

00:00:00	Music	Transition	“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 her guest, and then it fades out.
00:00:08	April Wolfe	Host	Welcome to <i>Switchblade Sisters</i> , where women get together to slice and dice our favorite action and genre films. I’m April Wolfe. 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. Perhaps one that’s influenced their own work or way of thinking. And today, I’m very excited to have writer-director-actor-stunt performer Jenna Kanell here. Hi!
00:00:29	Jenna	Guest	Hey! Thanks for having me.
00:00:30	April	Host	Nice to see you.
00:00:31	Jenna	Guest	Yeah, you too.
00:00:32	April	Host	Uh, let me give you guys a little intro on uh, Jenna’s life here. Jenna hails from Brookline, Massachusetts, and found her way into film by writing and storytelling when she was younger. And then, a single day as an extra on a film set pushed her on a path to take some classes and try maybe acting herself. Uh, she also got some great work feedback from some of her writing and thought, “Maybe I could do this?”
			Um, so in 2016, after working and doing a bunch of short films that her friends were making and other things, she starred in <i>Terrifier</i> , playing a young woman who must outwit and run a sadistic murderer named Art the Clown on Halloween. And that was a big one, I would say.
			<i>[Jenna affirms.]</i>
			And that year, Jenna also delivered a TEDx Talk on a short film she wrote and directed called <i>Bumblebees</i> , which, after its worldwide, award-winning festival run, led her to speak at institutions such as Harvard Medical School, and the National Inclusion Institute.
			She then wrote and directed the award-winning <i>Max &amp; the Monster</i> , <i>#SLUT</i> , and directed four episodes of the <i>Fear Haus</i> series, among many other projects. As a SAG-AFTRA actor, Jenna can be seen in <i>The Front Runner</i> , <i>The Bye Bye Man</i> , <i>The Resident</i> , and <i>Shots Fired</i> , among a lot of other spots that she’s been in. She is also a stunt performer, so sometimes she does some doubles in her own, uh as her own characters and then as other people—or um, you know, safety coordinator kind of stuff and all that, I’ve seen, right?
00:02:05	Jenna	Guest	Yeah, it’s mostly doubling for myself, and then sometimes yeah, helping coordinate when I’m on the production side.
00:02:10	April	Host	Oh my god, you’re such a budget-saver. Look at you.
00:02:12	Jenna	Guest	<i>[Laughs]</i> That’s what we like to hear.

00:02:15 April Host *[Laughs]* She also trains in krav maga, identifies as queer, and is arguably proudest of teaching her cat to do tricks. Which, I would love to do a whole podcast on teaching your cat tricks. As a—

00:02:26 Jenna Guest You let me know.

00:02:27 April Host —cat woman myself.

*[Both laugh.]*

Jenna, the movie that you chose to talk about today is *It Follows*. Can you give us a little explanation on why this is one of your fave genre films?

00:02:37 Jenna Guest Sure. Well, first of all, I was surprised that you guys hadn't done this one yet. Um, I—I love this film because it doesn't—it feels timeless. It feels as though its both contemporary and a classic film.

Um, and I—it's one of my favorites because it doesn't rely on jumpscare. It doesn't rely on anything cheap or surprising. It relies on a slow build and a slow burn and um, and is almost a new-age telling of a campfire story, in a way, and of a cautionary tale. And I really like that angle of um, of being scared and being unnerved.

And I like that it's almost a nightmare sub-genre type of thing, that relies on music and forced perspective, and the really unique cinematography, to make you feel on edge the entire time instead of just, you know, throwing things at you.

00:03:40 April Host Yeah, definitely. We're gonna get into all of that in the conversation. For those of you who haven't seen *It Follows*, 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 would like to pause and watch *It Follows* first, this is your shot.

And now that you're back, let me uh, you know, lull you to a nice sense of statis here with a synopsis of *It Follows*.

Written and directed by David Robert Mitchell, *It Follows* stars Maika Monroe as young college student, Jay, who goes on a lovely date with Hugh. At the theater, Hugh points out a girl that Jay can't see, and Hugh makes them leave.

00:04:25 Clip Clip **Jay:** I'm sorry, I just—I don't see what you're talking about.

**Hugh:** Can we go? I'm sorry, I just—I just don't feel. Can we—can we go back to the car?

00:04:32 April Host Jay is very confused. Later, they have sex in his car, but Hugh then knocks Jay out, and she awakes tied to a wheelchair in an abandoned auto factory. He explains to her that he passed a kind of curse onto her through sex, and that a thing will now begin following her, taking the face of multiple people.

00:04:51 Clip Clip **Hugh:** It can look like someone you know, or it could be a stranger in a crowd. Whatever helps it get close to you. It could look like

anyone. But there's only one of it.

