

Note: This show periodically replaces their ad breaks with new promotional clips. Because of this, both the transcription for the clips and the timestamps after them may be inaccurate at the time of viewing this transcript.

00:00:00	Music	Music	“Dead Presidents Theme” by Danny Elfman. Tense, eerie music featuring drums, breathy woodwinds, and gong.
00:00:02	Adam	Host	Look at all these slave masters posing on your dollar! This is the chorus to Run the Jewels’ “Just,” in a song which asks us to recognize the truth about the portraits that have been in our wallets and purses this whole time. It’s also what I thought of first when I saw we had rolled the magic 120-sided die and it gave us the film we’re discussing today— <i>Dead Presidents</i> . But while the song is an emphatic rejection of the injustices our country collectively ignores, and in some cases even canonizes, today’s film takes place within three periods of this injustice. Moments in places which act as inflection points in our main characters’ lives.

There’s a Bronx, yet to be touched by the scourge of drugs, while our characters here are young and hopeful. Even if a Keith David character is omnipresent. There’s the Vietnam conflict where innocence is lost, even though Keith David isn’t even around. And then finally a post-Vietnam Bronx, a home transformed, opportunities few, and a return to their pre-war lives impossible. Where not even Keith David’s character can fix this. At this point our main characters become desperate and radicalized and when your Keith David character can’t fix your problems, it’s time to blow shit up.

And so for the purposes of our war movie podcast in this war film, war is the inciting incident. A turning point that pivots the story into a genre-bending descent into slash heist film. And you don’t have to watch the film that when your heist plan turns into a descent into situation, you should probably take your heist plan back to the drawing board, you guys. It’s supposed to be a victimless crime! The money they’re stealing was going to be destroyed anyway! Look at it! It’s all wrinkly and gross! It’s too old! And they weren’t supposed to kill anyone, either, but when you’ve included “head in a backpack” guy from Vietnam in your heist crew, chances are pretty good there’s more than just cash that’s gonna end up in that bag.

It is no surprise that the heist plan fails and then the escape plan fails and then there’s this courtroom chair throwing at the end. In a lot of other films this might be felt as a cathartic moment—one last revolutionary act before Anthony’s story ends. But Hughes brothers films don’t have happy endings. When Anthony’s prison bus pulls up outside the yard, the film ends there. Where he could be seen as reflecting on what could’ve been. And as viewers, many of us may wonder the same. That’s Uncle Sam for ya—money to burn! On today’s *Friendly Fire*—*Dead Presidents*.

00:02:53	Music	Music	“War” off the album <i>War & Peace</i> by Edwin Starr. Impassioned, intense funk.
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War!
Huh!
Yeah!
What is it good for?!
Absolutely—

—nothing!
Uh-huh!

War!
Huh!
Yeah!
What is it good for?!
Absolutely—
—nothing!

Say it again, y'all!

War!

00:03:14 Ben Host *[Song fades down and plays quietly as the hosts speak.]*
Welcome to *Friendly Fire*, the war movie podcast that needs to free up some space in our backpacks so we can keep some heads as souvenirs! I'm Ben Harrison.

00:03:23 Adam Host I'm Adam Pranica.

00:03:25 John Host And I'm John Roderick.

00:03:27 Ben Host That head is really starting to stink.

00:03:29 John Host I didn't get the head.

00:03:31 Adam Host I thought the half-Bob would be, like, the grossest battlefield thing to experience. Until I saw—until Cleon became "head guy."

00:03:41 Ben Host One-eighth Bob? *[Laughs.]*

00:03:42 John Host Well, but there were also half-Bobs in that battlefield scene. There was every kind of gross, like, burned face and whatnot.

00:03:52 Ben Host I think the thing that I didn't get was not that Cleon went totally mental in country? But that then they came home and were like, "You know who we should get involved in our bank heist? Is—
[Laughs.] The guy that walked around the jungles of Vietnam with a severed head in his backpack."

00:04:10 Adam Host Yeah. I don't think you can say that you're good at creating and maintaining friendships if you're recruiting Cleon for your mission here.

00:04:23 John Host *[Ben laughs.]*
I did feel like there—that it was a pretty well-established that Cleon was an effective fighter. An effective guy on the ground. So I could see, in a situation like—for instance, when I put a podcast together, I'm like, "I don't want my smartest friend. I don't want my most dependable friend. I just want the guys that week-in, week-out, are gonna say some stupid shit, get outta my way when I start talking." You know what I mean?

00:04:54 Ben Host Mm. I feel very seen.

00:04:57 Adam Host *[John laughs.]*
You think the mission is going to fail. And by "mission," I mean the bank truck heist mission. Is gonna fail because of Cleon. It's sort of a fake-out, that it's not his fault!

00:05:09 John Host Well, isn't it, though?

00:05:11 Ben Host He fails to scare that cop away. Or find an excuse to get rid of the cop.

00:05:17 Adam Host It doesn't fail for reasons that you expect them to. Like, he doesn't cut the cop's head off.

00:05:23 John Host *[Ben laughs.]*
 What I'm interested in is that you guys—in a two-hour long film—you have jumped right to the heist—

[Ben laughs.]

—like, leap-frogging an hour and twenty minutes' worth of movie. To get to the six-minute-long heist sequence.

00:05:39 Adam Host I think that's demonstrative of... of what a person would get out of this movie. Is this a war film, or is it a heist film?

00:05:46 Ben Host I feel like my entire—like, I remember seeing ads for *Dead Presidents* on television or whatever and I remember it was like—I mean, the poster is like incredibly iconic.

00:05:58 Adam Host Yeah. Name a more iconic poster.

00:06:00 Ben Host Yeah. I dare you.

[Adam laughs.]

But then like I rented this in college and was like, "What the fuck is this Vietnam movie? *[Laughs.]* Like, I can't believe there's a Vietnam element to this?" And it's really like a two-act structure. The rare film with a two-act structure where the first half is about one thing and the second half is about, like, all of the fallout from that thing.

00:06:24 John Host So it's the rare film like *Full Metal Jacket* or *Deer Hunter*. Sure.

00:06:29 Ben Host Yeah. Well, I think Vietnam films are uniquely—are more often like this than a lot of other war films.

00:06:37 John Host That's a good observation. I think that's true. I think that a big part of it is that we think of Vietnam as the war—y'know, you go off to WWII and you come back changed, but the world didn't really change while you were gone? It was you that changed?

00:06:53 Ben Host Well, and also everybody didn't have to do Vietnam in the way that—like, WWII was like an all-hands-on-deck experience for the country. So maybe—maybe there's like more understanding in the civilian population when you come home?

00:07:09 John Host Yeah. Right. There's—it's the only war where you come home to a potentially hostile street life. But also in this movie, you see... a different kind of transformation than we see in a lot of war movies, where the cornfed American kid goes away and then he comes back and his friends are all hippies.

[Ben laughs.]

Because in this scene where—y'know—we're seeing what it's like in the North Bronx, and the difference between, y'know, what happened in the Black community in the United States between 1965 and 1975. I mean, a complete transformation that is not really like the... the hippie, Berkeley, switcheroo that happened.

00:07:54 Adam Host This film does a great job in giving you a couple establishing shots of that. Right? Like, we float over Ant early in the movie and we see this vibrant community of... of, y'know, people playing the numbers, but also like... people are getting by! And getting over in their way. But when we come back to this very same block, after Ant returns from Vietnam, it's basically like burned barrels in the street. It's pretty bleak.

00:08:22 Clip Clip **Music:** Groovy music plays in background of dialogue.

