

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.
00:00:14	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.
00:00:22	Jesse Thorn	Host	It’s <i>Bullseye</i> . I’m Jesse Thorn. So, I wanna start off this next conversation with a fun fact—a borderline fun anecdote. Not quite. It’s about the global positioning system, GPS. You know, the thing that your phone uses to get you instructions on how to get to the nearest ice cream store or to find out when the next bus is. GPS, we use it every day, transparently, visibly, millions of uses—big and small. GPS was created and is owned and operated by the United States government to this very day. Maybe you knew that. Maybe you didn’t. But these days, it’s easy to think that the role of the federal government in our lives is just a few, simple, obvious things: the Army, IRS, Congress.

There’s a new show on Netflix that came out earlier this year. It’s a documentary series called *The G Word*, and it explores the topic of government: what it actually does. It’s about bank regulation, food safety, the weather—and yes—global positioning. The ways that we might not be aware that the government has helped us all out and some of the ways it might have made our lives more difficult. And most importantly that the government is a bunch of us. It’s not faceless institutions; it’s our fellow citizens working on behalf of every one of us.

Adam Conover hosts *The G Word*, and there might not be a better person for the job. He’s a writer and comic whose brand you might describe as—and I think he would probably agree with me here—annoying know-it-all. Before *The G Word*, he hosted *Adam Ruins Everything*, an educational show where he fought misinformation and myths by ruining them. Both *Adam Ruins Everything* and *The G Word* are educational. They’re also very, very funny. Honestly! They are a good time. One thing though that *The G Word* has that *Adam Ruins Everything* doesn’t is an interview with former president, Barack Obama.

00:02:33	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
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00:02:34	Clip	Clip	<b>Adam Conover (<i>The G Word</i>):</b> But there’s also issues that, you know, we’re talking about on the show that we—people have been demanding change on for a reeeally long time. Criminal justice, police violence. It’s hard to take, “Hey, change is slow! Long arc of history!” I’ve heard it.
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**Barack Obama:** Alright. *[Chuckles.]*

**Adam:** You know? I’ve heard it and I believe it, but then sometimes I’m still frustrated by it! Are you—do you ever feel that way?

**Obama:** Of course—of course you’re frustrated by it. And you should be. And the reason it gets better is because people are

impatient. The only thing we can't do is lapse into cynicism and say, "Well, because this hasn't changed at the pace that it should, there's nothing we can do about it." Because each time we vote and elect people who are more responsive, there's a window of opportunity for us to make some changes. And typically, it's not gonna be 100% of what we want. But you know what? If we make things 10% better?

**Adam:** Yeah, but 10% for climate change isn't enough. When you ran in '08, you were the change guy. I—you know, I was—

**Obama:** I was the hope and change guy. Right.

**Adam:** And you didn't run on, "Hey, if we make things 10% better." You know?

00:03:40    Sound Effect    Transition

Music swells and fades.

00:03:42    Jesse    Host

Adam Conover, welcome to *Bullseye*. It's great to have you on the show.

00:03:43    Adam Conover    Guest

Thank you so much for having me, Jesse. I've been a fan for many years! So, it's a thrill to be here.

00:03:48    Jesse    Host

Have you always been this excited to explain things to people?

00:03:52    Adam    Guest

Uuuh, I guess I must be? Yeah, I guess I must have been. I mean, I ended up creating *Adam Ruins Everything*, my first show, because I started to explain things I had learned in my standup act, and I noticed people started responding more to me as a comedian when I started doing that. And then I built a whole show around doing that in a self-effacing way, in which I was annoying people by doing it. And then people just eventually started liking hearing from me enough that I felt I didn't have to be self-effacing anymore about it. I could just like, you know, share information and communicate with the public.

But when I created *Adam Ruins Everything*, it was very much me sort of doing a takeoff of how I was as a child that people would always yell at me for explaining things in too much detail or for going on and on. And so, that was very much—you know, the experience of being—"Why are you talking about this?! Shut up! We're annoyed! Go away!" was a thing I would hear a lot as a kid. And I ended up sort of building the show around that. So, I feel that is something I must have been doing my whole life.

[*They laugh.*]

00:04:56    Jesse    Host

I actually heard from a former intern on this show, Thomas—he sent me a message and he said, "I think Adam Conover and I have something in common. We both had subscriptions to [*chuckling*] *Consumer Reports for Kids*."

