

Note: This show periodically replaces their ad breaks with new promotional clips. Because of this, both the transcription for the clips and the timestamps after them may be inaccurate at the time of viewing this transcript.

00:00:00 Rob Schulte Producer Hey, everyone. Quick warning. Today's episode involves some discussion of sexual violence. It comes up early, and we wanted to give you a heads up.

00:00:08 Music Music Quiet music with melodic singing.

00:00:12 Ben Harrison Host The French title of today's film is *Rebelle*, which is a true cognate: means the same in English as you would guess. But that's not its English title, maybe because the word "rebel" has been so thoroughly monopolized in English by a single entertainment franchise. Rebels have graduated from bullseyeing womp rats in their T-16s and are now taking the fight to the Empire.

But despite that near monopoly of association, it remains easy for the media to completely rob us of a nuanced understanding of a civil conflict by using the term "rebel" to describe one of the sides. It starts to evoke terms like "freedom fighters," which we've all been trained to mentally translate as "terrorists." In today's film, our main character Komona feels so far from all of these definitions.

She is a twelve-year-old girl, who is basically too young to be motivated by the forces we imagine inspire people to become rebels. In fact, it's the rebels that completely wreck her life. Her coastal village is just sitting there minding its own business when they come collect the youngsters, force her to murder her family, and then spirit her away in a motorized tree trunk canoe to become a soldier for their cause. It's an unspecified country and an unarticulated grievance these rebels have with their government.

But quickly Komona becomes special to their troop and to the rebels at large, because they believe she is a witch, with a power to perceive ghosts and predict assaults by government soldiers. The supernatural abilities she commands can give them a tactical advantage, so despite all the danger she's surrounded by, her specialness acts as a protective against some of the worst things that can befall a girl in a war zone. Uh, temporarily, anyway.

00:01:54 Ben Host In truth, her journey starts in a terrible tragedy and scarcely gets better from there. Even though she makes friends along the way, and even has a romance, Komona is never safe. The war just keeps happening to her in a cruel multiplicity of ways.

Director Kim Nguyen based the film on research he did with actual child soldiers, and aid workers who did humanitarian work in conflict zones where child soldiers had been used. As he tells it, the goal was to tell a story with redemption for the main character. His script uses a device of narration where Komona recalls her story to her unborn child, and prays that she will be able to love that child when she gives birth. Maybe there is a glimmer of hope in there somewhere, but it is tough for me to divine through all the tragedy.

"When we take the magic milk from the tree, we can see things."
Today on *Friendly Fire*: the 2013 Canadian film *War Witch*.

			<i>[Music fades into the opening drumroll of the next song.]</i>
00:02:50	Music	Transition	“War” off the album <i>War & Peace</i> by Edwin Starr. Impassioned, intense funk. <i>War!</i> <i>Huh!</i> <i>Yeah!</i> <i>What is it good for?!</i> <i>Absolutely—</i> <i>—nothing!</i> <i>Uh-huh!</i> <i>War!</i> <i>Huh!</i> <i>Yeah!</i> <i>What is it good for?!</i> <i>Absolutely—</i> <i>—nothing!</i> <i>Say it again, y’all!</i> <i>War!</i>
			<i>[Song fades down and plays quietly as the hosts speak.]</i>
00:03:11	Ben	Host	Welcome to <i>Friendly Fire</i> , the war movie podcast that hopes God gives us the strength to love this episode when it comes out. I'm Ben Harrison.
00:03:19	Adam Pranica	Host	I'm Adam Pranica.
00:03:21	John Roderick	Host	And I'm John Roderick.
00:03:22	Ben	Host	Sad movie!
00:03:24	Adam	Host	<i>Beasts of No Nation</i> famously had a little boy as its main character. I approached this movie thinking like, "If you were to make <i>Beasts of No Nation</i> with a girl, would it be a <u>lot</u> , lot harder to experience?" and I was... surprised at—that the answer was no!
			<i>[Music fades out.]</i>
			How did you guys feel about the storytelling choice of making a little girl its primary character? Were you bracing for something that didn't happen?
00:03:56	Ben	Host	I definitely was. Yeah, I was—I was definitely... totally surprised that this was an easier movie to stomach, in a lot of ways.
00:04:06	Adam	Host	Yeah.
00:04:07	Ben	Host	And I don't think that it's necessarily—like, I don't think that the character goes through less worse, it's just that the movie is quite a bit more... judicious about how and what it shows.
00:04:19	John	Host	In a movie like this, particularly one that's written and directed by a guy, we—I—all three of us went into this thinking "Well, let's see. <i>Beasts of No Nation</i> , those kids were brutalized. This is a little girl.

