

00:00:00	Music	Transition	Gentle, trilling music with a steady drumbeat plays under the dialogue.
00:00:01	Promo	Promo	<b>Speaker:</b> <i>Bullseye with Jesse Thorn</i> is a production of <a href="http://MaximumFun.org">MaximumFun.org</a> and is distributed by NPR.
00:00:12	Music	Transition	<i>[Music fades out.]</i> “Huddle Formation” from the album <i>Thunder, Lightning, Strike</i> by The Go! Team. A fast, upbeat, peppy song. Music plays as Jesse speaks, then fades out.
00:00:20	Jesse Thorn	Host	It’s <i>Bullseye</i> . I’m Jesse Thorn. Can you draw a through line in the work of Adam McKay? Are there common elements? He’s had a pretty eclectic career. He started in sketch comedy, first as one of the founders of the Upright Citizens Brigade, then as a writer on <i>Saturday Night Live</i> . He worked on the show between 1995 and 2001. He studied at Second City, too. So, throw that in. Then he started working in movies. He collaborated with Will Ferrell to do some stone-cold comedy classics. <i>Anchorman</i> , <i>Stepbrothers</i> , <i>Talladega Nights</i> .

Starting in the 2010s, though, his work got a little more serious, topical, political. A few years back, he wrote and directed *The Big Short*, which deconstructed and explained the 2008 financial crisis. I guess if there is a common thread in McKay’s work, it is that he sells it. It’s never boring, never forced. He’ll take an extremely dumb joke, like I don’t know, stinky perfume that smells bad, and frame it in a way that’s so clever and compelling, you lose it. Or he’ll find a way to explain credit default swaps that’s so funny, bizarre, and novel, you forget you’re learning about credit default swaps. Recently, McKay has made his first foray into podcasting. *Death at the Wing* is a documentary series that takes us back to the 1980s, focusing on a spate of deaths involving young, promising NBA rookies and prospects. It looks not just at sports, but at the politics and socioeconomics of the time and how all of those things were deeply and tragically interconnected.

When McKay and I talked in 2019, he’d just directed *Vice*. *Vice* is a biopic about Dick Cheney. It’s probably fair to say that pretty much every American has an opinion of Dick Cheney, who’s played by Christian Bale in the movie. Cheney is gruff, droll, kind of blunt, a little bookish. *Vice* tells us why, for better or worse, Dick Cheney is one of the most consequential people in recent history. And since it’s an Adam McKay film, *Vice* finds the most compelling and fun way to show us that. Like in this scene, one of the pivotal ones in the movie, where George W. Bush—who’s played by Sam Rockwell—asks Cheney to be his running mate.

00:02:35	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:02:36	Clip	Clip	<b>Music:</b> Thoughtful, low music.

**Dick Cheney (Vice):** The vice presidency is also defined by the president. And if we were to come to a, uh, different understanding...

**George W. Bush:** Uh-huh. Go on. I’m listening.

**Dick:** I sense that you're a kinetic leader. You make decisions based on instinct.

**George:** I am. People always said that.

**Dick:** Yeah, yeah. Very different. Very different from, uh—from your father, in that regard. Now, maybe I can handle some of the more mundane jobs, overseeing bureaucracy, managing military, energy, foreign policy.

*[Birds chirp in the background.]*

**George:** *[Beat.]* That sound good.  
Music swells and fades.

00:03:32 Sound Effect Transition

00:03:33 Jesse Host Adam McKay, welcome to *Bullseye!* It's nice to have you on the show.

00:03:35 Adam McKay Guest Thank you for having me!

00:03:37 Jesse Host You just spent years of your life making a movie about Dick Cheney.

*[Adam laughs.]*

00:03:44 Adam Guest Are there things about Dick Cheney that you like and admire? Yeah, part of the goal of the movie was to dive into the mystery of this guy and, you know, who was this guy who very quietly took the wheel of our country, of our democracy, for—depending on, you know, what you believe—six to eight years and had this amazing influence? So, you know, a lot of people jokingly call him Darth Vader, because he survived all these heart attacks. He has kind of a gruff, cold exterior. So, there was no question, we were looking for the human being behind it. And absolutely I found some things—especially in his early life, pretty regular guy from Wyoming.

