

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	[Music fades out.] “Huddle Formation” from the album <i>Thunder, Lightning, Strike</i> by The Go! Team. A fast, upbeat, peppy song. Music plays as Jesse speaks, then fades out.
00:00:20	Jesse Thorn	Host	It’s <i>Bullseye</i> . I’m Jesse Thorn. Jonathan Majors has been acting professionally for just under five years. He’s done theatre, TV, movies. And in that short amount of time, he’s become one of the most captivating performers in Hollywood. I mean, look. I’m not really a betting guy, but I would put good money on Majors winning an Academy Award sometime in the next five years. On screen, he is charismatic and charming when the role calls for it and on a dime he can turn to vulnerable and broken. Watching him, you can easily lose yourself and forget about the other performers. He was in two of my favorite recent movies. In Spike Lee’s <i>Da 5 Bloods</i> , he played David—the son of Paul, played by Delroy Lindo. In <i>The Last Black Man in San Francisco</i> , an absolute masterpiece, he played Mont, best friend to Jimmie.
00:01:11	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:01:12	Clip	Clip	Jimmie (<i>The Last Black Man in San Francisco</i>): Did you see him today? How’d it go? Mont: He said this was a bad idea. Jimmie: Thought you said he was an idiot? Mont: No, he’s just mad ‘cause he lost the house. But what if we shouldn’t be here? Jimmie: Who should be here more? Hm? Some millionaire? They want it ‘cause it looks nice. Mont: But you’re the reason it looks nice, Jim.
00:01:53	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:01:54	Jesse	Host	Recently, Jonathan Majors earned an Emmy nomination for his work on HBO’s <i>Lovecraft Country</i> . That show is based on a book by Matt Ruff. The book and the TV series pull from some of HP Lovecraft’s most iconic tropes: dark mansions with hidden secrets, huge monsters covered in eyeballs. But it also reckons with Lovecraft’s work. HP Lovecraft has often been seen as one of the most influential writers of the 20 th century, but he also wrote essays, stories, and poems that were unapologetically racist. <i>Lovecraft Country</i> confronts his legacy head-on. Jonathan Majors plays Atticus in the show: a young Black man traveling across the US in the 1950s to find his missing father. Atticus embarks on the supernatural journey alongside his friend, Letitia, and his uncle, George. There are plenty of moments where Atticus and the rest of the protagonists fight to escape actual, literal

monsters. But the characters also face very real threats from elsewhere: racist police, burning crosses, lynchings.

Let's hear a bit from the show. In this scene, Atticus is on his way to his hometown to start looking for his lost father. Atticus's bus breaks down, leaving him to walk to the next town. An older woman who was also on the bus accompanies him and asks about a book he's reading.

00:03:18 Sound Effect Transition

Music swells and fades.

00:03:19 Clip Clip

[The sound of crickets.]

Speaker (Lovecraft Country): Tell me. What's that book you've been reading about?

Atticus: *A Princess of Mars?*

Speaker: Mm-hm.

Atticus: It's about this man named John Carter who goes from being a captain in the army of northern Virginia to becoming a Martian warlord.

Speaker: Huh.

Atticus: Starts with him running from Apaches and hiding in this magical cave, which transports him to the red planet. That's when it starts to get good.

Speaker: Hold on! You said the hero was a confederate officer.

Atticus: Ex-confederate.

Speaker: He fought for slavery. You don't get to put a "ex" in front of that.

Atticus: Stories are like people. Loving them doesn't make them perfect; you just try and cherish them, overlook their flaws. Music swells and fades.

00:04:01 Sound Effect Transition

00:04:03 Jesse Host

Jonathan Majors, welcome to *Bullseye*. I'm so happy to have you on the show.

00:04:06 Jonathan Majors Guest

My pleasure. My pleasure, brother.

00:04:09 Jesse Host

So, you've got some vet stories, running through your work. *Da 5 Bloods* is a story in which you play the son of a vet. The Lovecraft show, you play a vet who's come home. And you grew up partly a military brat.

[Jonathan confirms.]

Tell me about what you understood about the military when you were a kid.

00:04:35 Jonathan Guest

Yes, sir. No, sir. Yes, ma'am.

[Jesse laughs.]

