to Chicago as a bartender. And there's that dynamic of getting in the weeds. It's kind of halfway between being a chef and being a server, because you're preparing things, but you're also dealing with the public, and you're not doing anything that complicated. So you don't have the – there's not the elegance of being a chef, at least the type of bartender I was. I wasn't like a mixologist like you see now. But there is this – you do get into the weeds, and you have to do this dance with the people in a very small space. And I found that that rhythm was coming back to me as I was working, especially on that truck. Well, you know how to get out of the way. You pop in, you pop out. You reach around on somebody's left, on their right. You're behind them. You're not crashing into each other, and you're helping each other out, and you become like this big octopus together. And when you're working on the hot line, it's even more that way, because there's – behind you! There's like hot food coming through, people are speaking different languages, you're being asked to do things. You're being instructed, too. That's the other weird thing. It's not like they prepare you ahead of time and say, "Here's how you make everything. Let's train." Maybe when you first open a restaurant it's that way, but when you're working in an established kitchen, they basically just throw you on the line. And then the rush comes. And then they show you once how to do something, and then you just copy them, and maybe they show it to you again. And then the chef's watching you from a distance and saying, hey, you only put mayo on one side of the bun. It goes on both. There's a certain quality control aspect that the chef's – that's really what the chef's job is, is overseeing other people doing the work, and keeping the standards

to a certain consistency. And so there I was working, and little by little, first it's – I'm just doing the popcorn at A frame, and then I'm – the next thing you know, I'm pulling the burgers out, or doing the – assembling some sandwiches. The next thing you know, I'm plating. The next – so by the end of the Saturday dinner rush, there's a half dozen plates I'm helping with. And you start to appreciate how good these other people are. The people who work the broiler, or the sauté cook, or –

Tim Ferriss: The grill station.

Jon Favreau: Who's just nailing them. Making it perfect, and timing it just right, and then the one that I remarked at the most was the bus boy who knows just when to walk up to you with that deli container full of ice water, and like it's the best water you've ever had. Like I didn't even know I was thirsty, and then this guy this like 16-ounce – the quart size, like you get wonton soup in. That clear container. So those are all over kitchens, right, those deli containers. And they'll give you one full of ice water, and you'll drink it in like one sip. And it's the best thing you've ever had in your life. And as I was mentioning that to Roy, he says, "Now you're ready to make the movie. Now you've had that experience is what – how I know you're ready."

Tim Ferriss: So speaking of moments, when did you decide to write *Chef*? I'd love to talk a little bit about the writing process.

Jon Favreau: *Chef*. *Chef* was – okay. So remember, it's kind of hard out of context with what the *Swingers* experience was.

[Crosstalk]

Tim Ferriss: Well, let's talk about both.

Jon Favreau: So with *Swingers*, it was that I had not known I was gonna be a writer. Had received, from my dad, Final Draft, which was a program that is pretty user friendly, and formats your writing to look like a screenplay. And for people who are writers, or want to be writers, a lot of it is – there are subtle things that, much like a job – like a resume for a job. There are certain standards by how you're gonna put that together, so that when somebody receives that resume, it looks professional.

Tim Ferriss: The formatting.

Jon Favreau: The formatting. All that stuff. I don't know that much about just regular jobs, but I know like a lot of effort goes into the resume, a headshot for an actor. For a screenplay, as people receive the script, they're making a lot of little subconscious calculations and decisions about you based on what they're seeing. And a screenplay that's not formatted properly is something that's completely dismissed. And what was fun was when I received the program, I just typed a little bit. The next thing I know, it would look just like a real screenplay. And I had read enough of them from being an actor. And this was after I had already done *Rudy*. I had moved to Los Angeles. I thought that was gonna be my big break. But things weren't really popping for me. But I had read enough scripts, and knew enough about acting, to feel comfortable tapping away at a screenplay, never thinking anything was gonna happen with it. More to show my friends. You type for a half hour, an hour or two hours. The next thing you know, you get like a stack of eight pages, and it feels like you've got a piece of a screenplay there. So then it becomes like I just want to try this. It kind of goes back to the earlier conversation we were having about why do you do things? For you, it's that you can't sit still, and you're –

Tim Ferriss: That's part of it, yeah.

Jon Favreau: And you're super curious, and you've got a lot of energy, and you kind of hunger for it. I think with me, it's a little bit more erratic than that, where I just get – something bites me in the ass, and I want to try something. Like I'm just curious about something, if I could do something. But it's much subtler. And I just tap away at it, and peck away at it, and then it starts to look good, and then as it looks better, you start to build up – like with doing sculpture, like messing around a little bit. The next thing you know, oh, it kind of looks like a bear. Well, let me carve it a little bit better. Let me try it a little bit more. Let's see how far I could take this thing. And so with the screen play, it was kind of like that. And I showed it to some friends, showed it to the acting agent I had. People felt good about the *Swingers* screenplay, and then we –

Tim Ferriss: How long did it take you to get it to a first draft, let's just say?

Jon Favreau: Very fast. Because there was no pressure. I didn't have any – I would outline maybe a few pages ahead of where I was. I came from an improv background from Chicago. So it was really just characters talking to each other. The improv that I did was something called the Harold, which was Del Close invented, who was a great improv teacher.

Tim Ferriss: The Harold.

Jon Favreau: The Harold. Like the name.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, okay. Got it.

