

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 Katie introduces herself and her guest, and then it fades out.
00:00:08	Katie Walsh	Host	Hello! And welcome to <i>Switchblade Sisters</i> , the podcast where women get together to slice and dice our favorite action and genre films. Every week here on the podcast, we invite a new female filmmaker—a writer, director, actor, or producer—and we talk in-depth about their favorite genre film, maybe one that influenced their own work. I'm film critic Katie Walsh, and today we have filmmaker Hannah Macpherson here in the studio. Welcome to <i>Switchblade Sisters</i> .
00:00:29	Hannah Macpherson	Guest	Thank you! I'm really happy to be here. <i>[Music fades out.]</i>
00:00:31	Katie	Host	Yay! Hannah Macpherson was born in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and studied film production at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles and TV writing at the UCLA Professional Program. Hannah created and wrote edgy teen thriller series <i>Tagged</i> for AwesomenessTV, and directed two episodes of the Netflix show <i>Trinkets</i> , available now. She also wrote and directed <i>Sickhouse</i> , the first ever made-for-mobile, vertically shot feature film. She recently finished post-production on a feature film she wrote and directed called <i>Pure</i> for Blumhouse TV, which is available on Hulu as part of the <i>Into the Dark</i> series, and she is attached to direct the feature film <i>The Merciless</i> for Alloy Entertainment. Today Hannah has chosen the 2002 J-horror remake <i>The Ring</i> , directed by Gore Verbinski and starring Naomi Watts. The film that made us all fear sketchy VHS tapes forever! So Hannah, why did you choose <i>The Ring</i> ?
00:01:23	Hannah	Guest	I think it had a <u>really</u> profound impact on me, and every time I watch it I learn something new and sort of see it in a different way. I've been watching that movie for the last 18 years. I've probably—or it's—I think it came out in 2002, so, uh...
00:01:38	Katie	Host	It's crazy to think that you could say like, "Yeah, that was like, 17 or 18 years ago." <i>[Laughs.]</i>
00:01:43	Hannah	Guest	I know, that does feel <u>very</u> weird.
00:01:44	Katie	Host	Yeah.
00:01:45	Hannah	Guest	But I'm sure I see it like, at least once every couple years, and I think maybe also like, where I am in my life and also in filmmaking, I sort of find something new to discover in it. I think it's such a cool, layered—I think the script is near perfect. And then the direction, I think, is just like, <u>really</u> inspiring.
00:02:03	Katie	Host	When was the first time you saw it? Do you remember? <i>[Katie responds affirmatively as Hannah speaks.]</i>
00:02:05	Hannah	Guest	I saw it in the theaters. And I definitely remember having that feeling—in fact, I have to be honest, I have that feeling <u>every</u> time I

watch it—that somehow maybe watching the video within the video is going to—*[laughs]*.

00:02:18 Crosstalk Crosstalk

Katie: *[Laughing]* Yes!

Hannah: *[Stifling laughter]* It's coming for me!

00:02:19 Hannah Guest

I'm gonna get the phone call, "Seven days."

00:02:22 Katie Host

[Laughing] Yeah!

00:02:23 Hannah Guest

I think that's such—it's like, meta, but it's also like, so exciting and scary, and I remember in the theater with friends, we were like, "Are we gonna get the phone call?" *[Laughs.]* Like—

00:02:33 Katie Host

Right! Yeah, that's so funny! It's interesting because I—in researching the background of this movie, Gore Verbinski said that the first time he saw *Ringu*, which is the Japanese film that this is a remake of, it was on this like, sketchy degraded videotape and it leant it even more of that sense of creepiness and like, forbidden sort of like, "Oh, we shouldn't be watching this" vibe to his experience, which made him want to remake it.

So I'm gonna give a quick synopsis of *The Ring*. And of course, spoiler alert for those of you who haven't seen *The Ring*. Today's episode will contain spoilers, like... right now. But that shouldn't stop you from listening before you watch. Like we always say, it's not what happens but how it happens that makes a movie worth watching. Still, if you wanna pause this episode and watch it, now's your chance.

00:03:21 Music Music

"The Ring - End Credits" by Hans Zimmer. Melancholy, slightly eerie piano. Plays until after the first clip.

00:03:22 Katie Host

So. *The Ring* is a 2002 horror thriller directed by Gore Verbinski, written by Ehren Kruger, based on a 1991 novel by Kôji Suzuki. The film is a remake of the 1998 Japanese film *Ringu*, as we said, which was a sensation in Japan, spawning prequels, sequels, TV series, and comic books. *The Ring* was also wildly successful, with a sequel *The Ring Two* in 2005 and a reboot, *Rings*, in 2017.

Naomi Watts stars as a Seattle investigative journalist and single mom Rachel Keller, whose niece Katie—Amber Tamblyn—also completely forgot Amber Tamblyn was in this movie until I rewatched it *[laughs]*—passes away unexpectedly. Her son Aidan—David Dorfman—was close to his cousin, and he seems troubled by her death, drawing many disturbing and morbid pictures.

[Music shifts into the music of the upcoming clip, quieter and more subdued.]

Intrigued by some teen gossip about a haunted videotape leaving dead teens in its wake—

00:04:12 Clip Clip

Rachel Keller: I remember I was that age. Me and my girlfriend used to sneak up to my room, get high. Do you think maybe she was into—?

Male Teen #1: It's not about that. *[Beat.]* It's about the tape.

Girl Teen #1: Kellen. Don't even.

Rachel: What tape?

Male Teen #1: The one that kills you when you watch it.

[Clip ends, and previous music does not continue.]