Speaker: They say—hol-hol-hol-hol-hold on a sec. Keep the meter running.

00:08:24 Adam Host It's not just a lack of opportunity, like, that Anthony feels. It's that you can see it.

00:08:31 John Host Right. But there's also like—there's Black Liberation, which—when he went away, didn't exist as far as he understood and he comes back to a world where that's now a factor? When he went away there was not—presumably—like, he was not competing against any guys with big furry hats and chrome-plated 45s?

[Ben laughs.]

And all of a sudden, like, that's one of his main competitors. Like, y'know, the social world. His social world has changed as much as anything in the movie.

00:09:04 Ben Host I thought it was interesting that that wasn't Cowboy when he comes back. Like, the local neighborhood alpha male is not like a guy that we knew before he left. Kinda felt like they were setting Cowboy up to be a kind of—

00:09:19 John Host To go from being a clown to being the real deal?

00:09:22 Ben Host Right. But Cowboy stays a clown. *[Laughs.]* Like, he still sucks at pool and when Ant returns.

00:09:30 Adam Host Yeah, what did he do with all that time? He definitely didn't practice pool.

00:09:33 Ben Host Or fighting! *[Laughs.]*

00:09:35 Adam Host Yeah.

00:09:36 John Host There was no competition. He seemed like the big dog 'cause everybody left.

00:09:38 Adam Host Yeah. You don't get better playing pool by yourself, I guess.

00:09:42 John Host I feel like Cowboy's an example of where this movie kind of... missed a few opportunities. And one of them was—yeah. For instance, Cowboy is set up to be a pivotal figure. And he's being played by—like—an incredibly striking and beautiful and talented actor.

00:10:05 Ben Host Right.

00:10:06 John Host And in the final accounting, all he's there to do is, y'know, be like a one-dimensional figure that allows Anthony to be transformed. It felt like there was a lot left unresolved there? And the resolution—it didn't feel like it didn't resolve? It just felt like the resolve was... too shallow.

00:10:30 Ben Host I mean, there's like a million directions you could take that character. Like, he winds up also in the unit in Vietnam like Chris Tucker did. Or he is a much more, like, dominant crime figure in the intervening years. 'Cause also—like, I think that it's easy to forget how long Anthony was away. Like, he didn't do one tour and get done.

00:10:58 Clip Clip **Speaker:** Can't you look me in my eyes? I ain't seen you in four years.

00:11:02 Adam Host "Who is the bad guy in this movie?" Is the question that I thought a lot about as I was watching. I had expected—I loved *Menace // Society* and so I had never seen this movie before and I stepped to it expecting, I think, a quality that I got. But I also expected a fair amount of, like... *[sighs.]* White guy's the enemy in this movie. And this is a fairly restrained film in what it chooses to make its bad

00:11:51 Ben Host guys. Right? I would argue Cutty is maybe the heavy here, if there even is one. It almost feels like it's without a heavy. I think the, like, race commentary in this is so much less, y'know, central in your experience of watching it? Like, it's commenting on the Vietnam War through just putting a Black character at the center of the film? 'Cause like we just don't have that many films about what it was like for a Black guy to go off to the war. We have a lot of peripheral Black characters kind of speaking to that in other films, but—

00:12:19 John Host Or even central Black characters, but we don't get that arc that we were describing earlier where we start with them as kids and then come back to them having a hard time integrating.

00:12:30 Adam Host I'm wondering if you felt the same way, though. Like at the end we get the white judge judging our main character and he's also Martin Sheen.

[Ben laughs.]

00:12:58 John Host And we get a scene of rage, where... Ant throws his chair at him and I wonder if you're not white me, you see that as a moment of... that I couldn't. Y'know. If you see that as a moment of triumph.

00:13:00 Adam Host Oh. I don't think so.

00:13:05 John Host Or as a moment of, like, finally pushing back.

00:14:00 Adam Host Even in that moment—I mean, the film pulls—I'm not gonna say "punches," but the film isn't clear. About who the heavy is. Because even in that moment, what Martin Sheen says is, "I was a Marine. Don't give me that 'you were a Marine hero' baloney." And so even in that moment, there's at least in the dialogue one degree of separation—if you're trying to make the case that the enemy—the bad guy in the movie is white society or the United States of America that chews up Black kids or whatever, there's—Martin Sheen could be a lot more—he could make that point in a different way. But what he does is he says, "I was a Marine." And he could've said that to a defendant of any race that was trying to say, "Hey, go lenient on me because I'm a decorated Marine."

00:14:01 John Host Right.

00:14:15 Adam Host The film is making the case there that—I mean, that's in a way kind of an indictment of Curtis—I mean, of Anthony. Right? I mean, that his attorney would try to make that. Give him that escape card. What— *[Laughs.]* Like, it's interesting. Our main character is—by the end? I expected this to be a story where he was a victim and victimized. But by the end of the film I didn't feel that way! And I did not expect the film to present this character like that.

00:14:32 John Host The understood—and in a way, like, weirdly... it's not given the exclamation point that you would expect that a more heavy-handed film would do. Making the explicit connection between the fact that America is a white supremacist country and that Anthony can't get a job and that he's forced into the bank robbery by—not just by the fact that times are hard and he makes bad choices, but because it's inevitable that, y'know, that no one can get over unless they either turn to drug dealing, pimping, whoring, or crime. But a lot of that is... a lot of that punch is pulled because we spend a lot of time in this movie in a kind of domestic soap opera. We are also convinced that Anthony is extremely capable. And hardworking guy. Y'know. Who like avoids all the pitfalls of his friends and has a job as a freaking butcher.

00:15:33	Ben	Host	The movie takes a really long time to both give us the sense that he is really damaged? And also to make the heist seem like a choice that he would choose? Like, they're casing the bank for the heist, like, pretty early in that second act. And it felt like—like, he's got a job! Like, <i>[through laughter]</i> why is he casing a bank right now? Like, he hasn't got his back up against the wall or anything. And then over the course of the rest of the film, he does feel more and more like he's got his back up against the wall and he does start to have like nightmares and seem more and more psychologically damaged.
00:16:16	John	Host	Yeah. That nightmare scene does a lot of heavy lifting in the middle of this movie. Because he still—because the thing about Larenz Tate is he's a handsome and very sweet-faced person? You like him immediately when you see him, and then you continue to like him? And he does a good job acting in the latter half of the movie where you start to see pain on his face? But that nightmare scene—I've never quite seen anything like it. <i>[Laughs.]</i> Where it's like a Bruegel painting. <i>[Adam laughs.]</i> It's really a goulash of nightmarish images that's meant—because it's the first thing of its kind in the movie. And up until that point it's like, "Yeah, he does drink a little bit." And then all of a sudden, it's like, "Oh no." <i>[Ben laughs.]</i>
00:17:00	Ben	Host	Imagine waking up next to somebody that just had that dream. <i>[Laughs.]</i>
00:17:04	John	Host	Yeah. Right. You're like, "It's okay honey!" "It's not okay." <i>[Laughs.]</i>
00:17:09	Ben	Host	<i>[Through laughter]</i> It's the furthers it could be from "okay." Getting the job in the butcher does, like, keep him exposed to the bloody imagery. Y'know.
00:17:16	John	Host	Yeah. And us, too. Yeah.
00:17:20	Clip	Clip	Speaker 1: My best cut, Mrs. Stein! Enjoy!
00:17:23	Adam	Host	Speaker 2: Thank you very much. The ambiguity of what's good and what's evil kind of pervades the whole film and most of the characters, right? I think in a lot of war movies you have safe harbors with people. Y'know. Either you go through a PTSD experience and you wake up with a loving wife who is with you to the end, or you have, y'know, a father who went to Korea and was a soldier and might understand what you're going through? But here there are no safe harbors. Right? Because the-I don't think we see the parents very much after he returns from Vietnam. He scarfs down his dinner. His mom asks a couple questions and he doesn't wanna talk about it. Even Kirby isn't that guy, because the safety that Kirby provides also comes with a heist or a job or something?
00:18:14	Ben	Host	A lot of strings attached to Kirby's friendship.
00:18:17	Adam	Host	That helps keep this tension throughout the film. You never feel safe with anyone. You're always suspicious of even the people who are supposed to care about you.
00:18:26	Ben	Host	Yeah. I—maybe that's the utility that Cowboy is meant to play. Is just to like—even a guy that you beat in pool is potentially gonna pull a knife on you in the environment that Anthony inhabits?

