

[00:00:00]

Transition: Gentle, trilling music with a steady drumbeat plays under the dialogue.

Promo: *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR.

Music: “Huddle Formation” from the album *Thunder, Lightning, Strike* by The Go! Team—a fast, upbeat, peppy song. Music plays as Jesse speaks, then fades out.

Jesse Thorn: It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. Craig Robinson says that, for pretty much the first time in his career, he feels like a success. It's success that's maybe coming a little later than Craig might have hoped or expected. He started out as a comic and a musician. His act is sort of a mix of stand up and songs. He had a lot of great supporting parts in a lot of great movies and TV shows. Notably, *The Office*, where he played Daryl Philbin.

Transition: Music swells then fades.

Clip:

Daryl (*The Office*): Mike, get off of the lift, please! Come on, now!

Michael: I'm fine, I'm fine, I'm fine!

(A huge crash.)

We'll get somebody to clean that up.

Daryl: We're the ones that gotta clean that up!

Transition: Music swells then fades.

Jesse Thorn: *Pineapple Express*, with Seth Rogen and Danny McBride.

Transition: Music swells then fades.

Clip:

Matheson (*Pineapple Express*): I might act tough, but I got a lot of feelings. And you hurt damn near every one of them.

Transition: Music swells then fades.

Jesse Thorn: And a particularly great recurring role on *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*, where he was Doug Judy, the Pontiac Bandit.

Transition: Music swells then fades.

Clip:

Doug Judy (*Brooklyn Nine-Nine*): Since I'm going to jail, I want to enjoy my time left on the outside.

(Funky music fades in.)

Put me up in a five-star hotel, like the Royce. Unlimited room service and minibar privileges.

Holt: Three-star hotel, like the Brooklyner. \$60 a day meal allowance, no minibar.

Doug Judy: Four-star hotel, like the Oneida. 200 in food, no minibar or alcohol, but I get to go crazy on candy and nuts.

Holt: Agreed.

Doug: *(Cheering.)* Ow!

Transition: Music swells then fades.

Jesse Thorn: These days, he has his own show. It's called *Killing It*. The show recently wrapped up its second season on Peacock. It was co-created by Dan Gore and Luke Del Tredici, two of the creators of *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*. And, man, it is a great show. Here is the premise of *Killing It*. Robinson plays Craig Foster, and when the show starts, he's a security guard at a bank. He rents out his apartment on Airbnb and sleeps in his car so he can squeak by. But he's got a plan to make it big: buy up some cheap swampland in Florida, farm a special type of berry that only grows there, sell it to supplement companies, and profit. He joins forces with a relentlessly optimistic Uber driver named Jillian, played by the great Claudia O'Doherty, and as a team, they seem unbeatable. Of course, they are not unbeatable. The American dream always seems like it's just within Craig and Jillian's grasp when something, or someone, gets in the way.

Killing It is a show about the compromises and indignities that go with striving in America and the compromises and indignities that go with, you know, just trying to get by in America. Medical insurance premiums, hold music, hustle culture, the gig economy, snake hunting contests. It's satire, but it's *(inaudible)*. It is really, really funny. Here's a bit from the most recent season. Craig and Jillian have finally gotten their saw palmetto berry farm up and running. They have a handful of employees who live on the farm with them. The berries are just about ready to harvest. Everything is coming up Craig. Well, almost everything.

Transition: Music swells then fades.

Clip:

Shayla (*Killing It*): If you want your daughter to like the place, you might want to have the guy come and empty the porta-potty.

Craig: Shayla, it was just emptied last week.

Shayla: It needs to be emptied every week, boss.

Craig: There are only five of us on this farm. It shouldn't fill up that fast.

Shayla: Oh, I know it shouldn't! And yet...

Craig: Look, I don't want to get in another fight about this, because my daughter's coming, and I don't want to be embarrassed in front of her, but I go above and beyond what's legally required of me in terms of sanitation.

Shayla: I'm not as versed in (*sensor beep*) law as you, but I do know this. It bakes in the sun, and if I'm in there for more than 20 minutes, I feel like I'm about to pass out.

Craig: (*Whispered.*) Why are you ever in there more than 20 minutes?

