

00:00:00	Music	Transition	Gentle, trilling music with a steady drumbeat plays under the dialogue.
00:00:01	Promo	Promo	Speaker: <i>Bullseye with Jesse Thorn</i> is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR.
00:00:13	Music	Transition	<i>[Music fades out.]</i> “Huddle Formation” from the album <i>Thunder, Lightning, Strike</i> by The Go! Team.
00:00:20	Jesse Thorn	Host	It’s <i>Bullseye</i> . I’m Jesse Thorn. First up this week, Richard Jenkins. He’s being interviewed by my friend and <i>Jordan, Jesse, Go!</i> co-host, Jordan Morris.
			Richard Jenkins is, of course, an actor. He works a lot, mostly in supporting roles. He played the dead patriarch on <i>Six Feet Under</i> , maybe you know him from there. He’s also had wonderful part in <i>Burn After Reading</i> , <i>Step Brothers</i> , and <i>The Shape of Water</i> . He was nominated for Best Supporting Actor at the Oscars for the last one. I guess if you wanted to find a common thread in his roles, it’s that he usually plays dads. Or, at least, fatherly types. That’s in part because he started acting onscreen later in life. He got his first TV roles in his late 20s. He didn’t show up on film until his late 30s. He also has a very beautiful voice and a kind reassuring presence. I mean, what could possibly go wrong with Richard Jenkins as your gentle guide?
			And so, it is with <i>Kajillionaire</i> , his new film. It’s directed by Miranda July. Like a lot of Miranda July movies, it’s distinctive. It focuses on a family of grifters and con artists. There is, of course, the father—played by our guest, Richard Jenkins. His name is Robert. The mother, Theresa—played by Debra Winger. And their daughter, who they call Old Dolio, played by Evan Rachel Wood. Robert, played by Richard Jenkins, is very, very good at what he does, even when it comes to avoiding paying rent.
00:01:45	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:01:46	Clip	Clip	Robert (<i>Kajillionaire</i>): That wall is a sponge! It’s a sponge. This building ought to be condemned, really. We could—we could report it to the department of health and human services! <i>[Beat.]</i> Okay, okay. Just give us ‘til Friday. You’ll have 1500, cash bills. We’ll have it by Friday. Dude, we need a little time to get it together.
			Speaker: <i>[Voice strained.]</i> Friday’s tomorrow.
			Robert: It’s tomorrow? Um. Well, I didn’t literally mean—I mean, it’s just a saying. You know, “by Friday”, it just means end of the week.
			Speaker: Next Friday?
			Robert: Uh, I’ll—the one after that.
			Speaker: Friday after next?
			Robert: Yeah.
			Speaker: Two weeks.

00:02:26	Sound Effect	Transition	Robert: Uh-huh. Two weeks. Music swells and fades.
00:02:27	Jordan Morris	Host	Uh, Richard Jenkins, welcome to <i>Bullseye!</i>
00:02:30	Richard Jenkins	Guest	Thank you. Nice to be here. <i>[Chuckles.]</i>
00:02:33	Jordan	Host	So, the family in your new movie, <i>Kajillionaire</i> , is—I guess, let's just say very unusual. Was there anything at all that reminded them about your own family?
00:02:44	Richard	Guest	God, I hope not. Um. <i>[Jordan laughs.]</i> <i>[Chuckling.]</i> No. Um, no. No, it was fairly loveless and—or loving—let's just say—people always say that it's, "There's no love in the family." It's their idea of love. And no, no. It's—I don't think anybody's family is like this. It's singular. It's Miranda July's brain. That's what this is.
00:03:12	Jordan	Host	<i>[Laughs.]</i> Yeah, I mean, speaking of a very singular vision, the movie is very emotionally intense in places. But there's also a lot of just, like, fun, goofy, silliness. I'm thinking specifically about a scene where the family all sits together in a dry hot tub in a hot tub store. <i>[Richard chuckles.]</i> Were there any scenes that you remember as being particularly fun to shoot?
00:03:38	Richard	Guest	Yeah, that was fun. That was—I, you know, there was a couple that are not in the movie. A couple of cons. One about a watch and something else that was fun. It really demonstrated how bad these people were at this. But there—the scene where we pretend to be a normal family... we go into this guy's house and he's on his—he's dying. And he says, "Please, just act like a family in the other room so I can hear it." Which was—is just—I thought was brilliant. I mean, it was brilliant writing and Old Dolio starts to see the possibilities of a family—what it could be like. And yeah. That was...
00:04:22	Jordan	Host	Yeah, it is a—it is a very funny scene. And—but very, like—I imagine that that one in particular was kind of complicated to act, because you know, you are a character who has an unusual worldview doing what they think normal people do. What was it like to get prepared for that scene, in particular?
00:04:42	Richard	Guest	Well, it was—we found that we kind of fell into it. I mean, that it—that we kind—I mean, I said, "Do you think I could have a piece of pie, too?" Or cake, whatever it was. <i>[Laughs.]</i> You know. It's like, for a moment we were all just kind of there, in the living room, as a family. And it was— <i>[Jordan chuckles.]</i> And then it's gone as soon as its, you know—the next two seconds I say, "I think he's dead." <i>[They laugh.]</i> But yeah. Yeah, that was—that was an amazing day to shoot that.