Jon Favreau: And it was one of those things like what do you call it? Harold. It was one of those – that’s how it got its name. Like the Beatles haircut, I think, had a name. I forget what the name was. But there’s – it’s long form, so you would start off and take one suggestion, and do three different scenes with different characters that were unrelated, all inspired by this one suggestion. And then you would have three beats of those scenes. And by the end, they would all interweave and connect, and come to some greater statement about the suggestion than just a short form joke oriented improvisational skit would. So it’s looking to bring improve into revealing – as a higher form to reveal greater truths about the suggestion by forming group mind with a team of improvisers who are used to working with one another. That was the aspiration for that.

But it did give me a set of skills, having done that in Chicago for a while, that you’re self-editing, you’re knowing when each scene should end. You’re bringing the next scene to begin, maybe after some time has passed, or with a plot point that had occurred, and you’re learning story. You’re learning story the hard way. You’re learning story in front of a bar full of people who paid \$4 to be in there, and they want to be entertained and laugh. But the laughter doesn’t last if there’s no story. Story is the king. And you think it’s about the laughs, but really, it’s about investing in the story being drawn in. And so I guess I had enough skills from that, and also read enough screen plays, and maybe the Dungeons and Dragons and stuff, and being a storyteller, knowing how to create a little bit of a world that here I was, unfolding the story about this group of friends in Hollywood, set in the same world I lived in. I had broken up, or been broken up with at the time, about a year earlier, so I was still – that was fresh in my mind, so that was one of the character’s dilemmas. And although it wasn’t really autobiographical, there were enough things that I could draw from. What’s the expression from Glen Garry Glen Ross? Always tell the truth. It’s the easiest thing to remember.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah.

Jon Favreau: Draw upon – if you’re gonna talk about a neighborhood, talk about the neighborhood you grew up in. Talk about the neighborhood you know. Even if it’s not you. But you’re gonna have a more consistent world that you’re developing than if you’re putting the on Mars, and you don’t understand Mars. So a lot of things got slugged in, and I wrote it fairly quickly. About two weeks.

Tim Ferriss: Two weeks.

Jon Favreau: It was very quick. And it didn’t change really that much after that.

Tim Ferriss: Did not change.

Jon Favreau: Did not. But I had – remember, I had written like sketches and things.

Tim Ferriss: Did you write it start to finish?

Jon Favreau: Yeah.

Tim Ferriss: Did you write it – you wrote it from the beginning to the end?

Jon Favreau: From the beginning to the end. A few things changed. Not much. Ten percent, over time.

Tim Ferriss: And that was in Final Draft?

Jon Favreau: Yeah. It was a good –

Tim Ferriss: Was *Chef* the same way, that you did it start to finish?

Jon Favreau: So *Chef*, didn’t – I’d written *Made* after that, a few years later, and then I had been hired as a writer based on *Swingers* to do script doctoring and things. And that’s where it gets tough because when you start getting paid to do something that you used to do for fun, you don’t want to do it for fun as much. And what was nice about it is that you can make a living enough for a single dude to be able to buy a house over a few years, and drive a new car, or new-ish car. But you can make a living just being a writer for hire. Because they’re always looking for people with fresh takes and new ideas in the writing area, because the very established writers are all – they’re busy. You get hired to do one thing, that could keep you busy for a year. So there’s always room for another writer once you kind of make that list. Unfortunately, if you’re not on the list, you can’t get in the door.

Tim Ferriss: And *Swingers* put you on the list.

Jon Favreau: *Swingers* put me on that list. So I went from an actor, and also people kind of knew me from my acting from *Rudy*, and so there's a bit of a novelty of being an actor that they recognize. And when you're already used to being in those rooms, you're already – people know who you are. You know who they are. You already have representation. So it's easier to get into that system. So that was a bit of a – I wouldn't say it's a life hack, but it's – am I using that term properly or not?

Tim Ferriss: I think that –

Jon Favreau: I'm trying to sound like I fit on your podcast here.

Tim Ferriss: Oh, you already fit on the podcast. You're doing great. I think the – it seems like you gave yourself sort of more tickets in the raffle, so to speak, than a lot of people get, because you had the writing, acting, directing irons in the fire. Not all necessarily at that point.

Jon Favreau: That's eventually. But in the beginning, remember, I'm trying to break into another field, right? So I'm like seeing how far I could take this thing. And the acting thing got me more raffle tickets in that sense. But it was an interesting way into writing. And much like how acting was a really interesting way into directing, because in directing, one of the disadvantages that most people other than me had was that if you're going to direct, the only way you can show people you're a director is by directing. There's no apprenticeship, per se, in directing. It's not like assistant directors. There's an apprenticeship. You could work your way up from a PA, work your way up to second second, second AD to first AD. You will hit the top of the food chain by learning from other people who are better than you. There's no room on the set for another – the director's assistant is not another director. The director's assistant is somebody who was a PA. Somebody who worked in a development. Somebody who's – most – I don't think I've ever met a director whose assistant was a director in training. And even then, you're not getting that experience. But as an actor, I got to have front row seats for every director that I worked with. So by the time I ever directed, I already – there were half a dozen directors that I thought were great, and half a dozen that I thought weren't great. And I emulated the ones that I thought were great. And being an actor, you're kind of modeling yourself, imitating what the people you respect do. And that's kind of what musicians do too, right? If you – everybody practices Hendrix licks first, and then they come up with their own style. But there is this

mimicking phase of learning. And it's tough to get those 10,000 hours under your belt just by going to film school. Now maybe it's different, because now people can literally take a camera, go out, film something, edit it, put it up, get feedback, see if people like it or they don't, and they could hit the drawing board again, and it does not cost hundreds of thousands of dollars. They can do that thanks to technology. By the time I was coming up, that wasn't even an option. *Swingers* was done as cheaply as you possibly could for that quality of a film, and that was almost \$200,000. And *Clerks* had been done even cheaper than that.