00:18:39	John	Host	I think some of the confusion about the movie's viewpoint is that... when Anthony comes back and Delilah has become radicalized, we have set up now like an obvious sort of point-counterpoint in the film. Right? That she is part of a Black Liberation movement. Anthony has no experience with it. And he's kind of repelled by it. At first. And you see in the community in the North Bronx that there's an inkling, right, that the Black Liberation is becoming... a movement. But it's not a mainstream movement. You don't see any of the main characters really embracing it. It seems like a fringe kind of mentality or cloak.
00:19:24	Ben	Host	Yeah.
00:19:25	John	Host	And so the film kind of gives you a teaser. Like, this is what's going to transform Anthony. This is what's gonna kind of focus the whole question of—why was there a disproportionate number of Black soldiers in the war? We keep hearing this refrain that it's a white man's war; why are you fighting it. All of that is gonna get funneled into this sort of conflict between the Black Liberation movement and Anthony. It's gonna pull at his heart, y'know.
00:19:59	Ben	Host	Right. There are like elements of revolutionary movements that make the case that like any crime you commit in this evil society that we're trying to destroy is justified. So like it could've taken it in that direction. Like, this bank heist is like a righteous act by a guy whose life was ruined by the racist country he lives in. But he doesn't—he never seems to embrace the ideology fully. Like—
00:20:26	John	Host	He doesn't and the movie doesn't. And what's curious is that this—the events depicted here—are based on a real bank heist that was <u>really</u> performed by the actual Black Liberation Army. In conjunction with some other sort of Communist, like, Weather Underground types. And it was <u>explicitly</u> that. Right? It was <u>explicitly</u> a heist that was declared within the movement as a righteous heist because they were “liberating” the money from the white oppressor and—I mean, in the end, all the people that were convicted kind of stood in the courtroom, refusing to acknowledge the sovereignty of the United States of America? I mean, it was a super-duper political—
00:21:13	Adam	Host	Was there a chair throw?
00:21:14	John	Host	I'm not sure. I think—actually, I think there were—at least one of the people, when sentenced to life in prison, refused to attend the court proceedings? Y'know, because they refused to recognize the authority? And the judge went on record saying, “I don't see any good served by having them in the courtroom.” A snarkier quote than that as he sentenced him to life.
00:21:39	Ben	Host	I wonder if that part was taken out of the film because, like, they wanted to get major distribution for it?
00:21:46	John	Host	Well, that's the thing! I mean, the source material has all that politics in it. And because Anthony never fully embraces that cause? It's never clear within the movie itself whether the Black Liberation movement is taken very seriously or whether it's considered—whether the movie <u>itself</u> kind of considers it nonsense. Right? Delilah joins the heist, but she ends up, like, going... going full psycho. Y'know, and when she dies it's not like we mourn the movement. We just mourn the little girl. The movie could have decided that it was going to embrace that Black Liberation argument to justify the heist, or it could have <u>critiqued</u> that movement. But instead it was just kind of like... it was there in the room. Which is weird, considering that the ripped-from-the-

headlines element of this movie was like hyper political. One of the super political bank heists of that era.

00:22:51 Ben Host I kinda feel like it would've been a poison pill for the box office, though, if—in 1995—you made a movie about how like some badass Black Liberation people knocked over a Brinks truck.

00:23:05 John Host Having been there in 1995, if there was ever a time in American history where you could make a movie—

[Ben laughs.]

—that was unapologetically liberationist in that way? Y'know, like, portraying Black Panthers or Black Liberation in a positive light—1995 would've been it.

00:23:26 Ben Host But also we've seen a lot of movies that kinda... happen in this window that feel like they are trying to inhabit a post-racial America. And this definitely does not feel like it's coming from the same place as your Denzel Washington movie where he plays an FBI guy whose Blackness is not an aspect of his character. As far as the movie is concerned.

00:23:55 John Host Yeah. Right. It is the counterpoint to that.

00:23:58 Music Music Short reprise of theme song "War."

00:24:01 Ben Host Adam, you were talking about Martin Sheen scolding him in the courtroom. Y'know, my head immediately went to a, like, imagining like what a Martin Sheen came home to when he got home from his war. And it feels very outrageous that he's making this kind of—y'know, he's making this very, like, paternalistic assessment of Anthony's character from the bench when he doesn't know shit about Anthony's life and what Anthony has actually been through.

00:24:32 John Host Have you ever been to court? *[Laughs.]*

[Ben laughs.]

That's what they do.

00:24:37 Adam Host Do you get to claim extenuating circumstances when a bunch of bank truck guys have been shot in the face a half a dozen times?

00:24:44 John Host No.

00:24:45 Adam Host I don't think so, either.

00:24:46 John Host That's the problem. There's like, "I'm sorry that I got involved in this like card game racket or this numbers running thing 'cause I'm trying to provide for my family," but "I was part of a bank heist where six cops got shot in the face"? It's not really like, "Hey, go easy on him. He was a war hero." Y'know, there are lines.

00:25:04 Ben Host If it had placed the—like, part of the motivation for the heist more centrally in the like Black Liberation, like, "we're gonna do this and then, y'know, use the money to protect our neighborhood or feed kids or something," that's an indictment of the community that he comes from and that's not what this movie feels like it's trying to be. It's more just a—it's a "descent into" movie. It's a movie about how a guy who had a lot of—a lot going for him, but came from tough circumstances, like, played the cards he was dealt wrong.

00:25:42 John Host Yeah. But that—and that's what's weird about it. Right? Because his descent isn't really—we're not given—if you're gonna take the politics out of it, which—let's assume that that was a move the filmmakers made to try and stay safe. Right? "Don't put—don't foreground Black Panthers in this movie. Let's make it more general." But what we get then is like, a guy struggling to be in the

middle class and he's got some PTSD, but some of the big issues in his life are that his girlfriend, mother of his children, has another boyfriend, maybe. And that boyfriend comes by and gives money to her because he's like some kind of benefactor pimp.

[Ben laughs.]

But that isn't—but that's not set up within the movie as a sociopolitical commentary? It's set up in the movie as like a male competition issue. And so that kind of takes away a lot of the import of it, and it makes it just seem like it's a pissing match between two dudes. Which—again—like, robs the descent into hell narrative of some of its power. Because it's like, "Were you really, like, on the skids? Or were you just trying to compete with a pimp for your girlfriend's affections and you're not treating her very well 'cause you're a drunk with PTSD." But none of this—y'know, considering what was happening in the Bronx at this time? Where you've got junkies everywhere; you've got police brutality; the city is burning; there's—y'know, people are starving, for all intents and purposes? They're inventing hip-hop.

