

38 – Lance Reddick: A Stuck at Home Special

Speaker 1: From CurtCo Media.

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Jenny Curtis: Welcome to another special episode of Hollywood Unscripted: Stuck at Home. I'm Jenny Curtis, and I am so delighted to have our returning guest cohost Dana Gourrier back with us. Welcome back, Dana.

Dana Gourrier: Thank you, my dear. It is always, always a pleasure, and I will come back any time you invite me. I am always happy to be here.

Jenny Curtis: Today's guest has done so much. It would probably take us the whole episode just to list his credits, but he's best known for his acting work on The Wire, Amazon's Bosch, and Comedy Central's Corporate. So we're going to dig into all of that and so much more. I am thrilled to welcome Lance Reddick. Lance, thank you for joining us. We are so happy to have you here today.

Lance Reddick: Thank you.

Jenny Curtis: I absolutely love talking about the creative connections in the world. So I really want to start with this because Dana and Lance, you both have actually shared projects together even though you've never met. Dana was in American Horror Story: Coven, and she was in The Domestics, as were you, Lance, and I would love to start with those projects.

Lance Reddick: Wow. My experience was so vivid on American Horror Story because it was the... I don't want to say the only time, but it's one of the few times in my career where I feel like I almost went back to school because my first day was a three-page scene with Jessica Lange. And it was really interesting because whenever you work with a star like that, at least for myself, I always wonder what I'm going to get. I'm a little concerned about protecting my work. And two things, first of all, I realized very quickly that she's just all about the work. So I didn't have to worry about that. But the other thing was that it was the last scene of the day, and that particular season was her season more than any other season. So she was fried. We start the scene, and I remember she's kind of doing this ritual, and she's kind of mumbling to herself. My character, Papa Legba, he's a spirit. He appears halfway through her incantation.

So she's in the middle of this incantation, and you hear, in the next room, somebody drops something. Cut, cut, cut. She starts over again. I swear to god, about 30 seconds in, we hear clang! Somebody drops something else, and the room is quiet. You hear Jessica almost in a whisper, "Jesus Christ, when are we going to learn how to lock down a fucking set?" And I was like, "Oh, no. I better not mess up. Jessica Lange is mad."

Dana Gourrier: Oh, my goodness.

Lance Reddick: But then it was great. I mean, it was great, and the other thing that was interesting because I'm such a stickler about being prepared and knowing my lines, when you've got that much to do, and you're working hours that long, you got a three-page scene, sometimes you're going to go up on your lines. And the thing that I don't remember ever seeing before was that when she went up on her lines, she would just keep going. What was amazing to me about it was that her going up on her lines never took her out of it. She still stayed in it as the character. The other thing was, being a theater actor, even though you're always looking for something spontaneous on every take, once you find it, you're still pretty much trying to do the same thing. And I noticed that she was finding a little thing, because in some ways, she's more quintessentially a film actor than anything else, and I noticed how nuanced and different every single take was. It was really fascinating to watch. It was really educational. Then, of course, Kathy Bates is one of my idols. So that day was just nerve-wracking, and the same thing with Angela Bassett.

Dana Gourrier: I also had a similar Jessica Lange experience. She was so wonderful and kind and humble to me, and she was so sweet. But I saw her rip someone a new one that was just not on point, and they needed to be, and they were after that. And I just remember thinking, "That's a boss lady."

Lance Reddick: Wow. Wow. Wow, wow, wow.

Dana Gourrier: It was like watching a queen on her throne. Then there's also a fantastic grace and attitude that she had, which was just about the work. She was just about executing what needed to be done. That's literally one of the highlights of my career thus far, is getting to work with her and Angela, obviously, also Gabby Sidibe. That's where she and I met, and that's where we forged our friendship. We're still good friends to this day.

Lance Reddick: She's something else. What an intellect, too.

Dana Gourrier: People don't realize it, or they realize it when they meet her, within a few minutes. But I told her just the other night. I said, "Have you been tested, girl? You might be a little genius." And she was like, "Hm, I don't know." I was like, "Easily, yeah, you are." So we chuckled about that. She's like, "I'm just me, girl." I'm like, "You're also a genius." So that's fun. But that time was wonderful on American Horror Story, and I do remember your role quite prominently because weird stuff started happening. Your character ushered in a sort of spirit realm that was really freaky. I'm from New Orleans. We don't play with any of that stuff.

Lance Reddick: Oh. Wow.

Dana Gourrier: Also, the local folks that they had hired to come in and do the ritual practices with us, they made us pray with them prior to, at least in the scenes that I was in and some of the episodes that I had done. And I really appreciated that they asked us to humbly bow our heads and respect what was being done because it's not a game. It's not just for Hollywood film and television. It's a real thing to them. So we had to pay homage and reverence, which I really appreciated because you don't want to make nobody mad.

Lance Reddick: Oh, man. That is so cool.

Dana Gourrier: Yeah, it was interesting. It was with Sarah Paulson. There was a goat that had to be sacrificed all over her, and it was very messy and very grotesque and everything. But she was a champ and-

Lance Reddick: She is, yeah.

Dana Gourrier: She's amazing. That's my girl. She's so amazing. I love Sarah.

Lance Reddick: I didn't work with her in that season, but they had me come back for a cameo a couple seasons later, and I did work with her.

Jenny Curtis: I want to go back really quick to working across Jessica Lange. You guys both strike me as you're about the work. So being across from someone at that level of her career who also is all about the work, does it affect the way you approach your own work? Or is it kind of matching the energy you already have?

Dana Gourrier: I'm going to jump in really quick, Lance, because I'm not on Lance's level at all. And that's not to impugn my level. I consider myself a blue-collar actor. So, when I'm considered a local hire, or at least I was because now I'm based in Los Angeles. Before, when I was working in New Orleans and a local hire, people did treat you a different way, and you knew you were a supporting character. So you kind of understood the hierarchy of set life, if you will. Even still, I always watched what the greats were doing. I always take cues from them, and I let them dictate the temperature and the culture of the set. And if they're talkative and they're open, great. If not, I just kind of follow their lead.

