

# The Big Interview

Episode Number: 402

Episode Title: Benicio Del Toro

## ACT 1

DAN RATHER (VOICE OVER)

TONIGHT...ON THE BIG INTERVIEW...OSCAR WINNER AND HOLLYWOOD HEAVYWEIGHT BENICIO DEL TORO... ON HIS LATEST ROLE...A HITMAN IN THE WAR ON DRUGS...

DAN RATHER

What draws you to these kinds of roles or was it a case of the roles finding you?

BENICIO DEL TORO

Those films select me-- kinda like—honey will select a bee, you know.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

HE SAYS IT'S NEVER BEEN EASY, BUT DEL TORO HAS NOW BECOME ONE OF THE MOST SOUGHT AFTER ACTORS IN HOLLYWOOD...

RATHER

Any advice to any young actor now coming up-- any advice for them?

DEL TORO

I would say to an actor, turn down the volume of your expectations. And turn up the volume of your perseverance.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

AND NOW THE MAN WHO PLAYS "SICARIO" IS ABOUT TO SHIFT GEARS FOR HIS UPCOMING ROLE IN STARWARS.

RATHER

There's this-- at least a b-- strong belief that you-- once you win an Oscar you've got it made. Your troubles as an actor are over. Has that been your experience?

## DEL TORO

When you're recognized like that it -- it's like a firework. Just goes up. And then it just goes down. And you can't forget what got you there.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

BENICIO DEL TORO... TONIGHT ON THE BIG INTERVIEW.

## ACT 2

DAN RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THERE ARE NOT MANY ACTORS IN HOLLYWOOD WHO CAN PULL OFF A SCENE WITHOUT SAYING A WORD. BUT BENICIO DEL TORO HAS MADE IT AN ART FORM...ESPECIALLY IN HIS LATEST FILM, *SICARIO*, WHERE HE PLAYS A MYSTERIOUS ASSASSIN. FOR MUCH OF THE MOVIE THE AUDIENCE IS LEFT WONDERING IF HE'S A GOOD GUY OR BAD GUY.

DEL TORO'S CAREER HAS BEEN FULL OF DARK AND COMPLEX ROLES...

BENICIO DEL TORO as "Lado" in *SAVAGES*

Elena says you're going to need a better lawyer in the north.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

IMMERSING HIMSELF INTO CHARACTERS SO EFFORTLESSLY HE'S BECOME ONE OF THE MOST SOUGHT AFTER ACTORS IN THE BUSINESS. HE'S KNOWN FOR HIS MANY FILMS INVOLVING THE DRUG WAR, BUT THIS PUERTO RICAN BORN ACTOR HAS A BROAD BODY OF WORK THAT INCLUDES ACTING AND PRODUCING. HE MADE HIS HOLLYWOOD DEBUT IN THE 1990s ... LANDING HIS FIRST BIG MOVIE PART IN THE JAMES BOND FILM *LICENSE TO KILL*...

DAVID HEDISON as "Felix Leiter" in *LICENSE TO KILL*

Where is my wife?

BENICIO DEL TORO as "Dario" in *LICENSE TO KILL*

Don't worry we gave her a nice honeymoon

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

WHERE, AT 21 YEARS OLD, HE BECAME THE YOUNGEST BOND HENCHMAN EVER. HE HAS SINCE THEN ADDED MORE THAN 30 FILM AND PRODUCING CREDITS...QUITE A CAREER FOR AN ACTOR WHO'S NOT YET 50. THERE WAS HIS BREAKOUT ROLE AS "FENSTER" IN THE 1995 FILM WITH KEVIN SPACEY CALLED *THE USUAL SUSPECTS*.

BENICIO DEL TORO as "Fenster" in *THE USUAL SUSPECTS*

Yeah. He said he did jobs for him. Indirect stuff. He said he always made five times more money than the job was worth.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

THEN CAME *FEAR AND LOATHING IN LAS VEGAS*...A FILM ABOUT HUNTER S. THOMPSON WHICH ALSO STARRED JOHNNY DEPP

BENICIO DEL TORO as "Dr. Gonzo" in *FEAR AND LOATHING IN LAS VEGAS*

As your attorney I advise you to rent a really fast car with no top and you'll need the cocaine

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

BUT IT WAS HIS ROLE IN THE 2000 MOVIE *TRAFFIC* THAT MADE BENICIO DEL TORO A SUPERSTAR.

BENICIO DEL TORO as "" in *TRAFFIC*

We're going to keep our mouths shut

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

HE WAS NOMINATED FOR AN ACADEMY AWARD...AND ON OSCAR NIGHT, HE PULLED OFF AN UPSET.

ANGELINA JOLIE (at the 73<sup>rd</sup> Academy Awards)

And the Oscar goes to Benicio Del Toro, *Traffic*.

BENICIO DEL TORO

Hello

DAN RATHER

Hello, watch the light. Thank you very much for doing this.

DEL TORO

Thank you Mr. Rather

RATHER

You know, I saw *Sicario*. Congratulations. Getting good reviews. Let's hope it-- makes a lotta money for you and other people.