00:04:30	Katie	Host	—Rachel starts to investigate this urban legend, which rumor has it that if you watch the tape, you'll receive a phone call and then die in seven days.
00:04:36	Clip	Clip	Samara: <i>[Whispering]</i> Seven days...
			<i>[Someone, presumably Rachel, breathes shakily.]</i>
00:04:38	Katie	Host	Rachel tracks down the tape in a seedy motel and watches it, and she <u>also</u> shows it to her baby daddy Noah—Martin Henderson—and makes a copy, which her son accidentally watches while she's out investigating.
			Rachel tracks images on the tape to the Moesko Island lighthouse, where she discovers the tragic story of the Morgan family, who adopted a daughter Samara—played by Daveigh Chase—and shortly thereafter their horses fell ill and died.
00:05:02	Clip	Clip	<i>[Scene is punctuated by high sounds, like a rusty gate squeaking in the wind.]</i>
			Dr. Grasnik: She wanted a child more than anything. Poor Anna. They tried hard for years, but sometimes it's just not meant to be. Then one winter they went away. When they came back, it was with Samara. Adopted, they said. Never did say from where. Said the mother died of complications. But they had their baby, they had their horses, everything was fine.
			'Til Anna started coming to see me. Said she was suffering visions. Seeing things. Horrible things. Like they'd been burned inside her. That it only happened around Samara. That the girl put them there.
00:05:44	Katie	Host	Suspecting their daughter was the source of the evil psychic torment, mother Anna traps Samara in a well, where she died. And father Richard Morgan, horrified by the possible return of Samara's spirit, hops into a tub with a TV.
00:05:57	Clip	Clip	<i>[We hear running water through the scene.]</i>
			Rachel: Mr. Morgan, come out of there!
			Richard Morgan: And those pictures... Oh, good Christ. The things she'd show you.
			Rachel: She's still showing them.
			Richard: And she'll never stop. You coming here proves that.
00:06:10	Katie	Host	Rachel and Noah uncover the well, where Rachel is trapped inside. I'm sure none of that really makes sense, but... <i>[laughing]</i> it kind of is what happens.

So Rachel discovers Samara's corpse, has a psychic vision of her

horrible death, and they free this child ghost from her watery grave. But when they return home, they realize that Rachel's seven days have already passed, so thinking that they're safe. But Aidan warns her that the spirit has evil intentions.

00:06:38 Clip

Clip

Aidan: Is she still in the dark place?

Rachel: No. We set her free.

Aidan: You helped her?

Rachel: Yeah.

Aidan: [*Incredulous*] Why did you do that?

Rachel: What's wrong, honey?

Aidan: You weren't supposed to help her.

Rachel: It's okay now. She's not gonna hurt you. She's...

[*Long pause. Deep, quiet rumbling begins.*]

Aidan: Don't you understand, Rachel?

[*The rumbling births some ominous sonar-esque chirping.*]

Aidan: [*Whispering*] She never sleeps.

00:07:16 Katie

Host

And then Samara crawls out of her televised well and into Noah's loft, killing him. Rachel tries to destroy the tape, but she realizes that because she made the copy, she has inoculated herself from the curse. So she makes Aidan make a copy as well to save him, and they essentially let Samara move on to her next victim. But they save themselves.

So, viral video. Cursed viral video. [*Laughs.*]

00:07:39 Hannah

Guest

Yeah!

00:07:40 Katie

Host

The very first one on—in a mainstream film, possibly. So, um... I just love that this movie—it feels like one of the last movies that is very much about media and technology, but is also very analogue. VHS tapes, she's doing shoe-leather reporting, she's going through newspapers and library books, and you know, it feel—she barely uses a cell phone. I think she only uses a cell phone at the very end of the movie.

But I just love the way it feels, because it's definitely of this era. Obviously they would have shot it in 2001-ish, and it's the technology of the era but it's very much about like, the ways in which technology can be possessed, or the effect they have on our lives. And some of your films have been about technology, too! [*Laughs.*] Do you think that *The Ring* had a—was an inspiration in some way?

00:08:32 Hannah

Guest

I'm sure it's both things. One of the reasons *The Ring* is my favorite movie is it comments on sort of the human relationship with technology, but I was already—I've been fascinated by that relationship since I was a kid.

00:08:45	Katie	Host	Oh, wow.
			<i>[Katie responds affirmatively or in acknowledgment multiple times as Hannah continues.]</i>
00:08:46	Hannah	Guest	And so I think it's why I liked the movie, and it's also why I make things like that. But yes, it definitely—one of the things I think is so amazing is it's this scary movie with an amazing, obviously complicated, plot. Not a wasted scene, not a wasted beat. Not a wasted <u>word</u> , really. But it's—and it's about, you know, a woman becoming a good <u>mother</u> .
			She starts out as a bad mother and she becomes like, the <u>ultimate</u> mother. She'll die for her kid. But what's going on the <u>whole</u> movie is this commentary on—I think especially right—like, I remember being a teenager in the nineties. Like, people were having TVs babysit their kids. And so there's that one great scene where Naomi Watts steps out of her apartment.
			It's sort of a scene that doesn't feel like the rest of the movie, while Noah's watching the tape. And she looks in a bunch of other apartment windows, and <u>everyone's</u> sort of be—there's like an old man in a wheelchair who's being babysat by the TV, and a kid who's being babysat by the TV, and TVs that are just <u>on</u> in rooms where there aren't people. And it feels like somehow... we—you know, the first line is like, something like, "TVs are gonna kill us," basically.
			The teen girls are talking and they're like, "The analogue waves are coming in our brain!" And like—
00:09:57	Katie	Host	Yes! They're talking like, of the electromagnetic waves.
00:09:59	Hannah	Guest	Yeah!
00:10:00	Katie	Host	Yeah, which is so interesting.
00:10:01	Sound Effect	Transition	<i>[Whoosh.]</i>
00:10:02	Clip	Clip	<i>[Muffled voices in the background, presumably TV.]</i>
			Katie: You know, I heard there's so many magnetic waves traveling through the air because of TV and telephones that we're losing like... ten times as many brain cells as we're supposed to. Like, all the molecules in our heads are all unstable. All the companies know about it but they're not <u>doing</u> anything about it. It's like a big conspiracy.
00:10:19	Sound Effect	Transition	<i>[Whoosh.]</i>
00:10:20	Hannah	Guest	So it is—it's sort of like—you're right, it's frozen in time for like, the technology that it's <u>talking</u> about. But it's <u>so</u> relevant right now, and <u>so</u> —
00:10:28	Katie	Host	Oh, for <u>sure</u> .
00:10:29	Hannah	Guest	Like, that to me is so powerful that it's like—it never wasted a beat to be like, "This is still a thing." And literally, the <u>TV</u> slides down the floor and pushes her into the well.
00:10:39	Crosstalk	Crosstalk	Hannah: I mean, it's crazy.
			Katie: Yes! I'm like, "The TV's gonna kill her!"

