

00:00:00	Music	Music	"Switchblade Comb," by Mobius VanChocStraw. A jaunty, jazzy tune reminiscent of the opening theme of a movie. Music continues at a lower volume as April introduces herself, and then it fades out.
00:00:08	April Wolfe	Host	<p>Welcome to <i>Switchblade Sisters</i>, where women get together to slice and dice our favorite action and genre films. I'm April Wolfe.</p> <p>Every week, I invite a new female filmmaker on—a writer, director, actor, or producer—and we talk in-depth about one of their fave genre films, maybe one that influenced their own work in some way; and today I'm very excited to have writer Avra Fox-Lerner here with me.</p> <p>Hi, Avra!</p>
00:00:27	Avra Fox-Lerner	Guest	Hi! How are you?
00:00:28	April	Host	<p>Pretty good!</p> <p>For those of you who aren't as familiar with Avra's work, please let me give you an introduction.</p> <p>Avra started writing when she was 15 years old, but found her way into the entertainment industry from below the line, first working as a set lighting technician in Local 52—Local Five-Two.</p> <p><i>[Laughs.]</i> I gotta get the lingo right.</p> <p>Avra had to be convinced by her writing father, Terry Curtis Fox, that writing was probably her future. You had to be coaxed into it apparently, yeah?</p>
00:00:53	Avra	Guest	I did have to be coaxed into it. I mean, my dad was a television writer, and I was very adamant that I was <u>not</u> gonna be a writer and I was <u>not</u> gonna work in the film industry.
00:01:02	April	Host	Well, yeah, fuck you! You— <i>[laughing]</i> you're a writer now!
00:01:06	Avra	Guest	<i>[Laughs.]</i> I know, <u>and</u> , you know, I've been in— <i>[laughs]</i> working in the film industry for like, well over 15 years, so I <u>really</u> failed in all of these tasks I set for myself as a teenager.
00:01:15	April	Host	<p>Man, um, maybe better luck next time.</p> <p><i>[Avra laughs.]</i></p> <p>So Avra's lighting tech work supported her creative pursuits until she was able to turn writing into a full-time gig when Henry Jacobson—partner, collaborator—recommended her to Blumhouse to write what would be his directorial debut. Blumhouse then hired her to rewrite the psychological horror feature <i>Bloodline</i>, which Jacobson then directed.</p> <p><i>Bloodline</i> stars Seann William Scott as Evan, a mild-mannered husband and father to a newborn. But the arrival of the child in the household brings Evan's mother, played by Dale Dickey, to the family; and Evan begins to feel a protective... murderous rage? Rise inside of him, courtesy of his very scary mom.</p>

00:01:53 April Host The film premiered at Fantastic Fest in September, 2018, and went into wide release September 20th, 2019.

Avra recently completed the writers lab, is—is it IRIS New York Women in Film & Television, Meryl Streep and Nicole Kidman's thing, right?

00:02:07 Crosstalk Crosstalk **April:** Is that—

Avra: Yeah.

April: Okay.

Avra: That's right.

00:02:09 April Host And she went through that with her original female-centric western called *Lady Kate*.

Avra is now also a member of Film Fatales, and is developing numerous female-driven genre projects, with her eye on expanding the world of horror to include more female voices. So of course we enjoy what Avra's doing there.

Avra, the movie that you chose to talk about today is also one of my personal favorites, too. It's *Ravenous*.

00:02:31 Crosstalk Crosstalk **Avra:** [*Laughs.*] It's just—

April: Can you tell us a little bit—you know, a little explanation of why this is one of your fave genre films?

00:02:36 Avra Guest I mean, [*laughing*] *Ravenous* is one of the most amazing movies.

I actually saw this movie the year that it came out. And I was talking about this with a friend of mine, 'cause I was trying to remember how I ended up seeing this movie.

'Cause it came out in 1999, um, which, like, now is sort of being hailed as this golden era of movie-making, which I—I'm pretty much on board with that.

But I realize, like, you couldn't watch previews online, which is a big pastime of mine right now.

00:03:05 April Host Mm-hm.

00:03:06 Avra Guest So I must have heard a radio ad? Or seen a preview for it before another movie, but somehow, I ended up going with a group of friends to see this movie in a multiplex in Connecticut—which is where I was going to college at the time—not really knowing what we were getting into.

[*April laughs, and then responds affirmatively as Avra continues.*]

And I just even now remember the feeling of walking out of the theater, feeling like I'd never seen anything like this movie before, and just being like, completely blindsided by how amazing and visceral and funny it was.

00:03:39 April Host Yeah. Even today, I would say people would walk out of a theater and be like, "I've never seen anything like this before."

[Avra laughs quietly.]

For those of you who haven't seen *Ravenous* before, today's episode will give you some spoilers, but that shouldn't stop you from listening before you watch.

As always, my motto is that it's not what happens but how it happens that makes a movie worth watching.

Still, if you'd like to pause and watch *Ravenous* first, this is your chance.

[Beat.]

And now that you're back, let me introduce *Ravenous* with a short synopsis.

00:04:03 Music Music "Hail Columbia" by Damon Albarn and Michael Nyman, begins playing as April speaks. Inspirational, patriotic music.

00:04:04 April Host Written by Ted Griffin and directed by Antonia Bird for release in 1999, *Ravenous* stars Guy Pearce as Second Lieutenant John Boyd, who gets a medal for capturing the enemy in the—in a battle of the Mexican–American War.

00:04:15 Clip Clip *[Music continues.]*

Medal Presenter: For heroism above and beyond the call of duty, for successfully infiltrating the enemy's ranks and securing victory independently with cunning and honor.

[Fireworks begin.]

[When the clip cuts, so does the music.]

00:04:29 April Host Um, but he might not be the courageous guy some people made him out to be. Because of that, he's sent to a western outpost with a bunch of other outcasts, including Colonel Hart, played by Jeffrey Jones; Private Toffler, played by Jeremy Davies; and Private Reich, played by Neil McDonough.

Boyd's nervous and unsteady as he tells Hart the story of how he played dead and was buried in a cart under his comrades while their blood spilt into his mouth.

00:04:52 Clip Clip *[Conversation is punctuated by echoes of battle—shouting, the crack of gunfire.]*

Lindus: How did you get behind the enemy line?

