

[00:00:00] **Music:** “Oh No, Ross and Carrie! Theme Song” by Brian Keith Dalton. A jaunty, upbeat instrumental.

[00:00:09] **Carrie Poppy:** Hello, welcome to *Oh No, Ross and Carrie!*, the show where we don't just report on fringe science, spirituality, claims of the paranormal. No, we take part ourselves!

[00:00:18] **Ross Blocher:** Yep, when they make the claims we show up, so you don't have to. I'm Ross Blocher.

[00:00:21] **Carrie Poppy:** And I'm Carrie Poppy, and I'm back, people!

[00:00:24] **Ross Blocher:** Hey! Welcome back!

[00:00:24] **Carrie Poppy:** Thank you.

[00:00:26] **Ross Blocher:** This feels like a moment of freedom.

[00:00:27] **Carrie Poppy:** Oh, absolutely! Peh-caw! Did you hear that?

[00:00:32] **Ross Blocher:** Oh, yeah. What was that?

[00:00:33] **Carrie Poppy:** That was *The Sound of Freedom*. It was an eagle.

[00:00:38] **Ross Blocher:** (*Laughs.*) Oh, and it makes the sound peh-caw?

[00:00:40] **Carrie Poppy:** Peh-caw! I've never been around an eagle, but probably.

[00:00:44] **Ross Blocher:** Well, I've heard that whenever you see an eagle in a film, they actually play like a hawk noise for it instead. Because bald eagles don't actually make that regal of a sound

[00:00:54] **Carrie Poppy:** (*Excitedly.*) Let's look it up.

[00:00:57] **Ross Blocher:** Yeah.

(*They laugh.*)

Oh, we're already distracted.

[00:01:01] **Carrie Poppy:** Okay. I have found “call of a bald eagle” on YouTube.

[00:01:04] **Ross Blocher:** Let's hear it.

[00:01:06] **Clip:** (*A squeaking, high-pitched cry.*)

[00:01:12] **Carrie Poppy:** Okay. Hold on.

[00:01:13] **Clip:** (*A shrill, undulating shriek.*)

[00:01:17] **Ross Blocher:** (*Laughing.*) Oh no.

[00:01:19] **Carrie Poppy:** It's *The Sound of Freedom!*

[00:01:20] **Ross Blocher:** Oh yeah, sure, okay, fair. Fair enough. Because the bald eagle is our national bird in the United States, and of course, we are the country of freedom. The true country of freedom.

[00:01:30] **Carrie Poppy:** Yes, of course. The country with the most number of its own population behind bars is officially the country of freedom. You heard it here.

[00:01:40] **Ross Blocher:** Yeah, I might nominate like the Netherlands as the country of freedom.

(*Carrie agrees.*)

Well, we are the home of the free and the brave. And the home of the film *Sound of Freedom*. That's what we were getting to. It was made—it was financed here.

[00:01:56] **Carrie Poppy:** Oh, true. I guess I was thinking—this is appropriate of nothing, but I was just thinking like (*existentially*) where does a film live? And like, where does digital media live? You know, when you think about it?

(*Ross “woah”s flatly.*)

Yeah, that's where I went immediately for no reason.

[00:02:11] **Ross Blocher:** That's very deep. Well, (*laughs*) there's this movie called *Sound of Freedom* that has sort of taken the world by storm. You might say the storm is coming, because it's also really tied into a bunch of QAnon stuff. So, in case you were wondering like why is Ross and why is Carrie talking about this, that's why. We're going to get to that.

[00:02:32] **Carrie Poppy:** Yeah, so let me tell you what I knew about *The Sound of Freedom* when you mentioned it and said like, “Hey, maybe we watch it for the show.” I had heard there is a movie that is ostensibly about Operation Underground Railroad, a sex trafficking nonprofit. And that movie misrepresents their adventures in supposedly rescuing kids from sex trafficking. And the movie is at least liked and celebrated by the QAnon crowd.

[00:03:05] **Ross Blocher:** Mm-hm. Yeah, my understanding—I wouldn't have been able to name the organization or anything like that, but I knew that it was really popular amongst

churches, and that it was made by like the same people who financed a lot of films about Jesus, or like a TV series about Jesus, called *The Chosen*—which has been recommended to me, and I have waiting for me to watch, actually. I am interested in watching this, but also I knew that it had gotten a lot of press for becoming like this huge breakout success. It was a small budget film. But it made a bunch of money, and it was all through like—the church is saying, “This is the kind of content we want.”

[00:03:41] **Carrie Poppy:** “Buy tickets for you and your friends.”

[00:03:42] **Ross Blocher:** Right, right. This whole pay it forward program we'll talk about. And also, I knew that this was kind of a cause celeb of the political right and the church—this idea of focusing on child sexual trafficking and bringing awareness to this. But I have some understanding that these claims are kind of overblown. By how much? I don't know. Nobody likes child sex trafficking. That's bad.

[00:04:07] **Carrie Poppy:** Well, some people like it. The traffickers. Yeah.

[00:04:09] **Ross Blocher:** The people who do it. But most of us are firmly against that.

[00:04:12] **Carrie Poppy:** Sure. I will give child sex trafficking an official thumbs down.

[00:04:16] **Ross Blocher:** Yeah. Zero-star rating of child sex trafficking.

[00:04:19] **Carrie Poppy:** But it's interesting, because I first heard of Operation Underground Railroad before I ever heard of *The Sound of Freedom*. And I heard of them because a woman who worked for Operation Underground Railroad was running the book club at Bessel van der Kolk's trauma nonprofit. And he is very, very left and talks all the time about how much he hates Donald Trump. And that is absolutely the environment he cultivates in his seminars and all of his followership. Extremely left.

[00:04:54] **Ross Blocher:** So, there are some strange bedfellows sharing a bed.

[00:04:56] **Carrie Poppy:** Maybe. Yeah. So, when I heard like, oh, this is a right-wing film that's about Operation Underground Railroad, yeah, I was like, “Oh, gosh, my association with Operation Underground Railroad is through a leftist angle. So, that's interesting.”

[00:05:12] **Ross Blocher:** So, other things we can say about *Sound of Freedom* is that it stars Jim Caviezel, who's well-known for being in *The Count of Cristo*. I think that's like his most kind of mainstream, normal film that he starred in. But also, of course, *Passion of the Christ*, in which he played Jesus Christ, who happens to share his initials, JC. So, when we talk about JC in this episode, that's Jim Caviezel.

[00:05:39] **Carrie Poppy:** We're not talking about my friend, JC, the barista who works at the coffee shop down the hill from me. We don't mean that, JC.

[00:05:42] **Ross Blocher:** No relation?

(Carrie confirms.)

And it came out this year. They finished the film years ago.

[00:05:48] **Carrie Poppy:** Like 2018 or something.

[00:05:50] **Ross Blocher:** Yeah. So, it's been done for like five years, and apparently they just had a hell of a time getting it out into the public eye. So, that was another interesting factor, and there seems to be this kind of narrative about it being kept from the people—that the studios want to squash it, the Hollywood elite don't want you to see this. All the more impetus for the Church folk to buy extra tickets for this and pay those tickets forward to others.

It came out this year—2023, for those of you in the future. Hello.

(Carrie chuckles.)

I hope it's a good future you're living in.

[00:06:20] **Carrie Poppy:** *(Sing-song.)* Or the paaast! Any time travelers, we don't want to rule you out.

[00:06:25] **Ross Blocher:** Sure, yeah. Just let us know you're here.

(Carrie laughs.)

Send us, send us a message. If you are from the past, that is interesting. I don't know how we'll get your message.

[00:06:32] **Carrie Poppy:** If you're from another dimension, please email. *(Laughing.)*

[00:06:34] **Ross Blocher:** We want to be inclusive. So, it came out on July 4th this year and was a—

[00:06:41] **Carrie Poppy:** What a coincidence.

[00:06:43] **Ross Blocher:** Yeah, yeah. A film about freedom, and it came out—

(Carrie "peh-caw"s.)

Yeah, total coincidence. Yeah, what day of the week was July 4th this year? Now I'm curious.

[00:06:51] **Carrie Poppy:** Oh, that's a good call. Actually, you know what? I think it was a Saturday, which is a reasonable—oh?

[00:06:55] **Ross Blocher:** No, Tuesday!

[00:06:56] **Carrie Poppy:** Oh, it was! Oh, I'm sorry. Okay!

[00:06:57] **Ross Blocher:** That's unuuuusual. So, they really did want it to come out on the 4th of July.

[00:07:04] **Carrie Poppy:** (*Laughs.*) On a Tuesday. Yeah.

[00:07:05] **Ross Blocher:** Yeah, that's unusual.

[00:07:06] **Carrie Poppy:** Totally! Yeah, yeah, yeah. It's the day the emails pile up!

[00:07:08] **Ross Blocher:** I remember—I may have whined about this before, but the original *Thor* film came out on a Friday, like most films do.

[00:07:16] **Carrie Poppy:** Oh, I remember! I remember because you were very upset. (*Laughs.*)

[00:07:20] **Ross Blocher:** Like, (*emphatically*) there is a day of the week named after your title character.

[00:07:23] **Carrie Poppy:** Thor is a day of the week!

(*They laugh.*)

[00:07:26] **Ross Blocher:** And thankfully, I don't know, I never passed that feedback along except to people like you who could do nothing about it. But—

[00:07:33] **Carrie Poppy:** How dare you. I could've made a call!

[00:07:34] **Ross Blocher:** Oh, I'm sorry! I underestimate your reach. But when the second film came out, it did come out on a Thursday, a Thor's day. So, enough people made a clamor, I guess.

[00:07:46] **Carrie Poppy:** I think our friend, Jared, was also very upset about that. Shoutout.

[00:07:48] **Ross Blocher:** Oh, good. See? Jared's a good egg. He gets it.

[00:07:54] **Carrie Poppy:** (*Giggles.*) He is. He is, and he does.

[00:07:55] **Ross Blocher:** Okay. So, this came out on the 4th of July. And I think one of the big news items was that it earned more money that particular day than the new *Indiana Jones* film, *Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny*.

[00:08:08] **Carrie Poppy:** I still haven't seen that.

[00:08:09] **Ross Blocher:** Which it wasn't its first day out, but it was new-ish. And so, yeah, this is a big deal. Like, this tiny, little, indie, small budget film is performing way better than the Hollywood elites want you to—you know, they were all against it, and they tried to stop it from succeeding.

[00:08:25] **Carrie Poppy:** Now, is this an empty seats situation, or is this people are actually all going and sitting in these seats, not just buying these tickets?

[00:08:32] **Ross Blocher:** Good question. And as far as I can tell, a bit of both. So, the production budget is \$14.5 million dollars to produce. I don't know what was spent on like advertising or what have you. But as of—

[00:08:46] **Carrie Poppy:** It's not very much money for a movie, a big movie.

[00:08:47] **Ross Blocher:** This this morning or whenever I checked—\$210.5 million dollars worldwide.

[00:08:53] **Carrie Poppy:** Woooh! That's quite a return on investment.

[00:08:56] **Ross Blocher:** Yeah. That's a 14.5 times the \$14.5 million it cost, so yeah, that's a very good return on investment, which you don't know too much about the film yet, but you can already anticipate there will be more like it. 'Cause it made money.

[00:09:11] **Carrie Poppy:** I realized I said a crazy thing. I said \$15 million isn't that much for a movie. And then I was like where am I getting that? What's—how much is—how much does a Disney movie cost to make?

[00:09:19] **Ross Blocher:** Well, I'm not supposed to talk about that, but it's like 160 million.

[00:09:23] **Carrie Poppy:** Okay, okay. So, I am right that it is a lower budget, still.

[00:09:25] **Ross Blocher:** Oh yeah. That would be considered low budget. Of course, there are smaller films than that even.

[00:09:29] **Carrie Poppy:** Sure, sure, sure. You can make a movie on your iPhone!

[00:09:33] **Ross Blocher:** I'm making a movie right now as we're talking! It's about your cat, Golly.

Another fun part of the story was that it was produced by this studio called Angel Studios. And it was their second theatrical release.

(Carrie “wow”s.)