00:10:41 Katie Host And even—I also—you know, they're—they—when they go into the barn and they find where Samara has been kept, you know, away from other people. And there's a TV there. And it's sort of like that's why—you know, she has whatever her like, ability to like psychically etch, you know, curses onto people, she's sort of doing onto the TV because it's the only interaction that she has with other people. So that's like—she's pouring that into tech, technology, and television.

So it is interesting and I think, you know, because you made a Snapchat film, which is *Sickhouse*, and then you also made *Tagged*, which is this series where they're... you know, it's a mystery that's unfolding on like an Instagram-ish platform. You know, it's like the way that you use the medium to influence the storytelling. I mean, when you were making the *Sickhouse*, obviously you had to know Snapchat really well and sort of the forms of it, but what was your approach to like, putting like a traditional horror kind of story—or—into that medium?

[Katie responds affirmatively a couple times as Hannah speaks.]

00:11:55 Hannah Guest Well, the other thing that's sort of true about my career thus far, and my interests in writing and directing, is that I've focused very much on teenage girls. And this sort of coming-of-age time that now I feel like is magnified by the fact that everyone has a phone stitched to their hand.

So I—it's sort of how I do my research. I had, you know—ten years ago when I first decided that like, my brand of horror was a teenage girl with a cell phone, 'cause there's nothing scarier on the planet.

00:12:25 Katie Host [Laughing] Seriously!

00:12:26 Hannah Guest Yeah! I started following—I had some young cousins. I mean, like, between 13 and 17. And I followed them on Snapchat and I followed their friends on Snapchat. And the—especially—this was early Snapchat days, so it was wild to me the stuff these 16-year-old girls were posting. And pretty terrifying, [stifling laughter] and also I was very thankful that I did not grow up in a time when there was Snapchat.

But the amount of like, sort of nudity I saw—like, a lot of girls would like to like, shoot their friends in the shower or something but then draw over their...

00:12:58 Crosstalk Crosstalk **Hannah:** ...like, uh, [stifling laughter] private parts?

Katie: Oh my god. [Laughs.]

00:13:00 Hannah Guest And—because—so that really using Snapchat the way it was designed, which is that you can write on it. You can put stickers on it. You can use the filters, the face filters. And I just sorta fell in love with what that meant, the ability to sort of like, curate what your life experience is and share it with the world.

So I had had a meeting with Indigenous Media—and they're a great partner, because they really believe in sort of like, finding innovative, different ways to get stories to people. And so we just started spitballing, and we're like, "What if we can like, drop a story into someone's life without them knowing it's scripted?"

Because it feels that—you know, I was also—I was a teenager in—when *Blair Witch* came out in the theaters. And you know, found footage is so—we know it so well now. It's...

00:13:50 Katie Host

Mm-hm.

[Katie again responds affirmatively as Hannah continues.]

00:13:51 Hannah Guest

But at the time, I really was like—you know, part of me wanted to believe it was documentary. These cans of film they'd found in the woods. And I just didn't know. But it feels like you can't really do that anymore, and you know, there are ways, and one of them is that we found this very brave, massive Youtube star, influencer Andrea Russett.

And the reason I say she's brave is because a lot of the people we talked to weren't willing to sort of mislead their fans for several days. Our pitch was "You'll—going—like, basically at two PM on a Friday you're going to start living this scripted life for five days. There's two actors that we'll sort of inject into your life that are your friends—one's your cousin, one's your friend." And she actually started setting that up for us two weeks prior on Twitter, that her cousin was coming to visit and they were gonna go camping.

And then she—basically they go into the woods and they're looking for a house called Sickhouse, and they disappear. I mean, they die, really. Like, they—they go dark. All their channels go dark. And she took her—like, all her channels went dark for 48 hours after the five days in the woods.

00:15:01 Katie Host

Wait, so did you shoot this live?

00:15:03 Hannah Guest

Yes.

00:15:04 Katie Host

[Laughing] Oh my god.

00:15:05 Hannah Guest

It was like performance art. Like—

00:15:06 Katie Host

Yeah!

[Katie responds affirmatively a couple more times as Hannah continues.]

00:15:07 Hannah Guest

And Twit—I was like—we were shooting 12 hours during the day, but then I was going home and not sleeping 'cause I was watching Twitter just blow up. Like, it was one of the coolest things I've experienced. And it was fun, because I got to use like—I really tried to lean on some of the horror tropes I love. Like, you know, if you see a dog in the first act, like, there's a good chance that dog's gonna be dead before the midpoint.

And so the first thing these girls do is they go to Venice, and they're sort of like, hanging out, and this cousin is weird. She like, comes from the Midwest. She's obsessed with the fact that every time Andrea Russett Snapchats, a million people are seeing it within the first hour. Which is true. At the height of our posts we had half a million people opening the Snaps within five minutes.

00:15:55 Katie Host

Oh my gosh.

00:15:56 Hannah Guest

And so she's—takes over the—she takes over her cousin's channel.

Which allows us to have someone who's sort of like, more manipulative with the camera.