00:05:09    Adam    Guest

Oh yeaaaah! Yes! I had a subscription to this magazine—at the very least, I read it at the Library. I rented it a lot. And it was a magazine called *Zillions*, and it was an incredible magazine. It was so good! And I wish more people remembered it. I've actually looked up scans of it on stuff that's on like Internet Archive and things like that. But it was basically—it was sort of the '90s, the height of creative magazine design, right before the digital publishing revolution when they were still doing cutouts by hand and layouts were really crazy and interesting. And it was basically like what if *Mad Magazine* was

a little bit more serious. Like, all the sort of anti-consumerism and questioning and, you know, making fun of ads and stuff, but it was just a little bit more PBS-y. So, it's, you know, "Hey! Kids are gonna test to see if the big claims that ads make are really true!" You know?

And I remember, for instance, a really good one—like, just—it's like when I remember—a part of this magazine I remember from reading when I was a kid was that some kid wrote in and said, "I noticed whenever they do a boardgame ad, at the end a kid goes, 'I WIN!'" You remember that? "It's always a boy! Why is that?" And then *Zillions* did like a media review where they like reviewed like 50 ads and they said, "Ah! This is very true. In 80% of the ads, a boy yells 'I win' and we think that's unfair. Thank you for writing in." And like that—to me, I was probably eight years old when I read this. And that's very much *[laughing]* like the kind of thing I ended up doing in life. You know?

Like, a whole lot of kids love *Adam Ruins Everything* and love *The G Word* as well. And I didn't realize until after I had made the show that I was sort of reproducing or creating an updated version of a kind of media I really loved as a kid, which was poking holes in what you're told by the media, poking holes in what parents tell you. You know, encouraging kids to question and think critically, and doing it in like a really fun visual style.

00:07:05    Jesse            Host

Do you remember what the first thing that you explained onstage to positive response was?

00:07:13    Adam            Guest

Oh yeah! It was the same as the first episode of *Adam Ruins Everything*. It was the story about De Beers invented the concept of the diamond engagement ring, which was something I had just like read in I think an issue of *The Atlantic* or something like ten years prior. Like, I don't know, in 2003 or something. Just—and it lodged in my brain the idea that the diamond engagement ring was a marketing creation by the De Beers Diamond Corporation. And then I—I don't remember the context! I was just, you know, trying to write jokes and ended up telling that story about—you know, about that fact and sort of breaking it down and doing a joke based off of it.

And I noticed that when I told that story—you know, that they just put it in ads and then the ads were very convincing and people forgot it was an ad, and now it's just a part of our culture—that people started like, you know, leaning forward a little bit when I told that joke. They would come up to me after the show and go, "Oh, is that true?! That's crazy!" Or they'd, you know, come to my next show and say, "Oh, wow! I looked that up! That is true! Oh my gosh." You know? And then I was working at CollegeHumor at the time, and my job was to write two sketches a week. And so, I wrote a sketch with that premise. There had been other sort of—not explainer-y, but you know, person talking straight to camera content on CollegeHumor, but I had written sketches like that before that didn't make it past the table read. You know?

I remember thinking, "Eh, they're a little bit didactic. It's not quite working. I understand why these—you know—weren't greenlit." But when I wrote that one, I specifically wrote it as—Emily acts for it, and Brian Murphy, who are my colleagues who were in a real-life

relationship—and I think at the time maybe engaged? They were at least very close to being engaged. They are, you know, proposing to each other on the beach and I show up and I say, “Ah! Did you know the truth about the diamond engagement ring?”

And they’re like, “What? Why are you here? What? No! We don’t wanna know—oh, great. What?” You know. They’re just responding—they’re annoyed by me. They’re yelling at me about it. And honestly, the reason I wrote that in was because I wanted to write this sketch, but I was worried about the reaction that it would get in the writers’ room—that the other writers would hear the sketch and go, “Adam, this is so annoying and didactic.” So, I wrote them into the sketch saying, “Adam, this is annoying and didactic.” And that ended up being the comedy engine of the whole show and of—you know, that became the entire *Adam Ruins Everything* formula is I am being taken down a peg as I’m explaining the thing other people.

00:09:33    Jesse            Host

It also has a really intense aesthetic quality. There’s a lot of differences between *The G Word* and *Adam Ruins Everything*, but one of the things that they share is a kind of—yeah, like an aesthetic that is pretty different from other nonfiction television.