- 00:05:07 April Host And if it catches her, it will kill her. He forces her to see the first iteration of the thing, a naked woman walking towards her, and then he drives her home. Unfortunately, Jay finds Hugh wasn't Hugh, as police find he was a guy living under a false identity in an abandoned house.
- 00:05:31 Clip Clip **Jay:** There was an old woman at school today, and she was staring at me. It was like she was following me.
- Paul:** Did you know her?
- Jay:** No, but she freaked me out.
- 00:05:44 April Host She escapes and has a sleepover with her sister, Kelly and friends, Paul and Yara, but when someone enters the house, they cannot see it.
- 00:05:51 Clip Clip **Kelly:** Jay?
- Paul:** Jay, can you open the door?
- Jay:** *[Sobbing]* It's in the house.
- Kelly:** What's going on?
- Paul:** There's nothing in the house, Jay.
- Jay:** I saw it.
- 00:06:03 April Host But Jay sees first a woman urinating on the floor, and then a tall man with no eyes. She escapes to a playground. Cute next door neighbor, Greg, helps the group track down Hugh, who's actually Jeff, who says he got the virus from a one-night stand, and she has to pass it on to someone else by having sex with them.
- 00:06:21 Clip Clip **Hugh/Jeff:** Like I told you, all you can do is pass it along to someone else.
- Kelly:** The fuck are you talking about?
- Hugh/Jeff:** Look, she can do the same thing I did. I mean, it should be easy for her. She's a great girl. Any guy would be with you. Just sleep with someone else, and tell them to do the same thing. Maybe it'll never come back.
- 00:06:38 April Host Greg takes them to his family's lake cottage, where the thing assumes Yara's identity and cannot die. Jay escapes in Greg's car, but crashes and wakes up in the hospital, where Greg has sex with her because... eh, he doesn't really believe in any of this.
- 00:06:52 Clip Clip **Jay:** You believe me right? You're not just playing along?

**Greg:** No, I—I believe you. I just don't think it's following you.

00:07:01 April Host But later, this thing assumes Greg's mom's identity, kills him, and has sex with his corpse.

*[Jenna makes a disgusted noise.]*

Jay goes to a beach, sees three men in a boat, and undresses on her way out to meet them, presumably to pass it on to them. The group then makes a plan to lure the thing into a pool to kill it, which backfires at first, until Paul shoots the foreman in the head and the pool fills with blood. They're not sure if it's dead or not. Paul and Jay later and have sex, and we see them holding hands, walking down the street, with someone walking not so far behind them.

00:07:36 Jenna Guest Just hearing you relay the plot again gives me chills. *[She laughs.]*

00:07:41 April Host It's a lot.

00:07:43 Jenna Guest It's a lot.

*[Both laugh.]*

Ugh. It's so intense. It's such a good movie. It's so well done.

00:07:49 April Host Well, let's get into the first thing I have here, which is the fact that he, um—David Robert Mitchell wanted to kind of let his characters fail. He said—and this is them talking about the pool, luring it into the pool.

*[Jenna responds affirmatively.]*

"It's the stupidest plan ever!"

*[Jenna laughs.]*

"It's a kid movie plan. It's something that Scooby Doo and the Gang might think of. And that was sort of the point. What would you do if you were confronted by a monster and found yourself trapped within a nightmare? Ultimately, you have to resort to some way of fighting it that's accessible to you in the physical world, and that's not really going to cut it.

We kind of avoid any kind of traditional set up for that sequence, because in more traditional horror films, there might be a clue that would lead them to figure out a way to destroy this monster. I intentionally avoided placing those. Instead, they do their best to accomplish something, and we witness its failure. It's probably a very non-conventional way of approaching the third act confrontation, but we thought it was a fun way to deal with it."

00:08:42 Jenna Guest I love that. I mean, that addresses one of the major themes of the movie. The like, adulthood versus childhood dynamic, and the fact that we don't—we almost see no adults in the film. We never see their parents, we barely ever see other adults. They play a passive role if anything, or they just look like the monster. And so it's kind of these kids trying to handle a very adult problem in the only ways

that they know how.

00:09:15 April Host Yeah, like they don't—they don't have the capacity to be detectives. Like, they just don't.

00:09:22 Jenna Guest No.

00:09:23 April Host How do you approach this in your own screenwriting, though?

00:09:26 Jenna Guest Failure?

*[April responds affirmatively.]*

That's a really good question. Um, well *It Follows* was definitely one of the inspirations for *Max & The Monster*, the short that you mentioned. Which, we just finished our festival run, so it'll be publicly available pretty soon. Um, and I relate the two because, in the same way that they're approaching an intangible concept and giving it a monster's face, *Max & The Monster* is about a girl dealing with the trauma of sexual assault. And similar to in *It Follows* where it's kind of this haunted STD situation, um, she has this monster that starts following her around everywhere, except in *Max & The Monster* instead of being scary he's silly and goofy and not actually scary at all. He's more just a nuisance.

But it's about her relationship with him, and in—I hadn't thought about it in terms of failure, but it is, and that actually is applicable. Because in *Max*, she tries to ignore him, and that doesn't work because that's not how trauma works, and she tries to kill him, and that doesn't work, because that's not how we deal with our problems. And so eventually it's about her learning how to live with him but on her terms. And so in a way, she fails at the goal of getting rid of him, because with something like trauma, you physically can't. Um, but she succeeds at living with him on her terms.