Jenny Curtis: So, Lance, does that then affect you the way you approach your own work, or is your method set and some people fit better than others into your method of acting?

Lance Reddick: Fit better than others... Just a little point, I don't change my preparation based on who I'm working with. It's weird to say, but in terms of how I see myself as an actor, pretty much from the time I got out of drama school, I just always thought of myself as a great actor. So, in terms of the work, that never bothered me. So, when I work with people, I may be nervous to meet the person, but once the camera starts rolling, it's just about locking in and doing the work, do you know what I mean?

Jenny Curtis: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Lance Reddick: Now, sometimes I may get (inaudible). Perfect example is with Kathy Bates because, like I said, she's one of my idols. When I got out of drama school, it was Meryl Streep, Marlon Brando, Daniel Day-Lewis, and Kathy Bates. So, when I met her, and the scene that I had with her... I got there on a Sunday. My first scene was on a Monday. I think it was the second episode that I did. And somebody said to me something about the scene that I had with Angela and Kathy, and I said, "What scene with Angela and Kathy?" They said, "Oh, yeah, we're shooting it tomorrow. This is the writing." I said, "What?" So it ended up being this three-page scene. I don't know if it was the last scene or it was the penultimate scene. It's hard to remember, but I think Kathy's dead, and she's in hell. And she ends up having to be tortured by Angela's character.

So I get the scene in the afternoon, and I'm trying to look at it in between setups.

Dana Gourrier: Oh, my gosh.

Lance Reddick: And they did the scripts on red paper with black ink so that it would be hard to copy because they were so anal about secrecy.

Dana Gourrier: Oh, that's right.

Lance Reddick: Well, I was wearing red contacts, trying to read stuff on red paper in the dark because it was getting dark for a scene that was the next day that was a three-page scene with me and Angela Bassett and Kathy Bates. So I wrapped, went home to study, took a nap, studied, took a nap, and I was up and down all night doing that.

So, when we got to set that evening, we kind of stumbled through the scene because we were all learning the scene. But the thing about it is I had to work in the morning, and they didn't. So we stumbled through the master. Then I remember the director said, "Who wants to go first with closeups?" It was so funny because me and Angela both did this. And Kathy looked at us, and she said, "Fuck it, I'll go first."

The thing about the scene was that Kathy had a two-page monologue before my character enters. So they shot that first. I'm in my chair trying to learn my lines, and I'm watching the crew go by. And after every one of her takes, the crew were just shaking their head, going, "Wow." So, then, I'm thinking, "Man, I can't afford to get distracted. I can't afford to get distracted, but it's Kathy Bates. I've got to see what she's doing." So I went over to one of the monitors in video village, and I'm watching her do her thing. It's Kathy Bates. She was breathtaking. She was stunning. My heart kind of dropped into my stomach because I'm thinking, "Oh, my god. Oh, my god, oh, my god, oh, my god. I am so screwed. I am so fucking screwed." And then it was like, "No, no, no. Just keep focused. Just keep focused. Keep running lines. Keep running lines. Keep running lines."

Finally, they finished that part of the scene, and they're changing the setup. So the three of us are running the lines. The first time we go to run the lines, we get to my lines, and I'm in my little method thing trying to find the character. And Kathy says, "What? Speak up. I can't hear you." I'm like... So I raise my voice. Then, at one point, one of the PAs says, "Ms. Bates, they're ready for you." She said, "Well, hold on. We got to learn these lines." So we run it some more, and then the PA interrupts again, and Kathy yells, (foreign language). I'm like, "Ooh," even though she didn't even say what... in French. But, anyway, I'm thinking, "Oh, man. Oh, man. Oh, man."

So we set up for Kathy's closeup, and I enter. I have a paragraph, and in the middle of a sentence, I just went up. And all I'm thinking is, "Oh, my god. I'm going up on Kathy

Bates. I'm going up on Kathy Bates' closeup." To this day, I don't know how I did it. I just kept talking until I got through it, and it was fine. And the funny thing about it is, when it came to my closeup, we ran out of time so we had to go to another day. So I had to leave and come back, and by then it was fine. But that was quite an experience.

Dana Gourrier: That's incredible. Don't you love hearing stuff like that, Jenny, these seasoned, outstanding, incredible actors like, "Oh, shit, I went up on my lines"? There's something so magical for us, hearing that from someone who has so many credits that you have, who's such a consummate professional. It's, to me, it's inspiring, and it reminds you we're all human beings. Calm down. You'll get the work done. Relax. Everybody, in some way, feels this way, even Kathy Bates herself, probably.

Lance Reddick: She's funny, too. This is another funny story about Kathy because as a personality, she's diametrically opposed. She's (inaudible) from Jessica. She's just loud and forceful. So we're walking back to the trailers after we finished the scene, and she said, "So how you like it? You having a good time?" And I said, "Yeah, it's great." She said, "Yeah, because you never know with fucking TV, man."

Dana Gourrier: It's true, though. You never know. Yeah, everybody's winging it a little bit.

Jenny Curtis: I want to jump on to the fact that you said you always knew you were a great actor, which you are. But I read that you applied to Yale School of Drama on a lark. Is there a story there?

Lance Reddick: Yeah, there is. I mean, my whole journey as an actor is kind of weird because I didn't grow up thinking I'd be doing this. If there was a thing that was my thing growing up, it was music. I did a play in high school. My senior year, I was in Fiorello! I played the dealer in a card game. I think I had one line. It was the only thing I ever did just for fun. So I decided I was going to pursue it in college. I did productions in college for fun. I went to the Eastman School of Music. My first year, I actually was at the University of Rochester, and I transferred, but I'd go over to the campus and do a play once a year.