Really what change his life was his fell in love with Lynne Vincent, who became Lynne Cheney. Fell madly in love with her and she had a lot of ambition. Very smart woman. But the big thing about Dick Cheney that you find yourself admiring is he loves—sincerely, crazy about his family. Crazy about his wife, crazy about his daughters, did all the shopping for the family and did all the cooking for the family. That really became the human backbone of the movie, was this devotion to his family and you can see the fishing metaphor kind of runs through that—when it tells his daughter, “Well, it's not a good trick or a bad trick, fishing, but if we catch a fish, our family gets to eat.”

00:05:10 Jesse Host And so, that's kind of the base of the entire emotional arc of Cheney. And then, obviously, in the end you see—I don't wanna give it away, but some complications regarding that family. How did you decide to make this movie, and to a certain extent, your previous movie in the form that you did? Which is to say that they almost take—these are narrative, fictional films about real life events, but they almost take the shape of, like, a—you know, an Errol Morris movie, with less interviews directly facing the camera.

[Adam laughs.]

- 00:05:35 Adam Guest Like they're almost documentary-like in their structure. You know, *The Big*—I loved *The Big Short*. It was one of my favorite books I had read. And then a couple of years had gone by and I just was wondering why it hadn't been made! And a movie I had seen before that I really loved was *24 Hour Party People*, by Michael Winterbottom. It's a great little movie, if anyone out there hasn't seen it. And also, I come from a background in Chicago of longform improvisation, which is influenced by story theatre. You know, Mike Nichols, Elaine May, a lot of those people came through it. Part of that is breaking the fourth wall, using monologues and then going into scenes. So, that kind of coupled with my realization after seeing *24 Hour Party People*, I go, "Oh, you can do this. And it's actually pretty seamless and kind of fun!"
- So, I knew the only way to crack *The Big Short* was to play with form a little bit. It was very natural to that movie, because the financial products were so esoteric and confusing. And of course, were designed to be that way. With Cheney, it was a different motivation. With Cheney, it was the fact that his power was so quiet. It was so bureaucratic. It was so built around papers and desks and hallways. And yet, this power was changing the world. So, I wanted to find a way to bridge kind of this office bureaucratic knowhow and understanding of the government with actual, human impact about what's going on with the world. And also, at the same time, keep the audience off-balance. My worst fear was that they would settle into kind of a traditional biopic. And I just didn't want that comfort to run through the movie.
- 00:07:13 Jesse Host I mean, in some ways, what the movie is about is Dick Cheney creating comfort in America—and even within the administration, like creating a sense that things are just kind of moving along while doing extraordinary things.
- 00:07:32 Adam Guest It was—we actually say it in the movie—it's one of his superpowers and a lot of people around him confirmed this: that he has the ability to say the craziest things and make them seem very professional. You can look at photographs of him during the Ford years; there's a lot of him, like, stretching over behind Ford, kind of as his right-hand man, talking into his ear, leaning on the desk towards Ford. We actually discovered—Christian Bale and I, at one point—that really one of his strengths is he's kind of the ultimate codependent to power. He really presents himself as someone who's gonna make your power greater. And that's an unusual road, but that's a lot of where his power came from.
- 00:08:14 Jesse Host There's a gag in the movie where, as you present that idea—the idea that his superpower is to—is to [chuckles]—is basically to be so boring and so normal-seeming that he can say the most extraordinary thing without notice and have it be agreed to. You go full-on with a gag that could've been in *Talladega Nights* [laughing] or something.
- 00:08:45 Adam Guest Without a doubt, yeah. I mean, it's—we wanted to shock the audience and it's very fun seeing the audience thinking they're in this dusty old biopic and then suddenly that line is said by a character. Yeah.
- 00:08:58 Jesse Host [Laughs.] I think—I mean, I can't really repeat most of it on NPR, but it does end with, "Well, I do like a good puppet show." [Laughs.]

00:09:04 Adam Guest That's Henry Kissinger saying that, yeah. Yeah. That's the one thing you can say.

00:09:11 Jesse Host It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest is director Adam McKay.

00:09:32 Adam Guest You were a founding member of the legendary sketch and improv group, the Upright Citizens Brigade, which you left after not that long. But you participated in a very famous UCB show that involved flier-ing the neighborhood.

00:09:33 Jesse Host *[Chuckles.]* The city!  
The city.