Her life is gonna be just a series of uninterrupted rapes."

00:04:36 Adam Host Right.

00:04:37 John Host And... that doesn't appear in the film, except it—as a much smaller and, you know, like almost—you wouldn't believe the movie if it didn't have a sexual violence component.

00:04:53 Adam Host Right.

00:04:54 John Host But you have to wonder whether, in actual fact, her life would have been characterized by constant sexual violence, and it's just not in the movie. 'Cause the director left it out. Because otherwise it would have been an unwatchable movie.

00:05:10 Adam Host I wonder—*[sighs]*. I think I know the answer to this question, but like, the reason that she is not repeatedly raped is that she has a spiritual component to her. There's a mysticism or magic or, like, she is the war witch. You can't just rape the war witch.

00:05:26 John Host Although that doesn't keep her from being the victim of like, fraternal violence.

00:05:31 Adam Host Yeah.

00:05:32 John Host But also, she goes through a period at the beginning of the movie where, you know, pre—before the—it's discovered that she has witchy powers. And there are a lot of people that don't know or care. I mean, you know what I mean? Like, there's—there has to be... I don't wanna say that either one of these movies is either, like, completely a true accounting of what it would be like to be a child soldier, 'cause... course, we're spared a lot.

00:05:55 Adam Host Mm-hm.

00:05:56 John Host I'm sure, in watching this. But yeah, that was a component going in, where it felt like—in someone else's hands, this movie could have been even more excruciating.

00:06:08 Adam Host Yeah.

00:06:09 Ben Host I read a little bit about witch hunts in Sub-Saharan Africa, which is apparently a growing problem. I mean, the Wikipedia entry is pretty badly written and, uh—*[laughs]* has a—like a very, like, neocolonialist tone that refers to like, African culture as one monolithic thing.

00:06:34 Adam Host Well, get in there and edit that, man!

00:06:35 John Host Yeah, gee, Ben!

00:06:36 Adam Host That's what Wikipedia's for!

00:06:37 John Host What are we even doing here?

00:06:39 Adam Host You're complicit if you don't edit that article.

00:06:41 Ben Host Alright. Well—well, I'll just hang up the podcast and do that.

[Adam laughs.]

What I'm saying is that like, I—you know, based on the one thing that I had time to read before we sat down to record today, I don't feel like I have a great understanding of the phenomenon. But it seems like being labeled a witch would put somebody at quite a bit greater risk than not, in a lot of contexts. And in this movie it seems to be sort of a sphere of protection for Komona.

00:07:15 Adam Host Can you tell me real fast, like, when you refer to the witch hunt, are you talking about a hunt attempting to hunt witches, or a hunt that is accompanied by a witch that is on your side?

00:07:29 Ben Host No, like, children are routinely labeled as witches and then persecuted or abused.

00:07:36 Adam Host Oh.

00:07:38 Ben Host Because they are a source of evil. And... you know, that can be related to poverty, or war, or famine, or HIV/AIDS outbreaks. Like, it—

00:07:51 Adam Host Is it analogous to a colonial-style witch hunt? Where the behaviors or characteristics present in order to be accused of witchcraft are specious and... and crazy?

00:08:04 John Host You mean in comparison to like, actual witches that have been discovered—? *[Laughs.]*

00:08:07 Ben Host You—*[laughs]*. You—

00:08:08 Adam Host Yeah.

00:08:09 Ben Host You mean are the children actual witches, Adam?

00:08:10 Adam Host Yeah.

[Ben and John laugh.]

00:08:12 John Host The thing is that—another thing that's covered in this movie really interestingly is albinism in Sub-Saharan Africa, which is way more common than it is in other parts of the world. Like, albinism is an inherited trait there, and also often regarded as a sign that the person is... a witch. Or—

00:08:34 Ben Host Is evil. Yeah.

00:08:35 John Host Evil person. And so they're—so albinos there in Africa suffer greatly.

00:08:41 Adam Host Didn't seem like Magician was suffering for his albinism. Right?

00:08:47 John Host Well, both of them manage to get on the right side of the magic, uh, thing, and I imagine that that must be a component of—of a state of war.

00:08:58 Adam Host Mm.

00:08:59 John Host Right? If you were just living in a village and you were regarded as a witch, you would sort of end up I think probably being blamed for things more often than you were seen as an advantage. But in a state of war, I would think a warlord would employ, or deploy, witches as a fighting force, or as a—something to scare the enemy.