Yeah, their first one was *His Only Son*. Guess what it was about?

[00:09:51] **Carrie Poppy:** (*Chuckles.*) Uh, God and his little baby boy, Jesus.

[00:09:54] **Ross Blocher:** Jesus, yeah, which came out earlier this same year, on Easter.

[00:09:59] **Carrie Poppy:** Wow, yeah, okay. Next one comes out on Halloween, then we have a St. Paddy's Day movie.

[00:10:04] **Ross Blocher:** Yeah, exactly. (*Chuckles.*) They're hitting all of the holidays—or holy days, I should say.

[00:10:10] **Carrie Poppy:** (*Laughing.*) Yeah, July 4th is their first high holy day.

[00:10:14] **Ross Blocher:** You know what? I wouldn't put it past them to call that a holy day.

(Carrie agrees disappointedly.)

But that was the first film to use their pay it forward platform. And I guess however they're structured, they're allowed to do this kind of thing where essentially you get people who are excited about the film to go in and buy tickets for other people. So, if you need a ticket, take a ticket. If you can offer a ticket, you buy it.

[00:10:33] **Carrie Poppy:** Yeah, that's cool.

[00:10:34] **Ross Blocher:** Yeah, sure. I kind of like that model.

[00:10:36] **Carrie Poppy:** It's kind of like MaxFun saying you can give those memberships to, you know, an anonymous community member who comes in and claims that they need it.

[00:10:44] **Ross Blocher:** Yeah, very similar. But I guess it's not something that normally most Hollywood studios can pull off financially. But apparently it made at least \$12 million just that way. People—

[00:10:55] **Carrie Poppy:** Wow! Oh, so almost made its money back just through asking for money. Wow.

[00:11:00] **Ross Blocher:** Yeah, and a lot of well-meaning church folks like sponsoring groups to go out. “Come on, let's all get together and go see this! This is important. It's about the children. Save the children.” And apparently some of those tickets did go unused, so there was a fair amount of like tickets that were purchased but never actually—like wasn't a butt in the seat to correspond to that ticket.

I think this is telling. It got a 60% critic score on Rotten Tomatoes.

[00:11:23] **Carrie Poppy:** Okay, that's not very good.

[00:11:25] **Ross Blocher:** But the audience score, what do you guess?

[00:11:27] **Carrie Poppy:** Okay, there's no way for anyone to confirm whether they actually saw the movie, right?

(Ross confirms.)

83.

[00:11:35] **Ross Blocher:** 99.

(Carrie "wow"s.)

So, yeah, people were like really motivated to say, "I saw this movie, and I loved it."

[00:11:41] **Carrie Poppy:** I'm just surprised there weren't more people who got in there and were just—even if they hadn't seen it, were like, "This is propaganda, blah blah blah." You usually see a lot of that with these controversial films.

[00:11:51] **Ross Blocher:** Yeah, I think in this case just one side of the controversy was maybe more motivated to put their mark on it.

(Carrie affirms.)

But you know, 60% is still considered fresh on the tomato-meter. So, overall, the critical response was positive, but you know, kind of middling. And we mentioned it stars Jim Caviezel. JC.

[00:12:12] **Carrie Poppy:** Do you know why? Because!

[00:12:12] **Ross Blocher:** Because! He's very invested in this topic.

[00:12:16] **Carrie Poppy:** Okay, *(stammering)* true.

[00:12:18] **Ross Blocher:** Oh, and the guy who the film is based on—and they use his name in the film, Tim Ballard—he was asked who should play him, and he insisted.

[00:12:27] **Carrie Poppy:** Yes! Well, he said that's who he'd like, yeah. He said—I guess *Count of Monte Cristo* is his favorite movie. So, when they asked, "Who would you want to play you in the biopic of you?" He said, "The guy from that."

And they were like, “He looks nothing like you!” But they got him in the makeup seat and did their movie magic, and they were able to make it work.

[00:12:45] **Ross Blocher:** Well, and I wouldn't say they look nothing like each other. They're in the ballpark. They're—

[00:12:50] **Carrie Poppy:** Well, in the movie, you'd think he looks like him. But they do a good job in that makeup chair.

[00:12:54] **Ross Blocher:** They do his hair up to look like Tim Ballard's. And you've got to say both good looking guys. And it's funny, because the movie has a few scenes where it just sort of lingers on look at this good-looking guy.

[00:13:06] **Carrie Poppy:** Very much so. Very “we got a hot actor”.

[00:13:09] **Ross Blocher:** In this beautiful portrait lighting. Yeah, him and this other guy who actually is a producer of the film and kind of plays sort of a financier within the movie plot as well, another really good-looking guy. And both of them, there's just these long, slow scenes where it's just like, “Let's look at him. Let's bask in his glory. Look at how light his—”

[00:13:26] **Carrie Poppy:** Now that I think about it, it's pretty weird, because there's very little of that on Oscar winner Mira Sorvino.

(They laugh.)

Who's like kind of barely in the movie and is also stunning.

[00:13:37] **Ross Blocher:** She's in the film for maybe all of two minutes?

[00:13:40] **Carrie Poppy:** Yeah! She's barely there. I wonder if she made a really sweet deal with them. She's like, “I'll be on set for 25 minutes.”

[00:13:47] **Ross Blocher:** But apparently this is a cause she cares about as well. Yeah, she was a big deal in the '90s, and I feel like she's stuck around and been active. One thing I do know is that a friend of mine went to high school with her and had a crush on her then. And you know, obviously had good taste.

(Carrie agrees.)

She ended up being Mira Sorvino.

[00:14:04] **Carrie Poppy:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. *Mighty Aphrodite*.

[00:14:05] **Ross Blocher:** And apparently she's held onto her faith. It was a Catholic school where they went to school. And anyway, so I guess we should talk about the substance of this film. *The Sound of Freedom*. Oh no, not “the”. *Sound of Freedom*.

[00:14:18] **Carrie Poppy:** Oh, there's no "the"?

[00:14:20] **Ross Blocher:** Yeah, it's just *Sound of Freedom*.

[00:14:21] **Carrie Poppy:** Oh no, you can't do that.

[00:14:22] **Ross Blocher:** It's like *The Sound of Music*.

[00:14:25] **Carrie Poppy:** Yeah. Does that have "the"?

[00:14:26] **Ross Blocher:** Yes, yes it does. Okay, so what is *Sound of Freedom* actually about? What happens?

[00:14:32] **Carrie Poppy:** *The Sound of Free*—nope! *Sound of Freedom*.

(*Carrie laughs and Ross caws.*)

Okay, is a nonfiction film about a nonprofit, called Operation Underground Railroad, that does liberation attempts in Central and South America to get kids out of sex trafficking situations.

[00:15:00] **Ross Blocher:** Yeah, and they say that it's based on a true story. That's the very first thing you see. And of course, there's always some artistic license whenever you're making a film. You've got to compress schedules, flip things around. You combine some characters; you separate some characters. So, you expect some of that. But you know, for the most part, it's supposed to be based on a true story about this guy named Tim Ballard, who is the main character played by Jim Caviezel. And he is, like you say, a child rescuer, and he had been working for Homeland Security. And the story approximately is like that he has some opportunity to go overseas to continue his efforts to recover missing children. And he wants to stay there, but the government says like, "No, you have to come back."

And he's like, "Well, then I'm quitting my job! And I'm going to found this OUR—the Operation Underground Railroad—to allow me to stay here and pursue this case and create a sting where I can get a bunch of these pedophiles, round them up, and save the children, and send these bad guys to jail."

[00:16:01] **Carrie Poppy:** And that is how both Tim Ballard and Tim Ballard's likeness in the film—how they refer to these people. They're always saying—

[00:16:08] **Ross Blocher:** Bad guys.

[00:16:09] **Carrie Poppy:** But pedophiles, not just like—I don't know. This always drives me crazy a little bit, 'cause that's just describing someone's sexuality. We're not saying anything about how they behaved when we say pedophile. And what you mean is like child sex trafficker. Anyway.

[00:16:24] **Ross Blocher:** Both customers and—

(*Carrie agrees.*)

But you know, more importantly, people who are setting up the system or, you know, on the production end.

[00:16:33] **Carrie Poppy:** Right, rather than the consumer end.

[00:16:34] **Ross Blocher:** Right. So, yeah, apparently there's a few different missions that are sort of conflated a bit into the story. Again, as you might expect. There's this very insidious setup of kids who—at least the two main characters are like a boy and his sister. And this pretty lady spots them and says, “Oh, they'd be great as child models. Why don't you bring them by for the day?” And so, the father comes with his kids. Yeah. Okay. That's cool. They'll take photos, earn money for the family. And then, when he comes back at seven— ‘cause they tell him, “No, you're not allowed. You've got to come back later.” So, he leaves his kids, but he sees the other kids there. So, he thinks it's okay. He comes back at seven that night, and they're gone. Just the building is empty, and now his kids are never to be seen again.

And then, Tim Ballard gets wind of this in the US, as he's investigating a child pornographer, and like gets him to jail, and then pretends that he's secretly attracted to children as well and tries to gain the confidence of this guy. Finally, like gets the guy to kind of name a source overseas, and he ends up going to—there's elements of the story in multiple places. So, like part of the story takes place in Honduras, and part in Cartagena, Colombia. He goes there, and like we mentioned, the government says, “Okay, well, you've done what you can, come back.” And apparently he then talks to his wife over the phone, the Academy Award winning Mira Servino.

[00:18:04] **Carrie Poppy:** Oh, maybe! Uuh, I'm so sorry if I got this wrong, Mira. Maybe she was nominated.

[00:18:09] **Ross Blocher:** She won Best Supporting Actress. Best Supporting Actress, Mira Sorvino.

[00:18:14] **Carrie Poppy:** Yes! In what? Oh, she won for *Mighty Aphrodite*. I love that movie. Good for her.

[00:18:18] **Ross Blocher:** Hey, okay! So, she tells him, “Don't you dare come back until you do this.” And Tim Ballard—the real-life figure—has said that his wife not only said that, but said, “Don't you dare jeopardize my salvation by not coming back with those children.”

(*Carrie “woah”s.*)

Well, this might tie in with another one of our investigations and something they don't mention in the film, but Tim Ballard happens to be—

[00:18:41] **Carrie Poppy:** Mormon.

(Ross confirms.)

Yeah, that's what I kept thinking about during this movie, because one of the criticisms of Operation Underground Railroad is that it has elements of just securing adoptions for parents in the US who might kind of like this adventurous origin story.

[00:19:03] **Ross Blocher:** Mm. Mm! Oh, that there's a suspicion that maybe the story is a bit oversold just to facilitate the adoptions.

[00:19:11] **Carrie Poppy:** Yeah. I'm not arguing for this point of view, but I have heard that.

[00:19:15] **Ross Blocher:** Interesting, okay, I haven't heard that.

[00:19:16] **Carrie Poppy:** And the Mormon angle kind of made me see how people could get there, because the Mormons are so into expanding their families for the purpose of like getting a better station in heaven. So, you know, saying, “You better come back with those kids for my eternal salvation!” sounds very Mormon.

[00:19:39] **Ross Blocher:** Ah, yeah. Well, and I think it was also like this is something you have to do. This is something you're called by God to do. You were put in this situation. You know, so it's kind of a sweet story. But did you catch how many children they have? The real life couple?

[00:19:53] **Carrie Poppy:** Tim Ballard? Or—?

[00:19:54] **Ross Blocher:** Yeah, Tim Ballard. No, eight?

[00:19:57] **Ross Blocher:** They have seven natural born children, and then they adopted two children from, you know, situations. You know, rescue situations.

[00:20:03] **Carrie Poppy:** Wow, nine. That's over eight children. Wow. That's a lot.

[00:20:09] **Ross Blocher:** That is over eight children, yes. Yeah. It's 12.5% more.

[00:20:14] **Carrie Poppy:** Yeah, thank you for doing that for me.

(They laugh.)

Yeah, that's a lot!

[00:20:18] **Ross Blocher:** It's the service I provide.

[00:20:19] **Carrie Poppy:** I mean, at least in those families, they really trained the older kids to take care of the younger kids. So, you have like, you know, more internal rhythm to the system in those families, I think. But oh my God, still. Nine?! Oof.