Shayla: Woah, asking a woman?! That's technically harassment, Craig! And you're on tape.

Craig: Shayla, it's too expensive to have the truck come every week! End of discussion!

Transition: Music swells then fades.

Jesse Thorn: Craig Robinson, welcome to *Bullseye*. I'm so happy and excited to have you on the show. I'm such a fan.

Craig Robinson: Thank you so much. It's a pleasure to be here, man.

Jesse Thorn: I was just talking with my producer before we started about how *Killing It* is not just a funny show. It is also the very rare thing that is both effective as satire and actually funny. Usually, you kind of get one or the other. And I wonder when was the last time that you were trying to make ends meet?

Craig Robinson: The last time I was trying to make ends meet. Um, let's see. I guess it was... I was new on *The Office*.

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And was, you know, just trying to get jobs.

Jesse Thorn: What were the jobs that you got?

Craig Robinson: There were—I mean, I was hustling doing comedy shows, you know, going on the road when I could. And so, I was still trying to make a name for myself that way. And then the other jobs would be—this is while I'm doing acting, so I was always trying to—you know, I was trying to make it as an actor.

Jesse Thorn: How long did you live in LA before you got *The Office*?

Craig Robinson: I was in LA—let me see, I moved to LA in 1999, February. So, when did *The Office* pop? 2003? Or somewhere around there. So, I guess about—what? What's that? Four years?

Jesse Thorn: That's four. The first episode aired in 2005.

Craig Robinson: Okay, so yeah. So, I guess the last time I was trying to make ends meet was a couple years into that. So, maybe about 2007/8, before something took hold and said, okay, you can start saving some money.

Jesse Thorn: Did you think you were going to be a standup comic, or an actor, or a musician?

Craig Robinson: In college, I knew I was going to go into comedy. I went to college thinking I was going to be this like—a musician. A, you know, R&B singer or what have you. And then comedy just like took over.

Jesse Thorn: How did it take over?

Craig Robinson: My capacity or ability to be silly knew no bounds. Like, it was all the time. “You play too much! Oh my god. Da-da-da.” But I would be having people laughing and stuff. And then one day, I went to a homecoming show at school, and two guys that I know went up and did comedy. And it blew my mind that somebody would like—“Wh—how—how do you—?! What?!” And then I went and got this book, *Standup Comedy* by Judy Carter, and I started taking comedy serious. It was like one of the first things I decided to take serious in life. Like, how do you do this? How do you—

So, I'm trying to figure this out. And I looked up this guy, Neil Lieberman, who was in San Francisco. And I called him, because he was like a comedy coach. So, I called him up, and he was nice enough to tell me, “Hey, look, Craig. The thing about that book, half of it is right, and half of it is wrong, and you won't know which half.” But he gave me advice that I still hold on to this day over the phone. I should probably send him a check for that. But he said, “If a joke kills, slow down. And if a joke bombs, slow down.” So, I was like, oh, okay, that's great advice. You know, especially like now—in the year that I'm in it now, it really comes in handy. Back then it was like, okay. I got it, but I really get it now.

Jesse Thorn: You are the rare person who can say, “I went to college for music and decided to become a comedian,” and I can see your parents being like, “No, no, do something practical, like become a musician.”

Craig Robinson: Oh my god, my father called it pie in the sky. “Y'all want that pie in the sky!” And my father, you know, he was an attorney, a corporate attorney. My mother was a schoolteacher. So, yeah, that was not the thing they wanted to hear.

Jesse Thorn: But your mom was a music teacher.

Craig Robinson: She was a music teacher, yeah, yeah. And I was—matter of fact, I did teach music for a little while, following in her footsteps. But once that comedy bug came, I was like, okay, I'm graduating; I'll teach, and then—you know, but I was like going hard every night trying to figure out how to do this comedy thing.

Jesse Thorn: What kind of rooms did you play in Chicago?