DEL TORO

I don't know if it will make money for me. I got paid already. (LAUGHTER) But I-- it'll make for other people that are-- that are really supportive, yeah.

RATHER

Well, one thing that struck me in-- in *Sicario*, your latest film, to say nothing of the earlier films, *Traffic*, *Escobar: Paradise Lost*, *Savages*, you play characters involved in one way or the other in the drug war. Question: What draws you to these kind of roles or was it a case of-- each case of the roles finding you?

DEL TORO

Well, the roles find me. The roles find me. If we look at-- movies borrow from their time. They take reality of what's happening around and they-- make movies based on-- things that are happening during their time. The drug wars probably started somewhere in the '60s-- late '60s. And we can see movies like-- *Easy Rider*, you can see *The French Connection*, see movies like *Scarface*. I happen to come into the acting world when there is that problem that movies borrow from. Just like perhaps an actor like Edward G. Robinson or James Cagney during the prohibition time where the genre of the gangster movie came. So they made a career out of that. Now the prohibition lasted, what, s-- s-- ten years? Seven years?

RATHER

About that.

DEL TORO

So the drug wars has been goin' on now for a long time. And I've ha-- and I happen to come in as an actor. I had no control over this. But when there is that problem. Also these movies that deal-- like this-- this drug war genre, they also explore the human-- character, the human greed--

RATHER

The human condition.

DEL TORO

--the human condition. Yes. And-- so-- so it allows for an actor to explore themes that Shakespeare explored. So that's-- that's the way I look at it. I will explore other type of films too. But-- but, you know, I-- I think that-- those films select me-- kinda like-- honey will select a bee, you know, because they're good teams. I've worked with some great filmmaker in some of these films that we could call the drug war genre.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

BENICIO DEL TORO DID NOT COME FROM HUMBLE BEGINNINGS... HE WAS BORN IN PUERTO RICO. BOTH HE AND HIS OLDER BROTHER - WHO IS NOW A DOCTOR - WERE EXPECTED TO GO TO COLLEGE. HIS PARENTS, BOTH LAWYERS, EMPHASIZED THE IMPORTANCE OF AN EDUCATION...

BUT WHEN BENICIO WAS ONLY 9 YEARS OLD, HIS MOTHER - WHO HAD BEEN CHRONICALLY ILL FOR A LONG TIME - DIED. JUST A FEW YEARS LATER HIS FATHER REMARRIED. SUDDENLY BENICIO'S WORLD SHIFTED...STRUGGLING WITH THE DEATH OF HIS MOTHER AND DESPERATELY SEEKING HIS FATHER'S ATTENTION, HE BEGAN TO ACT OUT IN SCHOOL AND FELL IN WITH THE WRONG CROWD...SOON, HIS FAMILY PACKED HIM UP AND SENT HIM OFF TO BOARDING SCHOOL IN PENNSYLVANIA.

RATHER

You moved from Puerto Rico to go to a private school in Pennsylvania. Let's go back a little. That's because you were a bit of a hell-raiser in school. You--

DEL TORO

Yeah, a little bit of Tom Sawyer. I-- I think all my life I've been a little of Tom Sawyer and a little bit of Huck Finn. (LAUGHTER) S-- it-- it-- I change. I go back and forth. And by that I mean Tom Sawyer-- has the ideas and-- and creates some kinda chaos. Not really to hurt anybody but just because he likes the adventures. And-- and I've been Huck Finn who breaks away from the adventure and goes on his own adventure and then comes back and is manipulated-- and fails in what he learns. So I-- I've been-- I've been both. I've been both. I think-- been-- a little bit of both. I lost my mom was I nine years old. That's a big blow. That's a big blow for a kid and that was a big blow for me. And you don't-- in retrospect, you-- you can see the blow. When you're a kid you don't see the blow. You just react.

RATHER

That's true.

DEL TORO

And-- and I reacted into, you know-- going out with kids and being with the wrong crowd. It was really adventurous. It was really all this energy. And I got lucky that-- my godmother recognized that there was-- there was-- there was potential in me which I w-- I didn't know. Obviously she did know. And she recognized this and what happens when you're in a small town-- and I was Puerto Rico in San Juan, it's a small town. You get labeled early on. And that can stay for the rest of your life. And that's a really hard ceiling to break. So she recognized this and moved me. And she was the instigator for me to go to this prep school, Mercersburg Academy. Being there I've-- found myself alone. And I found myself with the potential of allowing new things and explore new things and really take some control and get away from that ceiling. Dan, I got into trouble in school as well in-- in Pennsylvania. You know. Nothing really bad but I did-- I made friends. I-- I I-- like excitement. So we mighta done a prank here or a prank there. Got away with maybe one or two. But-- that ceiling that was already kinda, like, being established in Puerto Rico, "Well, he's problematic." Boom. When I went to-- to Pennsylvania that roof was lifted. And I was able to have ideas and explore these little ideas. And that led into in college saying, "You know what, I wanna take this acting class and see what happens here-- there."