[00:20:34] **Ross Blocher:** I'm sure that was great on the prairie too, when you needed to like, you know, have people work in the farm, out in the fields. Now, it feels a little—it stands out.

[00:20:42] **Carrie Poppy:** It stands out. You said it!

[00:20:44] **Ross Blocher:** Anyway, so he meets this boy that he had seen in this video, and apparently this is based on the real story. So, like poor guy—I can imagine like for his job he needed to like watch these videos and catalog what happens. And so, then he for the first time met like the subject of one of these. So, then—this is really weird, and I think this is part of the film's artistic license, where he ends up being at the border at just the right moment to intercept that child from the guy who has him. Yeah, clearly, you know, that was just a convenience for the film. But yeah, he rescues him. And so, the boy's name is Miguel—at least in the film. And he—when he finds the boy, the boy is wearing a necklace that his sister gave him. It had like a scripture verse from Timothy.

[00:21:32] **Carrie Poppy:** Yes. Timoteo.

[00:21:34] **Ross Blocher:** Yeah. So, Tim Ballard, who speaks Spanish because he served his mission in Chile—again, they don't say that in the film. He says, “Oh, you can call me Timoteo.”

And the boy's like, “Oh, that's you! It says it right here. Why is your name on my—?” So, it's a sweet moment. Apparently a true story. And so, he gets to return the boy to his dad, but now we have the problem of the missing sister. So, he goes off looking for her and keeps like just kind of missing her.

[00:21:59] **Carrie Poppy:** Tim does, not that little boy.

[00:22:00] **Ross Blocher:** Yeah. Yeah. The little boy is now returned to his father, and you know, we assume in recovery. And so, we keep cutting back and forth to like kind of seeing her and seeing him try to like flush her out, find her and who she's with. And so, in the meantime, he's setting up these stings to rescue other children, hoping she'll be there, and she's not. And there's this really big one where they build this whole island and get financing for it. And they're going to like bring in these super rich people to pay \$100,000 for membership so that they can abuse these children.

[00:22:30] **Carrie Poppy:** And it's supposed to be like a child brothel kind of thing.

[00:22:32] **Ross Blocher:** Yeah. Private Island. So, they're asking that supermodel lady. And apparently she was based on a real person involved in this story, called Kelly Suarez, who was a Miss Cartagena that was involved in this trafficking.

[00:22:44] **Carrie Poppy:** Oh yeah. I think I saw this woman's photo. Yeah.

[00:22:46] **Ross Blocher:** Who had been luring children and all these other peddlers. He had been getting them to like, “No, we need at least 50 children,” I think it was. So, he wanted all of those children to be shipped to this island. And then, he was going to have the Feds come in—or not the Feds, but the CTI. I assume like Child Trafficking something that starts with an I.

[00:23:06] **Carrie Poppy:** And at first, the supplier says he can only get like 14 or 15 kids, but Tim kind of pushes him, has a suspicion that there are actually more kids kind of in tow, and that's when he pushes for the 50 or so. And then, this guy supplies them. That story brings to mind entrapment questions for me. But nevertheless, 50 real children, it appears, show up in this equation.

[00:23:35] **Ross Blocher:** Yeah. And the final number they give in the film is 54 are rescued. And apparently in real life not all of those were underage. You know, it was a smaller percentage of them that were actually—so, that's another, you know, artistic license of the film, making it look like they were all small children.

[00:23:52] **Carrie Poppy:** Oh, okay. Not all of them were underage, is that what you said?

[00:23:55] **Ross Blocher:** Right. It's all horrible, of course, but I think it's just—

[00:23:59] **Carrie Poppy:** It matters to know, though.

[00:24:00] **Ross Blocher:** Yeah, it's an example of a little bit of the sort of shifting of the numbers and the representation that I think are building towards sort of making the problem sound even bigger and worse than it is.

[00:24:11] **Carrie Poppy:** It could be. The age of consent thing is going to matter a tremendous amount, because if you're talking about an adult in a sex work position, you don't want to mistake that person for a sex trafficking victim. So, yeah. Yeah. (*Inaudible*) quite a bit.

[00:24:22] **Ross Blocher:** And if it's someone who's an adult or a young adult and they've been doing this for a long time, then they've been previously trafficked as an underage person and now are being, you know—

[00:24:32] **Carrie Poppy:** Oh, could be, yeah.

[00:24:33] **Ross Blocher:** You know, I'm sure it's complicated. Anyways, there's also these like really tense moments where like one of the traffickers—and you assume something like this would happen—wants to abuse one of the children. And there's like a super tense standoff moment and just—you know, in case anybody wants to see this film after hearing this review, just know that they never show any actual abuse happening on screen. There's a whole lot of suggestion, but it is PG-13. They find a way to always just evade the situation or prevent it.

Anyways, so now he's still trying to figure out how do I find this girl? So, he ends up sneaking into this cartel in the middle of the jungle all by himself pretending to be a doctor, and then he single handedly—it turns into like kind of this, I don't know—

[00:25:20] **Carrie Poppy:** Oh, he pretended to be a doctor? I didn't—*(laughs)* I didn't even clock that. Okay.

[00:25:23] **Ross Blocher:** Yeah, he had this whole story about like, “Oh, we're here to give vaccinations,” and so they only let one—

[00:25:28] **Carrie Poppy:** Oooh! You know what? I just thought like—*(laughs)* I was like, “I didn't know they were doctors too!”

(They laugh.)

I'm so trusting!

[00:25:37] **Ross Blocher:** He does it all!

[00:25:38] **Carrie Poppy:** I know! *(Laughing.)* That really is! I was like, “Oh, I guess—okay, so I guess they train you to be a doctor too in these situations.” I don't know what I thought!

[00:25:44] **Ross Blocher:** They had to look somewhat credible, so they were supposed to be like—there were two of them from the UN, and it was this other guy who is a part of the film but not worth explaining in any detail right now.

[00:25:53] **Carrie Poppy:** I check people's credentials for a living. You could just like still just float by me in a boat and be like, “I'm a doctor,” and I'd be like, “I guess so!”

[00:26:00] **Ross Blocher:** “These are my vaccines.”

(Carrie laughs.)

Well, that's essentially what the guards with guns did, is they said, “Okay, well, you come with us. You have to stay here. One of you has to leave.” And so, they picked him and bring him in. And then, it turns into like this superhero movie where he kind of creeps around in the darkness, finds her, and then it comes back later to rescue her, but she lets out a scream. And so, the bad guy—sorry, spoilers! I'm spoiling everything. I don't know. Why are you here if you don't want to—?

[00:26:29] **Carrie Poppy:** It's hard to see this movie anyway. We'll get to that.

[00:26:31] **Ross Blocher:** Fair enough. Anyway, so then he's gonna abscond with her to get her back to her family. And then, of course it's the boss—the jefe, as they're calling him—who's running this whole operation. He's the one who's taken her under his wing and paid

good money for her. So, he comes to take advantage of her. And so then, Tim sneaks out of the darkness and kills the guy. Like, they fight, and somehow the guy doesn't call his guards. I don't know. None of this seemed quite plausible. Turns out this part didn't happen. He didn't kill the guy. This particular rescue, I don't think, was a thing.

So, he gets her, they escape on a boat just in time, and none of the bullets hit them as they escape. And he's able to reunite the father with both of his children.

[00:27:13] **Carrie Poppy:** So, that part didn't happen?

[00:27:14] **Ross Blocher:** Yeah, I don't think so. At least certainly not in that way. It wasn't like the lone person running off into the cartel area and killing a man and running away with the missing child. I think that was invention.

[00:27:29] **Carrie Poppy:** Okay. 'Cause yeah, it was kind of hard to fact check this film.

[00:27:31] **Ross Blocher:** Yes! Yeah, there's a few reasons for that. Part of it because Operation Underground Railroad tends to hide details, because they say, "Well, we don't want to give up any details that would help us save children." So, they're not always forthcoming about things.

[00:27:47] **Carrie Poppy:** They don't want to release pictures of the kids, of these victims of sex trafficking, which would make sense.

[00:27:51] **Ross Blocher:** Oh, that's fair. But also, they receive a lot of money in donations. We're talking like tens of millions of dollars, and it's not always entirely sure where that money goes. Or like if you ask them to kind of give accounting of that, they'll just give you like a list of countries where they have operations. But yeah, there seems to be very little, you know, transparency about like how the funds are being used.

[00:28:11] **Carrie Poppy:** Yeah, fair enough. I mean, nonprofits are kind of like that, though. I mean, you can look at like which programs they're putting their money toward very broadly in their tax filings, but in general, we just kind of trust them to internally do what they say they're doing. Yeah, I don't know. When I was trying to look at the fact checking complaints about this movie, if you will—I don't know, they didn't really add up for me. I was like—mostly, it seems like Tim Ballard does like a little bit of PR spin, but in a way that's so familiar.

[00:28:47] **Ross Blocher:** Yeah. His stories get a little sweeter in the telling.

[00:28:50] **Carrie Poppy:** Yeah, it's a little bit of a big fish kind of a thing, but it's not like a made-up thing.

[00:28:54] **Ross Blocher:** Yeah, he's clearly a badass who's done some really cool child rescues.

(Carrie “wow”s.)

Like, yeah, I'll call him a badass. Like, you know, he's gotten himself in some really horrible situations and done good things, like save children. Like, I believe that, and I'm signing on to that. But it does seem like sometimes he'll let the Operation Underground Railroad take credit for things that they didn't actually do. Or he'll exaggerate the details of a story.

Like, there was one where he kept talking about this girl—and I guess in some venues he would sort of mention them rescuing her, but it turns out she escaped on her own. And then, like he'll make her seem younger than she is. Like, it'll be something that happened 10 years previous, and now she's like in her early 20s, and they'll make it sound like she's still at home.

[00:29:38] **Carrie Poppy:** Okay. Sorry, I think I know the woman you're talking—the girl you're talking about. But I don't know when I went back and like looked at that story it reminded me so much frankly of working at PETA.

[00:29:50] **Ross Blocher:** Oh, really?

[00:29:51] **Carrie Poppy:** So much, yeah, because like—listen, I worked at PETA. It was complicated. I don't know—

[00:29:54] **Ross Blocher:** A little bit of “lying for Jesus” kind of situation?

[00:29:56] **Carrie Poppy:** No! Well, that—I mean, not that that didn't happen. But like a—

[00:30:01] **Ross Blocher:** Curation?

[00:30:02] **Carrie Poppy:** Yeah, I need to get my copy tight and clear; my reader doesn't want explicit details about how the cat got from this lady's house all the way to care, blah, blah, blah. Okay, we helped get that cat out of this bad situation, and now it's in this situation. We liberated the cat. We saved the cat. We saved the cat, right?

And like, are you taking more credit than you should? Maybe, if like you were having a long conversation with your friend about it, and all you said was you saved the cat. But like, in PR copy, where you have like three paragraphs? Eh, I don't know.

[00:30:37] **Ross Blocher:** Yeah, yeah. Well, and like you shared an interview with me where he was saying, “Okay, she got out on her own. And sorry, I was just kind of abbreviating the story here, here and here, but elsewhere I told it correctly. You know, get off my back,” kind of thing. But also like he would say that she had been raped—what was it? 30 to 40 times per day?

(Carrie “woah”s.)

Which was double the number that was in the court documents and her account of the story. Which those are horrific numbers, whatever, but just that he'd kind of doubled it either in his mind or in retelling or something.

[00:31:14] **Carrie Poppy:** Yeah. I don't know. I thought you were going to say like that was much further off. Double—I don't know. That doesn't change much for me.

[00:31:21] **Ross Blocher:** I just think that there's a small inclination that he has to sweeten the stories, but I don't think it totally invalidates the good that he does.

[00:31:30] **Carrie Poppy:** Yeah, yeah, that's how I—(*stammering*) yeah, perhaps. I just don't know what the—the fact checking piece of it, I felt like, “Oh, this guy's like more or less passing.” The bigger picture of who this guy is and where he belongs to American politics and what he's trying to get done and all of that I think is probably where it gets sticky. Because this guy's running for office. You know, he was an advisor to President Trump.