So I hadn't actually thought about it in terms of what failure—how failure applies in terms of story there, but it actually does. And I think that applies to other films I've done and other ones I'm currently working on as well in that it's not necessarily about whether you fail or succeed, because I think often we start out on stories with a certain goal in mind and we fail at that, but then realize that, you know, failure isn't necessarily what we thought it looks like and what you wanted isn't necessarily what you actually need, and treasure was inside of you the whole time and, you know. Journey, not the destination. Insert trope here. *[She laughs.]*

00:11:39 April Host Yeah yeah yeah, you know, sew it on a pillow, right?

*[Jenna affirms and they both laugh.]*

00:11:43 Jenna Guest Get you a little throw pillow.

00:11:45 April Host I—

00:11:46 Jenna Guest Needlepoint.

*[Laughter resumes.]*

- 00:11:48 April Host One thing that you already mentioned that I feel like we should get into is the fact that the monsters are all adults, and um, sometimes you might not actually recognize who they are or like, the significance that they might have in a situation. But they're there and there's a kind of like, if you watch it again, you're like, "Oh, okay, I see."
- Um, he said—Mitchell said, "Within the film, we're sort of avoiding the influence of the adult world, and so I thought it was interesting to only enter into that space through the trope of the monster. There are other forms that tie into other characters, too. Some are very clear and people get it, and some are much harder to pick up on. There are a couple that I don't think I've ever even had anyone ask about, because we also tried to be true to distance. We tried to keep the camera closer to the location of the actors, so if there's a point of view shot from their perspective, we didn't necessarily throw a longer lens on so that you—so that the form of the monsters would be closer and clearer."
- So if you're paying attention, there are versions, iterations of the monster that have uh, thematic significance, but they're not always in clear view, essentially.
- 00:12:55 Jenna Guest Yeah. Well, and that makes a really good point too about perspective, and about giving the audience forced perspective, and about um, telling us or suggesting us who we should be, not siding with, but whose story we're supposed to um, empathize with more. And like yeah, the fact that every time we see the monster, we see them from the same focal distance as the characters do, and using camera work like that to inform um, yeah, to inform perspective and to inform where the story is being told from, and—and yeah. And using distance to create a sense of unease.
- 00:13:40 April Host Yeah, we never get like, a close on the character's face, you know?
- 00:13:43 Jenna Guest Right. That would give us—that would be an answer.
- 00:13:46 April Host Or the monster's face. That would be, yeah. It's a cheat.
- 00:13:48 Jenna Guest Exactly, yeah. It's scarier that we can't, that we have to squint and get closer to the TV in order to see what's going on. That's very clever. I tried to do something similar, that—the short that you mentioned, *#SLUT*, that I was hired to direct about a year ago, and we're just about to finish our um, festival circuit on that one as well. And we tried to do something where there's a story being told within the story, um, where the lens that we're seeing is from the point of view of this writer.
- And so, my DP Azariah and I tried to publish that by—every time we were in the quote-unquote "real world" with the guy telling the story, everything is handheld and feels very messy and uneven and unclean and just kind of rockier. And then every time you're in the story that he's telling us, the story that he wants us to believe and wants us to understand everything is clean and locked off and very controlled.

And obviously that seems very obvious and I know it's something that a lot of people do and obviously I stole it from people much smarter than I am. But it's a simple thing that when you watch it, it activates your mirror neurons in subliminal ways that you're not even necessarily aware of. And it's a similar sort of, for lack of a better word, trick, I think, like what he's talking about.

00:15:08 April Host Yeah I mean, filmmaking is all a trick.

00:15:09 Jenna Guest It's all a trick. It's just smoke and mirrors.

00:15:10 Music Transition "Switchblade Comb" by Mobius VanChocStraw.

00:15:11 April Host *[Laughs]* We're gonna take a quick break. When we come back, we're gonna talk um, a little bit about Mitchell's concept of slow horror, about knowing what your final shot is going to be, and making look books. All of that kind of stuff. And then also the simplest shot that actually is wildly complicated.

*[Jenna laughs and affirms.]*

Alright. We'll be right back.

*[Music swells and plays for several more seconds.]*

00:15:34 Promo Promo **Music:** Relaxing ukulele music.

**Manolo Moreno:** Hey, you've reached *Dr. Gameshow*. Leave your message after the beep.

*[Music stops.]*

*[Beep!]*

**Sara:** Hi. This is Sara, and I'd like to tell you about *Dr. Gameshow*. *Dr. Gameshow* is a band of geniuses, or nerds, or brilliant artists, or kids, or some combination of all of those who get together to make a show like no other that's family-friendly. It's an interactive call-in gameshow podcast.

When I found *Dr. Gameshow*, I found joy. I told my friends and family that if they weren't listening, they were wasting joy. I sent them the episodes that made me laugh until I cried, played it for them in the car. They laugh, too! Laugh their butts off. But they still don't listen on their own, so they're wasting joy. And I keep looking for someone to understand me. Maybe it's you! Give *Dr. Gameshow* a listen, and find joy.