I dropped out of music school because I realized that I didn't want to be a classical composer. I wanted to be a rock star. I got married straight out of school, and about a year after my daughter was born, I had a back injury. At the time, I was waiting tables, and I was delivering newspapers, and I was delivering pizzas. So I was always

working (inaudible) . So I just started thinking, " Man, I need to reevaluate my approach. I need to do something different or I'm going to be doing this for the rest of my life." So my brilliant thinking, " I'll be an actor."

Jenny Curtis: Because it's way more stable of a career.

Lance Reddick: Then I'll have my music career. It was even about I wanted to be an actor. It was like, " What can I do to have my music career? I'll act." I was living in Boston at the time. So I started going on local theater auditions and just getting cast and getting cast and getting cast. One of the things that I did, my go-to fallback job was working as an artist's model because there are just so many schools and so many art schools in Boston. One of the places I modeled at was this place called the Museum School. And there was a guy who liked me from the beginning, and I modeled for a lot of his drawing classes.

His name was Lou Geppetti, and about a year into that, he started painting me privately. He had this huge studio in this warehouse down by the railroad tracks. I would go there, and I would just sit for three hours. I was wearing these green khaki pants and this football jersey from high school that I had. I would sit in the chair. He would paint me for three hours at a time, and we would just talk. And one day, we got on to the subject of training as an actor. In my infinite arrogance, I said, " Oh, you don't need to train. You just learn as you go," even though I knew that that was bullshit because I was starting to realize that the bigger the roles, the more trouble I was having because I didn't have any technique. If the script was bad or the director was bad, I was lost. And I didn't want to go to New York City, The Actors Studio. The only place I'd even consider is Yale, and I couldn't get into Yale because I never finished my bachelor's degree. And the only reason I said that bullshit was because of Meryl Streep. That the only thing I knew. I just knew Meryl Streep went there.

Then he says to me, " Well, you might want to consider it because I have my master's in painting from Yale. And I don't have a bachelor's degree because I went to a diploma school." So I said, " Oh," and to this day, I don't know why that stuck in my head or what possessed me. But I ended up calling up information for the drama school and calling the admissions office and asking them. They said, " Oh, yeah, you can apply as a certificate student, and if you get in, you can just go through this program with everybody else as a certificate student. You'll get a certificate instead of a diploma at the end. And if you ever finish your bachelor's degree, all you have to do is send up proof that you have your bachelor's, and we'll convert it to a master's." So, really, it

was my fallback plan. I applied, and then I got in. Then it was like, " Oh, shit. What do I do now?" My wife at the time, when I applied, she thought I was crazy. But then, when I got in, she was like, " You got to go."

Dana Gourrier: Absolutely.

Lance Reddick: And every actor I talked to said the same thing. The only people who said I shouldn't was the casting director. " Just go to L. A. and make movies." Yeah, because that's how that works.

Dana Gourrier: You can't turn Yale down.

Lance Reddick: Yeah. So, 29 years old, with a three- year- old, married, I went to Yale Drama School, and it changed my life.

Jenny Curtis: Do you have a favorite speech warmup?

Lance Reddick: A favorite speech warmup? No. I have a vocal warmup that I do.

Jenny Curtis: What's the vocal warmup that you do?

Lance Reddick: Well, it's not like I can do it because it's a gradual thing. I just start with a tone, and I go as long as I can hold it. And I'll keep going up and up and up, and then I'll do that for five minutes. Then I'll pick a song, and I'll put it on, that's usually maybe four minutes. I'll make sure it's something that makes me stretch my range, and then I'll sing that. So I open up my chest so that, on one hand, it keeps my voice grounded, but on the other hand, it forces me to put it forward, as well, so that it's in my mask, you know what I mean?

Jenny Curtis: Yeah.

Lance Reddick: Because one of the things I discovered... The further on in my career I got, I started getting into the habit, and I started realizing in on Fringe, of not being on my voice. Part of the reason I realized it is because John Noble's voice is so deep and resonant. There would be days when I would be on my voice, and there would be days when I wouldn't be on it. I wouldn't know why, and I realized I needed to start to vocalizing again. I needed to go back to basics. So that's something I do.

Jenny Curtis: A Moment of Your Time, a new podcast from CurtCo Media.



Speaker 6: I'm currently 21 years old, and today I'm going to read a poem for you.

Speaker 7: It felt like magic extended from her fingertips down to the base of my spine.

Speaker 8: You have to take care of yourself because the world needs you and your voice.

Speaker 9: Trust me. Every do-gooder that asked about me was ready to spit on my dream.

Speaker 10: Like her fingers were facing me.

Speaker 11: It can feel like your purpose and your worth is really being questioned.

Speaker 12: Ain't going to stop me from playing the piano.

Speaker 13: She buys walkie-talkies, wonders to whom she should give the second device.

Speaker 14: Pets don't love humans. We never did. We never will. We just find ones that (crosstalk) .

Speaker 15: The beauty of rock climbing is that you can only focus on what's right in front of you.

Speaker 16: And so our American life begins.

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So your first role in TV was a Dick Wolf show, right, New York Undercover? Is that correct, that was your first role in TV?

Lance Reddick: Well, actually, no. That was my first role after I graduated from Yale. But believe it or not, I had a day player role as a local hire when I was living in Boston on one of Fox's first dramatic shows ever. It was called... Man, I hate saying that because this is telling you how old I am. This is back in 1990, and it was called Against the Law. It was starring Michael O'Keefe, and the guest star was Keith David.