Tim Ferriss: The budget was \$200,000?

Jon Favreau: \$175, something like that. But *Clerks* had been done for, I think, \$10,000, or something ridiculous like that. And that's a feat.

[Crosstalk]

Tim Ferriss: That had been done at a time when it wasn't quite that straightforward.

Jon Favreau: It was very inspiring to us. It was before we had done it, and we're like, why can't we just do it? Because instead of trying to sell *Swingers*, we ended up making it ourselves. So by the time I had done *Chef*, it was like I had been wanting to do something – everything was developing, I was trying to work as a chef into. Because I wanted it to be something I wanted to learn about. So if I was working on a TV pilot, or working on a – developing something for – producing something for somebody else, it was like what about a restaurant? What about a chef? Because it seemed like it was a very – from watching *Top Chef*, and following – reading chefs' biographies, reading *Kitchen Confidential*, which was the first one that I read by Bourdain.

Tim Ferriss: Great book.

Jon Favreau: Great book. And it seemed like there's something here. But it didn't seem like something that warranted its own – I couldn't see the way to make it into its own thing. So that was kind of bubbling around my head. And then something about – doing something about being a dad, being – we were talking about mindfulness? About mindfulness and parenting. About how a few simple – overseeing a few important things in your life over the course of many years can ruin your life if you don't invest enough into the things that are important, but not pressing. So if you put everything at your career, and not into the things that won't –

things that aren't the squeaky wheel, but are important, but not in the short term, over time, you'll find yourself in a situation that you don't even understand how you got into. And you see a lot in the *Chef* world, you see a lot in the movie world, a lot of families where it doesn't work out. And a lot of it's because the career demands so much time, so much effort, and creating that balance, which fortunately I've done. The older I get, the better I get at it. And now things are, I think, well-balanced for me. But I wanted to make something about somebody where they weren't well-balanced. What if I had made different decisions in my life early on? And then looking at it through the idea of the culinary world, and having – stories are about growth spurts. It's about, right, coming of age. I'm a big – I mentioned Joseph Campbell before. I'm a big –

Tim Ferriss: The monomyths.

Jon Favreau: Yeah. Huh? Sorry?

Tim Ferriss: No, I was saying, just the monomyth. I find –

Jon Favreau: The mono?

Tim Ferriss: Well see, he talks about – I've become fascinated by Joseph Campbell in the last few years also. How these archetypes translate across all cultures, and indigenous tribal –

[Crosstalk]

Tim Ferriss: Exactly.

Jon Favreau: Yeah. You ever seen, speaking of Skywalker, I think the first time I ever saw the Skywalker ranch was on *The Power of Myth*, where Joseph Campbell's interviewed by Bill Moyers.

Tim Ferriss: Oh, I haven't seen it. I haven't.

Jon Favreau: That's one of the first – when video first came out, that was one of the first things that was available in that realm, and it still holds up. It's great. I'm sure it's easy to get your hands on, *The Power of Myth*. And he's being – he's sitting in the library at the Skywalker ranch being interviewed of everything back from Adam and Eve and earlier, all the way through *Star Wars*. And it's like a four part or six part series from PBS, I think. And it was great. That was my introduction to Joseph Campbell. And then there's books about relating that archetype rise of the hero storytelling to

screenplays, and how there's less variation than you might think. And the more you stick to it, the better it just is. Those are great instruments to fly with. And with *Jungle Book*, I really am going back and doubling down on that, on just going back to the old myths. And it works so well for Lucas.

Tim Ferriss: Oh, yeah. I mean it's – I've been – I'm fascinated by screenwriting, and I haven't spent a lot of time looking at the format. But I took this story seminar by McKee, and have read a handful of books.

Jon Favreau: That's pretty intense.

Tim Ferriss: That is intense.

Jon Favreau: Even that book is intense. I don't know if I've ever gotten all the way through it.

Tim Ferriss: I found it very dense. I found it difficult. There were a handful of others, like *Save the Cat*, that I found very helpful for me personally, just to think about the storytelling mechanisms.

Jon Favreau: There's one called, if I may?

Tim Ferriss: Oh, of course.

Jon Favreau: *The Writer's Journey*.

Tim Ferriss: *The Writer's Journey*.

Jon Favreau: *The Writer's Journey*. And – I'm sorry, I'm at a loss. I could look it up while we're talking here.

Tim Ferriss: Oh, I'll put it in the show notes as well.

Jon Favreau: Okay. You'll put it in? Okay. Right. Because what it does is it takes Joseph Campbell, and refines it down from the perspective of somebody – I think it was a story executive at Disney. And breaks apart what those archetypes are, and how they apply to movies that you would have seen. Breaking down movies using that, and also talking about the three act structure as it pertains to the mythic structure that Campbell talked about with the calling, the refusal of the call, the entering into the extraordinary world, the entering **Inmo's** cave, the killing the dragon, taking the elixir, going back and healing the land. And even back when I – I even looked – I

had already read the book by the time I had done *Swingers*, and looked at *Swingers*.

