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(ADVERTISEMENT)

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. In a career that has spanned three decades, Tony Gilroy has made a habit of playing it safe. Those are his words, not mine. Tony, who's a writer and director, comes from a showbiz family. His brother is Dan Gilroy; he directed *Nightcrawler* among other movies. His other brother, John, is an editor; and his dad—Frank Gilroy—was a playwright and a filmmaker. He won a Tony and a Pulitzer in 1965 for the play *The Subject Was Roses*. When Tony and his brother were kids, their dad took a lot of big swings. He was a guy with grand ambition. He dumped his own money and time into movies and plays and TV shows. And when they hit, they hit. Things were great. When they didn't, the family would end up—well, right on the edge of poverty.

At first, Tony didn't want anything to do with his dad's career. He figured he'd be a studio musician, lay down a sweet keyboard line on a Mariah Carey track or something, cash a check, call it a day. Eventually though, Tony realized his calling was movies and television. But instead of working on fancy, artsy stuff, he stayed modest. He'd get his own screenplays produced from time to time, but he was just as happy to do a punch-up. After a while, he became a go-to script doctor in showbusiness, making a lot of money working on other people's stuff. He figured maybe it would be nice to direct, but what's the rush when the paychecks are coming in?

In fact, he didn't direct his first feature film until he was 50 years old. But wow! What a debut. *Michael Clayton*, with George Clooney.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Clip:

Speaker (Michael Clayton): You think he got the horses for that? Well, good luck and God bless. But I'll tell you this: the last place you wanna see me is in court.

Michael: I'm not the enemy.

Speaker: Then who are you?

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Jesse Thorn: Perhaps—and I really mean this—perhaps the best dad movie ever made. That earned him an Oscar nomination for best screenplay and best director. He directed two more movies after that, but mostly he went back to being the guy you call when your movie is broken or when you need somebody who can write a blockbuster with brains. Gilroy wrote a bunch of *Bourne* movies, for example. And when the *Star Wars* movie, *Rogue One*, was in production and looking like it was gonna be a disaster, the legendary producer Kathleen Kennedy called Gilroy. He rewrote it and directed reshoots that, by most accounts, saved the film—made it into one of the best in the *Star Wars* oeuvre.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Clip:

Speaker 1 (*Rogue One*): He's telling people they're making a weapon. The kyber crystals, that's what they're for.

Speaker 2: What kind of weapon?

Speaker 1: (*Angrily.*) Look, I have to go!

Speaker 2: (*Pushing.*) What kind of weapon?!

Speaker 1: A planet killer! That's what he called it.

Speaker 2: (*Shocked.*) A planet killer?

Speaker 1: Someone named Erso sent him. Some old friend of Saw's.

Speaker 2: Galen Erso, was it?!

Speaker 1: I don't know! They were looking for Saw when we left!

Speaker 2: (*Panicked.*) Who else knows about this!?

Speaker 1: I have no idea. It's all falling apart.

Speaker 2: Saw's right, there's spies everywhere.

(*Ominous music.*)

Distorted Voice: What's all this? Come out. Let's see some scandocs.

Speaker 2: Yeah, of course. Just my gloves. (*Chuckles uncomfortably.*)

(*Laser noises.*)

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Jesse Thorn: So, it wasn't as surprising as you might think when he got involved in another *Star Wars* project: *Andor*. It's a series on Disney+ about what happened before *Rogue One*. Diego Luna is the star as well as a producer. His character, Cassian Andor, goes from barely getting by at the edge of the galaxy to a hero of the Rebel Alliance. Now listener, I am a medium *Star Wars* guy. I have enjoyed most of the movies. I have seen the holiday special. But if you asked me to name, I don't know, four space admirals and the names of Baby Yoda's parents? Does Baby Yoda even have parents? I don't know. Whatever. The point is, I'm not that guy. But I can tell you this: I love *Andor*. Is it a *Star Wars* show? Yes. But it is written and paced and shot like a spy drama. It is grounded, suspenseful, has rich characters.

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And it is also really, really fun. And like I said, it stars Diego Luna, who is one of the greatest acting geniuses of our time. This is a clip from the final episode of the first season of *Andor*. We'll hear from Maarva Andor, portrayed by Fiona Shaw. She's Cassian Andor's adoptive mother. She lived and died at the edge of the galaxy. The bad guys with the laser blasters have killed her, and this holo recorded message is broadcast at her funeral procession.

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Clip:

Music: Dramatic orchestral music.

Maarva (*Andor*): (*Breathlessly.*) The empire is a disease that thrives in darkness. It is never more alive than when we're asleep. It's easy for the dead to tell you to fight. And maybe it's true; maybe fighting's useless. Perhaps it's too late. But I'll tell you this: if I could do it again, I'd wake up early and be fighting these bastards from the start.

(*Charging infantry noises.*)

Fight the Empire!

Transition: A whooshing sound.

Jesse Thorn: Tony Gilroy, welcome to *Bullseye*. Thank you for coming in, and I love *Andor* so much. I'm so glad to get to talk to you about it.

Tony Gilroy: Well, thanks for having me.