RATHER

Now when you went to Pennsylvania from Puerto Rico you're what age?

DEL TORO

Thirteen.

RATHER

Right. Was one of the reasons that your father-- your-- your mother died, as you said, your father remarried. Sometimes relationships with step-mothers are difficult. What was yours?

DEL TORO

Difficult.

RATHER

Was that one of the motivating factors in moving you?

DEL TORO

I wouldn't say-- yeah, probably. But it's not her fault. And it's-- it's not my fault. It's-- you know, I-- I was a mama's boy. (LAUGH) And here comes someone who's taking my dad's attention, changing the house. It was a difficult job for her.

RATHER

I-- I can see that. And--

DEL TORO

Very difficult.

RATHER

--and you're still in pain. You were a mama's boy.

DEL TORO

Right, right.

RATHER

And in comes the new lady.

DEL TORO

Yeah.

RATHER

By the way, did you speak any English when you came there?

DEL TORO

Yeah. It's Puerto Rico, U.S.A.

RATHER

Right. (LAUGH)

DEL TORO

And-- in Puerto Rico you have to take English from first grade.

DEL TORO

I spoke English with an accent, with a big, thick accent which-- caused for a lot of laughing in-- in-- in science class in Mercersburg. You know, every time they wanted someone to read all the kids would point at me. (LAUGHTER) And-- and I would get up and--

RATHER

I'm smiling but it wasn't funny for you at the time.

DEL TORO

--well, you know what, it was funny. And I recognize it because when I was in Puerto Rico in fourth grade a kid came in from Argentina. And that's a different sound than Puerto Rican Spanish. And when that kid-- came in from Argentina-- when she read out-- out loud we all laugh.

RATHER

In the same way that they laughed at you when--

DEL TORO

At me--

RATHER

--you went to Mercersburg.

DEL TORO

--exactly. So I did understand the kids and I didn't take it personal. It's-- maybe that's the little bit of understanding that human condition. You know, so-- so I did-- I did recognize it. And you know what; I did the best I could. I stood there and I did it. And I laughed with them at me 'cause I knew. So-- and-- I think they really enjoyed that I enjoyed it. You know?

RATHER

Well, listen--

DEL TORO

Beginning of my entertainment-- (LAUGHTER) line.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

COMING UP NEXT....EVERYONE HAS TO START SOMEWHERE. BENICIO DEL TORO'S FIRST FILM...WHEN THE BIG INTERVIEW CONTINUES.

### **ACT 3**

DAN RATHER (VOICE OVER)

...IT WAS AN INAUSPICIOUS BEGINNING... BENICIO DEL TORO BEGAN HIS CAREER IN MOVIES...AS A DOG.

BENICIO DEL TORO as “Duke the Dog-Faced Boy” in *BIG TOP PEE WEE*

I’m going to take a bite out of that broad’s bazoo if she doesn’t get over here now.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

YES, THAT’S HIM PLAYING DUKE THE DOG-FACED BOY IN PEE WEE HERMAN’S “BIG TOP”. HE HAD ONLY BEEN ACTING FOR A SHORT TIME WHEN HE GOT HIS FIRST BREAK. IT ALL BEGAN WHEN HE SIGNED UP FOR ACTING CLASSES IN COLLEGE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA AT SAN DIEGO TO MAKE, HE SAYS, HIS COURSE LOAD EASIER. THEN, HE LANDED A SCHOLARSHIP AT THE PRESTIGIOUS STELLA ADLER CONSERVATORY IN LOS ANGELES...AN ACTING SCHOOL WITH ALUMNI THAT READS LIKE A WHO’S WHO OF HOLLYWOOD LEGENDS. NAMES LIKE BRANDO, AND DE NIRO... ACTING WOULD BECOME BENICIO DEL TORO’S LIFE.

BENICIO DEL TORO

When I was in-- in-- in Mercersburg there was this moment that I felt I wanted to be a musician and I really was confused at what I wanted to do. So I asked this kid to teach me how to play guitar. And-- and he would come in the afternoons. And I just couldn't get one thing going. And-- and my attention span was very small. So I put the guitar down. And I was reading about all this g-- guitarists, you know, like Santana, George Harrison, they all played music when they were six years old. So I felt I was really behind on that. So I-- I went to the class.

RATHER

The acting class.

DEL TORO

First acting class. And the teacher said something that really-- clicked in me. And he said that-- he said that-- I was 18, 19. And he said that that was the right age to start learning about acting. Because you have a little bit of an idea about life. And that really-- that really clicked in me-- really for the first time it was like, “You're-- you're-- you're on time.” You know-- so I started taking the acting classes a little bit more serious than-- than I thought I would.

RATHER

I admire acting and I know it's hard work and it does require a lot of practice and a lot of talent. But with method acting-- the-- the-- the opposite of that would be, say, look, here's a script. The director would say to you, “Here's a script. I don't want you in this. I want you to read the script. I want you to read the lines as they're written and-- go that way.” Whereas method acting is you-- you-- you pour yourself into it, you use your life experience to make the character come alive.