So Michael O'Keefe is this attorney in this big law firm. He decides he wants to work for the people. So he opens up his own law firm. It was a flashback scene because Keith David was on death row. A cop went to arrest him, and he

got afraid. So he resisted, and then they (inaudible) for the gun, and I think it was a mistaken identity thing. And he ended up shooting the cop by accident. So he ended up being convicted for murder. I played Michael O'Keefe's co-counsel in the original trial and (inaudible). So that's actually my first credit. But New York Undercover was my first credit after Yale. It's probably the first one on IMDB.

Jenny Curtis: Either way, I'd love to hear about what, emotionally, a first day professionally on set is compared to where you are now, how things have changed.

Lance Reddick: That happened two years after I graduated. My first job out of school, I was understudying on Broadway. I did that for the first six months after school. Then, almost immediately, I got cast in an off-Broadway play at Manhattan Theatre Club that then later moved off Broadway to another theater and ran for a year. I'd just been doing theater straight for like five years. So I get on set, immediately I'm going to go into my theater thing and my Brando thing. And I remember the first scene that I shot was the first scene that I had in the show. It's when Malik Yoba and Lauren... I can't remember their characters' names. They come to tell me that my son's been killed.

In rehearsal, there were two things that happened. Number one, we rehearsed it a couple times, and the script supervisor said, "Oh, in the last rehearsal, you did such-and-such-and-such. You did something different. Which are you going to do?" I said, "Well, I don't know. It depends on..." And she said, "Oh, but it has to match." I said, "What do you mean, it has to match?" She said, "For editing, once you do a behavior, you have to do it the same every time." I'm like, "What? Oh, my god. That's ridiculous."

The other thing was I had all the lines. Malik and Lauren basically had two lines each. So we go to read the scene, and Malik says... I can't remember what my name was, but, "Mr. So-and-so... I'm sorry. Can I see the... What's the line? Oh." I was like, "He doesn't know his lines? What is going on? He's in the show. He doesn't know his lines. What the hell is going on? What is that?" So I was like, "You have to do the same thing every take, and the leads in the show don't know their lines. Man, what is this TV thing? This is ridiculous." That my naïve, self-important theater attitude my first day on set.

Jenny Curtis: Following that, throughout your career, have you found there are some sets that are way stricter on staying word perfect on the script and sets that aren't so much?

Lance Reddick: Well, coming from the theater as opposed to

sketch comedy, I've always been kind of... The words matter. As I've gotten older, and we film in television, I'm a little less strict about that, although by the time I actually shoot something, I want the words to be set. I don't want to be editing them on shoot. It's interesting because on *The Wire*, I found, after doing that show for five seasons, I didn't even realize that I had gotten into the habit of changing lines if I found that it just came out better. It got to where I didn't even check. And I remember, I think it was the last season, David had written that particular episode. There was always a writer on set, usually whoever wrote the episode, but not always. David Simon said to me, "Oh, no, the line is... I said, "Yeah, but it just doesn't feel as natural." He said, "Yeah, but you have to say it this way because... It had something to do with the nature of what I was saying and the legality and what it meant in cop-speak. So I had to say it the right way.

But the first time that I actually experienced script police being word perfect, which I thought was kind of ridiculous was *Fringe*. I went from *The Wire* to *Fringe*. So I'd go from shooting on location with the showrunner, the creator of the show or the person who wrote the episode there all the time. We're shooting the first season of *Fringe* in New York. The writers room is in Los Angeles. I'd change something in a scene so it comes out better. I'd get a note, "Oh, that's not what it says." I said, "Yeah, but it comes out better if I just change the wording." It wasn't even like I wanted to change the meaning. I just wanted to change the wording of the sentence, and it was one sentence. He said, "Well, you've got to call L. A. because these people, they know what they're doing." What? Come on, really? This was my first day, not the pilot, but the first day shooting after it went into production. So, yeah, that kind of sucked. It was also the difference between cable and network television.

I remember there was a scene, and this situation was a clusterfuck, anyway, because it was a re-shoot of a scene that Anna hated in the first place. To add insult to injury, I had flown to Los Angeles for some kind of publicity thing for Fox. I was supposed to catch a flight that morning to go to set, and I set my alarm for p. m. instead of a. m. by accident. So I missed my flight. I wake up to my phone ringing and people saying, "Lance, where are you?" I said, "I'm in bed." They went, "What? You're supposed to be on set." I said, "What? I'm in Los Angeles." Also, the lines had been changed. So I'm learning the new lines on the plane. I don't even remember how many hours late I am. Then we go to set to do this re-shoot, to re-shoot the scene. We read through the scene. We go to shoot the scene, and after the first take, and Anna's apoplectic by now because she just hates the scene, anyway, and the script supervisor says, "

That's the wrong line. It's been changed." I said, " You know what? At this point, I'm just going to say the line that I've been saying. I'm just going to do that." So we shot the scene.

That evening, I get a call from Joe Wyman, the showrunner. I say, " Hey, Joe, what's up?" He said, " I heard you were in the scene today, and you didn't want to say a line?" I said, " Well, yeah. The line they wanted to change didn't make it better, and it was throwing me. And it was already a mess because Anna was upset throughout the whole scene because she didn't want to do the scene." He said, " Well, you need to check if you want to change a line from now on." I said, " Really?" He said, " Yeah. Well, the problem is the line was, 'We've lost the battle, but we're going to win the war.'" He said, " The network wants us to try to avoid using the word war right now because it has something to do with politics." I'm like, " The storyline is that our universe is at war with another universe. Are you fucking kidding me?" Excuse me. I didn't say that, but I'm... And now, every time I want to change a word, I got to call and wait for an answer through Los Angeles? This is absurd. Then, a couple days later, there was a memo that went out to all the cast about not changing lines without calling. I was like, " Oh, boy. Okay. We are on network television. That's what it is."

Jenny Curtis: Is there a different approach from cable to network in how you create a character because the format is so different?