*[Adam confirms.]*

*[Chuckling.]* Before the show. And, like, the UCB was always engaged in, like, trying to make improv shows almost into happenings, pulling people into the street, things like that.

*[Adam agrees.]*

00:09:50 Adam Guest This was probably its grandest manifestation, though. Yeah, we went out, papered the city, handed out fliers on subway cars, the L, basically advertising my own suicide. I'm assuming this is what you're thinking.

*[Jesse confirms with a chuckle.]*

And I had a really terrible headshot done a couple of years before that was super cheeseball, where the guy was like, "Smile bigger!" And we used to always laugh at my terrible headshot, so that was the picture. And it just said, "On such and such date, Adam McKay will kill himself." And then, in big letters, "No joke." And there were some people that were concerned. And then during the show, at one point—this is how long ago this was—we went to a local real estate guy and they had a building across from the theatre that was like six stories high, seven stories high. And I think it was the Flat Iron building. And we said, "Can we get on your building and can I yell to a crowd that we're gonna pull out of the theater?" And, once again, the mid-'90s, and the guy's like, "Sure! I always support the arts."

*[Jesse laughs.]*

So, we dragged the audience out of the theater, and I was up on top of this building yelling, "Is this what you want?! Is this why you came here?!" And I could hear Del Close down there going, "Juuump! Juuump!" And then I backed up and we had a CPR dummy dressed as me. And it really did—I mean, from far away, it kind of looked like me. And we threw it off the building and I could hear the crowd gasp for like half a second. The body hit and I was dead and then meanwhile I ran as fast as I could downstairs. We took an elevator and then bolted out. And then a guy named Armando Diaz, who now runs a theater in New York City called the Magnet Improv Theater, he came out as the grim reaper to claim me. And the UCB bribed him to go away and then I snuck into the group and popped back to life and we all went into the theater with cheers. But it was a good time! *[Laughs.]*

00:11:39 Jesse Host Why was it important to you to make a scheme as grand as that one when you, to be fair, like, were probably earning \$30 from that show?

00:11:50 Adam Guest Uuuh, I don't even think we made that.

*[Jesse laughs.]*

I think we made zero on that show. We would save the money to buy our props, so we weren't making anything. We were all teaching improv on the side. I think that's how we did it. You know, we were—the whole fun of the initial Upright Citizens Brigade—and obviously, it evolved into something different and wonderful. The beginning was—you're right, it was like happenings. It was pranks. We would just do things you weren't supposed to do. We took the whole audience back to my apartment, once. 'Cause it was a first-floor apartment and I played out a whole murder scene where Horatio Sanz busted in the room and killed a guy. It was like an actor, and it looked like a real apartment. Part of the audience was like, "What are they doing?!"

We just did all kinds of things like that and took the audience into the street and improvised a scene over an intersection where it was like Thanksgiving dinner. And, you know, we were in our 20s and we were just—it was that last time you could kind of do stuff like that before people started really freaking out about insurance and little things like "the law". *[Chuckles.]* And the whole spirit of the Upright Citizens Brigade was you really don't know what's gonna happen at these shows. I remember another time, we had a guy planted in the audience—a lot of great actors in Chicago, too. This was a guy no one would have known, but he was a good actor. And in the middle of our show, we said, "What are you doing, sir? Why are you writing notes?" And he like's trying to blow us off. And then it turns out that he's Richard Christiansen, the biggest critic in Chicago for I think the *Tribune*. And we all said, "Let us see those notes." And we start reading them and they're terrible. They're panning our show. And we grab him, and we run him out of the theater and throw him on the street. The audience follows him, and we tear up all his notes and we scream at him and say, "Don't ever come back!"

And for a week, it buzzed all around Chicago that we had thrown Richard Christiansen out of our show *[chuckling]* and torn up his notes! And I believe the real Richard Christiansen had to say like, "Nooo, I've never seen their show." Like—yeah! It was great. It was—that was also the theater scene in Chicago at that time. There were a lot of really cool, experimental groups like—there was group called Theater Oobleck and there's a group called Cook County Theater Department that Gary Wilmes was in and Richard Maxwell, who's now an Obie Award winning playwright, in New York City. And it was a really vital theater scene that was going on there.

00:14:07 Jesse Host At the same time, at some point you had to figure out how to make comedy a profession if you wanted to spend that much time on it.