[00:31:54] **Ross Blocher:** Yeah. There's a video of Trump with Ballard where Ballard is partly telling that story of that same person and using that to promote building the wall, saying—and that's one of his major talking points is that the most compassionate border is a secure border. Because he feels that—and he singles out the Biden administration for this, but he feels that they will even aid the traffickers in that they'll let people through the border, and then someone will speak up as their sponsor, and they'll—with taxpayer money—send the child to that person who's the sponsor. And he's implying there that this sponsor is often the abuser. I don't know if that's true.

(*Carrie affirms.*)

By the way, I'll just say that Operation Underground Railroad Incorporated has 100% on Charity Navigator. Interestingly, though, Tim Ballard left Operation Underground Railroad in 2019. And I don't know, I saw various accounts that seem to be insinuating that they were uncomfortable with some of the overblown claims, and that was the reason maybe why he was dismissed as—because he was the founder. That maybe like why he had to leave as CEO—I don't feel like I got a solid answer on that.

[00:33:09] **Carrie Poppy:** Mm, okay. Oh, I see *Motherboard* wrote about this. It's—the byline is Anna Merlan and Tim Marchman. And it says, “By one account, he'd gone to donors in a state of upset, saying that he'd been forced out and asking for their help with a new organization. Another person who's worked with the group said, to the best of their knowledge, he was no longer with OUR and was focusing on his work with the Nazarene Fund, a Glenn Beck backed organization that is focused on religious minorities in the Middle East but has more recently operated in Afghanistan and stepped away from Operation Underground Railroad prior to the launch of the film.”

[00:33:49] **Ross Blocher:** Yeah, which is interesting, because the film itself—which, as we said, was completed in 2018 and then shopped around—you know, it still promotes Operation Underground Railroad, has their website on it. So, you know, I guess it was just kind of too late to remove that as part of the package since they had this film that was done.

So, this is part of the story too around this film is that it was originally sponsored by Fox. They had been behind the film during its production. But then when Disney acquired Fox, they just discontinued it, weren't seeking to release it or finish it or whatever. And so, then the film—

[00:34:26] **Carrie Poppy:** So, you did this?

[00:34:27] **Ross Blocher:** Yeah, it was me. (*Laughs.*) Funny, considering I'd never heard about this until everybody else did. And so, they tried to like shop it to Amazon and Netflix and they not only turned it down for funding, but they've elected not to stream it.

[00:34:43] **Carrie Poppy:** Yeah! Which is unusual, you know.

[00:34:45] **Ross Blocher:** For a successful film.

[00:34:46] **Carrie Poppy:** Yeah! To not even get on like Amazon Prime?! They'll take anything! They will take anything!

[00:34:49] **Ross Blocher:** Right? So, like as we're recording this, two and a half months after the initial release, if you want to see it—

[00:34:57] **Carrie Poppy:** It's hard!

[00:34:58] **Ross Blocher:** Yeah, you have to go find one of the few theaters still showing it, which I did in VanNuys.

[00:35:04] **Carrie Poppy:** Or you have to marry someone who has magical ways to get movies in front of you in the wrong language with subtitles.

[00:35:11] **Ross Blocher:** Uh, yeah, it's not available for streaming. It's not on your Roku TV. You can't see it that way.

[00:35:16] **Carrie Poppy:** Yeah. I get why some people would react to that as like, “Why are you keeping people from seeing the movie?”

[00:35:22] **Ross Blocher:** Yes, so this has sparked this whole kind of conspiracy theory about how, again, Hollywood's trying to bury this, doesn't want people to see it. The implication being is that Hollywood smiles upon child trafficking, and that's why they're against this.

[00:35:38] **Carrie Poppy:** Oh! Oh, interesting. I just took that as like they don't want to deal with the right v left of this.

[00:35:45] **Ross Blocher:** The politicization. Yeah. And that makes sense too. Like, “Well, we don't want this hot button topic, and we're going to get slammed from either side, no matter what we do.” Yeah, I get that.

But yeah, it is seen as persecution, and there was this rash of conspiracy theories that rose up even around AMC, the theater chain, where people were posting TikTok videos. They got like millions of views, saying things like, “The air conditioner was off at the theater!” And— or “They refunded my tickets, because the air conditioning was off. I wonder why the air conditioning went off. Interesting it was on in the lobby.”

(They laugh.)

And there was another person—

[00:36:26] **Carrie Poppy:** I'd like to think that that really was like an AMC employee that that person had just been a nightmare to for 25 minutes and finally they're like, “I'm just turning the AC off in *Sound of Freedom*, where that guy is.”

[00:36:37] **Ross Blocher:** There was one person who had had their tickets refunded, but then they called back, and they said, “Oh yeah, well, we're having problems with the theater, but you can still watch it if you want.”

And they're like, “Okay, yeah, well we want to.” And they watched the movie.

Some other people came out and said, “I didn't realize ‘til the end, but the lights were on the whole time. They didn't want us to see the film!” It's like you saw the film! You didn't even know—?! How on were these lights?

[00:36:59] **Carrie Poppy:** Oh, humans are paranoid.

[00:37:00] **Ross Blocher:** There was another one where like alarms had gone off, and they're like, “Oh, see what's happening right now?”

(Carrie snickers.)

It's like—the CEO of AMC had to like tweet about this or X about this, or whatever you do now, and say, “This is absurd. Like, here's how many tens of thousands of people saw the movie at AMCs. We're like the number one collaborator of theaters for this movie.” *(Chuckles.)* But the, the conspiracy theory is so strong with, I would say, this crowd, that any little thing—even if it didn't keep them from seeing the film—was seen as like this obstruction effort.

[00:37:33] **Carrie Poppy:** Um, do they hate Nicole Kidman yet? She's the face of AMC.

[00:37:37] **Ross Blocher:** Oh, you know, I haven't heard her—she sure is. Um, I haven't seen her implicated. Thankfully, she's escaped the—what do you call that? Kickback? Flashback? Lashback?

[00:37:45] **Carrie Poppy:** Uh, backlash.

[00:37:46] **Ross Blocher:** Backlash. (*Wheezing a laugh.*) Thank you. Thankfully, she's escaped the backlash.

[00:37:52] **Carrie Poppy:** Yeah. She's inhuman.

[00:37:52] **Ross Blocher:** There was also a tweet that was saying, "I'm an AMC employee.

And I was given the substance to insert into the beverages of people seeing the movie, and I refused. But I looked it up later, and there were nanobots in it!"

[00:38:07] **Carrie Poppy:** (*Gasps then laughs.*) What was the substance? Was this like the cherry additive in the cola?

[00:38:11] **Ross Blocher:** Turns out it was a fake post from a few years earlier that was just repurposed for this. Yeah. Yep.

[00:38:18] **Carrie Poppy:** Oh goddd. Okay. You know what I wish Tim Ballard would do?

[00:38:22] **Ross Blocher:** Wish he'd just produce a high-quality website.

[00:38:26] **Carrie Poppy:** Thank you! Thank you, Ross. Thank you.

[00:38:28] **Ross Blocher:** You're welcome! I mean, it needed to be said.

[00:38:30] **Carrie Poppy:** We were all thinking it. If he just had a clean, beautiful Squarespace website, then we could take in his argument, we could evaluate it rationally. It would be out there in the marketplace of ideas. Maybe he's already done this. I haven't looked at his website, but I'm sure it could be better if it's not made by Squarespace.

[00:38:50] **Ross Blocher:** It could be more beautiful. He could be engaging with his audience. He could sell anything—products, content he creates, even his time. And guess what? You, listening to this podcast, you could also do those things. You could create a beautiful website.

[00:39:03] **Carrie Poppy:** Why not? You know, Squarespace is the all-in-one platform for building your brand and growing your business online. You know, they all come—every single website on Squarespace—comes with a suite of integrated features and useful guides that help maximize your prominence among search results. So, when someone's Googling "Carrie Poppy", you don't want them to get a dog named Carrie and a cat named Poppy. You want them to get you, Carrie Poppy, and Squarespace helps you do that.

[00:39:29] **Ross Blocher:** Well, I'm uninterested unless they have an online store.

[00:39:36] **Carrie Poppy:** They do! They. Do.

[00:39:37] **Ross Blocher:** Meaning my website would have an online store?

[00:39:39] **Carrie Poppy:** Your website could have a store where you sell shirts that say, “I’m Ross,” in that way that you say, when I say, “Ross, is it?” “I’m Ross.”

[00:39:48] **Ross Blocher:** Oh, yeah. (*Laughs.*) That’s right. The kind of like “I’m Mark Sargent.” I’m really upset, ‘cause I lost that shirt. I had one that said, “I’m Mark Sargent.”

[00:39:54] **Carrie Poppy:** Oh, you just got three.

[00:39:57] **Ross Blocher:** I don’t know—(*chuckles*) I just got three?

[00:39:58] **Carrie Poppy:** Three are about to arrive to you in the mail by saying that on this podcast.

[00:40:01] **Ross Blocher:** Oh, maybe! You know, that is a nice perk of being on a podcast. People do send us free stuff. Thank you. Uh, yeah. I’m really bummed I’m missing that shirt. Size, medium.

(*They laugh.*)

But with Squarespace extensions, you can connect your store to third party tools and extend the functionality of your website.

[00:40:22] **Carrie Poppy:** And they have something called Fluid Engine, and I know what you’re thinking. That sounds like something that happens after I eat too much curry. But no, Fluid Engine is a next generation website design system from Squarespace. It’s never been easier for anyone to unlock unbreakable creativity. (*Building momentum.*) You heard it here! It is impossible! You will get in the flow, and it will be IMPOSSIBLE for you not to make great art.

(*Ross agrees pleasantly.*)

Yeah. So, start with a best-in-class website template, and customize every design detail with reimaged drag and drop technology for desktop or mobile.

[00:41:01] **Ross Blocher:** Whenever I hear drag and drop, I picture a dragon, and it drops.

[00:41:06] **Carrie Poppy:** (*Laughs.*) Aw, yeah, that’s much better.

[00:41:07] **Ross Blocher:** So, if that’s for you—and I think it is—you’re going to head to [Squarespace.com/ohno](https://squarespace.com/ohno) for a free trial. And what do they do, Carrie, when they’re ready to launch?

[00:41:17] **Carrie Poppy:** Thanks for asking. Use offer code “OHNO”, O-H-N-O, to save 10% off your first purchase of a website or domain. Squarespace. Eat your curry!

[00:41:28] **Ross Blocher:** Speaking of curry.

[00:41:29] **Carrie Poppy:** Let's.

[00:41:30] **Ross Blocher:** What is that glowing figure that just walked in the door?

[00:41:33] **Carrie Poppy:** Oh! That's an orb. It's a ghost orb. There was a man who died here at my house. And he's haunting it, and that's him.

(Ross "hello"s.)

And—but the great news is that he brings messages from the other side.

[00:41:47] **Ross Blocher:** Nope, personal space, buddy. Back up a little.

[00:41:48] **Carrie Poppy:** *(Ghostly.)* Hello? Hello?

[00:41:49] **Ross Blocher:** Okay. Hello? Hello? What is this?

[00:41:52] **Carrie Poppy:** *(Ghostly.)* I have a jumbotron.

[00:41:54] **Ross Blocher:** Woah, woah. There's something like coming out of the orb. Okay. I'm gonna grab it.

[00:41:59] **Carrie Poppy:** *(Ghostly.)* Here it is. Most ghosts speak their messages, but not me. I write them down.

[00:42:04] **Ross Blocher:** Alright. I'm unfurling it here. Okay. Looks like it says—

[00:42:09] **Carrie Poppy:** *(Ghostly.)* In a loud, clear voice, here we are.

[00:42:11] **Ross Blocher:** Okay. Oh, and it's addressed to Alyssa. And it says, "To my adventurous, binge watching, state visiting, and soon to be world traveling partner in crime—"

[00:42:22] **Carrie Poppy:** "Happy birthday, my incredible wife!"

(Ross "aw"s.)

"Another year means more hilarious escapades, mouthwatering chef dinners, and tackling that never ending movies and shows list together."

[00:42:33] **Ross Blocher:** "Love you!" And that's from Dano.