Jesse Thorn: You started working on *Star Wars* working on *Rogue One*. Was that something where it was one of the billion showbusiness screenwriting jobs you had? Like, was it something where somebody said, “Uh, get Tony Gilroy to come in here, and he can come up with some stuff”?

Tony Gilroy: Yeah, it was a doctoring job. It was a clinical job. I mean, Kathy—I’ve known Kathy for years from—she and Frank Marshall had been—I mean, Frank was on *Bourne Identity*, and our relationship goes back even deeper than that. And yeah, I actually went on it early. The summer before, she had called me up and asked me to read it, and I had a lot of things to say about it. My father was dying at that point in time. I basically said, “Kathy, I only have three weeks. I can only work on this for three weeks. 'Cause it looks like it's gonna be the end.”

And I did work on it for three weeks, and then Scott Burns came in after me and feathered in, and then I forgot about it. And then the following year, they came back with the movie. And it needed an overhaul, and so we went to work. That's about as much about that as I like to say. I don't really like to get into details on that, but that was a clinical job—mercenary. To start. It became a—I’m really into what we did, and my brother came on. It was a big commitment, but it was a very different experience than *Andor*.

Jesse Thorn: You've worked on all kinds of different movies in your career—especially, you know, in those sorts of clinical jobs, as well as in the stuff that has your name at the top.

Tony Gilroy: It’s the really great—I mean, it's one of the great perks of—I mean, weekly work is a really great side hustle.

Jesse Thorn: What did you learn that first time around about working on something like *Star Wars*? Something that is so huge and also has such a, you know, set of associations and things that travel alongside it. You know what I mean?

Tony Gilroy: Uhhh, it’s kind of the reverse—I mean, my superpower was not knowing that much. My superpower was not caring very much or being respectful. I think people—a lot of people get involved in *Star Wars*, and they change their game. You know, it's so heady, and it's so—it means so much to them. I had very—I had the lack of respect that you need if you're a doctor. I mean, you don't really want your surgeon to come in and do anything other than do what needs to be done. So, that was a very—at least the climb-in on that was very mercenary. Completely different than my experience on *Andor*.

What did I learn? I mean, I learned the—I spent a long time on *Rogue*. I learned a lot about *Star Wars*. I learned a lot about—you know, it's kinda like—you really have to think of it like the Vatican, really. I mean, you know, there's a curio, and there's people that manage the rules of it. And the rules used to be a lot more restrictive then. So, I learned all about that. I learned about the— And then in the follow-on—in the release and whatever—I learned a lot about the *Star Wars* community. And yeah, it was a baptismal experience.

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But I thought it would be a one-off. I didn't think it was gonna be (*chuckling*) a continuing part of my life at that point.

Jesse Thorn: So, why wasn't it? Why did it become a continuing part of your life?

Tony Gilroy: A couple things. I mean, I had a couple movies shot down after that. I wasted some time on some really important things that got shot out from under me, some movies I wanted to make. And you know, it's a really heady moment after you win something as big as *Rogue*. You know, they were very excited about what they could do with the franchise and lots of ideas popping around. But the economics hadn't worked themselves out yet. There was no huge-scale streaming going on that would—you know, Disney, there was no—Disney didn't have a streaming— And anybody who's spent any time in *Star Wars* at all, you cannot do it on the cheap.

Jesse Thorn: Right. Like, you could—there was no version of—there was no *Hercules: the Legendary Journeys of Star Wars*.

Tony Gilroy: No, man. It's just—it's like *Bond*. You can't—there's no skinny version of it. And so, all the ideas always seemed sort of wonky for the first couple years. Then Kathy sent me a—they wanted to do a story; they wanted to do a prequel for Cassian Andor, and they wanted to do the five years that led into *Rogue*. They had that idea. That was theirs. She sent me just as a, you know, “Take a look at this, and as a friend in court, just read this.” And they had done a really cool, very slick, very smart version of the show with a crippling flaw in it. You know? It was just—the crippling flaw was it was Cassian and K-2, the droid, going on missions. You know?

And I basically said, man, “This is really— The people who put this together, it's really slick. But you're gonna run outta road really fast. (*Chuckles.*) There's just no—there's no story nutrients here to keep going.” They moved off that, and then they did another version—a much more complicated version, but still with the same basic premise. They were just fixated on K-2. They were fixated on that relationship and a variation on what had happened before.

In the middle of that, I had written sort of a manifesto in some sort of (*laughs*) manic downtime. Not to try to get a job or anything, but just to Kathy as a friend. I said, look man, if you're gonna make a show about this, this is why you can't make it him and K-2. Here's what you have to do. And if you're gonna make a show, take those five years and put 'em in as big a hole as you possibly can in the beginning. And you know, take a roach, and watch him become a butterfly. That should be your show.” And a couple other ideas, but that was the central piece of it.

Jesse Thorn: Because like adventure show is not a crazy idea that they were pitching you, right? Like—

Tony Gilroy: No, it makes sense in a conference room.

Jesse Thorn: People like watching Kungfu, you know? And *Xena*. And it's a—you can visit a different planet every— You know, it worked for *Star Trek*. You know what I mean?

