00:00:00	Music	Transition	Gentle, trilling music with a steady drumbeat plays under the dialogue.
00:00:01	Promo	Promo	**Speaker**: *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR. *[Music fades out.]*
00:00:12	Music	Transition	"Huddle Formation" from the album *Thunder, Lightning, Strike* by The Go! Team.
00:00:20	Jesse Thorn	Host	It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. Errol Morris is one of my favorite filmmakers. He's the kind of director that gets shown in film schools all the time, and he's contributed that much to the field of documentary making. And if you've actually seen his movies—*Gates of Heaven* or *Fast, Cheap & Out of Control* or even the short documentaries that he made for ESPN—they are entertaining and fascinating and exceptionally watchable, not like impenetrable or boring art house films. Morris has a way of painting these portraits of people—nuanced and funny, tragic, fascinating. His newest movie, *My Psychedelic Love Story*, tells the tale of LSD advocate Timothy Leary's longtime partner, Joanna Harcourt-Smith. She was an author, an activist, and—according to Errol—maybe a CIA plant. That's classic Errol Morris material, folks. When I talked with him in 2018, he'd just released something really interesting: a Netflix miniseries called *Wormwood*. It was a bit of a departure for Errol. First, he set aside his signature Interrotron—which is an elaborate device that lets his subjects make eye contact with him while also making eye contact with the viewer. Instead of using the Interrotron, he's conducting interviews on camera. He also draws on the work of actors to tell the story for much of the film as well. The movie is classic Morris in a lot of ways. It focuses on Frank Olson, a former CIA biochemist who died mysteriously decades ago, and his son Eric, who's worked for years to uncover the truth about his life and death. Let's take a listen to a little bit from *Wormwood*. In this scene, Eric Olson is talking about reading the results of a 1975 government investigation into his father's death.
00:02:17	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:02:18	Clip	Clip	**Music**: Eerie, unsettling music. **Eric Olson (*Wormwood*)**: When the story came out in the Rockefeller Commission report, I get this phone call from my brother-in-law, "You should read the *Washington Post* today." So, I ran down to Out of Town News in Harvard Square, get the *Washington Post*, *[chuckling]* read this thing, and am just totally blown away. There it is on the front page: "Suicide Revealed. The Rockefeller Commission has discovered that an Army scientist, after being drugged with LSD, jumped out the window of a New York hotel." How many scientists could be jumping out of windows in 1953 in New York City? This has gotta be my father. But wait. They didn't call us. They didn't notify us. They didn't say, "It's your father." How do you know? Maybe it isn't.

00:03:11	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:03:12	Jesse	Host	Errol Morris, welcome back to *Bullseye*! I'm very happy to see you.
00:03:16	Errol Morris	Guest	Thank you for having me here. You put me in this box.
00:03:20	Jesse	Host	Yeah, well, this is called a recording studio. *[Laughs.]*
00:03:24	Errol	Guest	*[Cheerfully.]* But it looks like a box.
00:03:26	Jesse	Host	*[Laughing.]* It is a weird—it is a weird, like, modular recording studio that I bought on Craigslist. I will admit to that.
00:03:34	Errol	Guest	I hope you didn't overpay for it.
00:03:36	Jesse	Host	No, I underpaid for it if anything. Yeah. This is—this is a bargain basement recording box. There's no doubt about that. Errol, one of the things that happens in a lot of your documentaries is we hear someone—we see someone speaking for themselves about their own experience and because of the way that you shoot them, they are looking right at us. They're making eye contact with us in a way that is unusual in documentary film, because you have created a machine that's a little bit like a teleprompter that puts your face, as you interview the subject, in the line of sight of the camera—directly.
00:04:20	Errol	Guest	Essentially, it's two teleprompters. But you're close. *[Jesse concedes with a chuckle.]* Just one teleprompter off.
00:04:27	Jesse	Host	In this film, we see you on camera talking to your subject.
00:04:36	Errol	Guest	You were shocked?
00:04:37	Jesse	Host	I was—I was genuinely shocked! Because I had, you know, from watching even—you know, you made an entire television program, called *First Person*, which was built around a person staring into the barrel of the camera and talking about their—themselves and their experience, right? You've directed—you've made a living making television commercials with that premise. You know? You've done so much and mostly all we get of you is you kind of barking at someone from offscreen a little bit.
00:05:06	Errol	Guest	Yes. I don't often think of it as barking, but have it your way.
00:05:14	Jesse	Host	*[Laughs.]* So, why are you on camera asking questions in this movie?
00:05:23	Errol	Guest	One of the reasons—if there is any reason, and there may not be any reason to make documentaries—but <u>if</u> there is any reason—
00:05:31	Jesse	Host	I hope, for your sake, there is.
00:05:33	Errol	Guest	Eeeh. *[Jesse chuckles.]* I don't know. You get this opportunity to reinvent the form every time you make one. In principle, it's possible. And in principle, maybe that's what you <u>should</u> be doing. I hate to make this into a kind of moral edict, but I like to think that each time I'm making one of these things, that I can change it up. I can do something different. I can reinvent the form. I can *[censored]* with people.
00:06:11	Jesse	Host	Why?
00:06:13	Errol	Guest	Why not? *[They laugh.]*
00:06:18	Jesse	Host	How does it end up being different? I mean, we can get into the fact that the new movie also has, you know, much more developed,