00:27:25 Ben Host
00:27:27 John Host
00:27:31 Ben Host

They're inventing hip-hop, or about to.

I mean, it also robs the movie of the critique of the war, because like... I mean, we've got the opportunity to really dig into "this is a white man's war; we have no beef with the Vietcong. Like, we're just trying to—we've got our own problems domestically" kind of conversations. But they never get past that.

00:27:54 John Host

Right. Right. And perhaps because—A, it's an impossibly big topic to take on without taking—without presenting a viewpoint. It was what made *Do the Right Thing* such a big movie in its moment. Which was that Spike Lee had a viewpoint. It was just not clear to a white audience what that viewpoint was. That's what was so shocking about that movie. This movie didn't come up with a viewpoint, because the heist feels undercooked, also. Like, you were saying, the poster is iconic. And that face paint is amazing. But we're only given a little foreshadowing of it when they were Marines and kind of putting on their Marine face camo. But there's no—the film gives us no insight into how it is that these bank robbers—rather than just wear masks or like pantyhose over their heads—how it was that they came to have the most striking and cool—

[Ben laughs.]

—bank robbery face paint that anyone's ever seen. And it's like, "Where did that come from? Like, which one of the five of you is like some genius makeup artist?"

[Ben laughs.]

00:29:10 Ben Host
00:29:14 Clip Clip
00:29:15 John Host

Wait. We don't get the Batman suiting up scene where they're getting ready?

Speaker: Never leave the Cave without it.

Right. And where somebody's like, "You know what we should do? We should use all this extra, like, greasepaint that I had from the community theater days."

[Ben laughs.]

00:29:22 Adam Host Like, there's a reason that Skip and Cleon are put out on the block instead of in the dumpsters? It's 'cause they refuse to wear the face paint?

00:29:32 John Host *[All laugh.]*
But like, yeah. All the planning that we get for the heist is just that scene where we've got some streets drawn on a piece of cardboard and he's put some quarters around. And he actually—in the process of talking about the heist to everybody—he's like, "Okay. You stand here; you stand here; you stand here; you stand here. And we've gone over the actual heist a bunch of times, so we don't need to do that right now."

[Ben laughs.]

00:29:55 Adam Host Like, he says it in the film!
John: We're like, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa."

00:29:59 John Host **Ben:** *Italian Job* this ain't!
Wait a minute, wait a minute, wait. Well, you guys might've gone over it, but I think we should see, too, what the plan is.

00:30:05 Ben Host The film sails into the heist fully confident that it's a fully-baked plan. And it is not. *[Laughs.]*

00:30:11 John Host It's not. And we're given all this evidence, like, "Oh, wait, this is a really ragtag bunch of people and something's gonna go sideways here." But there are so many movies with a heist at the center where the heist goes wrong and a lot of other movies have done it where you felt more... a part of it. And more invested in it when it starts to go haywire.

00:30:37 Ben Host Well I wonder if the heist... seems like it's supposed to be at the center of this movie because that's the way the movie was marketed. 'Cause to me this is a movie about... Vietnam and the way it ruined this guy's life.

00:30:55 John Host I feel like Anthony had a good time in Vietnam. He succeeded there. He succeeded. Was decorated and got promoted. Unlike Skip, who—the whole time—is wanting out and kind of, y'know, dragging his feet. Anthony was very reluctant to go home. And so in a way the movie kind of makes an argument that going home from Vietnam is what fucked up Anthony. 'Cause when he shows up on the block, the day he gets back, he's the tightest one of anybody in the whole neighborhood! Like, he's got confidence and pride and it's just reintegrating that is the... integrating into a world that didn't exist when he left.

00:31:40 Adam Host Isn't it interesting how like the case that he makes to Skip in Vietnam is that like by not thinking about anything or anyone but himself there, it allows him to survive his crazy circumstances during war. But when he returns home, what does he do? He's gotta provide for Juanita. He's gotta think about his daughter.

[Sound of old-fashioned printer plays in background.]

00:32:08 John Host Once all of these other concerns creep into his head, that's when he's in great danger. Right?
Right.

00:32:09 Adam Host There's my film paper. Bam.

00:32:12 John Host [Ben laughs.]
 Hey. Boom.

00:32:13 Ben Host I was waiting for that, Adam.

00:32:15 John Host There's a lot of gore that feels just sort of thrown in there? Where the camera typically does not zoom in on someone's mandible where the flesh has been burned away? But the actual war stuff was a pretty good war movie, I thought.

00:32:33 Ben Host Yeah. It had kind of almost like a Mel Gibson-y quality when we were seeing action? Like, that you could tell that the really cared about like making that exciting and visually as arresting as it could be.

00:32:49 John Host Yeah. It didn't have that *Forrest Gump*-y think where you're like, "We're in this movie and now we're in the Vietnam part" and it feels just as kind of goofy as the Sally Field part.

00:33:01 Ben Host I may be like making this up? But does it feel like there are a zillion examples of a Vietnam combat scene in a movie where we're in the jungle but then they get back out to the ruins of a church and take cover there while they wait for their helicopters to come?

00:33:20 John Host It's the *Platoon*. Yeah.

00:33:22 Ben Host Yeah! [Laughs.] I feel like *Forrest Gump* might have a scene like that also? Like, when he's saving all those guys? What's going on with that?

00:33:30 John Host Lot of churches, man.

00:33:31 Ben Host Lot of ruined churches in Vietnam?

00:33:32 John Host Yeah. It's such a great visual metaphor that no filmmaker can step away from it.

00:33:39 Adam Host [Adam laughs.]
 Speaking of trope-y visual Vietnam War metaphors, this film saves the water buffalo and does not hack it to bits.

00:33:47 Crosstalk Crosstalk **John:** Oh, yeah. That's right.

Adam: Did you feel like this film was talking to *Apocalypse Now* in that scene?

00:33:52 Adam Host The bombs go off in the background—

00:33:53 John Host Interesting.

00:33:54 Adam Host —and the water buffalo escapes in the foreground? I thought that was neat.

00:33:57 John Host Like, "Look man, you don't need to kill a water buffalo to make a good Vietnam movie."

00:34:02 Adam Host [Ben laughs.]
 Right. Right.

00:34:03 Ben Host "You can get some somewhere else."

00:34:04 Clip Clip **Speaker:** So what's the matter with you? You acting kinda weird!

00:34:08 Ben Host The bank that they knock over—or attempt to knock over—is like six blocks from my old apartment in Greenpoint.

00:34:14 Adam Host Whoa!

00:34:15 John Host Really? What is that building actually?

00:34:18 Ben Host It's just some warehouses. The door that they had there, I think, was put up by—

00:34:25 John Host Yeah. It looked fake.

00:34:27 Ben Host —the prop department or by the set dressers. But that door actually caught the attention of an internet pedant. Would you guys like to hear a moment of pedantry?

00:34:36 Crosstalk Crosstalk **Adam:** Yes.

00:34:39 Ben Host **John:** Every time.
 “At the bank doors on the dock, the soundtrack implies metal doors being unlocked and opened/closed. The door opens and you can see that there are no bolts. It has a deadbolt, but nothing on the door edge suggesting an opening. At the top edge of the door—”

[Sound of telegraph plays in background.]

00:35:00 Crosstalk Crosstalk “—it looks almost wood-like. The door did not even lock or have a doorknob channel.”
Adam: Wow.

00:35:03 Ben Host **John:** Durr.
 Door pedant.
 00:35:04 John Host Come on, filmmakers!
 00:35:08 Adam Host Guy sounds like a real dork.