Boyd: I froze. I was scared.

Lindus: Scared? You froze while the rest of your unit fought—

Unknown Speaker: Can it!

00:05:03	April	Host	<p>Lindus: —and <u>died</u>?</p> <p>And only <u>after</u> that, he was able to capture the enemy.</p> <p>Suddenly, a strange man shows up at the fort, played by Robert Carlyle. The guy's near death and explains to the fort that his wagon train was slowly overtaken by a soldier named Ives, who became a cannibal.</p> <p>He says that one woman was left with the soldier.</p>
00:05:21	Clip	Clip	<p><i>[Tense music.]</i></p> <p>Colqhoun: Would have been nobler, I know, to have stayed and protected Mrs. MacCready from Ives, but...</p> <p><i>[Metallic jingling, as of coins.]</i></p> <p>Colqhoun: <i>[Whispering]</i> I was weak.</p> <p><i>[Breathes shakily.]</i></p> <p><i>[Still whispering]</i> I fled.</p>
00:05:34	April	Host	<p>And Hart says, "Ugh. Damn it. It's <u>our</u> job to go out there and try to rescue her."</p>
00:05:38	Clip	Clip	<p>Hart: Let's pack up.</p> <p>Toffler: <i>[Alarmed]</i> Pack?</p> <p>Hart: We've gotta go out there.</p> <p>Toffler: Why—why pack?</p> <p>Hart: We've <u>got</u> to go, it's our <u>job</u>.</p>
00:05:41	April	Host	<p>Despite George, played by Joseph Runningfox, pleading with them to understand that this man is probably the wendigo...</p>
00:05:47	Clip	Clip	<p><i>[Tense music, different from the last clip.]</i></p> <p>George: Ojibwe <i>[speaks Native language.]</i></p> <p>Hart: Uh, it's an old Indian myth from the North.</p> <p>George: Wendigo <i>[continues speaking in Native language.]</i></p> <p>Hart: A man... eats... another's flesh. Um, it's usually an enemy.</p> <p>George: <i>[Speaks in Native language again.]</i></p> <p>Hart: And he, um... <u>takes</u>—no, uh, <u>steals</u> his strength—uh, essence. His <u>spirit</u>.</p>
00:06:15	April	Host	<p>...they still go on a search party, leaving Dr. Knox at the fort to wait for two others who'd left the day before.</p>

			During the search, Toffler takes a bad fall down a mountain, and wakes up in his tent with the strange man licking his bloody wound.
00:06:28	Clip	Clip	Toffler: HE WAS LICKING ME!
00:06:31	April	Host	It's pretty freaky.
			They continue on, but they have to restrain the strange man. And when they get to the cave, Boyd and Reich descend into it, and find that the stranger is <u>actually</u> Ives himself, and this was a setup.
00:06:44	Clip	Clip	Reich: Ives. Oh, Jesus.
			<i>[Rapid thudding.]</i>
			Reich: IT'S A TRAP!
			<i>[Lantern shatters.]</i>
00:06:50	April	Host	Ives kills <u>all</u> in the party but Boyd, who escapes by tumbling down a mountainside and hiding out in a pit with the deceased Reich.
			Ives goes about devouring the men, gaining their strength.
			Boyd finally gives in and eats some of Reich to heal himself enough, and escapes back to the fort.
			But the survivors <u>there</u> are really suspicious of why <u>he's</u> the only one left.
00:07:12	Clip	Clip	Boyd: You don't believe me, sir.
			General Slauson: Well, we have four missing soldiers, Captain, and no bodies. We <u>need</u> a supportable explanation.
00:07:19	April	Host	The general—who sent Boyd there to the fort in the first place—he then brings in the new colonel. Surprise! It's Ives.
00:07:27	Clip	Clip	<i>[Tense music.]</i>
			<i>[Boyd gets progressively shakier throughout this scene.]</i>
			Boyd: It's him, sir.
			Slauson: <i>[Irritated]</i> It's <u>who</u> ?
			Boyd: It's <u>him</u> , sir.
			Slauson: <u>Who</u> is?
			<i>[Music is getting more ominous, some tuba or baritone.]</i>
			Boyd: He's Colqhoun, sir!
			Slauson: Colonel Ives is...?
			Boyd: He's the one that—that killed them all, sir.
00:07:40	April	Host	Boyd tried to convince—tries to convince them that Ives is gonna kill and eat them, to no avail. <u>He's</u> the crazy one, to them.

			Ives <u>does</u> , in fact, kill and eat them, however. And one more surprise: Colonel Hart shows up! A new convert to cannibalism. Healed by it.
00:07:56	Clip	Clip	Hart: <i>[Whispering]</i> I feel terrific. Boyd: So <u>you're</u> gonna kill me. Hart: <i>[Affronted]</i> No! Tch. <i>[Sighs.]</i> It's lonely being a cannibal. <i>[Laughs.]</i> Tough making friends. No, I like you, Boyd. We, uh... wanna bring you into the fold. You gotta <u>eat</u> .
00:08:13	April	Host	Hart and Ives try to get Boyd to eat human flesh and stay with them, harvesting western settlers, and Boyd can only resist for so long. Hart convinces Boyd to kill him eventually, and put him out of his misery.
00:08:25	Clip	Clip	<i>[Portentously, the background music features the tolling of bells.]</i> Hart: You have to do me a favor before you go. <i>[Pause.]</i> You have to kill me. <i>[Deep breath, and then almost crying]</i> I can't live like this anymore.
00:08:36	April	Host	And then Boyd and Ives fight to the death, dying together in a bear trap. Uh, in each other's arms; it's beautiful.
00:08:43	Crosstalk	Crosstalk	Avra: It's very beautiful. <i>[Laughs.]</i>
00:08:45	April	Host	April: But the wendigo lives on. Because the general comes along and tastes some of Ives's delicious stew, made from human meat, all but sealing his fate of constant cravings. The film ends with the <u>only</u> woman, Martha, walking away from all this turmoil, back to her Native tribe. Okay. So. That's, uh, <i>Ravenous</i> in a nutshell, <i>[laughing]</i> but it's not <u>really</u> in a nutshell.
00:09:04	Avra	Guest	<i>[Laughing]</i> I have to say that when I chose this movie, I was like, "Oh, April's gonna have to synopsise it, and that's really challenging."
00:09:11	Crosstalk	Crosstalk	Avra: This is <u>not</u> an easy movie to kind of like, boil down to its pieces. April: It's—noooooo.
00:09:15	April	Host	There's a lot of twists. <u>And</u> this is also a film where music plays a great deal of, um—of a <u>character</u> , I would say, in the film, too.
00:09:21	Avra	Guest	I think <u>absolutely</u> , it's a major character in this movie.
00:09:25	April	Host	Probably one of the—one of the greatest horror scores of all time, I'd say, 'cause it runs the gamut from Appalachian folk music to—um,

a—actual Plains tribe singing, Native singing, and everything in between.