No, ma'am. Uh, I mean, it's... the—I guess, as a child—as a young boy, it was respect. I mean, that's what it was. It was respect and posture. And then I believe, as I began to get older and we moved off the base and got to take in more life, I realized that this military lifestyle or way of being really established a really clear decorum in my life about how to do things in a certain way. You know, you make your bed. You clean your dishes. You say, "Yes, sir. No, sir. Yes, ma'am. No ma'am." You know? And that—and that also came from being, you know, raised in the Methodist and the Baptist church and also just being a Texan. You know? Though we were based in California for a while, I—both my parents are of Texas birth. You know? So, yeah, the military had a huge, quiet impact on kind of who I—who I became as a—as a man and who I became as a—as an artist. And who I believe I'm still becoming. I think.

00:05:55 Jesse Host
00:05:57 Jonathan Guest

Was it your dad who was in the service?

Yeah, my father was. My father was in the Air Force and my maternal grandfather was in the Army and my paternal grandfather was in the Navy. So, we almost—we almost got them all. And I was gonna be a Marine! I was ready to drop out of—not drop out, I guess. I guess—I mean, drop out is drop out—drop out of Yale. *[Chuckling.]* My, uh—my first year. And join the Marines. And so, I guess that would've given us the full quatrain for the US armed services. But alas, that didn't come to be.

00:06:37 Jesse Host
00:06:39 Jonathan Guest

Or maybe not alas. You're doing alright.

[Laughs.] Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. I'm not a Marine, though. You know? But yeah, yeah. We're doing alright. We're doing alright.

00:06:45 Jesse Host

You know, I grew up going to vets' AA meetings with my dad. So, when I was seven or eight years old, I would like sit in the back and draw and hear *[chuckles]*—hear really brutal and intense stories about being in the military.

[Jonathan affirms.]

And I wonder if you had any understanding of—I don't know if your father was a combat vet, but if you had any understanding of what it was to be in the service or be in war beyond standing up straight?

00:07:25 Jonathan Guest
00:07:27 Jesse Host
00:07:29 Jonathan Guest

My father or me, personally?

If you had any understanding of that?

Oh, man! Yeah, it's kind of—it's kind of strange how it comes about. War is a very real thing. You know? And it's—I believe it's always kind of happening around us. And some of us are enlisted in a certain war and we know it. And some of us are enlisted in the war and we don't. And though I never—you know, I'm not a—I am not a veteran. You know, I was never a soldier in any capacity, but being raised by soldiers and—you know—having the life I led really put me in some what I would call war zones. *[Chuckles.]* You know?

Not to put too fine of a point on it, but being a young kid anywhere is tough. Being a young Black kid in the south is tough. Being a young Black male in the south is tough. Being a young Black male in the south who had a certain build is tough. You know? Like you do begin to learn how to war and to protect yourself, both mentally and physically and spiritually. And, yeah, you—there's a certain amount of bearing that you have to have in order to survive. And

yeah, I think I definitely took that on and kind of carry that with me. You know, maybe that's a good thing, maybe it's not. But I have it nonetheless.

00:08:52 Jesse Host

What did you know about the circumstances of your dad leaving when he left, when you were—what was it, like about eight years old?

00:09:00 Jonathan Guest

Yeah, that's deep, man. You know as much as—he was—it's a—I'm 31 years old, now. Almost 32. And you don't know certain things until time—time has a way of making things clear to you. And—to one and to me—and in regards to my father, man. It was a... it was deep, 'cause the first thing—you know, if you're gonna talk about it, and I think it's a common thing—you know, it's like the stages of grief. First, you don't—you don't believe it. Right? If it—say it happens at 8, you know, you don't—you don't really buy into it until about 11. You know what I mean? And then by then, it's—you got too much—too much love for, you know, the other parties involved to ask questions. You just—you just hold your bearing and soldier on.

Truth be told, it's still a conversation that, you know, my own personal growth would have to happen, you know, man to man. To hear the why of it. We all know what it was, but what is the why of it? You know, as an artist, that's what I'm most interested in. You know. What we do is—that's not here nor there. Why are we doing it? That's what—that's the character. You know? And that's the thing to really examine, for me. And continuing to love him and trying to build something with him, you know, after that—after that type of... experience.

So, not much. You know? We've never—I—we've never gotten into it and *[sighs]*—and it's gonna take a big part of me to do that. Hopefully, that'll come around sometime.