Tony Gilroy: Yeah. But you're doing the same thing every week. And I had had the experience on *Rogue*, which I reminded them. And if you go back and watch *Rogue* with this filter, there are—I don't know; I can't remember now—but there are three or four places in the film where (*laughing*) we're very, you know, trying to hide it, but like— “I'll stay in the truck while you go do this” or “I'll be back here”—like, he doesn't—K-2 just like was a real story killer. You couldn't take him anywhere. You can't do anything with him. He's so—well, you can't disguise him. You can't put him in a hat. You can't—he can't do anything but be what he is. And it's—

Jesse Thorn: And anytime he is on screen you have to spend quagillion dollars having him on screen as well.

Tony Gilroy: EXACT—uhhh, I don't know whether that—yeah, but it's— (*Stammering.*) That wasn't my—my concern was like I could just see how limiting the story possibilities would be. Yeah.

Jesse Thorn: There's no trench coat big enough.

Tony Gilroy: So, they came back and said, “Well, two things. One, we have streaming now. And we wanna build aircraft carriers. We wanna build cathedrals. You know, we want to go big. And we read that thing that you sent us last year, and like we wanna do that now.” So, that's how I began to tiptoe back into it. I didn't jump in right away, and they didn't jump in right away. It was, you know, a process. But that's where it started.

Jesse Thorn: What are the most exciting parts of working on something this huge and this genre-ic? I mean, the genre here is *Star Wars*—

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Jesse Thorn: —relative to working on a, you know, political intrigue thriller that is set in Washington DC in 2025 or something. Like, what's cool about it?

Tony Gilroy: I mean, honestly what was interesting was the idea that— A) I knew Diego really well from *Rogue*. And—

Jesse Thorn: Diego Luna, who's the star of the show.

Tony Gilroy: Diego Luna. Yeah. Plays Cassian Andor. And he is just—not just an incredibly impressive actor, but just a really great human a great partner and a really smart producer. And so, it was like, wow, he's a really cool person to be in business with. That's A. Check that off the list. They were basically saying to me, “We want to give you an epic canvas, a gigantic canvas with really big resources and a really—you know, a really skilled, even base of Pinewood and *Star Wars* technicians and all that stuff. And we want you to do a piece about revolution and insurrection and authoritarian power.”

And my five-year tranche that I have of the calendar is just the most kinetic, exciting piece of the puzzle, really. And I had spent my whole life—I'm not—I had no proper education, but I'm really—as a result, I'm very autodidactic. Everything I needed to learn, I taught myself. And I'm pretty curious person. I've been reading all kinds of history for decades and really fascinated with revolutions, and the Russian Revolution, and the French Revolution, and Zapata, and Oliver Cromwell. And I just—for whatever reason, I just was loading up on that my whole life and revisiting things. You know, new books would come out. I'd go back and deep-dive on something else.

(Sighs.) All this cool (*censor beep*) that I was never gonna have a chance to use. And they're giving me a piece of— They're giving me this massive thing and saying, “We want to do that. And we want a show about ordinary people, you know, when history comes and knocks at the door.”

And then there's a testing process, a feel-out process. You know, do they really mean it? And so, I do a lot of work for free. I know the guild doesn't like that or whatever, but it's worked for me. I like to do a lot of—if I'm working for you, I wanna show you a lot before I decide to get married, 'cause I don't want to have the—don't wanna wake up and find out we don't want the same things. And so, alright, what if I, uh—I wanna do an opening scene where he goes to a brothel and kills two cops who roust him.”

“Okay.”

Okay, and then we go, “We wanna hire the production designer from *Chernobyl*. He looks like he's 14. He's a young Mozart production designer. We want that guy.”

And they're like, “Okay.”

And so, I'm testing them, they're testing me. And finally, we're starting. It was just too... it was just too cool an opportunity to pass by.

Jesse Thorn: I mean, I imagine they were basically like, “They can't swear, and you can't show any guts coming out of anybody, but like besides that, we hired you for a reason.”

Tony Gilroy: Well, I mean, my game is not secret. I mean, I haven't really changed the way I work for a long time. I kind of have my thing. So, they're hiring me. They know it's gonna be a behavior show. It's gonna be a character show. They know I'm going to— They know kind of what I'm gonna do. The restrictions—I think I thought the restrictions would be more limiting when I started than when we finished it. We can't—I mean, there's a limit to where

we can go sexually, obviously. But in terms of violence and in terms of (*chuckles*) graphic pain and emotional pain, we can—I haven't really felt—I haven't felt really limited over the past five years in a way that I might have anticipated.

Jesse Thorn: Even more with Tony Gilroy after a quick break. Stay with us. It's *Bullseye* for MaximumFun.org and NPR.

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Promo:

Music: Exciting, rhythmic synth.

John-Luke Roberts: If you like too many podcasts, you'll love *Sound Heap with John-Luke Roberts*. It's got clips from all your favorite podcasts, such as *Diary of a Tiny CEO*—

Tiny CEO: Leonard Sprague, tell me how you make your money!

Leonard Sprague: I go to the beach, and I steal people's towels.