[Adam agrees.]

It involves—whenever you’re addressing the camera, there’s generally at least one venue change per paragraph.

00:10:01    Adam            Guest  
00:10:04    Jesse            Host

Yeah! Yeah. Lotta scene changes.

There’s a lot of people entering and exiting the frame.

[Adam chuckles.]

Things like that. So, did you have examples to lean on when you started making—especially as *Adam Ruins Everything* got a little longer, ‘cause it went to TV and so forth—did you have examples for nonfiction film things that you wanted to be like? Or did you just have to invent it?

00:10:28    Adam            Guest

Not—yeah, not really. I mean, I—we really did kind of invent it. In the early days, it was me, my director Paul Briganti, who directed much of the first season before going to work at *SNL*. And you know. So, he definitely contributed to a lot of the early visual look, but mostly I was just trying to pack things in. I was just trying to make it work every single way that I could. And then, I had started doing standup, and so *Adam Ruins Everything* was sort of the combination of the two. But I think I just had a paranoia that, you know, any moment would be too dead. That the information by itself wasn’t gonna carry it and that I wanted to juice it in some way.

And so, I just packed everything I possibly could into every single moment. So, every line is punctuated by either a joke from me or something happening in the background. And you know, we keep the camera constantly moving really, really fast. In the first—in the very early web series of *Adam Ruins Everything*, it’s more cuts, where we cut to different—we cut to a De Beers commercial parody, and we cut to the future, and we cut da-da-da-da-da. And then eventually, we started figuring out the thing of like making it

			sort of seamless and having something continue from one shot to the next.
00:11:37	Jesse	Host	There's a lot of like you standing in the middle of sketches. [Laughs.]
00:11:41	Adam	Guest	Yeah! Yeah, or zipping into the middle of them. I think I had a lot of unconscious influences. Like, I finally realized again when I—when the show premiered on TruTV and immediately kids were watching it. Like, people were like, “My seven-year-old loves your show.”
			I'm like, “Our show's on at 10:30 at night. I thought we were doing comedy for a <i>Daily Show</i> audience.” We were literally—our first season had an episode called “Sex” and an episode called “Death”. And around episode five of the season, I started realizing that kids were watching, and I posted a post on Tumblr—to tell you what year it was—and said, “Just so people know, we have these more adult episodes coming up, so maybe watch them before you show your kids.” ‘Cause I was worried about getting blowback. I never got it. Kids love to learn about sex and death. It's fine. But I realized eventually that I was unconsciously borrowing things from kids TV that I liked.
			Like a show that I loved as a kid was <i>Beakman's World</i> , if you remember that show. Very similar to <i>Bill Nye the Science Guy</i> , hosted educational science show. But I liked <i>Beakman's World</i> more than <i>Bill Nye the Science Guy</i> , and it's because it was even faster and more visual and silly and—you know, every movement that Paul Zaloom, the actor who played Beakman, did is like punctuated by a little sound effect. You know? Like doodle-loodle-doodle-loodle-doodle-loo when he's wiggling his fingers or whatever. There's a guy in a rat suit who he's always talking to. They actually do this sort of dialogue thing that we do on <i>Adam Ruins Everything</i> , where the guy in the rat suit is like, [???] “Centrifugal force?! What's that?!” You know? And then like, “Well, I'll tell you, Lester!” That kind of thing.
00:13:10	Jesse	Host	Even more with Adam Conover, the host of <i>Adam Ruins Everything</i> and <i>The G Word</i> , when we come back in a minute. It's <i>Bullseye</i> , from <a href="http://MaximumFun.org">MaximumFun.org</a> and NPR.
00:13:21	Music	Transition	Thumpy synth with light vocalizations.
00:13:25	Jesse	Host	Welcome back to <i>Bullseye</i> . I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest is Adam Conover. He's a comedian and a writer. He hosted the TV show <i>Adam Ruins Everything</i> , which ran for four years on TruTV. These days, he hosts <i>The G Word</i> . It's a documentary series about the role the federal government plays in Americans' lives. It's streaming right now, on Netflix. Let's get back into our conversation.
			Something that I was thinking about with <i>The G Word</i> that was also true of <i>Adam Ruins Everything</i> is this: you licensed <i>The G Word</i> —you know, <i>The G Word</i> was originally based on a book by Michael Lewis. And Michael Lewis is known the world over as one of the world's greatest nonfiction narrativizers.
			[Adam confirms.]
			You know. He wrote a whole book about the thing that I was a nerd of, which was baseball. And it never occurred to me had any narrative element at all. Right?