An oboe with fluctuations.

It's got everything. It's got everything!

00:09:48 Avra Guest

[April responds affirmatively as Avra speaks.]

It does have everything, and it also manages to feel really contemporary at the same time that it uses all of these elements of music from this time period, which I think is super-duper exciting.

I mean, I definitely—*[laughing]* I own this soundtrack on CD.

00:10:05 April Host

Oh, yeah!

00:10:06 Avra Guest

Because it's sort of so extraordinary, um, in that—in that it is almost unique, right?

But it helps the story unfold, and also lets you know, as an audience member, what kind of movie you're watching without telling you how to feel.

[April repeatedly responds affirmatively as Avra continues.]

And actually, that was a big thing on *Bloodline* that, um, Henry and I talked about with Trevor, our composer, 'cause we wanted this very synth-y, eighties score, but we wanted it to feel sort of timeless.

And Henry was really adamant about making sure that Trevor understood that it was supposed to teach you how to watch the movie in terms of timing and tone, but not dictate to you how your emotional reaction is supposed to be while you're watching it.

00:10:52 Avra Guest

Right? Like, there's so many movies where—you know, the violins swell and you know it's time to cry, or, you know, it's levity! And now you know it's time to laugh!

And I think *Ravenous* does a great job juxtaposing this. I mean, there are moments where—like, that first great chase scene, with Colqhoun Ives and Tolliver, *[laughing]* throughout this like, endless chase scene that ends in like, many long falling scenes.

00:11:20 Crosstalk Crosstalk

Avra: Um, it has this incredible humor to it because of the song that is chosen to play over—

April: It's so wacky!

Avra: —over the scene.

00:11:27 Sound Effect Transition

[Whoosh.]

00:11:28 Clip Clip

Music: "Run!" by Damon Albarn and Michael Nyman. Fast-paced, cheery music with a banjo and fiddle overlaid with yodeling.

[Someone is panting and wincing and audibly tripping over things.]

00:11:36 Sound Effect Transition

[Whoosh.]

00:11:37	Crosstalk	Crosstalk	April: Yeah.
			Avra: It's—yeah!
00:11:38	Avra	Guest	It's like, "Ooh, it's so kooky and wacky!" But at the same time you're <u>terrified</u> , because you've just learned that this person that you thought was a victim is actually a perpetrator.
			And he's coming to get these characters that you've begun to develop a real fondness for.
00:11:54	April	Host	There's one thing—I mean, like, we're already talking about the scene, so let me get into it a little more, because I said something about the—there is that moment.
			Boyd's in the pit, and he—his bone is sticking out of his leg, and he has to, um—he has to, you know, muster all of his courage and put the bone back into place. Like, reset it.
			And so the—there's a <u>really</u> great edit cut, a point where he does that but we cut to David Arquette's character back at the fort, chopping a thing of wood, um, like a log of wood.
			And it's a really lovely edit and cut, and the way that Ted Griffin was talking about that in some of the commentary on the DVD was that that was one of his favorite things, that that is both a visual and a sound cut that works for both of those scenes.
00:12:38	April	Host	And he didn't have that necessarily in the script, but it made him start thinking about writing that type of work <u>into</u> his scripts, of like, trying to put those scene transitions in there.
			And, um—but he hadn't really previously done that when he was doing his early drafts.
			And I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about that process of, you know, trying to learn how to maybe even write for an edit. You know, how can you—how can you get as much of what you write on the page, on the screen?
00:13:06	Avra	Guest	Oh, well, I think that's—I mean, that's one of the reasons why I love <i>Ravenous</i> so much, is because—I mean, the opening of <i>Ravenous</i> is possibly my favorite opening of any movie ever. Right?
			Like, there's this great quote from Sam Fuller, who's another director that I really love who was making movies mostly in the fifties, and he said "When you're writing a story, if it doesn't give you a hard-on in the first five minutes, throw it out."
			<i>[April responds affirmatively as Avra continues.]</i>
			<i>[Stifling laughter]</i> And it was like, the single best piece of writing advice I've ever gotten, maybe. I think about that every time I sit down—especially as someone who works in genre, and works specifically in horror, right, like, you <u>have</u> to kind of, like, blow your audience away right away.
00:13:42	April	Host	Yeah!

00:13:43 Avra Guest And that opening, like, there's so much incredible editing decisions being made in the opening of *Ravenous*, with the blood on the plates and the soldiers at the big table eating, and then it cuts to Boyd under the pile of bodies and the blood trickling into his throat.

00:13:58 April Host Mm-hm.

00:13:59 Avra Guest And this transition that he goes through from being a quote-unquote "coward" to being this, you know, war hero. And how that happened and he—

[Laughing] And then he goes outside and vomits.

00:14:09 April Host Yes!

00:14:10 Avra Guest *[Laughing]* And then "*Ravenous*" comes on the screen, and so you know everything you need to know about this character, and everything you need to know about what type and tone of movie you're gonna be getting.

And when Henry and I were sitting down to talk about how we want—like, what kind of movie we wanted *Bloodline* to be—'cause Henry co-wrote it with me as well as directing it—we talked a lot about editing, and about, um—

Specifically there's a hopefully horrific montage where Evan's wife, who's just had a baby, Lauren, is trying to breastfeed their baby, and it's not going well, and her—you know, her—she's just sort of unraveling.

00:14:50 April Host Mm-hm.

00:14:51 Avra Guest And this loop of sound and images and misery just becomes very overwhelming for Evan, and you realize that like, he is not gonna be able to hold it together.

Like, he's gonna have to release this thing that lives inside of him—*[laughing]* which is a serial killer, um, spoiler alert.