John-Luke Roberts: *Rememberama*.

Speaker: Remember the trend of everyone whacking themselves in their head with hammers and mallets when they wanted to lose weight?

[00:20:00]

John-Luke Roberts: And *Elty Jom's Lobly Sonds*.

Elty Jom: I'm here today with Kiki Dee! Hello, Kiki Dee!

Kiki Dee: Hello, Eltonnn.

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(*Music ends.*)

Transition: Thumpy synth with light vocalizations.

Jesse Thorn: It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest is Tony Gilroy. He's the creator and showrunner of the *Star Wars* series *Andor*.

I rewatched *Michael Clayton* recently, the film that you wrote and directed. I loved it every bit as much as I loved it when I saw it, you know, in a movie theater when it came out. One of the things that I hadn't thought about much since I saw it back then was the extent to which it, you know, defined and redefined George Clooney onscreen and like what he could be onscreen. That you know, he had been great on *ER*, and people had been trying to figure out how to make him a movie star because he was so gorgeous and talented. And I think *Michael Clayton* really nailed perfectly what was special about him as an onscreen presence.

What was special about Diego Luna that you learned from making *Rogue One* or that you were thinking about when you were making *Andor*?

Tony Gilroy: He just—he has an instantly palpable, soulful... atmosphere to him. He's classic. You could see him working in any era of filmmaking. I like that a lot. He's one of those actors who can just turn everything his way. Any line, any— His fluidity. And there is something— I knew there was something inherently messianic about what we were doing. There is some sort of spiritual dynamic to him that some actors have and some don't. Sometimes you don't want that at all. You want somebody who isn't vibrating in a certain way. You want somebody who's sort of just right there. And he's not that.

It's ephemeral, but I just— And in *Rogue*, by luck of the draw, every—(chuckles). You don't know very much about him. It's very enigmatic, but the few things that are really articulated were really helpful for what we were doing here. So, we weren't painted into a corner. Everything that was in *Rogue* was really helpful. “I've been in this fight since I was six years old.”

And what does he say at the end? She comes out and says, “Oh, they're not gonna let us make the mission.”

And he's with all these guys. And he says, “Man, we've done horrible, horrible things for the rebellion. And if we don't go do this, everything we'll have done will be wrong. We have to go off and sacrifice to do this.” (Chuckling.) And that's a pretty good place to—jumping off point. That's a long answer to a short question, but.

Jesse Thorn: I mean, there's something about looking at him. I was trying to think about it as I was watching the show today. And he's really beautiful in such a human way. Like—

Tony Gilroy: (Inaudible) pretty though. He's really—no, he has that movie star— Yeah, I know what you mean.

Jesse Thorn: Like, Timothée Chalamet is gorgeous. Incredible to look at. I've loved him in everything I've ever seen him in. Right? I believe him as a human being in everything I've seen him in, because he's such a vibrant actor. Right? But he also seems like an amazing space being in a way, (chuckles) when I look at him on screen. Right? I'm like, “Wow, look at this!” You know?

(Tony affirms.)

Diego Luna has all of that sort of beautiful charisma. Like, I wanna look at him. But he also seems like a guy that could be standing next to me, which is a very rare thing to have both of those.

Tony Gilroy: Yeah. And mileage. You really feel there's mileage there. Like, he's really—he's used himself. I don't know, it's—you know it when you see it. And man, he just does it every day. It just—it's been a bouquet with him all the way through.

Jesse Thorn: I know you had done a little bit of TV work, but you work very substantially on movies.

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So, what did you have to adjust in thinking about writing 10 or 12 hours of something with other people, rather than writing 90 minutes or 120 minutes by yourself?

Tony Gilroy: Oh man, it's absolutely liberating in the most amazing way. I mean, (*stammering*) my feeling is that I've been a short story writer for the bulk of my career, and I'm a novelist now. This is really—I think there's a risk to it. We talk about this in my cohort of the older screenwriters, that—you know, what would happen if you didn't grow up with the restrictions and all the limitations that we had to go through and all the things we had to learn to keep everything tight and, you know, the sort of ghetto of 125 pages, and all really bound up—? 'Cause I mean, that is—that's a thing. I mean, that's a constant thing. What's gonna happen when people are only doing longform, and they don't have to worry about the clock, and they don't have to worry about the time?

But oh my god, it's as if there's a new dial on a console of your imagination where time is just a new—a plugin. And like, oh my god, I just—I loved not looking at that number on the top righthand side. I loved the fact that the episodes could be any length that we really needed them to be. We never worried about, “Oh, it's 39; it's 52.” Never. Some of them—it's shocking; sometimes I don't even know how long they are. And the idea that we—(*sighs*) oh my god, 12 hours to take care of a year? I mean, I felt free. I felt free all the way through the whole thing, to let scenes go on a little bit longer than—not button everything up. And I mean, all the things that you were— You know, I came up in the '80s. All the things you were, you know, not trained to do; you were you're trying to feed your family. (*Laughs.*) These are the things you learned how to do. You know?