			dramatic narrative, actorly bits than any of your other films. But even just this one part—
00:06:36	Errol	Guest	More actorly, dramatic bits—that's also known as "drama."
00:06:40	Jesse	Host	Yeah. But there's plenty of drama in your—in your interviews, as well. I was trying to figure out what the word—what's the—what's the word for—sometimes they call it "narrative", but nonfiction films are narrative, as well.
00:06:54	Errol	Guest	It's tricky because *Wormwood*, in particular, demands some new kind of nomenclature. How do you really even describe this? I sold it as the everything bagel, because I said, "I'm going to put everything in this. I'm gonna put drama, reenactment—"
00:07:16	Jesse	Host	Caraway seeds.
00:07:18	Errol	Guest	Everything but raisins.
00:07:19	Jesse	Host	Yeah. Raisins are gross.
00:07:21	Errol	Guest	Raisins don't belong in bagels.
00:07:24	Jesse	Host	They're okay by themselves. I don't mind a raisin by itself. But I don't like a raisin added to almost anything else. Oatmeal, maybe.
00:07:31	Errol	Guest	There you go—there you go.
00:07:33	Jesse	Host	So—but let's talk specifically about the, you know—
00:07:36	Errol	Guest	Raisins with constraints.
			[They chuckle.]
00:07:39	Jesse	Host	Let's talk about the interview parts specifically first, before we get—before we get into—
			[Errol agrees.]
			—the acting parts. How was different? I mean—
00:07:47	Errol	Guest	I'm at your mercy! I'm in this box! What am gonna do?
00:07:51	Jesse	Host	When you're—when you're shooting with—when you're shooting as you did with, like, a million cameras in this new movie. Like ten or something like that, right?
			[Errol confirms.]
			So, you're shooting this interview with ten different cameras—
00:08:02	Errol	Guest	Someone asked me, "Why ten?"
			I said, "Because it was one more than nine."
00:08:06	Jesse	Host	There you go. So, you get into the—you get into the editing studio and you're starting to put together the film. What was different about having those ten shots—one of which is you on camera, or maybe more than one of which is you on camera—than when you are primarily using this eye contact, down-the-barrel shot that has been the signature of many of your movies?
00:08:32	Errol	Guest	What's different? Well, I hate people who repeat questions, but I'll repeat it anyway. What's different? *[Beat.]* It's a different experience. Um. In the Interrotron, I'm hidden away behind a second teleprompter. And it's almost as if—I used to describe smoking as a way of simplifying the world, because when you're smoking, there are only three things that you have to consider: there's you, the cigarette, and the rest of the world is the ashtray.
			[Jesse chuckles.]

