

[00:00:00] **Music:** Gentle, trilling music with a steady drumbeat plays under the dialogue.

[00:00:01] **Daniel Clowes:** *Bullseye* with Jesse Thorn is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR.

[00:00:14] **Music:** “Huddle Formation” from the album *Thunder, Lightning, Strike* by The Go! Team—a fast, upbeat, peppy song. Music plays as Jesse speaks, then fades out.

[00:00:21] **Jesse Thorn:** It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. Daniel Clowes, who is an award-winning cartoonist, thought that after his mother died, he'd find out everything. Dan was mostly raised by his grandparents. His mom had an intense, chaotic, and mysterious life. She dated race car drivers. She fixed cars on the south side of Chicago. Dan says the two of them never really connected. The gaps in her biography stretched out for decades. The stories that she'd tell about her life were opaque and vague. He figured, once she passed, he'd have a heart to heart with his brother, who knew his mom better. But it turned out, the brother died a month before their mom.

So, Dan Clowes did his own research: scoured websites, called family members, talked with old friends. The things that he didn't know about his mom could fill a book. And ultimately, they did. The book is called *Monica*. It took Clowes five years to write and draw. The title character narrates most of the book. She tells us about her life, but also about that of her mom, Penny, who—like Clowes's mother—was mercurial, frustrating, and mysterious. *Monica* spans genres. Decades, in fact. It doesn't present a grounded and reliable telling of Penny's life, but instead a collection of fantastic, beautiful, and sometimes confounding narratives.

I really loved it. I can't wait to talk with Dan about it. Let's get into it. My interview with Daniel Clowes.

[00:01:59] **Transition:** Pleasant, playful synth.

[00:02:05] **Jesse Thorn:** Dan, welcome to *Bullseye*. It's nice to see you, and I was so happy to read this book.

[00:02:10] **Daniel Clowes:** Oh, thanks, Jesse. Glad to be here.

[00:02:13] **Jesse Thorn:** This is a book that lives in a strange world betwixt and between, and I want to get into some of the betwixt and between. But first I want to ask you about just a simple kind of aesthetic question. A lot of the stories in this book, especially the first few, draw from the kind of aesthetics and styles of genre comics. Did you read genre comics? That is like comics that were, you know, war comics, romance comics, horror comics, those kinds of things?

[00:02:47] **Daniel Clowes:** Yeah, I was born in 1961, you know, started reading probably two or three years old. But I had a brother who was ten years older than me who bequeathed me his collection of old comics from his childhood, you know, ten years earlier. So, I was sort of ten years behind the current timeline. You know, I was reading horror comics, like old

sort of off brand funny animal comics. Characters like Super Duck, you know, that were like Disney rip-offs and—

[00:03:22] **Jesse Thorn:** I mean, *Super Duck* sounds pretty good, Dan.

[00:03:24] **Daniel Clowes:** *Super Duck* was actually a masterpiece. It was a very strange, bitter guy who was smuggling a lot of weird ideas into the comics. I remember there was one where the license plate on Super Duck says, 4Q2U2. You know, it's like he's—that was his attitude toward the kids reading the book.

But so, you know—so, yes, I read war comics, science fiction, early superheroes, but mostly the ones that are sort of intentionally goofy. You know, where Jimmy Olsen gets like a giant cranium, something like that, you know. So, yeah, I was immersed in that world. It was really—it was kind of the way I processed the world from a very young age.

[00:04:12] **Jesse Thorn:** When I look at those kind of comics as an adult, I'm struck by the intense combination of really compelling aesthetics and also just like some of the most truly (*censoring himself*) half-A'ed artistic output I've ever seen in my life. Like, it is—the disjuncture is so huge between like how compelling I find those frames and how much I just think of someone who had to make 50 of these in a month or whatever.

[00:04:55] **Daniel Clowes:** Yeah, and that's what it was. You know, it was—most of the comics I read, I think, were by, you know, sort of young GIs coming back from World War II. They wanted to be artists. They would study at the Art Students League in New York or something. And you know, every artist back then, commercial artist, wanted to work for the slicks. You know, that was *Saturday Evening Post*, *Collier's*, you know, all the big magazines. Those paid really well. They wanted to be Norman Rockwell; you know.