00:14:15 Adam Guest That was it. And then, so I auditioned for Second City just 'cause how many auditions can you do that are improv? And I thought, eh, might as well. Not expecting to get in. And I got in and they paid! *[Laughs.]* And that was it. So, eventually, about a year after that—

			'cause you start off kind of slow, at Second City. I told them, I said, "I gotta—I gotta leave. I gotta pay my rent." And they made the greatest trade since Lou Brock for—what's that famous terrible baseball trade? Lou Brock for some guy you've never heard of. And I left the group—
00:14:44	Jesse	Host	Let's say Jeff Bagwell for Larry Anderson. That's the one that I remember off the top.
00:14:46	Adam	Guest	I like it! That's veeery good. That's very good. That's a little more modern, too. And so, they traded me for Amy Poehler, and the rest is history. And so, they were like, "Aw, McKay left," for about a week. And then it was Amy Poehler, and they were like, "Waaait a minute!" And they kind of shot like a rocket ship. And it worked out great for all of us. I got to go to Second City and got hired by <i>SNL</i> and then they all moved to New York, so I still got to do improv with them. And it's been very cool to see that theater just grow and grow.
00:15:16	Jesse	Host	I wanna play a sketch that you wrote at the Second City. And this is the scene where you are Mr. Grissom, who is a corporate bigwig and you get called in to the HR office after having taken some, like, aptitude tests.
00:15:35	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:15:36	Clip	Clip	<i>[The audience laughs repeatedly throughout the scene.]</i>

**Jerry:** Question number one on your test, Mr. Grissom, read, "Complete this sequence of numbers. 2, 4, 6, blank."

**Mr. Grissom:** Mm-hm. Good.

**Jerry:** For your answer, you drew a picture of a snowman and you wrote, "Happy, happy foot time." And, uh, that would be an incorrect answer.

**Mr. Grissom:** Are you sure about that, Jerry? Have you checked the answer key?

**Jerry:** I don't need to check the answer key, Mr. Grissom. This is a simple—

**Mr. Grissom:** Well, I've checked a lot of answer keys in my time, sir. You might wanna check it.

**Jerry:** Well, this is a sequence of positive numbers, which is quite simple—

**Mr. Grissom:** *[Yelling over him.]* Jerry, I'm a vice president! These are \$40 socks! Just check the key.

**Jerry:** Mr. Grissom, the key is right here. The answer is eight! It's not "foot time"!

**Mr. Grissom:** Well, not quite, no. Let's not get ahead of ourselves, Jerry.

**Jerry:** Mr. Grissom, according to these test results, you have no sense of object permanence. This is a basic thing we establish

when we were six months to a year old that allows us to understand that when your parents leave, they're not gone forever or when an object goes behind an object, it still exists—well, I can show you right now.

**Mr. Grissom:** *[Concerned.]* Jerry? JERRY!? Where the hell were you!? I'm sitting here talking to myself, Jerry! I'm a busy man!

**Jerry:** Mr. Grissom, you're 44 years old and we basically just played peek-a-boo.

**Mr. Grissom:** Well, I didn't enjoy it.  
Music swells and fades.

00:16:53 Sound Effect Transition

00:16:54 Adam Guest

*[They laugh.]*

00:16:59 Jesse Host

Oh my god, Scott Adsit, too. Oh, he's the best. Scott Adsit, folks might know from *30 Rock* among other places. The tone of that sketch, I think maybe even more than the many great things you wrote with and for Will Ferrell on *SNL* when you were head writer of *SNL*, is like where your career ended up more recently. Which is: it is just openly contemptuous of the idea of business leaders being business leaders and all the phoniness around being a business leader.

00:17:30 Adam Guest

Yeah! Yeah, I think that's accurate. I think what was great about Chicago was just that Chicago kind of, you know, ethos is that comedy blends with politics, blends with community, blends with social active—you know, everything is in the same pot, in Chicago. And you know, I mean, it's in their tradition of unionism and Chicago's Studs Terkel and all that kind of stuff. And that's what Del Close taught, too. His famous line was like, you know, "Aim for art or relevance, and if you miss, you'll get comedy. Aim for comedy and you miss, and you get nothing." So, we definitely encouraged that and Second City's kind of built on that.