DEL TORO

It-- that's part of it. But I wouldn't say that's the whole of it. And this is my training and this is basically my approach. First of all, you have to understand what the writer is trying to say. If you don't say that you're not going anywhere.

RATHER

Right

DEL TORO

Then your tools would be your life experiences-- and by that I mean everything that you've read, everything that you soaked in from your memory that can help you put this character together, the way you look at life and all that stuff. Then the next step is research. You need to do research. I think all those things-- put together. Then you can then start making an interpretation. And that's really I think the key of acting is to make interpretations. I-- you know, it's not like just, like-- ooh I-- I can cry or I can get angry-- that's a tool, but that-- that's a brick but that's not the house. You know, so I think it's really-- reading comprehension is kinda, like, important for acting. You need to read and understand the piece that you're in. And that takes time. You know, at the beginning when I was in acting class what I was interested was, like, I could get angry, I could, you know, kick something.

RATHER

You could weep.

DEL TORO

I could-- yeah, or I could try to weep. And I could, like-- yell really loud. And-- and then you start understanding that's just a tool. That's not an interpretation. And that, I mean, that's kind of the-- the basis of Stella. You know, it's-- it's just really you gotta understand the writer. And-- hopefully with the director you guys understand it the same way 'cause sometimes, (MAKES NOISE) you know, you can go-- (LAUGHTER) you can go opposite ways.

RATHER

Can you think of an example when you went (MAKES NOISE) with the director?

DEL TORO

Yeah. I can. You know, my first couple of films I-- I was really happy to-- , to just be-- very much-- part of the team; not question anything and be happy being there because they are the ones that give you the job. But when I saw myself on the screen everything that I'd learned was not being put to play.

RATHER

Well, let's pause for a second. Your first two films were what?

DEL TORO

There were-- guest stars that I did on TV shows. There were-- the-- there was a *James Bond* movie I did. There was a *Pee-Wee Herman* movie I did. There was-- a film called *China Moon* that I did with Ed Harris. It was several movies. N-- not-- it seems, like, you know, I was working all the time. But they were kinda spaced in the first maybe four years.

RATHER

By the way, what was it, *Pee-Wee* and the what?

DEL TORO

*Pee-Wee's Big Top*.

RATHER

And you played, what, Duke, the dog-faced--

DEL TORO

Yes, sir. (LAUGHTER) I-- I must have caused an impression. Yes, I played the do-- my first role was, you know-- I was covered in makeup. And-- and it was just-- it was fun. It was-- a lot of fun. It was like-- that was my very first role. And then my second role which came on the heels of that one was a *James Bond* movie. And-- that was-- wow.

BENICIO DEL TORO as "Dario" in *LICENSE TO KILL*

(LAUGH) You're dead

CAREY LOWELL as "Pam Bouvier" in *LICENSE TO KILL*

You took the words right out of my mouth

DEL TORO

I was-- I was just interested in being really-- oh, you know, almost like a guest at someone's house. I don't wanna, like, you know, I don't wanna move the table. Just-- behave really well. When it comes to the approach to my character. It wasn't until a little bit later that I realized that everything that I've learned-- and I put all this time in class-- that needed-- I needed to let that out. I needed to-- I needed to grow. So it wasn't until a movie I did called-- I think it's called

*Fearless*. It's a Peter Weir film-- that I really went, "I'm gonna bring in everything that I've learned and try to make it play."

BENICIO DEL TORO as "Manny Rodrigo" in *FEARLESS*

She'll be right out.

JEFF BRIDGES as "Max Klein" in *FEARLESS*

Did you do this? The carving?

DEL TORO as "Manny Rodrigo" in *FEARLESS*

Yeah the whole bit. I was playing

DEL TORO

And by that I mean I'm gonna be from the superficial-- from the wardrobe to the-- the character and make an interpretation. I-- I-- I'm ma-- I'm gonna make an interpretation about this guy. I'm gonna look at the guy and I'm gonna say I'm gonna-- I'm gonna make an interpretation and then I'm gonna try to have moments where I can show things that together makes an interpretation. I rubbed some people the wrong way.

RATHER

By trying to break out?

DEL TORO

By trying to do what I had learned and what I considered the best I could do.

RATHER

And that rubbed them wrong way.

DEL TORO

That rubbed-- the-- the-- some people-- yes. The wrong way.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

...BUT HE WAS TAKING CHANCES, AND IT WAS PAYING OFF. IN 1995, HE WAS CAST AS FENSTER...IN A MOVIE CALLED *THE USUAL SUSPECTS*.

BENICIO DEL TORO as "Fenster" in *THE USUAL SUSPECTS*

Did you get to talk to your lawyer?

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

HE HAD AN IDEA...DEL TORO THOUGHT THE CHARACTER WOULD BE BETTER IF HE ESSENTIALLY MUMBLED THROUGH THE MOVIE.