And instead, you know, they maybe weren't quite good enough for that, so they start working for, you know, shops that would just churn out comics. You know, these guys would do—I don't know, five or ten pages a day. The writers would probably write, you know, an entire comic book in a day. So, it's all like straight from the id. You know, there was no time to censor. There's no time to think it through and work things out. So, the stories never really make sense. Or if they do, it's a very predictable, trite kind of sense making. But within that, there are these images that are indelible and iconic. You know, things that seem straight from the id of, you know, troubled young men from—you know, who are grappling with post-traumatic stress and things like that.

So, that's the stuff I really responded to. It felt like—you know, my own dad was a World War II vet, and he never talked about anything. He was very quiet about it all, and it felt like those comics were almost expressing his inner turmoil in a way that that he didn't.

[00:06:38] **Jesse Thorn:** Other than Super Duck's custom license plates, are there images or comics that you read as a kid that you remember particularly vividly?

[00:06:50] **Daniel Clowes:** Yeah, it's—a few years ago, when my mom died and I was going through my stuff—I thought I had long ago got all the comics out of her house, but then I

found boxes and boxes that I had forgotten about. And there was a box of comics from when I was a kid that were—that were ones that were just imprinted in my brain. So, you know, mostly they were early like DC comics. There's one in particular that I've talked about that was sort of a science fiction called *Tales of the Unexpected*. And it's got a family on the cover. There's a blazing sun in the background. You know, big, bright red sun. And the family is trying to drink out of a drinking fountain, but the water's frozen. And so, they can't. They're unable to drink, even though it's the hottest day of the year—you know, in the history of mankind.

And I remember seeing that, and I was so frustrated by that image as a kid that I started pounding my head against the wall until my mom was like, “What are you doing?!” And I was showing her that cover. You know, how can it be? This is so horrible! And so, a few years ago, a friend of mine who runs an auction site saw that the original art for that cover was being sold. And so, I scraped together every penny I could find, and now I actually own the artwork to that cover, and it hangs sort of in front of my drawing board. And every day I look at it and I think, “How can this be? How could I own something so primal and powerful that—you know, that affected me so deeply as a kid?”

[00:08:29] **Jesse Thorn:** That must have been quite the covert operation, Dan Clowes—secretly bidding on the most important artwork of his childhood.

(*They chuckle.*)

Like, you just—you can't tell any other comic book nerds that that's Dan Clowes's favorite because they'll—

[00:08:46] **Daniel Clowes:** Absolutely. No, I swore my friend to secrecy. Do not tell anybody about this. Because I imagine somebody else would buy it just so that they could, you know, make me trade them my most valuable piece of artwork for it.

[00:09:02] **Jesse Thorn:** So much more to get into with Dan Clowes, author of the terrific new graphic novel *Monica*. Stay with us. It's *Bullseye* from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

(*AD BREAK.*)

[00:09:59] **Music:** Funky synth with light vocalizations.

[00:10:03] **Jesse Thorn:** Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. If you're just joining us, I'm talking with Daniel Clowes. Clowes is an award-winning writer and comics artist. He created the legendary series *8-Ball*, along with *Ghost World*, which was turned into a movie of the same name. His latest work is *Monica*. It's an epic and beautiful graphic novel based in part on his own attempts to learn about the life of his late, largely absent mother. Let's get back into our conversation.

Can you tell me what the circumstances of your childhood were? With the understanding that maybe they're difficult to capture, and that's why you wrote fiction. (*Chuckles.*)

[00:09:54] **Daniel Clowes:** Yeah, yeah. Do we have three hours? I mean, so here's what I knew sort of growing up: that my parents were divorced. My mom married a race car driver. He died in a race, and my mom had kind of a breakdown after that, and I went to live with my grandparents and visited my dad on the weekends. And that was—and saw my mom pretty infrequently, like once a week for dinner, and that felt normal. That was my childhood but—

[00:10:25] **Jesse Thorn:** How old were you when you went to live with your grandparents?