Yeah! And we were—we caused some trouble in those days, too. I mean, we used to do a lot of, you know, protests and activism back then, usually with a theatre base to it. And I remember we took over Navy Pier on the weekend that it opened, because it was sponsored by Pepsi and that—a German company bought all the sweetener companies? The corn syrup companies around the Midwest and locked out the employees, saying we're gonna pay you half as much as you get. So, we took over the Navy Pier, pretending we were from Pepsi and then staged an entire scene where protestors were coming at us and we were humiliating them, and they started tearing up our Pepsi signs and the police showed up and actually arrested the actors playing the protestors. And I was one of the Pepsi guys and I was like, "Oh, crap. What are we gonna do?"

And then the cop came up to me. He goes, "How do you wanna handle this?"

*[Jesse laughs.]*

And I went, “Uuum, you know I think Pepsi’s taken enough brand damage today. Why don’t we just let them go?”

And they’re like, “Okay, gentlemen, you’re free to go.” And we all scurried off to our car and it was like on a couple news stations. So, yeah, that’s Chicago. It’s a unique, interesting town in that regard. I think that also maybe has something to do with your personal predilection, which is to just go all the way to it. I mean, even if— even the, you know, silliness that you did on *Saturday Night Live* or, you know, in *Anchorman* is still—I always just have my breath taken away at how far you were willing to take the silliness.

00:19:20 Jesse Host

00:19:49 Adam Guest

Yeah, I think it goes back to when I was a kid. The stuff I loved— and there’s no better feeling than when you laugh so hard you have tears in your eyes—and certain jokes from when I was a kid, like an airplane. When the newspapers spin and they say, “People on airplane doomed to die. How will they land the airplane?” And then the third newspaper says, “Boy trapped in refrigerator eats own foot.”

*[Jesse laughs.]*

And I—literally, I’ve talked to other comedy writers. Like, I think that joke changed my life. And, you know, when I was waaay younger, even *The Three Stooges*, which is just—the level of violence! It’s almost like punk rock in that show! And I remember laughing so hard and *Amazon Women on the Moon*. I remember Donahue on *SNL*. Like, that was the stuff that I was definitely drawn towards. And the thrill of just seeing someone go too far—I just—to this day, I still get excited by it.

00:20:43 Jesse Host

We’ll wrap up my conversation with Adam McKay after a short break. He’s making more serious movies these days—movies about real stuff that actually happened. He’ll tell me about how he manages to keep his films fresh, funny, and weird, even when Will Ferrell isn’t in them. It’s *Bullseye*, from [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org) and NPR.

00:21:02 Music Transition

00:21:04 Jesse Promo

Relaxed, jazzy music.

This message comes from NPR sponsor Green Chef.

Green Chef is a USDA certified organic meal kit, offering plans for every lifestyle—including paleo, plant-powered, keto, and balanced living. With their wide variety of high quality, clean ingredients seasonally sourced for peak freshness, you can feel great about what you’re eating and how it got to your table. Get \$90 off your first month, including free shipping, at [GreenChef.com/90bullseye](http://GreenChef.com/90bullseye) and use code “90bullseye”.

00:21:38 Promo Clip

*[Music fades out.]*

**Music:** Bright, bubbly music.

**Speaker:** On NPR’s *Pop Culture Happy Hour* podcast, we talk about movies, music, and more. Like why *The Great Pottery Throwdown* is a comforting binge-watch, and a look back at some of Chadwick Boseman’s essential performances. All of that in around 20 minutes every weekday. Listen now to the *Pop Culture Happy Hour* podcast from NPR.

*[Music fades out.]*



00:22:00 Promo Clip

**Music:** Peaceful, angelic music.

**Benjamin Partridge:** *The Beef and Dairy Network* is a multi-award-winning comedy podcast, here on the Maximum Fun. And I would recommend you listen to it. But don't just take it from me. What do the listeners have to say?

*[Several beeps of a busy signal.]*

**Speaker 1:** I would rather stick a corkscrew inside my ear, twist it around, and pull out my ear canal like a cork than listen to your stupid podcast ever again. Please stop contacting me.

**Speaker 2:** Hell would freeze over before I recommended this podcast, *The Beef and Dairy Network*, to anyone.

**Speaker 3:** Not in a million years. Actually, scratch that. Make it a billion years. No, how long's infinity?

**Benjamin:** That's *The Beef and Dairy Network* podcast, available at [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org) and at all good and some bad podcast platforms.