00:35:11 Ben Host *[John laughs.]*
 Did you guys get the sense that that armored truck had a lot of gasoline in it, in addition to—

[John laughs.]

00:35:23 John Host —money? *[Laughs.]*
 00:35:25 Adam Host That was quite a gas ball. *[Laughs.]*
 It had money and solvents inside.

00:35:30 Ben Host *[All laugh.]*
 I thought that that was such a great character choice? That the guy was just like so excited about how big the explosion was and was completely off the scent of they’re gonna get some money?

00:35:41 John Host Well, yeah, ‘cause he was the one that was—at that point—like so high on speed that he had lost the—what did we have in that heist team? We had a speed addict; a heroin addict; a booze hound; a guy—y’know, a psycho that has become a Christian—

00:35:56 Ben Host That’s the opiate of the masses!
 00:35:59 John Host A Black Liberation teen girl.

[Ben laughs.]

00:36:05 Adam Host And then a one-legged guy.
 Is Kirby the most normal one of all of them?
 00:36:08 Ben Host I think Kirby qualifies as a problem drinker. Right?

00:36:13 John Host *[John laughs.]*
 He’s making bad, bad choices. Plus, he’s the one that should be—y’know, he should be the adult role model here.

00:36:19 Ben Host Hm.
 00:36:20 John Host I would—I do think that that heist scene is notable for the fact that—for the most part—it’s the only time in the movie where we see white people. Other than the lieutenant in the squad in Vietnam.

00:36:41 Adam Host Well we get to see more of Cassel’s butcher character, which I think it significant.

00:36:45 John Host Oh, right, right, right.

00:36:46 Ben Host And the white cop that gets paid off by—at the beginning. But that’s—yeah. Very few and far between.

00:36:53 John Host Does your movie have two or more white people talking to each other about something other than the heist?

[Adam laughs.]

00:37:02 Adam Host That’s about to happen on them?
That’s the Bank-tel test?

[Ben laughs.]

00:37:05 John Host In this case, all of a sudden you’re struck by the fact that one, two, three, four, five different people are like middle-aged white men and it stands out! You can almost see—very briefly—from the perspective of the people within the film how ugly middle-aged white cops are.

[All laugh.]

00:37:33 Ben Host Yuck! Oh, wow!

00:37:36 John Host Yeah. You’re definitely like rooting for the heist, right?

00:38:02 Adam Host In a way. You’re not rooting against it, for sure. It doesn’t—it’s not clear if they pull this heist off, how they’re going to keep from... it’s like the Lufthansa heist in *Goodfellas*. You almost know for a certainty that if they get away with the money, it’s going to bring ruination upon each one of them. You’re gonna watch them die one after another from this money.

00:38:24 Ben Host I’m gonna take the other side of that argument. I’m not rooting for the heist. And the reason why is it’s the Black officer is the first to die! Like, that’s the thing that starts the whole thing off. And that’s the awful tone setter for the failed mission. It fails before it begins because that guy’s the first to go.

00:38:27 Adam Host He’s like the most helpful cop in the history of cops? [Laughs.]

00:38:42 Ben Host You just like ache for him—and god, think about that scene. He’s alive so long in that scene! That’s the worst part! He’s just there and helping and waiting. And you’re wondering which one of the main characters is gonna be the one to do the awful thing.

00:38:56 Adam Host But before he saunters around the corner and starts offering to radio in for the bus schedule, you want the heist to go down without a hitch. Right? You want them to get away with the million dollars!

00:39:02 Ben Host I want Kirby and Ant to have the *Shawshank Redemption* ending.

00:39:19 Adam Host Right. And like... this movie doesn’t have a lot of depictions of like the cops that are dangerous and a problem to have an interaction with if you’re, y’know, a black kid in the North Bronx in the ‘70s.

00:39:23 Ben Host This version is, they are a big problem if you’re trying to rob a bank truck.

“Too-nice cop”— [Laughs.]

[Adam laughs.]

00:39:29 John Host Is not the Hughes brothers’ signature.

I think my problem with the movie is that I struggled to have a takeaway. Personally. The movie doesn’t give you a very clear viewpoint, and so in the end I wasn’t sure whether to be... happy? Sad? Angry? Thrilled? I kinda wandered through the movie.

00:39:56 Ben Host I thought a lot watching it about our previous film, *Path to War*, and how—I mean, that movie was, y’know, the 30,000-foot experience of the same war. The president trying to get the Equal Rights Amendment passed and feeling like the Vietnam War is a distraction in the way of that. This is the, y’know, the super zoom-in on the ground. And I thought they were kind of an interesting double feature because when you get to the zoomed-in view of the guy on the ground who goes off to Vietnam, like, the decisions being made at the presidential level seem so impossibly far away at that point. Like, minor decisions that like, “Okay, yeah. Like let’s go from seemingly minor decisions—like, let’s go ahead and pass this omnibus spending bill that will enable us to keep doing the war.” And like... failing to calculate how ruinous that is to how many lives, y’know, in reality. Like, the level of abstraction that they were dealing with in *Path to War* really hit me in a new way seeing this one.

00:41:13 John Host Yeah. I think that’s maybe the best thing about doing this show. Is to watch the *Path of War* and then this movie and try to... try to put them together in the same—not just cinematic universe—but in the actual universe where we live.

00:41:30 Ben Host You marvel at it.

00:41:32 John Host You do. Yeah. *[Laughs.]*

[Ben laughs.]

But it’s interesting how to maintain a consistent worldview or viewpoint just as a film watcher. From one film to the next. It’s hard to accept a muddled viewpoint on its own... terms. Because we’ve seen so many films that are talking about so many of the issues in this movie that if the movie leaves it to us to fill in the blanks—and I think that may be part of what’s happening here. I do think that the mid-’90s was a period in—certainly in like Black cinema—young Black cinema—where the Hughes brothers may have expected the audience to fill in some sociopolitical blanks.

00:42:28 Ben Host Right. You’ve seen enough Vietnam films. You’ve seen enough Spike Lee films.

00:42:32 John Host Right. And particularly like, if you’re a Black filmgoer, you’re gonna come into this already knowing a lot of the sociological stuff that is informing these characters and the choices they make. So they’re saying—in 1995—“You can go into this movie and we’re not gonna have to explicitly say some of the things.” But the problem is in 2020, the cinema world and the sociopolitical worlds are not so condensed and not so single-minded. Certainly we’ve seen so many Vietnam movies that if you just hand us a kind of half-filled-in crossword puzzle and say, “You guys know! It’s like Vietnam and the Bronx! Y’know! Just fill in the blanks!”

[Ben laughs.]

It’s like, “Well, I don’t know. We just watched a movie about Lyndon Johnson and McGeorge Bundy.” That movie, tragically not enough about McGeorge Bundy.

[Adam laughs.]

00:43:38 Ben Host I would’ve loved for there to have been a scene where they’re, y’know, heading out to another deployment in some jungle and

they're on the back of a truck that gets caught in a traffic jam and they look down and there's Robin Williams with Forest Whitaker.

[All laugh, John particularly enthusiastically.]

Forest Whitaker's like, "Guys! Guys, guess who I've got right here!" Like, imagine Chris Tucker— *[Laughs.]* Giving a fuck about that.

[Laughs.]

00:44:08 Adam Host

If all of these films had been made 20 years later we'd be talking about a Vietnam cinematic universe, right?

00:44:14 Ben Host

Right.