[00:10:28] **Daniel Clowes:** , I was six. No, wait, it was 1966, so I was five. And then, after my mom died, I kind of learned—I knew that my parents were sort of involved in auto racing, kind of low level, what they call Formula Junior racing—or they called it back then. I don't know if it even still exists as a thing. So, they were involved in racing. My dad was an engineer, had designed and built his own race car and kind of taught my mom how to work on the car. And she really took to it, and it was sort of their couple's hobby. And then apparently what happened was they hired a race car driver. He and my—he was married, but he and my mom had some kind of an affair. They divorced their spouses, and they got married.

And so, that was sort of something I didn't know at all 'til after my mom died. And he and my mom started an auto shop on the south side of Chicago. It was like the first place in Chicago that fixed foreign cars. And so, my mom ran that up until—I don't know, the '90s, I think.

[00:11:39] **Jesse Thorn:** How old were you when you found out about this stuff?

[00:11:44] **Daniel Clowes:** You know, like two years—like 60 years old, you know. And I found it out just by like researching online, looking at—you know, there's all kinds of racing websites where you can look up, you know, the owner of a car, the driver, all that. And I noticed like that—you know, the car that my dad was the owner of was being driven by my stepdad like two years before I was born. So, that was something I'd not—my dad never mentioned the driver's name ever, so. You know, and my mom I don't think wanted to tell me about her affair or whatever. So, it was all a big mystery. I'm surprised my grandma never told me. But you know, she was old-fashioned. Didn't want to embarrass my mom, I guess.

[00:12:34] **Jesse Thorn:** Did you go looking for this information? I mean, obviously you did in the simplest sense. You found it somewhere, but was it like a big project for you?

[00:12:48] **Daniel Clowes:** You know, my plan all along had always been that my mom would die, and then my brother and I would finally like become close. We were never at all close. And I thought he knew everything. You know, he was 10 years old when I was born. So, he knew the whole lore of the family and that once it was just the two of us, I would kind of get all that information from him. And then he wound up dying a month before my mom did, just randomly. So, at that point, I realized like I've got to either ignore this and, you know, just put it all aside, or if I want to actually to make sense of it, I have to kind of do some detective work. So, you know, I went through all—I found my mom's old diaries, and I found letters she had written. She had a friend that she used to write to, and she would Xerox the letters. And so, there were these long letters that kind of explained what she was thinking.

And she talked about like regretting, you know, not being around as a mom. But then always said, yeah, but I think I made the right choice, you know.

She basically chose to—after my stepfather died, she switched over to motorcycle racing. So, she married motorcycle racer as her next husband. And she kind of, you know, went on the circuit around the country doing that. So, that was sort of her choice. And that's—you know, she didn't really regret making that choice.

[00:14:22] **Jesse Thorn:** How did you feel when you read her describing herself not regretting making that choice?

[00:14:29] **Daniel Clowes:** You know, it was—in a way, it was sort of a relief, you know? Because I had always felt it was me a little bit, you know, like that I was inherently off-putting in some way. You know, just—you know, it's funny to say this about a mother/son relationship, but we just never really connected. Or maybe we did when I was very little. I remember feeling very close to her when I was, you know, three or four. But at a certain point, I just—we had nothing to say to each other. Sometimes I realize like I never got in an argument with my mother my whole life. I mean, imagine that. You know, how many people can say that? Like, it just never even occurred to me to argue with her. 'Cause you have to have some like emotional connection to have an argument, I think. And I always felt like, oh, if I argue with her, she'll just shut down, and maybe I'll never see her again. So, it was just a very strained, distant relationship.

[00:15:23] **Jesse Thorn:** It's weird to have this part of life that is both within and without your memory.

(Daniel agrees.)

I went and cleaned out in my mom's basement a few weeks ago in San Francisco, and I was in charge of going through all the photos. My mom's alive and healthy—but going through all the photo albums, and I had to pick some stuff out to save and put the rest in the dump. And there was these pictures of my parents when they were together, and my parents split when I was about four, maybe five. And it both seemed familiar and was something that I didn't remember at all. You know what I mean?

(Daniel affirms.)