*[Beep!]*

*[Music resumes.]*

**Jo Firestone:** Listen to [Dr. Gameshow](#) on *Maximum Fun*. New episodes every other Wednesday.

*[Music fades out.]*

00:16:27 Music Transition “Switchblade Comb” by Mobius VanChocStraw.

00:16:34 April Host Welcome back to *Switchblade Sisters*. I’m April Wolfe, and today I’m joined by Jenna Kanell, and we’re talking about *It Follows*.

Okay so, Mitchell, when he was constructing this, he, you know, he admires the school of what he calls slow horror. He said, “My basic idea was of a horror film where the fear came from something that is so slow that you can somehow escape from, but the fact that its relentless and eternal, the fear would come from that. Take something as simple as looking at *Night of the Living Dead* to realize something slow can be terrifying. But this was different than that. And yeah, there was a bit of a question mark for some people in terms of how it would feel. I just had to have some faith that what was in my head and on the page would work.”

And I mean, yeah, it does.

00:17:18 Jenna Guest *[Laughing]* It totally does. And I love what he’s saying too, because I feel like there’s such a—there’s such a temptation for us to make movies fast and do to have a bunch of things blow up and there’s just tits everywhere and everything’s like, quick cuts and there’s a fight scene but it’s like, you know, shakey and everything is super crazy and we’re seeing a million things at once and, um. And I like movies like that that treat us, as the audience, as though we are intelligent beings, and as though we are paying attention and um, and yeah. As though we’re smart, you know?

And that type of horror, I mean, look at *The Shining*. It still holds up. It’s still very scary when you watch it now, and there’s no crazy special effects or CGI in it. It’s all slow burn and it’s all very atmospheric.

00:18:11 April Host *[Jenna affirms several times as April speaks.]*

The evolution of horror in recent years is very interesting, because I do think that like, this movie and *The Babadook* were kind of marking this newer version of horror. I mean, horror was already great in indie spaces. It was already—but there was something that they were trying to kind of branch out with universality with it. Meaning that it didn’t rely on gore, and that was kind of the barrier a lot of people had um, for getting into horror. ‘Cause they thought it was like, only that, you know? And yeah, there is a lot of that, but there’s also so much ingenuity and creativity.

But those two movies I think in particular were kind of changing and bringing a lot of people into the fold who may not have thought that they were horror fans because it didn’t have those kinds of markers of what people thought were like, were horror, from, you know, usually relics from uh—

00:19:06 Jenna Guest Hitchcock and—

00:19:08 April Host Yeah yeah yeah. And I think that, uh, it’s going to be a thing that I’m going to remember in terms of horror history that is—it’s huge. And I don’t know if it’s um—but then we expect horror movies to be like this and only like this now, which is interesting.



00:19:27 Jenna Guest *[Laughing]* But the—it's—people don't realize how—you were just saying this—people don't realize how big it is and how there's—there are elements of horror in most genres. And uh, and horror as a genre itself, it's like metal. It has fifty subgenres that are all very different from one another. And you can have a movie—I mean, like *Terrifier* is a great example. It's not trying to be a psychological horror movie. Damien, the director, would never pretend that it's a nuanced movie—

*[Both laugh.]*

—by any means. That's not what it's trying to be. It's a slasher, that's what it is.

00:20:03 April Host Yeah. He's got a scary clown with good makeup—

00:20:06 Jenna Guest That's what you got.

00:20:07 April Host —and he's got women in peril who are fighting for their lives.

00:20:09 Jenna Guest That's what's up. Yeah. That's what—that's what you come for, that's what you get. And there's nothing wrong with that, but that's only a small sample size of horror. And then you have *It Follows* and you have *The Babadook*, which is also incredible.

And you're right that the two of those kind of introduced something that uh, I think we started to play with, it feels like, in the 80s, but now we're almost—we see filmmakers perfecting of this kind of um, social commentary horror. Um, or like, allegorical horror. And more recently, *Get Out* did it really well, too, and you talking about that made me think about how many friends that I had that went and saw *Get Out* and said, "I don't like horror movies, but I liked this."

And when I first saw it, I didn't necessarily see it as a horror movie, but it is. It's just the genre's almost expanding, but then at the same time, maybe it was always this big and we just need to understand.

00:21:08 April Host I think it was, and I think people are taking chances on those projects now. I mean, look at Karyn Kusama, *The Invitation*.

00:21:13 Jenna Guest Ugh, so good. She's incredible

00:21:14 April Host A lot of people were like, again, who weren't horror fans were like, this is a really tense, weird drama that has a big final act. But that's also similar to what you get in *Get Out*, where it's just like you're waiting, you're waiting, you're waiting. And so there's a lot of patience in horror films right now. And I consider myself a very patient person, so I'm okay with that.

00:21:36 Jenna Guest *[Laughing]* Me too. Yeah, and especially if it's—if it's an interesting patience. If it's not waiting for the sake of waiting.