00:09:21 Adam Host Right!

00:09:22 John Host And all of a sudden you would have value that you wouldn't in normal life.

00:09:25 Ben Host This—I mean, it's very hard not to compare this film to *Beasts of No Nation*. This came out in 2012, and *Beasts* came out in 2015, I think?

00:09:36 John Host Was there controversy about *Beasts* fictionalizing—I mean I guess they're both fictions, but *Beasts* taking it—taking whole aspects of this? Did that come out in the filmic press?

00:09:49 Ben Host I never read anything about it, but this is like an incredibly small film.

Like, I think the box office gross was like in the hundreds of thousands. So...

00:09:59 John Host Although it was nominated for an Academy Award, right?

00:10:01 Adam Host It was.

00:10:02 Ben Host Yeah, like Foreign Language from Canada?

00:10:06 Adam Host It lost to a Michael Haneke film, Ben. Which I found surprising. Michael Haneke wrote like a romantic film about two old people, which is another surprising thing that I didn't think he was capable of. *[Laughs.]*

00:10:19 John Host Right. Also witches.

00:10:20 Adam Host Yeah. *[Laughs.]*

00:10:21 John Host Probably.

00:10:23 Ben Host Oh, yeah. Michael Haneke of *Funny Games*.

00:10:24 Adam Host Yeah!

00:10:26 Ben Host Funny, funny movie!

[Ben and John laugh.]

00:10:29 John Host Funny, funny kind of movie. Nutty, nutty kiiind of movie.

[Ben laughs.]

It was a—one of these films, and we've seen it before on this podcast, where we're watching the movie in subtitles, but there are multiple languages happening within the film.

00:10:47 Ben Host Yeah.

00:10:48 John Host 'Cause the movie's in—predominantly in French, and then in the Congolese language Lingala. And if you were a French-speaking audience watching it, when it went into Lingala and into subtitles, it would be clear that you were in an African syntax.

00:11:07 Adam Host Right.

00:11:08 John Host And then the French language could—you know, it would have that role of the colonial language, the state language. But—I mean, and of course Ben is fluent in French, because he went to—

00:11:22 Adam Host Yeah, I was curious about how much you picked it up.

00:11:23 John Host Yeah, he went to tennis school or whatever, but—

[Ben laughs.]

—but for me I had—multiple times would kind of snap into a feeling of like "Oh, they're speaking French right now!" Like, "Oh, that's interesting. What does that mean, I wonder?"

00:11:34 Ben Host Right.

00:11:35 John Host Ben, did you have a different experience?

00:11:38 Ben Host Well, I had just spent about a week in France right before watching this, so I—I think it was easier for me to detect the switches.

00:11:48 John Host Like any good socialist, he spent Christmas in France.

[Ben laughs.]

Were you over there working for universal healthcare, Ben?

00:11:55 Ben Host Uh, no. I was over there with my parents, who are living on the pensions they earned—

00:12:01 John Host Oh, god.

00:12:02 Ben Host —after 30 years of service as public employees.

00:12:04 John Host You're so insufferable. You really are the worst.

[Ben laughs.]

00:12:07 Adam Host Good for them.

00:12:08 John Host Yeah. Thank heavens.

00:12:09 Adam Host Yeah.

00:12:10 John Host Thank them for their sacrifice, will you?

00:12:12 Ben Host I—it doesn't look like a sacrifice, as far as I can tell. *[Laughs.]*

00:12:18 John Host Anyway, so you were—so your ear for French was attuned.

00:12:22 Ben Host Yeah. I think it was just like, you know, maybe if I'd watched it the week before that trip, I would have been less tuned into it. But I don't always know why the code-switch. And I don't—I don't know if it's because like, some people just speak, like, their local flavor of Bantu and don't speak French, or that this maybe was made with a Canadian filmgoing audience in mind and there's like, you know—like a lot of people study French in school there, so, makes it an easier sell to the filmgoing public in Canada? I'm not really sure.

00:13:04 John Host Well, I mean, French is an official language of the Congo. And—I'm sorry, French is the official language of the Congo, and all the native African languages are recognized but not—it's not the language of government or commerce.

00:13:19 Ben Host Right.

00:13:21 John Host Did our main character, Rachel, ever speak French?

00:13:23 Ben Host She speaks it in her voiceover. And she does occasionally speak it to other people. I'm not strong enough of a linguistic observer to have detected what the difference was in, you know, her decision-making about that.