DEL TORO as “Fenster” in *THE USUAL SUSPECTS*

Oh is that the one about the hooker with dysentery?

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

IT WAS RISKY, BUT IT WORKED AND IT BECAME BENICIO DEL TORO’S BREAKOUT ROLE.

DEL TORO

The other actors, the photography, the script which was flawless. The directing, the editing, the music. Everything came together. It was a very independent film. I think we did it in 26 days. And it was, like, you know, \$5 million picture. I-- I think I worked on that film for 11 days. Great cast. Gabriel Byrne-- Kevin Spacey, Kevin Pollak, Stephen Baldwin, it was just a really great-- Giancarlo Esposito. It was really a great cast and it just came together. It, you know, I-- I always think that movies find themselves, like, they just become. But what it was funny about that film is while we were shooting the film everybody was kinda confused with the film. We didn't think it was gonna be any good. (LAUGHTER) I went out on a limb playing a character p-- that was on the borderline of showboating or-- or-- or being really, like, over the top. And the fact that the movie worked-- people consider it-- a breakthrough-- in my career. And I-- and I-- and I recognize that as well. It was the moment-- because the movie was on point. It-- it became what it had to become.

RATHER

And in that movie you found yourself which is to say these shackles, if you will, that you felt before, the pressures to be something other than what you wanted to be, it all k-- kinda came together in this movie.

DEL TORO

Yeah. But it's not that-- it's not that-- it's not that clean of a victory. I remember the day I finished shooting that film I was so depressed. I felt I overacted. I felt I-- it was the end of my career. I felt, okay, you know, I dared and I tried to do this character. But there was this feeling of, like, it-- it-- what-- what a big mistake. I should've played it in a different way. And all the other actors were so themselves and here I am-- I am, you know, I'm-- (MAKES NOISE) and so I-- I-- I was really-- really-- it was-- it wasn't like, “Oh yeah, I did a great part. And here we go. And my career is just gonna take off.” It's not like that.

RATHER

Well, now the other end of the spectrum you did-- *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* made-- after-- Hunter Thompson's book. And that movie didn't do so well. Didn't do all that well critically, didn't do all that well at the box office.

DEL TORO

Well, that's another one of those-- glorified failures. First of all I got a chance to spend time with Hunter S. Thompson, and I admire his work. I admired that book. I-- I read that book maybe four times back and forth just to understand it. I learned so much about literature reading that book because it was the first time that I started seeing writing as-- just like acting. You're building.

RATHER

Right.

DEL TORO

And-- and you have a point of view. And I felt I needed to give my all to this movie. And so did Johnny Depp. And we worked really hard. And-- I gained weight too. And did it by myself.

RATHER

Like 40 pounds.

DEL TORO

I gained 40 pounds. You can see how I changed when you watch-- *License to Kill* which was maybe five, six years before and then-- that movie *Fear and Loathing*. But I did it by myself. I had no trainer. I just-- I had eight weeks to do all I ate was-- I found out eating doughnuts-- eating 16 doughnuts a day you gain three to four pounds every day. And that's all I did. (LAUGHTER) And we-- the movie comes out. It's-- it's-- the reviews are terrible. It-- it doesn't find an audience. But the movie has found an audience by itself. And--

RATHER

Because it's become a cult.

DEL TORO

--a cult. Yes, yes. Which is very gratifying. You know.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

MORE OF MY INTERVIEW WITH BENICIO DEL TORO WHEN WE COME BACK. SO DON'T GO AWAY.

BENICIO DEL TORO as “Dr. Gonzo” in *FEAR AND LOATHING IN LAS VEGAS*

Look at your face. You're about to explode.

## ACT 4

BENICIO DEL TORO as “Jack Jordan” in *21 Grams*

Hell? This is Hell right here!

EDDIE MARSAN as “Reverend John” in *21 Grams*

You're damning your soul! You shut up now and ask Christ to forgive you!

DEL TORO as “Jack Jordan” in *21 Grams*

Hey! Forgive me? I did everything He asked me to do!

DAN RATHER (VOICE OVER)

SUCCESS WAS NOW COMING QUICKLY FOR BENICIO DEL TORO. HE RECEIVED HIS SECOND OSCAR NOMINATION THREE YEARS AFTER WINNING FOR *TRAFFIC*. THIS TIME IT WAS FOR THE MOVIE *21 GRAMS*

OPHELIA LOVIBOND as “Carina” in *Guardians of the Galaxy*

I present to you Taneleer Tivan, the collector

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

AND IN 2014, HE APPEARED IN THE WHAT WOULD BECOME THE TOP GROSSING FILM OF THE YEAR...*GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY*.

BENICIO DEL TORO as “The Collector” in *GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY*

Beautiful.

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

BUT HIS PASSION PROJECT WAS A MOVIE ABOUT MARXIST REVOLUTIONARY LEADER CHE GUEVARA. *CHE* TOOK SEVEN YEARS TO RESEARCH AND

EVENTUALLY BECAME A TWO-PART FILM. BENICIO DEL TORO CO - PRODUCED IT AND STARRED IN IT.