00:16:05 Katie Host So was the cousin the—an actor?
00:16:07 Hannah Guest Yes.
00:16:08 Katie Host Okay.
00:16:09 Hannah Guest And—who now is a big actress, and she—the casting was great on this, because she had never acted prior. But she had kept coming into our casting director's office and getting pinned on like, big parts, like—but she no back—like, you couldn't Google this chick.
00:16:23 Katie Host *[Understanding]* Okay.
00:16:24 Hannah Guest You couldn't image search her. You couldn't find out that she was an actress living in LA. So they find this little tiny kitten, which—to be honest, that cat was like, the most expensive part of this entire movie.

[Katie laughs, Hannah chuckles.]

And people fell in love with Itty Bitty Kitty. And then, you know, within—like, basically the cousin Snaps the kitty in the middle of the night and is saying weird things, and then the kitty's dead in the morning.

00:16:49 Music Music "Switchblade Comb" starts fading in as Hannah continues.
00:16:50 Hannah Guest And so there was just like, this real—like, *[stifling laughter]* people were just freaking out about the cousin.
00:16:53 Katie Host So you were using these horror tropes... you know, in an ongoing fashion—
00:16:57 Hannah Guest Yes.
00:16:58 Katie Host —while you were shooting. That's so interesting.

And we will talk about that a lot more, but first we're gonna just take a really quick break.

[Music continues until the promo.]

00:17:09 Promo Clip *[A telephone rings.]*

Hotshot Hollywood Producer: Listen, I'm a hotshot Hollywood movie producer.

Music: Fun, grooving music begins to play quietly in the background.

Producer: You have until I finish my glass of *[articulating]* kom-bu-cha to pitch me your idea. Go.

[Slurping sounds.]

Ify: Alright! It's called *Who Shot Ya*: a movie podcast that isn't just a bunch of straight, white dudes. I'm Ify Nwadiwe, the new host of the show and a certified BBN.

Producer: BBN?

Ify: Buff, Black Nerd.

Alonso: I'm Alonso Duralde, an elderly gay and legit film critic who wrote a book on Christmas movies.

Drea: I'm Drea Clark, a loud, white lady from Minnesota.

00:17:34 Promo Clip

Ify: Each week, we talk about a new movie in theaters and all the important issues going on in the film industry.

Alonso: It's like *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* meets *Cruising*.

Ify: And if it helps seal the deal? I can flex my muscles while we record each episode.

Producer: I'm sorry, this is a podcast?! I'm a movie producer. [*Disdainfully*] How did you get in here?

Drea: Ify, quick! Start flexing!

Ify: [*Dramatically*] Bicep! Lats! Chest! *Who Shot Ya*, dropping every Friday on MaximumFun.org, or wherever you listen to podcasts.

[*Music ends.*]

00:18:00 Music Transition

"Switchblade Comb" plays again, fading out as Katie speaks.

00:18:08 Katie Host

Welcome back to *Switchblade Sisters*. We are talking about *The Ring* with director Hannah Macpherson, and we were gonna talk about the cinematography. But I also wanna put a tag on our discussion of teens. The Adam Brody cameo [*laughs*] as the angry teen. He has a single line, or maybe one or two lines. That was so funny to me going back and re-watching it. I just forgot so many people were in this movie! [*Chuckles.*]

00:18:30 Hannah Guest

Yeah, and when I saw him I was like, "Oh, I hope—I know he doesn't come back, but I wish he would."

00:18:35 Katie Host

[*Laughing*] I know!

00:18:36 Hannah Guest

Like, you can see the star charisma even in that one minute.

00:18:39 Katie Host

Absolutely! Even like—she walks outside and there's a quick shot of him. And I kept thinking—you know, obviously I knew who he was, but I'm like, "Go back to him! Go back to him! [*Laughing*] Stop talking to these girls!"

00:18:50 Hannah Guest

Yeah, exactly. I mean I think that that's one of the things that's cool about this movie, is you were saying it's got so much—it's sort of got so much going on anyway. But there's also a lot that it just... sort of breezes pa—like, those characters are actually interesting to me, those weird teenagers.

00:19:05 Katie Host

Oh, yeah.

00:19:06 Hannah Guest

And then you know that there's three kids we never met who also died the same night as Amber Tamblyn. Her boyfriend that no one's supposed to know about, and then these other two kids at his school. And I wanna know about them! Like, I think there's a prequel to be had that's those four kids at the cabin.

00:19:20 Katie Host

Yeah, it's so interesting. I was also doing some research on the press

that came out when the film came out. And they keep referring to Naomi Watts as like, "a fresh face," and how she was basically unknown. And it's so weird because she's such a huge star now. She was in *Mulholland Drive* and that, I think, launched her into a more arthouse realm. But she was not—this—I think this movie really launched her as like a big movie star. And even Gore Verbinski had only done two small-ish movies before this, too, and then of course it's like, *[laughing]* "Do a *Pirates of the Caribbean* movie!"

But they were saying "Oh yeah, we need someone who's an actress, not a star, who can really take on this role but is not like too recognizable." So it's just so—*[stifles laughter]* it's so funny looking back on that time and being like "Oh yeah, Naomi Watts wasn't... Naomi Watts." Like, we know her to be today this like, amazing actress. But she really does get like a huge, meaty, juicy role. Which involves a lot of... being scared on the phone, and screaming, and running around and stuff, which is also fun to watch.

I think she said something like... she didn't get a lot of preparation for the film, but that fear is a simple pretty emotion to play. "It's a pretty good driving force, so imagination was really my key." And then Martin Henderson was saying that like, because there weren't any special effects when they were performing, they would be like, "Well, we hope we don't look stupid! *[Stifling laughter]* And that someone else makes it look scary so we don't look like idiots!"

How do you work with your actors to sort of like, express fear? Is that something that you just have to say to them, like, "Go and do it"? Or is there something that you can work with them on?