			On the Interrotron, there's you, your subject, and you're really closely connected. The amazing thing about it is the rest of the world just vanishes. It's intense, personal, focused. Moving away from that, there were a whole number of reasons. You know, part of it is the desire not to be a one-trick pony, even if I am a one-trick pony. I don't wanna be seen as such. I'd like to think, "Oh! He's so inventive! He's always trying something new and something different." Well, we had these ten cameras and I'd been playing with multiple cameras over the years. And the protagonist—I think it's a fair way to describe him—of *Wormwood*, Eric Olson, Frank Olson's son, came in. He was nervous about the interview. He saw the ten cameras—or maybe he didn't register all ten of them. But he saw there are a lot of cameras here. Hm! Oh my! And sat down and he decided just to surrender. I thought of it not unlike a cornered animal who realizes that there is no hope, just give up.
00:10:41	Jesse	Host	*[Chuckles.]* I mean, that's a little bit like what the effect of the Interrotron is.
00:10:47	Errol	Guest	NO!
00:10:48	Jesse	Host	Yes! It is that—
00:10:49	Errol	Guest	Nooo!
00:10:50	Jesse	Host	It is—I think that when you are shooting someone, you know—ordinarily in this kind of interview documentary situation, maybe you're shooting somebody with two cameras or one camera behind the interviewer and—you know, that kind of thing. Maybe there's a master—there's a shot of the two people talking together and there's one that's over the shoulder of the interviewer or there's a kind of talking-head shot. You know. And in those situations, I think if you are the person on camera, you are very aware of your performance to those cameras. And ten cameras or that Interrotron camera are both ways of making the camera disappear for the subject. Either with the Interrotron, it is because that subject almost immediately feels like they're talking directly to a person and the camera has almost disappeared. And with ten cameras, it's like there's no camera to address, because there's just too many cameras. It's like overwhelm.
00:11:51	Errol	Guest	God, you've described this really, really well. *[They chuckle.]*
00:11:55	Jesse	Host	I'm glad you agree with it, 'cause I said a lot of stuff. *[Laughs.]*
00:11:59	Errol	Guest	I do agree. I didn't realize this at first, when I started using the Interrotron, that it produced this… effect. I mean, there's no way to really predict this kind of thing without actually doing it. But you don't see the camera anymore. All you see is my face in limbo. And I often thought of it like the old AT&T ads. And they'd say, "The next best thing to being there." And I would always think that it was, um… incorrectly expressed. <u>Being</u> there is the next best thing to using the telephone, because you're limiting stuff. You're focusing on a certain aspect of communication. Like, "Do I really need to see you now? Is that really necessary?" With the Interrotron, the camera vanishes. For all intents and purposes, it's gone. The crew is gone. Everything is gone except—god, what a nightmare. Everything is gone except for <u>me</u>.

[They chuckle.]

00:13:11 Jesse Host What a delight, Errol! That's not a nightmare. Quite the opposite.

00:13:15 Errol Guest Why, thank you. The multiple cameras—it's different again. It certainly changes the way in which an interview is edited. Perhaps that's even obvious. You have all these angles to choose from. And on the Avid, it's made really quite simple. You just press a button, and you can go through the cameras one by one by one by one. But at the heart of the story is this idea of collage. Perhaps it's the heart of every real detective story is this idea of collage. Because what is a detective doing? In effect, he's doing something that we're all doing all the time: he's trying to put the world together in a way that makes sense.

And it amounts to bits and pieces. You know. The detritus of the world, our experiences, glued, stitched, stapled together in a way that hopefully forms a picture of what's out there in reality. The whole collage idea is a central part of *Wormwood*—the collage of different kinds of forms, from archival to home movies to these interviews with multiple cameras, to drama. And I tried to emphasize that in the way in which every part of it was shot. The graphics are collaged. The interviews are collaged. The drama itself, actually, has collage elements as well. So, why am I proud of it? Twenty-five—now, over 25 years ago, it shocks me—when I made *The Thin Blue Line*, I tried something really different.

Uh… I asked Philip Glass to write a score. It's not something that you really do that often in documentary. At that time, it was something that was close to unheard of. And I used stylized reenactments of the murder, which was at the center of the story—the murder of a Dallas police officer on a… barren roadway in West Dallas. Now, you see it everywhere. I'm reminded of this line in *Conan the Barbarian*. "Used to be just another snake cult. Now you see it everywhere." And that's certainly true of the style of *The Thin Blue Line*. It's endlessly imitated, copied.