Tim Ferriss: Oh, *The Writer's Journal*. So it's been around for a while.

Jon Favreau: It's been around for a while, and I remember reading that book, and seeing if it – if I was structurally correct with *Swingers*, and I was satisfied that I was. But the trick, I think, is not to use it as a map to write. Because you have to write – I think you just have to brain dump when you write. I don't think you could try to control your writing too much, for me. Some people are very different. People who come out of where they're creating series arcs for a television show, it becomes a – you have to develop a group mind, and you use the dry erase board, and you plot things out. It may change, but it's very well thought through. And I find that people that have come from that background tend to like to outline a lot. And then there are other people who just come from prose and creative writing, or short story writers that where they just want to – the routine has more to do with what time of day they write, and how much coffee they have before they do. Getting into that – getting into the creative routine. And that's where their structure is. There's always some form of structure. Sometimes the structure's in the writing. Sometimes the structure's in the writing, the act of writing. But I find that for me, I like to do – I like to outline a little bit. I like to – first I do – so here's what, getting back to *Chef*. So with *Chef*, those two thoughts of wanting to write something about the chef world, and wanting to do something about mindfulness and parenting, both crashed into each other. And I got the idea, the epiphany hit me, that this could all come together in a project. Let me write this thing. And I took out – I like composition. I know you like the minutiae.

Tim Ferriss: I do. I love the minutiae.

Jon Favreau: So composition – Mead composition notebooks, the black and white flecked cover, cardboard.

Tim Ferriss: Sure.

Jon Favreau: Sewn spine.

Tim Ferriss: Looks kind of like a zebra, the black and white on the cover.

Jon Favreau: Right, right. Exactly.

Tim Ferriss: I like those because I find – I think it's from my drawing days, when I used to get like a really nice leather-bound drawing paper sketchbook, I'd be so reluctant to defile it.

Jon Favreau: Yeah. Like is this drawing good enough for my – because it always feel like a showpiece, whereas the notebooks seemed like because everybody grew up with them, like as their first notebook, that there's a freedom in marking it up, but you can't rip pages out, right? So you can't self-edit because if you do, the book falls apart. So it's not like a spiral. You can't use a spiral – for me. You can't use a spiral. So I have, for everything I've done, and there's a lot of incomplete projects. I'll get a composition notebook. I'll date it, title it, and then just start filling it with sometimes stream of consciousness, sometimes a list of movies that I want to look at that relate to this, a book, an image, something, and it becomes my – it's where I just brain dump.

And so for *Chef*, I was actually meditating. I was meditating, and the two things hit each other. And usually, if I'm meditating, which I try to do at least once a day, I'm – although I don't always, but it – I find that in part of the distraction of meditating, creative thoughts might pop into my head, but that seems to be a distraction, so I have to push past those. It's kind of like on the highway entrance. First you have everything you're worried about hit you. Then you start to have creative thoughts that are interesting and inspiring. But those'll trick you into not meditating too. So like these are all obstacles that you have to kind of pass by. And then you get into the good part, if there's such a thing. I know, you're not supposed to judge it or think about it any – but you get into that brain wave, or whatever that thing is that seems to be the experience that when you meditate, that you seek. That kind of baseline thoughtless –

[Crosstalk]

Tim Ferriss: The void. Floating in the void.

Jon Favreau: I don't know if I get as far as the void, but –

Tim Ferriss: For me, that's how I feel, but that's –

Jon Favreau: Yeah, that's good. I don't know if I'm that good at it.

Tim Ferriss: How do you meditate? What type of meditation?

Jon Favreau: Just –

Tim Ferriss: Do you focus on your breath? Do you focus on something else?

Jon Favreau: Yeah, I can do that. That TM, or breath, or I try different things. But now, honestly, it's like I don't even – it's more of like an exercise now. Like I know how to get to – I think it might be a brain wave pattern. I don't know. But it's a state of mind that I can hit without really tricks. I kind of just need to – it takes me about five or six minutes, and I could get there.

Tim Ferriss: Do you sit on a chair with your feet on the floor, or are you legs folded?

Jon Favreau: Different. I try not to lay down because you fall asleep, right?

Tim Ferriss: Yeah.

Jon Favreau: But I try to do that. I used to do it – I haven't found a place ever – it's nice when you can do it the same time every day. I just switched from production to post-production on this, so I don't – haven't gotten into my routine. I haven't been doing it as much as I should, or as I'd like to. But in the middle of it, I got – the idea for *Chef* hit me, and I let myself stop, which I don't usually do, and I took out a pad, and I just scribbled down like eight pages of ideas and thoughts. And left it alone. And then read it, and it had – if I look back on it, and read those pages, it really had 80 percent of the heavy lifting done as far as what it was about, who was in it, who the characters were, what other movies to look at, what the tone is, what music I would have in it, what type of food he was doing, the idea of the food truck, and the Cuban sandwiches, and Cuban music, and he's from Miami, and so it all sort of grew out from that. And then I went ahead, and I have enough half-written screenplays that I just force myself to keep writing every day. And so this only took me a few weeks. Two to get the first draft. But the big thing was I was so scared of – it's like the Kubla Khan dream, the poem Kubla Khan, right? Wasn't that the story that it was a dream, and only part of it was written down because he forgot it all? The poet. I think I have that right. Going back to school. I don't remember some of the details right. But the idea that sometimes you feel like when you're writing a story or screenplay, if you let enough time pass in the first draft, you get off of that kind of creative –

Tim Ferriss: Get out of the zone.