[April laughs.]

And that, you know, that that kind of editing work that Antoni—like, especially, like, those beats and mixing that with the music that I see in *Ravenous*, I think for sure really influenced Henry and I both when we were talking about it.

But it's interesting, 'cause putting it on the page, I—I definitely had a very specific idea, but it wasn't until Henry started cutting stuff away—I mean, there was a longer version of that montage at some point.

00:15:36 April Host Mm-hm.

00:15:37 Avra Guest And every time Henry went back into the editing room, he tightened it up a little bit more, and when I finally got to see the final cut, I was like, "Whoa, this is so effective."

Because although it doesn't take up a lot of time on screen, it actually captures the feeling that you have as a new parent *[laughing]* really well.

00:15:54 April Host Mm-hm.

00:15:55 Avra Guest And that feeling that you're sort of mentally unraveling.

Because you can't get enough sleep, and you're really worried about your baby, and you have no way of communicating with it, and your ability to communicate with your partner is maybe also getting a little bit difficult 'cause you're both in the same boat but having different experiences.

And I—and I do think that as a writer, you have to understand the tool that editing can be. It's almost like you get to re—and I feel like many creators have said this before, but it wasn't until I actually wrote something that got produced that I saw it.

00:16:28 April Host Mm-hm.

00:16:29 Avra Guest But you do do another rewrite in the editing room.

00:16:32 Crosstalk Crosstalk **April:** Yeah.

Avra: Right?

00:16:33 Avra Host Like, the movie changes drastically from what's on the page to what you sh—to what you shoot, to then what ends up being on the screen.

00:16:40 Music Music "Switchblade Comb" begins fading in.

00:16:41 April Host So we're gonna take a quick break, but the things that we should get to are definitely Ted Griffin, um, how he got this even into Fox's hands, and then we should get a little bit further into Antonia Bird coming on and having, like, six days of prep because she's a fucking monster.

When we come back, we're gonna talk a little bit more about that, and then also what it is for a female point of view to be directing this type of movie. So we'll be right back.

00:17:05 Music Transition "Switchblade Comb" continues until the promo.

00:17:10 Promo Clip *[Background music: "War," by Norman Whitfield and Barrett Strong, lead vocals by Edwin Starr.]*

Ben Harrison: Not all heroes wear capes! Some heroes watch war movies and then review them.

[Adam Pranica laughs, then so does Ben.]

John Roderick: *Friendly Fire* is a war movie podcast for people who don't necessarily like war movies, although it does not exclude people who love war movies.

Adam: I'll have you know that I am wearing a cape; my cape is just made of sound-deadening material from an audio recording studio.

Ben: *[Laughs.]* It's a really great show. John's daughter doesn't like it because we sometimes say swear words on it, but almost everybody else that has ever listened to it has enjoyed the program.

Adam: Download and subscribe to *Friendly Fire* wherever you get your podcasts.

Ben: To the victor go the spoiler alerts.

Music:

War!

Huh!

00:17:53 Music Transition "Switchblade Comb" fades back in, and eventually fades out as April speaks.

00:17:58 April Host Welcome back to *Switchblade Sisters*. I'm April Wolfe, and I'm joined today by Avra Fox-Lerner, and we're talking about *Ravenous*.

So first off, we'll get back to Ted Griffin. How did this movie even fucking get made? Because he had written this, and first off, one of the reasons why, you know, it feels like it's a five-act structure is because he took his time writing it, and then wrote it in kind of chunks.

So you can feel when he was inspired by this and feel when he was inspired by this, and then that. He said, "On page 60, I killed a good number of my characters. I stopped and put the script away for three weeks, and the notion came of having Colqhoun return as the new commander of the fort."

And so that was a thing that kept happening to him again and again, was the fact that he would write a chunk, you know, like 30 pages here, 30 pages here, and 30 pages here, and each time he would be like, "Okay, well this has to completely circumvent this, or this has to completely circle back on that, or it has to, you know, completely do away with what I thought the story was going to be."

And I thought that was a really lovely process, but it also is... You know, it makes a movie that is harder to sell. *[Laughs.]*

00:19:13 Avra Guest *[Laughing]* Yeah, that's for sure.

00:19:14 April Host 'Cause like, it's a great movie, but you know, how did these executives sell it, you know?

[April responds affirmatively as Avra speaks.]

00:19:18 Avra Guest *[Laughing]* I mean, I've spent so much time wondering that very question, as someone who writes kind of strange, offbeat genre stuff.

I'm like, "What is that pitch meeting?" Like, that—that Griffin went through.

00:19:30 Crosstalk Crosstalk **April:** Oh, yeah.

Avra: You know?

00:19:31 April Host Oh, yeah. And it's—this—also, we should say this is Ted Griffin's first script, and he went on to write so many other great things that it's like—you know, obviously this is where he would start. *[Laughs.]*

You know?

00:19:45 Crosstalk Crosstalk **Avra:** *[Laughing]* Yeah! Obviously!

April: Throwing the spaghetti at the wall, right?

[Avra laughs.]

00:19:48 April Host But it was one of those things where he had written the script, got it into a producer's hands, um, before the weekend.

On that weekend, the guy went scuba-diving with his friend who was a producer at Fox, and while this guy was sleeping on the way back, the friend stole the script out of this guy's bag, read it, and then called Ted Griffin the next day and said, "I wanna make this at Fox."

[Avra sighs/laughs.]

00:20:16 Avra Guest And, uh... I thought that was like—

That's, like—

[April laughs]

[laughing]—the most true trial of Hollywood story I've ever heard!

00:20:21 April Host Like, what the fuck?! And also—

00:20:22 Avra Guest I feel like there's so much—I mean, if you listen to or read about writers talking about writing, especially screenwriters, there're all of these sort of like, "How do you sell your screenplay?" and like, "How did you get your start?"

[April repeatedly acknowledge/affirms as Avra continues.]

And the reality is you do have to put in this enormous amount of work, right? Like, you have to learn how to write and hone your craft and find your voice, and all of these things.

But at the end of the day, the—like, actually getting a job is totally "Some guy stole a script out of his scuba partner's backpack, read it, and was like 'I wanna make this movie.'"