**Speaker 4:** Disgusting.

00:22:44 Jesse Host

*[Music fades out.]*

Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest is Adam McKay. He's a filmmaker, ordinarily. He directed the movies *Anchorman*, *Stepbrothers*, *The Big Short*, and *Vice*, among others. These days, he's dipping his toes into the waters of podcasting. *Death at the Wing* tells the story of a handful of young NBA recruits whose lives were cut short in the 1980s. It's out now. Adam and I talked in 2019.

00:23:29 Adam Guest

When you went to work at *Saturday Night Live* as a writer—you initially auditioned for a cast role but ended up getting a writing job on the show. Were you familiar with Will Ferrell and his work and reputation? He had been LA-based, I think.

No, we had no idea who he was. He's also a much more secure, healthy person than myself and my friends.

*[Jesse chuckles.]*

So, we were all from Chicago and we were nonstop doing bits. Nonstop joking around. And he just doesn't do that! He's a pretty normal guy, if you bump into him. And so, we all just thought he was the straight guy. And then the very first readthrough, he just uncorked, like, four of the funniest sketches you've ever heard, characters, full commitment. We were like, "Hooly cow!" But the reason we really connected was 'cause we were doing bits all the time and it turned out Ferrell loved to do bits. And he just started showing up in our office and jumping into the bits we would do. And he was really good at them. And he loved it and then, like, after six months he's like, "Yeah, I just wanted to hang out with you guys 'cause you're always doing bits."

And that was the kind of foundation. And then we wrote a sketch together. I think the first one we wrote was “Neil Diamond’s Storytellers”. It’s actually hard to find, I think, ‘cause of the music rights. But it went really well, and it was just such a joy to write with and we just started writing together more and more.

00:24:36 Jesse Host  
00:24:42 Adam Guest

What did you figure out was funny about Will Ferrell that is special? I think his dead commitment. Like, just total, all out, like, no wink in his eyes commitment. He also—we both have a very similar sense of humor. We love when stuff gets out of control. We love the idea of seeing something on TV or in a movie that you’re not supposed to see. That’s not supposed to happen. And he also—he has this great, like, all-American face. It almost seems like he could have been in, like—you know, some sort of action TV show in the ‘80s or something. Like, he’s kind of handsome? But like it’s a little off? And he just knows how to use it so well. And what’s so impressive about him is he can kind of play every kind of comedy. He’s actually a great straight man. Which he doesn’t get to do very often, but a really good straight man.

So, yeah! We’re both about the same age, both came from divorced parents. His dad was a musician—is a musician. My dad’s a musician. It was a—kind of a freaky thing of just the same age, same influences, and neither one of us are big handwringers. Like, we do the best work we can do when we write our stuff. We want it to be good. But you know, there would be some people at *SNL* that would work on a sketch all day long for 14 hours, and then at the last second pull it from the readthrough ‘cause they didn’t think it was good enough. Ferrell and I would never do that. We’d just be like, “Well, it’s the readthrough. If it doesn’t work, it doesn’t work.” And yeah. It was just a really good match. I don’t—I think in all the years, we’ve never had one single creative argument ever.

00:26:11 Jesse Host

The movies that you made with Ferrell—including the *Anchorman* movies and *Talladega Nights* and so forth—are all so intensely packed with so many crazy jokes that they border on incoherency.

00:26:29 Adam Guest  
00:26:32 Jesse Host

[Laughs.] I think that’s fair. Depending on who you are. Yeah, yeah. Yeah! And I mean, to varying extents, *The Other Guys* is a pretty—is structurally a pretty straight genre movie with some jokes like that in it.

[Adam agrees.]

00:26:45 Adam Guest  
00:26:47 Jesse Host

And I love all these movies, I wanna be really clear about this.

Oh no, yeah, yeah, yeah. That’s fine.

But I wonder what it was like to transition from making a movie that is as crazy as *Anchorman* or *Anchorman 2*, where—you know, on *Anchorman* you had so many bits that weren’t in the movie that you made a second movie—a feature-length out of the stuff that was left out of the first movie—into making a movie that is about real things that really happened, where you’re responsible to some extent for representing, like, documentary truth.

[Adam laughs.]

And you—you know, you have to plot it out so that this really complicated thing can be explained in the course of the narrative, as well.