Craig Robinson: Rooms? I mean, there were—you got the clubs, which was—back in the day, we had All Jokes Aside, which was a Black comedy club, downtown's premier comedy club. Then, we had Zanies, and they had about four of those at the time around Chicago. So—one downtown and one in the suburbs. And you have Riddles out there. And then there were these rooms, you know, where you do your open mic or whatever. The Monkey Bar and the No Exit Cafe. Like, I would try to do something every night if I could. No Exit Cafe was this little cafe on the north side where there was like maybe seven people and four of them was playing this game called Go.

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I think it was marbles or something, some kind of marble game.

Jesse Thorn: Sure. It's like an ancient Chinese game involving turning tiles over, changing colors.

Craig Robinson: Exactly that. And then—

Jesse Thorn: Not known for drawing a humor-oriented crowd.

Craig Robinson: Exactly. They were not there for the comedy. They were there to play the game and have their coffee or whatever. And—

Jesse Thorn: You're doing comedy in they're click, click, click, click, clicking with the go tiles?

Craig Robinson: All day.

Jesse Thorn: (*Giggles.*) I read you played a room called Heckler's Heaven, a heckling positive club.

Craig Robinson: Heckling positive. Yeah, it was at the Q Club, which is a pool hall in Chicago. And in the back, they had this cool little room with a stage. It was cool. And there was a bar back there too. Almost like a dive bar kind of effect. But it was cool. It was like—it wasn't small, wasn't big. But it was good for the crowd and stuff. And they would do is you get on stage; you have three minutes of nobody bothering you—okay? And you have eight minutes total to be on stage, but you got three minutes of nobody bothering you. Once those three minutes are over, they ring a bell. Now, if the crowd wants to heckle—or what they did, they gave three people in the crowd a rubber chicken, actually. So, if you got all three rubber chickens, you had to get offstage.

(*Jesse laughs.*)

And then I think three other people had a score sheet. So, you know, the first week—man, woof! I went up there. I was like, “Can you sign me up?” I was like all charged up.

And the girl was like, “It's hard.”

I was like, “Okay? Yeah, sign me up.” And then like the Chicago greats, went up there. Like, Corey Holcomb, James Hannah, Godfrey, B. Cole. And I went over to the girl and said, “Can you take my name off the list, please?” (*Chuckles.*) I took my name off the list. And she had this—almost like she was vindicated.

She was like, “Uh-huh. Yeah.” Like, told you. But then I was so determined. The next week I went, I was like, no matter what, I'm going up. I'm going up, I'm going up. Put my name on the list, they called. I get up there, I do my—you know, my first couple of jokes. (*Chuckles.*) And once they rang the bell, I wasn't doing too well. So, I got like two chickens. In my mind, I was like, I'm not getting a third chicken! Goodnight! So, I left with only two chickens. And then the next week I came, and I brought my keyboard, and there was no chickens that night.

And that's all she wrote. I never looked back.

Jesse Thorn: We're going to take a quick break. When we come back, Craig Robinson, a little bit more. Stay with us. It's *Bullseye* from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

Transition: Thumpy synth with light vocalizations.

Jesse Thorn: Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest is Craig Robinson. He is an actor and comedian and musician. He's had recurring roles on *The Office*, *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*, *Mr. Robot*, and elsewhere. These days, he is starring in the very funny show, *Killing It*. It's a satire about snake hunting, sketchy supplements, and many, many other ill-advised ways to get rich in America. You can stream both seasons of *Killing It* right now on Peacock. Let's get back into our conversation.

Thinking of Chicago comedy makes me think of that time that Bernie Mac was on Def Comedy Jam. And came out, and the first words out of his mouth famously were—

Craig Robinson: “I ain't scared of you.”

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, exactly! (*Laughs.*)

Craig Robinson: “I ain't scared of you, mother—” Yeah, man. Talk about a legend. Talk about a great dude, man. Bernie used to have this show in Chicago every Tuesday at 8PM at Milt Trenier's. It was in the bottom of the Holiday Inn Hotels downtown. So, people would come there at 5PM for an 8PM show. It would be packed out. And so, you know, they're eating their wings, whatever, chilling. And it was a jazz club, Milt Trenier's. So, Bernie had—the band was backing him. Bernie come out, destroying the room. I think Ali LeRoi was writing for him and performing. So, they'd do some sketches, but then he'd also bring up a Chicago comedian and a Chicago musician, you know, who wanted to come up, whatever, or were trying to make it. And one day—and I went there, and it was like this amazing environment, and all of a sudden—and I went.