00:44:15 John Host

Right. We need to write a *Forrest Gump*-like Vietnam movie where our—

00:44:22 Ben Host

That ties them all together? *[Laughs.]*

00:44:24 John Host

Yeah. Our main character meets every single—he meets Kurtz. He meets—

00:44:29 Ben Host

He walks through a scene in Hamburger Hill. *[Laughs.]*

00:44:32 John Host

Yeah. Charlie Sheen goes by and we just digitally insert all those other people. 'Cause Vietnam was not that big of a country and there weren't really that many people there.

[Ben laughs.]

00:44:45 Ben Host

Really good idea, I think.

Our main character dies at the end by going down the Insinkerator in *Heaven & Earth*?

[All laugh.]

I mean, spoiler alert. I don't wanna ruin this movie before we write it. But.

00:44:57 John Host

Right.

00:44:58 Music Music

Short reprise of theme song "War."

00:45:01 Adam Host

It's rating and review time on *Friendly Fire*, which means we need a rating system to then review this film. That's the order of operations, right?

00:45:10 Ben Host

[Laughs.] Yeah.

00:45:12 Adam Host

Everyone knows that! Why do I keep explaining it? I explain it every time—

[John laughs.]

—because it might be a person's first time listening to the show, right?

00:45:19 Ben Host

Either it's their first time or they just like the rhythm of the podcast, like, there's kind of some reassurance to the pattern.

00:45:27 Adam Host

There's comfort in format.

[Ben laughs.]

There aren't many fun/funny moments in this film? But Kirby's explanation for beating the shit out of that guy outside of his restaurant being, "He grabbed the wrong leg"?

[All laugh.]

I thought was great. And it really endeared me to Kirby! It made me want to be with him through Ant. Like, I saw him as someone who would make our main character safe. Right? He's older. He's a veteran. He kicks ass. He's funny. Like, there aren't many sources of oxygen in this movie but I think Kirby is really one of 'em. He's dangerous the way that most characters in this film are, but I don't feel like he is unpredictably dangerous. He grabbed the wrong leg. That's why he got his ass kicked. Like, it's cause and effect.

[Ben laughs.]

And he's not embarrassed by the wounds he endured in the Korean War. Right? As that shopkeeper grabbed the wrong leg, pulled it off of him, and it enraged him. It didn't embarrass him. It was almost like an empowering moment to him. And I wonder if the fake leg isn't the best rating system for *Dead Presidents*. Because like while our main characters come back from Vietnam with all of their legs, it's the legs in their minds that are missing.

00:46:55 John Host
00:46:58 Adam Host

Damn. Wow.

There's a couple of ways that you see people survive this war, right? You either come back without something—like Kirby's leg—or you come back with something, like Skip's Agent Orange disease which we didn't talk too much about. Which was a huge factor in how incapable he was in returning to any kind of normal life. He couldn't be a pimp after the war anymore. Nothing was working. So when the film comes back from the war, what the film loses is the hope of a better future. The hope of getting over. The hope of equality that I think the film left to go to war with. So on a scale of one to five of Kirby's fake legs—

[Ben laughs.]

—let's review *Dead Presidents*. I like a heist film. I might even love a heist film. And I especially love a heist-gone-wrong film. And when I think about this film in those terms, I might like it more than what it is as a war film. But I like my heroes dead at the end of heist films. And the ending of this film is unsatisfying that on the one hand, like, good filmmakers are very self-aware of giving you an unsatisfying ending. It's one of the reasons I recoil from a Spielberg ending. Like, don't tie this up in a nice bow at the end. Fuck that. Give me the ambiguity; let me think about things for myself. And I think—I don't know if we did that. I don't believe that we did this, but I think there is a version of watching this movie where you see what the Hughes brothers don't give you at the end and you're like, "Well, this is intentional. I'm not going to give you the entire meaning of the thing. You should go and figure that out for yourself."

00:48:55 Adam Host

But there's another viewer that sees this as an incomplete story. A film with less of a message. And it just depends on what you're projecting onto it. I think you could make the case either way. Like, among the things that this film really gets right are—I love how it looks! We didn't talk very much about it, but all of the colors and the textures of the neighborhood that Ant and Kirby live in? I think are beautiful. That basement pool room with the backroom where they count the money. Like, all of these scenes feel very at home in a Scorsese film. Right? And I think they are as beautifully captures as a Scorsese film. I really think that.

And I think the war scenes are—as Ben was saying—super capably captured and horrifying? I think mid- to late-’90s gore has a particular quality that shocks a modern viewer and I don’t think that, for its time, this was super-duper out of place. This was a run of horror films that really relished in the maggotty kind of gore that this film gives you. So I’m not gonna cap on it for showing us the maggots. I thought that was just part of a mid-’90s quality of film. But I love how it looks. I love the soundtrack. What a great soundtrack! I would buy this soundtrack in a heartbeat. It’s so good.

But man. It’s so hard to decide the intent of a filmmaker. And if you think the intent is to let you figure it out, I think it’s a high-scoring, lots-of-legs film. But if you think you like your films more—with more of a *Shawshank Redemption* ending, and you feel like this film just refused to give it to you in a spiteful kind of way, then I don’t think this works for you. I don’t think I’ve made up my mind about it! I think I’m gonna give it... 3.8 legs. That’s just the confused scoring of someone who might need more time to think about it. This conversation about it was great and I think it argued both sides of that idea? But it didn’t convince me either way. You know what? The episode is a lot like the film in that way to me. Still couldn’t decide.

00:51:29 Ben Host

Mm. A little ambiguity at the end.

00:51:31 Adam Host

Yeah.

00:51:32 Ben Host

I think I’m a little less charitable about it than you, Adam. Because to me this feels like it maybe started life in the script as a more... specific statement? And the ways it feels unclear to me smell like meddling by the studio or punches that were pulled because they were concerned that they wouldn’t be able to sell a story like this to white audiences. And, like, this is something that the studios have done for time immemorial, which is, like, not believe that stories with Black characters at their centers will be appealing to non-Black audiences. And—

00:52:22 Adam Host

Ben, you know what’s fucked up though? Is that like *Menace II Society* was a huge hit. And most film directors who come onto the scene with a massive splash like that get the blank check second film to go and make exactly what they want. Paul Thomas Anderson is an example of this. Like, he made *Boogie Nights* as his second movie and what is more repulsive to a mainstream audience—

[Ben laughs.]

—than a film about ’70s pornography?

[John laughs.]

Like, why didn’t the Hughes brothers get that same kind of “make whatever you want; you proved you could be great with *Menace II Society*.” Like—I wish we knew more about whether or not there was meddling!

00:53:04 John Host

I think that it’s—that 1995 is the one year that that’s a hard accusation to level. It’s like the peak of ’90s Black cinema. I mean, this was the heart of the real Black experience finally being put onto film in film after film after film. So I mean—I hear what you’re saying

about it? But—and I’m sorry to—Adam and I are jumping in on your review portion.

00:53:29 Adam Host Yeah. That’s not fair.

00:53:31 Ben Host No, it’s a conversation and I think that that’s... it’s hard to know. ‘Cause I didn’t find a lot of like documentation of studio meddling. As far as I know. I don’t know for sure that that’s where it came from. Maybe it’s entirely internal to the Hughes brothers. They said to themselves, “Well, we could make a movie about a bunch of Pinko revolutionary ex-Vietnam veteran Black guys knocking over a Brinks truck and run the risk of being a marginal film, or we could make something that’s got more mainstream appeal.” Like, that could’ve been—it could’ve come from their own heads as well. I’m not sure. But it does feel to me like a movie that had an opportunity to make a big statement and winds up feeling like it didn’t make a statement. And it’s also just a bummer! It’s like such a fucking sad movie. I am personally just... I have a really hard time with “descent into” as a genre?