*[Adam laughs.]*

And both of your shows are about as non-narrative as I have seen nonfiction television be. It's not to say that they're without narrative.

*[Adam hums thoughtfully.]*

But you structure your shows not as information that reveals itself from a story, but as a—you know, nonfiction argument, as—you know, an expository argument. Right? And I think that is—and again, like not without narrative by any means. But relative to—I don't know. Relative to *Love Island* or whatever. You know, whatever the nonfiction things on television are, which are hyper focused on narrative. Or even a Ken Burns documentary or whatever. You are really focused on the information and what it means.

00:15:16 Adam Guest

Yeah, I mean that's a—that is a really good and somewhat subtle point. I mean, it's true that a common form in documentary is to make it a story that's like a movie. You know. I didn't watch the various Theranos documentaries—Theranos documentaries, but I can imagine—you know, *[dramatic narrator voice]* “Elizabeth Holmes was born in—” You know, whatever. “And then she met whoever.” And you know, it's like, “And when did she start wearing the black turtlenecks?” It's very, very, very story-esque, to the extent that you can then adapt it into, you know, just a *[censored]* made for TV movie. Right?

And that's a fun way to work, it's just not what has interested me. I love characters and I love stories, but the story that I'm more interested in is the story of ideas, the story that we give the audience about the way that they think the world works. Not necessarily the story of an individual person. So, the story that I love the most is you've been taught your entire life that the world is the way it is for a reason, and it's supposed to be that way. But what if I told you that the reason it's that way is actually because someone made it that way in order to benefit them, and they lied to you about it. And here's the real story of why things are the way they are.

That is sort of a deep—that's my version of Joseph Campbell *[laughing]*, you know—of I can tell that story all day long; I'll never get sick of it. The audience will never get sick of it. It's always fun to learn that. It hits you like a thunderbolt every single time. And you know, that—for me—came from just, I don't know, reading *The New Yorker*, listening to podcasts, reading nonfiction, and having that experience over and over again of having my entire perspective about the world changed. And I just realized, “Oh! I can do that for other people! I can make them see the world differently.” I don't know. That's the kind of truth that I'm interested in that I guess think is more valuable, because if all you do is follow individual people's stories, it can be entertaining, but you know, you don't necessarily end up learning more about the world that way.

You know, how many true crime documentaries are just about one person's life, their murder, the capture of the person, and tell you

nothing about the criminal justice system and the reality of the sin that we're committing against our fellow citizens by—you know, locking them up by the millions for absolutely no purpose. Like, sure, it's fun to hear about the individual story, but unless you're learning something about the world, well, what's the point? That's my—that's how I feel about it. I'm not casting dispersions on people who do that work, but I have a different emphasis, I guess. On *Adam Ruins Everything*, you were set up by the show as a pest.

00:18:04 Jesse Host

[Adam agrees several times.]

It was—you know, the conceit of the show is that you're there to be annoying. That kind of self-deprecation is a way to—significantly, a way to protect you as a performer. Right? It may or may not be annoying that you're a know-it-all, and so if you set the show up that you're a know-it-all, then at least—you know, that gives a context in which, well, you're just doing your job. Right?

00:18:37 Adam Guest

It does a number of things, and that is one of them. For sure. It's also a continual joke fountain on that show. We can always do a joke about how I'm being annoying. And yes. But yes, it is essentially self-protective. I'm making fun of myself before you can.

00:18:51 Jesse Host

Like, I created a podcast called *Judge John Hodgman*. My friend, John Hodgman, judges people on it. And the reason that he can do that and people don't hate him—besides the fact that his judgements are very sensitive and sound—is that the name of the show is *Judge John Hodgman*, and so like we've set it up so they know what that is. And the same—I'm the sidekick on the show. Like, if I tell somebody to can it or whatever, they know that that's what's coming. Right? [Chuckles.] They know that I've been put there to do that.

[Adam agrees.]

On *The G Word*, you have dispensed with that. So, was that a specific choice that you made for reasons other than just differentiating it from the previous show?