Jon Favreau: Run you're on. Yeah. Because I don't think it's something you control. I think it's something you access. And I don't think – not to say it's from some other mystical place, but whatever that part of your brain that it comes from is not a part of your brain that you necessarily can force to do what you want it to do.

Tim Ferriss: You're not fully domesticated.

Jon Favreau: Right, yeah. You gotta kinda trick it into doing its thing.

Tim Ferriss: And when you did the brain dump down into the composition notebook, do you take then – I imagine these are not necessarily in chronological order. It's just a full-on brain dump?

Jon Favreau: It is. It's – some of it's chronological. Then you go back and hit another part of it, and then run it through again. And so it does go on little tears. It's like a pitch session, except you're alone.

Tim Ferriss: And when you said tone, what would be an example of tone for a movie? How would you sort of write that down or describe that?

Jon Favreau: I said that like eat, drink, man, woman, opening. Like that stuff, right?

Tim Ferriss: Fantastic.

Jon Favreau: Big night. A lot of it's movies. A lot of it is Buena Vista Social Club. Soundtrack. Food truck. Cuban sandwiches. Cuban sandwiches. The son. There's a divorce. They've been separated, but they get along. Get along, and he's with – he's stuck. He's with – there's a critic coming. This is Ratatouille. There's only so many cooking restaurant movies you can make. And the guy is preparing these – he goes to the farmer's market and brings his kid with him. Like so there's moments, there's vignettes. There's images. And some of them are sequences, and some of them are movies. And sometimes it's movies that are in your memory, and then when you see the movie, it's not that. But it's the version in your head from what you remember of a movie. And then Kitchen Confidential, I remember referencing that a lot. And who the characters are. And I wanted very – a lot of Latino cast members, because that's what was really – Kitchen Confidential, I remember, like that's really what kitchens were, and what I saw, and what it was, and never what was depicted. And how does that – how does the vibrance of that culture, with the music playing in the kitchen, and they're cooking food that's not that? And then in being re-inspired, he's inspired by that. Who the people that are

surrounding him, the music he's listening to, and where he came from in Miami. And maybe that's the type of food he used to cook, and now he's cooking very trendy, user friendly food that wasn't inspiring to him, and being frustrated by not being inspired by – his art is no longer inspiring him, and he's hit an impasse. And also the impasse is affecting both his professional life, but in a way he's not aware of, his personal life too. He's stuck. Spiritually stuck.

Tim Ferriss: And on the show business side of things – this is something I know very little about, but in terms of the actual making, selling, distributing of the film, and feel free to correct me if I get this wrong, but I've heard you refer to, I think, making *Chef* as going back to basics, and sort of constraining the size, or the budget, so that you could do certain things, like have the language you wanted to have in the movie, for instance, be authentic.

Jon Favreau: Yes, that's right.

Tim Ferriss: How did you make this movie? And I know that's a very novice question, but I've talked to people sort of indirectly who have gone through the big studio process, and have had a very rough time of it. What made *Chef* different? How did you – or similar? Did you get to come in on –

Jon Favreau: Different times.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah.

Jon Favreau: Again, I think it's all a matter of adjusting to what the environment is at any given moment, an adjusting in an Art of War kind of way. I don't think about it in those terms, but acknowledge what the terrain is. And I think a lot of what seems like, in my career in general, as though I've had this vision for how my career was gonna change, and things I would try to do, and to get things accomplished was more a reaction to what the circumstances were. So for example, I thought *Swingers* would open a lot of doors for me acting-wise. It didn't. I got to do a little bit of stuff here and there. It was fun. But I was very sought after as a writer after that. And so the writer door opened up. The actor door was more of a small – a little cracked open door that occasionally I could poke my nose through. But it wasn't receiving me. But the writer door was wide open. So I started to do that, and I learned a lot about storytelling, and interacting with executives, and what the system was by being involved with projects, and none of which ever got actually produced with the versions that I wrote. But I was part of

a chain of writers on certain projects. So I was pretty good at adjusting to what path was available to me, and finding something interesting about what was available. But without ever feeling that I was compromising, but just trying to check out something that could be cool, and not getting in my own way of saying, “Why shouldn’t I be a writer on this? Why not pitch this take on a movie?” Even though I’ve never done a rewrite, why not go in there and talk to them about this. And so I think I’ve had enough confidence to not be scared to try something new, which is something that I think gets in a lot of peoples’ ways. I think people get in their own way a lot, and there are certain things that I have been scared of, but for some reason, career-wise, maybe it’s my early upbringing – I don’t know what. But I never feel intimidated when I’m in a room with people, or if I’m onstage in front of people. Like I don’t get that – my heart doesn’t race in those situations.

Tim Ferriss: And that was even before the improv?

Jon Favreau: Yeah. I’ve always been comfortable like getting in front of people and talking, and I’ve been a bit of a ham when I was little, like loving to jump up in front of the family and put on shows. I just think certain people are wired, now that I have three kids.

Tim Ferriss: For sure.

Jon Favreau: You’re just kind of wired a certain way, and certain people are kind of – they kind of have certain things that they like, and certain things that they’re good at. And you could adjust them, and change them, but you’re kinda working with – you’re kind of handed – it’s like poker. You get a deck – you get dealt a hand, and you can play those cards well or poorly, but you’re definitely working from – you’re definitely inheriting your properties in Risk at the beginning of the game, you know what I mean? You’re starting from a certain vantage point, and then it’s what do you do with that?