Like, and the fact that it is both of those things, I think, is what helps animate at least the search for the protagonist of your book. Like, this world that you can almost put your finger on, but not quite, is very different from, you know, “What did Grandpa do in the war?”

[00:16:35] **Daniel Clowes:** Oh, sure. I mean, I don't trust my memory at all. I feel like it's absolutely the truth. I feel like I remember things very clearly, but I know enough about memory to know that I'm probably remembering memories of memories of memories, and they're always being edited. I know how I work on stories. You know, I start out with sort of a primal image or a moment of inspiration. And then, that turns into—that gets honed through repetition in my mind over and over until it feels, you know, like a gem-like moment in a

story, something that's indelibly itself. And I know I'm doing that with my own memories, whether I like it or not.

So, I certainly wanted the memories in *Monica* to feel that way, to feel like there's no sort of omniscient truth to the images. In some comics, I've played with the idea that the images are the absolute truth, and the words that the characters are saying are playing off of that in that they maybe aren't the truth. And you're hearing sort of the character's self-justifications or their own versions of things that are then shown to be somewhat inaccurate. But in this book, I wanted the images and the words to all be in question. And you're not sure which is the truth or if any of it is the truth.

[00:18:06] **Jesse Thorn:** Do you see yourself—Dan, do you see there being a truth in the narrative of *Monica* and her childhood and her mother? Like, is there a story in your head that you deviated from as, you know, we see it from different perspectives and through different layers of memory?

[00:18:30] **Daniel Clowes:** You know, I wanted the story—as I started getting deeper into it, I wanted it to feel the way I felt about my childhood and to try to actually remember how I felt as a child and the sort of mystery and chaos and just sort of the fear of everything being in constant flux—constantly, you know, being swept out from under my feet. I wanted to capture that emotionally. I wanted it, you know, through the eyes of a very small child.

[00:19:07] **Jesse Thorn:** Was that a feeling that was hard to access?

[00:19:13] **Daniel Clowes:** Mm. Once I kind of put myself in the world of that character and, you know, started drawing people as I remembered them and drawing a version of my mom's basement apartment and just, you know, sort of seeing the world from that low angle of a child, it all came back. I started remembering things I had forgotten years ago. Just, you know, that feeling of when your parents take you to somebody's house because they're friends with the adults and they just happen to have kids, and they throw you in a room with these other kids, and it becomes like *Lord of the Flies*? You know, back then it really was—I remember some truly horrific kids that I was kind of forced to play with. And you know, you'd leave the party just traumatized, and downstairs, your parents were just like, you know, talking about Joan Baez or something.

[00:20:13] **Jesse Thorn:** (*Laughs.*) What did you remember that ended up depicted in the book?

[00:20:20] **Daniel Clowes:** I tried not to do too much of my own stuff. I wanted it to feel like it was somebody else's life that was just tangential or almost a mirror of my life. But everything is vaguely similar—all the boyfriends that Monica's mom goes through, they're all amalgams or versions of various men in my mom's life and all the—you know, all the posters on Monica's wall are things that, you know, maybe I didn't have, but my friends had. You know, things that were just part of that landscape of that era. You know, I wanted to feel like I was really back there. You know, I looked at all my old photo albums and things like that and saw the kind of—you know, kind of the way rooms looked back then. You know, people decorated in a very different way.

[00:21:22] **Jesse Thorn:** Was your mom the kind of countercultural drifter that Monica's mom was?

[00:21:31] **Daniel Clowes:** No, not quite the same. My mom was almost—you know, in *Monica*, the mother character is sort of aligned with a cult. We don't really know if she's involved or what her involvement is, but my mom was almost a cult leader. You know, she had a sort of—you know, the only woman auto mechanic on the south side of Chicago. She had a bunch of acolytes. You know, she had a lot of people who followed her and listened to what she said. And like many people of her age—you know, and my age now—her opinions were sort of cemented into place at a very young age, and she never reexamined them or thought anything about, you know, making them more complex or anything like that. She just stuck to the things she believed when she was, you know, 35 years old.

So, it got kind of tiresome after a while to listen to her opinions, because you didn't need to hear it. You could just imagine it. You know, anything that happens on the news, I can just imagine her response. So, it would be—absolutely fall in line with, you know, what she'd said a million other times.