Jesse Thorn: Yeah. I mean, and a big part of your job—not just in writing things, again, that had your name on them, but things that didn't have your name on them—was figuring out what gears had to be moved or replaced in order to not lose the audience's attention for a moment at any point.

Tony Gilroy: Always. That's still the job. I mean, that's job one, to hang onto your attention. That is my number one—no matter longform, shortform, no matter what I'm doing. In this interview, I'm trying to keep you hanging on. I mean, I want you to know what happens next.

It removes an anxiety that's always been there for every screenwriter, and I found it incredibly freeing.

Jesse Thorn: I mean, I'll tell you that when I was watching the first season of the show, I was sitting there the first two episodes thinking like, "Oh man, I get to watch a character-driven *Star Wars* TV show?! I love this." And I was like, "Oh, I get to watch a heist-y *Star Wars* TV show? Oh, this is like my dream! This is the greatest!" And then I was like, "Wait, it's a whole additional thing?!" (*Laughs.*)

Tony Gilroy: I know, man, we just keep going! No, I know. It's, um...

Jesse Thorn: And I mean, this season you're looking at a bigger chunk of time, and you've essentially made four serial films—like, four 3/4-hour films in a row. Like, it's a whole 'nother project.

Tony Gilroy: It's how we think of it. We think we've made, you know, eight films in five years. That's how we really do think of it. But yeah, man. The big canvas, the time, the resources to do it. I mean, 400 speaking parts over the two seasons. 400! I mean, some of it's silly, but it has been a great place to hide out for the last six years. It really has been for me.

Jesse Thorn: *Andor* is incredibly aesthetically intense, even for a *Star Wars* thing. Like, *Star Wars* in and of itself is a very aesthetic experience, a visual experience. And *Andor* is very particularly so. So, other than just, you know, knowing that you can always look at a coffee table book of concept art from *The Empire Strikes Back* that's sitting around the office, how do you decide what you want things to look like when you get a *Star Wars* thing?

Tony Gilroy: My number one primary creative collaborator on the show is the production designer, Luke Hull.

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Aaaall of the preliminary. that I have for everything are with Luke. What was terrifying in the beginning became just a joy as we went on. But the terrifying thing that you realize in the beginning is that absolutely every single thing we do has to be designed. You can't say "radio interview", you gotta design it. You say "cam". I mean, everything! Library, street—

Jesse Thorn: Tony, I have a friend who is a professional theme park writer. So, he writes the storylines that you experience—

Tony Gilroy: (*Chuckling.*) What a cool job! Right, okay.

Jesse Thorn: —yeah, when you're in line at Disneyland or whatever. Right? Or at a, you know, Snoopy theme park in Dubai. These are consultancies.

And when the Disneyland *Star Wars* world opened up five years ago or whenever that was, the most exciting achievement of his long career was a photograph that he posted: “I designed this cocktail cup for *Star Wars* Land.” (*Laughs.*)

Tony Gilroy: I know, man.

Jesse Thorn: And it's like, yeah! You're gonna have a *Star Wars* thing, they're gonna drink cocktails. If they're gonna drink cocktails, they have to have a space cup.

Tony Gilroy: Okay. So, just—I mean by a factor of a billion, that's what we—we can't do anything without designing it. And so, Luke and I, it was daunting in the beginning. It was really just shocking. The naivete that we went into the show with and the ignorance that that started it was—I mean, without COVID, it would've been a huuuge public Hollywood failure. 'Cause we really didn't know what I was getting into. Diego, we really didn't know what we were getting into, the scale of it. But then, once we had a system and once we settled into it and once we got a rhythm to it, it just—I mean, I lived a maximal imaginative experience—literally, no exaggeration—every single day for five years. I mean, there isn't any part of my imagination that wasn't valuable, useful, in play all day long, every day, meeting after meeting, thing after thing. Everything has to be designed and chosen. It's not just the casting; it's not just the color of the hair; it's not just the sash on his robe; it's not just the weapon; it's not just the scene; it's not—

It's all of it. And it became a real joy to do that. And all the world building and anthropology that we did, all the worlds that we created, languages and cultures and customs, and—I mean, what a gas, man! I mean, just really turned into, it really turned into a lot of fun. A great place to hide out. (*Chuckles.*) I miss it. A great drug!

Jesse Thorn: When actors sign up for network TV shows, something that I often hear from them when they come in here is the extent to which they had not grappled with the fact that they had signed up for potentially one job for the next 10 years of their life.

Tony Gilroy: I know!

Jesse Thorn: You obviously have now been working on *Andor* for—what, five? Six years?

Tony Gilroy: Almost six years, yeah.

Jesse Thorn: And you know, you will have made two seasons of the show, and that's gonna be the end. Had you come to terms with the idea that you were signing up for such a big chunk of your life being dedicated to this?