00:21:03 Hannah Guest

I think that—I do think that fear—I actually disagree with her that it's a simple emotion to play. I think that it's a real challenge, and I think there can be great actors who struggle with playing fear. And then there's also, like, scream queens, who can nail it! But they might not do great in a dramatic role.

00:21:21 Katie Host

Mm-hm.

00:21:22 Hannah Guest

On the series *Tagged*, there's a lot of that sort of like, looking over your shoulder, the—because they're being followed and stalked on social media, and that's starting to bleed into their real life. There is a lot of that, like, "what's around the corner," sort of like, "who's watching me?" So very much sort of like a slow burn. There are some jump scares.

But I think that... I love working with actors. I mean, it's really the—my number one favorite thing about this job, that—there's a lot of things I like, but—I also love working with actors of this age group. And so I think I would—talking about process, my—the first thing that I really try to do, even if I'm just directing episodes of a TV show, is get to know them first. And just like, sort of as people, like, try to carve out some time to just have a lunch or a coffee. Which especially on like, the low-budget things I've done so far, there's not even really time built in for rehearsal, let alone...

So you're sort of like, asking a lot of the actors to like, "Come and share your life with me a little bit, just so we can trust each other." I think when—maybe more when you're directing—maybe not more,

but fear, you—they really have to trust you.

00:22:29 Katie Host

Yeah.

[Katie again responds affirmatively as Hannah continues.]

00:22:30 Hannah Guest

And maybe it's also for that reason that like—a lot of times what they're afraid of isn't in the shot, *[stifles laughter]* or isn't there. And also—

00:22:37 Katie Host

"Look at the little tennis ball on the stick!" *[Laughs.]*

[Katie responds affirmatively/in acknowledgment a few times as Hannah continues.]

00:22:40 Hannah Guest

Yeah! And there's, you know, lots of people around, and bright lights, and so it takes a lot of sort of like, trust, and I think... So, *[stifles laughter]* sometimes I do...

You know, sometimes—depending on how I know the actor works—I know something in their life that will help them sort of at least set the scene. And I have some actors who really like that and need that, and, um... and maybe I even know something from their childhood, and we can play, and go there, and they do trust me, and I'm always very careful about protecting their secrets and us, you know, being private with that stuff.

But I also think that for me, so much of what I have learned to do on set as a director is because I was an editor for a long time. And knowing sort of what footage I need to sell a scare? And so part of that is bracketing performance. Like, I have been in the—I've had the experience where like, I thought I knew exactly the level of terror I needed in this scene, and then sort of based—once we were in the edit bay, and we're building the fear, it was too much for that early on or something like that. So I do try to work with the actors.

I—and that's also nice for them, 'cause I can say like, "We're definitely gonna do one for you." You know? But let's sort of have this one that's more restrained, as if you're in public when you're afraid, you don't want people to know or whatever. And then the one that's all out, or you're exhausted, or like, trying to find a place of grounding it in an emotion that isn't just like, "Oh, can you scream louder?" or "Can you make your eyes bigger?" or something.

00:24:17 Katie Host

So that's interesting, that you kinda get like, different levels of emotion so that you can play around with it in the edit when you're building the tone.

00:24:27 Hannah Guest

Yeah. Exactly.

00:24:29 Katie Host

That's great. That's so interesting. I wouldn't have ever thought that that would be something that you could... you know, work on in, you know, like, *[laughing]* "We'll take a green light, a red light, a yellow light" kind of thing.

[Katie continues responding affirmatively/in acknowledgment as Hannah speaks.]

00:24:41 Hannah Guest

Absolutely! And it can save you, because I—I mean, really the situation I was in once was you could sort of hit a plateau where everything was hot. And of course, like, we're shooting everything out

of order. I—none of us know sometimes. These poor actors, they're doing the scariest thing up front. And so you really—I think it's helpful to—like you said, it's like you have a five and you have a six and you have a seven and you have an eight. And then you're—and then you have a lot more freedom.

00:25:06 Katie Host So I did wanna talk about the cinematography a little bit, 'cause like, we've kind of touched on it, the way it was shot. One thing that I think is so interesting, so they shot it in Washington State, in Seattle. But they used that overcast, like, lack of sunlight to basically remove the shadows. So the cinematographer Bojan Bazelli and Gore Verbinski really wanted to take the shadows away so it felt like the characters were sort of floating in space, and give them kind of like a ghostly nature to it. And I had never realized that before, and I think it's—you know, they just do it with lighting.

It's—I don't think they digitally removed anything, but just using that sort of like... overcast light that is so ubiquitous it becomes oppressive. It becomes, like, "Oh my gosh, like, when are we gonna see the sun?" *[Stifles laughter.]*

00:25:58 Hannah Guest

Yeah.

00:25:59 Katie Host

I think the only—I was noticing last night the only time we really see a shadow is when they go into the barn. There's like a direct light on them when they're opening the door, so you see their shadows, but... It's an interesting choice! Because it's not a traditional horror style, in terms of the like, chiaroscuro shadows and you know, the sort of canted angles. Like, I think they created a sort of new visual language for horror in this film, which I think is super interesting.

00:26:30 Hannah Guest

Yeah! I agree. I think that—I didn't know that about the shadows, but when you say it, it all the sudden makes a lot of sense. But part of that overcast, why it works so well is it feels like you're always almost at sundown.

00:26:45 Katie Host

Yeah!

00:26:46 Hannah Guest

And every—that's what's scary. You know, it's always scary to go into nighttime in a horror movie. So it's like, I felt like the whole movie exists at like, 5:30 PM, and it freaks me out.

00:26:55 Katie Host

Yeah. Yeah! And even that sense of like—even transitioning. I think there's something weird about dusk, where it's a transitioner—a transition period during the day, so... *[stifling laughter]* there's like an unsettled nature to it.