00:21:46 April Host Oh yeah, just art bullshit?

00:21:47 Jenna Guest Yeah. If it's not just art bullshit.

00:21:49 April Host Yeah, you gotta have something else. I think that I would want to bring up the criticism that Mitchell was getting, and how he was

responding to it. Because there were people who were saying that like—it's a film that, again, kind of rehashes some old stuff, like punishing a woman for having sex. Um, and then there's a kind of retro-sexism involved, that like, by emulating films from the past, it's perpetuating as opposed to adding something new.

And so, he was talking about that, and did he ever kind of reinterpret his work based on feedback, so this is a long one, but I think it's useful.

00:22:29 Jenna Guest

Yeah, no, I'm curious.

00:22:31 April Host

He said, "Some people have mentioned that to me, and to me, that's unfortunate if people see it that way. Listen, I always knew that there was going to be somebody that is going to read it that way. I don't want to insult anyone's interpretation. Personally, it's a little offensive to me that someone would see it that way, but everyone has a right to see things the way that they see them.

I do reinterpret at different stages of creating the film, though. There is a difference for me between the way I see it at the writing stage, and maybe when we're in editorial, and we're putting the film together. And there are some things that, maybe, I'll start to notice. Maybe this means this, or we can push it in this direction now, by making these choices in terms of what we put in, what we leave out, how we build the sequences. It's something that I'm always thinking about, it's not to say that I shut down once it's done. Ultimately, the film is finished, and other people have it in the world, and it's for other people to have, at all."

00:23:18 Jenna Guest

Oh, wow. I mean, he does make a good point that the moment a script leaves your fingertips, it's not yours anymore. I mean, you then have an army of other people touching it and making it their own, and then especially once that product is done—you know, filmmaking in a way is all about control, but then the one thing you can't control is how people are gonna interpret your art.

00:23:42 April Host

Honestly, you just have to do the best that you can. The one thing is—so, in horror films specifically, genre films, we have a history of, as you were saying before, that horror is kind of allegorical. There's been a great deal of scholarship around horror since the beginning of horror, and dissecting metaphors and what they mean.

And I would say that there is a larger responsibility placed on genre and horror directors because there is automatically going to be people who are going to interpret things. Because they've already been trained to see that this is allegorical, so they are going to read into every single choice that you make. Which means that, yeah, there's a lot of pressure on that.

Mitchell, who was not a horror director before, and who wasn't necessarily into horror past, you know, the regular kind of horror. I wonder if he was just unprepared for that, and the idea that like, the larger, broader film audiences will just, you know, embrace it because they're having a great time. But horror audiences expect a kind of thoughtfulness throughout, like, every single thing is

controlled.

- 00:24:56 Jenna Guest Mm-hm. That you have a responsibility, almost.
- 00:24:58 April Host Yeah, yeah. But it's a big responsibility, and it's sometimes unfair to horror writers and directors. But also, it is the way that it is.
- 00:25:08 Jenna Guest That's true. And yeah, you have—you do have the directors that go out, like Jordan Peele, who make a point to have a social commentary. And then you have people like David Lynch, who are just chaos sometimes. And one isn't necessarily better or worse than the other, they're just different forms of telling a story.
- But you're right that people are still gonna look for that sort of thing. And it's interesting because I find that very freeing, because I find that I always want to be able to say something. Because I think film is the best medium with which to render complicated topics digestible. And so, I find it freeing, because then you can literally and figuratively beat people over the head with something in a horror film in a way that you can't in any other genre.
- 00:25:58 April Host Yeah. You have to be so subtle in other genres. In horror, it's like, "Well, here we are!"
- 00:26:06 Jenna Guest "So this is about... man vs. self."
- [Both laugh.]*
- "The lighthouse is a dick." So, um, that's interesting and I wonder if you're right, and he maybe felt constrained by that. And then also, he even talks about that line and how thin it is, between commenting on something and becoming the thing that you're making a comment about, and that's a really tough line to walk.
- 00:26:35 April Host Yeah, you have to have constant control over the image and the direction of it. And you know, if you're like him, and you're making these choices in the writing stage and the editorial stage, and kind of driving a movie in certain places, based on what you, you know, a gut feeling or something, it's just like, probably constantly checking to make sure that the way that you are reinterpreting your work is kind of pure, for lack of a better word. Like, that vision or that trajectory.
- 00:27:11 Jenna Guest Yeah, absolutely. And it does seem like we're getting more—that we think more intricately about that stuff now than we used to. And I mean, I don't know, I wasn't around, but for instance in—back when the Red Scare was happening, and America was terrified of communists, a bunch of films came out, like *The Thing*, which I love, that are about bodysnatchers. People who aren't who they seem, and I think all of that was a societal reflection of things that we on a larger scale were freaked out by.
- And I don't know that there was a ton of analysis at the time, but of course now looking back we have that. So I wonder if, I mean, do you think that some of it is that we're becoming more aware, and we all have computers in our pockets, and we can all, um—

00:27:58 April Host Yeah. Because, I mean like, you know, horror writers and directors and viewers, I think we're always thinking about these things. Now we're doing it on such a scale that it's—it can be exalting and wonderful, or it can be maddening, and it's just, like, it's a lot.