Tony Gilroy: The agreement that we made in the beginning—the silly, naive thing—we said, “Oh, we'll do five seasons. One season will be each year that gets him closer.” Without ever really considering any of the things that we've just been discussing. As we got rolling, as we started shooting and I got outta quarantine and I could get over there and we had our system down of how we're gonna make the show, I went up to Scotland. And Diego and I literally sat down in the backyard of this little hotel in Pitlochry and had a scotch, and we just were like,

“What are we gonna do? There's no way in hell we're ever gonna be able to make five seasons of this show.” He'll be 60; I'll be in an assisted living home by then. It's ridiculous! What are we gonna do!? And I was trying to—

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And there was this incredibly elegant answer sitting right in front of us. Just like, wow, you know what? We need four years, and we have four blocks of three episodes. That's how our show has always been organized from a production point of view. The directors come in and do blocks of three. And we're like, “Wow, four blocks of three, four years. What if we did a year every block?” And I literally think I went upstairs to the hotel room and started sketching. What would that be like? And god, there's all this negative space. And wow, what if we came back, and when we came back we only did—what if we came back on a Monday, you know, Thursday/Friday/Saturday? What if we came back for three days each time or something really intense? What would that do? Wow. There's gonna be all kinds of problems with that.

The more I played with it, the more elegant and energizing it grew. I was like, alright, lemme write the top and lemme write the first and last scene of each block just as proof of concept. So, we don't want to have all this exposition, Jacobean kind of, you know, “Oh, since last I saw you—” and all that. Can we—? And like, I would love to be able to take credit for it as like, “Oh, this is what I thought of,” but it really came about from an epic problem that we had. And once it got on the table, and once we started to figure it out, it was just so exciting and so energizing. And it had all these knock-on effects to help us out.

That was our big solve. That was our really big breakthrough. And the reason that the— If the show really works, and the show is really good, the real reason that that's possible is because we knew our ending so clear. Our last scene of what we were gonna do was so evident. I can't stress how, for anybody who's working on anything—I mean, problem solving limitations, not enough tools in the toolbox, the restrictions are your friend. I mean, it's almost always incredibly liberating to work your way around these things. You almost always come up with a better solution. And problem solving has been our— Like, COVID, strikes, this issue, money issues later on. They've all led to—they've all forced inspired problem solves.

Jesse Thorn: So much more to get into with Tony Gilroy. Now that his time on *Andor* is coming to an end, does he yearn to just—I don't know—sit down and write a movie about a guy who plays poker? We'll get into it. It's *Bullseye* for MaximumFun.org and NPR.

(ADVERTISEMENT)

Promo:

Ella Hubber: Alright, we're over 70 episodes into our show, *Let's Learn Everything*. So, let's do a quick progress check. Have we learned about quantum physics?

Tom Lum: Yes, episode 59.

(Pencil scratching.)

Ella: We haven't learned about the history of gossip yet, have we?

Caroline Roper: Yes, we have! Same episode, actually.

Ella: Have we talked to Tom Scott about his love of roller coasters?

Caroline & Tom: *(In unison.)* Episode 64.

Ella: So, how close are we to learning everything?

Caroline: Bad news. We still haven't learned everything yet.

Ella: Awww!

Tom: WE'RE RUINED!

Music: Playful synth fades in.

Ella: No, no, no! It's good news as well. There is still a lot to learn!

(They cheer.)

I'm Dr. Ella Hubber.

Tom: I'm Regular Tom Lum.

Caroline: I'm Caroline Roper, and on *Let's Learn Everything*, we learn about science and a bit of everything else, too.

Ella: And although we haven't learned everything yet, I've got a pretty good feeling about this next episode.

Tom: Join us every other Thursday on Maximum Fun.

(Music ends.)

Transition: Thumpy synth with light vocalizations.

Jesse Thorn: It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. I'm here with writer and showrunner Tony Gilroy of *Andor*, the *Bourne* movies, and more.

Your brother Dan Gilroy is a writer and director as well. Your brother John is an editor. Your father was a playwright and screenwriter, who—among other things—won a Pulitzer and a Best Play Tony when you were a little kid. Did having a parent who was a writer make writing as a life and career more or less appealing for you?

Tony Gilroy: Wow. Um, it made it understandable. It's not anything that we— It wasn't what I started off— It wasn't what any of us started off doing. And my father moved us away from Hollywood into upstate New York, because he didn't want any of us to go into the business. I was a musician at that point.

Jesse Thorn: And you quit—yeah, you quit college to go into music.

Tony Gilroy: Yeah. And I mean, Danny and Johnny both, I don't think any of us really initially—we didn't grow up saying, “Oh, we're gonna do this.”

I think that—you know, people talk about nepo, you know. When it comes to writing, no one's gonna make your movie because (*chuckling*) you know somebody or because you have a connection. And I really do believe that a great script is a great script, and people want great scripts. So, an undeniably great script will get found. I think that where the real advantage is, people don't really pay attention to.

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I think that the real nepo uplift, the step up, is the fact that we learned what a writer's life looks like. The tempo of it. The financial, you know, triumph and failure of it. And one day you're—you know, everything's wonderful. The next day you're trashed. It's just we learned—that made sense to us. A writer's life made sense to me when I came to it. I understood that.

I think that's the really big advantage. How to live was not something that I had to worry— You can't learn how to write at the kitchen table. Your father's like— I grew up in a great house with a lot of books, great library, kind of a terrible education we all had. It was kind of a weird place to grow up. It wasn't— I mean, I went to college for 15 minutes. And I mean— But what the life looks like, how it feels, it made sense to me. I think that's the real fundamental advantage.