Here, I think I've done something even more innovative and more dramatic. I've tried to stitch together so many different elements—so many elements that I wondered, "Is this going to even work? Is this going to be confusing? Is this going to be totally… beyond the pale?" And I believe it works. Am I the best judge of this? Wait a minute! I'm promoting myself, here! *[Impassioned.]* Of course, it works! It's great! It's <u>fantastic</u>!

00:16:41 Jesse Host *[Chuckles.]* I feel like there is a—there is this—one of the great moments in *Wormwood*, at least for me, a moment that really surprised me is Eric, the son of the man who's died whose mystery the film partly tries to unravel, is talking about—I think he's talking, if I remember correctly, he's talking about visiting the White House. He's invited to the White House not long after his father dies, because—or—

[Errol begins to correct him, but Jesse continues.]

Not long after they start to realize there's something weird about his father having died. And it's because the government essentially wants to give him something to land on that will keep him from bothering them more.

00:17:27	Errol	Guest	I think it's called throwing him a crumb.
00:17:31	Jesse	Host	Yes. And he essentially kind of—he apologizes for the fact that his memory of these events is not purely narrative, that he does not remember the sequence of events and every event in them and remember them in order, but rather that he simply remembers certain impressions of the events. And this is, you know, something that happened 35, 40 years ago. And that—that little moment in the film—I mean, that's what memory is. Like, no one remembers their lives narratively, I don't think. I certainly don't.
00:18:14	Errol	Guest	We should get down on our knees—if you're a believer, you could go ahead and thank God. If not, thank anyone of your choice—thank God that we remember so little.
00:18:29	Jesse	Host	You were a private investigator for quite a while. *[Errol confirms.]* Do you feel like the purpose of getting involved in a mystery is because you want to solve it? You want the satisfaction of, you know, completing a puzzle?
00:18:47	Errol	Guest	Well, yeah! I'm tempted to say, "Duh." *[Jesse chuckles.]* But that wouldn't be nice. Occasionally, you get paid to do this kind of thing. I was paid as a private detective, but—okay, I'll fess up. Was my primary motivation money? No! I'm not even sure what my primary motivation was. Curiosity? A desire to learn something that I didn't know? Why people search for the truth, or even search for any kind of answers—your guess is as good as mine. Part of our species—and I really do believe that this is an extremely rotten species. I don't care what you've read, what paeans to man, what encomiums to the human experience. I think it's a pretty miserable, miserable species. But we do have one thing going for us. And that is that we have some knowledge of truth. We have some knowledge that there is a world outside of ourselves. And that perhaps we can come to know something about it through effort. Through investigation. Through ratiocination. Whatever you wanna call it.
00:20:14	Jesse	Host	I have no idea what the last word you said was. "It"—I know what "it" means, but what was that rad-eo-snation?
00:20:20	Errol	Guest	Thinking!
00:20:21	Jesse	Host	Got it. I'm a public radio host, here. I'm supposed hold my own when people start using big words. I went to public school, you know?
00:20:29	Errol	Guest	Yeah, well, my favorite of them is hippopotomonstrosesquippedaliophobia.
00:20:39	Jesse	Host	Which is?
00:20:40	Errol	Guest	Fear of large words.
00:20:43	Jesse	Host	*[Laughs.]* We've got more of my interview with Errol Morris after a quick break. When we come back, a lot of his more recent work focuses on the US government in the mid-20th century. He says it was a crucial turning point in American history and a dark time. We'll talk