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And I would tape my sets on this little tape recorder, itty bitty. So, Ali LeRoi, we were in the bathroom—that's the only place you could hear, and I played it for him. And he was cracking up. He was like, “Okay, you're on next week.” And so, the next week I went, and I had about six minutes of material. And I went down there and did my—you know, sit down at the piano, quiet, and do my thing. And Bernie was like, “Craig, whatever you need, I got you.” You know, complimenting me and letting me know I had something special. It was cool. He was real cool. Rest in peace.

Jesse Thorn: One of your first acting roles was on *The Bernie Mac Show*, right?

Craig Robinson: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. He kept his promise, and I got the part to be on that show as a barber. That was an interesting time. I had no idea what I was doing. I don't know how I made it this far, because a lot of—when I go back and look at a lot of these things I was in, I had—I didn't know what was going on.

Jesse Thorn: I could see you playing a barber as a man with impossibly perfectly coiffed hair in every photograph I've ever seen of you.

(*They laugh.*)

Craig Robinson: I try to not take pictures if my hair's all messed up or something. And people always, you know, “Can I get a picture.” I'm like let me get myself together, you know. Or “Oh, you look fine!” No, I don't. I know when I'm looking good.

Jesse Thorn: You know, you can make a living doing standup in Chicago. I know I often hear stories from my friend Jimmy Pardo, Chicago born and bred comedian.

Craig Robinson: Jimmy Pardo!

Jesse Thorn: A legend. He would just do—when he lived in Chicago, was like, “Okay, I got shows in Indianapolis, Evanston, Illinois.” You know, whatever, on down the line—these Midwestern places that are within driving distance of Chicago, if you're willing to make the drive. And that was just a career for a while. And you'd have to kind of choose to have a different career than that, I think. Did you always intend that your career was going to take you out of Chicago?

Craig Robinson: Yes. Matter of fact, I felt claustrophobic in Chicago at one point. I had won this contest—and I don't know if it was before or after I placed second in another contest, but I was hearing of other people getting opportunities, and I was like—I needed to take a risk or something. So, I was like I'ma drive to Milwaukee and go bungee jumping. And so, I didn't do that. But! I felt the need to, you know what I'm saying? And—

Jesse Thorn: (*Laughs.*) Uh-huh! I think at some point, Craig, we've all felt the need to drive to Milwaukee and go bungee jumping. The universal story.

Craig Robinson: (*Laughs.*) I just needed to take a risk of some kind and get out of Chicago and really like, you know, spread my wings. You know what I mean? See if I could fly. Because I was feeling it, but I felt stagnated, you know?

Jesse Thorn: What did you do when you didn't go bungee jumping in Milwaukee?

Craig Robinson: Whew. Man. I think I calmed down and knew I had to work harder. I knew I had something to figure out. 'Cause no matter what book you read, there's no 1, 2, 3, boom, you're a comedian. You know? It's different for everybody. And I was like winning contests and stuff like that, but it still wasn't enough.

Jesse Thorn: How much were you singing in your act?

Craig Robinson: Back then it wasn't a lot. Today it's—I probably do two jokes right after a song, and then I do about six songs, and then I go back into the jokes. So, I'm singing a lot more, and I'm having so much fun. And it's—you know, sing along and all of that. But back then it was just a little bit.

Jesse Thorn: You have a full on, for real band. I mean, I watched you performing with your band, and I thought—the thought that I had to myself was, “Oh, this band is real!”

(*They chuckle.*)

This isn't just like, “I'm famous. Would it be fun, friends from back home or whatever, for us to have a goofy band?” Your band is comprised of very real, professional musicians.

Craig Robinson: World class, man. International. Thank you for noticing that. Yeah, I'm easily the weakest link, talent-wise, in that band. (*Chuckles.*) They make me better, and it's too much fun being in front of that band.

Jesse Thorn: Like, they all have Wikipedia pages. You know what I mean? As individuals.

Craig Robinson: Right, right. They're unbelievable. And between us, I think we know every song ever made, plus all the new ones.