Tim Ferriss: With a movie like *Swingers*, for instance, and again, this is – these are just things that I’ve heard quoted, so feel free to correct me if I’m wrong, it seems like everyone is in *Swingers*. I mean, it gets quoted all the time. The box office was around six million?

Jon Favreau: It was – yeah, if that.

Tim Ferriss: If that.

Jon Favreau: So it was considered – so just to give you a perspective, we – trying to get it made for a year. Nobody gives us the money. Doug Liman was able to raise the money, and we make it together.

Tim Ferriss: What is his, I guess –

Jon Favreau: He’s a director. Sorry.

Tim Ferriss: Director. Got it.

Jon Favreau: He’s the director of the film. But when I had met him, I was trying to set it up as a director. I was trying to direct it. And he had already done a film. He was just part of a circle of friends. Not very – I wasn’t very close with him, but I knew him through somebody else, and he was somebody who had directed, and so I had bought him a cup of coffee. He talked me through lenses, and was preparing me for when it was time for me to direct. And then in that process had said, look, hopefully you will get to put this thing together, but I can raise the money. And so we agreed to creatively be partners on this thing, and we made it a much smaller budget than I thought was possible.

Tim Ferriss: This was the 200k or so.

Jon Favreau: This was the 200k that he was able to bring, and figure out how to bring that movie to the screen with that budget with the experience that he had had. So that – it happened. We tried to get into Sundance, and –

Tim Ferriss: Not to interrupt, but was he – that financing from some independently wealthy individuals, or was it from companies, or?

Jon Favreau: Yeah, I think it was more like that. I think it was more the connections that he’d had from growing up in town, and being involved with – there were people that he knew that were willing to bet on him. Some of it was based on stuff he had done already, and some of it was that he had passion about this thing. But he was able to get the – secure the financing.

Tim Ferriss: Got it.

Jon Favreau: So the first experience was that then we made it, and that was real seat of the pants, and then we didn’t get into Sundance, which was our goal, was to get in. That was the be all and end all for us. And I don’t know if it was that it wasn’t finished enough, or we had just pulled a cut together for them, or it was screened on videotape

versus a screening. Who knows what it was. But it was incredibly disappointing to us. So it felt like all was lost. Then we put up – after Sundance, that Sundance festival, when everybody had gotten back, we had done our own screening in Los Angeles for the cast and crew, and invited some distributors to it as well, and it played extraordinarily well there. And then we had multiple buyers, and you don't have to be in Hollywood to know what that means. More than one person is interested, it's a whole different dynamic. And now there was a bit of a bidding war over it, and it ended up selling for five million dollars, and –

Tim Ferriss: There are distribution rights.

Jon Favreau: Distribution rights. And so we were riding high. It was – and all the – everybody wanted to interview us, and everybody wanted to feature us in their magazines, and we were like the next thing. And so in like the year between when it was acquired and it came out, we were riding very high. Vincent I think got cast in the sequel to Jurassic Park, which is as big as you can get, and everybody who was nobody was now – had a seat at the table. Had another shot. And the by the time the movie came out, it opened – the first weekend was in, whatever, two theaters, four theaters. It was a huge box office. And then a few weeks later, nobody cared, and it made five million dollars, and it was considered a failure, box office-wise. Because you gotta figure on one side of us was like Slingblade that made a hundred million dollars, and won Oscars, and on the other side was Good Will Hunting that won Oscars and made like a hundred million dollars. So we were kind of the disappointing underperformer at Miramax at that point. And so all of it kind of ebbed away. But again, it was enough to get my foot in the door as a writer, and I had already – now I had not just been the guy who was in *Rudy* as a character actor, but now I had been in this movie that, as you said, everybody has seen. So thanks to video, and later DVD, and later on, laser disc, everybody had seen this film, and it had become part of our culture. And that's when I kind of learned that it's not always the movie that does the best that has the most impact, or is the most rewarding, or does the most for your career, for that matter. Even though in the short term, success is celebrated here, and failure is unforgivable, but over time, I think that that shifts a bit. And I know, for example, like Vincent got in Jurassic Park on the heels of *Swingers*. He's far more recognized now from *Swingers* that grossed one, not even a tenth, maybe a hundredth of what that movie made. But for some reason, this one has had more impact on his career, even though far less people went to see it in the movie theater. So you never know what's gonna – and I find in

my own career the same thing. It's not always the things that make the most money. It's the things that – performances where there's certain things about certain projects that stick in peoples' memories more.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, the staying power. I mean, I was astonished as I started studying film more, and looking at movies that had a huge impact on the era where these landmark, iconic films among the high school and college males who were the majority of my friends. *Fight Club*, for instance. And I was astonished that it wasn't some massive, massive hit.

Jon Favreau: What, *Raging Bull* was – all these movies that are sort of failures in the beginning, and for *Rudy* was my first experience with a movie coming out, and it didn't do well at all. It didn't even do No. 1 at the box office, and was considered also an underperformer. But now everybody knows it. It's a cultural – it's a cultural point of reference. I hear the music everywhere. People refer to it constantly. So like those are the ones where you make the ripple, the cultural ripple, and that's honestly the thing that is most exciting, that's most appealing to me, is how can you impact – how can you make that kind of impact, and affect people, and either touch them, entertain them, make them laugh, make them feel connected? That's the part that's the most rewarding at this point in my career.