00:27:11 Hannah Guest

Yeah.

00:27:12 Katie Host

'Cause you're not in the daytime, *[stifles laughter]* or the nighttime. The weird in-between—I think they did a great job with creating that aesthetic, which I do think pervades all of the sort of early 2000s horror movies, especially the Japanese horror remakes like *The Grudge* and *Dark Water*. But that was like such a trend in the early 2000s, all those Japanese horror remakes. Have you ever seen *Ringu*, the original?

00:27:36 Hannah Guest

No.

00:27:37 Katie Host

I think I've seen it but I can't—I haven't seen it in such a long time. What are your thoughts on horror remakes?

00:27:44 Hannah Guest

Oh...

[Katie laughs.]

I mean, I think that's like, a loaded question.

00:27:47	Katie	Host	<u>Yes</u> .
00:27:48	Hannah	Guest	I sort of could debate either side of it, and if you ask me one day I'll feel very strongly that like... more so when I think that there is no <u>need</u> for them, it's more because I feel that there's <u>so</u> much <u>original</u> storytelling that's not happening. And so that sort of just bums me out. It's like, "Oh, we're gonna do another remake or another sort of like, franchise-able situation."
00:28:11	Katie	Host	Right.
00:28:12	Hannah	Guest	As opposed to just letting people tell original stories. But in terms of... oh, it's so weird! Because to me it's very subjective. Like, I did not think <i>Psycho</i> needed to be remade, and it was a huge mistake.
00:28:24	Katie	Host	[Laughing] I know!
			[Katie continues responding affirmatively/in acknowledgment as Hannah continues.]
00:28:25	Hannah	Guest	But at the same time, like, I—[laughs]. I think someone told me that <i>Labyrinth</i> is being remade? And I have had some <u>serious</u> arguments with my friends, because I think that's a <u>great</u> idea! [Stifles laughter.] Because I think that that movie—and I'm, like, treading in very dangerous water here—
			[Katie laughs.]
			—but like, is <u>extremely</u> outdated and like... sort of annoying! So I— [stifles laughter]. And I think someone <u>now</u> could do something <u>so wild</u> . I would hope that—I hear sort of like—I actually heard that <i>The Ring</i> was <u>sort</u> of a shot-for-shot remake of <i>Ringu</i> . I'm not sure that that's true or fair to say, but, like, <i>Let Me In</i> vs. <i>Let the Right One In</i> was <u>was</u> very much a shot-for-shot, practically.
			So I think that <u>that doesn't</u> make sense to me. That seems like a money ploy to have something sort of land with new stars, with a current audience. As opposed to something where you could be <u>truly</u> innovative again, you know?
00:29:18	Katie	Host	Right. And it is interesting when you bring up <i>Let the Right One In</i> , because it's like, oh, are American audiences just not going to watch a foreign-language film because it has subtitles? Do we have to like, spoon-feed them a version of this that it, like, has, you know, [laughing] recognizable actors and English-language dialogue?
			I didn't think <i>Let the Right One In</i> needed to be remade, but—yeah, I mean, I guess it's—and I was pretty—I love the original <i>Suspiria</i> . And so I was kind of suspect about the Luca Guadagnino one. But you know, it was <u>so</u> different in so many different ways that it was— <u>kinda</u> —it worked—
00:30:01	Hannah	Guest	It's almost not a remake, right?
00:30:02	Katie	Host	Yeah! It's—
00:30:03	Hannah	Guest	I mean, because it shows its hand right away as opposed to <u>building</u>

towards the reveal.

00:30:07 Katie Host Right.

00:30:08 Hannah Guest Like, you know they're witches right out of the gate in the newest one.

00:30:12 Katie Host Yeah, and it, you know, completely changes the setting and adds all these different characters and, you know, adds in this like, *[laughs]* political subplot that wasn't in the original one. I think—yeah. I think updating it for the time that we're in and like, dealing with those, like, universal themes, I think you can't really go wrong. But like, trying to be slavishly shot-for-shot or something, that's always like, a weird choice to me.

00:30:37 Hannah Guest Yeah. I guess I don't have like, as much hate for it as a lot of people do. Like, I—thank goodness they remade *It!* I mean...

00:30:43 Katie Host *[Laughing]* God!

The original is so funny to me.

00:30:46 Hannah Guest Yeah! It's painful.

00:30:48 Katie Host *[Laughing]* Yeah!

00:30:49 Hannah Guest And it was such a cool concept to split the present and the past.

00:30:52 Katie Host Mm-hm.

00:30:53 Hannah Guest I thought *Chapter Two* was way too long, but—well, I guess when you have to service all those stars...

00:30:58 Katie Host I know. Yeah.

00:30:59 Hannah Guest But you know, I think that—what—you could definitely have a debate on the, um, *[amused]* "subtitle" topic. Because there is a lot of America who won't read them.

00:31:08 Katie Host Yeah.

00:31:09 Hannah Guest So even though like, we can say like, that's—you know... Like—and also, especially with horror, it can be very distracting to read it.

00:31:15 Katie Host Yeah.

00:31:16 Music Music "Switchblade Comb" starts fading in.

00:31:17 Hannah Guest Because you really do want to see sort of, like, watching what's behind them, and—and so—I don't know. It's like—I guess it's case by case, and it's always gonna piss someone off.

00:31:25 Katie Host For sure. It's a quandary.

Alright. We are gonna take another quick break, and we'll come back and talk more *The Ring*.

[Music continues until promo.]

00:31:36 Promo Clip **Music:** Upbeat, fun music.

Lisa Hanawalt: Hey, if you like your podcasts to be focused and well-researched, and your podcast hosts to be uncharismatic, unhorny strangers who have no interest in horses, then this is not the podcast for you.

Emily Heller: Yeah, and what's your deal?

[Lisa laughs.]

I'm Emily.