Like, it really becomes so much a game of luck, and—and so arbitrary. I think that is—

00:20:58 Crosstalk Crosstalk **Avra:** I mean, *[laughing]* that is a *BoJack Horseman*—worthy Hollywood story.

April: Yeah!

00:21:03 April Host But it is one of those things where, you know, you—it's—part of it is luck. Like, the end part is usually luck.

But getting yourself into a position where you could actually take the job is, you know, many years of honing your craft. And then when that luck comes, you better be ready.

And you know, there's the people who are ready, and there's the people who aren't ready.

And I know for you, you know, working with Blumhouse on your first feature, it—probably, you know, maybe a similar experience of like, getting ready for that time—

00:21:32 Avra Guest

Oh!

00:21:33 April Host

—when someone says yes.

00:21:34 Avra Guest

Oh, yeah, absolutely! I mean, I'm—I'm—I'm like an early career writer, but I have been writing for a really long time.

And actually, we—Henry and I had a—*[laughing]* although it did have elements of cannibalism in it, by—by the last rewrite.

[April laughs.]

But we were actually working on a horror Western together, that I was writing and he was developing, with him to come on and direct.

And we actually did a different lab, the New York Stage and Film Screenwriting Lab, where we workshopped that and we really focused in on it and honed it, and we realized we could make it for about \$1,000,000—which is very low-budget for the movie-making world.

00:22:12 April Host

Mm-hm.

00:22:13 Avra Guest

And Henry had developed a relationship with Jason Blum and Blumhouse, because he'd done some non-fiction projects for them, and he was like, "I'm gonna take them—" It's called *Good Land*, the script. He's, "I'm gonna take them *Good Land*."

00:22:25 Crosstalk Crosstalk

Avra: *[Laughing]* Um, it's definitely very *Ravenous*-damaged.

April: *[Amused]* Mm-hmmm?

00:22:29 Avra Guest

And he took it to them, and they read it. It's—it's about 100 pages of script, and there's maybe 100 *[laughs]* lines of dialogue.

And they said, um, "We're never gonna make this movie."

[April starts laughing.]

"It's way too quiet and weird. But we have this other script sitting on a shelf. We bought it outright. Seann William Scott is attached to star in it. We haven't been able to crack it. Why don't you guys sit down and take a look at it, and see what you think?"

[April repeatedly responds affirmatively as Avra continues.]

And I mean, it—like, that was our luck moment. Right?

00:22:58 Avra Guest

And then the fact that Henry and I have known each other since we were in high school, and the fact that I've been writing for 15, 20 years, really came together, right, like that door would not have opened if I hadn't written this other script and spent so much time on

it, and given so much love to it, even though that was a script that didn't end up getting produced.

Right? Like, that's the work part of it.

And a lot got—went into getting to that place. But it is—it is that moment, right, where you're sort of like the—you know, he called and he's like, "Do you wanna read this serial killer script?" And I said, "Of course!"

[April laughs.]

But serial killer story is not necessarily the story that I most naturally would have been drawn to, and so one of the great things about it—and actually, I think there are some interviews with Antonia Bird where she sort of talks about inheriting this movie, um—that, you know, where you—you know, yeah! That door opens and you can't say no.

00:23:52 April Host

Mm-hm.

00:23:53 Avra Guest

And then taking this language that's already been established, especially within a genre tradition, and saying, "Okay, well what can I do with it that's a little bit different? That pushes the envelope a little bit more? That puts a little bit of my personal stamp into this world where we kind of know the story already?"

[Laughing] Although with *Ravenous*, like—I still—like, I didn't watch it for a while and then re-watched it, and it was like—there was a stretch where I was like, "I have no idea what's gonna happen next.

[April laughs.]

Which also almost never happens to me when watching a movie, right, 'cause that's sort of the downside of being a writer is you're constantly cracking stories. You see a lot of movies, and you can sort of see the path that they're gonna take.

00:24:31 April Host

Yeah.

00:24:32 Avra Guest

And I think that also is one of the reasons why *Ravenous* is so beloved to me, is because it's just filled with insane surprises that you can't see coming.

00:24:40 Crosstalk Crosstalk

April: Yeah.

Avra: At all.

00:24:41 April Host

Exactly.

And you know, I would say—like, let's get into what you're talking about with what Antonia Bird brings to this project. You know, she only had six days of prep to get in this, and that's insane.

00:24:53 Avra Guest

[Laughing/whispering] That's insane.

00:24:55 April Host

It is. That is not something that normally happens, especially if you're gonna be shooting in multiple countries, which she was.

And for her, you know, there were already a lot of decisions made by the time that she got there. Which means that she wasn't doing casting. She was, you know, she was outside of that.

She could handle—she could do music, so she selected music, and she was able to kind of, you know, work with the new cinematographer—because the cinematographer was also someone who was fired, and then they got someone else on.

So it was just kind of a weird, slapdash, everyone's there. And according to her, it was actually pretty serendipitous that they were shooting in the middle of nowhere, where there wasn't even like, a cafe or a bar in town, because it ended up having to make them bond very quickly. 'Cause they had nothing else to do.

[Avra laughs.]

00:25:48 Crosstalk Crosstalk

Avra: *[Laughing]* That's amazing.

April: They had like, some liquor that they imported with them, and that was it.

00:25:52 April Host

And they just had to hang out and sit tight. *[Laughs.]* And—

00:25:57 Avra Guest

[Laughing] Kind of the best way to make a movie, I think, actually.

00:25:59 April Host

Yeah! Yeah, I think so! I mean, not maybe something that people would normally choose to do. But that's what she did!

And another thing, you know, something that we can obviously really pinpoint—something that she brought to this movie that wasn't in the original director's vision was a sense of humor.

And that's something that is so, so deeply integral to how this movie works and why this movie works, um, is that there's a—there's a winkiness to it. There's a realization that this is, in some ways, kind of silly, in the same way that, you know, Antonia Bird always referenced the *Dracula* movies.

You know, this kind of European sensuality *Dracula*-ness to it. And I like that almost over-the-top bit about it.

But can you imagine it without the humor?

00:26:55 Avra Guest

[Laughing] I mean, I was just literally trying to imagine *Ravenous* without the humor, and I think—unfortunately it's kind of—I would think it would be actually kind of unbearable.

[April repeatedly responds affirmatively as Avra continues.]