[00:22:50] **Jesse Thorn:** How did cults enter the story?

[00:22:53] **Daniel Clowes:** I mean, partly I'd always been interested in cults and to an unhealthy degree. It was just sort of a hobby when I was young.

[00:23:01] **Jesse Thorn:** Wait, what does that unhealthy degree mean? Does that mean that you joined a few just to see how it would go? (*Laughs.*)

[00:23:06] **Daniel Clowes:** No, it always seemed so—it seemed like the last thing I would do. I always felt like the opposite of a cult member in a way, like I was very much in my own cult of one. But as a teenager, I remember being fascinated by SLA and the Manson family and all those groups. Maybe because they—you know, I had a very negative view of the counterculture just based on my childhood. And so, it sort of—it clarified that I was right. You know, the SLA was representative of like my brother. (*Chuckles.*) You know, like I think it was sort of that. But like when I first moved to Berkeley, the first thing I did back—it was 1992. I walked the two blocks from my house to the apartment on Bienvenu Avenue where Patty Hearst was kidnapped. You know, I couldn't even believe I was there.

[00:24:04] **Jesse Thorn:** You didn't go get a nice loaf of bread? That's what I would do if I was in Berkeley right now, get myself a nice loaf!

[00:24:10] **Daniel Clowes:** Yeah, well, you could do that too. But then I, you know, as I was working on the story, it felt more and more like everybody all of a sudden nowadays is in a cult. I feel like maybe I'm in one. You know, it's like everybody's opinions are sort of like honed by a certain group that they're in, and everything feels very like we're all—you know, we all have our own doctrines, and that we—if we go against those doctrines, they'll be hell to pay within the cult. You know, it feels very much like that. So, I thought it had a resonance for just how the world feels today.

[00:24:52] **Jesse Thorn:** We'll finish up with Daniel Clowes after a quick break. When we return, he spent an extraordinary amount of time researching his family's history, turned over dozens and dozens of rocks, heard stories that he never thought were possible, learned things about his mother that, frankly, were of the sort that you can't unlearn. Is he glad that he did all that? We'll find out. It's *Bullseye* from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

[00:25:19] **Promo:**

Music: Fast-paced, futuristic synth.

Brenda Snell: Have you ever wanted to know the sad lore behind Chuck E. Cheese's love of birthday parties?

Austin Taylor: Or why Saturday mornings are reserved for cartoons?

Brenda: Or have you wanted to know how beloved virtual pet site Neopets fell into the hands of Scientologists?

Austin: Or how a former Mattel employee managed to grow Sega into a video game powerhouse?

Brenda: Join us, hosts Austin and Brenda, and learn all of these things and more at (*echoing*) *Secret Histories of Nerd Mysteries!* Now on Maximum Fun!

(*Music fades out.*)

[00:25:48] **Music:** Thumpy synth with a syncopated beat.

[00:25:53] **Jesse Thorn:** It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest is Daniel Clowes. He's the author of *8-Ball*, *Ghost World*, and the brand-new graphic novel, *Monica*.

There's like a horror and sci-fi comic trope and other form trope, which is like “I'm back in the old hometown, and it's how I remember it, but it's not how I remember it”, and that shows up in *Monica*. There are a lot of kind of revisitings where something seems slightly off.

(*Daniel confirms.*)

And it occurs to me that the feeling of having perfected a picture—that that picture has its kind of like still perfection—is not that different from that feeling of like “I've been in this diner a thousand times, but something's a little bit wrong”.

[00:26:50] **Daniel Clowes:** Yeah, I mean, that's certainly how I experience all the art that I've loved my entire life. You know, there's certain things that I loved the first time I saw them when I was six or seven years old have gone back to. And I go back to them in cycles. Like, the artist Basil Wolverton, who drew these very grotesque figures. They're very appealing to like any or seven-year-old boy. They're very grotesque. And so, all my friends, we loved

them. And then—you know, and then they seem like, okay, I get it. You know, I'm moving on to something else. And then 15 years later, you look at them again, and all of a sudden you see them in a whole new light. You see a whole new level of what's going on, and you appreciate them on a different plane. And then another 15 years passes, and you go back. And I find I've done this cycle with all my favorite artists over and over. And they all—all the good ones keep coming back in ways that are exciting and interesting and new. You know, they become new again.