00:13:42 John Host And we've talked about this before in terms of wishing that subtitling in films also had a color code, if there were multiple languages being used.

00:13:51 Ben Host Right.

00:13:52 John Host Like, have it be in red when it's in French, have it be in blue when it's Lingala. So that it would—I think it would increase the—the, um... the intelligibility of a film like this in multiple languages?

00:14:03 Adam Host And you'd want English to be white, wouldn't you? You monster.

00:14:06 John Host English should always be crystal-white.

00:14:08 Adam Host Yeah.

00:14:09 John Host Snow-white.

[Adam and John laugh.]

00:14:12 Ben Host I mean, there's a lot of imagery in this movie that I also didn't understand. Like the, you know, smash-cut to Jean-Claude Van Damme—

00:14:19 Clip Clip **Speaker:** I'm going back. I'm going to fight.

00:14:21 Ben Host —uh, was—*[laughs]* something Adam and I talked about a bunch, as like... a total mind-fuck. Like—

00:14:28 Adam Host It straight up confused me.

00:14:29 John Host Really?

00:14:30 Adam Host I actually thought it was a mistake in the film.

[John laughs.]

I looked down for a second. Like, I'm—I didn't watch this movie in the bathtub.

00:14:37 John Host Right.

00:14:38 Adam Host I was not distracted by anything.

00:14:39 John Host Right.

00:14:40 Adam Host I—it only—I only looked away for a moment, and then when I looked back it was Jean-Claude Van Damme on the screen, and he was monologuing.

00:14:46 John Host You thought it might be a *Fight Club* moment, where somebody had slipped in some—

00:14:49 Adam Host Yeah.

00:14:50 John Host —some porn?

[Ben laughs.]

00:14:51 Adam Host "What does it mean??" *[Laughs.]*

00:14:53 Ben Host Adam's like "This movie is starting to get good!"

[Ben and John laugh.]

00:14:57 Adam Host *[Stifles laughter.]* My film paper's about why Jean-Claude Van Damme is in *War Witch*.

00:15:00 John Host I felt like it was a brilliant moment, because you know, they're living in a world where everyone's got a gun. They're—from the time they're little children, all they know is war. And when they're consuming Western media, they see Western media heroes also, you know, laden with guns, firing a million rounds at one another.

00:15:22 Adam Host But here's my film paper, though.

00:15:24 John Host Oh, let's go.

00:15:25 Sound Effect Sound Effect *[Printer noises.]*

00:15:26 Adam Host Jean-Claude Van Damme does not use a gun.

00:15:27 John Host *[Whispers]* Ohhh.

00:15:28 Adam Host His body is his weapon.

00:15:29 John Host Right. Well, so—

00:15:30 Adam Host What must that be like?

[Printer noises stop.]

00:15:32 John Host Because he's a witch, Adam.

[Beat.]

[Someone makes an explosion sound, "mind blown."]

Put that in your film paper.

[Ben laughs.]

00:15:38 Adam Host Is that—is that plagiarism if I did?

[John laughs.]

Are you just gonna give that to me?

00:15:42 Ben Host He is holding a gun in one of the shots that they show, so—*[laughs].*

00:15:46 John Host He's just holding it for his friend.

00:15:47 Ben Host Oh, okay. Yeah. "I don't even know how to use this thing." *[Laughs.]*

00:15:51 Adam Host Ben, you ever clean a friend's gun?

[Ben laughs.]

It's just a nice thing to do.

00:15:56 John Host One of the things that we see, one of the ways that witches are employed, or witchcraft is employed—we saw this a lot in *Beasts of No Nation*, and in this movie, too—is the idea that a soldier can be made invincible by medicine. And then bullets go around them. And that's a—that seems to be a motif in sort of child soldier conscription and like, Sub-Saharan African wars in general.

00:16:25 Ben Host Right.

00:16:26 John Host That if you can find a witch, find the right magic, you can make yourself invincible. And I think in a Jean-Claude Van Damme or Arnold Schwarzenegger movie or, you know, *Rambo*, you see characters that appear to have invincibility. They appear to—you know, with a talisman or just with their charisma... bullets go around them.

00:16:50 Ben Host Yeah.

00:16:51 John Host And I imagine that kinda stuff... If you're watching it in that context—

00:16:54 Ben Host I mean, Rambo can get shot in the leg with like a—you know. *[Laughs.]* A large-caliber bullet, and still run at full speed. So...

00:17:02 John Host Yeah. Right. Right. *[Laughs.]* He—yeah, right. And he can stand with 50 Spetsnaz guys shooting at him simultaneously.