Lance Reddick: Well, sometimes the work is frustrating because a lot of times your preparation ends up being thrown out the window on set. That's hard, particularly when scripts change so much day to day. That was really frustrating on network, but that didn't happen very often with *The Wire*. Or, if it did happen, it started happening more toward the end of the season but not so much at the beginning of the season. And it was a shorter season. It was half as long. But it turns out, the preparation... I mean, you prepare, you prepare. Now, do you mean preparing for a scene, or do you mean creating a character?

Jenny Curtis: I think I mean creating the character.

Lance Reddick: No, because it's all the same work. You try to figure out as much as you can about who the person is. That doesn't change just because you're doing network or... at least not for me.

Dana Gourrier: You can do all the preparation in the world,

but you can show up to a set, and then a (inaudible) or a director may say, "That's not how I envisioned her." And you have to, on a dime, recalibrate and reassess.

Lance Reddick: Oh, man. That's tough. That's tough.

Dana Gourrier: That's a real acting exercise. That's a real challenge, I think, as an artist, when you've done months of preparation, and you get there, and it's like, "No, that's not quite it," even after you've had rehearsals. It's like, "We changed our mind. It's this other thing now," and you have to, in three seconds, make a decision, find a word, dig deep, lean on your training, and find a way to create a whole new character in three seconds. That's absolutely happened.

It's so funny, too. Lance may not feel the way, but I do feel like there is a difference, at times, between creating a character... Of course you go at the work the same way. But the feel I feel with, say, an HBO series versus, like Lance was talking about, network series, there is a different temperature. There is a different vibe, a whole different culture on the set, a whole different energy. But he's right in the sense that you're bringing what you're bringing no matter what. They're going to take it and cut it and edit it the way that they do to make it fit into their mold of their television show. The war comment was also interesting to me because everything is, for better or worse, politics and who's going to sponsor and marketing. Everything has to be considered.

Lance Reddick: Yeah. Well, that war comment... I don't remember what it was because it was 17 years ago, but it had something to do with Iraq and Afghanistan.

Jenny Curtis: I want to, really quick, jump back to *The Wire*, because, after auditioning for a couple roles, you were auditioning for Daniel's, and you didn't get the third page of your audition sides. So you had to prep your monologue in two minutes outside and then go back in and nail it. Do you think there's a freedom to that, when you actually don't have the time to prepare? Does it bring something different to the character?

Lance Reddick: It brings something different to me. One thing that's kind of funny about that is that, and it's something that I had been discovering in the course of auditioning for television, that if I had a week, I'd be great. Or if I had it the day before, I'd be great because there was something psychological about knowing things are an even playing field. If I had two days, it was never enough time. I

mean, I know that sounds crazy. So having to cold read that monologue, there's just a part of you that just says, " Fuck it. Let me just do what I can do." Do you know what I mean? I don't know how to describe it, but there's a part of you that says, "It's not even worth being nervous. The only thing that matters is being focused."

Dana Gourrier: That's right.

Lance Reddick: So find what you can find. Figure out your marks, and just make sure you hit those marks.

Jenny Curtis: Obviously you booked the part, so you did it well. But do you remember what the feeling was while you were doing that monologue?

Lance Reddick: I felt transparent. In other words, I was just in it, do you know what I mean? It was one of those things where, because it required so much of my focus, I didn't let my brain have any room to wonder about how I was doing or what the casting director was thinking.

Jenny Curtis: Then, speaking about not having a ton of time, I know, for John Wick, you had a week to basically perfect your African accent. And you had to pick between South African and Kenyan.

Lance Reddick: So here's what happened. When I got the offer, which was like the week before, I read it, and for some reason, I didn't notice it when I read it, that in the stage directions, it said with an African accent. Looking at the role again, I said, " Oh, my god, it says African accent." So I call my agent. I said, " I'm not sure. It says African accent." So he checked, and then he came back to me. He says, " You don't have to do an African accent." I said, " Whoa, whoa, whoa. No, I think that could be cool. I think I want to try it." So I had (inaudible) South African accent. It's funny how you never know how your preparation's going to pay off. I did a movie in 1998 called I Dreamed of Africa that was set in Kenya. And I was cast without reading a script. So part of my preparation, I called up the embassy in Kenya, and I found a guy. He had agreed to talk to me. So I interviewed him, and I taped his accent. Then, once I got the script, I realized that all my lines, the few that I had, were in Swahili. So, being able to do a Kenyan accent, speaking English with a Kenyan accent was not a thing. But I had it.

So I tried the South African accent, and it just didn't seem to fit the character. Then I just picked up the Kenyan accent, and I tried it, and it was working. So I just went with it. Then, when I got on set, I told Chad... I remember

saying this to Chad Stahelski, " You know I'm doing the African accent, right?" He said, " Yeah. Well, let's hear it." So I did it. He's like, " Sounds great." We just went with it. Yeah.

Dana Gourrier: I love that.

Jenny Curtis: Is there a difference, speaking of that character, in living in a character for a franchise for film rather than living in a character for a series?

Lance Reddick: Wow, that's a good question. I mean, John Wick's the only franchise I've been a part of. I guess Angel Has Fallen, but I came in at the end. It's a little similar in that you pick a character up. Then you put it down. Then you come back to it a year later or two years later, and you have to find it again. You have to find the accent again. I had to find his attitude, how he moved because he's so taciturn and reserved. But at the same time, he has so much power as a being. But part of his job is to pretend he doesn't, which is very different from other characters that I've played which are overt alpha males, from the cops that I've played.

So, in that regard, it's similar. And I remember... Well, Irving was interesting because when I first started Bosch, I actually had a difficult time finding his accent, finding how he speaks. But I remember coming back second season and feeling like I had to find him all over again. So, in that regard, it's very similar.

Jenny Curtis: I wanted to jump backwards to Tennessee, which was a movie you did with Mariah Carey.