00:19:38 Adam Guest

Yeah, it was what I wanted to get to, as a performer and communicator and public figure. I mean, you know, I sort of began to understand why—you know—Stephen Colbert wanted to stop doing *The Colbert Report* and wanted to start doing the CBS show. And I say that feeling that *The Colbert Report* is one of the great comedic performances of the century, and that his *Late Show*, while a wonderful show, is not nearly achieving the comedic heights. I hope he doesn't hear this, because I'm—you know—such an admirer of his. But—

00:20:10 Jesse Host

And it is a very good show.

00:20:12 Adam Guest

It's a very good show! Absolutely. And he—by the way—is, I think, the best technical performer as a late-night host that we've maybe ever seen. And I could get really deep into what I mean by that and how I'd compare him to everybody else, but god, he just does—it's like watching an Olympic figure skater doing triple axels, watching him do a turn on a joke. But after a while, the conceit—if you've got this one engine that you're using to build all your jokes, it becomes restrictive. And you start feeling like, "Alright, we've done everything in that area, and we don't need it anymore." And really, I'm not doing this anymore because I think it's funny to annoy people, I'm

just doing it to share the information. And people are watching the show because they just want the information.

So, to a certain extent, we can just cut out the middleman and I can be myself. On *Adam Ruins Everything*, it was a version of myself. It was heightening of myself. It was a—like I said, a younger version of myself. It was the way that I often felt. As a kid, I constantly felt that—you know—other kids, adults were always yelling at me and telling me to sit down and be quiet and why am I talking right now. And so, you know, I just wrote a show in which people do that to me all the time, because that was a sort of personality that I knew how to adopt, and I knew why that would be funny. And maybe it exorcised some of those demons for me. But I'm not that person anymore! I don't feel that way! People don't yell at me anymore. *[Laughs.]* Right? I'm no longer socially awkward after years of doing standup comedy, which is an intensely social world. I can just sort of—I just wanna be myself and just be the self that I am on a standup stage but do that on television.

So, *The G Word* starts from a point of view of, you know, "Hey! Here I am making this show about the government. Here's what I'm curious about. Like, here's what I'm angry about. Aren't you angry about this too?" And there's still a lot of writing there, but it comes more from my really personal emotion about how I—how I feel about the government and what I'm actually interested in. And it's a distinction that I think like a lot of the audience maybe doesn't even notice, 'cause they're not as tuned into it as you are. But it means a lot to me and it's—to me, it's sort of about shortening the distance between myself and the audience and being right there with them so that we can engage in the investigation together.

00:22:30    Jesse            Host

There's all this social science research that shows that a negative connection with someone is much stronger than a positive one. Like, two people who both hate the Cowboys are much more easily bonded than two people who both like the Eagles.

*[Adam hums thoughtfully.]*

And you know, it's one of the—it's one of the animating factors of social media is, you know, on Twitter things that we're outraged and upset about get shared more widely than things we're happy about.

*[Adam agrees.]*

And those connect people more easily. I think to some extent that is true in this kind of work. It's easier to say, "this is a scam" than "this is not a scam".

*[Adam laughs.]*

And one of the big differences between *The G Word* and *Adam Ruins Everything* is that the premise is no longer that everything you thought you know is baloney. That's part of it. It comes up sometimes.

00:23:38    Adam            Guest  
00:23:40    Jesse            Host

Yeah. It's one of the stories we go back to, yeah. But you know, the boss of this show is Mr. Hope himself, Barack Obama.



*[Adam laughs.]*

So, what was it like to make a show where part of your job is covering things that actually are going well or are—