And that is very much like revisiting that—you know, that old town that you remember from childhood and everything's a little different, but it's all still the same too, somehow.

[00:28:11] **Jesse Thorn:** There's also though that kind of distressing quality of stillness that is often in those stories and is in the versions of those stories in *Monica*. Like, the streets are all empty, or I don't see someone that I recognize, or I kind of see someone I recognize, but they look slightly wrong. And I think like if your comics had more kapow action panels, maybe we wouldn't feel that disquieting stillness. But that aesthetic of having perfected the picture and that kind of stillness dovetail really effectively.

(They chuckle.)

[00:28:54] **Daniel Clowes:** Yeah, it's—you know, certainly I love those kinds of stories. I love the Lovecraft trope, you know, where he goes down the windy road and finds this town that he'd never heard of somewhere in New England. And you know, it's run by alien creatures or what—you know, I love that. Well, I love the idea that you could get lost anywhere in America and find some little town that nobody knows about. You know, that's such a dreamy idea. I think as a kid, I felt like that. I felt like—we'd go on these cross-country trips, and all of a sudden you'd get on a dirt road somewhere in Michigan, and you'd find yourself in some tiny little whistlestop farm town where there'd be a—you know, a drugstore that all of a sudden sold weird comics and magazines that you'd never seen before.

You know, that kind of feeling was so exciting. It felt like the world was filled with stuff like that. And now that's—it feels impossible. It feels like you'd have to go to rural Slovenia or something to find something that not everybody knew about. You know, it's not going to happen in, you know, New Hampshire or whatever like it used to.

[00:30:09] **Jesse Thorn:** Monica, the protagonist of this book, the woman who's looking for her roots, becomes a success in business. That's sort of like an essential piece of the middle of her story. The thing that drives her towards her search is that having ended. And the way that you depicted success was so vivid to me. And it's kind of like medium success. It's not like, you know, I get to play a Stradivarius in the Berlin Philharmonic type success. But I wondered: is Dan writing here about his own uncomfortable/comfortable feelings about his own success?

[00:31:02] **Daniel Clowes:** I certainly felt like, you know, I had things to say about how that feels that felt like they should or could be shared. And I also—you know, in dealing with, you know, being involved in Hollywood, being involved in museum shows and things, I realized I'd found myself somewhat adjacent to very rich people occasionally. And that feeling was so unlike any depiction of how it feels to be rich that I felt like I had sort of a window onto that,

that was something I wanted to explore. It's—you know, it's something not—people are very uncomfortable writing about it, so I wanted to of push into something that was—you know, that would have been easy to avoid. But I thought it was an interesting area to explore.

I didn't want to show her at her most successful, because I kind of—I felt in my own experience, that's the kind of thing I just tend to forget. That's the stuff that does not stick in my memory or are those like good moments where, you know, all of a sudden, you know, a book's doing really well or something like that. It's much more sort of the painful elements that surround it that stick in my memory.

[00:32:26] **Jesse Thorn:** Do you feel proud of your successes?

[00:32:30] **Daniel Clowes:** It depends on my frame of mind. I mean, I try to, because it's my inclination to kind of beat up on myself and to think of—look at only the flaws and the failings. And so, I try very hard to like appreciate it. I don't know if I'm proud of it, but to appreciate especially the fact that, you know, I've supported myself as an artist for a long career. That's a miracle. That's something I would have never in a million years dreamed I could do. And if nothing else, that's—you know—just an incredible thing for me to imagine telling the 22-year-old version of myself who would have, you know, sold his soul for that.

[00:33:22] **Jesse Thorn:** I feel like when I was making \$18,000 a year, I was like ready to ride that out. I was like, “It's fine. We'll figure it out. \$18,000 a year forever. Alright.”

[00:33:34] **Daniel Clowes:** (*Chuckles.*) That seemed like an incredible amount of money.