00:05:12 Jordan Host I read an interview with Miranda July where she was talking about creating backstories for all of these characters. And in the interview, she said your response, when she tried to tell you about the backstory she had created, was, “Please don’t burden me with backstories. I hate backstories.” Um. *[Chuckles.]* When did you figure out that this wasn’t a technique that worked for you?

00:05:35 Richard Guest Well, I’m—I—it’s—if it’s not on the page, if it’s not there in the text, in the script, I don’t underst—I don’t know how to play that. How I felt about my mom. You know. If it’s not there. How does that manifest itself in the movie? It’s just confusing, to me. I mean, unless there’s something that I wanna create, a physicality or something, that—and I don’t mind them. They just are not—I just don’t find them that useful. And I tell this story many times, but Guillermo del Toro writes eight, nine-page backstories for all the characters. And he writes them, and Miranda writes them because they love these people so much. And they have this world in their head of where these people came from and who they were and what—but, again, I don’t—I don’t know how to make that work if it’s not in the movie. You know.

It’s just—it’s just hard. So, Guillermo said, “You know, you can read it and use it. If you don’t wanna use it, that’s fine.” So, the next day he said, “Did you read it?”

I said, “Yeah.”

He said, “You going to use it?”

And I said, “No. No.”

[Jordan laughs.]

I mean, I—you know, I probably should have said yeah. But so—in the Golden Globes, when I lost, *[chuckling]* he turned to me and he said, “If you’d used the backstory, you might have won.”

[They laugh loudly.]

00:06:54 Jordan Host That is kind of cool that you had this kind of private little Guillermo del Toro short story that was just for you.

00:07:02 Richard Guest Yeah! It’s amazing! And when you read them, it’s like, “Wow!” But I—again, I just don’t know how it manifests itself in the movie. Now, Michael Stuhlbarg—oh my gosh! He just—he devoured it! I—you know, he probably used mine! *[Chuckles.]* He—Michael wants everything. You know, he’s just meticulous about this stuff. And it works for him and he’s brilliant. Michael Stuhlbarg’s a brilliant actor. So, hey, maybe I’ll start using them now that I think about it. Maybe.

[They chuckle.]

00:07:30 Jordan Host So, Miranda July, she gets really surprising performances out of actors. This movie in particular. Is there something about her style that makes it easier for actors to take chances?

00:07:44 Richard Guest I think her—the way she writes! I mean, that just—if you—I mean, that’s just—the whole movie’s a chance! I mean, it’s just not something you see every day. And she’s open. You know, she has the movie in her head, she has these people in her head. But she’s not unwilling to let you contribute, because that’s why you’re there.

And it becomes a true collaboration. I mean, it really is fun to work that way with her. I think it's the first movie she wasn't in, herself. You know. So, that was a different story for her and a different way to work. I kept thinking, "She's gonna be fascinated to see this movie."

Uh, because there's the movie that you have in your head, the movie you write, then the movie you shoot, and the movie you edit. They're never the same.

[Jordan chuckles and agrees.]

And so, but... um, this is Old Dolio's movie. This is who—this is who the movie is for. I mean, this is her movie. And part of her journey was this family. And I wanted to see what it'd look like, on screen.