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That might be a lie. But we went on the college tour one time. We would learn the college song. I would send them the college song, and they'd learn it. And then like the fact that we would learn their college song? Oh my god, it was blowing their minds.

Jesse Thorn: Your mom was a music teacher. Your brother is a professional musician—a singer, and instrumentalist as well. Works with you sometimes. Did you sing at home with them?

Craig Robinson: Every day, many hours a day. Yes.

Jesse Thorn: What did you sing?

Craig Robinson: Everything. We sang a lot of gospel music. You know, we had choir and stuff, but we would harmonize all the time. In the car, at the dinner table. We would always be singing. Our house was like a rehearsal studio. Piano upstairs and downstairs, organ downstairs, had a drum set, trumpet, saxophone. Probably—I know I had saxophone lessons before; I had clarinet lessons before. I don't think I had trumpet lessons, but I've tried to play the trumpet.

So, we touched something—pianos pretty much stuck. My brother can play probably ten instruments though. So, yeah, we were always singing. Our house was music.

Jesse Thorn: What was your dad's role in all this?

Craig Robinson: My dad plays a little bit, right? Like, he would play the guitar. And he would play the drum pack, and he played 'til three in the morning, you know. So, we're trying to sleep, all you hear, (*sings a scale*). And then be like, oh, okay, he finally stopped. And then you hear (*imitates the drums*). So, he was up late playing. But it also showed, hey, your father's not out here, you know, running the streets. He's, you know, learning instruments and, you know. So, I think it instilled something in us to—you know, you got to—this is an art form. You have to practice, and you have to get your basics, your fundamentals. But like he—and he sang in a choir with us too. So—and he has a great voice.

But like I said, he's not the musician that's coming out playing for everybody. Like, he's a home musician. I think he played one song at church one time. "Sweet Hour of Prayer", I

believe it was. And he was, you know, kind of nervous for that, but he did good. But it's like, yeah, he's not coming out and “Come on, everybody, jam!”

Jesse Thorn: Do you think that you would give up comedy for music if you weren't doing funny music?

Craig Robinson: Uh, I do—it's not just funny music—I mean, there's—we do some serious, straight ahead, too. But I think—yeah, just me playing in a, you know, a dark room somewhere, that's the dream. And not even, you know, having to talk. Maybe a couple of interstitial, you know, “Good evening, ladies and gentlemen.” But yeah, just sitting there getting lost in the music, that's the dream.

Jesse Thorn: Do you get lost in the comedy when you're doing comedy?

Craig Robinson: Yeah, for sure! So, I've been preparing to do a special, right? But since I do so much music, that's why I don't have one out pretty much. And so, now I'm working with this company, and they're like, well, here are the songs you can do, here's what you can't do. So, you take all this—and I'm not just doing songs most of the time. There's always—there's usually a joke or something involved. And then there's, you know, a song that I just like to do, because I'm having fun or it invokes a memory or gets the crowd going, whatever. So, everybody has kind of been like, “Here's what you can do, which is like this many songs, and here's what you cannot do.” And it's like but that's my bread and butter.

So, finally, this year I was like let me start working on new bits and, you know, figure out how to get a special that I'm comfortable with, that I want to put out that, you know, somebody would be comfortable producing that won't cost \$12,000,000 just because I'm using ten songs. And then something funny happened. (*Chuckling.*) I started doing more music. I just started getting inspired to do this and that. So, now I'm having this blast. And I'm still writing and, you know, figuring out these other jokes and figuring out how to incorporate old stuff and new stuff and all this kind of stuff. But it's going up every night and like really putting—like, I'm going at it like I'm new. You know, sometimes in LA I might have four or five shows. I call that one of my New York nights.

So, the more I do it and the more I'm comfortable and know what's coming up next—yeah, there is a zone. And sometimes like, you know, just kind of taking it in and feeling the crowd and waiting and—I don't know, I guess there's a moment where I can kind of see myself.

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And that's when I take a pause. I slow down. And I just—you know, whatever comes out next, comes out next.