Lisa: I'm Lisa.

Emily: Our show's called *Baby Geniuses!*

Lisa: And its hosts are horny adult idiots. We discover weird Wikipedia pages every episode.

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Emily: We haven't asked them to stop! But they also aren't stopping.

Lisa: Join us on *Baby Geniuses*.

Emily: Every other week on MaximumFun.org.

[Music ends.]

00:32:11 Music Transition

"Switchblade Comb" plays again, fading out as Katie speaks.

00:32:19 Katie Host

Welcome back to *Switchblade Sisters*. We are talking about *The Ring* with director Hannah Macpherson.

[Music fades out.]

And *The Ring*—we mentioned before that when you were watching the movie you were like, "Oh my gosh, *[laughing]* I don't even wanna watch the tape on screen."

I think it is such an interesting, weird, mysterious little piece of film that must have been really fun for them to put together. Gore Verbinski said about it that the tape had to function on three levels. It had to be disturbing on its own, it had to provide a series of clues, and then it also had to have some resonance to the author. "I started with images that I found horrific, and then we built the tape long and kept reducing and reducing and tried to avoid the temptation to make it narrative. It's amazing how when images fall together, how quickly they start to tell a story even when you're trying not to."

But I love—I—the film—like, the tape that they watch, it feels like, almost like a early silent film, *[laughs]* or like—like an early silent, like, European art film. Like I was like, "Oh, *[laughing]* this looks kind of like early French cinema."

Just—but that kind of—where they were just learning how to use cameras and like, just being like, "We're gonna shoot a ladder" or like, "this woman looking in a mirror and..." It is—it is so eerie,

though.

[Katie responds affirmatively and/or in acknowledgment several times as Hannah speaks.]

00:33:38 Hannah Guest Yeah. And I think part of that is something that Noah points out at one point, at least the part with the mirrors, where because there's a—you're looking straight into a mirror, you should see the camera person. There's something that feels—I don't have a—really a thought of exactly how they pulled this off.

But as you learn that these were things that Samara must have seen or felt in emotional moments—or even maybe like, manifested, like the horses drowning and things like that—it feels... They do feel very memory-like, or sort of like—like a first-person point of view. Like, I—and part of that I think is like, at one point Anna, the mom, turns and looks straight into the lens.

And so there's just something about them that once you realize—the first clue is sort of like "These are somebody's thoughts." And—but I—every—and that's one of—the tape is still one of the things that every time I go back, I learn something. I see something new or realize something new. Like the centipede. I didn't understand for the longest time that huge centipede that crawls out from under the chair. And then when she's going through the stuff in the house and finds the tape, and then there's this centipede, and it's like a great—it's like a—one of the biggest jump scares, at least for me. Because it's coming out of nowhere.

And so then I just had the thought, I was like, "Oh, that place has centipedes." Like, it's just that—and I don't know, maybe I should have picked up on that sooner, but it's so organic where those images are coming from, especially when you're a kid. Like, you picture out on the swing, or laying in the grass, and I still—like, every time I see it I have a different opinion of whether she was a normal kid whose crazy mother killed her and then only her anger is manifested in death, or if she was like a mind-controlled kid. Like a—you know, with telekinesis or like, some sort of anger issue. And then... and like, what created what, you know?

00:35:39 Katie Host I know! That's why I had such a hard time like, *[laughing]* describing in the synopsis.

00:35:42 Hannah Guest Yeah!

00:35:43 Katie Host I'm like, "Was it her? Was she the evil presence first, or did they make her evil because of the abuse that happened to her?" Because it's essentially like... If they were trapping her in the barn, you know, they're—it's a domestic abuse type of story.

00:36:00 Hannah Guest Yeah, and it's also island mentality, I think.

00:36:02 Katie Host Oh, yeah.

00:36:03 Hannah Guest It's like, "Oh, when the kid came, then the horses started to die." It's like, oh, well maybe the horses got, like, whatever that horse disease is that makes them crazy!

00:36:11 Katie Host Right.

[Katie continues responding affirmatively as Hannah speaks.]

00:36:12 Hannah Guest You know, you don't—like, and then the kid happened to be there, and—but there's also the great mystery of like, they went away and they came back with a child. But there's a birth certificate for her, so it's just—it's like, every time I get new details, and part of it's because the filmmakers are so confident in letting that information be very short. Nothing is spoon-fed, nothing is over-discussed. So it's just like, it's there for you if, on your hundredth viewing, it finally clicks into place.

00:36:38 Katie Host Yeah! I can imagine, you know, 'cause I haven't revisited this movie in almost 20 years—which is a terrifying thing to say—but you watch it frequently. So have you ever like, shown it to anyone for the first time and been like, "I'm gonna show you *The Ring*"? *[Laughs.]*

[Katie responds affirmatively and/or in acknowledgment a couple times as Hannah speaks.]

00:36:51 Hannah Guest No, I have never had that pleasure. But I do talk about it a lot. And I—the reason I watch it so frequently is I'll have a thought, like—I mean I've been very impressed with like, Mike Flanagan's work and this sort of like, reversal from the jump scare horror movie to more like *The Shining*, sort of this slow-build tension. And I really think it's so—so I'll think, like, "Oh, how would I wanna shoot a scene, you know, where a woman's coming down a hall and we know something's in the furthest door?" or something.

And it's like, pretty much anything I could come up with happens in *The Ring*. And then when I look at it, it's always simpler than I thought it would be.

00:37:35 Katie Host Oh, wow.

[Katie continues responding affirmatively/in acknowledgment.]

00:37:36 Hannah Guest And so that sort of is always—I mean the first shot in the movie is the exterior of that house where the girls are. And then the second shot, it has to last about 90 seconds. It's just a slow push on those two girls on the bed. Never a single. Never cutting to the TV. And like, I would—I felt so much tension even in that just slow push. And the way they use things that aren't scary naturally, like water.