[00:33:36] **Jesse Thorn:** I was like, “I got that catastrophic health insurance. I'm made in the shade.”

(*They laugh and Daniel agrees.*)

Come get me catastrophe.

[00:33:45] **Daniel Clowes:** Right. Bring it on. I'm here to withstand.

[00:33:49] **Jesse Thorn:** But there's something odd about the kind of success that—you know, there's like the classic story. “I always was driving for this success, and when I got it, it tasted bitter.” But there's this other kind of success that is like not what you expected or imagined or were thinking of. Not that you were against it (*chuckles*), but it's an odd, sideways kind of thing.

[00:34:16] **Daniel Clowes:** Yeah, I mean, and really the—as things have gone on, the only thing that I'm really happy about is that I can still draw the comics. You know, that's the great joy in doing all this is to be able to that time where I'm completely alone figuring these things out and getting into the studio every day and just drawing and writing and creating these comics. That's—you know, the fact that I'm allowed to do that is the true success. You know, once things come out and people like them or don't like them or buy them or don't buy them, that's—that feels like commerce. That's sort of somebody else's thing that I'm kind of party to

or, you know, participate in. But it's—the actual drawing of the comics is the thing I'm really living for and just trying to constantly support.

[00:35:19] **Jesse Thorn:** Are you glad that you went poking around in the half-remembered and unknown parts of your family and past?

[00:35:30] **Daniel Clowes:** I think so. I think keeps me from, you know, sort of picking at the scab, trying to figure everything out, trying to—you know, it keeps my imagination from wasting its time trying to figure out scenarios. You know, I don't spend much time trying to understand just the logistics of what was going on. You know, it's almost like devising a plot for a story. That takes up a lot of mental energy. And so, now I use my mental energy for other things. So, I am glad I got at least the basics down. Of course, I'll never understand the character motivations of anybody in my family. You know, it was all—that's all very mysterious. I'm not sure I can ever quite figure that out.

[00:36:16] **Jesse Thorn:** Well, Dan, I'm glad to see you; I'm glad to get to talk to you again, and I'm glad for this book, which I honestly think might be the best thing of yours that I've ever read. I just loved it. So, thank you very much.

[00:36:27] **Daniel Clowes:** Oh, man. Thank you, Jesse. You're really the best. That was great.

[00:36:32] **Jesse Thorn:** Daniel Clowes. His new book is called *Monica*. One of my favorite works from Clowes, as you probably heard me say. And he is a legend in the genre. You can get it at your local book or comic store or [Bookshop.org](https://www.bookshop.org).

[00:36:48] **Transition:** Bright, chiming synth.

[00:36:50] **Jesse Thorn:** That's the end of another episode of *Bullseye*. *Bullseye* is created from the homes of me and the staff of Maximum Fun in and around greater Los Angeles, California. I just got home from touring with my friend John Hodgman and our show *Judge John Hodgman*. I had such a great time. Thank you to everybody who came out to those shows. We have a streaming version. You can find all the information about that, which is gonna premiere soon, at our events page, [MaximumFun.org/events](https://www.maximumfun.org/events). It's a good time. You can hear me sing.

The show is produced by speaking into microphones. Our senior producer is Kevin Ferguson. Our producers are Jesus Ambrosio and Richard Robey. Our production fellow at Maximum Fun is Bryanna Paz. We get booking help from Mara Davis. Special thanks this week to Katie Jensen of Vocal Fry Studios in Toronto for recording Jillian Tamaki at her studio and to Bryan Matheson at Skyline in Oakland for recording Daniel Clowes. Our interstitial music is by DJW, also known as Dan Wally. Our theme song is “Huddle Formation” by The Go! Team. Thanks to The Go! Team. Thanks to their label, Memphis Industries.

Bullseye is on Instagram. There we share interview highlights, behind the scenes looks, and more. We're [@BullseyeWithJesseThorn](https://www.instagram.com/BullseyeWithJesseThorn). I think that's about it. Just remember, all great radio hosts have a signature sign off.

[00:38:12] **Promo:** *Bullseye* with Jesse Thorn is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR.

(Music fades out.)