*[Adam cackles.]*

00:24:04	Adam	Guest	<p>—or correctly?</p> <p>Yeah! I mean, it was—first of all, I don't think that any of my previous work was—you know—cynical or negative. Like, we have values that we're trying to get across to the audience, and we're angry when things are violating that. But there's always—you know, often, in <i>Adam Ruins Everything</i> even, there were stories that would begin with, "Things used to be great! Look at how good things were! The city street, everyone would walk through it and—you know, it was a public place where people could play. And then the automobile came through, and we're mad about that. But we could have that again!" You know, we always had those—you know—moments of positivity. We'd show you a street project that was—you know, had closed off part of a street and become a public square and how great that was.</p> <p>There was a—there was always like a positive core and a positive project to it. So, it was very natural for me to be able to say, "Well, yeah! We're gonna do segments about the shocking things that are amazing! That people don't know about that we wanna protect. And <u>then</u>, we're gonna tell you about how those things are under threat. So—and a big example on the show is about the National Weather Service, how the National Weather Service is this like jewel of America that has all these dedicated meteorologist who produce every weather forecast that you get. With our tax dollars, they fly planes through hurricanes in order to figure out where the hurricanes go.</p>
00:25:21	Sound Effect	Transition	Music swells and fades.
00:25:22	Clip	Clip	<i>[The sound of heavy rainfall and wind.]</i>
			<p><b>Adam:</b> <i>[Yelling over the noise.]</i> I always assumed like—you know, you're—again, you're watching TV and you're saying here's where the hurricane is, but they were doing that through satellite or radar or something. But you—this is like the movie <i>Armageddon</i>. It's like we gotta send a team into the storm to find the exact—that's the only way we know where the storm really is. And then when you find it, you have to drop a payload into the center of it. And you do that multiple times a day?! When there's a hurricane?!</p> <p><b>Speaker:</b> I guess so. I mean, we're not blowing up the hurricane!</p>
00:25:51	Sound Effect	Transition	<p><b>Adam:</b> You're almost blowing up the hurricane!</p> <p>Music swells and fades.</p>
00:25:53	Adam	Guest	Every single person I met who worked for or touched the National Weather Service was like an incredibly dedicated civil servant, just a cool nerd who loved talking about the weather, just the most awesome people you'd ever meet. True competency porn was a big

thing we would go for on the show, just seeing people—like people do their job well at a high level is really fun. And then, we'd tell you that, you know, the for-profit weather company, AccuWeather, is working hard to disembowel the National Weather Service and to cut you off from them and to make you pay again for the weather reports that your tax dollars were already paying for. And so, sure, sometimes—you know, in order to feel like a complete meal, we go for that flavor where there's a villain and a victim and you're gonna get a little pissed off.

And we do that strategically, but also when it's true. And we think you should be pissed off about something going wrong. But it was a joy to be able to also share things that are going well and to be able to bring those to people. I mean, that's—it was a way to work that was new to me and one that I really loved exploring.

00:26:56    Jesse            Host

I wanna play a clip of a fake evil businessman. This is our friend, Rob Huebel, past guest on this show. One of the funniest jerks in all of—

*[Adam cackles.]*

00:27:13    Adam            Guest

In all of television and film acting.

00:27:14    Jesse            Host

Wonderful performer.

And this is a segment about GPS. And GPS is a system of satellites that were put up originally, substantially for military use, that—you know—are controlled by the federal government and used by 10,000 products that we use in 10,000 different ways. And in this scene, we are hearing Rob Huebel as a—like a tech bro CEO type. Music swells and fades.

00:27:45    Sound Effect    Transition

00:27:46    Clip            Clip

**Music:** Chiming, futuristic synth.

**Businessman:** We've used this technology to change the world in countless ways. Google used GPS to revolutionize navigation. Uber used it to disrupt the taxicab industry right out of business. And Tinder uses GPS to make dating worse. Since the 1980s, GPS had generated over 1.4 trillion dollars for American businesses.

*[Cash register sound. The music mellows.]*

**Adam:** Isn't this incredible? I mean, some of the most valuable companies in America were built on the back of a government utility that we the public paid to develop. *[Chuckles.]* You know, maybe that means they shouldn't work so hard to get out of paying their taxes?

00:28:42    Sound Effect    Transition

**Businessman:** Uh-buh-buh-buh-buh-buh-buh! Um. Just so you know, my private island is a business expense, okay? It's where I dock my work yacht. It's a work yacht. Music swells and fades.

00:28:44    Jesse            Host

So, *[laughs]* what's something from the world of government that you didn't know about that you learned about and were impressed by or delighted by?

00:28:55    Adam            Guest

I mean, the GPS story is one of them. We—so, we went into it knowing a lot of—a couple of the stories that we wanted to tell. I

knew about the National Weather Service and AccuWeather, because that was covered in Michael Lewis's book. And I was like, "Alright, this is the sort of story that I'd like to tell more of." And I asked my staff of writers and researchers, "Hey! Please bring back in more stories of incredible things the government does, good and bad, that we don't know about." And one of my researchers—I believe it was Sam Roudman, wonderful man—brought in, "Did you know that the government invented and still runs the entire GPS constellation? That all of GPS is run by the federal government?"