			more about that in a minute. It's *Bullseye*, from MaximumFun.org and NPR.
00:21:06	Music	Transition	Thumpy, upbeat music.
00:21:08	Jesse	Host	This message comes from NPR sponsor NerdWallet: a personal finance website and app that helps people make smarter money moves. Have new money goals this year? Whether you want to use credit card points to plan a family vacation abroad—once it's safe—or take advantage of low mortgage rates to refinance and save for your child's education, NerdWallet is the best place to shop financial products to help make your 2021 money goals happen. Discover and compare the smartest credit cards, mortgage lenders, and more at NerdWallet.com. *[Music fades out.]*
00:21:41	Promo	Clip	**John C. McGinley:** Hey, kid. Your dad tell you about the time he broke Stephen Dorff's nose at the Kids' Choice Awards? *[Audience laughs.]* **Music:** Upbeat, funky rock. **Andrew Reich:** In *Dead Pilots Society*, scripts that were developed by studios and networks, but were never produced, are given the table reads they deserve. **Will Forte:** When I was a kid, I had to spend my Christmas break filming a PSA about angel dust. So yeah, being a kid sucks sometimes! *[Audience laughs.]* **Andrew Reich:** Presented by Andrew Reich and Ben Blacker. *Dead Pilots Society*. Twice a month on MaximumFun.org. **Echoing Background Voices:** *Dead Pilots Society...* **Sage Ryan:** You know, the show you like. That hobo with the scarf who lives in a magic dumpster? *[Audience laughs. Scattered applause.]* *[Music fades out.]* **John Hodgman:** ...*Doctor Who*? **Sage Ryan:** Yeah! *[Audience laughs and applauds as the clip fades out.]*
00:22:23	Promo	Clip	**Music**: Relaxed guitar music. **Speaker**: Are you ready to take your career to the next level? Well, *Life Kit*'s here to be your career counselor. All this week, we'll have episodes to help you plan your next career move. We'll give our best tips for asking for a raise, finding a mentor, switching careers, and much more. Listen now to the *Life Kit* podcast from NPR.

[Music fades out.]

00:22:43 Jesse Host

Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. If you're just joining us, we're listening to my conversation with the filmmaker Errol Morris. Errol is, of course, the director of so many great documentaries, including *The Fog of War*, *The Thin Blue Line*, and *Gates of Heaven*. He's got a new movie out on Showtime, *My Psychedelic Love Story*. It's about Joanna Harcourt-Smith. She was the longtime partner of LSD researcher Timothy Leary and also maybe a CIA plant. When we talked in 2018, Morris had just released another documentary that delved into the underbelly of the CIA: *Wormwood*. That film investigated the death of the government biochemist Frank Olsen. Let's get back into it.

I feel like part of what you're doing in *Wormwood* is offering the thing that people often want from a story about a mysterious criminal act, which is offering up the idea that you will get the satisfaction of knowing the truth in the end and that the truth will be an interesting surprise. Why did you make that kind of movie? I mean, like *The Thin Blue Line*, for example—*The Thin Blue Line* is, you know, that is your investigation of a murder that reveals a surprising truth that was very important in the world and very clearly demonstrated by the film and your investigation. There's nothing quite that clear in *Wormwood*.

00:24:22 Errol Guest

I was lucky in *The Thin Blue Line*. You don't know where a story is going to take you. I'm not inventing the story; I'm uncovering a story. You know. It's the real difference between inventing a toaster oven and finding one.

In *The Thin Blue Line*, I stumbled on a case by accident and pursued it obsessively until I had answers. And they were answers that I could find. It's a detective's—I was going to say wet dream. I don't think that's so incorrect. What do you dream of? You dream of cracking an extraordinarily complex and difficult case. In this case, a man who came within two days of being strapped into Old Sparky, the Texas electric chair, and executed for a crime he most certainly did not commit. The opportunity to show he was innocent, to get him released from jail and to show who actually did it—you don't get that opportunity every day.

Most cases don't resolve so neatly. There's this fantasy, probably a fantasy created by detective fiction, that somehow if you dig deeply enough, if you work hard enough, scratch around here and there and… that somehow an answer is going to pop out of the machinery. It's a fantasy I share, because what motivates you as a detective is this idea that you're going to arrive at some powerful conclusion. You're going to reveal something that no one else knows about and you're going to prove it! You're gonna prove it beyond, you know—what's the expression? A shadow of a doubt.

But the world is strange. It's almost, as we move from past to present to future, the world is constantly exfoliating. It's shedding bits and scraps of things. And from those bits and scraps, we try to reconstruct a picture of the world, a picture of what might have happened. But what if the evidence is destroyed? What if it's been adulterated? What if we have only a piece of it but we don't even

