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| 00:00:00 | Music | Transition | Gentle, trilling music with a steady drumbeat plays under the dialogue. |
| 00:00:01 | Promo | Promo | Speaker: <i>Bullseye with Jesse Thorn</i> is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR. |
| 00:00:13 | Music | Transition | [Music fades out.] “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. |
| 00:00:16 | Jesse Thorn | Host | It’s <i>Bullseye</i> . I’m Jesse Thorn. My first guest this week is Jason Woliner. Jason is a director, mainly. He was the behind the camera member of the sketch group Human Giant, alongside performers Paul Scheer, Aziz Ansari, and Rob Huebel. Jason directed episodes of <i>Parks and Rec</i> , <i>Nathan For You</i> , and <i>The Last Man on Earth</i> . And in 2020, he directed his first major motion picture: <i>Borat Subsequent Moviefilm</i> —one of the biggest comedies of the decade so far. It was a sequel that improbably lived up to the original <i>Borat</i> . Pretty incredible. I’ll talk to Jason about that. |
| <p>But that’s not really why Jason Woliner is coming on <i>Bullseye</i> today. For the last ten years of his life, Jason has been working on a different project. It started when he got a tweet from a guy who called himself Paul T. Goldman. Paul, according to his telling, had really been through it. A sham marriage, a bitter divorce, a private investigation that—again, this is according to Paul—uncovered a massive human trafficking ring. It’s extraordinary, unbelievable stuff. So extraordinary that Paul T. Goldman wrote a book about it. Then, he wrote a screenplay for an action film based on the book. Then—as I said—he tweeted at my guest, Jason Woliner.</p> <p>Actually, he tweeted at literally hundreds of people who work in Hollywood, but my guest—Jason Woliner—followed up. The two of them met. They talked about Paul’s story, ways to make his movie a reality, and Jason almost immediately started rolling tape. Long story short, ten years later, we have the finished product. It’s a TV show, not a movie. It’s called <i>Paul T. Goldman</i>. Over six episodes, Paul tells us about his marriage to a woman named Audrey who turned out to have a kind of double life. With Jason directing and very gifted professional actors, Paul acts out scenes from his screenplay. He plays himself. Scenes based on that marriage, but not always—well, not always portrayed exactly as they happened.</p> <p><i>Paul T. Goldman</i> is a six-part series about—well, it’s about Paul T. Goldman. It’s streaming right now, on Peacock. It’s about Goldman’s harrowing, strange search for companionship. It’s about his quest to share his story with the world. It’s about what it means when that story isn’t necessarily backed up by the facts. And it’s about Paul’s relationship with Jason. This is a scene from the first episode. As I said before, a lot of the show is about Paul’s marriage to a woman he calls Audrey. The two of them met on an online dating site in 2006. They dated for about three months before Paul asked her to marry him. Her answer was yes, but there were conditions.</p> | | | |
| 00:03:28 | Sound Effect | Transition | Music swells and fades. |
| 00:03:29 | Clip | Clip | Music: Dreamy orchestral music. |

Paul (Paul T. Goldman): Audrey kept on telling me that this was her forever marriage!

[Fireworks sounds.]

Audrey: This will be my forever marriage.

Paul: So, we were married.

Music: “Bridal Chorus” by Wagner played on an organ.

Paul: Under the condition that it was a part-time marriage.

[Music cuts out abruptly.]

Speaker: What is a part-time marriage?

Music: Whimsical string music.

Paul: I know what you’re thinking. Who would accept a part-time marriage?! [Chuckling.] Well, I would. And I did! Why? You know, a 92-year-old grandmother, I knew that sooner or later it would become a full-time marriage. I was looking long-term for the rest of my life.

00:04:01 Sound Effect Transition

Music swells and fades.

00:04:02 Jesse Host
00:04:05 Jason Guest

Jason Woliner, welcome back to *Bullseye*. It’s nice to see you. Thanks, Jesse. It’s great to see you. It’s so great to be back.

00:04:08 Jesse Host

Paul T. Goldman, not exactly his real name—but Paul tweeted at you? Why did you click on a link that he sent you?

00:04:18 Jason Guest

That’s a question I’ve been trying to figure out for [chuckles] the last ten years! No, that was 2012. Twitter was a different thing. You know, way before Musk. It was pre-Trump. It was before Twitter became what it did. It was just a lot of goofiness and bits and jokes, and it really felt like just a small group of people making each other laugh. Or trying to make each other laugh. And I would just go down rabbit holes. And so, he tweeted at me—basically, yeah, I got a tweet from this person I didn’t know calling himself Paul T. Goldman. And he said, “I have an incredible story to tell. I wrote a book. I wrote a screenplay. The screenplay’s all written. Go to my website—” Which at the time was DuplicityOnline.com. The book’s called *Duplicity*. “And find out more.”