Lance Reddick: Wow.

Jenny Curtis: Tennessee was also done with Ethan Peck. I was speaking with him this week, and he says you might not remember, but I should ask you about the line replacement, " It makes your tongue hard thinking about it, doesn't it?" He said there might be a story there.

Lance Reddick: Oh, yes. Wow. Man, what a memory he's got. He was on the receiving end of that monologue. So I played Mariah Carey's husband in that. I think he's a state trooper who's also a psychopath, an ambitiously abusive man. She meets these boys in a bar and brings them home because they need a place to stay. I don't even realize they're there, and then she says something I don't like because I'm back playing cards, drinking with my boys. And I threaten her. So I've got her by the throat, and she's up against a wall. Then she's like, " We're not alone. We've got company." I said,

"What?" So I peek around the corner. I see these two white boys sitting on my couch. So I go out there, and I sit in between them and ask them if they think my wife's attractive. And, at one point, I say something lascivious, and I said, "It makes your dick hard just thinking about it, don't it?" And we needed, for TV, a PG version.

Dana Gourrier: So that was the PG version?

Lance Reddick: That was the line they came up with. I kid you not. That was the for-TV version, "It makes your tongue hard just thinking about it, don't it?"

Dana Gourrier: Wow.

Jenny Curtis: Oh, that's certainly something.

Lance Reddick: Ethan was great in that movie. He was great in that.

Jenny Curtis: Yeah, he said he absolutely loved working with you. That was a little bit of a deviation. I don't want to keep asking the same question of how do you create different characters within the same archetype, but I know you've been cast a lot as the authoritative figure.

Lance Reddick: That's actually a great question, and it's not a question that I really get, at least not asked that intelligently or nuanced. One of the interesting things for me about the difference between particularly Daniels and Irving is just being so much older and looking so much different. I've gained a lot of weight since then. Daniels is essentially... His ambition in terms of rank was driven a lot by his relationship with his wife. This is a gross analogy, but it was a bit of a Macbeth/ Lady Macbeth type of situation, whereas Daniels really just loved the job. He just wanted to do the police work. The thing about Broyles is that Broyles is essentially a soldier doing a cop's job. But his mentality is that of a soldier. Irving is the quintessential politician. He loves power, and he loves the structures of power. So, in that regard, he's very, very different in terms of his personality, from Daniels. And that was the thing that I could find.

Robert Ross: Hi, I'm Robert Ross, host of Cars That Matter. You might be wondering what makes a car matter, and I have a feeling you already know the answer. Some cars have changed history. Some you can hear a mile away. Some have lines that make your heart skip a beat. If a car has ever made you look twice, then I think you know the ones that



matter. Join me as I speak with designers, collectors, and market experts about the passions that drive us and the passions we drive. Cars That Matter, wherever you get your podcasts.

Jenny Curtis: Playing roles where you've covered similar territory, do you find that you still have a fire in your belly about it? Or does it become a job that you still love but comfortable in?

Lance Reddick: Broyles to Irving were different experiences because Broyles came right on the heels of The Wire. So, on the one hand, I felt like I really didn't want to play the same character again. But on the other hand, it was J. J. Abrams first big show after Lost. So we thought it was going to be the next Lost, even though it didn't end up being that. And it was really the only role that I felt right for, and it also happened kind of organically because I'd just been cast in Lost. I was cast on Lost literally two weeks before I wrapped on The Wire. So I was little bit in family, and I was really excited about that character because... It changed at the beginning of the second season, but at the beginning of the series, there's a cold, calculating way that he is. There's kind of a cold-blooded killer in him that Daniels didn't have. I liked that, and I also liked the fact that there was a mystery to his backstory, which the way the show was unfolding for a season, part of the unfolding of the mystery of his backstory was tied to the unfolding of the overarching plot that was set up at the beginning of the series and was moving through the first season, which was supposed to move through the show. But unfortunately, it just kind of went away the second season.

With Irving, quite frankly, when it first came up to me, I didn't want to do it. I threw a tantrum. The offer came in, and I blew my top. I was ranting and raving at my wife, "Goddammit, I told them no more cops." So I go to call my agent, and I see that I have a message. For some reason, I decided to listen to the message first, and it was from my agent. She said, "Lance, you're getting an offer. Don't freak out. I need to talk to you about it first." So I call her. The thing I didn't know about Irving when I got the offer was I had no idea who Michael Connelly was. So I didn't know that it was based on a series of books that were huge all over the world. The other thing I didn't know is that the offer came from Eric Overmyer, who was the showrunner, the co-creator of the series. But, in addition to being a famous playwright, Eric and I know each other from The Wire because he came on as a writer/producer in the fourth season. So, basically, I had a conversation with Eric, and he said, "We really need a great actor for this role." I said, "I'm

hesitant because I just finished playing two cops in a row." He says, " Oh, yeah. Well, sorry." He said, " We'll write it however you want us to write it. We'll write it as big or as small as you want. Michael Connelly's, Michael's happy to talk to you." So I called Michael Connelly, and we talked. Then I decided okay. And another part of me saying okay was that first season, Irving was only supposed to be a recurring character. And at the time, it was never going to happen because the writer's agent didn't want him to do it. But I was trying to get the writer who wrote... There's a skit that went viral that I did on Funny or Die called Toys R Me.

Jenny Curtis: We watched it yesterday.

Dana Gourrier: Yeah, we watched it last night. It's great.

Lance Reddick: I was really hot on trying to develop that as a television series, preferably for Adult Swim. So I figured, " Well, I got a year to do that while I'm doing this," because the plan was for me to recur the first season, have a big storyline second season, become a series regular second season, and then figure it out from there. Well, we shot the pilot in the fall of 2013. In May of 2014, it gets announced to the trade that it got picked up for series. And the day that it was announced to the trades, I get a call from my agent. " Lance, they want to make you a series regular for the first season." And I was like, " Fuck. What do I do now?" Because on the one hand, it's not like I got Big Bang Theory money. I still got to pay a mortgage, but on the other hand, it's like, " Am I doing something that's going to be the nail in the coffin for my career artistically and professionally?" You know what I mean, in terms of doing the kinds of things that I wanted to do?