Tim Ferriss: And I am keeping an eye on the time. I know that you've been very generous with your time, and I'll only take a few more minutes. The – it would be remiss of me if I didn't mention that a number of my fans have said thank you for *Chef*. They've rented it five to ten times. Just to show friends. So I think that that –

Jon Favreau: That's awesome.

Tim Ferriss: I think that that's gonna be one of the movies. I think it's –

Jon Favreau: That was kind of the thing. I know within like the chef community, they accepted it, the ones that I've met. So that was a big, scary part of it for me. Because if everybody – if people had liked it who didn't know about that world, and but then the people who were in the world didn't like it, it would've been a mixed – it wouldn't have felt good to me. But the fact that people are seeing it, and they're like, I'm spending more time with my son after seeing the movie. Or you know what? I'm gonna try to open up my own business that I've been putting off forever. And that's when you feel really humbled, and good, and flattered, because

you feel like you're connecting. It's selfishly just a very good feeling to know that your – me being on this planet has changed somebody else's experience, like in a good way. And it feels – you feel connected to people, which I think is kind of part of the trip here. It's kind of part of the goal.

Tim Ferriss: Oh, for sure. Well, I think anything with a basis for storytelling at some point, I mean, you're making a lot of connections through this. I think we are hardwired for this Joseph Campbell-like experience.

Jon Favreau: I think so.

Tim Ferriss: Even in our own lives. I'd love to ask just a couple of rapid fire questions.

Jon Favreau: Sure, sure.

Tim Ferriss: The first is, when you hear the word 'successful,' who is the first person that comes to mind?

Jon Favreau: Wow. Oh, I like listening to this on your show. I don't like answering it. Let's see. I guess just kneejerk?

Tim Ferriss: Kneejerk.

Jon Favreau: Gates. And not – you know why? Because – not because of the richest guy, but because of his – because of how he shifted his priorities. Because he's now making tremendous impact with the hand he's been dealt, or the pot that he's built up. That he's making – that there's one – there's like the Bill Gates from – there's the Microsoft Bill Gates, and there's the post-Microsoft Bill Gates. And to me, there's something fascinating about that. And that he would be able to be effective in what his goals were for the first chapter, and then what his goals are now, which are very different. So he was able to shift his entire agenda, and be effective.

Tim Ferriss: Be completely effective on the very similar, metric-driven, hardcore approach.

Jon Favreau: Yeah. And I don't know a lot about him, honestly. This is purely layman's perspective of, hey, there's a lot of – this is – how many lives have been saved by this, or this many people have agreed to have charitable donations. But it's just – there's something that – he's just the first name that popped into my head.

Tim Ferriss: Any particular director who comes to mind? Director or writer in film?

Jon Favreau: Yeah, there's a few, and they're all different. Like I worked with Scorsese, and I think that he's been – I think there's a certain – there must be, when I came up, and what he represented, and I got to meet him, and see him work. And so he's inspired me as far as what his body of work, and who he is as a person. But I also think of like the Coen brothers, who've managed to tickle their own fancy, and enjoy everything they're doing, and have tremendous variety, and entertain people as well, but seem to have maintained a certain balance, a healthy balance between their work and their private lives. And I haven't dealt with them that much, but they seem like genuinely well-adjusted, normal, nice people who happen to make really exciting, cool movies. And then Jim Cameron, who's sort of at the other end of the spectrum, who's kind of the guy who's reinvented aspects of the industry over and over again with tremendous enthusiasm, and also just a sharp intellect that's into solving problems and changing the way we do the magic tricks. And I've certainly inherited a lot of the ground that he broke with *Avatar* with *Jungle Book*. A lot of the same technology, a lot of the same people, I'm working with. So there's a healthy respect. And then Walt Disney is another one who I had researched quite a bit back around the time of *Iron Man 2*, when we were referencing him in the Stark expo, in the old Stark archives. But he was a bit of a techie in his time, and a bit of a storyteller too. And so he was doing the – what he was doing in his time seems like what Pixar's doing now. It's like cutting edge technology, great stories, great emotion. Telling stories with a different set of tools that nobody ever had before. And there's something really, to me, I think he's one of those key figures.

Tim Ferriss: Oh, a total hacker. They display a bunch of his old, cobbled together, MacGyver-like rigs at the Disney Family Museum in San Francisco, yeah. Which is amazing. What is the book that you've gifted the most to other people?

Jon Favreau: Actually, *The Writer's Journey* was one of them. I've given your book. I've given *Four Hour Body* to people too.

Tim Ferriss: Well, thank you for that.

Jon Favreau: I've given that. Those are the biggies. I'm trying to think if there's anything else. Hm. I did – when I first started off in acting, I gifted Grodin's book to my family, his first book, *It*

Would Be So Nice If You Weren't Here, because it really told the story about how difficult it is when you're first starting off trying to be an actor. And he had such a great voice. Other than that, I can't – none are jumping to mind. That's three, though.

Tim Ferriss: That's plenty. That's plenty. Last question. Actually, they're two. They're pretty quick. The first is: what advice would you give to your 20-year old self?

Jon Favreau: Wow. Oh, he wouldn't listen.

Tim Ferriss: 30-year old self.