All of GPS for the entire world, not just the United States. But if you go to Denmark, you go to China and—you know—turn on a phone, you are using the US's GPS satellites. And genuinely, I was like, "How?! Really?! How the [censored] didn't I know that already?! Like, why aren't we telling this story?" I genuinely assumed it was some sort of—you know, tech consortium that Garmin and TomTom—is that still a company?—they got together and put some satellites up. I knew how—

00:29:58    Jesse            Host  
00:30:00    Adam            Guest

They got together with the *Thomas Guide* people. Yeah! Sure! I knew how GPS worked, even! But I did not know that it was literally US government satellites that are run by what was formally the Air Force, now the Space Force runs them. We went and visited the tiny room where the ten, you know, Space Force operators run the entire GPS constellation. It's wild [censored]. And you know, it ended up being a really perfect narrative opportunity for us, because we've allowed tech companies to take all the space and to say that they did it all by themselves—to take all the credit for it. And in reality, it was something that we did together! At the very least, it was our money, or it was our elected officials making it happen.

And that's a story that we need to be telling more! But we also need to be telling the story of why it happened and the reason it happened was in order to have better missile guidance systems, in order that soldiers could find their way on the battlefield, in order so that we could kill people more easily. And when you look at—you know, that episode is full of other incredible things the government invented that we don't realize, from the computer mouse to the drone. But they did it so they could kill people more easily.

And that [censored] sucks! [Laughs.] Like, what if we—what if we devoted some of those resources to—you know, to actually facing our greatest challenges, as I say at the end of the show. What different kind of world would it be if we focused on—you know, if we took some of that money from DARPA and devoted more of it to green energy research? Which our government does! Or government is currently the biggest green energy researcher on the planet. But it's still a fraction of what we're spending on killer robots and things of that nature.

00:31:38    Jesse            Host  
00:31:46    Promo           Clip

We'll finish up with Adam Conover after a quick break. Stay with us. It's *Bullseye*, from [MaximumFun.org](https://www.maximumfun.org) and NPR.  
**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](http://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.]*

00:32:28	Music	Transition	Thumpy synth with light vocalizations.
00:32:32	Jesse	Host	You're listening to <i>Bullseye</i> . I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest is Adam Conover. He's the host of <i>Adam Ruins Everything</i> and <i>The G Word</i> .
00:32:50	Adam	Guest	One of the episodes of the show is about food. And you go to a meat processing plant. I don't know if it was a full-on abattoir. I don't know if killing was happening there. Yeah. There was killing happening there. Yeah. We did not go into those rooms or film them, because we didn't want to show that on television. But yeah, that was a full Cargill Beef Processing facility where cows come in one end and steaks and—maybe not hamburgers, but you know, processed meat comes out of the other end. They're butchering it, chopping it up into parts, and then it's going on its way into the rest of the food system.
00:33:16	Jesse	Host	It would be amazing if hamburgers came out one end. Like, they just—at the very end, there was a McDonald's.
00:33:22	Adam	Guest	<i>[Laughs.]</i> It's pretty—it's pretty wild stuff! Yeah.
00:33:27	Jesse	Host	Like a McDonald's factory store kind of situation.
00:33:31	Adam	Guest	<i>[Laughs.]</i> I mean, there are, you know—independent meat processing plants around the country you can go to that do do that. And we visited one that didn't make it to air. But yeah, we were the first camera crew allowed in one of these Cargill facilities in decades, because they're completely locked down to media because of—you know—how many times PETA or other animal activists have tried to sneak in there with cameras. They don't wanna show people what happens in those places. And it was

really a dubious honor, but an honor to be able to like bring that to people and show them, “Yeah, here’s what *[censored]* happens in these places.”

00:34:08    Jesse            Host

One of the reasons that I have never looked inside a slaughterhouse is that I like eating meat and I don’t want the responsibility.

*[Adam agrees.]*

Learning about things can expose you to responsibility that can be paralyzing. It can open you to accusations of hypocrisy. Which is, on the internet, probably the worst thing you can be accused of. There is a lot of baggage that comes with knowing difficult to know things. How do you deal with that in your own life? And how do you deal with it when you’re—you know, in part offering it to other people as entertainment?