And it took me long enough to make up my mind that the producers started to get pissed. But I decided to jump off the deep end and just go for it. And it has been great, a great role, part of a great show. The other thing is, unbeknownst to me, between 2013, it was not only when we shot the pilot for Bosch, it's also when I shot John Wick. It's also when The Guest got into Sundance. It's also the year that I did American Horror Story. So all these other things were happening in my career that were so different from that. And they continued to happen. It was really fortunate. In terms of people seeing me a particular way, I'm not in danger of that anymore. It's been a great ride.

Jenny Curtis: Not only that, but you've also been on Corporate, which is an authoritative character but completely different. We wanted to talk to you about your approach to

comedy because your comedy characters are so dramatic.

Lance Reddick: Except for Key & Peele. That was...

Dana Gourrier: I was going to say we watched in Key & Peele, and that was actually just hilarious.

Jenny Curtis: When do we get to sing Over the Rainbow? Yeah.

Lance Reddick: I mean, I guess those are the characters that I've been cast as. I'm sure it has something to do with the persona of my cop roles in the past. Corporate was one of those things where I didn't get it. So I have to take my hat off to my agent. When I read it, I just didn't get it. I was like, "Another asshole boss in a suit, I don't need to do that." I said, "I don't usually do this, but what do you think? I want your opinion." She said, "I think you should do it." I said, "Why?" She said, "Because I promise you, Lance, it's a different asshole boss in a suit." And the other thing is they really captured the culture of fear that pervades corporate working culture, and it's truly been one of the highlights of my career. I can honestly say I'm as proud of Corporate as I am The Wire. What an incredible group of people. I'm so fortunate. My only regret about Corporate is that it's (inaudible).

Jenny Curtis: Was it a set that would break out into laughter all the time?

Lance Reddick: People were cracking up all day. I'm not saying... People would get through takes. Sometimes not, but most did get through takes, and then they'd start laughing a lot at the end of them. But one of the things that was challenging for me in Corporate was having to let go a little of thinking that I can be better in terms of my character preparation. I remember Pat Bishop, when we were shooting... First of all, Pat is about 5'2", and he looks like he's 12. So the first scene we shot for the pilot was my first entrance, where you see me get out of bed and working out and making my protein shake. I read this biography of this black billionaire and did all this preparation about who the guy is. They had stuck a bunch of pills all over the counter. I'm like, "He wouldn't do that. This guy's really fastidious. He wouldn't have this shit all over the counter like that." Pat's like, "Yeah, but it'll be funny." He said, "It'll be fine."

I'm like, "This kid's telling me what my character is, and he's walking away. What the fuck, man? These guys don't know what the fuck they're doing. I just got to get through this, get my paycheck, and get out." And it was funny. Also, the shot went by so fast you hardly noticed. Now I know

Pat's a fucking genius, and I don't say that lightly. I mean, they all are, but Pat's really fucking smart. The other thing is that, except for Anne Dudek, who is her own phenomenon of just amazingly talented, everybody else is just either from sketch comedy or standup comedians, particularly Adam Lustick. He would improvise take after take after take for days and do different stuff and have you rolling in the aisles. I'm sorry that I keep using this word for the people in this show, but he's a fucking genius. It was just amazing.

Jenny Curtis: Would you improv?

Lance Reddick: Did I, or would I ever?

Jenny Curtis: Did you in the show?

Lance Reddick: Not a lot. It's interesting. One of the things that Jake Weisman, who plays Jake on the show, he told me one of the things that they loved doing was figuring out how to give me a monologue that the language was as convoluted as possible to see what I would do with it.

Jenny Curtis: Recently, *One Night in Miami* premiered at Venice and Toronto to absolutely rave reviews. It was the directorial debut of Regina King, which she's so phenomenal as an actress. I'm really curious to know how that translates to being a director and what it's like working with someone on their directorial debut.

Lance Reddick: It's one of those rare instances where I didn't do it... Similarly to *Little Woods*, I didn't do it for the role, I did it for the project but also because I wanted to work with Regina. There's something about actors that direct. They just know how to talk to actors because a lot of directors, they don't really understand acting. They don't understand how to talk in terms of motivation. If you're giving an acting note, unless something is just too fast or too soft or too loud, unless it's purely technical, you need to be able to speak that way. Yeah, and she's great at that.

Jenny Curtis: In the span of your career, can you think back to one of your favorite directions you've ever received?

Lance Reddick: Wow, nobody's ever asked me that. I got to think about that one. See, the problem is that, usually, it's the bad direction that sticks out, that you remember.

Dana Gourrier: I was going to say that.

Lance Reddick: I mean, I could give you a couple bad ones. And

part of what makes me angry is that I took it. This was a director who... I'm not going to say his name. He was French, and this is a director that they loved on Fringe. And he disrespected me from the first day. He didn't even start treating me with respect until people started talking about The Wire, and then he put two and two together because I don't think that he'd ever seen the show. But there's a scene where it's an alternate universe, and my character, he's been blackmailed by the archvillian, which is played by Jared Harris. And my son had this rare disease that he had a cure for, but he'd only give it to me if I would betray my universe. So I did something that caused the death of one of the big people. So, after the funeral, I come home, and when I return to my wife, she asks me... Karen. I remember her name. I can't remember the character's name. Anyway, she asks me if I'm okay. How I played it when I came in is I came in, she looks at me, and she says, "Are you okay?" And I say, "I'm fine," and I go and I start looking at the mail. He says to me, "Lance, what are you doing? It's not about the mail. We need to see your eyes. We need to see your eyes. Look at her." Like, "Dude, you fucking idiot, I'm responsible for the murder of one of my people. The last thing I want is for the person who knows me better than anyone in the world to look in my eyes right now. I'm sorry. I'm not playing with mail. I'm trying to avoid her eyes, you dipshit." He was looking for melodrama rather than what makes sense psychologically for the character in the moment, which is just stupid. Sorry, sorry. Yeah, and also, the other thing was he would love me giving me this, "He needs more intensity," which really meant, "I need to see you doing something because I can't see what you're doing." You know what I mean?