[John laughs.]

Like, I did not like *Breaking Bad* at all. And I tend not to like movies that follow that trajectory. And I think that, like, that trajectory exists in the world and I understand why art about it exists, but it’s just not my favorite way to spend a couple of hours. So I’m gonna give this one two and a half prosthetic legs.

00:55:05 John Host Rough!

00:55:08 Adam Host Is that the socket half or the foot half?

00:55:12 Ben Host Oh, like, the above or the below the knee?

00:55:14 Adam Host Yeah. Or I guess you could just bifurcate it down the middle.

00:55:18 John Host Like a goat head.

00:55:19 Ben Host Like the Horn of Gondor?

[All laugh.]

00:55:25 Adam Host Alright. It’s important to be clear on these ratings.

00:55:27 Ben Host Yeah. I’ll give it the above-the-knee half but also like half of a goat head.

00:55:35 Adam Host Alright.

00:55:36 John Host Well, in answer to some of these questions, *Menace II Society* had a budget of three and a half million. And this, the Hughes brothers’ second film, had a budget of ten million. They did bump up by almost two-thirds in terms of the money they were using. Or the money they had to play with. But I think the—in looking at it for me, one of the salient factors is that the Hughes brothers made *Menace II Society* when they were 22 years old. And then turned around and made *Dead Presidents* when they were 24 years old.

00:56:16 Adam Host [Through laughter] Wow.

00:56:17 John Host And in attempting to make a movie as their—y’know, their second film—they’re sitting there, the two of them, with their notepad. And they’re like, “Let’s make a sweeping epic about the Black experience in Vietnam and what happens when they come back to the Bronx and find society falling apart. And we’re gonna use as source material this Black Liberation Army heist of a Brinks truck. But... we don’t want to... make it like a... like a super political movie, because it’s gonna be an adventure and a heist movie and—” you can just hear them making this movie in their heads. But they’re 24 and it got away from ‘em. They just didn’t have the...

they didn't have the skills at that age to make what they were attempting to make. And given what they made, it's an amazing accomplishment! That at 24 you could put—even though there are two of you, so technically you're actually 48—
Just imagine being 24 and being tasked with directing Keith David.

00:57:22 Adam Host

[Ben laughs. John joins in.]

00:57:30 John Host

[Through laughter] I mean, at 24 years old I kept having to be reminded that I had to go to work today. By my boss calling me and saying, "You were supposed to be here 20 minutes ago." I don't think Hollywood gives \$10 million to 24-year-olds very often. And this film looks beautiful. It's got a lot of, y'know, pretty great acting in it. A lot of overacting, but some great acting. And great—y'know, the sets are great. They really do capture the feel of the Bronx in 1970? Which is a Bronx they absolutely, like, did not know personally? 'Cause they weren't even born in 1970?

But I think all the flaws that we've pointed out are just because this was too ambitious. And what made *Menace to Society* successful was that it was—it focused on a very small universe. And they were able to completely flesh it out. And they just weren't able to address everything they were trying to. And what's crazy for me is—given the complexity and disproportionate scale of the Black experience in Vietnam, that there—although *Platoon* is a movie that has, like, a majority—or at least a Black cast that is proportionate—it's told through the eyes of the white kid and all the, y'know, all the main officer characters are white or the NCO characters are white. There's not a Black Vietnam movie. And Spike Lee's got one coming out right now. *Da 5 Bloods* is in the pipeline. But can you imagine over the last 50 years that there's not really ever been a successful... movie exploring that perspective? Not that there's just one perspective, but just from that viewpoint! Pick a viewpoint! Just make everybody—just make it the Black story. Astonishing. To me. That that hasn't happened. And thank god that Spike Lee has chosen to go there, even if he—y'know— *[Laughs.]* Even if he makes a has of it.

[Ben laughs.]

And I look forward to seeing that. But I agree. I just felt like this film was probably five different pretty interesting films. It could—this movie could've been any one of those five interesting films and I would've been into it. But it was all five of those films, not really fully explored. I didn't come out of it with more questions than I went into it with? I came out of it with a collection of images. Which isn't quite enough. So I'm gonna go, uh... I'm gonna go right there with Ben, I think. What were you? 2.8?

01:00:41 Ben Host

2.5. But I tossed a half a goat head.

[Adam laughs.]

01:00:46 John Host

I'm gonna do 2.5 legs and the other half of the goat head.

01:00:51 Adam Host

Well, only whole guys are permitted in the nomination of who your guy might be. Ben, who's your guy?

01:00:59 Ben Host

I think it's gonna be Cowboy. I think I would be the guy that does not get any better at pool in the intervening years.

[John laughs.]

But I also just—I mean, Terrence Howard is so beautiful in this movie. He’s an alluring character despite being so scary. And he’s like a loser and he sucks and yet he’s like so— *[Laughs.]* You’re so drawn to him whenever he’s on screen! It’s like such a weird kind of guy to be in a movie. Like, let’s have the prettiest guy in the movie be a dangerous loser. *[Laughs.]*

01:01:36 Adam Host

He has a face like the velvet Jesus painting that looks like the eyes are following you around the room. Like, he looks like—like, professionally lit—at all times in that way.

01:01:47 Ben Host

Cowboy. My guy.

01:01:50 Adam Host

My guy comes from—god. Y’know, now that I think about it, maybe the second fun/funny scene in the movie. Is Skip and Ant are wearing Santa hats. They’re giving toys to the neighborhood kids. Y’know, one thing that goes fairly unremarked on is Chris Tucker in this movie. And what a whirlwind he is. How much energy a young Chris Tucker had at this moment in time. Really gives a lot to this film and his performance. But that scene where they’ve popped the trunk and they’re giving the toys away—the kids are allowed to go into the trunk and pick out their own toy. And I think it’s a huge mistake. You can sense that something bad is gonna happen in this scene. And you get the payoff when there’s a kid who goes in the trunk and grabs a bottle instead of a toy.

[Ben laughs.]

That little kid is my guy. He knows what he’s not allowed to have and he goes and reaches toward it anyway.

[John laughs.]

I love that decision that little kid makes. And he’s not gonna go for something that’s already wrapped. He’s gonna go for the sure thing, and the bottle is it. So you, little kid, are my guy. What about you, John?

01:03:07 John Host

Well, y’know, there are a lot of potential guys here. Seymour Cassel, who plays Saul, the butcher; the corrupt cop at the beginning who plays Paulie. Who plays Paulie in *The Sopranos*. I’m gonna end up being Jose, I think. Jose got his hand blown off in the war and he turns into a pyromaniac. And that kinda dovetails with my experiences. I mean, I never got my hand blown off in the indie rock irony wars of the late ‘90s? But I feel like part of me got blown off. I have a little bit of a— *[Laughs.]* Like, a phantom personality syndrome. But I’m a pyromaniac. And when he blew up that truck—even though all the money was getting burned up—I shared his excitement with how—

[Ben laughs.]

—cool this explosion was.

01:04:03 Adam Host

Yeah.

01:04:05 Ben Host

It was a pretty cool explosion.

01:04:06 Music Music

Extremely short reprise of theme song “War.”

01:04:07 Promo Clip

Music: “Baby You Change Your Mind” by Nouvellas.

Raleigh Smirl: I'm Raleigh Smirl.

Sydnee McElroy: I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Taylor Smirl: And I'm Taylor Smirl.

Sydnee: And together, we host a podcast called *Still Buffering*, where we answer questions like...

Raleigh: Why should I not fall asleep first at a slumber party?