00:05:23 Jesse Host
00:05:25 Jason Guest

And so, I clicked it. And on the website, he had a video that he had shot himself. Which is—I believe that is still on YouTube. And I just became very fascinated with him and his personality, wanted to know more. Then, I read his book. I kind of devoured his book and became fully obsessed and did not let go until now. [Chuckles.]

So, have you actually let go?

No. No, I’m still very much talking to Paul almost every day. This show started airing—the first three came out New Year’s Day this year, and the last one came out on January 22nd. So, I’m now kind of in this process of trying to reclaim my brain, because it’s been 100% Paul T. Goldman for the last year. And kind of in an ambient

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| 00:05:54 | Jesse | Host | way for the last ten years. [Chuckles.] But very intensely—yeah, trying to pick up the pieces of what’s left of me. First of all, all credit to him for being one of the last holdouts on adding “online” into a URL. |
| 00:06:01 | Jason | Guest | [Laughs.] It’s true. Not a lot of people give him credit for that. |
| 00:06:05 | Jesse | Host | And “my duplicity” would’ve sounded bad, so I can understand why he didn’t go—“iDuplicity” would be another thing he could— |
| 00:06:16 | Jason | Guest | What did you think you were clicking on when you clicked on it? You know, I was just like well, what is this? Is this person crazy? Is this just—you know—someone who’s delusional? I thought he was very interesting and funny and—I mean, what got me right away was he was telling a very dark and clearly sad story about a marriage gone wrong and a person he said betrayed him. And then, what he had described as uncovering a—you know, international crime ring that his ex was running and his mission to take down the ring. So, it’s like this very serious—you know—often upsetting story, but he himself was very almost cartoony and just very light and very friendly. And also—you know, in some ways this kind of caricature of like a nebbishy, you know, Jewish guy. And so, you had these two things that were in contrast to one another, and I was just curious. I thought—you know, for whatever reason, it connected with something in me that I had to see what was there. And part of the process is, you know, going from—examining this person who at first does come off very cartoony, very caricaturey, and then trying to determine—you know—well, what’s behind that? What’s underneath that? Who’s the real person there? And look at all sides of it. |
| 00:07:33 | Jesse | Host | There’s a scene in the movie where you’re trying to convince him not to smile as he acts in a very serious scene. It’s hard for him. |
| 00:07:42 | Sound Effect | Transition | Music swells and fades. |
| 00:07:43 | Clip | Clip | Jason: Okay, let’s go again right away. Now, Paul. Paul: Yes? Jason: I think your impulse is to smile. Paul: Yeah. Jason: I think this scene will play better without smiling at all, because you’re finding out shocking information. Paul: Oh! Okay. Jason: So, it’s still playing a little bit too light, I think. Unless you were smiling while you met him, but I feel—I always pictured it— Paul: No, I don’t think so. No. Jason: Yeah, so I would imagine you to be kind of annoyed and upset in this. Let’s try to do it very seriously. Paul: Okay. Okay. |

Jason: Great. And remember, Paul, very serious. Look upset. Action.

Music: Dramatic string music.

Paul: It's good to meet you, Bob. I wanted to ask you right off. [Sighs.] How long were you married to Audrey?

Bob: We were only married four months.

Paul: Four months?!

Bob: Couldn't take her lies anymore. After two months of marriage, she asked me to put her name on all my assets.

[Cutlery clatters.]

Paul: Oh, just—[chuckling] sorry. Sorry.

Jason: [Inaudible], Paul. Watch it, watch it. And action. Music swells and fades.

00:08:47 Sound Effect Transition

00:08:48 Jason Guest

Yes! That was the pilot. That was from a pilot that we shot for Hulu in 2017. That's most of the first episode. And you know, he was excited to be on set. [Laughs.] And it's exciting—you know, he had come from—he had no Hollywood background, and really he had just been tweeting and people. And I had been kind of working with him for years at that point to get this made, and we were finally on set. And I'd never intended to be in it. I was really opposed to being in it for many years, working on this. I said I would be a voice in the background or something like that. I didn't want the attention to be on me. I wanted it to be clear—you know.

I like documentaries where the filmmaker has a presence but maybe isn't fully on camera, necessarily. I like some stuff where people are on camera too, but for this project I wanted to just kind of be guiding it. And then—but I told the camera operators on set, "Just roll all the time. Just get everything. Get behind the scenes. Get the scenes. We'll get the whole process. And so, I wasn't—when I came over and I saw he was smiling and he's getting shocking news in this scene, I saw he couldn't really stop smiling, 'cause he was so kind of giddy to be onset. And that was purely just, you know, trying to direct a better performance out of him.