00:28:18 Jenna Guest It is, yeah.

*[April laughs.]*

No, exactly! And maybe he wasn't ready. He's like, "You people are crazy."

00:28:23 April Host "Ohhh, Mitchell, so sorry."

00:28:25 Jenna Guest *[In a Canadian? Minnesotan? affectation]* "Oh Mitch, I'm so sorry."

00:28:28 April Host David Robert Mitchell just needs to cut down to one name at this point.

00:28:32 Jenna Guest It's a lot of names.

00:28:33 April Host Just do Mitchell.

00:28:35 Jenna Guest Dave Rob Mitch.

00:28:36 April Host Yeah. How do you trust a man with three first names?

00:28:39 Jenna Guest You can't.

00:28:40 Music Transition "Switchblade Comb" by Mobius VanChocStraw.

00:28:41 April Host So, we're going to take a quick break, and when we come back, we're going to get into some more of Maika Monroe's process, because she is obviously a huge component of this film, so we will be right back.

*[Music swells and plays for several more seconds.]*

00:28:54 Promo Promo **Music:** Classical orchestral music.

**John Hodgman:** Hey, everyone! It's I, John Hodgman of the *Judge John Hodgman* podcast.

**Elliott Kalan:** And I, Elliott Kalan of the *Flop House* podcast.

**John:** And we've made a whole new podcast! A 12-episode special miniseries called *I, Podius*. In which we recap, discuss, and explore the very famous 1976 BBC miniseries about Ancient Rome called *I, Claudius*! We've got incredible guests such as Gillian Jacobs, Paul F. Tompkins, as well as star of *I, Claudius* Sir Patrick Stewart! And his son! Non-Sir Daniel Stewart.

**Elliott:** Don't worry, Dan, you'll get there someday.

**John:** *I, Podius* is the name of the show! Every week from [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org) for only 12 weeks. Get 'em at [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org), or wherever you get your podcasts.

[Music fades out.]

00:29:39	Music	Transition	“Switchblade Comb” by Mobius VanChocStraw.
00:29:46	April	Host	>Welcome back to <i>Switchblade Sisters</i> . I’m April Wolfe, and I’m joined today by Jenna Kanell, and we’re talking about <i>It Follows</i> .  Um, so, getting into Maika Monroe and what she was doing for this movie. She’s in peril most of the time, and she’s got kind of a tight rope to walk with that, because she is both extremely vulnerable, but has to be strong enough to withstand a lot of things. So she’s not like this, uh, flawless—
00:30:12	Jenna	Guest	Damsel.
00:30:14	April	Host	—damsel, but she’s also not a flawless final girl, you know? She has to be normal.
00:30:19	Jenna	Guest	Right? Imagine that.
00:30:20	April	Host	So um, for this, she also had to stay in a particular mood for the entire thing. And you know, like many actors, she was just kind of like, staying in it on set. She said, “I felt that my character was in a very dark place for most of the movie, so on set I would keep headphones in my ears and stay distant. I think she goes through a pretty interesting arc, and in the beginning of the movie, I don’t think she thought of herself as a hero, or someone who could survive such a horrific event, and then she becomes a survivor.”  So, she never really, like, opened up, necessarily. Like, before filming began, and I’ll talk about this a little bit later, she was definitely friends with the cast. And we’ll get into kind of, catching that tone, and that feeling of actual friendship on screen. But once they got to the set, it had to be, like, kind of shut off. And she was just in her own kind of terrible place for most of it, which is not the best thing for an actor. But it’s the job.
00:31:26	Jenna	Guest	Right. I’ve certainly had to do that before, where—you know, days where you have to um—like I had to do an episode of <i>NCIS: New Orleans</i> where I’m like, basically my—my role in it was my husband is dead. And so I spent most of it screaming and crying, and so you don’t want to be like, at crafty, getting, you know, fruit snacks and talking about the last thing you worked on, or like, politics. Like, you—I understand that on a smaller scale, the need to almost tune out and separate yourself. But then there is the thing as an actor, you don’t want to seem like you’re rude or better than anybody else, but you do at the same time have to feel almost alone in a huge group of people, and music is a really good uh, way to do that.  I remember Stacy Title, who directed <i>Bye Bye Man</i> , she had me um, there’s a séance scene where I’m supposed to be hearing like, fifty different voices talking to me. I’m like, tuning into the great beyond. And she had me put in two different headphones, before—like when I was alone in my trailer beforehand, and one of them was playing beautiful classical music, and one of them was playing screamo, and to like, turn them both up and listen to them at the same time.

So music is a really powerful tool in regards to that sort of thing. In regards to feeling isolated or receiving a lot of sensory input, and yeah. And also some of it is knowing, for the director and for the actor, when to separate yourself from everybody and when to have a sense of community.