00:27:32 Adam Guest Well, it's funny hearing you phrase it like that. It actually—it actually makes more sense than I would think it would make, because they're both kind of the same thing. With the comedies, you're breaking routine. You're shocking. You're going into the world of absurdity and you're kind of jarring an audience. You're screwing with their expectations. And that's exactly what needed to happen in *The Big Short* and *Vice*, because if you just list the details of the financial crisis, everyone glazes over. But if you can think of a way to give it a pop and a life and connect and break routine, then the whole story of the financial crisis is really a break in routine—or, as Adam Davidson called it, you know, they used weaponized boredom to kind of get away with this kind of stuff. So, we have to kind of break that weaponized boredom. And the same thing with Dick Cheney. He uses this kind of bureaucratic, quiet, cranky professionalism to just make it all seem like, "This is normal."

So, yeah, in both cases, rather than it being a big, absurdist, comedic moment that we're breaking the routine with, that we're screwing with, screwing with the form of a movie, it's the financial crisis. It's the esoteric, underlying algorithms behind these products that we're being sold. In the case of Dick Cheney, it's the real-world impact of these paper pushing decisions that seem so innocuous, initially. So, yeah, hearing you phrase it like that, I think that's exactly kind of what happened. It's still about kind of keeping an audience off-kilter, off-balance, not letting them settle into traditional, sequential beats in a movie.

00:29:13 Jesse Host Yeah, I mean, you run credits halfway through [*chuckles*] the new movie. And you know, in a way it's like it shares some DNA with the kind of borderline situationist stuff you were doing in person, in Chicago, which is—the theory of that is that your goal is to give someone an authentic and immediate experience by taking them out of the mundanity of their lives—that there's this kind of drumbeat that we all have that we, you know, we go through the motions of our lives without even noticing, much less appreciating, what's going on. And in breaking that somehow, you kind of bring people into what's going on right in front of them.

00:29:58 Adam Guest Yeah! I think that's fair. You're right. I think it's a consistent thread that runs through what we're doing. I think in *Vice*—I think that kind of... urgency of it went to another level. I was joking with my editor that like we're definitely showing our pit stains in this movie. We're definitely not being cool about it. We are fully waving our arms in the air and saying, "Something is very, very wrong." So, it's less cool, in *Vice*. And *Vice*—you know, in this current climate that we live in, you know, stumbled into the red versus blue nonsense that kind of filters every basic fact that we encounter in this world. So, that's kind of a hornet's nest unto itself.

But I think the use of that kind of routine breaking—formula breaking style, in *Vice*, is more to say, "Hey, things are really, really wrong on a bigger, grander scale." And depending on who the person is, some people love that. Some people hate that. You know, there's a lot of people that like the cool, remove of watching the world click by. And in that movie, we're definitely saying, "No, no, no." I wanna break as many moments as I can. I want—you know, I want people to be inside of this.

			There was someone who said like, you know, “Like it or not, as the audience in <i>Vice</i> , you’re involved in this movie.” And I thought that’s pretty great! I can stand by that! For better or for worse, depending on your opinion, there’s no doubt the audience is very involved in that movie.
00:31:25	Jesse	Host	Adam McKay, I’m so grateful to you for taking the time to be on <i>Bullseye</i> . It was really nice to get to meet you and I’ve admired your work for so long.
00:31:31	Adam	Guest	Thank you for having me on. This was fun!
00:31:34	Jesse	Host	Adam McKay. His new podcast, <i>Death at the Wing</i> , is out now wherever you listen to podcasts.
00:31:41	Music	Transition	Plucky piano music.
00:31:44	Jesse	Host	That’s the end of another episode of <i>Bullseye</i> . <i>Bullseye</i> is created from the homes of me and the staff of Maximum Fun, in and around greater Los Angeles, California—where I learned that the construction site dirt that covers my car every day is something called, “fugitive dust”. Uh, so. I don’t know. Maybe that’s useful to you. Didn’t help me, unfortunately.

The 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. Production fellows at Maximum Fun are Richard Robey and Valerie Moffat. Our interstitial music is by Dan Wally, also known as DJW. Our theme song is by The Go! Team. Thanks very much 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.
00:32:42	Promo	Promo	<b>Speaker:</b> <i>Bullseye with Jesse Thorn</i> is a production of <a href="http://MaximumFun.org">MaximumFun.org</a> and is distributed by NPR.

*[Music fades out.]*