00:10:52 Jesse Host

And he was gone throughout your childhood.

[Jonathan confirms.]

00:11:01 Jonathan Guest

Did you know that was real, when you were a kid?

Yeah, I think—it's deep, man. I there's a image I remember—it's almost as if my mother told me, you know, they were... you know, it wasn't working out. It's almost like—as if I knew the outcome. I knew that I had lost my—I had lost my guy. You know what I mean? And I just went outside and banged on this tree. Just banged—just wailed on this tree, man. And I came back in, and she said, "Is the tree okay?" And, um.

[They chuckle.]

I said, *[angrily]* "I don't know, woman!" You know? And then probably went into my room and destroyed my room, which was just a bad habit of mine when I was a boy. But... I don't know, man. That's pretty much all I can say about that, on that point. I think. I'm just sitting in it. I'm just—I haven't—I haven't thought about it in a beat. You know? Yeah, I haven't thought about it—that moment, that particular moment—you know, the tree and my mom. You play it out. You play it out. You know? The imagination does that. I mean, that's something I've always been—I've always fallen victim

to, you know. Actually, I can't say victim. That's not true. I've always been very close to my imagination. And it's there for a reason. It's like the god particle in us, you know that allows us to think and create worlds and circumstances outside of our given circumstances. You know? Which, you know, helped me, you know, find a path to live and to work and gave me purpose. You know?

But in that moment, it really—you know, spooked me and though time had to go on, you know—certain events had to pass. You know, Christmases had to go by, and birthdays had to go by and... to really know like, yeah. That's it. That happened to you. You know what I mean? *[Chuckles.]* Like that happened to you and then when you see—you know, when you see the fella, you know, 12/13 years later—you know. It's a—it's a different experience. Yeah.

[Chuckles.]

00:13:20 Jesse Host

Did you talk to him in the—when he was gone? Did you ever say to you mom, “Can I call him?” Or did he ever call you?

00:13:25 Jonathan Guest

Oh man! It was—it was crazy, man. It was—I wonder—I wonder, you know, how much of this I should say and how much of it is, you know—I don't mind it, though. You know? But—no, there was a—there was a real—there was a real effort. But kids, man. You know what I mean? There was a real effort to—kids don't really hold malice. You know what I'm saying? That's something we're taught. But yeah. I tried to make contact a lot. You know? A lot. A lot. A whole lot. And... you know, it was fated, for whatever reason, that that was to happen. And fight as I—fight as I did to make it feel better, it was just something I had to swallow. You know? And not just me. I mean, my—you know, my whole family.

I mean, it was—I guess I can speak to it because it is a—it is a very developing event. You know? In my life. You can't shake certain things like that. I mean, you wanna talk about war? I mean, war with a ghost is something that you can't—I guess some do, but... and not even a ghost. With an idea. That's a hard—that's a hard pill to swallow. You know? And you're not equipped for it, you know, at such a young age. And... but you do! I mean, we're—we are a strong species and, you know, I think even then I knew I was an artist to a degree. And I knew that—it's funny, when I got to my first drama school, someone said to me, you know—and I'm sure it's a common anecdote but, “Nothing bad ever happens to an artist. It's all material.”

And when I—you know, at 18—you know, those circumstances still being what they were, I realized I had a great deal of material. A great deal of material to pull from. And lo and behold—and those things—because... because the material is immaterial, you know—it is imagination in a way. You apply it in different ways. You know? I could apply it to, you know, characters I was playing. I understand and understood at a very young age what it was to be, you know, quote/unquote betrayed. I mean, how many *[chuckles]* how many—you know—9-year-olds understand that? You know? How many—and really how many 18-year-olds understand that? These are—these are things that hopefully one never experiences. But time goes along, and time has a way of giving you gifts. You know? And sometimes they're packaged in pain, but it does—it does benefit you. You know?