Jesse Thorn: Did it feel stable to you when you were young?

Tony Gilroy: No. No, no. We—I think the term of art in our house was “luxurious insecurity”. No, my father was—he was essentially a real gambler. I mean, a real gambler, and then he gambled on his career. He was really—he really needed risk and really needed to (*laughs*)—he needed to constantly—you know, he needed to risk everything all the time.

Jesse Thorn: In what way?

Tony Gilroy: Independent films, independent attitudes, mortgage the house to make a movie. Huuuuge, huge successes. Big, you know—we're rolling in it, and we're living large. He used to come out to—I mean, he used to come out to Beverly Hills Hotel. You know, and he'd check in, and he wouldn't have the money to pay for the hotel. And the concierge was a pal of his, and he'd get a—you know, he'd have to stay out until he got a job to cover, come back, hit it big, knock it out. And it was a rollercoaster, a real rollercoaster.

Jesse Thorn: How do you think that affected you as an adult?

Tony Gilroy: It made me very conservative and risk averse. I think my career has been very risk averse. I think—I didn't direct until I was 50. I think I've had a very conservative career in that sense. I think I've only become more free as time has gone on.

Jesse Thorn: Time has gone on. I mean, I can understand why being a craftsperson with a skillset would be appealing if—

Tony Gilroy: Yeah, very much so. I did it when I was playing music, I think the same sort of thing. I had an artificial attraction and idea that, you know, I wanted to be like a real—I wanted to be—“I'm not gonna direct; I'm not gonna make films. I want to be the guy you call. I wanna be a screenwriter. I wanna be that thing. And I'll nail that down, and I'll save my money, and I'll live that life.” And as I went along, you know, I realized how inhibiting that was, and you're selling yourself short. I got looser as I got older in every way. I'm much freer than I ever—you know, than I certainly was when I started, for sure.

Jesse Thorn: You had attempted a music career first, then a fiction writing career—that is to say like an on-the-page fiction writing career.

Tony Gilroy: Yeah, trying to be short story. Trying to be Raymond Carver like everybody else.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, and you backed into writing for the screen, sort of.

Tony Gilroy: Kind of.

Jesse Thorn: When you did that, did it feel like a backup option?

Tony Gilroy: I was a very, very, very good musician. And I thought I was gonna be a studio player until I came to LA and saw real studio players, and I— But I wasn't natural. I didn't have that—I didn't have what I wanted. I didn't have that like drop-dead—and then when you're around those people and the more of them you meet, you kind of go, “Wow. I'm good and interesting, but I'm not that.” And you know, if you're lucky as a human, you find the thing that feels natural to you.

When I finally went to writing screenplays and scenes and being a dramatist, I was like—I felt at home. I felt like all the weird things I'd ever done on my life and all the weird jobs I'd ever had and all the crap I'd done that was so weird like all made sense And you know, I felt like, “Wow, this is something that I see better than everybody else sees.” I felt like I always

wanted to feel as a musician, in a way. And couldn't, and felt outside of. And I felt like I was home. You know, it took a long time to get good at it and really hone that, but I kind of knew I was in the place I should be.

Jesse Thorn: William Goldman was a family friend of yours, right?

Tony Gilroy: He was, yeah.

Jesse Thorn: How did you think of him? Did you know him when you were a kid?

Tony Gilroy: Yeah, I met him when I was like 10/12 years old, yeah.

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He was a friend of my father's. Yeah.

Jesse Thorn: Did you know what his deal was when you were that age?

Tony Gilroy: Yeah. I mean, the astonishing thing about Bill was that, you know, he would always come to the children's table, or he would always seek you out, and he would just grill you about like, "What are you listening to? What are you watching?" He was a pop culture sponge. He really was incredibly curious about what you were doing. And so, you sort of hang out with him. And then I must have been 12 or whatever. I was a big reader, and I started reading the books, and I'm like, "Wow, that guy—that sounds exactly like the guy who's writing this book!" Like, the idea that you could have such a short distance between your head and your hand was fascinating to me. I'm reading this guy, and that's his voice. That's him. I feel like I'm with him.

And then—I mean, it's fascinating. Too long to go into, but my relationship with Bill was as a friend of my father's and as a child. And then Danny and I, when we became a writing team, we worked for and with Bill. I then became—I collaborated with him in many ways. I became an advisor to him in later life. I became, I mean, just a— So, when Bill died, other than my brothers—it was so weird; he was like my oldest friend. A very strange, really wonderful, complicated relationship. Yeah.

Jesse Thorn: What was the complication?

Tony Gilroy: No, just of that, of having a contemporary of your father's, and having someone who had been a mentor and somebody who had been a peripheral figure in your life becoming someone who could make your career happen for you and help that happen. And then someone who needed you. You know, to have him need me. And that happened as well. Fascinating that, you know? Unexpected.

Jesse Thorn: And interesting I imagine, to have everyone's mentor in the abstract—like, the person— Like, I think of him as a mentor having never written a screenplay in my life, nor had any interest.