And when we were editing the show, the editor—Mike Giambra, who edited the pilot—put that in. And I was like, "Oh, I don't wanna be in this." And we looked at it again, and it became maybe an interesting thing where if you watch this and clearly some of it is being played for laughs and the awkwardness of a real person who is not a professional actor, not a professional writer, starring in this thing—these scenes that he wrote about his life and with real actors and with real production value. And if you were laughing at that in the beginning or thinking that this is kind of like a pranky thing or about humiliating this guy, to watch the director person come in at the end and see, oh no, he's trying to get a better performance out

of him. This is not about humiliating this guy. It's not just kind of a pranky thing.

I kind of had to admit, "Oh, that does add a layer that I do want." I do want people to understand I'm really—it's not—for me, it was never about just laughing at this guy. Of course, I knew elements of it were funny, but I was always aiming for something more interesting than that.

00:10:58 Jesse Host

Let's talk about the story that he told. So, before you decide that maybe you wanna try and get some money to make a movie with this guy, you read his self-published book, *Duplicity*. What are the sort of broad outlines of the story that he tells in this book that he claims is the real story of some wild events in his life?

00:11:26 Jason Guest

The story of Paul's book, *Duplicity: A True Story of Crime and Deceit*—it's a self-published book that he—

00:11:32 Jesse Host

First of all, thank you for restating the question in your response.

[Jason laughs.]

00:11:39 Jason Guest

Now we can use it in our documentary.

So, the book is about—he is a 40-year-old. Or actually, he's 44 years old. He's a single dad from a first marriage that we get into in the show. And he's raising his son, and he decided that he feels like the son needs a mother. The son's mother is alive. She's a doctor and Paul had custody of his son, Johnny, at the time. And meets and marries a woman after a very brief courtship, despite a lot of red flags that he details. And then, a few months into the marriage—which is a part-time marriage, as she calls it, where she says she's visiting her sick grandmother for four days out of the week. The family is paying her to take care of this grandmother for four days out of the week.

And then, Paul comes to discover that she was scamming him out of money through a fraudulent—like a shell company and asked him to write checks that he thought were going to health insurance. And kind of unwinds this thing and finds out that she had this whole very elaborate double life. And then, through the evidence that he uncovers in their divorce trail discovery period, comes to believe a lot of other stuff about—basically that she was running like an escort service and then, ultimately, like a human trafficking ring with her boyfriend that Paul discovered. And so, he writes this book about his—what he said, "Read my book and find out—you know—about my efforts to take down this crime ring."

And so, I read the book, and every chapter would—you know, would end with, "I just knew I had to take down the whole damn ring." [Chuckles.] And I got to the end, and he hadn't done it yet. And I think he just wanted to put the book out. A lot of it's about the divorce trial. He got to keep his houses. And I just—I observed him for a few months, because I just became obsessed with his voice of the book, and the kind of disconnect often between what he thought was the most interesting or important part of the story and what I was responding to most or the subtext I would see in the story of his choices and his personality and what he chose to see as a red flag versus what I thought were actual red flags. [Chuckles.] And—

00:13:51 Jesse Host

What's an example of that?

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| 00:13:53 | Jason | Guest | Um—oh, jeez, like [chuckles] like she—I mean, it’s in the first episode that she orders octopus at a restaurant, and he’s like, “Well, that’s very curious. I’ve never heard of anyone to order octopus before.” And so, that to me—you know, to him, it was like well, this is a mysterious person. And to me, it’s like that’s more interesting about Paul that he had never heard of anyone ordering octopus before. Maybe, you know, it’s like living in New York and LA where I’ve lived, it’s like, oh, that’s a very common thing that people eat in restaurants. And so, there were things like that that he thought were interesting, and I would see in a way. Or like, I think that is interesting! But interesting in a way that it reveals really something more about Paul than the story he was essentially telling. |
| 00:14:40 | Jesse | Host | We’ve got more to get into with Jason Woliner, including his work on <i>Borat Subsequent Moviefilm</i> and the several times he had a gun pulled on him onset. Comedy! It’s risky business. It’s <i>Bullseye</i> , from MaximumFun.org and NPR. |
| 00:14:56 | Music | Transition | Thumpy synth with light vocalizations. |
| 00:15:01 | Jesse | Host | Welcome back to <i>Bullseye</i> . I’m Jesse Thorn. If you’re just joining us, I’m talking with Jason Woliner. Jason is a director. He’s worked on TV shows like <i>Parks and Recreation</i> , <i>Saturday Night Live</i> , and <i>Human Giant</i> . He directed the Academy award nominated comedy, <i>Borat Subsequent Moviefilm</i> . His latest project is called <i>Paul T. Goldman</i> . It’s an absolutely bonkers documentary series about a man who calls himself Paul T. Goldman. |
| | | | Goldman claims, among many other things, that his former wife stole money from him and ran a human trafficking ring. In some ways, it’s a true crime documentary, but there are generous helpings of Errol Morris and Werner Herzog. In fact, it’s as much a commentary on true crime documentaries as it is one. <i>Paul T. Goldman</i> is streaming now on Peacock. Let’s get into the rest of my interview with director Jason Woliner. |
| | | | You’ve been working on this movie for ten years. When you started a decade ago, did you have a plan or a rubric or an idea in your head of what would be the way to make this—to put this on film, morally? |
| 00:16:23 | Jason | Guest | Yeah, I wanted to make sure that Paul was onboard with the process the entire time by the time we were shooting. So, when I met him, first I was thinking, “Well, it’s a funny premise to just do as a written movie. It’s kind of a goofball trying to take down a crime ring.” [Chuckles.] |
| 00:16:43 | Jesse | Host | ‘Cause he had a—he had a feature film script that was adapted from his book. |
| 00:16:48 | Jason | Guest | Yes. So, he basically wrote this book and then he adapted that into a feature script, and then he changed some scenes and added some scenes. He wrote some scenes that he wasn’t there for to add some intrigue and wrote a cliffhanger ending, which we get into in the show. And you know, I wasn’t gonna option—so, I wound up contacting him about four months maybe after. I was quietly watching him for a while to try to get a sense of who he was and make sure this wasn’t a person who was dangerous or who was mentally ill in a way that—you know, that would make this project predatory and too sad. And I just found myself arriving at that Paul was in this sweet spot. You know? His self-awareness is different, I |