So they'll just—you know, it's like a huge wide shot, but the foreground, there's water creeping or water dripping off a—we start to realize that water is also Samara. But they don't have to do anything to tell us that. It's just—it's like you feel like, "Oh, there must have been a lot of shots! And like, a shot of the water, and the water dripping." It's like, nope. It's just in the foreground, creeping, and it's a long wide the whole time as she comes down the hallway. It's so cool.

00:38:30 Katie Host Yeah! It is deceptively simple. Even the amount—the few amount of characters that we sort of interact with, the way that he shoots it, and—but you realize that there's such a richness to the production design, the lighting, the cinematography. So it's really—it's just such a well-woven, like, well-crafted world. So I understand why you're consistently sort of like, get—drawing inspiration from it.

Is it something that you like, watch as a reference? It sounds like you kinda watch it as a reference sometimes when you're coming up with

your own shots and approaches to shooting things.

- 00:39:11 Hannah Guest Yeah! I think probably actually the most times I've turned to it is writing.
- 00:39:16 Katie Host Oh, I see.
- 00:39:17 Hannah Guest Because it is almost like—it is such spot-on three-act structure, like, Blake Snyder's 15-point beat sheet, to the—practically to the minute. Like, I'm like, "Oh, this is the break into two. She watched the tape." And it's 25 minutes and 36 seconds in. And then her son has watched the tape at the midpoint, and it's 55 minutes in. And it's just like—literally like, "Oh, the dad dies. It's 'all is lost.' And now we're in the dark night of the soul and she's gonna end up in the well."
- And it's just like... So to sort of... To sort of go back and be like, "How did all the little—how did the little scenes get us to these points where we can have these major reversals?" Like, I think it's so handily done that whenever something good happens, like Noah calls her at the midpoint and says "I believe you."
- 00:40:05 Katie Host Right.
- 00:40:07 Hannah Guest He's just seen his own face messed up. And she says "Our son just watched the movie." So there's nothing—she is tortured from day—from the first moment, and it's unrelenting. And I also think it's like, cool to—I have to remind myself; sometimes I go back and I'm like "We don't know that's their son."
- 00:40:26 Katie Host I know!
- 00:40:27 Hannah Guest For 60 minutes.
- 00:40:28 Katie Host Yeah!
- 00:40:29 Hannah Guest And that's just such cool writing! Because it's like, then you look back and you're like, "Duh. [*Laughing*] Of course."
- 00:40:34 Katie Host Right, right! I also—it's the way that they delay in the writing, especially, and then in the—and in the screenplay. They delay the reveal that—of the son. They delay the reveal of Brian Cox, you know, [*stifles laughter*] who's a pretty big star. I mean now he is; I don't know—you know, back then he was like a well-known character actor. But he doesn't show up until an hour in the movie, and then he's on screen for like four minutes.
- 00:40:57 Hannah Guest Mm-hm.
- 00:40:58 Katie Host And he has two—basically two scenes, and—but you're just like, "Oh my gosh, I—" You know, "Brian Cox!" He's like, so memorable in this and his death scene is so intense and crazy. And I was also noticing that there's very few shots in that, but it's—as horrifying as his death is, it's like, it's the lead-up, 'cause you're anticipating what he's gonna do and the amount of things he's plugging in.
- And then you're—you're—like, [*laughing*] I'm like "Don't step on the water!"
- 00:41:25 Hannah Guest Yeah!
- 00:41:26 Katie Host When she's—
- 00:41:27 Hannah Guest She steps in and then steps out, and—
- 00:41:28 Katie Host Right, and you know, you're—you're like, "When is this thing—when

is this guy gonna get zapped?" And then he hits the power strip. *[Laughs.]* And goes in, but that's very few shots! It's like, his hand... some red-looking water, and then like, his body kind of in the background, but it's not a lot of... gratuitousness, or like, showing what's happening, but you just get enough to get that scare, and that creepy feeling of what happened to him.

So it's really impressive how they—you know, like you've been saying. You know, the restraint that both Ehren Kruger the writer and Gore Verbinski use in the filmmaking.

So this was super fun! I so enjoyed talking about *The Ring* with you.

00:42:13	Hannah	Guest	Oh, it was a blast!
00:42:14	Katie	Host	Yeah! So your stuff is available on—we've got the Netflix episodes of <i>Trinkets</i> , and <i>Pure</i> which is on Hulu, and <i>Tagged</i> which is on Hulu.
00:42:28	Hannah	Guest	Yeah, there's three seasons of <i>Tagged</i> . So that's exciting. There's a lot of half-hour episodes. And <i>Pure</i> , I'm very excited, just came out in September. And it's a—
00:42:37	Katie	Host	<i>Pure</i> did, yeah.
00:42:39	Hannah	Guest	It's a feature. Yeah, for the <i>Into the Dark</i> series. And if you have—if you need like, to like, put a fire under your feminist side, you should—that's like, the movie to watch.
00:42:46	Music	Music	"Switchblade Comb" is fading in."
00:42:47	Katie	Host	Hell yeah.
00:42:48	Hannah	Guest	Yeah.
00:42:49	Katie	Host	Alright. Well, thank you, Hannah, for being here.
00:42:51	Hannah	Guest	Thank you.
00:42:52	Katie	Host	Thank you for listening to <i>Switchblade Sisters</i> with me, Katie Walsh! If you like what you're hearing, please leave us a five-star review on Apple Podcasts.

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[Music finishes.]

00:43:25	Clip	Clip	Samara: <i>[Whispering]</i> Seven days...
00:43:26	Music	Transition	A cheerful guitar chord.
00:43:27	Speaker 1	Guest	MaximumFun.org .
00:43:29	Speaker 2	Guest	Comedy and culture.
00:43:30	Speaker 3	Guest	Artist owned—
00:43:31	Speaker 4	Guest	—audience supported.