- 00:33:12 April Host I uh, I think that people don't know really that—some people don't know—Maika Monroe is also a pro athlete.
- 00:33:22 Jenna Guest What?! I am one of the people who did not know that.
- 00:33:25 April Host Yeah, she was a pro kiteboarder.
- 00:33:27 Jenna Guest What?! *[She laughs.]* Not what I was expecting you to say!
- 00:33:30 April Host And she was like, a dancer for thirteen years, I think. And so she had to choose a career between kiteboarding and acting.
- 00:33:41 Jenna Guest Oh my god.
- 00:33:42 April Host And so she did her own stunts for this movie, and she—she does her own stunts quite a bit, because she has, um—she athletically—she has that ability, and she—and you would not think about that because she is a slight, petite actress. But at the same time, she's trained. She's like, kind of built of muscle, too.
- 00:34:03 Jenna Guest Mm-hm. Yup. I can relate to that. I mean, I've never kiteboarded. That sounds really fun. And I certainly did not have to make that sort of decision.
- [Both laugh.]*
- Wow. Um. But I mean, we were talking about this before started recording, but um, I do krav maga, and so I go out of my way to try to do all my own stunts as well. Because I feel like it also helps you as an actor, in terms of informing the situation that you're in.
- I mean, uh, all the stuff we talked about before, I did all my own stunts in, and it—for me, it helps me get in—into my body, for lack of a better word. Into the same, sort of like you were saying, peril that the character is feeling and the same sort of danger. And your body experiencing something physically sends messages to your mind, even ones you're not aware of. So I mean, I love—and I also think stunts are super, super fun. I love them so much.
- 00:35:00 April Host Yeah, I mean, as long as you're not hurt. *[She laughs.]*
- 00:35:03 Jenna Guest Right. Yeah, as long as you're careful. As long as you're safe. And then at the same time, that stunt training is helpful, because then on other projects you can—you're aware of, "Oh, this is how this needs to be accomplished safely." And like, some of the stuff that I've directed, I've been able to have more of a hand with uh, the stunt coordinator's process, and things like that.
- So it's just—it's just yet another tiny piece of this huge machine, and the more pieces you know how they move, the better you understand how the whole game works.

00:35:36 April Host Yeah, and that's how you build a career.

00:35:38 Jenna Guest Yeah, I hope so.

*[Both laugh.]*

00:35:42 April Host Um, so uh, speaking of stunts and scenes that are physically uncomfortable, to get into that.

00:35:49 Jenna Guest What a transition.

00:35:40 April Host This is—I mean, her athletic training, she said, helped her with the wheelchair scene. She said, “We shot the scene in this abandoned car factory—” It's actually the Packard plant in Detroit. Um, “—and already, it feels like the apocalypse, because there's no one there and you have all these buildings where nature has taken over. We were actually supposed to be there two weeks earlier, but we had to change the schedule because there was a girl murdered at the college and the body was found there.”

00:36:17 Jenna Guest Cool. Great.

00:36:18 April Host “So we get there, and at this point it's five weeks driving myself insane, screaming and running, physically and mentally exhausting. They wrapped me up in blankets between takes, and then when they called action I just had to focus, so my body wouldn't be shaking. I was trying to get it nailed really quickly, but David is really specific. He wants the framing to be right, and acting-wise, he'll be like, ‘let's do it where it's subtle’, or ‘let's do it bigger’. It was not easy. This was the first movie where I was in just about every scene, so I've never had that experience of working twelve to fourteen hour days. It was so intense.”

00:36:50 Jenna Guest Yeah. Wow.

00:36:51 April Host Like, I don't know that an actor who doesn't have a kind of control over their physical body can withstand something like that.

*[Jenna affirms.]*

Because um, being from Michigan, it gets real cold.

00:37:05 Jenna Guest *[Laughs]* I'm sure.

00:37:06 April Host And she is just wearing like, the tiniest bra and panties, in a wheelchair, while everyone else is in parkas and clothed, you know?

00:37:15 Jenna Guest Yeah, where there are space heaters and yeah, all that stuff off-camera that she does not get to experience.

00:37:19 April Host Yeah, and she's not shaking.

00:37:20 Jenna Guest No. Which is very hard to do. I did uh, an action indie film a couple years ago called *Misfortune*, and there was a scene where—spoiler alert—there's a scene where I get, um, at the end where this guy buries me, or he's putting me in this hole he dug. And we were in the middle of the desert in Arizona, and I mean, Arizona during the

day is very warm but—

00:37:44 April Host At night.

00:37:45 Jenna Guest —at night, that shit drops. It was freezing, and like most women in horror movies, I was not wearing very much. And um, and it was so hard to be dead and not shake and not look stiff, and like, all these weird little nuances. I mean, *Terrifier* was fucking freezing. That was in New Jersey in the winter time, and you're also in a tiny costume, and like, yeah. You have to do almost breathing exercises, and like, time it out between takes and all these—there are all these weird little tricks you have to learn.