would say—in terms of guilelessness or what have you. But I felt like he was—he can make the decision whether or not he wanted to participate in this. And so, I contacted him. I began a relationship with him. I filmed him at first. We started trying to get money for the film.

Early on, I realized more than the story itself, Paul was the story. I was very compelled and fascinated by this person. And I felt like, oh, I need him in it in some way. And I thought, you know, the best way to do this is to kind of—to be able to take a camera inside Paul's mind would be to have him in these scenes and act in them and, you know, be able to kind of experience his writing and also allow him to kind of lead us through it. But yeah, I didn't wanna do it ever in a way that felt like a prank, felt meanspirited. And so, I didn't tell him that for a couple of years. And we just basically kept trying to get money and kept trying to get it going and brought him out to LA to do auditions with real actors. And it was partly for me kind of. I hadn't said this to him yet, but to see well, what would it be like if you put Paul with real actors? And if good actors—great actors—could deliver his kind of unpolished material and not try to play it for laughs, and just try to make it good and elevated just through performance. And then, you have Paul in the scene with them knowing that you're watching the person who wrote this—that he's depicting his version of how he wants his life presented, I thought that could be interesting.

And while we were doing it, Paul arrived on his own at—he started talking to the camera in the middle of a take. And then he looked at me and he was like, "What do you think? Do you like that?" I was like yes, that's great! I mean, I always just wanted to kind of follow his lead. And then, he said—you know, "Maybe I could play Paul." I think, you know, he was half joking. He knew he was not an actor. But it was at that point where I was like yes! I think—I do think actually that would be the best version of this. And so, you know, by the time we were shooting this pilot for Hulu in 2017, he was—you know—very aware of that this would be ultimately a documentary project, including his scenes and including behind the scenes of the production of the show and—you know—interviews, true crime style interviews. And he loved that idea. We just always talked about how interesting it was and different it was. And yeah, I just wanted to make sure. You know, of course, at the end of the day—and the show kind of gets to this towards the end.

There are—there were always gonna be choices that I was gonna make in the edit that wouldn't be what Paul made, in terms of moments I thought were most interesting, sometimes funny, sometimes disturbing, sometimes very sad. I always knew I was editing this show, and that was gonna be the disconnect. We always knew what show we were making. Paul was always onboard with that. That was the one thing where I knew he wouldn't have made all the same choices that I made.

00:20:15 Jesse Host

It must have been weird, over the course of the ten years that you made this—even just in the few years between when you made a pilot of it and when you made the rest of the series. The ways that A) the form became such a monumental dominant form in media—this way of telling true crime stories. Right? Obviously, they don't

usually have the kind of fully scripted reenactments that are in this, necessarily. But like they have a lot in common.

[Jason agrees.]

And then also, that compulsive narrative making to the point of self-delusion changed like the actual arc of history. You know what I mean?

[Jason agrees with a chuckle.]