00:34:52    Adam            Guest

For my own—man, that’s a very good question, Jesse. Uh. For my own part, I just try to know the things I know, and I try to not forget them. And I think that’s the most important thing to say of people. The example that I use a lot is like, look, I don’t wanna tell you whether or not you shouldn’t watch *Annie Hall*. I don’t wanna tell you how you should feel about that movie. Some people, it’s one of their favorite movies. I do think I would suggest that when you watch *Annie Hall*, you also know the other half. You also know the other thing, and you think about it when you’re watching the movie, and you don’t try to deny it or say it didn’t happen or etc., etc.. You say—you hold those two things together, and you allow them to influence each other.

I think that’s what it means to be a responsible person. And I don’t need to make a conclusion for you about what I think you should do as the result of that. I don’t think we need to take the movie off the shelves, but if someone chooses to take the movie off the shelves because they know about it and they’re like, “You know what? I don’t wanna sell this in my *[censored]* Blockbuster—in the last Blockbuster in Alaska, wherever it is.” I say, well good! Then you made a decision based on you holding those two things next to each other.

If someone wants to have that understanding of the meat industry and say, “Well, okay, I’m gonna become a vegan as a result.” I’m like okay! That’s good! You made your decision. Great. I don’t think you should be under the illusion that that’s the end-all-be-all of your responsibility that you’ve done that. I personally think that my responsibility is deeper than just changing my individual behavior. I think that my responsibility is to dismantle the systems that cause all of that pain and death, and that’s a much larger project. But that’s my own view of my own responsibility. I don’t wanna go around telling people what their responsibility is, other than to—once they’ve heard the information—just to *[censored]* know it and have it as part of themselves, and be thinking, reasoning, empathetic people who care about it.

And beyond that, I think that’s—you know, any conversation we can have after we’re all in the same basis of knowing the difficult thing is gonna be better than the conversation that we have when we either

are ignorant of it or when we are trying to push it out of our minds. And I think that's the most important thing that we don't do. "Ah, it doesn't really matter. Ah, it's not that big a deal. The cows are fine." You know? Well, I don't know that they are, man. I'm not saying you have to stop eating meat, just like—you know, I went and looked, and I brought a camera crew. So, you can look at the segment and come to your own conclusion, or you can decide that you're gonna push that to the side. And I don't think that you should. I think that you should try to know what you know.

00:37:30	Jesse	Host	Adam Conover, thanks so much for taking the time to be on <i>Bullseye</i> .
00:37:33	Adam	Guest	Is this the end?

*[Jesse confirms.]*

00:37:38	Jesse	Host	Okay. Thanks for having me. <i>[Cackles and struggles for words.]</i>
00:37:40	Adam	Guest	It's all over now, baby.
00:37:41	Jesse	Host	That could have been the beginning!
			This is it. This is the end in the grand sense. We're done. We got like five more minutes, and then ffs!
00:37:48	Adam	Guest	Oh, is there a meteor coming? Is that what you're saying?
00:37:50	Jesse	Host	Nuclear holocaust. We're in a—we're—
00:37:53	Adam	Guest	Oh my gosh.
00:37:54	Jesse	Host	We're in a proxy war with a nuclear power. Like, it's done!

*[They chuckle.]*

Adam Conover. His latest TV show is called *The G Word*. It's streaming right now on Netflix. A lot to be learned and a lot of laughs to be had. *Adam Ruins Everything*, his previous show, is also great, also worth checking out.

00:38:16	Music	Transition	Bright synth with a steady beat.
00:38:18	Jesse	Host	That's the end of another episode of <i>Bullseye</i> . <i>Bullseye</i> , created from the homes me and the staff of Maximum Fun, in and around greater Los Angeles, California. Sitting right now in my home office in Lincoln Heights, basically. And my producer, Kevin, is in his apartment in Highland Park, just a few miles down the road. And he keeps turning on his Zoom camera while he's holding his cat, Wayne, in an apparent effort to distract me.

Our show is produced by speaking into microphones. Our senior producer is Kevin Ferguson. Wayne is his cat. Our producers are Jesus Ambrosio and Richard Robey. Our production fellow at Maximum Fun is Tabatha Myers. We get booking help from Mara Davis. Our interstitial music is by Dan Wally, also known as DJW. Our theme music is by The Go! Team. It's called "Huddle Formation". Our thanks to The Go! Team for sharing it with us, along with their label, Memphis Industries.

*Bullseye* is also on YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook. You can find us there and give us a follow and we will share with you all of our interviews. And that's about it. Just remember: all great radio hosts have a signature signoff.

00:39:28	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.
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*[Music fades out.]*