[Ben laughs.]

All highly-trained commandos! And somehow—

00:17:14 Adam Host All of them with names. Spetsnatz.

00:17:16 John Host *[Laughs.]* "Hey, Spetsnatz!"

And because he has that little—even though he gave his necklace to Short Round—

00:17:22 Adam Host That's Kobow's talisman!

00:17:23 John Host Yeah.

00:17:24 Adam Host It keeps him safe!

00:17:25 John Host Yeah. What mean talisman, Rambo?

00:17:27 Adam Host Hey, so, the—the tree sap is the thing that... I think creates a feeling of invincibility, within the child soldier?

00:17:36 John Host It's hallucinogenic, somehow.

00:17:38 Ben Host It's not brown-brown this time.

00:17:40 Adam Host Yeah, I mean, can you crossfade that with some brown-brown? And get really fucked up?

00:17:45 Ben Host Oh, wow. Yeah. Then you're rolling, baby. *[Laughs quietly.]*

00:17:48 John Host I mean, I've—I have consumed a lot of tree sap, trying to get high.

00:17:51 Adam Host Mm-hm.

[Ben laughs.]

00:17:52 John Host And at least in the Northwest, there's no, like, funky tree sap. Or the hippies would never come to town.

00:17:58 Adam Host When we talk about Vermont maple syrup, there are grades.

[John laughs.]

00:18:02 Ben Host Mm-hm.

00:18:03 Adam Host But the white maple syrup, what is that? Grade... grade H?

00:18:06 John Host It's the bir—you know what? It's birch bark syrup.

00:18:08 Adam Host Is it?

00:18:09 John Host Or it's birch syrup that's the real expensive stuff.

00:18:11 Adam Host Yeah. That—

00:18:12 John Host 'Cause—you know, 'cause birches are small. *[Laughs quietly.]*

00:18:14 Adam Host You're making your high-test pancakes with that syrup.

00:18:17 John Host That birch syrup, you just put a drop on there, that's all you need.

00:18:19 Adam Host Is that what sizzurp is??

00:18:21 Music Music Brief distorted, electric music.

00:18:23 Ben Host *[Laughs quietly.]* That's codeine.

00:18:24 Adam Host Alright.

00:18:25 John Host It's like a—you're using street slang!

00:18:26 Adam Host Yeah!

00:18:27 John Host Wow! *[Laughs.]*

[Music fades out.]

From the—from the—

00:18:30 Adam Host No one sees it coming from this host! *[Laughs quietly.]*

00:18:32 John Host From the dark streets of Redmond!

00:18:34 Adam Host *[Laughing]* Uh-huh!

00:18:35 John Host Comes sizzurp.

[All three laugh.]

00:18:39 Ben Host Another thing that I didn't totally get in this movie was the set that they keep coming back to is this very like, pagoda-looking place? Great Tiger lives in like a... it almost looks like a temple or something, of Chinese or some other Asian kind of design.

00:18:58 John Host Yeah, it feels like—*[sighs]*. It feels like a colonial-era estate of some kind that had been, you know, built and decorated in—*[laughs]* in a completely separate colonial style. Because right, we're looking at—we're looking at what had been a French colony. And they—and the French also had colonies in Indochina. And it may have just been a folly, right? Of a—

00:19:25 Ben Host Wow.

00:19:26 John Host Of some kind of, like, aristocrat, or, you know, colonial sort of officer.

00:19:32 Adam Host Yeah. Kind of some incoherent design choices there. You're gonna wanna get in there with a remodeler, and—

[John and Ben laugh.]

—straighten out those knots.

00:19:40 John Host Work on the feng shui?

00:19:41 Adam Host Yeah.

00:19:42 John Host I think—yeah, but Ben, you've spent quite a bit of time in Africa, and you know what it's like when you encounter the residue of... because most of these countries weren't liberated until the fifties and sixties.

00:19:55 Ben Host Right.

00:19:56 John Host Or you know, didn't gain independence. And so there can even be mid-century modern architecture that dates to the period before, uh...

00:20:07 Ben Host Yeah, totally.

00:20:08 John Host And you see those things that are kind of in various states of decay or being repurposed.

00:20:13 Ben Host Right.

00:20:14 John Host And they often really stand out on the landscape, like "Whoa!"

00:20:17 Ben Host Yeah. This was like, pretty unique even in that context, though. I thought it was like a really striking, you know, place. And you know, the movie is not at great pains to explain things like that to a—to an ignorant Western audience. And so I felt... I felt a little dumb watching it! You know, like "What the heck is going on here?"