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| 00:21:16 | Jason | Guest | In really terrifying ways. Yes. I mean, so much became relevant as I was trying to make this. Even—you know, I was doing this before Trump. And then, what Paul was doing—in terms of, you know, he walked into a bad situation and then he was like, “Well, that’s my thing now. I’m that guy.” And he went out to—you know, just push himself. But this was before influencer culture. This was before the like—you know, currency of attention became the most important thing! And I just I said, “What is this guy doing?” It’s like, oh, now I’m seeing millions of people do a similar thing—just pushing themselves, just branding themselves, being like, “This is my thing. This is who I am, and this is how I’m gonna make it.” And at the same time, you had true crime. I was worried is there gonna be true crime fatigue by the time I can ever finish this? Is there gonna be con artist fatigue? We saw that in the last two years, just everything was a con artist. |
| 00:22:33 | Jesse | Host | I think this show is different enough that, thankfully, people have seen it as more of a comment on that stuff than another—just another one of those things. Even Q Anon, everything like that—sex trafficking being [inaudible] from kind of conspiracy-minded people. So much about this wound up becoming a very big deal in the time that I was working on it. I think it was just luck and instinct, maybe. Bad luck, possibly? |
| 00:22:35 | Jason | Guest | [They laugh.] Well, bad luck for the world! Good luck for me! |
| 00:22:45 | Jesse | Host | [They laugh.] Good luck for this project that it became more and more relevant as the world got crazier. Yeah. A big part of the show is the context provided by the professional actors who act with Paul as they grapple with who he is, what’s going on. And it’s not like you’ve tricked them or anything, it’s just they’re in this crazy situation. And early on in the show, there’s—one of these actors says it’s like acting with a child. And you just kind of have to show them which way to—you know. And you were a child actor, Jason. |
| 00:23:36 | Jason | Guest | [Jason confirms with a laugh.] I don’t think I need to tell you that. And you must’ve been aware of that when you decided to put that remark into the show. |
| 00:23:38 | Jesse | Host | I hadn’t thought of that until this moment, actually. That’s not true. |

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| 00:23:39 | Jason | Guest | That's true! Yeah! |
| 00:23:40 | Jesse | Host | That's not true. For real? |
| 00:23:41 | Jason | Guest | That's really funny. Yeah! Yeah. No, you're—that's—I hadn't made that connection. |
| 00:23:46 | Jesse | Host | Because I read you in five interviews about this show bring up the fact that you really—one of the reasons you really were uncomfortable putting yourself in front of the camera as part of this show was that you were all in front of the camera-ed out from being a child actor. Like, I know that that is not far from who you are. |
| 00:24:08 | Jason | Guest | Yeah, I've really hid as best I could when I stopped acting. I acted from when I was about 4 to when I was about 12. And I hit puberty, got awkward, became very self-conscious, didn't wanna do it anymore. My parents were never stage parents. They were like, "Great, yeah. If it's not fun, let's move on." And then, I started making things professionally. You know, my mid-20s, I was able to start earning a living doing this. But when I did, you know, I was in—I did work with this sketch group, Human Giant, and was technically the fourth member. I was never in the show. I was never on camera. |

And you know, anything else really just tried to hide as best I could. And yeah, I assume that's because I didn't—I just had done enough. This thing—at a certain point, it demanded that I be in it, as much as I resisted. It became clear that the story of us trying to get this thing made was as much a part of the story as anything else that happened in Paul's life. But I never connected before just now that [chuckling] that—you know, that line a guest actor compares Paul to a child. I mean, we put that line in there—you know, some stuff like that, when you see an actor kind of talking about the scene, those are in there almost to provide like a little bit of release to the audience. The show is so uncomfortable to watch—more so than even I was expecting for people.

I like that kind of stuff, but a lot of people—it's kind of an intense experience. [Chuckles.] And so, any time someone can literally appear onscreen and tell you—it just kind of helps shape the tone, tell you how to feel about a moment, tell you oh, it's okay to laugh at this or—you know—this is in a good spirit or frame it as, you know, he's—oh, the other people on set like him! He's childlike. And that's—this guy's charmed by that and whatever. That's why, you know, I thought I put that moment in there. But maybe—I'm sure you're right, though! [Laughs.]

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| 00:25:59 | Jesse | Host | Yeah, I mean, I'll tell you what I was thinking about when I saw that knowing—having been sent by my producer a clip of you talking to Ringo Starr on <i>Shining Time Station</i> —what it made me wonder was does Jason have a particular understanding that other people might not have, or a particular connection that people might not otherwise have to someone who wants to be there, chose to be there, is excited to be there, is doing their best, but also is guileless and different from the other professionals who are there? |
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| 00:26:49 | Jason | Guest | Oh my god, yeah, I think you nailed it! [Laughs.] I never thought of it in those terms before, but yeah. I mean, that is—that was my experience. And you—I feel very lucky that I got out of being a child actor without being screwed up the way—you know, just having a very hard path ahead of me. I think, you know, I was lucky enough to not become famous or ever recognizable. I was very close on a |
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lot of big movies, so they say, but—you know—I was in this movie, *Weekend at Bernie's*. I was in the show *Shining Time Station* with this magical train station with Ringo Starr. I acted in a Broadway play. So, I got to do a lot and it was very exciting. But the whole time, people were telling me—you know—be careful. You don't wanna get too famous, 'cause child actors are all messed up!