Taylor: How do I be fleek?

Sydnee: Is it okay to break up with someone using emojis?

Taylor: And sometimes we talk about buuutts!

Raleigh: Nooo, we don't! Nope!

[Sydnee and Taylor laugh.]

Sydnee: Find out the answers to these important questions and many more on *Still Buffering*, a sisters' guide to teens through the ages.

Raleigh: I am a teenager.

Sydnee & Taylor: And I... was... too.

Taylor: Butts, butts, butts, butts butts!

Raleigh: No... *[Laughs.]*

Music:

*Baby, you change your mind
Far too many times
Over and over again
Over and over again*

Music: Dramatic organ/piano music.

[Background noise throughout: a howling wolf and cawing crow. April speaks in a sinister voice.]

April Wolfe: Hello there, ghouls and gals. It is I, April Wolfe. I'm here to take you through the twisty, sca-a-a-ry, heart-pounding world of genre cinema on the exhilarating program known as [Switchblade Sisters](#).

[Sinister echo on the title.]

The concept is simple: I invite a female filmmaker on each week, and we discuss their favorite genre film. Listen in closely to hear past guests, like *The Babadook* director Jennifer Kent, *Winter's Bone* director Debra Granik, and so many others every Thursday on [MaximumFun.org](#). Tune in! If you dare...

01:04:54 Promo

Clip

[Thunder booms, something growls over April as she cackles evilly, and then all sound abruptly cuts.]

April: *[Rapidly]* It's actually a very thought-provoking show that deeply explores the craft and philosophy behind the filmmaking process while also examining film through the lens of the female gaze. So, like, you should listen.

01:05:40 Promo Clip

[Same sinister echo effect] **Switchblade Sisters!**

Music: Gentle, upbeat piano music.

Helen Hong: Hey, J. Keith.

J. Keith van Straaten: Hey, Helen! Hey, you've got another true/false quiz for me?

Helen: Yep! Our trivia podcast *Go Fact Yourself* used to be in front a live audience.

J. Keith: True! Turns out that's not so safe anymore.

Helen: Correct! Next. Unfortunately this means we can no longer record the show.

J. Keith: False! The show still comes out every first and third Friday of the month.

Helen: Correct! Finally, we still have great celebrity guests answering trivia about things they love on every episode of *Go Fact Yourself*.

J. Keith: Definitely true.

01:06:10 Promo Clip

Helen: And for bonus points, name some of them.

J. Keith: Recently we've had, uh, Ophira Eisenberg plus tons of surprise experts like Yeardeley Smith and Suzanne Somers.

Helen: Perfect score!

J. Keith: Woohoo!

Helen: You can hear *Go Fact Yourself* every first and third Friday of the month, with all the great guests and trivia that we've always had. And if you don't listen, you can go fact yourself!

J. Keith: That's the name of our podcast!

Helen: Correct!

J. Keith: Woohoo!

01:06:30 Promo Clip

[Music finishes.]

Music: Dramatic organ/piano music.

[Background noise throughout: a howling wolf and cawing crow. April speaks in a sinister voice.]

April Wolfe: Hello there, ghouls and gals. It is I, April Wolfe. I'm here to take you through the twisty, sca-a-a-ry, heart-pounding world of genre cinema on the exhilarating program known as [Switchblade Sisters](#).

[Sinister echo on the title.]

The concept is simple: I invite a female filmmaker on each week, and we discuss their favorite genre film. Listen in closely to hear past guests, like *The Babadook* director Jennifer Kent, *Winter's Bone* director Debra Granik, and so many others every Thursday on [MaximumFun.org](#). Tune in! If you dare...

[Thunder booms, something growls over April as she cackles evilly, and then all sound abruptly cuts.]

April: *[Rapidly]* It's actually a very thought-provoking show that deeply explores the craft and philosophy behind the filmmaking process while also examining film through the lens of the female gaze. So, like, you should listen.

01:07:16	Music	Music	<i>[Same sinister echo effect] Switchblade Sisters!</i>
01:07:19	Ben	Host	Short reprise of theme song "War."
01:07:30	John	Host	Okay, guys. I think we've reached the point in the show where we select our next film. We don't select the film, though. 120-sided dice does it.
01:07:34	Adam	Host	Yep. Here it is.
01:07:37	John	Host	You recently posted a picture of that! Never thought—
01:07:38	Adam	Host	I did. I did.
01:07:40	John	Host	Never thought I would see that.
			Here it is in its dice cup and... let's go! There we go. It's rolling!

[Sound of die clanking loudly.]

Get your bets on the table!

[Ben laughs.]

[Sound of die stopping.]

01:08:00	Ben	Host	Fiddy-five! Fiddy-five! 55 is a... 2013 film directed by Peter Berg and set in Afghanistan.
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[Tense, dramatic, low music plays in background.]

01:08:12	Adam	Host	It's <i>Lone Survivor</i> !
01:08:13	Ben	Host	Whoa.
01:08:18	John	Host	That's the Mark Walberg picture, right? We love a Mark Walberg picture.

[Adam laughs.]

01:08:21	Ben	Host	Mm-hm. Alright. Well, guys, I'm looking forward—
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[Theme song "War" begins to play faintly in background of dialogue.]

—to next week in a big way. In the meantime, we're gonna leave it with Robs Robs Robs Robs. So for John Roderick and Adam Pranica, I've been Ben Harrison. To the victor go the spoiler alerts.

[Theme song plays briefly at full volume before receding slightly into the background of dialogue again.]

01:08:41 Rob Schulte Producer

Friendly Fire is a Maximum Fun podcast hosted by Adam Pranica, Ben Harrison, and John Roderick. The show is produced by me, Rob Schulte. Our theme music is "War" by Edwin Starr, courtesy of Stone Agate Music, and our podcast art is by Nick Ditmer. Feel like diving into the back catalog of *Friendly Fire*? Last year your hosts watched *Lebanon* from 2009, a film about a lone tank and its infantry platoon during the first Lebanon War. And if you want to listen to more, you can also gain access to our bonus episodes by heading to MaximumFun.org/join. For as little as \$5 a month, not only will you receive our pork chop feed—you'll gain access to *all* of the Maximum Fun bonus content. Don't forget—you can now follow us on Twitter and Instagram under the handles [FriendlyFireRSS](#). Thanks for listening! We'll see you next week with another episode of *Friendly Fire*.

[Theme song plays for some time at full volume before fading entirely.]

01:10:00 John Host

Sounds like somebody's having a nice big icy beverage over there.

01:10:02 Adam Host

I've got a loud icy beverage. That's bad podcast form. By me. I need a quieter beverage.

01:10:09 John Host

Oh, no. Adam likes iced coffee! I always forget that!

01:10:10 Adam Host

Ben loves iced coffee!

01:10:12 John Host

Is that right?

01:10:13 Adam Host

Yeah.

01:10:14 Ben Host

[Sound of faint clinking.] There's my iced coffee.

01:10:15 Adam Host

It's like the main thing about him.

01:10:16 John Host

Wow.

[Ben laughs.]

01:10:17 Ben Host

[Through laughter] I don't really have anything else about me.

[All laugh.]

01:10:22 John Host

It's like doing a podcast with a couple of Karens.

[Ben laughs. String twangs.]

01:10:27 Adam Host

How dare you!

01:10:28 Speaker 1 Guest

MaximumFun.org.

01:10:30 Speaker 2 Guest

Comedy and culture.

01:10:31 Speaker 3 Guest

Artist owned—

01:10:32 Speaker 4 Guest

—Audience supported.