[00:42:37] **Carrie Poppy:** *(Ghostly.)* I also love you!

[00:42:39] **Ross Blocher:** Alright, ghost. Well, Alyssa, you got a lot of admirers. And uh, yeah, it sounds like you're doing life right. Yeah. Fun.

[00:42:45] **Carrie Poppy:** Especially when your spouse calls themself Dano. Not Dane-o, not Dan. Dano.

[00:42:52] **Ross Blocher:** Dano. Yeah, well I hope you have a wonderful birthday.

[00:42:54] **Carrie Poppy:** (*Cheering.*) Happy birthday!

[00:42:55] **Ross Blocher:** And you know what, Alyssa? You should listen to this Maximum Fun show.

(*Carrie "ooh"s.*)

[00:42:59] **Promo:**

Griffin McElroy: Throughout history, sirens have captured men's attention, enticed men with their feminine wiles, and fulfilled men's primal needs. The sirens allure persists—

Travis McElroy: Uh, they have not! Unless the primal need is “I need to be smashed on the rocks”.

Griffin McElroy: Yeah, smash me. (*Laughing.*) Smash me, Mama!

Travis McElroy: Smash me, Mommy.

Justin McElroy: Smash me, Mommy!

(*They cackle.*)

Griffin McElroy: The siren's a little—(*laughs*).

Travis McElroy: Why do we do this to ourselves?!

Justin McElroy: Strand me, baby! Strand me, Mom!

Travis McElroy: Strand me, baby!

Music: “My Life is Better with You” by Montaigne, a bright, energetic song.

Justin McElroy: So, yeah, listen to *My Brother, My Brother and Me*, from Maximum Fun on Mondays. It's just like... that. (*Laughing.*) It's just like that, but more—it's just like that, but more of it. There's—there's just more of that.

(*Music fades out.*)

[00:43:40] **Carrie Poppy:** Well, speaking of film, we have our in-house film critic and expert, Drew Spears, here today.

[00:43:53] **Ross Blocher:** (*Gasps.*) The Drew Spears?

[00:43:54] **Carrie Poppy:** I'm going to scoot over, because we have one microphone. Yes, the Drew Spears, my spouse, my sweetie pie. Welcome.

[00:44:01] **Ross Blocher:** I feel like I should say we do have more microphones. They're just not plugged in right now.

(*Carrie confirms.*)

In case some listeners are like, “Oh, these poor people, like they’re sharing one microphone.” Welcome, Drew.

[00:44:10] **Drew Spears:** Hey, what's up?

[00:44:11] **Ross Blocher:** Yeah. Tell us about *Sound of Freedom*.

[00:44:13] **Drew Spears:** I think what's most interesting about the success of *Sound of Freedom* will be the ramifications on whether or not Hollywood and distributors want to take bigger risks on Christian films. And I think it's interesting what you all talked about with like this kind of persecution of like “they don't want to see us or like they don't want to see the film or Hollywood doesn't want to support *Sound of Freedom*”. And you know, they obviously extrapolate bizarre reasons behind that, but I do think there's some truth there.

Like, it clearly was a production that like no one really wanted to touch. Fox—you know, it was made for \$14 million dollars, you know. Sony has their Christian arm. That seems to be around the size of kind of Christian movies in America, the big blockbuster ones. You know, they don't get made for much more than that. And then, they have modest success. Angel Films, which previously was a company that censored movies for then release that they were then sued by companies. And they're still, I believe, paying off this rather large—

[00:45:16] **Ross Blocher:** For creating bowdlerized versions of the films, so people could watch it without the swears and the nudity.

[00:45:25] **Drew Spears:** Yeah. So, like they've just been recently out of that litigation and into production and distribution themselves. They obviously picked this up for distribution. And I mean, I don't know how you view anything like this other than a huge victory for them and, you know, their causes. You know.

(*Ross agrees.*)

You can say, “Oh, how many people really use those pay it forward tickets?” or something like that, but there's even examples since then of small indie distributors using pay it forward promotional campaigns for rather small documentaries and things like that that have cropped up. So.

[00:46:00] **Carrie Poppy:** MaxFun basically has a gift membership that's like that.

[00:46:04] **Drew Spears:** Yeah. And I think—I mean, you know, given how precarious going to theaters has been over the last several years, and this being a strong summer—you know, with *Barbie* and *Oppenheimer* and other things—industry newspapers like *Hollywood Reporter* or *The Ankler*, you know, are more or less saying, “This is too big to be ignored, you know. These companies—” You know, when it previously was like a *God's Not Dead* that made—I don't have the exact number off the top of my head, but they didn't make the money of something like that, then you can say like maybe the juice isn't worth the squeeze. But now that they're seeing, you know, a movie go out for hundreds of millions of dollars, I think you're gonna start seeing some strange bedfellows. I think you're gonna start seeing some of these bigger production arms like kind of quietly doing productions and hoping that they can make their own *Sound of Freedom*.

I mean, even the success of *Sound of Freedom*—we were talking about how it's not currently available on streaming. I maintain a big part of that is because, you know, it's—they're still rolling it out internationally, and it's still doing well internationally, and you know, you keep the movie in the theater as long as you can. And then, you release it on streaming when there's no more juice in theatrical. But Angel Films also has had a big success with their TV show, *The Chosen*, which is about the birth of Christ. And like, that is big. being aired on CW and Netflix and also was originally crowdfunded. So, that's the other thing for these distributors, even if they just want to use Angel Films as the production arm and then distribute it. It's like you're defraying your risk by already having a crowdfunded work. You know?

[00:47:38] **Ross Blocher:** Right. Which reminds me, like at the very end they play this list of over 6,000 names of people who contributed to the making of the film.

[00:47:48] **Carrie Poppy:** Woah! I must not have seen that.

[00:47:50] **Drew Spears:** Yeah, I think it was cut out of our theatrical experience.

(*They chuckle.*)

[00:47:54] **Ross Blocher:** But it also turns out that one of those listed investors was Fabian Marta, who was charged with felony child kidnapping.

(*Carrie “oh no”s.*)

Yeah, and of course, there's no way for them to be vetting all of these people.

(*Carrie agrees.*)

You know, I'm not—

[00:48:12] **Drew Spears:** That happens to indie film Kickstarters all the time. Their producers get nabbed for that.

(Ross laughs.)

[00:48:16] **Carrie Poppy:** Wait, charged or convicted?

[00:48:14] **Ross Blocher:** Charged with felony kidnapping. Let me see here. This is recent enough after the film came out, that I don't think—I imagine the justice system is still—

[00:48:26] **Carrie Poppy:** Awaiting trial?

[00:48:27] **Ross Blocher:** Probably. So, I'm not faulting the film, but I'm thinking there must be some story where he thought like, “Oh, I'm wrestling with this demon.” And apparently in since-deleted tweets, he said something about how proud he was to be supporting the film, how this is an important issue. So, maybe—I'm picturing that he's thinking like, “Oh, well this is my way of like trying to undo what I've done,” or something. Who knows.

[00:48:52] **Drew Spears:** Maybe. But I think one of the interesting tensions here that will be going forward beyond just like—you know, Hollywood will absolutely become bedfellows with, you know, any sort of group like this if it means that it's financially advantageous enough. So—

[00:49:04] **Ross Blocher:** Right, which makes those AMC conspiracies so silly, because it's like, well, AMC's getting money. That's their business model is people coming to buy tickets.

[00:49:12] **Drew Spears:** And I think that's what lies at the contradiction of this kind of like Christian new-right media ecosystem is like—one, they, I think mostly for accurate reasons, recognize that—you know, it's that old axiom. You know, the right controls politics, the left controls culture, and either side wants that reversed. You know, I think—you know, it drives certain swaths furious to not have like cultural cachet. That's why you see the Republican answer to *The Daily Show* every couple of years, or, you know, these big movie events. And yet, at the same time, they also want to remain persecuted. They want to be able to say that Hollywood is against us and stuff like that.

So, it will be interesting to see how those kind of two desires—one, to be getting to have their own Hollywood ecosystem and also be able to call the Hollywood ecosystem full of like sicko pedophiles—will remain. Because—I mean, it's interesting. Because it's like, I do think this movie, because of the subject matter, has a certain juice that like, you know, made people want to see it in a way that maybe their next production slate won't. But I mean, I do think they're hitting on something here and serving a market that has, up until this point, been relatively tokenized by, you know, entertainment industry. You know, I would argue with good reasons. I don't particularly want those, you know, values expressed.

[00:50:32] **Ross Blocher:** Well, it's funny, because of all the people I know, you two probably watched the most Christian media of anybody.

(Carrie cackles and agrees.)

But it does seem like this comes up every three to five years when there is some standout Christian project, but there is a market for it when...

[00:50:48] **Drew Spears:** It's a market for it in like the fact that the movie is well made on a technical sense. It's not one of those films that you watch and you're like, "Ugh, this is embarrassing." Like, the fact that it's like—you know, probably puts it at a tier above all the other Christian films. And then, for me as a consumer of it, that takes all the juice and all the fun out of it. I found the experience of watching *Sound of Freedom* tedious and boring. I would have loved it to be more conspiracy-addled. It didn't really even function as an action movie. You know, most of it—Carrie brought it up. It's like, most of the movie, there's—you know, it's just like we're going to do this big plot. It's like if like a heist movie was just them talking about the heist mostly, and also if like, you know, instead of like being cool *Ocean's 11* guys, it's like Jim Caviezel having a weird death stare and Bill Camp being—I thought he was the best actor in it, but just, you know, just being like, "We have to do this."

It just was like every five minutes, it was just like the same conversation of, "We have to do this for the kids. God's children aren't for sale." And it's two hours.

[00:51:50] **Ross Blocher:** Oh, you said the catchphrase! Ding, ding, ding, ding!

[00:51:52] **Drew Spears:** Yeah. That's the catchphrase.

[00:51:54] **Ross Blocher:** Oh, there's a duck from the ceiling. Yeah, Carrie, I'd love to get your thoughts on like what you thought of this as a movie.

[00:52:00] **Carrie Poppy:** Yeah, okay. Thank you, babe!

[00:52:01] **Drew Spears:** Bye, babe!

[00:52:02] **Ross Blocher:** Thank you, Drew! All very good points from Drew.

[00:52:04] **Carrie Poppy:** Yes, thank you to Drew for reminding us that this is a movie. Yeah, yeah, it's—I found it boring too. But I also find most action movies boring, and I think this does fit into that kind of action/thriller category.

[00:52:20] **Ross Blocher:** Yeah, I would say it was technically well made.

(Carrie agrees.)

You know, like the lighting was good. It's a dark film overall, but it's a dark subject, so that's not a complaint there. And the acting was pretty good.

(Carrie agrees.)

But also, really slow in plotting, I think, as Drew was suggesting as well. Like, it really takes its time. You could have cut it down considerably. Maybe cut in half the glorious man shots of Jim Caviezel and that other handsome guy.

[00:52:45] **Carrie Poppy:** Yeah, it really doesn't have like character development or interesting turns even. It's just a very straightforward, "We need to get the kids. We got the kids."

[00:52:55] **Ross Blocher:** I mean, there's plenty of built in drama just with the situation and the subject matter, because of course you care about these kids, and you want to see them escape. And I'll admit like watching this movie at the end is like, "Yeah, I want to go rescue children! And beat up bad guys! That sounds great. Let's do it. Let's get 'em."

[00:53:13] **Carrie Poppy:** Cool, cool. High tea.

(They laugh.)

[00:53:19] **Ross Blocher:** So, yeah, it worked on that level at least. It was interesting, at the end there's this plea from Jim Caviezel, and it even—

[00:53:28] **Carrie Poppy:** Yeah, so in the credits.

[00:53:30] **Ross Blocher:** Yeah, in the theater, like in the credits, it said in the lower corner—it said like, "Important message coming up in, you know, two minutes and 15 seconds." And it did a little like

[00:53:40] **Carrie Poppy:** Ticker tape, countdown.