I mean, there's a trend right now, I think, to make—I can't tell you how many times I talk to people and they tell me they're looking for "elevated genre," and I understand what they're saying, right, as a sentiment, or like, the message behind that kind of buzz phrase that's being thrown around a lot right now.

But I think inherently linked in our minds with the word "elevated" is "serious." And so there's a lot of just reeeally self-serious genre work that's being done right now.

00:27:34 Avra Guest And... I'm not opposed to it, because I do think it brings this—it opens the door to a more independent, character-driven, like, person-focused story within a genre framework that I personally find really exciting.

00:27:51 April Host Mm-hm.

00:27:52 Avra Guest But I do also find that it becomes sort of tedious when nobody can laugh at themselves.

00:27:58 April Host Mm-hm.

00:27:59 Avra Guest Because it—I think *The Wire*'s actually a phenomenal example of this, right, which is one of my favorite shows for sure.

But it is so bleak, the world of *The Wire*, right, it's—it's drug addicts, drug dealers, and beat cops in Baltimore, and it just makes you wanna cry when you watch it.

But the writers of that show clearly were being guided to find these patches of humor, and it relieves you!

00:28:25 April Host Mm-hm.

00:28:26 Avra Guest Of that just, like, end—like, well of hopelessness.

But it also allows you to then continue pushing the darkness further and further and further. Right? Because you break the tension with the laughter, and then you can introduce something that's even darker than the thing you had before, but your audience is willing to go along with you.

00:28:45 April Host Mm-hm.

00:28:46 Avra Guest Because they've laughed. And they know you're gonna give you—them this gift of being able to laugh again.

00:28:51 April Host Yeah!

00:28:52 Avra Guest And I think *Ravenous* does this in an incredibly beautiful way. I mean, it is a truly dark movie if you look at it thematically.

And her use, also, of the style of the blood and the gore, I think, is also something that—the texture of it, and the feeling of it, is so visceral.

00:29:11 Crosstalk Crosstalk **Avra:** And it does make you feel sort of *[laughing]* nauseous and hungry at the same time.

April: Mm-hm.

Avra: *[Laughing]* Maybe that's just me.

April: Mm.

00:29:17 Avra Guest But that was also something—the col—you know, the color palette and the viscosity of the fake blood is actually something you think

about a lot when you're making a movie that has to have gore in it. Right?

And we really—Henry and I talked a lot about this, and he talked a lot to the Russells, who were our practical effects pair.

00:29:37 April Host

Mm-hm.

00:29:38 Avra Guest

A married couple. Geniuses.

Um, about—about that. Right? Like, you end up having these conversations about hunting knives and fake blood and the quality of blood that you're looking for. You don't want it to be too watery, you want it to be really thick.

00:29:50 April Host

Mm-hm.

00:29:51 Avra Guest

And you get to pull on the reference of all of these different movies, and I think *Ravenous* was definitely—the way in which blood is used in *Ravenous*, the thickness of it, and how it almost becomes sensual, is definitely something that like, informed us when we were deciding how did we want this, the palette of this movie, to look.

00:30:06 Music Music

"Switchblade Comb" begins fading in.

00:30:07 April Host

We need to take a quick break, but when I get—when we come back, I wanna get into some things that you were mentioning before.

Again, we have one female character.

00:30:15 Crosstalk Crosstalk

April: I'd like to talk about the genesis of her.

Avra: Martha. *[Laughs.]*

00:30:18 April Host

And then going into some of the process of rewriting and rewriting and rewriting, and some on-the-fly work that Antonia Bird did on this movie.

So we'll take a quick break, and we'll be right back.

00:30:32 Music Transition

"Switchblade Comb" continues until the promo.

00:30:37 Promo Clip

[Ocean sounds in the background.]

Speaker 1: *[Piratey voice]* Ahh. There's nothing quite like sailing in the calm, international waters on my ship, the *S.S. Biopic* (*bi-AH-pic*).

[Ship's horn toots.]

Speaker 2: *[Piratey voice]* Avast! It's actually pronounced... "BI-oh-pic."

Speaker 1: No, ya dingus! It's "Bi-AH-pic!"

Speaker 2: Who the hell says that? It's "BI-oh-pic!" It comes from the words "biology"—

Speaker 1: It's the words for "biography" and "picture!"

[Boat horn honks.]

			Speaker 2: If you—
00:31:01	Promo	Clip	Dave Holmes: Alright, that is enough! Ahoy! I'm Dave Holmes; I'm the host of the rebooted podcast formerly known as <i>International Waters</i> ! Designed to resolve petty—but persistent—arguments like this! How? By pitting two teams of opinionated comedians against each other with trivia and improv games, of course! Winner takes home the right to be right.
			Speaker 1: What podcast be this?
			Dave: It's called <i>Troubled Waters</i> ! <i>[Boat engine revving, driving off.]</i> Where we disagree to disagreeeee! <i>[Voice trails off into the distance.]</i>
00:31:27	Music	Transition	"Switchblade Comb" fades back in, and eventually fades out as April speaks.
00:31:33	April	Host	Welcome back to <i>Switchblade Sisters</i> . I'm April Wolfe and I'm joined today by Avra Fox-Lerner, and we're talking about <i>Ravenous</i> .
			So first off, we'll hit off with Martha. So according to Antonia Bird, she said, "It was interesting for me as a woman filmmaker making a film pretty much about men. It was not my choice to make this character a woman.
			In the original script, Martha was a man. Joe—" um, "Joe's brother," in the—that's George. Joe's the actor.
			"The decision had been taken, and it hadn't really been developed in the script in any way. And I was keen to develop something from my perspective. From this point on," and she's talking about where Marthra—Martha has to come back to the camp, you know, after all the murders had taken place, she said, "From this point on, her character is developing for the rest of the film.
00:32:21	April	Host	It was important for me that she was the one person who walked away from this with any dignity. Not because she's Native American, necessarily, but also because she's a woman."
			And—so yeah, it wasn't her choice to have a woman. She actually expected it to be a man, <i>[laughing]</i> and she would have preferred it.
00:32:37	Avra	Guest	That's super interesting. I have to say that I—like, as a writer, as a female genre writer, my dream project—it's actually another Henry-and-my dream project is a story that has no women in it.
			<i>[April responds affirmatively as Avra continues.]</i>
			And I think that's another reason why I love this movie so much, right, is that it has a very—to <u>me</u> it has a very female stamp <u>on</u> it, but is a movie that <u>really</u> is not dealing a lot with women at all.
00:33:02	April	Host	Mm-hm.
00:33:03	Avra	Guest	And the idea of contemplating what masculinity is and what <u>isolated</u> masculinity is is really, really fascinating.