RATHER

Well-- when you-- you took on the movie, *Che*, as in Che Guevara, it became a passion for you. That's pretty obvious. It had become an obsession?

BENICIO DEL TORO

Growing up in Puerto Rico-- in the history books-- there was nothing written about Che.

When I went to the United States also there was n-- not much written about Che in the history books or-- or the Cuban revolution. Just, you know, we got the picture of Fidel and-- we got a picture of Che. And the picture of Che was kinda, like, associated-- in my brain-- as a terrorist. When I was doin' the *James Bond* movie I-- went to a bookstore. And I walked in and there was a picture of Che and he was smiling. And it was a disarming smile. And I go, "That can't be a terrorist." And it was promoting a book of his letters. When I read those letters I just started goin' like, "This guy who's, you know, Hispanic, Latino-- it's writes with a sense of humor, with a sense of many things." I started seeing this other f-- picture, this other side of that story. We flew to Cuba. We-- legally. And we-- we met with people, you know, in Cuba they were kinda, like, looking at us, "Why is Hollywood wanna make a movie about Che?" And they were a little bit-- but if we're gonna do a movie about Che which was about the Cuban revolution we needed to get the information from Cuba.

RATHER

Well, and you're studying Che Guevara-- and you immersed yourself in this for-- for years. And turned out a film that runs, what, four hours?

DEL TORO

Yeah.

RATHER

About that. By the way, if you had to do it over again, what do you shorten the film?

DEL TORO

No. I wouldn't shorten the film. I think that-- if we're doin' it again we would go to HBO and try to make it longer. (LAUGHTER) Because it's really difficult to tell the story of this man that-- and we also have to recognize this thing that he is a product of a time, you know, that is-- he's a product of the Cold War, what was goin' on in the '60s.

RATHER

And you started out by saying-- before you got into the project, making the film, *Che*, that you viewed him as a terrorist. After making the film, did you continue to believe in-- he was a terrorist?

DEL TORO

No he's not a terrorist. No.

RATHER

You know, there was a time in this country when you possibly been indicted for saying that.

DEL TORO

Yeah, I know. Well, but he was not a terrorist.

RATHER

Fair to say that you view him more-- your personal opinion view him more as a revolutionary-- he was a revolutionary. But not a terrorist by today's definition.

DEL TORO

Not a terrorist by defini-- he was a revolutionary and-- of-- of that time.

RATHER

I would talk to you about Cuba, Castro, Che Guevara the rest of the afternoon.

DEL TORO

Yeah.

RATHER

But we better get back to the movies.

DEL TORO

Okay, okay.

RATHER

You won an Oscar for your role in *Traffic*.

DEL TORO

Yes.

RATHER

There's this-- strong belief that you-- once you win an Oscar you've got it made. Your troubles as an actor are over. Has that been your experience?

DEL TORO

Yeah, there's nothing-- nothing in this business is straight line. Listen, when I won the Oscar it did help. It-- it did help in-- the business side of it. It helped in-- how-- how-- perhaps having more choices. But with more choices it doesn't come, like, happiness necessarily. So-- or-- or-- or, like-- problems. With more choices it doesn't mean that problems go out the window. Maybe more problems come in. But I-- I-- I'm very honored to be recognized with that Oscar-- it's an honor to be part of that list. It's like-- that was the moment where my family felt like, "Oh yeah, he's an actor." 'Til then they were going, "You should go back to college and finish college. And at that moment they were like, "Okay." But when you're recognized like that it-- it-- it's-- it's-- it's-- it's like a firework. Just goes up. And then it just goes down. And you can't forget what got you there. And by that I mean I-- I love the process. And I just enjoy getting into it and going up that mountain again. Sometimes you don't get to that mountain-- to the top of that mountain, sometimes you do. But that's-- that's-- that-- that's what got you there. And that's what you should-- perhaps I'm talking to myself now, huh? But that-- that's what you have to strive. It's just, like, the-- the Oscar is not gonna change anything.

RATHER

Candidly, do you sometimes maybe late at night, just before you go to bed, look up at that Oscar and say to yourself, "Damn, I made it."

DEL TORO

Not-- not I-- well-- yeah, perhaps not exactly like that. You know, when I-- when I grew up, in-- in my room I had-- cut out a picture-- a page from Sports Illustrated. And it was maybe 1978. And the Seattle Supersonics had just beaten the Los Angeles Lakers in 1978. And there was a picture of-- a player named Jack Sikma.

RATHER

Oh, I remember him.

DEL TORO

And he was goin' up the rim like that over Kareem Abdul Jabbar. And it said on the top, "Yet another mountain to climb." And that was always in my wall. And I, for some reason, I always kinda look at-- look at it like that. I-- I-- I look at the Oscar and I'm just very proud of it. But I don't go, "Oh I got to the--" there's always this other mountain to climb. There's life. There's other ideas. So I had that piece of paper --that cutout on the wall at my house and I use it more now than I did as a kid. (LAUGHTER) You know, it was like something that—that it was --that -- that I just remembered. And I kind of look at the Oscar and I kind of go, "Yet I got another mountain to climb." Because even though if we beat the Lakers, even though if I won the Oscar, I just feel that I --there's other things to do. There's other stories out there that can, you know, burn me to get up and just try harder.