And I do think—yeah, I mean, it absolutely shaped my personality, in terms of like the reward system of having grownups clap for you. I think it's terrible! [Laughs.] I think kids should all be CGI in movies at this point. Kids—children should not have jobs. Kids should not have jobs. It's terrible to do that to a kid. Even the positive reinforcement you get I think skews you quite a bit—of being the center of attention of these people in a position of power above you. Even saying you did a great job, but especially when you don't do a great job, those feelings I think are very harmful. [Laughs.] And so, I feel very fortunate I feel—you know—mentally fine.

But that's so interesting, 'cause it is a similar situation that I put—you know—Paul in, in terms of—yeah, it was the most exciting thing that's ever happened. It's 80 people standing around you. You're the center of attention. And you have no control over what happens after that and how your image is used. And you know, even when people had the best intentions—and I really tried to protect Paul and show him fairly, good and bad. But it's a level of powerlessness that—you know, all actors have to an extent, but especially child performers.

00:28:54 Jesse Host

You directed *Borat Subsequent Moviefilm*, the sequel to *Borat*. I thought it was great. I thought it was hilarious.

[Jason thanks him.]

When you go in to have a meeting with Sacha Baron Cohen and the other people who are the bosses of *Borat*, I guess is how I wanna say it.

[Jason laughs and agrees.]

00:29:30 Jason Guest
00:29:33 Jesse Host
00:29:34 Jason Guest
00:29:38 Jesse Host
00:29:42 Jason Guest

Did they have a rubric for what is okay to do in the interest of making *Borat* a funny movie?

Okay morally? Legally? Or—?

Either one.

Legally, everything is—they don't do anything illegal. [Laughs.]

[Chuckling.] Legally, everything's tight. Morally? Eh?

And morally, a lot of it was about—you know, and that was part of I think what I came in and pushed, is to not just be attacking people, to be finding real people in the movie like what wound up being the babysitter or even the two conspiracy guys, Jim and Jerry, where we could use real people in a way that he hadn't done before that felt fresh that was more about showing the humanity in people and less about just, you know, here's a person who believes this. Let's humiliate or attack them.

And then, when it's someone like Rudy that has—you know—brought evil into the world [laughs], then that's fine. But it's always a consideration about punching down or—you know, what are we

saying with this scene? And you know, I spent months and months in the writers' room. And all these—you know, every big idea would just—we would go over again and again, well what are we saying? What are we doing here? Who are we attacking here? What's the target here? And really just trying to figure out, you know, making sure we were able to justify what we were doing. And then, legally, it's—yeah, he's got the best First Amendment lawyer in the world, and it's just rock solid. You know, there was a lot of running from cops and running from people who wanted to beat me up. Because they would always get Sacha and Marie out first, and then I would be left in the—you know, historic home in Macon, Georgia, after the debutante ball went really bad for them.

[Chuckling.] You know, it went great for us—exactly what we wanted to happen. But there were some very angry debutante dads, very drunk and coming to beat me up. And always calling the cops. And you know, at gun rallies, people pulled guns out on us. You know? There was no—I mean, we had security, but it was very chaotic. At the same time, what kept a pit in my stomach for that year and a half was the idea of having worked on a disappointing sequel to *Borat*. That was more stressful to me, of just like is this working? Is this funny? Is this gonna work? Yeah, that was the thing that kept me up at night. So, no, I was very happy when people liked it.

00:31:36 Jesse Host It was such a scary world that you made that film in and particularly that you released it in.

[Jason agrees with a laugh.]

And that really colored—it certainly colored the way I experienced the movie. Like, the difference between how comfortable it was to be mad at the rodeo guy in the first movie, who's Islamophobic. Right? Like, he feels so inconsequential and relatively powerless. Obviously, Islamophobia, very powerful in this country. But like you're just like, "Well, this is some jerk that's at this rodeo." And when Borat is onstage at a like—you know, borderline Unite the Right rally, it's a lot more stomach-turning.

00:32:36 Jason Guest I mean, it was such a heightened, dark time. And it's a totally different situation when that viewpoint is being espoused from the top versus—you know—the first *Borat* that Larry Charles directed, a lot of the content, like the moment you mentioned, was shocking for people. Because people had never seen anyone speak like that guy or a lot of the people in that movie. It's a different situation 14 years later, where those views are being espoused by the people in power freely, and without shame! [Laughs.] And so, it was a much scarier vibe. That's why Sacha speaks about how he—why he thought he had to bring the character back. It was because of Trump, because of what America kind of had become that it became just more heightened almost than the jokes in the first movie. You couldn't—yeah, just the disconnect between the two worlds is shocking, yeah.

00:33:34 Jesse Host We have to go for a quick break. When we come back, we'll wrap up with Jason Woliner. Stick around. It's *Bullseye*, from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

00:33:44 Promo Clip **Music:** Dramatic synth.