But Martha is the voice of reason in this movie. *[Stifling laughter]* Every single thing she says is true and level-headed, and she's the only character that actually falls into that at all.

00:33:21 April Host Mm-hm.

00:33:22 Avra Guest And the other thing that I really love about Martha is that she's in no way sexualized, and I think that's also one of the things about having a female director that—to me, that's maybe the most female thing about this movie.

I mean, the way she lights *[laughs]* Guy Pearce, and that sweater—oh my god, *[laughing]* that sweater that he wears—

[April laughs]

—in like the last 20 minutes of the movie—

00:33:44 Crosstalk Crosstalk **April:** *[Amused]* Oh, yeah.

Avra: Like, at some point I was like, "It's about men who eat each other, and also... a sweater."

[April laughs.]

Avra: *[Laughing]* This beautiful sweater. Um, but Martha—

April: *[Dreamily]* The cable-knit beige sweater.

00:33:52 Avra Guest Oh my god, it's just—it's like—it's distressed in the perfect way, *[laughing]* like the costume designer did such a great job with that sweater!

00:33:59 April Host Very good.

00:34:00 Avra Guest But Martha is... is always clothed. She always feels strong. She always feels centered. She always feels logical. Right?

00:34:10 April Host Mm-hm.

00:34:11 Avra Guest And she's really powerful in that way.

And she's the one who—she sees what's going on, and she's like, "I'm gonna get out of here." Like, "I'm done. I'm walking away. I have no interest engaging in this further. I don't wanna try to stop it anymore. This is your problem. Like, I need to just go and live my life."

And I think that's a really strong decision that that character—I mean, that that character makes, but that having that character within the movie where everybody is so on top of each other and so tortured by their moral decisions and their emotions.

And they're contemplating mortality and what place they have *[laughs lightly]* within this world of cannibalism and wendigos, and Martha's like "I'm just walking away."

00:34:49 April Host Mm-hm.

00:34:50 Avra Guest And that strength, and that ability to create this female character that has that center and that strength and is never treated like an object of desire?

00:34:59 April Host Mm-hm.

00:35:00 Avra Guest I realized in retrospect, right—'cause I saw this movie when I was in college, so I was a young woman—that that must have been very revolutionary for me as a viewer and as a—especially as a genre fan, right, that's very rare that you watch a horror movie and you aren't presented with a female form that's desirable in some way.

00:35:17 April Host Mm-hm. She—

00:35:18 Avra Guest *[Laughing]* And so it's really powerful, actually!

00:35:21 April Host She's, um... *[Sighs.]*

I'm trying to think of how this movie would be if it were a man. I think it would probably be easier for the politics, because Antonia Bird could have just, you know, offed everyone, not cared.

But she ended up having to do an extra bit of work to try to make sure that this character wasn't just thrown away. *[Laughs.]*

00:35:41 Avra Guest Yeah! I think that's a real challenge! I will say, like, we—I—there were so many great things about the original script that we got of *Bloodline*, but one of the things that I feel like was—I mean, the thing that was essential to me to bring to the project is that I needed the women to both feel real and have agency, and that wasn't necessarily something I felt a ton of in the original script.

00:36:04 April Host Mm-hm.

00:36:05 Avra Guest *[April repeatedly responds affirmatively as Avra speaks.]*

And I think there—there's a lot of talk, I'm sure, as you know, and listeners know, about inclusion and diversifying Hollywood, but I—I have—in my personal experience, collaboration really answers a lot of those questions.

You know, I think... Henry listened to me. Right, when I said, "We need to make these women more active." And I'm—at—whatever beautiful twist of fate brought Antonia Bird to this place where she was able to say, "Martha needs to walk away with her dignity," somebody listened, right, and they let that happen.

They weren't like, "Oh, no, everyone has to die by the end."

And I—and I think that's where you begin to see different possibilities within the genre form, when you have different voices telling the story. That you have a woman who says, you know, "This has to feel like a real breastfeeding experience, even in the midst of a serial killer slasher movie that makes you laugh a bunch of times."

00:37:02 Avra Guest *[Laughing]* Or the most peculiar cannibal Western vampire movie of all time, right?

[April laughs.]

Like, there's—there's a voice that is listened to that gives you something different, that you haven't necessarily encountered before in the genre, and that's the beautiful thing about working, like, within the genre space.

00:37:19 April Host I wanted to get into an idea that Antonia Bird had, and, you know, of course we would love to get into more of the rewriting thing.

I should say that Ted Griffin was there rewriting things consistently, constantly, for a while. And then he realized that he didn't want to be on set anymore, because it was cold.

[Laughing] And it was—

[Avra laughs.]

00:37:41 Crosstalk Crosstalk **April:** And he said the best thing about being a writer is that you're not needed on set.

Avra: *[Laughing]* You get to go home.

April: And the worst thing about being a writer is that you're not needed on set.

00:37:47 April Host So he just kind of skulked out one night, he said, and just left them.

And—and so he said that he still regrets it to this day that he wasn't on set the entire time rewriting, even, you know, 'cause they were climbing up into the mountains, and—

But then he also looks at what happened in the improvisations of the actors and things that he might have fought against if he were there, and he—he's—appreciates that he wasn't there.

Because what they came up with on the spot was something that you just—you couldn't come by in an office, writing someplace.

00:38:23 Avra Guest Well, I think that's both the great joy and the great tragedy of being a writer.

00:38:26 April Host Mm-hm.

00:38:27 Avra Guest And not a writer-director.

00:38:28 April Host Yeah.

00:38:29 Avra Guest Right? Is that you have to hand the product off to somebody, and kind of let them make the movie that they have envisioned.

00:38:37 April Host Mm-hm.

00:38:38 Avra Guest And it is hard. It is definitely not the easiest thing when you write—at least when I write, I really have to hold a very clear image of what I want it to look like in my mind so I can describe it properly.

00:38:50 April Host Mm-hm.