Jon Favreau: I think to not confuse how you feel about something with how that thing really is. I think you think you're being more objective than you really are, and you're colored by emotion more than you think you are. In positive ways and negative ways. But it's – perspective is much more subjective than you think. You think you're a lot more objective than you are. To me, specifically at 30. And 20, I don't even know. I wasn't even a human being yet. I don't know what I would say at 20. Because part of it is just the ignorance of walking into the forest, and not knowing where I was going. And whatever was getting me through it, thankfully I had enough – something in the back of my mind told me to just take that road, and walk not knowing where I was going. And so that was – so I'm very grateful. I like where I am. I like what the experience of my life is. I like – every year I like better, I like who I am better, I like what my life is better. So I'm very reluctant to interfere with the way things were. But I think a lot of it is how I feel about things, and what I do to – how I kind of balance things out in a way that I'm proud of, that I like.

Tim Ferriss: Well, I love your work, and thank you so much for the time. Where can people find out more about you, find you online?

Jon Favreau: Me? Let's see. I don't know. I'm on Twitter and Facebook, @jon_favreau. Oh, on Twitter. And Facebook, I think, is just Jon Favreau. And Instagram, Jon Favreau. It's pretty –

Tim Ferriss: Pretty consistent.

Jon Favreau: I've been working, so there's not a lot of stuff up there. I'm on there. We do popups once in a while in Los Angeles. Maybe we'll do one up north for the – from the food from *Chef*.

Tim Ferriss: Oh, that'd be great.

Jon Favreau: So we've been doing that, so that's –

Tim Ferriss: I've been dying to have not only Cuban, but the grilled cheese sandwich. I'm sure you must hear about that a lot.

Jon Favreau: Yes, I've cooked them. I cooked them for the crew of the movie. I cook them for my kids. I cook them here at the – in the editing rooms. But I enjoy cooking. And we've cooked together.

Tim Ferriss: We have.

Jon Favreau: I think. Can I reveal that?

Tim Ferriss: Definitely.

Jon Favreau: That you and I have cooked beignets together.

Tim Ferriss: Beignets. That was an amazing experience.

Jon Favreau: That was for a Super Bowl party.

Tim Ferriss: So good.

Jon Favreau: You had never done that before.

Tim Ferriss: I hadn't.

Jon Favreau: There it was, that was what we were talking about. Here we were. We didn't really know each other that well. I'd read your stuff, you saw my stuff, and then lo and behold, you put some hot oil there, and the focus is no longer on one another. Keeping all your fingers while you're at it, scalded.

Tim Ferriss: Keeping all your fingers. Well Jon, thank you so much. There's tons more to explore. Everybody, I'll put links in the show notes to where you could find Jon, and thanks so much for your time.

Jon Favreau: Great, great. And thank you too. I love the podcast, but you've – I know this is about me, not about you. But I got to know you through your writing, and I was very – you're very intriguing. I get pulled into your work. You make it very easy to read your stuff. It had been recommended. I think Four Hour Body was recommended to me. And one of those things where you just pick a chapter here, a chapter there. Next thing you know, you're reading the whole thing. And your approach to questioning things,

and curating research, and fact-based, but not being – it seems like there’s always – you’re always either dealing with a scientific method where something has to have been through a double blind study, or completely anecdotal. There is no middle ground. And what’s interesting about your stuff is you’ll say, hey, look. Here’s what I’ve experienced. Here’s the sample that I’ve seen this experience with. It’s not something that should be looked at scientifically, but there are certain indications that this is worth looking into more. And here’s what I do, and here’s what I’ve done. And it makes it much more inviting than either the very walled off world of traditional –

Tim Ferriss: Academia.

Jon Favreau: Academia, and also this, I don’t know, science that’s more based on anecdotal information that doesn’t take science into consideration as much. But to acknowledge that science has an importance to it, but also looking at how what has not yet gone through that machine might have some truth to it too, and giving full disclosure of your context, and why, makes it not intellectually offensive, you know what I’m saying?

Tim Ferriss: Sure.

Jon Favreau: It feels like you could be responsible intellectually – not flying in the face of science, but you’re also opening it up to new ways of thinking, and I think it relates to the way your context, the whole world that you’re – the whole northern California way of – ethos of looking at things, and how to be more effective and efficient in approaching problems that we still face. So I love looking at your stuff.

Tim Ferriss: Thank you.

Jon Favreau: And like I said, the Four Hour Chef was really – was a great counterbalance to the other chef biographies that I was reading, or autobiographies, or cooking books, and documentaries I was watching. And then here was the very concise version of a lot of the same information that was a really good counterbalance.

Tim Ferriss: Well, I really appreciate it, and I love watching your experiments. I love watching you do the huge blockbusters, then do *Chef*. I can’t wait to see what you do next. Well, I know – I guess I’m waiting to see –

Jon Favreau: For *Jungle Book*.

Tim Ferriss: *Jungle Book*.

Jon Favreau: For about a year.

Tim Ferriss: It's gonna be amazing.

Jon Favreau: It's gonna be something different and cool, and just like everything else, doing one with this level of technology, which I got a taste of here and there with *Iron Man*, and – but to really throw the whole thing into – have the whole thing rely on that magic trick working is – it's exhilarating. But if it all works as well as it looks like it will, it'll be something nobody has seen before. So it's exciting stuff.

Tim Ferriss: I can't wait to see it. Well Jon, to be continued. Thank you so much for the time.

Jon Favreau: Great. My pleasure.

Tim Ferriss: And this was fun.

Jon Favreau: It was quick and easy.

Tim Ferriss: Quick and easy. All right, thank you.

Jon Favreau: Thanks.

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