Andrew Reich: [Dramatically.] Since the dawn of time, man has dreamed of bringing life back from the dead. From Orpheus and Eurydice to Frankenstein’s monster, resurrection has long been merely the stuff of myth, fiction, and fairytale. Until now!

[Record scratch.]

Actually, we still can’t bring people back from the dead.

[The music turns upbeat and brassy.]

[Chuckling.] That would be crazy! But *The Dead Pilots Society* podcast has found a way to resurrect great dead comedy podcasts from Hollywood’s finest writers. Every month, *Dead Pilots Society* brings you a reading of a comedy pilot that was sold and developed, but never produced, performed by the funniest actors from film and television. How does *Dead Pilots Society* achieve this miracle? The answer can only be found at MaximumFun.org.

[Music fades out.]

00:34:25 Music Transition
00:34:30 Jesse Host

Chiming synth with a steady beat.
I’m Jesse Thorn. You’re listening to *Bullseye*. My guest, Jason Woliner, directed *Borat Subsequent Moviefilm* and the new documentary series *Paul T. Goldman*, streaming now on Peacock.

The first *Borat* was one of the most successful comedy films ever made, artistically and commercially.

[They chuckle.]

And relied upon people not knowing who Borat was. How often was shooting something for this new *Borat* film ruined because of the fact that everyone on Earth, except maybe Rudolph Giuliani, knows who Borat is?

00:35:11 Jason Guest

There’s very few scenes in the movie where he’s fully in public looking like Borat. The one where he gets recognized was the very last thing we shot, and that was—yeah, that was probably about a month before it came out. And that was—we knew that was what we wanted the scene to be. We wanted to kind of acknowledge that we’re going out in the world with this very famous character. And so, those were all real people who we just put in him on a street and let him get recognized and ran away.

Otherwise, there is a very—you know, we never wanted anyone playing along, ‘cause the whole thing doesn’t work if people know that they’re in a scene with a comedic character. [Laughs.] And so, there’s a very, very intense and invisible and proprietary system that the field team—or the people who go out in the world and find these real people that are in the show—do to invisibly make sure. All these psychological techniques, all this kind of secret stuff that they do to kind of assess whether or not the people we’re gonna be shooting with knows who Borat is. And most of those scenes are very contained in rooms and such like that, so we can—you know—bring him in and shoot a scene with someone we’ve determined doesn’t know him. And there are people out there!

We were surprised, eventually. You know, we found a lot of people that didn't know who Borat was. And you know, still, you would get there sometimes—a few times, people would see him in person, and something would go off or something would click, and then we would have to—you know—figure out a way out of that situation and do it in a way that it didn't blow the whole thing. But what we determined—and part of the reason it took a year and a half to shoot, besides covid, besides everything—is it was very hard to find people who didn't know Borat and were the right type of person to shoot with. Because you don't want to shoot with people who you just feel bad for, who are poor, who are—just seem, you know, low intelligence or, you know, you're picking on. So, it had to be people with a sense of, you know, self-assuredness and people who were smart and, you know, people who were on camera. And also, people who were the type of people who we wanted to film these scenes.

We had ideas we wanted to—oh, get her a makeover or we wanted to find a woman who could babysit her. You know, these were all ideas that we had going in, and we had to find people that matched those descriptions, were good on camera, had—you know—confidence. We're not gonna be feeling like you were picking on them. And who had never heard of Borat. So, I think what we found is like one out of—and were willing to be on camera in this, you know, weird documentary project that a stranger approached them about. I think it was like 1 out of 1000 people fit the bill. So, that's part of why it took quite a while to shoot that movie.

00:38:00 Jesse Host

You also billed the movie around a character and his daughter that people don't immediately recognize. But then, you're locked into—you have to find somebody who is both not recognizable and so good at doing this weird thing that they can do it alongside Sacha Baron Cohen and have it not just seem pathetic.

00:38:26 Jason Guest

Yes. Yeah. Maria was a miracle find. And that was someone—yeah, I watched hundreds and hundreds of audition tapes and had to really carefully watch each one, because I didn't wanna miss if we found the one. And she had taped herself, you know, in an attic in the middle of the night—I think right after she had graduated from acting school—and sent it in. She was in Bulgaria. And I watched it, and I thought, yeah, I think there's something here. And then, we kind of—Ant, Sacha's main writer of that movie watched it with me. And we were like, "Yeah, yeah, she's good. She's good. Now we have to go kind of show him and sell it to him." And then we did a lot of testing in the real world.

We flew to London and met her there and tested her with real people. We did that with other actresses, as well. There was months of that, yeah. And we—you know, there were other contenders, really funny actresses. But you know, from more of an American improv background doing an accent. And yeah, if there's one false moment, then—you know, people are smart. We're filming with smart people. They say, "What is this, a joke?" You know. If you say one line that sounds like a joke, like a written joke, people know. And so, yeah, Maria was really one in a million.