00:38:51 Avra Guest And you do end up doing a lot of visualization, and you end up kind of half-directing it in your own head.

And so then to hand it over to somebody else and have them make choices that are really different than the choices that you imagined while you were putting it on the page is really challenging.

00:39:04 April Host Yeah. Especially if you're in genre, because you—to describe fight scenes, to describe these things, any action, you do have to write directions in a sense.

You know, even though you're not saying "the camera goes here" or "the camera goes there," you know, the things that you're choosing to focus on are very explicit in the expository sections.

But the few things that did really get cut from Ted Griffin's draft that he was really disappointed were things that were from budget, actually. Because there were multi—there were more fight scenes.

There was like, hand-to-hand combat stuff between Ives and Boyd in the wilderness. Like, a lot of hand-to-hand combat, and like, treetop battling, you know? Like, really getting into, like, almost, you know, Asian, Chinese, like, Hong Kong cinema.

And they cut that out, and it was just for budget, but honestly, they didn't need it. You know, you don't need—

00:40:01 Avra Guest I don't think they did!

00:40:02 Crosstalk Crosstalk **April:** No, you don't—

Avra: Yeah!

April: —need these fantas—fancy fight scenes. And so—

00:40:05 Avra Guest No!

00:40:06 April Host You know, he—I think he was—he was grateful for what Antonia Bird did, and also maybe the budget issues just kind of dictating that like, "Oh, less is actually more."

Um, but I wanted to end finally with Antonia Bird's thing. She said, quote:

"For me, it's really important that good wins over evil. But being pragmatic about the world, the fact that the colonel takes a mouthful of the stew and could go on and lead a whole army of cannibals through California, it was important to leave that idea in.

You have to listen to so many people as a director, and you tend to lose your way, but the way we ended up ending it with them together, that works."

So she was really happy with this—this bear hug and this almost, like, romantic end with the two of them embracing in this—in this bear trap. Even though it's not a complete "good wins over evil," there's still a suggestion that good could potentially win. Eventually, in the end.

00:41:01 Avra Guest Yeah. I think it's a perfect ending. And I think that is also one of the things that I really love about horror, is that—that type of ending.

[April responds affirmatively as Avra continues.]

Where you give your audience the satisfaction of the completion of the story with a hopeful note, but a nnnnniggling bit of doubt in the back of their mind that it probably isn't gonna work out as well as they hope it's going to.

00:41:22	April	Host	But—yeah, that's the thing. You know, she talks also about the idea of trying to put something that <u>means</u> something into a movie while also entertaining.
			But you know, part of that is also leaving this potential for hope at the end. <i>[Laughing]</i> Even if it's bad.
00:41:37	Avra	Guest	Oh, yeah! I think that's—I mean, in many ways I find that horror has many, many happy ending—I mean, that's like a joke I use all the time with my work, which is very, very dark.
			Is that I'm like, "But it's a beautiful love story!"
00:41:51	April	Host	Mm-hm!
00:41:52	Avra	Guest	Or in the case of <i>Bloodline</i> , like, it's a beautiful story of family togetherness. It's a <u>happy</u> movie because the family that slays together stays <u>together</u> .
00:42:00	Crosstalk	Crosstalk	April: Yeah!
			Avra: Right?
00:42:01	Avra	Guest	<i>[April responds affirmatively as Avra speaks.]</i>
			It's about the nuclear family. They <u>champion</u> all of these challenges that have arisen before them, and they come out together: a mom, a dad, a mother-in-law, and a baby, and they get to live together in a house and move forward with their lives.
			You know? Just because they all happen to be serial killers doesn't necessarily make them bad <u>people</u> .
			<i>[April is cracking up, Avra laughs.]</i>
00:42:23	April	Host	That's a great place to wrap up! Alright!
			<i>[Both laugh.]</i>
00:42:26	Crosstalk	Crosstalk	April: Avra, thank you so much for joining us today to talk about <i>Ravenous</i> , and hopefully we can have some new converts.
			Avra: Thank you so much for having me!
			<i>[Both laugh.]</i>
00:42:33	April	Host	And <i>Bloodline</i> is available to see how?
00:42:37	Avra	Guest	<i>Bloodline</i> is now streaming. You can watch it on iTunes and Amazon and Vudu, and yeah! It's available for download now!
00:42:46	Music	Music	"Switchblade Comb" begins fading in.
00:42:47	April	Host	It's out there. Thank you so much for joining us today.

00:42:49	Avra	Guest	Thank you so much, April!
00:42:51	April	Host	<p>And thank you for listening to <i>Switchblade Sisters</i>! Some of you may have noticed, but this is our 101st episode!</p> <p>So I just wanted to give a heartfelt thank-you to <u>everyone</u> who has supported us over the past almost two years, and listened to our podcast through our first 101 episodes.</p> <p>You guys are amazing, and we couldn't do it without you. I'm just so happy to bring any kind of film fun to you every week.</p> <p>If you like what you're hearing, please leave us a five-star review on Apple Podcasts. We've got one from SoftPieces. Says:</p>
00:43:25	April	Host	<p>"If you love discussions of process, this is for you. I also really appreciate this podcast for taking their subject seriously, digging deep into technique and subtext, while being un-self-consciously excited about filmmaking.</p> <p>There's so many shows that talk about what they hate. It's cool to hear people talk about what they love."</p> <p>This is one of my favorite reviews. Yes, we love movies! We love talking about movies, with you, for you.</p> <p>If you wanna let us know what you think of the show, you can Tweet at us at @SwitchbladePod or email us at switchbladesisters@maximumfun.org.</p> <p>And please check out our Facebook group, too. That's Facebook.com/groups/switchbladesisters.</p> <p>Our producer is Casey O'Brien. Our senior producer is Laura Swisher, and this is a production of MaximumFun.org.</p>
00:44:07	Music	Music	"Switchblade Comb" finishes.
00:44:12	Clip	Clip	Toffler: HE WAS LICKING ME!
00:44:14	Music	Transition	<i>[A cheerful guitar chord.]</i>
00:44:15	Speaker 1	Guest	MaximumFun.org .
00:44:17	Speaker 2	Guest	Comedy and culture.
00:44:18	Speaker 3	Guest	Artist owned—
00:44:19	Speaker 4	Guest	—audience supported.