00:16:34	Jesse	Host	<p>I really think that's... the beauty of being, you know, an artist for me. That, you know, the heartache is inevitable and you just kind of deal with it and metabolize it and learn from it and use it.</p> <p>Even more with Jonathan Majors still to come. Stay with us. It's <i>Bullseye</i>, from MaximumFun.org and NPR.</p>
00:16:41	Music	Transition	Bright, chiming music.
00:16:44	Jesse	Promo	<p>Support for <i>Bullseye</i> and the following message come from Culturelle. Culturelle wants you to know that an estimated 45 million Americans may have IBS, according to the International Foundation for Gastrointestinal Disorders. Culturelle IBS Complete Support is a medical food for the dietary management of IBS. It's designed to relieve symptoms like abdominal pain, bloating, diarrhea, and constipation in a safe, well-tolerated, once daily dose. Save 20% with promo code "radio" on Culturelle.com.</p>
00:17:26	Promo	Clip	<p><i>[Music fades out.]</i> Music: Relaxed piano music.</p>
			<p>Peter Sagal: I'm Peter Sagal, host of NPR's <i>Wait Wait... Don't Tell Me!</i> That strange sound you heard on our last show was live people! Laughing! And applauding! Be a part of our next show with real live people on August 26th at Tanglewood! Join us live and you too can finally see what our real live legs look like. Legs! Remember those?</p>
00:17:46	Music	Transition	<p><i>[Music ends.]</i> Thumpy music with light vocalizations.</p>
00:17:50	Jesse	Host	<p>Welcome back to <i>Bullseye</i>. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest is Jonathan Majors. He's an actor. You might have seen him in <i>Da 5 Bloods</i> or on the Marvel TV show, <i>Loki</i>. He's nominated for an Emmy for his role in the HBO horror drama, <i>Lovecraft Country</i>, where he played Atticus. You can stream that show in its entirety on HBO Max. Let's get back into our conversation.</p>
			<p>It must have been pretty intense to work in <i>Da 5 Bloods</i>, which is a movie about a group of African American Vietnam vets who go back to Vietnam. And you play Delroy Lindo's character's son, who goes back with them. It must have been intense to be on this like literal, physical journey. Right?</p>
			<p><i>[Jonathan confirms intermittently as Jesse continues.]</i></p>
00:19:04	Jonathan	Guest	<p>You're going to a foreign country, and you have this guy who is your onscreen and metaphorical dad, in Delroy Lindo, who is portraying a soldier and a vet. While you are also <i>[chuckles]</i>, you know—you're a few years into trying to reestablish what your relationship with your biological dad is. That must have been a pretty intense experience to have those two things going on at the same time.</p> <p>Man, it—you know, I say this all the time. I think I should just start every interview with it. You know, growth as an artist and growth as a human being are simultaneous. That's just—that's just—I mean, that's an adage that was given to me in school and I've really held onto it. And when a role like David picks you, you know, in the situation you're in—you know, we're protected in a way 'cause—not in a way. We're protected under the guidance and auteurship of</p>

Spike Lee. He's put this whole cast together. There's no other way to go into it. You know? We're going into war.

I mean, shooting film [*chuckles*] is very much like going into war. You know? Sometimes you feel like you have the higher ground and sometimes you feel like you don't. You know? And it's your crew, it's the film against the elements. That's always a factor. You know. Making a—making a movie is a miracle. But *Da 5 Bloods* and working with the giant, Delroy, it was a... personal experience insofar that what David was going after is something that I understood for myself to be something that I knew I needed and need for myself, just a relationship between father and son and what does that look like.

Now, look. We've gotten in to the—look, we were at war, maybe 20 minutes? Maybe 15 minutes into this thing? I gotta say, man, I had great, great, great, great, great, great, great father figures in my life. You know? Nothing can and does replace dad. You know what I mean? In my situation. But I didn't want for any guidance in any way. You know, sometimes I fought against it, but I have a great uncle. I have my great—I have my—I have my grandfathers that were awesome. And I had a hell of a mom. I only bring up those, you know, familial icons because stepping into *Da 5 Bloods*—you know, it was like stepping into another family in a way. And Spike, still to this day, is a guiding light—you know? And a coach and a mentor for me. And Delroy—[*chuckles*] I mean, we really—we really—we really went after it. You know? 'Cause he too has a son. You know?