[00:53:41] **Ross Blocher:** Yeah. Like a countdown clock. There we go. I can't think of basic words right now. But yeah, then he pops up on screen, and it was this impassioned plea like, "Hey, this is real. You need to contribute to this. You know, here's how you do this. And the real heroes, of course, are the children! The children are the heroes, not any of us, not the person I played."

[00:53:58] **Carrie Poppy:** It's just the children whose faces and names you have not seen. Which of course they can't show us, but I don't know, there's something always a little, I don't know, falsely modest about that.

[00:54:08] **Ross Blocher:** Yeah, it did smack me as falsely modest, but then the other plea was to please get everybody to see this, buy tickets for others, telling about the whole pay it forward program and everything like that. And this might be a good moment to mention why Jim Caviezel specifically ties this film to what we've been talking about with like QAnon.

[00:54:30] **Carrie Poppy:** Yeah. Okay, so yeah, there is this conflation of this movie with QAnon, and at first I thought that was unfair, because Tim Ballard has pretty consistently—it seems to me—been like, "No, that's not what we're into. We're not trying to push that

narrative. No, we disagree.” Maybe not as vehemently as you or I might like, but it's at least like not espousing that.

[00:54:52] **Ross Blocher:** Yeah. I think the one thing that he said that kind of falls in that category is he bought into the Wayfair conspiracy.

[00:54:59] **Carrie Poppy:** (*Laughing.*) Oh no, that's a really obvious one! Okay! Oh nooo!

[00:55:02] **Ross Blocher:** That this furniture company was, in coded ways, selling children in their furniture.

[00:55:08] **Carrie Poppy:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. Wayfair, they have just what I need.

[00:55:12] **Ross Blocher:** I was like is there more—like a less ridiculous way to say that? But I don't think there is.

[00:55:16] **Carrie Poppy:** No, no, yeah, that was a really obvious one, and that certainly calls his judgment into question. Yeah, but he at least like doesn't officially agree with that, but Jim Caviezel, by contrast, is all up in it.

[00:55:27] **Ross Blocher:** Yes, JC. Is a true believer. And to the credit of the film's producers and like the director, like they've tried to distance themselves from this and like the film does not portray any of this stuff. It doesn't say anything about people drinking the blood of children or the Hollywood elites even. You know, there's one scene that took place in California where the pedophile was, and maybe that's where the guy really was. So, you know. But yeah, I don't think that content was in the film at all.

But if you get Jim Caviezel in front of a conference—

[00:56:00] **Carrie Poppy:** Let's.

[00:56:01] **Ross Blocher:** —as he did with the Health and Freedom Conference in Tulsa, Oklahoma, Jim Caviezel talked about the adrenochroming of children. We've talked about this before, and he described it kind of in that interview, where he said that the Hollywood elites, these sickos, these billionaires, they drink this thing called adrenochrome, and it's obtained from children when they're frightened.

[00:56:27] **Clip:**

(Applause.)

Speaker: You said a word a minute ago, and I want to clarify what that word was, because you said a word. And I want to make sure that—you said adrenochrome.

Jim Caviezel: Yeah.

Speaker: And by a show of hands, who's heard that word before in this building?

(Someone in the audience shouts "yes".)

Could you please explain, to the extent that you want to or not want to, what that is? Because some people have never heard that before, and we need to discuss that.

Jim Caviezel: Essentially, you have adrenaline in your body. I'll just simplify it. And when you are scared, you've produced adrenaline. If you're an athlete, you get in the fourth quarter, you have adrenaline that comes out of you. If a child knows he's going to die, his body will secrete this adrenaline, and they have a lot of terms that they use that he takes me through. But it's the worst horror I've ever seen. The screaming alone, even if I never, ever, ever, ever saw it, it's beyond. And these people that do it... there'll be no mercy for them.

(Applause.)

It's—this is one of the best films I've ever done in my life.

[00:57:46] **Carrie Poppy:** Remove it from their blood somehow.

[00:57:48] **Ross Blocher:** Yeah, I think like out of their brain, and it's supposed to make you stay young. And first of all, adrenochrome is a real substance. You don't need to get it from children. I don't think that's even a way to get it. You know, there's a much easier way to obtain adrenochrome, and it's used in some countries for blood clotting. But the way he described it and as QAnon tells it, it's this drug that is—and Jim Caviezel repeated this—

[00:58:15] **Clip:**

Jim Caviezel: The whole adrenochrome empire, this is a big deal that's it is listed under the NIH. It is a chemical compound. Its molecular structure is C₉-H₉-NO₃. It's an elite drug that they've used for many years. It's ten times more potent than heroin.

[00:58:37] **Carrie Poppy:** Okay. Ten times more potent than heroin. *(Snickers.)*

[00:58:40] **Ross Blocher:** All of that is based on absolutely nothing. It's nonsense. It's complete nonsense. And it's very much akin to blood libel.

[00:58:49] **Carrie Poppy:** I mean, just even the word potent doesn't make sense when you're crossing categories like that. I'm just gonna be like what are you measuring? Oh, you're not measuring anything, are you? My brain is caught up with doing this scientifically, and you've moved on, haven't you?!

[00:59:00] **Ross Blocher:** Oh yeah, you're just trying to create an emotion.

[00:59:03] **Carrie Poppy:** Yeah, yeah. Okay, but anyway, sorry. So, what came after that?

[00:59:07] **Ross Blocher:** Oh, that was to Steve Bannon, by the way. In another interview, he mentioned that it was ten times as potent as heroin, that it's this elite drug. But yeah, zero evidence of this whatsoever. Oh, oh, oh, and I was starting to say it's a lot like the blood libel, like this idea from late antiquity that had a resurgence in the medieval period. This whole idea that the Jews were secretly absconding with Christian children and then reenacting the crucifixion with them and taking their blood and using it to make their matzah.

(Carrie “wow”s.)

Yeah. Just absurd, always patently false things. You know, like a witch hunt, where the underlying claim isn't even true. At least in this case, child trafficking is a real phenomenon. Maybe the numbers are being inflated to make these points, and maybe the perpetrators are being misrepresented. But yeah, in this case, the whole adrenochrome thing is like the blood libel in that it's just completely made up to create this other scary other.

[01:00:07] **Carrie Poppy:** Mm-hm. We should mention—you know, because you said perhaps the perpetrators look different than what's in the movie. I think that's true. I think usually it's someone that the child knows, but Tim Ballard has also made that point a lot. Like, I was listening to his podcast where he was defending himself against various accusations, and he pointed to a number of other documentaries he's made and essays he's written and stuff where he makes that point pretty exhaustively. So, I think he can't quite be accused on that angle.

[01:00:36] **Ross Blocher:** That's fair. Though, I think well over 90% of the audience interacting with this project are just going to see the film. They're not going to follow up, look up other sources or read a bunch of articles like we've been doing. They're going to just, like me, going to want to either like go to another country and beat up bad guys and rescue these poor children or pay someone else who will go do that for them. And they get the wrong mental image of what most of this looks like. Like you're saying, most of the time it's someone that the family knows. It's not just some creepy stranger who's showing up out of nowhere. So, it gets you kind of looking for the wrong target.

And it's not in the film, but the implication that it's the Hollywood elite, it's the politicians who are the real child molesters, that gets all just wrapped up into this. And that's, as far as I can tell, imaginary. At least, it's not like to any extent that's greater than pedophilia would be in the general population, if that makes sense. There's no cabal. There we go. There's this whole belief in this cabal that doesn't exist. And yet that's what gets passed around.

[01:01:42] **Carrie Poppy:** I mean, yeah, there's always going to be small groups of people who work in any black market. So, in that sense, you're going to find some circles of people.

[01:01:53] **Ross Blocher:** Yeah. And yeah, then you find like your Jeffrey Epsteins.

(Carrie agrees.)

[01:01:55] **Carrie Poppy:** Right. That's what I'm—yeah, that's what I'm thinking of.

[01:01:57] **Ross Blocher:** Yeah. Yeah. Rich, well connected billionaire. And yeah, take them down.

[01:02:03] **Carrie Poppy:** Right. I'm just saying like I could imagine—I guess I always have trouble asking myself questions about conspiracies. I'm always like, well, it's a conspiracy. If you have three people trying to do something on the black market, I guess the three are conspiring, you know? I don't know. I just—it always feels like a losing question to me to even try to answer.

[01:02:22] **Ross Blocher:** But it's orders of magnitude off from, I think, the mental picture that most Christians seeing this film and getting excited about it are picturing. And even though the film itself doesn't say, “This is representative of all cases,” I think it's creating that impression, and it's certainly not discouraging that impression.

[01:02:42] **Carrie Poppy:** Well, the end does have a title card that claims that there are more slaves alive today than slaves alive during the time when slavery was internationally legal.

[01:02:56] **Ross Blocher:** Yeah, of all time.

[01:02:57] **Carrie Poppy:** Yeah, if you take all slaves of all time, most of them are alive. And currently in slavery. So, I have a suspicion about this statistic. When I hear that, I hear, “Why are there more people getting cancer every year if our treatments are getting better?” I hear, “Oh, there's probably a change in definition or spotting or regulating that is making it look like the phenomenon itself is growing, when actually the awareness of the phenomenon is growing, or the definition of the phenomenon has widened.”

[01:03:31] **Ross Blocher:** I think that's definitely at play here.

[01:03:33] **Carrie Poppy:** Yeah, and I went and looked, and the age of consent laws and various countries have changed in the last decade in many places. So, I'm thinking, okay, most of the time—well, actually in all the cases I looked up, the age increased. None of them decreased it, right? So, a lot of countries changing from like age 14 to 18, or age 16 to—in one case it was 20, which surprised me. So, that would mean then, if one of the markers is being a minor and (*chuckles*) then an older—

[01:04:05] **Ross Blocher:** Suddenly, by definition we've just changed a lot of the same situations from one category to the next.

[01:04:11] **Carrie Poppy:** To another, yeah. And maybe for good reason. But it makes it look like you have an inflated slavery pool when actually you may just have a different definition of slavery.

[01:04:18] **Ross Blocher:** Yeah, yeah, there were a lot of articles—and it's interesting. *Rolling Stone* really did a lot of coverage on this film and addressed it from a variety of angles. But one was talking to people who work in child trafficking; their job is trying to end it. And there was a kind of a constant refrain of like this false perception creates problems, because then when people are looking at legislation that might change the situation, they're

not addressing like the 80% of the situation. They're addressing the 5% of the situation. And that we already mentioned like, you know, most of the perpetrators are people that the children know. Also, that not all of them are super young children, like the film might lead you to believe that it's all about kids who are like 11 to 14. Because that gets like the biggest response from people. Like, the protagonists were I think like 10 and 11, 9 and 11, something like that. But you know, most are 15 to 17, which doesn't make it better. It's just, you know, again, the perception is slightly shifted.

All of these notes were just to say it's more complicated than what the movie would lead you to believe.

(Carrie affirms.)

That there's these mustache-twirling bad guys everywhere doing this all the time. And then, the numbers they give—I think just listening to various interviews with Tim Ballard alone, I've heard like 10 million. I've heard 8 million. I've heard 2 million. And then, sometimes it'll be like people in slavery, and then it'll be like people who are being trafficked, and then you realize that like some of them, maybe most of them, are having organs removed, and so it's like a different category from the sexual side.

[01:05:56] **Carrie Poppy:** Lord! Yeah, oh yeah, I saw that about organ harvesting. I really want to know if that's veridical.

[01:06:02] **Ross Blocher:** Indeed. And then, bigger numbers about forced sex work will get kind of blended with the numbers about the ages involved. Anyways, all of this is to say, you know like of course, none of this is okay. But the perception is, again, being blown out of proportion. And so, you said that you were able to find some statistics.

[01:06:22] **Carrie Poppy:** Yeah. Okay. So, I jumped on Harvard's research library yesterday and I was like, "I'm going to look for peer reviewed articles about the prevalence of child sex trafficking." And boy, hard to find a clear answer! It actually reminded me quite a bit of the research that I've done in like false memory and mistaken accusation and stuff like that, in that I sense this sort of reticence in how the researchers are speaking and maybe not wanting to be accused of downplaying a real problem, but still rein in the statistics specifically so that we can study it without statistical noise and actually understand the size of the problem so that we can articulate a solution that actually works.