00:39:41 Jesse Host

Do you like to watch discomfort because you, yourself, are comfortable enough to watch it? Or because you need to see something that reflects your own discomfort?

00:39:57 Jason Guest I think B, yeah. I'm a deeply uncomfortable, self-conscious person. It's why—yeah, I didn't wanna be in the show. I think most conversations—not this one; this has been lovely. But a lot of times, I'll just be so panicked thinking about what I'm gonna say next that I stop listening to the person talking to me. [Laughs.] And then, I'm really lost. So, yeah, I think I experience a lot of discomfort in my day-to-day, and I think that's funny and interesting. [Laughs.] And I wanna make everyone else experience it as well.

00:40:33 Jesse Host You've managed to stay locked into me substantially by talking to me while looking over here to my left, your right.

00:40:40 Jason Guest [They laugh.]
Someone—does anyone—do people generally maintain eye contact with you?

00:40:44 Jesse Host Much of it. Much of the time.

00:40:45 Jason Guest That's so—that's so interesting. Yeah, it must be some kind of fear thing. I remember my friend who's an animator has told me that a lot of times people will have eye contact while they're listening, and then when they talk, they look off. I remember—I had a meeting once at Tom Cruise's house for like two hours, and I—one thing I just remember about it is that he never relinquishes eye contact for a moment. Like, he is always locked into someone. Yeah, I guess I look off a lot. [Chuckles.]

00:41:13 Jesse Host Do you just think about that experience all the time? Like, just never stop thinking about that?

00:41:17 Jason Guest All the time, yes. [Laughs.]

00:41:20 Jesse Host I know a guy who rode on Harrison Ford's airplane. And Harrison Ford helped him figure out how to do the buckle. And I don't think he's ever stopped thinking about the experience of being fathered by Harrison Ford, just as one might never stop thinking about the experience of having one's eyes locked into Tom Cruise. [Laughs.]

00:41:40 Jason Guest Oh, I mean, that's—it was so memorable, and also I just remember when—it was when—I was working with Aziz Ansari, and he was hosting the MTV Movie Awards, and Tom Cruise wanted to do some kind of video or dance number as his character from *Tropic Thunder* with the name I can't remember. [Chuckles.] Anyway.

00:42:04 Jesse Host Showbusiness.

00:42:05 Jason Guest Yeah, the showbiz guy, the yelling guy. And so, we were trying to figure out what they could do or if they could do something together. But then, I remembered waiting—you know, there's staff around the house and they all knew my name and it was just a very intense experience and memorable. But then, waiting for my car to come up, it was just me and him, and he just started asking me what my parents' names were and what they did for a living and where I grew up. And we just stood there for ten minutes talking. I was like, "Oh, I'm—I love you forever now." [Laughing.] You've given me a moment, we've connected. It's like meeting the president or something. It's like, oh! I'm only gonna think good things of you for the rest of my life, because you asked me what my parents did for a living.

[Music fades in.]

00:42:50 Jesse Host And I still do. I genuinely, I was like I really like him! I see! I get it! [Laughs.]
Well, Jason Woliner, thank you very much for taking the time.

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| 00:42:53 | Jason | Guest | Thanks so much, Jesse. It was so fun. |
| 00:42:55 | Music | Transition | Bright synth with a steady beat. |
| 00:42:58 | Jesse | Host | Jason Woliner, everyone. If you haven't watched his documentary series <i>Paul T. Goldman</i> , it is really something to behold. An absolutely wild ride. It grows and thickens through the course of its six episodes in incredible, unpredictable, indescribable ways. A wild and satisfying ride. Absolutely worth watching. |
| | | | [Music fades out.] |
| 00:43:27 | Music | Transition | Halting, discordant synth. |
| 00:43:29 | 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. Look, here in Lincoln Heights, I gotta jump in the van. It's almost time for the farmer's market. |
| | | | Our show is produced by speaking into microphones. Our senior producer is Kevin Ferguson. Our producers are Jesus Ambrosio and Richard Robey. Our production fellows at Maximum Fun are Tabatha Myers and Bryanna Paz. We get booking help from Mara Davis. Our interstitial music is composed and provided to us by DJW, also known as Dan Wally. Our theme song is by The Go! Team. It's called "Huddle Formation" Our thanks to them and to Memphis Industries, their label, for sharing it with us. |
| | | | <i>Bullseye</i> is on YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook. Follow us in any of those places. We will share with you all of our interviews. And I think that's about it. Just remember: all great radio hosts have a signature signoff. |
| 00:44:26 | Promo | Promo | Speaker: <i>Bullseye with Jesse Thorn</i> is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR. |
| | | | [Music fades out.] |