And we're really just in there—I'll speak for David. David's really just in there trying to work out his [*censored*]. You know? And the beauty about good art—not even good art. Art in general—is that the artist is always trying to work out their [*censored*]. You know? And here I was, in a position where I look across from me and I see this Black man, you know, who's calling me son and all David wants in that film, you know—it's never about the gold, for David. And he says it. You know? I say it to—David, we, say it to Otis. You know? We say, "It feels like it's my last time with him." You know? So, the stakes are high. To get to know the father, to get to know one of your origins, I think that's a very human thing to want and to need. And I know it is for me, you know, to this day—to really get to know where you come from. You know? And from whom you come from. And so, David really got to work that out and that was his entire mission: to see and feel and understand—understand his father's love. That's a deep thing. And that's what the script offered me, and that's really what Spike was gifting me. And Delroy was a great scene partner, insofar that it's not all "yes, sir; no, sir" when the heat gets hot. You know? Especially when the son has been in the world a bit and is trying to find his own footing, trying to find his own place. You push it a little bit. And David does push it a little bit. Just the push and pull of that: him trying to be his own man but also trying to find who he is through his father.

00:22:33 Jonathan Guest

He has a wonderful experience and there's a healing in that, very much like Montrose and Atticus. You know? The work has been very rewarding and healing.

00:23:33 Jesse Host Was there anything that you wanted to ask your dad when you reconnected with him?

00:23:38 Jonathan Guest Yeah. You know, you try it. You try it, man. You know, and like I'm not—you know, I'm not a therapist. *[Chuckles.]* You know what I mean? I don't know how to—you know what? And I'm a very sensitive cat. *[Laughs.]* You know, I'm a bit of a crybaby. You know? All those things. But you know, it's a—it's a journey. It's a journey to do that. And we've—I've tried it. Tried it when I was a boy and then, you know, at damn near 32 years of living... maybe after this conversation. You know? 'Cause we've dug it up. I may holler back at him and—you know, and just say, "Hey, man. What's up?" You know, 'cause some of it—and here's the weird part, man, some of it's understood.

Some of it is understood. Not necessarily absolved but understood and we now stand apart from that individual. You know? We share a last name, and we share blood, and you are a part of a team—part of a lineage. And just because one is one way doesn't mean you have to be that way. And it's actually you being a different way and being more individual is what buoys the entire legacy. And that runs back to Atticus: the legacy of the Freeman family. We all know what's going on with the Montrose and Atticus situation. You know, there's a lot of—there's a great deal of pain in that. Atticus does not succumb to it. He actually goes and goes—he goes to the pain. He goes and gets him.

'Cause ultimately, it's about love and *[chuckles]*—you know, it's funny. There's a John Mayer song. You know, it says, "You love who you love." And it's actually about, you know, an amorous companion, you know. But you love who you love, man. And I mean, those guys love their dads. You know? Atticus loves his dad. I would—I would reckon to say that that's an overall truth, unless something—I mean, unless it's not. And if it's not, it's not. You know? You can't change that. But yeah. Atticus runs towards the pain of it. You know? He goes and gets his dad. You know? 'Cause love—the love he has for him snuffs it out. You know? And who wouldn't go get, you know, *[chuckles]* Michael K Williams? You know? Who wouldn't go—who wouldn't go find him and bring him...?

00:26:10 Jesse Host I don't know if you've ever read it; I think I'm allowed to talk about it. It's been a few years since I brought it up on this show, even though I've probably brought it up five times. But David Mamet wrote this book about acting.

00:26:21 Jonathan Guest *True and False?*

00:26:22 Jesse Host Just like—yeah.

00:26:23 Jonathan Guest Yep. Break it down.

00:26:24 Jesse Host So—okay, so, like all David Mamet things, there is some entertaining bloviating in it. Like he's—you know, he says a lot of stuff that he—that it's clear he thinks it would be fun to say.

[Jonathan agrees intermittently as Jesse continues.]

He does a great job of it. That's his specialty. But like, basically the premise of this book *[chuckling]* is—it's a very entertaining book. The premise of this book is that actor's job is to say the lines loud enough so the audience can hear it. *[Laughs.]* And then the

secondary premise is theatre education and acting education, besides that, is dumb. And *[laughing]* I—I really like this book. When I was reading it, the thing that occurred to me is that, as much as David Mamet is complaining about, you know, whatever—an acting exercise where everybody in the class has to pretend to be a different kind of tree or whatever. Like—

00:27:20 Jonathan Guest

[Laughs dryly, although it becomes more genuine as it goes.] Though, I don't know why that's so funny! I'm looking at all these *[censored]* trees in front of me, you know, and I'm just thinking about me and my classmates just like, "Yep. Been there. Done that. Yeah."