00:08:43 Jordan Host Yeah, this movie—it's interesting. It kind of takes place in a heightened reality where some things are kind of silly and some things are kind of off. Is that something you think about when you're creating a character? Like, what version of the world does this take place in?

00:09:00 Richard Guest I—well, it can be. But it didn't for this, for me. I mean, I saw them as real people and—you know, I always thought just Robert thought, "This is the best way to raise a child." You know, I mean, the way... *[sighs]* I mean, this family, these two adults, this is the way they deal with the world to make it possible for them to exist. And you know, they tried another way, and it didn't work. They tried the straight and narrow and that just is not who they are. So, whether they're successful or not at this, it just seems to be the only way they can function in the world. We all find our own ways to function. That's the way that these two have found, is becoming these horrible grifters. It's really not good.

00:09:49 Jordan Host Yeah, no, it's so—it's so interesting, because you know, the character you play in the movie does a lot of *[censored]* stuff. We'll have to bleep that out. Um, what is it like to play someone but to kind of hate their behavior so much?

00:10:06 Richard Guest I *[stammering]* you just, you can't hate their behavior. You really can't. You have to justify it. You know. And—you know, when you said that, I thought, "Well, what do I do that's so *[censored]*?"

[They laugh.]

I guess I do. I guess I do do a lot of *[censored]* stuff. You know. But... no. I just—I don't—I don't—I can't do that. I can't look at this person and say they're a terrible person. You know. It's kind of... hard to be that guy if you hate him—every fiber of him.

00:10:39 Jordan Host Right. So, you got your start in the theatre. Can you—can you remember the first live theatre you ever saw? Was it the—you know, *Nutcracker* at Christmas? Something like that? Or—yeah. Can you remember the first live theatre?

00:10:54 Richard Guest The first live theatre I saw—I was in, probably—14, maybe 15. And I went to Chicago with my parents and saw a touring company production of *Bye Bye Birdie*.

00:11:07 Jordan Host Okay, that's a very classic first play to see!

00:11:10 Richard Guest Yeah. And I was—we were—I was from a smaller town, in Illinois. About 60 miles west of Chicago. It was, uh, DeKalb, Illinois. It's a

small town. And it was Christmas, and we went, and we had gone shopping and my mother had left a package under the seat. And when we were leaving the theatre, she said, “Oh, I forgot the package.” I—so I went back in and they were having understudy rehearsals or something. I assume that’s what they were. I didn’t know what they were at the time. And all these young kids in the show—they looked young to me—and they were onstage horsing around, having fun. And I just—I stood there and stared at them, like, “How do you—that’s—look at this.”

00:11:59 Jordan Host And I remember—that’s my first experience with theatre. I mean, obviously you were kind of drawn to it from the—*from the get-go*. It sounds like you were kind of drawn to the work part of it. Like, watching those people at a rehearsal was captivating in its own way.

00:12:12 Richard Guest They were having fun, you know? They were having—and it’s like, I just saw the production and it was—I was—it was amazing to me to see that. You know. But... you know, I—it was—started with me, film. I went to the movies. I didn’t go to theatre. I went to—I saw movies and I would go to the movies and just, the same thing, it’s like, “How do you do that? What is that? How—where do these people come from?! What do—?” You know.

[Jordan agrees.]

00:12:50 Jordan Host So—but it was all a mystery and exciting and I had no experience in it, but I did know that I wanted to do it and I don’t know why. I don’t know where it comes from. I had—I don’t know. But it was just—this is what I wanna do.

00:12:59 Richard Guest So, you—I mean, you went on to be part of and to direct a theatre company. Did you eventually get to do *Hamlet* or other Shakespeare?

00:13:23 Jordan Host I didn’t do a lot of Shakespeare. I directed more Shakespeare than I—I’ve only—I directed two Shakespeare. I didn’t—did very little Shakespeare. I did *Troilus and Cressida*. I did *Twelfth Night*. And a small part in *Taming of the Shrew*. I didn’t do a lot of Shakespeare in the—in the company. But yeah. It was intimidating to see college kids doing it and it was riveting to me. I mean, it was like—you know.

00:13:35 Richard Guest Did you learn anything about the process of an actor when you were directing? Like, when you were directing that Shakespeare, did you learn anything about acting that you took forward?