And like *Beasts of No Nation*, it also doesn't explain like, what

country we're in, what the war is about, who are the sides, what—you know, this is just the context in which Komona finds herself.

00:20:55 John Host Well also—curiously, right? Both this and *Beasts of No Nation* were written and directed by like, men—North-American men that are half Asian.

00:21:06 Ben Host Yeah.

00:21:07 John Host This film was made by Kim Nguyen, who's half Vietnamese and half, like, French-Canadian I guess. And *Beasts of No Nation* was Cary Fukunaga. And so it—I'm not sure if there—if that's just like—I mean, must just be coincidence. But it's an unusual...

00:21:24 Ben Host Yeah, what happens if those guys are both at the same house party and like, catch each other's eyes across the room?

00:21:30 John Host Well, one of them says "I—my film was a success and now I'm directing the *James Bond* movie."

[Adam and Ben laugh.]

"How was *War Witch*? How did that do?" *[Laughs.]* I'm just guessing.

[Ben laughs.]

Having been to some Hollywood parties.

00:21:45 Adam Host God, people are mean at Hollywood parties!

00:21:47 John Host They suck! You guys were just at some Hollywood parties with me!

00:21:50 Adam Host That's true, but people were nice at our Hollywood parties!

00:21:52 John Host Well, that's right. That's right.

00:21:53 Adam Host Until we turned our backs.

[John laughs.]

00:21:54 Ben Host I left 'cause it didn't suck enough. *[Laughs.]*

00:21:57 John Host *[Stifling laughter]* People weren't mean enough to Ben; he didn't know how to behave.

00:21:59 Ben Host Yeah.

00:22:00 Adam Host I'll be mean to you, Ben.

[Ben laughs.]

00:22:03 John Host But you're right, Ben, that there were—and I feel like the lack of explanation... maybe the audience—maybe even a French-Canadian audience sees that and recognizes it as part of some cultural patrimony that... like, "Oh, that's that place that we've all—that we all heard about, because in our version of *Wheedle on the Needle* there's this temple in the Congo that keeps popping up in like our children's stories."

[Beat.]

00:22:30 Ben Host *[Laughing]* Our version of what?

00:22:31 John Host *[Laughs.]* I'm sorry, that was a very—

00:22:33 Adam Host Is that a Neil Young song?

00:22:34 John Host That was a very local reference.

00:22:35 Adam Host "Wheedle in the Needle Done"?

00:22:37 John Host You—*[laughs]* you know what *Wheedle on the Needle* is, Adam! Don't pretend.

00:22:40 Adam Host Yeah, you're right.

00:22:41 John Host Yeah.

[John and Adam laugh.]

00:22:42 Adam Host I'm laying in the Wheedle over here!

[John and Adam laugh. Someone does a drumroll on their desk.]

00:22:47 John Host But then, I mean—well, you tell me. Does that increase the... the danger of a film like this is that it—is a certain amount of Orientalism. Right? Where we are... where the exoticness of it becomes not just a character, but a kind of fetish character. Like, *Beasts of No Nation*, we had some bonafide Hollywood stars that our eyes could fix on, and that we—you know, we could... we could have a Hollywood star sort of guide us through this foreign territory.

00:23:19 Ben Host Right.

00:23:20 John Host In this movie there is no Hollywood star.

00:23:24 Ben Host In fact the person on whom the film rests, she was a homeless street kid before this film. Like, she—

00:23:32 Adam Host Wow. Really?

00:23:33 Ben Host Rachel Mwanza was literally living on the streets in Kinshasa when she was cast in this film.

00:23:39 John Host Because her family thought she was a witch! And expelled her from the family.

00:23:44 Ben Host Wow.

00:23:45 John Host So... *[exhales forcefully]*. I—you know, that—

00:23:49 Adam Host She is spectacular in this film. I didn't realize that she had that inside her, though, to put into the character. My god.

00:23:57 John Host She really is spectacular.

00:23:58 Adam Host Yeah.

00:23:59 John Host I cannot imagine the casting call. The Kinshasa casting call where they're like "Let's get the street kids that have been accused of witches in here."

00:24:08 Adam Host Yeah.

00:24:09 Ben Host Yeah.

00:24:10 John Host Accused of being a witch.

00:24:11 Adam Host Only they would know.