00:27:35 Jesse Host

[Laughs.] But one of the things that I think Mamet maybe misses—you know, maybe intentionally—is that to be the person who is acting, who is saying the words loud enough so that the audience can hear, to be—you know—William H Macy in one of those Mamet plays—

00:27:55 Jonathan Guest

00:27:58 Jesse Host

Come on. Come on.
—there is a kind of presence and absence of self that *[chuckling]* spending years in a room full of people pretending to be different kinds of trees cultivates! Because it—*[laughs]* it's so embarrassing in a way that it leaves you—that it leaves you, you know, outside of performance. Right? It—you have to be present to accept that premise that we're all gonna pretend to be trees. You have to be there and just do it. There's not a—there's not a halfway way, after a while, to pretend to be trees with 12 other people. So, at some point, you just have to be present and say the words loud enough so that the audience can hear.

[Jonathan hums in agreement several times.]

00:28:51 Jonathan Guest

And *[chuckling]* I wonder how you feel about acting education as a guy who got over ten years of it.

It's funny you say this, man, because I'm... I'm literally having this exact conversation right now. And—like right now. Like every morning with my pal. We're sitting in the café and he and I have a theatre company together and we're always talking about pedagogy, and he teaches independent of me at a very good school. And I'm always on his *[censored]* about like, "Yeah, man, but that's *[censored]*." *[Chuckling.]* You know what I mean? Like that's—that's got—you know?

Like—and I will say about brother Mamet, like artist to artist, not man to man. I don't know the cat. But that is—that is the—I feel, and come at me, Mamet, if I'm wrong. You know what I mean? But I do feel that like that is a clear perspective of someone who is a master of the craft. Right? A complete master of the craft. If he's got a problem with me saying that, I will give you my address, bro. Come see me. But no, I mean, Mamet is a master of his craft. A complete master of his craft. And so, I understand the sentiment. *[Chuckles.]* You know? However, here's my take on—should we start with the trees, or should we start with theatre training in general? Um.

[Jesse laughs.]

Theatre training—theatre training is, in my opinion... [sighs] wow, okay, here it comes. Right? So, you did say—you know—ten years of training. Now, I know myself. Right? I'm just gonna speak for myself. I know myself. And again, this goes to I guess the upbringing of being a military brat and also being, you know—growing up in a very disciplinary—being raised by disciplinarians. Mother, father, grandparents, etc. It's a part of—it's just a part of it, right? And my just civilian ego of not liking the idea that artists are not—and particularly actors are not viewed as real professionals in certain circles. Right? And predominantly in our country, in the United States. In the United States of America. There were so many jokes about us, you know? "Oh, you're a waiter." And then—and then that leads to this conversation with actors of like, "Oh, I'm not an actor unless I'm—unless I'm like on a show or doing this or doing that."

And they go, "Okay! Okay, okay, okay, okay." My mind went to that place probably when I was about, uh, 19? And I really hit it at 21. At 21, I was in drama school already and I was finding that I was locked. You know what I mean? I was locked. I was—I was in a place where I could—I could easily hit the target for what it is my teacher was asking me to do. Right? That's that discipline. That's that militancy. I could do that. And this is just my opinion, you know, where I was in my craft and in my growing. And then, it was this—it was—it was late at night, and I had—and I was working with my dear friend and classmate. And we were working on *Jesus Hopped the 'A' Train*, Stephen Adly Guirgis. I don't know if he lives in New York; I don't know if he's from New York, but I'm pretty sure he is. But it's about that life. It's about real people. Anyways, I'll make it quick.

00:32:09 Jonathan Guest

But it was in that moment. We were rehearsing and something unlocked, right? And I went, "Oh, [censored]. Man. I've told this story before, but holy [censored], man." I'm talking to my buddy outside the Pickle Jar, which is where we—it's like our community area at school—and it's early in the morning or late at night, however you view it. And I was like, "Oh, man. You saw that." We all saw it. It was just he and I in the studio and it was—I couldn't explain what it was, but we see—I see it in other actors all the time. But what it was was this freedom, right? It was this untamed response to language. Right? Which I think is what Mamet is talking about: stand there and say it. Right? If you give an untamed creature—right?—a task, it will be natural. It will be honest. It will be true.