## **ACT 5**

DAN RATHER

Wanna go back to Puerto Rico for a moment.

BENICIO DEL TORO

Yes, sir.

RATHER

Do you go back there often now or not so much?

DEL TORO

Yeah, all the time.

RATHER

Well, you read the papers, you know what's happening. Puerto Rico is teetering on the razor's edge of bankruptcy. What do you think about Puerto Rico today?

DEL TORO

Puerto Rico is--let's-- let's start with this. Puerto Rico, U.S.A. Every Puerto Rican-- I'm sure you know this. But every Puerto Rican became an American citizen in 1917. It was not by choice. It was the federal government made every Puerto Rican an American citizen.

And Puerto Rico has been part of every war that America has been part of. Somehow in the last maybe 15 years there's been an exodus of Puerto Ricans moving into the mainland U.S.A. Inevitably people look for opportunities. You know, I mean, people from New Jersey move to California to-- or from-- Philadelphia, they move to Arizona to look for opportunities. So Puerto Ricans are moving-- young Puerto Ricans looking for opportunities in the States. Not many

Americans are moving to Puerto Rico. For the first time ever in history there's more Puerto Ricans living in mainland U.S.A. than in Puerto Rico.

RATHER

Wow.

DEL TORO

So now that creates a problem. And it's not just a problem of Puerto Rico because it's Puerto Rico, U.S.A. And I'm not saying that it's-- oh it's just a problem of the United States. It's a problem of both. And I think this problem with the-- with the economic problem which I don't know the details and I'm not an economist to really talk about it. But I do feel that it's a problem of both. And I do feel that-- that it needs help from-- from the federal government, from the United States. The issue whether Puerto Rico should become a state or not, that's-- that's-- that's a big conversation. But some things need to be helped so that Puerto Rico can move on from the problems that are-- that are happening because it's part of the United States. You know.

RATHER

Do you expect in your lifetime to see Puerto Rico become a state?

DEL TORO

I don't know if in my lifetime that's happened because the federal-- economic help is based on the population of your state. So Puerto Rico would jump the line. If-- if we were going by economics, it would jump over states like Delaware-- and other states. So it would fall right kinda, like, in the halfway mark. I don't think there's many states that would like that-- that you jumped a line. So s-- something would have to-- would have to happen. But I just think that it's tilting in a direction to take that other step to get closer to become perhaps a state. But it-- it's a little bit more complicated.

RATHER

Well, you know, I'm old enough to remember when-- discussing whether Hawaii or Alaska were to become states.

DEL TORO

Whoa, whoa.

RATHER

You could say oh it's never gonna happen.

DEL TORO

Right, right.

RATHER

And so I'm not saying it's comparable. I'm just reminding myself, you know, back in the '30s and the '40s people say, "Hawaii as a state, not gonna happen. Alaska as a state, not gonna happen." So who knows if Puerto Rico.

DEL TORO

Right, right. Who knows? Who knows?

RATHER

Well, let's talk about young people of-- Latino heritage who are trying to make it as actors today. Easier than it was when you were coming up, tougher or about the same?

DEL TORO

I think it's a little bit easier. Perhaps I'm hoping also. But I think it's a little bit easier. I think there's more opportunities. I think the-- the perception of Latino-- it's a little bit more included in our day to day-- America day to day. I mean, you know, when I first came to Hollywood it was-- Edward James Olmos, it was Raul Julia and it was-- Andy Garcia. Those were the actors-- the Latino actors here.

But when you went to auditions, you know, there were not that many-- roles for Latino. So-- and if it was, there were, you know, the stereotype. And you know what, I am-- taking a couple of those stereotypes and I wanna say, "You know what--" someone asked me, "Well, you're always playing Latinos." And I said, "Well, I am Latino." (LAUGHTER) So I can't put that down.

RATHER

And advice to any young actor who has Latino heritage now coming up-- any advice for them?

DEL TORO

Well, I would say to an actor, like, also write. Because that's what makes movies is that experience, that-- that-- that-- that-- the Latino experience. Um, I would also say that-- you know, turn down the volume of your expectations. And turn up the volume of your perseverance because it's tough for anyone who wants to be an actor.

RATHER

You bet.

DEL TORO

So you gonna have to have really a lotta tenacity that-- to-- to go after-- after that-- a career like that. But I'd say-- and I-- I actually went to talk to some kids in east L.A. in Boyle Heights. And they were all Latinos. And they wanted to be journalists. And I-- and I told them, you know, you have to write your experiences. This is something that I heard, when I went with-- with Oliver Stone to the University of Puerto Rico. He said something to the-- the Puerto Rican students there. He said something that really, like, hit home. And he said, "You have to write your experience, your story, as if it was the story of the Queen of England, with that pride, with that ego, with whatever you call it. You gotta go out and express yourself and be respectful to that story and really care about that story and really put yourself out there." And I think that the experience of the Latino in this country-- it-- it-- it falls in the hands of the-- of the storytellers. And the actor alone cannot tell the story.