(Tony affirms.)

Just from reading *Adventures in the Screen Trade* and *Which Lie Did I Tell?* and watching his movies. But like, to have that be your real-life mentor! (Laughs.)

Tony Gilroy: Scott Frank and I, we arranged a large part of Bill's funeral, and we did the final two eulogies, and it was obviously extremely well attended. And we put together the movie clip and the whole thing. And Scott and I did it together. And Scott did a thing in his eulogy. We split it up, so everybody had a different topic, and Scott did this amazing thing. He said, "Everybody in this room that Bill took to lunch and talked to you and helped you out, stand up in this room right now." And man. And the number of people that were there—and who they were, some of them—I mean, what a murderer's row of—I mean, yeah, man. I mean, no. But I had the—(chuckles) yeah, I had an inside track on that, yeah.

Jesse Thorn: I mean, it's sort of like when Stephen Sondheim died. Like, Stephen Sondheim, the greatest songwriter of the—you know, there's an argument to be made—

Tony Gilroy: One of Bill's best friends!

Jesse Thorn: Yeah. There's an argument to be made, greatest songwriter of the 20th century. Right? And like, when he died there, sure, there was a lot of talk about how great *West Side Story* is and how great *Company* is—and they are—but also just everyone being like, "Oh yeah, he replied to my letter too." (Laughs.)

Tony Gilroy: I know, man! They give—I mean, you gotta give back. You really—I mean, the giving back and the— But it wasn't like anything fabricated. It was legitimate interest. And Bill kept himself young and kept himself plugged in and kept himself alive. But that same curiosity that used to come and bug us was the same thing that carried on for a very long time. And the only time— You know, it's a lesson to all of us. The people that know him—you know, when that started to run outta gas is when everything started to run outta gas. And you really gotta keep that alive. You gotta keep it alive. Your curiosity has to stay just vibrant all the time.

Jesse Thorn: Now that you have made this show that involved millions upon millions of dollars and an infinite number of production design decisions and the creation of multiple cultures and languages and so on and so forth—all these things, right?

Tony Gilroy: (Chuckles.) Yeah.

Jesse Thorn: Do you think that when you are done talking to people like me, your desire will be to get your hands on something that big and exciting again? Or do you think it will be to sit down and write something about a compelling person to look at who drives around in a black car and visits four specific boardrooms? (Laughs.)

Tony Gilroy: No, I already did it. I wrote another film over the summer—last spring and summer.

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Very, very, very different, all about movie music and movie scoring and about a cellist who comes back to Hollywood to do session work. And no, I got the monkey off my back right away. No, I don't want to—I couldn't take the heat of this for... You're also vulnerable on a show like this. You can't get sick. You can't stumble. It's like a wave. It's like surfing one of those huge waves. You get underneath it, you start spinning. If it fell away from you, you'd really, really drown. I was very fortunate to just sort of stay able and whatever. And that kind of pressure, (*sighs*) I'm not sure I would want to take on something that substantial. And I yearn to direct again. You know, I—

No, I'll be well sat, as long as I'm making something. Making, that's—making, the process, finishing, working with other people, I'm easily satisfied that way, I think.

Jesse Thorn: Well, Tony, I'm really grateful for your time. And I'm especially grateful for your work, 'cause I just really adore *Andor*, and I love so much of your other work.

Tony Gilroy: Thank you.

Jesse Thorn: Tony Gilroy, everyone! You can watch both seasons of *Andor* on Disney+. And look, as Tony was leaving, he turned to me, and he said, (*chuckling*) “That was a really great conversation. We really want people like the ones that listen to your show to check out *Andor*. Can you ask them to?” And look, I'm the kind of person that listens to my show. I love *Andor*. I think you should watch it. I'll tell you this, my wife—0% nerd, doesn't care about *Star Wars*—she watched the first season of *Andor*, and she was like, “Oh, Jesse, you were right!” Go watch it. It's great.

Transition: Cheerful, chiming 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—as well as at Maximum Fun HQ, overlooking beautiful MacArthur Park in Los Angeles, California. As I record this, it's my birthday. I'm headed over to Eagle Rock to try a new pie place. We'll see.

Our show is produced by speaking into microphones. Our senior producer is Kevin Ferguson. Our producers, Jesus Ambrosio and Richard Robey. Our production fellow at Maximum Fun, Hannah Moroz. Our video producer, Daniel Speer. Booking help from Mara Davis.

Our interstitial music comes from our good friend, Mr. Dan Wally, also known as DJW. You can find his music at [DJWsounds.bandcamp.com](https://djwsounds.bandcamp.com). Our theme music was written and recorded by The Go! Team. The song is called “Huddle Formation”. Thanks to The Go! Team. Thanks to their label, Memphis Industries.

You can follow *Bullseye* on Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, where you will find video from just about all our interviews—including the ones that you heard this week. And I'm just gonna say that one more time: please follow *Bullseye* on Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube.

Check out video from our past interviews and future interviews. And it's a lot of fun there on the internet. You probably heard about it. I call it the Information Superhighway.

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.)