The thing about being an actor, is that we train and train and train and train and train and then we're trained, but we have to train—and it happens for different times and some people are just madly gifted, you know, where it's different. But you wanna work until you're untamed. Right? And what the school—what schools should do is focus on what it is to be untamed and conscientious of what it is you are doing. That is what we—that is what I hope to strive for in my work, that I am conscious of what it is I am doing. You know? That does leave room for the spirit. We may not even get to that, today. But I'm conscious of what it is I'm doing. The training is keeping me on the rails of the thing I have crafted. Right? And the

craft comes from my imagination, from the imagination of my collaborators.

But it is not to speak clearly, though I can. It is—though we can, as artists—it is not to, you know, absolutely—ugh, *[censored]*, I'm in it now—absolutely hit mark. Right? Though I can! You know what I mean?! You know, like—and that's the collaboration element of it. Right? That's like filmmaking, storytelling. You know, when the actor is collaborating with other artists. Right? But my take on drama school is more of a take on philosophy and approach. Acting, like everything else, is an approach. Right? Otherwise, it's just a skillset. But there is an approach to it and the approach, I think in drama schools—not at large—is that there's a—you know, they call it the classic—you know, classically trained. You know, there's a certain way of doing things.

And I'll say to any actors listening, you know, there's a certain way of doing things and you gotta get your work done, but you also have to be able to harness that untamed element in yourself. You know? And a school can't give you that, but they should, in some ways, be moving towards it. Because, ultimately, we wanna see stories about people. And people don't—not every character you play went to drama school. *[Makes an "I don't know" sound then laughs.]* Alright. I mean, I don't know what—that's a mess, fam. But I hope you—I hope you get what I'm saying. You know? I mean, it's like—this is like politics for actors. You know what I mean? Like real politics and who the *[censored]* am I to talk? I mean, I've got—again—like, unfortunately or fortunately, I mean I did what I did, and I went to the schools I went to. And I have beef with those schools. *[Laughing.]* You know what I mean?

00:35:37	Jonathan	Guest	Like I also have great thanks to those schools. You know? It's—like any real relationship, it's bittersweet. I wouldn't take it back, but <i>[censored]</i> , man, it was not easy.
00:35:49	Jesse	Host	We'll finish up with Jonathan Majors in just a minute. Stick around. It's <i>Bullseye</i> , from MaximumFun.org and NPR.
00:35:57	Music	Transition	Surreal synth music.
00:35:59	Jesse	Promo	This message comes from NPR sponsor Discover. Discover matches all the cashback you earn on your credit card at the end of your first year, automatically. With no limit on how much you can earn. It's amazing because of all the places where Discover is accepted. 99% of places in the US that take credit cards. So, when it comes to Discover, get used to hearing "yes" more often. Learn more at Discover.com/match . 2021 Neilson Report. Limitations apply.

00:36:35	Promo	Clip	<i>[Music fades out.]</i> Music: Fun, cheerful music.
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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?

[Kirk chuckles.]

Maddy: In that case, you should check out [Triple Click!](#) It's a 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.]

00:37:19 Music Transition
00:37:23 Jesse Host

Thumpy, relaxed music.
This is *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. I'm talking with actor Jonathan Majors. He's the Emmy nominated star of HBO's *Lovecraft Country*. Let's get back into our conversation.

00:37:58 Jonathan Guest
00:37:59 Jesse Host

There's this saying that people say about rappers. Like, if you watch like a really intense freestyle on, you know, one of these videos of people rapping on HOT 97 or on Sway & Tech or something like that. You know, like that one that—there was one that went around like maybe two years ago of Black Thought, just bars and bars and bars and bars and bars and bars and bars—

Wickeeed!
—that went on for like ten minutes. And they say he blacked out.

[Jonathan affirms multiple times as Jesse continues.]

00:38:24 Jonathan Guest

Right? And, you know, that is true of many art forms, but I think few as much as acting, where—you know, you have these parameters, right? You have given circumstances. You have a script. You have marks to hit, if you're on film. You know, you have—
You have spike marks, if you're on the stage. Yeah.