00:14:07 Jordan Host I learned I can hurt people. I can hurt a performance a lot easier than I can help one. And you know, I was aware of that—that I had hurt some performances, hurt some actors. And it’s a horrible feeling to do that—to think you’re helping and you’re just confusing. And... then you realize that maybe you have a lot to learn. So, that was—yeah. That was part of it.

00:14:14 Richard Guest Um, so you transitioned from theatre to film a little later in your career than a lot of actors.

00:14:19 Jordan Host I did everything later than most people. So.

[They laugh.]

00:14:19 Jordan Host So, do you remember that first film role?

00:14:23 Richard Guest Well, I remember it. Well, the—hm. It’s kind of weird. It’s—I did some television. I did small parts on *Theatre in America*, on PBS. I

was just—had small parts in plays that we did, at Trinity Rep, that I—they put on film. And I didn't really consider that film acting. I didn't do much. But the—kind of the first—I did an independent film, a Horton Foote movie, called *On Valentine's Day*. And, as I recall, that's the first time I just fell in love with being in movies and being able to be in the place where it's happening. You know. In the room where it happens, you know? You're there. It's not a set. It's just there. And I thought I just loved that.

And then the first studio movie that I did with a nice part was *The Witches of Eastwick*. And that was—I was, again, a neophyte, and that was amazing.

00:15:25 Jesse Host

We'll finish up with Richard Jenkins in a minute. After the break, Richard Jenkins tells us about his first job out of high school and why he wasn't very good at it. It's *Bullseye*, from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

00:15:38 Music Transition
00:15:41 Jesse Promo

Relaxed music with synth piano.

This message comes from NPR sponsor, Microsoft Teams. Now, there are more ways to be a team with Microsoft Teams! Bring everyone together in one space with a new, virtual room. Collaborate live. Drawing, sharing, and building ideas with everyone on the same page. And make sure more of your team is seen and heard with up to 49 people onscreen at once. Learn more about all the newest Teams features at Microsoft.com/teams.

00:16:14 Promo Clip

[Music fades out.]

Music: Ominous, rhythmic music.

Rodney Carmichael: I'm Rodney Carmichael.

Sidney Madden: And I'm Sidney Madden.

Rodney: And on our new podcast, *Louder than a Riot*, we trace the collision of rhyme and punishment in America.

Speaker: We were hunted by police. We were literally, physically hunted. You'd be standing on the corner, drug squad would pull up, everybody would run.

Sidney: New, from NPR music. Listen to *Louder than a Riot*.

00:16:40 Promo Clip

[Music fades out.]

Music: Fun, cheerful music.

Kirk Hamilton: Video games!

Jason Schreier: Video games!

Maddy Myers: Video games! You like 'em?

Jason: Maybe you wish you had more time for them?

Kirk: Maybe you wanna know the best ones to play?

Jason: Maybe you wanna know what happens to Mario when he dies?

[Someone chuckles.]

Maddy: In that case, you should check out [Triple Click!](#) It's a brand-new podcast about video games.

Jason: A podcast about video games?! But I don't have time for that!

Kirk: Sure you do. Once a week, kick back as three video game experts give you everything from critical takes on the hottest new releases—

Jason: —to scoops, interviews, and explanations about how video games work—

Maddy: —to fascinating and sometimes weird stories about the games we love.

Kirk: *Triple Click* is hosted by me, Kirk Hamilton.

Jason: Me, Jason Schreier.

Maddy: And me, Maddy Myers.

Kirk: You can find *Triple Click* wherever you get your podcasts, and listen at [MaximumFun.org](#).

Maddy: Bye!

[Music finishes.]

00:17:24 Music Transition
00:17:39 Jesse Host

Thumpy, grungy transition music.

Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. My colleague, Jordan Morris, is speaking with actor Richard Jenkins. Jenkins stars alongside Evan Rachel Wood in the new movie *Kajillionaire*. He's also the star of the new film *The Last Shift*, where he plays a guy who's worked at a burger joint for almost four decades. Anyway, let's get back into his conversation with Jordan Morris.

00:17:51 Jordan Host

You've made a couple of movies with people from the world of sketch comedy and improv, which is different than the training you had. When you're shooting a scene with, like, Will Ferrell, can you tell that you and him have had very different kinds of training?