Jesse Thorn: So much more to get into with Craig Robinson. We haven't even talked that much about his great show, *Killing It*, yet. I'll ask him whether or not he thinks his character is a fool for chasing the American dream and whether or not Craig himself thinks that he's made it. It's *Bullseye*, from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

Promo:

Music: Upbeat, quirky banjo music.

Dan McCoy: I'm Dan McCoy.

Stuart Wellington: I am Stuart Wellington.

Elliott Kalan: I'm Elliott Kalan.

Stuart: And together, we are *The Flop House*: a long-running podcast on the Maximum Fun Network where we watch a bad movie and then talk about it.

Dan: And because we're so long running, maybe you haven't given us a chance. I get it, but you don't actually have to know anything about previous episodes to enjoy us. And I promise you that if you find our voices irritating, we grow endearing over time.

Elliott: Perhaps you listened to one of our old episodes and decided that we were dumb and immature. Well, we've been doing this a while now. We have become smarter and more mature, and generally nicer to Dan.

Stuart: But we are only human, so nooo promises!

Dan: Find *The Flop House* on MaximumFun.org or wherever you get podcasts.

(Music ends.)

Transition: Thumpy rock music.

Jesse Thorn: This is *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. I'm talking with Craig Robinson. You've seen him on *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*, *The Office*, and on the new Peacock show, *Killing It*.

I want to talk a little bit more about *Killing It*, because I really love the show.

Craig Robinson: Thank you.

Jesse Thorn: Of course. How did it come to you?

Craig Robinson: So, I think it was just before the pandemic. Like, *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* was winded down, and I think maybe six months, a year before, I had a meeting with my manager Mark Schulman. Shout out. Dan Gore, we sat down, and Dan was like, "Yeah, we want to do some work with you, you know. Da, da, da." And I love Dan and Luke Del Tredici. So—

Jesse Thorn: And Dan Gore had been one of the creators of *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*, on which you had a very funny recurring role.

Craig Robinson: Thank you. Yes, exactly right. So, Dan and Luke were the head writers of *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*. So, we all met up at a Jon & Vinny's in LA. And we would go there and talk a little bit, and then we came back, and then they were like, "Okay, so we're going to

come with three ideas.” And so, the next time they came, they had three ideas. One was a music idea. And they were all three good ideas and great writers. I forget what the other one was, but then this one was about these, you know, snake contests. And we all were like that’s so different. Nothing like that is going on. And to be honest, I didn’t see it like how it is now. I didn’t see the full picture, but that’s how it happened.

And then the pandemic happened. They were developing, developing, and you know, getting it to Peacock. And then once the pandemic was over, it was like, yeah, yeah. We got to do it. But yeah, like I said, I didn’t—like, I trust the writers. I knew it was going to be, you know, their levels—which is, you know, what I’m happy with. But once I saw it, like once I like started seeing the series—even though I read the scripts and stuff, I didn’t realize how edgy and dark it was. And I love it so much. It turns out, this is what I have been yearning to do. You know what I’m saying? I always kind of wanted like something kind of *Curb*-ish, you know. It doesn’t have to be a laugh track, but you know, something kind of follows me, and I get to, you know, bounce off of people. But then it’s got this like hardcore like “What?! What just happened—?” So—

Jesse Thorn: There are explosions of violence on the program from time to time.

(They laugh.)

Craig Robinson: So, I’m really—yeah, so I’m really enjoying it at this stage, man. You know, to get two seasons out of this is a blessing.

Jesse Thorn: One of the things that I really enjoy about the show is that, you know, in some ways, what it’s about is these kind of economic indignities and humiliations that happen to your character and Claudia O’Doherty’s character, who’s your—

Craig Robinson: Can I steal that line for my next press?

Jesse Thorn: Please.

Craig Robinson: Economic indignities and humiliations. Got it! Yes.

Jesse Thorn: And what I love about it is, Claudia is such a radiant, cheerful performer.

(Craig agrees.)

And you—as Craig, the lead character—are so determined that the darkness on the show never takes it over. Like, really believe in you, even—you know, as you believe in yourselves.

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Even though sometimes maybe you don’t believe in yourselves.

(They chuckle.)

Maybe resolve is what I'm describing more than belief. But yeah, there's something sort of relentlessly hopeful about the show for a show that's about such a bleak world.