What I was able to find was a study in 2022 from a journal called *Trauma, Violence, and Abuse*. And I don't know this journal, but it was a literature review where they looked at other studies and tried to see what kind of prevalence they could estimate. And basically, their conclusion was like, "The research that exists, the sampling is so poor that you probably shouldn't derive anything from it."

(Ross "wow"s.)

Yeah, this was basically encouraging different experts from different disciplines to try to attack this issue, because so few are.

(Ross “wow”s.)

Yeah, so I wasn't able to get a very clear answer there. Then, I was able to find a report from Ohio. It was the only state I found that just gave like a clear number, and they were able to find 1,035 adults and children in trafficking the year that they did the study, which I want to say was 2019.

[01:08:06] **Ross Blocher:** In Ohio?

[01:08:07] **Carrie Poppy:** In Ohio. 1,035. 13% of those were children, and most of them were not sex trafficking; it was some other kind of trafficking. So, you're getting—so, the number in my head was whittling down to somewhere around like under a dozen children that they were able to find in Ohio.

[01:08:25] **Ross Blocher:** Hm. This is a much older statistic, but in 2005, the US State Department reported that 600,000 to 800,000 people were trafficked across international borders per year, with about 50% of those being children. So, you know, that requires some movement as well, you know, for that number. And that's many years ago, maybe people would say that the problem has increased since then.

[01:08:52] **Carrie Poppy:** And that was adults and children, sex trafficking, and labor trafficking?

[01:08:56] **Ross Blocher:** Yeah, it just said traffic, so it didn't break out sexual traffic there. So, you know—

[01:09:01] **Carrie Poppy:** Because labor trafficking is the far larger category.

[01:09:04] **Ross Blocher:** Right. Right. So, you know, you see these big numbers, but even then we're talking about half a million internationally. But then, when you see the film and it mentions like 10 million, you know, you get this mental image that's—it's not quite right.

[01:09:17] **Carrie Poppy:** Yeah, yeah. And then, statistical noise becomes a real problem when you're actually trying to research these things and find a solution. These aren't just like, you know, conversational points to make as we're fighting our right-wing or left-wing uncles. (*Laughs.*) Like, there are actual experts like trying to go and help kids, and we don't want to mess this up for them by stating the problem wrong.

[01:09:42] **Ross Blocher:** Right. Yeah. And I think that is a huge point, which is that like a lot of these #SaveTheChildren efforts don't actually save children, you know, and people are getting kind of distracted by this thing that, much like blood libel I think was intended to do, makes people really upset when you hear about like, “What are they doing to children? This is horrible! You don't do that to children.” Uh, understandable, but it kind of hijacks your rationality, and it steals your focus from other things. And I feel like that's kind of been used as a political ploy here to get you not to be so concerned about the breaking up of your labor union or the price of groceries or whatever it is. You know, that you're more fixated on the

children! Because if that's happening, yeah, you're going to be upset about it and want it to stop above all other things.

[01:10:30] **Carrie Poppy:** Yeah, so this brings up another issue that I was saying to you earlier today. I really think that when we look at something as, you know, uniquely horrifying as child sex abuse, moral panic will almost always ride along the top of it. And we will have to just deal with these things in duality. We will have to just learn like, oh, moral panic will travel with certain concerns. That's okay. We're just going to notice it. We're going to use an inhale/exhale strategy to deal with it. You know, like, oh, whoops. We went a little too far in the moral panic area this time, pull it back. Oh, we went a little too far in looking the other way this time, pull it back. You know, we're going to have to learn that these things travel together when we're talking about like extremely vulnerable populations that need other people to speak up for them. The other people will sometimes develop paranoia as a tactic.

[01:11:23] **Ross Blocher:** Right. Yeah. I do think like this has been politically weaponized, because it is an easy way to whip up the base and get these conspiratorial fears. And especially when you have voices introducing this whole idea of this cabal and all the seediness that's going on and being approved of by Joe Biden and that he himself is complicit in all of this. I was taking note of a lot of the people who have promoted this film. You had Trump screen this film at his Bedminster club.

(Carrie "wow"s.)

Yeah, and promoted it on his Truth Social platform.

[01:11:58] **Carrie Poppy:** *(Laughing.)* I keep forgetting about Truth Social.

[01:11:59] **Ross Blocher:** I have an account. And every—

[01:12:01] **Carrie Poppy:** You do?!

(Ross confirms.)

Oh, that's right. You told me this! Oh yeah, screaming into the echo chamber.

[01:12:08] **Ross Blocher:** Yeah, that's right. *(Laughing.)* Yeah, I never got around to making a Twitter account, but I do occasionally go make fun of Donald Trump.

[01:12:17] **Carrie Poppy:** *(Laughs.)* Oh, that's great. I'm sorry, what's Twitter?

[01:12:17] **Ross Blocher:** Uh, X.

[01:12:20] **Carrie Poppy:** Oh, X. Yes, of course.

[01:12:21] **Ross Blocher:** Formerly known as Twitter. And of course, Trump is always flirting with QAnon and like just dropping just enough to placate the people who are really

into it without fully embracing it. Kevin McCarthy, the House Speaker in Congress, held a screening of the movie for members of Congress.

[01:12:39] **Carrie Poppy:** This is so interesting. It's like the Bible. Looking at the actual source material, I'm like, "How much are you getting out of this?" But, oh, right. It's not the actual source material. It's the cultural baggage added on to the source material that's actually being communicated.

[01:12:56] **Ross Blocher:** Right, right. So, it's like the film itself is not the biggest problem here I think. It is all this baggage that rides alongside it, and it's getting used. Elon Musk, also on X, promoted saying that like this film should be hosted here free so that people can watch it. That was one of his Xes. I don't know. What do we call these things? Tweets?

[01:13:18] **Carrie Poppy:** I don't even know, man. Did the movie people like the idea of it being shown on X for free? I would think they'd be like, "That's our IP. We don't want that."

[01:13:26] **Ross Blocher:** Yeah, he—Elon Musk mentioned something about like, "We won't keep any of the profits," so maybe there's some way of monetizing this. I'm not sure.

[01:13:32] **Carrie Poppy:** I see. Interesting. Okay.

[01:13:35] **Ross Blocher:** Uh, I don't think it was a full-fledged idea. It was just that, "Let me put this out to millions of people."

[01:13:38] **Carrie Poppy:** Sure. Sure. "I'm Elon Musk."

[01:13:40] **Ross Blocher:** Mel Gibson has spoken up in favor of the film, Ben Shapiro, Tim Tebow. Yeah, it's got its, you know, set of supporters in the media as well. And that's always riding alongside this conspiracy angle. I feel like they're often passionate about this because they see this larger cultural issue wrapped up with the film. And Jim Caviezel, again, when he's going off on all of his adrenochrome stuff and all of that, he'll also talk about the central banks, the IMF, the Rothschild banks, you know, this anti-Semitic stuff that's just kind of crept into his language.

[01:14:17] **Carrie Poppy:** This is Mel Gibson?

[01:14:19] **Ross Blocher:** No, this is Jim Caviezel, but it might as well be Mel Gibson. Yeah. They're good buddies. Catholics. Very similar. Oh, Ted Cruz also encouraged people to watch it, of course. You know who Marjorie Taylor Greene is, right?

(Carrie confirms.)

Okay. So, she had an interview with Lesley Stahl on *60 Minutes*.

[01:14:36] **Carrie Poppy:** Well, maybe we should explain who she is for people who don't. An American congresswoman.

[01:14:40] **Ross Blocher:** From Georgia.

[01:14:41] **Carrie Poppy:** Strange.

[01:14:42] **Ross Blocher:** Strange! That's generous.

(Carrie thanks him.)

So generous. Yeah, she has spoken of Jewish space lasers and gazpacho police, and she's just, um...

[01:14:52] **Carrie Poppy:** Strange.

[01:14:53] **Ross Blocher:** Strange. So charitable. Yeah, she's out of her depth. She should not be a representative of anybody. She should just be the crazy cousin that you see on Facebook.

[01:15:04] **Carrie Poppy:** And then, you could just be like, "She's strange."

[01:15:05] **Ross Blocher:** Yeah, but now she's creating trouble for everyone, especially because she has political power. But she had an interview with Lesley Stahl on *60 Minutes* where she said the Democrats are a party of pedophiles. Leslie tried to push back a little bit and say, "Okay, how so?"

And she said, "Well."

[01:15:27] **Clip:**

Marjorie Taylor Greene: I would definitely say so. They support grooming children.

Lesley Stahl: They are not pedophiles. Why would you say that?

Marjorie Taylor Greene: Democrats support, even Joe Biden, the president himself supports children being sexualized and having transgender surgeries. Sexualizing children is what pedophiles do to children.

[01:15:46] **Ross Blocher:** Again, more hate on transgender people. All of this I think just gets absorbed by the same public and conflated.

[01:15:54] **Carrie Poppy:** Yeah, I see she's sponsored or introduced the Protect Children's Innocence Act, which would block the purpose of changing the body of an individual to correspond to a sex that differs from the individual's biological sex.

[01:16:09] **Ross Blocher:** She is inconceivably low on my list of favorite people. So—

[01:16:14] **Carrie Poppy:** But she made it!?

[01:16:15] **Ross Blocher:** She made it? What, to Congress?

[01:16:16] **Carrie Poppy:** She's on the list?

[01:16:17] **Ross Blocher:** Oh, if it includes all people on the planet, yes.

[01:16:22] **Carrie Poppy:** (*Laughs.*) Okay. Okay. Okay. Got it. Okay. You also sent me a video of Tim Ballard like comparing child sex trafficking to having a trans kid and allowing them to transition as a child.

[01:16:34] **Ross Blocher:** Oh yeah. He was on this horrible rant about—I guess he was talking about some group in the Netherlands that he's really against that he feels are like trying to approve the sexualization of children. And he said that like their platform is—

[01:16:51] **Clip:**

Tim Ballard: They include things like separate children from parents, because parents are a bad influence. The state knows best. Sexualize kids, let them see pornography too.

Speaker: Karl Marx.

Tim Ballard: Three, take God out of education, because that just gets in the way. And kids: consent, consent, consent. Children can consent to anything. At 12 years old, they should be able to vote, they should be able to do anything. Now, what am I saying here? I'm—my stomach is getting sick as I'm reading this. I read this every day. It's the woke left agenda. I'm not saying that they're colluding or talking. It doesn't matter. It's the same dark source. They are pedophiles. Pedophiles are sitting back right now going, "We've been pushing this agenda for decades, and now we don't have to push anymore, because the left is taking care of it for us in America."

In America! And this whole trans voice on children. You know, again, I'm libertarian. Adults do what you want. I'll fight for your right to do whatever you want, okay, in terms of adults. I'm talking about children, and what they're saying is children can consent to having their bodies filled with a chemical that will destroy the reproductive system. They can consent to ripping apart their genitalia. Like, this is insanity.

[01:17:58] **Ross Blocher:** Not great!

(*Carrie agrees.*)

Tim. Tim. Whatcha doing?

[01:18:01] **Carrie Poppy:** Yeah, there's this other aspect that we haven't talked about, which is like the paramilitary piece of this. So, you know going into another country with your armed friends when you like used to be a cop.

[01:18:14] **Ross Blocher:** Can be legally murky.

[01:18:15] **Carrie Poppy:** Yeah. Well, yeah and ethically, you know. And I'm not prepared to say that vigilante justice has no place in the world. I'm not ready to make that kind of statement or to say we should always turn to an institutional solution for these things. I think people will always do this. I think there will always be rogue actors who take these things into their own hands, and we will never know exactly how to feel about them.

[01:18:38] **Ross Blocher:** And this film's only going to encourage more of that.

[01:18:40] **Carrie Poppy:** Perhaps. Yeah, I don't know. But it's interesting to me that like, even if it's sort of on like an animal level, that at the end you did kind of—you did feel that kind of swell of like “I'm going to go and help the kids!” ‘Cause I didn't have any response like that.