			know that it's a piece of it? We don't even know what's missing. What then? Is it always possible for incomplete information to reconstruct what the world is like?
00:27:20	Jesse	Host	Why do you think so many of your films are retrospective? Why do you think that they're about people's remembrances of events in the past or people's kind of introspections about the past and themselves rather than, you know, why aren't you—?
00:27:40	Errol	Guest	In the moment?
00:27:41	Jesse	Host	Why aren't you at a teen basketball tournament taping interviews with kids who might end up winning and then making a story out of that?
00:27:52	Errol	Guest	Sports suck. I'm not gonna do that.
			[They laugh.]
00:27:55	Jesse	Host	*[Disbelieving.]* You made some really great movies about sports!
00:27:58	Errol	Guest	Doesn't matter!
00:28:01	Jesse	Host	*[Laughs.]* I like sports, Errol.
00:28:02	Errol	Guest	And also—my condolences. Also, you know, history—and history does fascinate me. I'm gonna tell everybody listening to this a secret. History is retrospective. You're looking back into the past. We all are looking back into the past. That's all we have, really, to go on. The present is too fleeting and the future? Who in hell knows about the future! I've been obsessed. What's it called? I'm gonna use a big word again and I'm gonna be punished for it, I know it. Epistemology, which is the study of how we know things. It's an obsession with how we know what we know and whether we know anything or how reliable is the knowledge that we have? Is it really knowledge or is it some spurious thing? Is it—to coin a phrase—fake news?
			And all of *Wormwood* is about this search that's—it's a search through various lockboxes. The lockbox of memory, of history, to try to understand the nature of our obsessions and where they lead us. I like *Wormwood*, because it's like a set of Chinese boxes. There's a story within a story within a story within a story. There's the story of Frank Olsen, an Army bioweapons scientist who was experimenting with all kinds of lethal bioweapons, including anthrax. It's the story of his son, who could never accept the government explanation for why his father died or how he died. And it's—you know, I'll fess up here. It's my obsession with Eric and his quest. A quest which I strongly identify with. And in many ways it became my quest as well.
			He has this question that's very near the end of the film. Is it a rhetorical question? I'm not sure. "What is this about?" And he's talking about 60 years-plus of scratching around, trying to get answers to this mystery. And he gives us an answer—a partial answer—that this is about America. What did indeed happen to this country? A question which I ask myself repeatedly, nowadays. I won't say why, but I'll leave it to the listeners' imagination. And Eric says that in the fifties—this is a story that goes back to the origins of the Cold War—look, we won this war. We won the war against Germany and Japan. And then we descended into a world of second guessing, paranoia, and lies. Okay, this was going on forever. But what happened in this period of time that turned America's government into a secret government? And the question:

			Can you really, truly have a democracy when the government has to habitually, repeatedly, unremittingly—see how many big words I know—lie to its citizens?
00:31:23	Jesse	Host	I think a lot about my dad, who is in his early 70s and was in the military in the early sixties, came home and worked for decades, thereafter, in the peace movement, and the relationship that he had with the FBI agents who bugged his phone. He tells—he often told me the story, when I was a kid, of having problems on his line and then someone saying, "I'm sorry about that, Mr. Thorn. We'll get this fixed for you." And him waving at them from their office across the street from his office. *[Chuckles.]* You know, where they were always standing in the window. And that there is this kind of like—that particularly in that time, there's this very vivid, intense back-and-forth between the democratic ideals and this idea that there was an existential threat to the country that came from whatever—social change, communists, people with long hair. Like, whatever it is, that it was this terrifying time. And to me—as a 36-year-old—that always seemed like a thing that came from my dad. You know. I was like, "Oh, that's a thing of my dad's life. Not a thing of my life." And in the—in, you know, the last couple of years, I have felt untethered. Like, there was a time when I felt like, "I feel like I've got a pretty good handle on what my government is and the ways in which it does and doesn't represent me." You know? And I feel differently about it now.
00:33:22	Errol	Guest	There's something so strange, so disorienting, when you live in a world where the government that supposedly represents you shares none of your values. What does that mean? I'm not even sure what it means. It leads to a kind of anger. Despair. But we do seem to be living in an almost hopeless time. *[Beat.]* Sorry to be such a downer. You're gonna throw me out of the box any minute now.
00:33:58	Jesse	Host	You said something in a different interview that really blew my mind, which was *[chuckling]*, you said, "Well, you know, we—as people—don't ever think that we're wrong." Like, *[laughing]* that's not a way that we think of the world. "I'm wrong."
00:34:17	Errol	Guest	No. I assume that almost everything I think is wrong. I just hope people will be nice.
00:34:24	Jesse	Host	Let's listen to a scene from *Wormwood*, the new film-slash-Netflix series from my guest, Errol Morris. And this is one of the narrative recreational, professionally acted, scripted portions of the film.
00:34:43	Errol	Guest	It's a something-something.
00:34:44	Jesse	Host	Yeah, okay. One of the something-somethings from the movie. Frank Olsen, who is a government scientist who died in mysterious circumstances, is played by Peter Sarsgaard. He, in this scene, has just gone to what amounts to a—like a hunting lodge retreat with some folks from the CIA, some colleagues. And he's—this is in the—in the woods in Maryland. You know. Like, a ways from Washington, D.C. And Tim Blake Nelson plays one of the CIA guys and he's speaking to them and things start to feel weird for Frank—Peter Sarsgaard.
00:35:28	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:35:29	Clip	Clip	**Music**: Low, ominous music. **Sidney Gottlieb**: Gentlemen, TSS has embarked on a new program called MK-Ultra. This program is designed to help us to