00:24:13 John Host But how do you cast a—a 15-year-old street kid who—and from what I read, she did not read when they cast her in the film. And they—the filmmakers committed to teaching her not just to read, but committed to her education until she was 18.

00:24:32 Adam Host I wonder if that's a big reason for so much voiceover.

00:24:35 John Host Yeah, maybe. Although her—like, the depth of feeling in her... it seemed like she wouldn't talk, right? She's made to kill her own parents at the beginning of the film.

00:24:45 Adam Host I mean, was her performance all director-led line-reading stuff? How else do you do that with someone who can't read?

00:24:54 John Host Must have been. Must have been.

00:24:55 Adam Host Wow.

00:24:56 John Host But how do you cast an actor like this who is so... you get it so right? It's so extraordinary. But when they were casting the *Roseanne* television series, they cast that little boy as her son. And he continued to be terrible throughout the whole run of the series, even until his—he was like 27 at the end and he still couldn't act his way out of a paper bag.

00:25:17 Adam Host John, we've edited out your *Roseanne* comments of this show for dozens of episodes.

[John and Adam laugh.]

00:25:24 Ben Host Yeah, we should—maybe, Rob, just leave that one in and, like—

00:25:27 Adam Host Yeah. I—that's a representative—*[laughs]* *Roseanne* comment by John.

00:25:31 Ben Host Yeah. I cannot be more clear: This is something we deal with every. single. week.

00:25:37 Adam Host *[Laughs.]* I don't know why you have it out for that kid!

00:25:40 John Host *[Stifling laughter]* Stop silencing me, you guys! This is—this needs to be told! This story needs to be told!

[Ben laughs.]

00:25:46 Adam Host Did you meet the *Roseanne* kid at a Hollywood party?

[Ben laughs.]

00:25:48 John Host *[Stifles laughter.]* He's so terrible! He ruins what would otherwise have been a classic American television show.

00:25:53 Adam Host You have nothing bad to say about Roseanne herself, but everything bad to say about that kid in *Roseanne*!

00:25:57 John Host Roseanne's a comedic genius.

00:25:59 Ben Host John saw him across the room yakking it up with Cary Fukunaga, and he was just consumed with jealousy and rage.

00:26:05 Adam Host Wow.

00:26:06 John Host Agh, he's so terrible.

[Ben or Adam laughs.]

00:26:08 Clip Clip *[Shouting in Lingala and/or French, and gunfire.]*

00:26:09 Adam Host I wonder how much this is an example of just war as a place, to tell another kind of story, and this is instead a love story. And if this were really about the war, we would know more about it, and that's okay. Are you saying that—are we really missing the war knowledge, here?

00:26:28 John Host Well, I think because the soldiers are children, they don't have war knowledge. They don't know who they're fighting.

00:26:35 Ben Host Yeah. She's not reading the morning paper.

00:26:38 Adam Host But that's—

00:26:39 John Host Right, she doesn't even know who the government is. I mean—

00:26:40 Adam Host Do you believe that's technique?

00:26:42 John Host Well, I would imagine it has to be. One of the things that is confusing is that the kids can put their guns in a blanket and bury it in the jungle and walk into town, and they just look like normal residents. But somehow the war keeps finding them.

00:27:02 Adam Host Well, I mean, yeah. The one time Komona brings her gun into a doctor's office, that doesn't go well.

[All three laugh.]

00:27:08 John Host Right! And she ends up in a—in like a jail van.

00:27:13 Adam Host God.

00:27:14 John Host That doesn't run. Just it's like "Okay, you go in the jail van."

00:27:17 Adam Host That jail van was something else. And then the jailman?

00:27:20 John Host The jailman. Lets her out because she's pregnant.

00:27:23 Adam Host Yeah.

00:27:24 John Host It's very destabilizing from a narrative point of view, but it also is—I think it's an editorial comment on what those wars are—

00:27:34 Adam Host I wonder, when you make a movie set in this part of the world during a conflict like this—part of the thing that happened to me as I was watching it was I was trained to flinch. Like, when the jailman lets her out of the van, I'm like "Oh, god, here it comes."

00:27:48 John Host Something worse.

00:27:49 Adam Host Like, I'm waiting for something worse. And it—and the film sets up this series of tensions where "worse" only occasionally ever comes.

00:27:59 John Host Right. When Magician gets killed, you're like "Well, something bad's gonna happen" and then something much worse happens.

00:28:04 Adam Host Right!

00:28:05 John Host Which is that her anchor, her... you know, the one thing in the world that she—where she found some good...