[01:18:55] **Ross Blocher:** Really? Okay. I mean, it did get my hackles up to see that, even knowing that—like, for example, I saw written that Tim Ballard has never claimed that the original inciting incident in the film about the brother and the sister ever happened. You know, but seeing that—yeah, it makes you upset! Because you can imagine that. And that's one of his main lines in the film. And I guess originally it was said by a father of a different child from a different case to him. But like, “How would you be able to sleep if this happened to your child?” And you know, if you can picture it happening to someone in your life, you can get upset about it.

And that was another point in the film where like he was trying to get this wealthy financier to help him set up the island to catch all of the predators and rescue the children. And the guy was like, “No, I'm not doing this.”

And so, then he left him one final picture of the girl and said, “Alright, don't think about the 50 children. Think about the one.”

And that got the guy to sign on like, “Okay, you got me. Yes. Let's do this. It's not just a statistic.” So, yeah.

[01:20:01] **Carrie Poppy:** I mean, 50 is still pretty—you can see 50 faces.

[01:20:04] **Ross Blocher:** Yeah. Yeah, that's true. This pulls on some deep emotions.

[01:20:08] **Carrie Poppy:** Yeah, I guess so. I didn't—I wasn't really feeling anything watching this. Yeah.

(They laugh.)

I don't know what to make of that! But I wasn't really.

[01:20:17] **Ross Blocher:** *(Hurriedly.)* Well, that's it for our show!

(*They laugh.*)

[01:20:20] **Carrie Poppy:** I mean, I just—when I hear stories like that, my mind goes, “You don't have that story clear. You have no idea what happened there! Hm, wonder what everyone else said. I don't know!” And I just—it gets filed away as like you have no new information.

[01:20:37] **Ross Blocher:** Okay. Because you're able to stop it and start questioning how reliable is the source? Did this really happen? But not everybody is equipped with that. Fun fact, Angel Films, as Drew was mentioning, originally created as a like a content filtering company, like they sell you the cleaned-up versions of films, was founded by two Mormon brothers.

[01:21:01] **Carrie Poppy:** Oh, and I watched some of their productions. I watched one TV show, called *Freelancers* that was absolutely just the Mormon version of the show *Detroiters*, if anybody's seen that.

[01:21:14] **Ross Blocher:** Which you told me I would like.

[01:21:15] **Carrie Poppy:** You'd love *Detroiters*. We love it. And I think you'd love it.

(*Ross affirms.*)

But it turns out Mormon *Detroiters*—very slightly different from regular *Detroiters*, which is already just endlessly chipper.

[01:21:26] **Ross Blocher:** Still good?

[01:21:27] **Carrie Poppy:** You know! I would say still pretty okay. Still pretty okay. Not as good as *Detroiters*, but pretty okay. Yeah. And then, I also watched a little bit of their standup comedy channel. Not as okay.

(*They laugh.*)

So, it was—you know, it's hard to get up there on that stage. Yeah.

[01:21:44] **Ross Blocher:** Sure. Fair. Hey, kudos to you for doing it. Well, there you have it, folks. That's *Sound of Freedom* for ya.

(*Carrie “peh-caw”s.*)

Yeah, the movie itself, fine. Go ahead, watch it.

[01:21:56] **Carrie Poppy:** Yeah, kinda boring. Like, not even particularly bad in an interesting way.

[01:22:00] **Ross Blocher:** Maybe you'll be able to buy it on Vudu in December? I think was the closest I saw to like a legit—

[01:22:07] **Carrie Poppy:** Vudu?

[01:22:08] **Ross Blocher:** Yeah, it's one of those streaming services.

[01:22:10] **Carrie Poppy:** I've never heard of it.

[01:22:11] **Ross Blocher:** Oh, interesting. V-U-D-U. Maybe it'll get released somewhere else. I don't know. Or you can go spend \$15.39 to see it in VanNuys. There was still like a decent sized group there too. Like, there were—you know, the theater was almost half full, I'll say. And it was a small theater. So, like 13 to 16 people behind me while I was furiously taking notes in the second row. But it's—you know, like we said, it might get your hackles up. It might not, depending on whether you're a Ross or a Carrie. It's not just the film itself. It's all the cultural baggage that rides alongside it, related to a lot of things that we've talked about.

[01:22:47] **Carrie Poppy:** Yeah, it's interesting. So, I feel like—I was listening to Ballard's podcast, and he was defending himself, and I was like, “Yeah, I'm kind of on your side about this piece of it.” You know, I think you've been a bit railroaded in the fact check process. A lot of people just like looking at PR speak for the first time and being like, (*antagonistically*) “Well, this is a little simplified!” And I'm like, yeah.

[01:23:07] **Ross Blocher:** Yeah. And he made a very good point there that oftentimes people would say, “Well, it didn't say this in the court transcript.”

And he was saying, “Well, you don't put all the details in the court transcript. I was there.”

And then, again, you do see that sometimes he will exaggerate a story. So, it makes you wonder how much of the stories that, you know, no one was present for were exaggerated. You'll often see like in documentaries about them or specials, like there will be footage of these rings happening and these arrests and stuff. And I found out in my reading that like those are usually volunteers with their organization who are recreating something like that, but it's kind of pitched as like, “Oh, look, here's the thing!” And I remember looking at some of that thinking like, wow, how did they get that clear of footage?

[01:23:47] **Carrie Poppy:** Yes! Totally. Yeah. He played something—I was watching a talk. He gave at BYU, and he's like, “Here's some footage of my wife adopting our kids.” And it's like this highly produced—it goes out of—from like black and white to color. (*Laughing.*) And I was like what?! This is just how it happened, huh?! But yeah, it seems like he's putting a lot of Operation Underground Railroad's finances into producing basically beautiful films of his family so that we all realize, you know, how his kids came out of the system and are all better. You know, so it's supposed to be this sort of allegorical tale.

[01:24:24] **Ross Blocher:** You just reminded me of something else. If you watch the film, just pay attention to how much he actually interacts with his real, biological children in the film. Almost not at all. I don't think he actually exchanges words with his own children.

(They laugh.)

[01:24:37] **Carrie Poppy:** Yeah, they just show up at one point. I was like, oh, I guess these are your new siblings.

[01:24:42] **Ross Blocher:** He has breakfast next to them at one point, and I don't think says anything to them. So, he's just—in the film, he comes across as a very absent parent. One of those people like when you see the film, where like, “This guy is a great communicator and teacher, but like abandons his own children, and they don't know who he is.”

[01:24:57] **Carrie Poppy:** Right, right, right. Very *Hook*.

[01:25:00] **Ross Blocher:** I don't know. At some point you have to cut something out of the film, but you could have cut some of the long lingering stairs.

[01:25:04] **Carrie Poppy:** Oh my god, it's too long!

[01:25:05] **Ross Blocher:** *(Chuckles.)* Yeah. And added more interaction with the family? Whatever. Uh, I won't Monday morning quarterback that. So, there you go. And if you choose to see it—well, I hope you—“enjoy” is not the right word. Hope you get something out of it.

[01:25:19] **Carrie Poppy:** Eh, you can enjoy it if you want. I don't care if you enjoy it.

[01:25:22] **Ross Blocher:** Carrie won't judge you. *(Whispering.)* I will.

[01:25:23] **Carrie Poppy:** You can email me if you enjoy it, and if you just felt neutral, you can email Ross. If you disliked it, I don't know, email Drew.

[01:25:30] **Ross Blocher:** Hey, this was fun.

[01:25:31] **Carrie Poppy:** This was fun. That was our lukewarm review of a pretty bad movie.

[01:25:35] **Ross Blocher:** Yeah, it was like meh. I don't know what I'm gonna give it. I haven't rated it on Letterboxed yet. Maybe I'll give it like a two and a half or three stars. It's out of five stars.

[01:25:41] **Carrie Poppy:** C minus? Yeah, I'd give it a C minus. Did you see *Barbie*?

[01:25:46] **Ross Blocher:** Okay, I'll give it three stars. I did. Yeah. You didn't like *Barbie*.

[01:25:48] **Carrie Poppy:** Oh, did you like it?

(Ross confirms.)

Oh my god.

[01:25:51] **Ross Blocher:** I had a good time.

[01:25:51] **Carrie Poppy:** Oh my god. Oh my god. D plus. Maybe.

[01:25:55] **Ross Blocher:** Alright. Carrie's always got an interesting take.

[01:25:59] **Carrie Poppy:** *(Laughs.)* Well, that's it for our show.

[01:26:00] **Ross Blocher:** Our theme music is by Brian Keith Dalton.

[01:26:03] **Carrie Poppy:** This episode was edited by Ross Blocher.

[01:26:05] **Ross Blocher:** Very quickly. Our administrative manager is Ian Kremer.

[01:26:08] **Carrie Poppy:** You can support this and all our movie habits by going to MaximumFun.org/join.

[01:26:14] **Ross Blocher:** Thank you to everybody who does support us there at MaximumFun.org/join. I'm saying it again, so they'll remember. Because they get to their browser and they're like, "Shoot, what did she say? Oh, thank goodness. Ross said it again."

[01:26:24] **Carrie Poppy:** Yeah. "It was slash what? Slash what? Slash what?!"

[01:26:26] **Ross Blocher:** "What's the word?!" But you can also support us by telling a friend, leaving a positive review.

[01:26:31] **Carrie Poppy:** Yes, you can. Or! You can get a tattoo across your forearm that says, "Listen to *Oh No, Ross and Carrie!*, my favorite podcast. Thank you for reading my tattoo."

[01:26:39] **Ross Blocher:** Oh man, if you actually do that, you gotta send it to us. And we'll be very impressed and feel guilty.

[01:26:49] **Carrie Poppy:** A little regret.

(They laugh.)

Very impressed, a little sorry.

[01:26:51] **Ross Blocher:** And remember!

[01:26:53] **Clip:**

Speaker: So, don't know if any one of you have already been to see *The Sound of Freedom*, but my friends and I just walked out.

(Car horn honks.)

Hi! And we are curious what your experiences were in the movie theater, because we preordered our tickets. Paid for them. They were claimed. Got the link sent. This is an AMC theater in Pineville, North Carolina. At some point today, the tickets got refunded to my friend, and we couldn't figure out why. So, we come anyways to the theater after dinner. And they're like, "Oh, well, we refunded all the tickets, because there's no air conditioning in our theaters." Okay, whatever. We don't care! Are you still showing it? "Yeah, you can still watch it." So, we get to thinking, why did they not send out a notice in the email saying, "Hey, we refunded your tickets, because there's no air conditioning." And we just are curious why didn't they let us know?

There was no one in that theater. There was us four and four other people. Eight people in the theater on a Friday night. There was air conditioning in the lobby. There was air conditioning in the hallways. There was air conditioning in the bathrooms. Not the theaters? They don't have the bartender or anything in the theater? I smell something stinky, and I think it's shit.

[01:28:24] **Music:** "Oh No, Ross and Carrie! Theme Song" by Brian Keith Dalton. A jaunty, upbeat instrumental.

[01:28:37] **Promo:**

Music: Suspenseful, orchestral music.

Maddy Myers: *The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom.*

Kirk Hamilton: *Diablo 4.*

Jason Schreier: *Final Fantasy XVI.*

Maddy: *Street Fighter 6.*

Kirk: *Baldur's Gate 3.*

Jason: *Starfield.*

Kirk: *Spider-Man 2!*

Jason: *Master Detective: Archive's Raincoat* for Nintendo Switch!? No? Is that just me?

(They laugh.)

Maddy: It's a huge time for video games.

Kirk: You need somebody to tell you what's good, what's not so good, and what's amazing.

Jason: I'm Jason Schreier.

Maddy: I'm Maddy Myers.

Kirk: And I'm Kirk Hamilton. We're the hosts of *Triple Click*, a videogame podcast for anyone who likes games.

Maddy: Find us at MaximumFun.org or wherever you get your podcasts. Bye!

(Music fades out.)

[01:29:18] **Sound Effect:** Cheerful ukulele chord.

[01:29:19] **Speaker 1:** Maximum Fun.

[01:29:21] **Speaker 2:** A worker-owned network.

[01:29:22] **Speaker 3:** Of artist owned shows.

[01:29:23] **Speaker 4:** Supported—

[01:29:24] **Speaker 5:** —directly—

[01:29:25] **Speaker 6:** —by you!