Jenny Curtis: Yeah.

Lance Reddick: It's like, "It's because you're a fucking idiot. It'll be there on the screen." That reminds me of a great Keanu Reeves quote. I was talking to Chad Stahelski, and we were in the lobby of the Continental. It was in between takes after a walk and talk that I had to be in with Ian McShane. And somehow we got on the subject of Keanu, and he said that when they first started working together, Keanu said, "When you watch the dailies, you're going to have to watch them on the big screen. You can't watch them on the small screen because if you watch it on the small screen, it's going to look like I'm not doing anything. But I'm actually doing a lot."

Dana Gourrier: I love that guy. He's so great.

Lance Reddick: Wow. Isn't he magical? I mean, his energy.

Dana Gourrier: And it's not just his skills and artistry. It's also his humanity.

Lance Reddick: Yeah, he's like a different being. Yeah, he's extraordinary.

Jenny Curtis: I want to quickly ask, because I'm just personally really curious because I'm a podcaster, you're in a series, a podcast called DUST: CHRYSALIS?

Lance Reddick: Yes.

Jenny Curtis: I'd love to hear about the process of acting in a podcast. I know you've done voice acting for video games and all of that. But is it different doing something for a podcast?

Lance Reddick: So, for me, voice acting is different. It tends to be different from acting on camera because you don't have your face. You can't use your face and your body to communicate anything. The other thing is you don't tend to memorize the lines, and often you don't act with the other people. So you have to rely a lot on the director. With film and television, usually my rule of thumb is unless you see something egregious, just stay out of my way because I know what I'm doing, with directors. But with voice acting, it's like, "What do you got? What do you want me to do?" Do you know what I mean?

Jenny Curtis: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Lance Reddick: I really found that because I've done so much voiceover work for the video game Destiny. I definitely found that out with Destiny because often I'd have lines I wouldn't have any context for. But even with dramatic things, you don't always know when something is communicating, or when you think something's communicating and it's not.

Jenny Curtis: I can't wait to listen. I'm very excited to hear that show.

Dana Gourrier: Did you enjoy working on The Domestics? Because it was a lot of fun for me.

Lance Reddick: It was so much fun, once again, to be able to play the kind of character that I don't get to play. I had a great time. There was one argument I had with the director that I lost that I shouldn't have.

Dana Gourrier: With Mike? Mike was so sweet and docile.

Lance Reddick: Docile is definitely not a word I would use for Mike. But by the same token, I loved working with Mike. Like I said, there was only one scene where we disagreed, and I lost that argument, and I shouldn't have.

Dana Gourrier: When Jenny asked you about the question of, "What's a direction that you have gotten that you loved?" And it's definitely been from Mike, which was just, "Go further, and literally fuck them up." It was a blast to work with him on *The Domestics*.

Jenny Curtis: I like that you say he was a character you don't get to play much. You mean the sweet, kind, generous family man who's a cannibal? Yeah, I'd assume.

Lance Reddick: Both of those things, a guy who's sweet and just laughs and dances with his wife and makes goofy jokes with his son, and also who says, "You know what? If you say anything right now, I will fucking gut you and feed you to my wife and children," which is pretty close to the line I said. Yeah, I don't get to play characters who do that, either.

Jenny Curtis: I want to wrap up with my favorite closing question. What does it mean to you to have a life in storytelling?

Lance Reddick: Wow, what a question to ask when we don't have a lot of time. Yeah, that's deep. When I feel like I get it right, both in my performance and with the material that I'm working on, I feel that I'm doing something important. I feel like it's important to feel that way for two reasons. Number one, I just feel like it's a fundamental human need to feel that what you do matters. But the other thing is that one of the things that makes human beings unique as beings is language. So everything about how we relate to our reality is a story. So the kinds of stories matter. I can give you a perfect example. There's a woman very close to my wife who told her the story of when her son was about six years old. He was the younger of her two boys, and they were in a McDonald's. And he never really met any Black people before. There was a Black guy in the McDonald's. And she said she was mortified because he walked up to the guy, he said, "Hey, are you a bad guy?" because his only orientation with Black people is what he'd seen on television.

Jenny Curtis: Oh, god.

Lance Reddick: So, to me, there's no such thing as just

entertainment. All the stories we tell matter because they shape our values and they shape our standards of beauty. They shape how we relate to each other.

Jenny Curtis: Lance Reddick, thank you so much for joining us today. I really appreciate you taking the time to chat with us. And Dana, as always, thank you for joining, as well.

Dana Gourrier: My pleasure.

Jenny Curtis: I really appreciate it. So thank you, Lance.

Lance Reddick: Thank you.

Jenny Curtis: Hollywood Unscripted was created by CurtCo Media. This special episode of the Stuck at Home series was hosted and produced by me, Jenny Curtis, with guest co-host Dana Gourrier and guest Lance Reddick, co-produced and edited by J Whiting. The executive producer of Hollywood Unscripted is Stuart Halperin. The Hollywood Unscripted theme song is by Celleste and Erik Dick. Make sure to subscribe so you don't miss any special episodes of Hollywood Unscripted: Stuck at Home. Stay safe and healthy, and thanks for listening. CurtCo Media, media for your mind.