00:18:08 Richard Guest

No, not really. I mean, I—it's—when you're in a movie with Will, it's like you—I watched him, you know. I watched Will and John Reilly. You know. These guys are just—they're... you know, they're unstoppable. I mean, guys like Adam Scott and—you just—it's just a whole other way of working. It's a—it's—you know, you come—if you come from the theatre, you have—you have the text and it's your job to figure it out and make it come to life. And, you know—so you go into a movie and that—[stammering] but sometimes that's not what's required. It's required that you find other things. And it teaches a freedom and—don't make decisions. You know. Quit coming to conclusions, here. Let's just—let's just, like, open this up and see where it goes, you know. Trust yourself. You really have to trust yourself.

And with somebody like Adam McKay, who directed *Step Brothers*, you know, there's—you never feel you can—even though you may say something so stupid, you never feel that it's a problem. Or that they're rolling their eyes. If they are, you don't see it. Um. [Chuckles.] You know, you—it—there—you really—it's a safe place to... try to be—to try to have fun. Um. And I think that's important, with a movie like *Step Brothers*. And working in that world, you have to feel safe.

00:19:36	Jordan	Host	Did it feel uncomfortable at first? Working on a movie where people are more loosey-goose about the script?
00:19:43	Richard	Guest	No. No, not really. I mean, you just—you kind of marvel at it, is what I was doing. You know. And you kind of watch them and you go, "Oh! I'm in this scene. Okay. Uh." But it's amazing. It's an incredible process, you know. And it was fun. It didn't take me long to jump in there and have as much fun as I did. We—'cause I think—I said to Mary Steenburgen once, "I think we're having too much fun, here." [Laughing.] It comes across! It <u>really</u> comes across, in that movie.
00:20:12	Jordan	Host	[Laughing.] It comes across! It <u>really</u> comes across, in that movie.
00:20:14	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:20:15	Clip	Clip	Music: Dramatic string music.

Robert (*Step Brothers*): When I was a little boy, I always wanted to be a dinosaur. I wanted to be a tyrannosaurus rex more than anything in the world! I made my arms short and I roamed the backyard and I—I chased the neighborhood cats. And I growls and I roared. Everybody knew me and was afraid of me. And then one day, my dad said, [Breathlessly.] "Bobby, you're 17. It's time to throw childish things aside!"

[Distraught.] And I said, "Okay, Pop!"

But he didn't really say that. He said, "Stop being a [censored] dinosaur and get a job." But you know?

I thought to myself, "I'll go to medical school. I'll practice for a little while. And then I'll come back to it."

Brennan: Dad. How is that a skill?!

Robert: [Whispering.] I forgot how to do it.

Dale: You're human! You could never be a dinosaur.

Brennan: Yeah!

Robert: [Devastated.] I lost it.

Dale: Well, Dad, what's the point?

Brennan: Yeah.

00:21:04	Sound Effect	Transition	Robert: The point is, don't lose your dinosaur. Music swells and fades.
00:21:06	Jordan	Host	In your—in your other new movie that we're talking about today, <i>The Last Shift</i> , you play a fast-food employee. I was wondering if

00:21:22 Richard Guest you ever personally worked in food service or anything that's kind of similar to, you know, a minimum wage fast food job?
I worked—I made pizzas, when I was in high school.

[Jordan affirms.]

But it was—it was really different, because it was a—this was back in 1964, '63, and pizzas were just starting to become the big thing. And I, in my town, there was a university. So, it was a place called The Pizza Villa. It's still there, actually. It's still in DeKalb. Still got great pizza.

[Jordan chuckles.]

00:21:57 Jordan Host And—but it was—a lot of my friends worked there, too. So, it was kind of a hangout. So, it was—yeah. It wasn't really like a job. It was fun.
The director of *The Last Shift* comes from the world of documentaries. Was his style different because he typically works in nonfiction?

00:22:08 Richard Guest Well, you know, he wanted something. Again, you—he wanted it to look like the camera was kind of window peeping and not, you know—he didn't want you to be aware of the camera. I think—I mean, I'm speaking for Andrew, so I really have to be careful 'cause I—I'm not sure. But that's the impression I got, is that he didn't want a camera move or something that you—all of the sudden you're made aware that this is a move, that something's happening with the camera. And he just wanted it to seem like you were looking in somebody's window. That was my impression.