Craig Robinson: Yeah, and Claudia—man, I can't say enough about working with her. She's just fantastic. When she auditioned, she was the last one to audition. And if I've got it right, I think the guys wanted her. You know, they were looking for somebody—you know, a type, a Claudia O'Doherty type. But the part wasn't written for an Australian person. You know, it was—so, then we got on there, and our chemistry through the computer—because it was over Zoom—it was awesome. You know. So, she's so smart and so aware—like self-aware of who she is as a comedian, her timing, her pace. You're not gonna rush her, and she's gonna do it the way she's gonna do it. And it worked, because we dance. You know? It's a beautiful bond there.

Jesse Thorn: What's the biggest challenge for you of playing this character?

Craig Robinson: (Sighs.) There's that balance of being a good guy and showing him as a good guy who's really trying to make it the right way in the end. You know, he has a dark turn where he has to accept that maybe good guys do finish last, and he doesn't want to finish last all the time. So, I think that in that turn somewhere, there's a—(sighs) I think people see me as a, you know, sweet dude. So, there's the, the awe factor. “Oh, not you, Craig!” And then, you know—and then I also have to sell that, that I could be that guy.

Jesse Thorn: Sometimes I wonder if the idea of success is a hustle itself. Like, it's a con. And this show makes me think about that. Do you think that it is ultimately a good idea character Craig to try and become a success? Or do you think he's just stepping on the same rake over and over?

Craig Robinson: I think he's after that American dream. Which, when you say it like that—the American dream—that does sound like it could be a con at this point. But no, I have to believe that he's not stepping on the rake. I gotta—for me and for him, I gotta believe he's—you know, he's going about this for something other than a con. It's gotta mean something. It's gotta mean something. You know, he's—deep inside, you know, he believes his father, man. You can do it. You just gotta have faith. You gotta be a good person. You gotta work hard. And he's got these, you know, good morals. So, it's gotta mean something. Nah, I don't think he thinks it's a con or is being set up for one.

Jesse Thorn: Do you feel like a success?

Craig Robinson: Yes! I feel like a success. I'm doing, you know, certain things. I'm putting in work. And last night I went up at the Comedy Cellar, and it was one of the first times I knew what I wanted to do at the Cellar. Like, usually I'll go up and I'll go (*ensor beep*) around, have some fun. But last night was like one of these times it was like—'cause I've been doing my—like I said, working on my act and doing, you know, building. And I haven't had a set list in forever, but it was like, oh, I'm gonna do what I've been doing! And it just felt good. And it felt like, okay, this is—you know, working in LA; I was working in New York,

da, da, da. Things of success that's happening that I caused to happen. So, I'm achieving success, and I see it in real time.

Jesse Thorn: Well, Craig, I sure appreciate all this time you gave us. It was really nice to get to talk to you. Been an admirer of your work for so long.

Craig Robinson: I appreciate you too, brother. Thank you!

Jesse Thorn: Craig Robinson! Both seasons of *Killing It* are on Peacock right now. You should watch them because they are really funny. It's a great show.

Transition: Cheerful synth.

Jesse Thorn: That's the end of another episode of *Bullseye*. *Bullseye* is created from the homes of me and the staff of Maximum Fun, in and around greater Los Angeles, California. My thanks to former *Bullseye* producer Nick White who, this week, came over to my house after I realized that my van was full of hardware flooring, but the boxes were too heavy for me to move by myself.

[00:35:00]

We got them out of there! Pretty soon there'll be a floor!

The show is produced by speaking into microphones. Our senior producer is Kevin Ferguson. Our producers are Jesus Ambrosio and Richard Robey. Our production fellow at Maximum Fun is Bryanna Paz. We get booking help from Mara Davis. Our interstitial music is by DJW, also known as Dan Wally. Our theme song is "Huddle Formation" by The Go! Team. Thanks to them. Thanks to their label, Memphis Industries.

Bullseye is on Instagram, [@BullseyeWithJesseThorn](#). See pictures of me and guests and what's going on and all kinds of stuff. We're also on Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook. And I think that's about it. Just remember, all great radio hosts have a signature signoff.

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

(Music fades out.)