And something that I once heard Peter Jackson—I have not worked with him—but I—on a behind the scenes DVD commentary, I once heard him say, “Pain is temporary, film is forever.” And that's something that I find myself—

*[Both start laughing.]*

—repeating to myself on the regular.

00:38:43 April Host So, I wanted to cover the fact that Maika Monroe was not into the script when she read it.

00:38:49 Jenna Guest Really? I did not know this.

00:38:51 April Host But for her it was like taking a leap of faith, because she read the script and was just like, “I don't really get it.”

*[Jenna laughs.]*

She said, “For me, it was really the director. The script was difficult, because if you think about the concept of *It Follows*, in which a supernatural being is passed on through sexual intercourse, and reading it on a page, I don't think it came across properly on the page. It was hard to imagine in film how people would take it. It was really after I spoke to Mitchell that I realized, okay, he has a vision, he has an idea, and I need to be a part of this. But it was not on the page.”

*[She breaks off, laughing.]*

00:39:26 Jenna Guest That's something I—oh, man. Because that's—that's always a thing, too. Because that happens the other way too, where sometimes you'll read a script and you're like, “This is genius,” and then you see the movie and you're like, “What the fuck?”

00:39:37 April Host “What happened between here and there?”

00:39:39 Jenna Guest Yeah, something happened. Something went horribly wrong. Exactly. And I worry about that sometimes. I was on a call with my writing partner on the way here. There's a feature that I co-wrote to direct that we're in the process of getting off the ground, and it's tough because you really, you can't—when you're writing a script you can't say, “Okay, so I'm gonna shoot it like this. This is what the music's gonna be. We're gonna light it like this, single source, CTB.”



Like, all this bullshit. You can't. You have to evoke a mood and a feeling and all these story details without all the other pieces that come with a movie.

- 00:40:13 April Host Without the technical, yeah.
- 00:40:15 Jenna Guest Yeah, but we don't think about like, the sound design and how important that is, and the music, and the movement, and all these other details that the movie would be nothing without. And think about—like, I was thinking about—like the opening scene of *Get Out*, I re-watched it recently, and when you think about it, all it is is a guy walks through the suburbs alone at night and gets kidnapped.
- [April affirms.]*
- That's all it is on the page. What makes it scary is the way they used to shoot it with, the way that it's lit, and the way that they color corrected it even, where they bring down on all the shadows and everything is really contrast-y and dark. But most of that couldn't have been on the page when they originally wrote it. So some of it is trust.
- 00:40:58 April Host So it has to be a vision.
- He actually talks a lot about how he had to get people to trust him, because it just took a long time. He had been working in commercials and videos and branding stuff for a long time as a director, and then he had made one film before this. Um, which was not horror. And then I think he was using horror as a means to break into the industry. You know, it's just like, "How can I get people to pay attention to me? Horror!"
- [Jenna affirms.]*
- It's what a lot of filmmakers do.
- 00:41:28 Jenna Guest Yeah, exactly. It's because it's, in theory, the cheapest to make and the easiest to sell.
- 00:41:33 April Host In theory.
- [Jenna affirms.]*
- Yeah. Although, oh man, I would love to have a big budget horror movie someday. Okay, um—
- 00:41:39 Jenna Guest One day.
- 00:41:40 Music Transition "Switchblade Comb" by Mobius VanChocStraw.
- 00:41:41 April Host Um, thank you so much for joining me today, Jenna, and I would like you to remind people how they can see the stuff that you've been working on.
- 00:41:47 Jenna Guest Yeah. Thank you for having me. This was so much fun. Again, I would do this for hours. Uh, I'm on Instagram as @Squidthusiast. Like someone who's enthusiastic about squids. Um, uh, Laser

Pigeon Pictures, that's my production company. Obviously I'm on IMDB. My last name has one 'N' in it. Um. *[She laughs.]*

00:42:07 April Host

Jenna Kanell. One 'N.'

00:42:09 Jenna Guest

Two 'N's in the first one, one 'N' in the second one.

*[April laughs.]*

I'm overcommunicating and now I'm gonna be murdered.

00:42:17 April Host

Thank you so much for coming on.

00:42:18 Jenna Guest

Thank you.

00:42:19 April Host

Thank you for listening to *Switchblade Sisters*! If you like what you're hearing, please leave us a five-star review on Apple Podcasts. If you do, we'll read it on air.

If you want to let us know what you think of the show, you can tweet at us @SwitchbladePod or email us at [SwitchbladeSisters@maximumfun.org](mailto:SwitchbladeSisters@maximumfun.org).

Please check out our Facebook group. That's [Facebook.com/groups/switchbladesisters](https://www.facebook.com/groups/switchbladesisters).

Our producer is Casey O'Brien. Our senior producer is Laura Swisher, and this is a production of [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org).

*[Music fades.]*

00:42:49 Clip Clip

**Jay:** I saw it.

00:42:50 Speaker 1 Promo

[MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org).

00:42:52 Speaker 2 Promo

Comedy and culture.

00:42:54 Speaker 3 Promo

Artist owned—

00:42:55 Speaker 4 Promo

—Audience supported.