			better understand human behavior—who we are. What we do. And, more importantly: what we could reveal. In this Cold War, the most dangerous weapon is information. When a few scared boys confess on the world stage, it diminishes our country's credibility. We must find a way to contain these lies. *[Beat.]* You are the men who know the secrets. We are the men who keep the secrets. Our coexistence depends on trust.
00:36:38	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:36:39	Jesse	Host	We see that Frank has been given a cocktail with LSD in it. What did you decide in making this movie was your responsibility as a documentarian when you are directing actors in a scripted scene?
00:36:58	Errol	Guest	My responsibility—whether it's with actors or with anything else, is a responsibility to the truth. I'm telling a story about something that really happened, happened in the world, happened in 1953. A historical event, if you wanna think of it that way. One of the oddities of this story—let me backtrack quickly. When I made *The Thin Blue Line* and I used reenactments, the reenactments weren't purporting to show you what really happened. They were illustrations more often than not of lies—things that people said that were untrue, accusations that were made that were false, and the reenactments takes you back into those claims. Not reality, but into those claims so you can think about them. You can think about their truth or their falsity.
00:37:51	Jesse	Host	And the aesthetics are pretty specifically non-directly representational, too. Like, you see it and it does not feel like you are looking at a picture of truth. It looks like you are looking at a picture of… memory, you know. Whatever.
00:38:09	Errol	Guest	That's a nice thing to say. I like to think that's the feeling that is produced. Well, here there's a different kind of thing going on. When the Rockefeller Commission—which was set up by President Gerald Ford—when they released their report, for the very first time—Frank Olsen had gone out that window in 1953. We're now in 1975. The report comes out early in 1975 speaking about an unnamed Army scientist who plunged to his death and had been given surreptitiously, by the CIA, a dose of LSD. So, this becomes public knowledge. Eric, the son, is a graduate student at Harvard. He runs to Out of Town News, which is the main news kiosk in Harvard Square, picks up a *Washington Post*, sees the article, knows—of course—immediately, "This is my dad." And within days, he's in the Oval Office of the White House, speaking with Gerald Ford and, oddly enough, Donald Rumsfeld. He meets with the then-Director of Central Intelligence, William Colby. At the president's direction, Colby gives him a pile—hundreds of pages of documents. The lawyers subsequently referred to them as the Colby documents. And in these documents, it's like a filmmaker's dream. They're all of these first-person accounts of what happened to Frank Olsen. However! Were they true? You don't know. You don't know whether Colby gave the family all of the documents. The CIA director said, "Here. These are aaall of the documents on Frank Olsen." Do we believe them? The CIA tells you something, do you just take it on faith? Mmm. Not so much.
00:40:26	Jesse	Host	I mean, it also means that the only thing that we can see in the film that we can purely trust is—in a way—Eric, the son's, personal