RATHER

I wanna come-- talk politics for a minute. At ease, I'm not gonna ask you what your politics are. But we're in the midst of a United States presidential campaign where we have not one but two-- very high-profile candidates with the chance to become the Republican nominee. And thus if that happens become President of the United States. And-- Marco Rubio and Ted Cruz. Both from-- Cuban history. But nonetheless, Latino, Hispanic. Setting aside whatever your own politics may be, do you take some pride in that?

DEL TORO

Yes. I do. Even though I might not agree--

RATHER

I understand.

DEL TORO

--with this or that. Yeah, but you do take some pride. You do take some pride. It's-- it's-- it's-- stunning. You know, but-- but I'm not gonna make my decisions based on my heritage necessarily. I'm gonna make my decisions on-- on what I gathered.

RATHER

The policies.

DEL TORO

--the policies, yeah, yeah.

RATHER

Yeah, I--

DEL TORO

But there-- there's an element of pride, for sure.

RATHER

Now I can remember a time-- and it hasn't been that long ago-- when I along with many, many others thought I'd never live to see the day when we had an American president of African heritage. Do you expect to live to the see day when one of Latino heritage is elected president of this country?

DEL TORO

Yeah, yeah. Yeah but you know this, the-- the line of change and how things happen sometimes can be endless. And then suddenly (MAKES NOISE) it happens, you know. And I agree with you. I-- I, you know, I think that-- you know, that-- that's-- an incredible moment when African-American-- person became the President of the United States. What a message to the world. So a Latino being elected-- or Latino-descent, you know-- would also be quite-- amazing. Hopefully we agree on many things

RATHER (VOICE OVER)

NOW COMING UP NEXT HERE...WHAT BENICIO THINKS OF HIS NEW ROLE IN THE 2017 *STAR WARS* FILM, AND THE JOYS OF FATHERHOOD...SO STAY HERE WITH US

## **ACT 6**

DAN RATHER

I hear that you're down for the role in the next *Star Wars*. Not the ones in theatres right now. True?

BENICIO DEL TORO

Yeah, true, true.

RATHER

How do you feel about that?

DEL TORO

Yet another mountain to climb. I-- no, I feel-- it-- it's excellent. It's great, it's great. You know, I'm-- I'm a father now. So this is a movie that I can take my daughter. I've been-- talking to her about *Star Wars*. I showed her the-- the first *Star Wars* which-- that-- oh the-- Chapter Four. So that's cool. But it's work, Dan. I have to look at that character. I've talked to the director and -- you know, we-- we started talking about the character. And it's, like, you know, you just-- th-- those movies are really-- they're almost, like, part of the-- of the human race. I mean--

RATHER

Well, they're one of the great franchises in all of Hollywood history.

DEL TORO

--yes. I mean, and-- and I'm gonna be part of it. And I better, you know, I better not get caught flat footed.

RATHER

Well, you mentioned your daughter. She's what age now?

DEL TORO

She's four.

RATHER

Well, tell me about fatherhood. Fatherhood as an actor has to be-- have its own set of difficulties.

DEL TORO

Well, you know, one thing that I learn is that every human being is born already with that-- with a pattern. And my job as a father is to stimulate that pattern and try to guide that pattern so she can be the best that she wants to be in what she wants to be. I also, I mean, you also explore things with her and I explore in myself again and that's kinda, like, fun. But it's always really a happy thing that's happened in my life. And I'm grateful for that.

RATHER

Are you prepared for that day when she-- which is inevitably come-- when she starts dating? As a father I can tell you it's one of the most difficult times for me. Are you ready for that?

DEL TORO

I-- I th-- I hope I am. (LAUGH) You know, I'll be-- I'll be a stalker dad. (LAUGHTER) You know--hopefully she will, like-- she's gotta respect herself. That's-- that's key.

RATHER

Who are you Benicio? I mean, you're an actor, the public person that you are is known. But who are you in your id, in your soul, who are you?

DEL TORO

You know, I-- I-- I take pride in what I do which is-- being an actor, being a storyteller. I-- I study the human condition in some ways. I'm a student. I-- I try to treat people-- the same way I expect them to treat me. I like a challenge. I represent, you know-- a group, a minority. I'm aware that I represent the Latinos of this country. So-- but-- there's-- there's many mes in different moments too. There's many mes. But-- but I try to walk the line.

RATHER

Well, I thank you for doing it. I wish you good luck.

DEL TORO

I-- thank you very much.

RATHER

From the looks of your most recent film not gonna need much luck. It's doing well.

DEL TORO

It's doing well. Thank you, yes.

RATHER

Thanks again.

DEL TORO

Thanks Mr. Rather

RATHER

Thank you very very much

DEL TORO

It's a pleasure

END TRANSCRIPT