00:38:27	Jesse	Host	Yeah. You've got blocking, you know, you've gotta—you've gotta cross upstage at this certain time, whatever it is. Right? You have all of these things that you have to execute. Maybe you're doing an accent. You have to get the accent right.
00:38:39	Jonathan	Guest	You know, craft.
00:38:40	Jesse	Host	<i>[Jonathan agrees multiple times as Jesse continues.]</i> Like, there's—you know, you're—you shape your body in a certain way. All of these things are given to you, and you just have to be able to accept them all as true, in a very pure way, and then act like a human being. Then just be a human being. And that is like a crazy—that is a crazy trick to me <i>[chuckles]</i> that I definitely could never do. Like, I never was able to do all that stuff and also get out of my head.
00:39:10	Jonathan	Guest	That's deep, man. Because the common day—what we call an actor now, right, is historically—you know, is the shaman. That's who we are. Like that's where we come from. Every culture has it: the griot, the shaman, you know, the witch doctor. We have that gene. And there is a sense of trance, there is a sense of elevation, there is a sense of something that does possess the artist to tell the story a certain way. You know? With a certain passion. You know? With a certain vigor. It's a part of it—I mean, I think you've gotta be a little crazy. <i>[Chuckles.]</i> You know? To be—to be an actor.
			I mean, I think everyone's a little crazy in general, but to be an actor is that you are willing to, you know, really come up against your crazy. And sometimes that's helpful and sometimes it's not, but if you're an artist, you don't really have a choice in that. You know? And you just hope that you have the—again, back to—back to the topic we began with, you know—the decorum of a lifestyle that gives you barriers and boundaries, you know, for yourself. That you have the discipline to go there. You know, I say a lot of times—some cat's like, "The actor has to be the sanest person in the room." Because what they're asking you to do—between action and cut—is take your soul and throw that <i>[censored]</i> across the wall. You know what I mean? Like, chuck it. And then pick it back up and do it again."
			You know what I mean? That's what they're—that's what you're signing up for, you know? That's what you're signing up for. Hopefully you take pleasure in that and hopefully you understand—one understands the service and the benefit and the gift it is for not just oneself but for the world as a—as a—as a whole. Yeah?
00:41:15	Jesse	Host	Well, Jonathan Majors, I'm so grateful to you for taking this time to be on <i>Bullseye</i> . It was nice to get to talk to you.
00:41:20	Jonathan	Guest	Oh, man! <i>[Chuckles.]</i> It was alright! Yeah! Yeah, it's my pleasure, man. My pleasure. And thank you for—thank you for being a ear in some ways, man. I didn't know I was gonna talk about... any of that. <i>[Chuckles.]</i>
00:41:34	Music	Transition	Easy keyboard music.
00:41:37	Jesse	Host	Jonathan Majors. He's up for Best Lead Actor in a Drama Series for his part in <i>Lovecraft Country</i> , at this year's Emmys. You can also watch <i>Lovecraft Country</i> on HBO Max. Also, I have already mentioned this, but if you haven't seen <i>The Last Black Man in San Francisco</i> , drop what you're doing. Go see it. it is beautiful. Completely unique. Just a wonderful, wonderful film. You can catch

it on Prime Video or on Kanopy, which you can get for free with your library card in a lot of places.

00:42:09	Music	Transition	<i>[Music fades out.]</i>
00:42:15	Jesse	Host	Thumpy synth music. That's the end of another episode of <i>Bullseye</i> . <i>Bullseye</i> is created from the homes of me and the staff of Maximum Fun, in and around greater Los Angeles, California. Here at my house, my daughter has created her own set of Mystery Science Theater 3000 robots, including <i>[laughs]</i> —including a Ken doll fashioned to look like Jonah Ray—to watch cheesy movies with her. Our show is produced by speaking into microphones. Our senior producer is Kevin Ferguson. Our producer is Jesus Ambrosio. Production fellows at Maximum Fun are Richard Robey and Valerie Moffat. 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 to their label, Memphis Industries, for sharing it. You can also keep up with our show on Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. We post our interviews in all of those places. And I think that's it. Just remember: all great radio hosts have a signature signoff.
00:43:17	Promo	Promo	Speaker: <i>Bullseye with Jesse Thorn</i> is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR. <i>[Music fades out.]</i>