			experience. That—and, you know, the way that he interprets his own personal experience. Not as literal truth—we can trust it as, in a way, like a sincere representation of his personal experience, his own—
00:40:49	Errol	Guest	What he went through. Yes.
00:41:01	Jesse	Host	And that kind of changes what the movie is about in a way.
00:41:04	Errol	Guest	How so?
00:41:05	Jesse	Host	Well, I mean, it—this is—it could be a movie that is purely about determining the literal truth of this story.
00:41:13	Errol	Guest	That's part of it, certainly.
00:41:15	Jesse	Host	But substantially, it becomes about—because we can look at Eric onscreen speaking to us and speaking to you, as you try and discover this other story—the story that he is connected to, his father's story—because Eric is there in front of us, it becomes a story about Eric, in a way.
00:41:35	Errol	Guest	I agree. There's so many stories. It doesn't have to be story A or story B or story C. You know. I go back to the Russian dolls. There's stories within stories within stories. The story of Frank Olsen and the Korean War or biological weapons used by the United States in Korea. A story about a son who is repeatedly lied to by his family and by the US government, the highest echelons of US government—including the president of the United States. And a story about the government versus us. A whole set of very powerful stories woven together. I feel lucky to have stumbled on this. And that's the only way to describe it. When I go into a story, it's really not so different from a detective being assigned to a case. Why are you being assigned to a case as a detective? 'Cause somebody—maybe even you—wants to discover something you don't know! You wanna learn something! You wanna figure something out. And that's certainly true of *Wormwood*.
00:42:54	Jesse	Host	I mean, what *Wormwood* made me think of was the scenes in a fictional detective show. I was thinking of *The Wire*, where there's a corkboard in the office and the corkboard has the pictures of all the people and—
00:43:11	Errol	Guest	There're always corkboards!
00:43:13	Jesse	Host	Right. I mean, it's a visual representation—you know, it's a—it's an easy way to show what's—
00:43:19	Errol	Guest	You want corkboards. You want pictures. You want pushpins and you want strings.
00:43:25	Jesse	Host	Yeah, and what *Wormwood* made me think of—as Eric, the son, is talking about having done his graduate work in the collage method of psychology—is what if the corkboard didn't have the strings? You know? That you're putting these things—that you're putting these things next to each other and, in a way, asking the viewer to provide their own interpretation of their relationship between each other. Like, instead of that perfect, formal form that we usually—you know, that we usually expect from a detective story.
00:44:04	Errol	Guest	I wrote a book about a detective story that I was part of and that has obsessed me over the years involving Jeffery MacDonald, a book called *Wilderness of Error*. It comes from an Edgar Allan Poe quote in his story *William Wilson*, where the protagonist says, "I was looking for an oasis of fatality amidst a wilderness of error." A theme which I closely identify with. A story that I could examine. I could scrutinize. I could obsess over. But I couldn't crack it, in the end. I

			could crack part of it, but not all of it. And *Wormwood* is very much like that.
00:44:53	Jesse	Host	Well, Errol, thank you for taking this time to be on *Bullseye*. It was really great to have you back on the show.
00:44:58	Errol	Guest	Is it called *Bullseye* because you plan to shoot me at the end?
00:45:01	Jesse	Host	*[Pleasantly.]* Yes.
00:45:03	Errol	Guest	Oh, good! Good. Now the name makes complete sense.
00:45:07	Jesse	Host	Yeah.
			Errol Morris from 2018. *Wormwood*, his Netflix series from that year, is an addictive binge-watch. You can catch his latest movie, *My Psychedelic Love Story*, right now on Showtime.
00:45:20	Music	Transition	Relaxed, twangy music.
00:45:22	Jesse	Host	That's the end of another episode of *Bullseye*. *Bullseye* is created from the homes of me and the staff of Maximum Fun, in and around greater Los Angeles, California. I have had to segregate my dogs. One of them was bothering the other one too much, so now I have an upstairs dog and a downstairs dog. Our show is produced by speaking into microphones. Our producer is Kevin Ferguson. Jesus Ambrosio and Jordan Kauwling are our associate producers. We get help from Casey O'Brien. Out interstitial music is by Dan Wally, also known as DJW. Our theme song is by The Go! Team. Thanks to them and their label, Memphis Industries, for sharing it. You can also keep up with the show on Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. We post all our interviews there. And I think that's about it. Just remember: all great radio hosts have a signature signoff.
00:46:10	Promo	Promo	**Speaker**: *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR. *[Music fades out.]*