00:22:46 Jordan Host Yeah, it is—it is a very, like, naturalistic movie and the locations in the movie are very every day. It is not glamorous at all.

00:22:57 Richard Guest No. [Chuckles.] No, it isn't. And, you know, it's—I just—I guess it's one of those things where you read it and just go, "Geez, I—I wanna do this. I really wanna do this. I wanna play this guy. I don't know what he is yet, but I just wanna play him." And it was—it was really fun.

00:23:15 Jordan Host The characters in *The Last Shift* are having some really, like, difficult, challenging conversations about society and about race in particular. Are those kinds of scenes hard to shoot when, you know, big issues like that are part of the text?

00:23:33 Richard Guest No. No. [Beat.] We just kind of would—we just kind of... figured out where would it go? Where would this go? You know. Let's just see where this goes. And we—I think we waited a while to shoot those scenes. Until, you know—kind of like—they kind of, in the script where it is was, we got to know each other a little bit and it seems like maybe this is the time to talk about something like this, on Jevon's part. You know. And let's just see where it goes, you know? And yeah.

00:24:21 Jordan Host But no. No. It wasn't hard to do. It was a little uncomfortable, but you know.
They don't seem like they're coming out of a writer who has a thesis. It does just seem like the hearts of these characters are coming out. I don't know. I thought—I was impressed with how natural and kind of nonjudgmental those scenes were.

00:24:38	Richard	Guest	<p>He is. Yeah. And Andrew is not. He is not. You know, he's—you know, it's that thing of somebody—you know... they have—he has more in common with Jevon than he has with <i>[chuckles]</i> anybody else, you know. But he just doesn't get it. He doesn't see it. You know. And that's—and it's—he's not a bad man. I mean, he's a racist. He is a racist. But if you've seen it in the context of this thing, it's—it's—he could have been something else. He could have been somebody else, if he had a little different life. You know? And here's a chance for him to be something else. And he doesn't take it. He's—he doesn't have the tools or the wherewithal to take it.</p> <p>He doesn't—he doesn't—but, you know, I think at the same time he knows he would—he knows he was wrong. But he—it's not in him now at this time in his life, he doesn't have the—he doesn't, he just doesn't have the tools to do it.</p>
00:25:35	Jordan	Host	Well, Richard Jenkins, thank you so much for joining us on <i>Bullseye</i> .
00:25:38	Richard	Guest	It was my pleasure. Thanks for having me.
00:25:41	Jesse	Host	Richard Jenkins. His two newest movies are <i>Kajillionaire</i> and <i>The Last Shift</i> . His interviewer, Jordan Morris, is also a TV comedy writer and podcaster. He's my cohost on the comedy podcast, <i>Jordan, Jesse, Go!</i> He also created the scripted sci-fi podcast, <i>Bubble</i> , which has just been announced as a graphic novel. And you can see his jokes on the wonderful Disney+ alien Muppet show, <i>Earth to Ned</i> .
00:26:08	Music	Transition	Uplifting transition music.
00:26:09	Jesse	Host	That's the end of another episode of <i>Bullseye</i> . <i>Bullseye</i> is produced out of the homes of me and the staff of Maximum Fun, in and around greater Los Angeles, California—where my daughter deemed our backyard balance beam “not high enough!”, so I went on a popular eCommerce website and ordered a higher balance beam. Can't go anywhere! It's 2020.
			<p>The show is produced by speaking into microphones. Our producer is Kevin Ferguson. Jesus Ambrosio and Jordan Kauwling are our associate producers. We get help from Casey O'Brien. Our interstitial music is by Dan Wally, also known as DJW. Our theme song is by The Go! Team. Thanks to them and their label, Memphis Industries, for letting us use it. You can keep up with the show on Facebook, on Twitter, on YouTube. Just search for <i>Bullseye with Jesse Thorn</i>.</p> <p>And I think that's about it. Just remember: all great radio hosts have a signature signoff.</p>
00:27:04	Promo	Promo	<p>Speaker: <i>Bullseye with Jesse Thorn</i> is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR.</p> <p><i>[Music fades out.]</i></p>