00:28:13 Adam Host It's interesting that there are kinds of movies like these that use other movies in order to establish that. You go into this world expecting the worst, and when it doesn't happen it's almost like a—a meta intensity happening. That is not something that the film itself is conjuring; it's using your own feelings.

00:28:34 John Host 'Cause you wait for it, you wait for it, you wait for it.

00:28:35 Adam Host Yeah.

00:28:36 John Host And then, yeah.

00:28:37 Music Transition Brief clip of "War."

War!

00:28:38 Promo Clip

[Music stops.]

[Music.]

Travis McElroy: I'm Travis McElroy.

Courtney Enlow: I'm Courtney Enlow.

Brent Black: I'm Brent Black, and we're the hosts of *Trends Like These*.

Courtney: *Trends Like These* is an Internet news show where we take the stories trending on social media, and go beyond the headlines!

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Courtney: Or wherever you get your podcasts!

Brent: *Trends Like These*. Real life friends talking Internet trends.

[Music ends.]

00:29:08 Promo Clip

Music: Dramatic organ/piano music.

[Background noise throughout: a howling wolf and cawing crow. April speaks in a sinister voice.]

April Wolfe: Hello there, ghouls and gals. It is I, April Wolfe. I'm here to take you through the twisty, sca-a-a-ry, heart-pounding world of genre cinema on the exhilarating program known as [Switchblade Sisters](#).

[Sinister echo on the title.]

The concept is simple: I invite a female filmmaker on each week, and we discuss their favorite genre film. Listen in closely to hear past guests, like *The Babadook* director Jennifer Kent, *Winter's Bone* director Debra Granik, and so many others every Thursday on [MaximumFun.org](#). Tune in! If you dare...

[Thunder booms, something growls over April as she cackles evilly, and then all sound abruptly cuts.]

April: *[Rapidly]* It's actually a very thought-provoking show that deeply explores the craft and philosophy behind the filmmaking process while also examining film through the lens of the female gaze.

So, like, you should listen.

[Same sinister echo effect] Switchblade Sisters!

00:29:54 Music Transition Brief clip of "War."
Huh!
Yeah!
[Music stops.]

00:29:56 John Host Congo was a Belgian colony. They speak French, but it's a Belgian French. Congo is where the worst of all the *Tintin* books was set. Congo as a Belgian colony was one of the largely agreed-upon, um... the Belgians were the—among the cruelest and worst colonial administrators, and Congo was a desperately exploited place.

I wonder what it would be like to film a war movie in a place where these were not uncommon conditions. A lot of—I mean, how do you take a child who's been accused of being a witch, and put her in a film where she is playing a child who has been accused of being a witch? Like, that's just all so—

00:30:51 Ben Host It almost feels cruel to subject a child to like, peeling that scab off.

00:30:57 John Host Well, that's what I'm wondering. Like, she has now been conscripted in a different kind of incomprehensible project where at least in this case, what it meant was that one day she went on an airplane for the first time—

00:31:10 Adam Host Yeah.

00:31:11 John Host —and was taken to Hollywood, to the Oscars. Like... so another aspect of this film is that there's magical realism.

00:31:20 Ben Host I wanna see that movie! *[Laughs.]*

00:31:21 John Host Right? Right? Isn't that—*[laughs]* that's the movie, right? "Aaand, cut! That's it! It's a wrap! Okay, we need to get you a passport. Here's how to sign your name."

00:31:30 Adam Host Yeah.

00:31:31 John Host But there's magical realism in this movie, in a way that in *Beasts of No Nation* we see—we see a kind of *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* sort of stylized sense of what it's like to be stoned. Or tripping. But in this movie we see tripping, but we also—we're living in a world of actual ghosts, who appear all the time and affect the outcomes. And how did you feel like that played for you, as a film watcher?

00:32:02 Adam Host I thought it was effective, and creepy as hell, to see the powdered soldiers come down off of the rock face and approach our characters. Especially in that scene where there's some intercutting between the living soldiers and them.

00:32:22 John Host And she says in her voiceover, like, "There are so many ghosts in this country."

00:32:26 Adam Host Yeah. I mean we get the slow-motion scene of a child firing a machine gun, and then we're cutting back and forth to the ghosts and then real people dying. I thought it was spooky. And... that's what it was supposed to be.

But the scenes with her parents, her dead parents, also I felt were—

was super tragic. I mean, we open the film with that scene of her killing her own parents, and then that they keep revisiting her is... it's not manipulative. I thought it was effective, in reminding you of that trauma that she feels for her entire life.

- 00:33:05 Ben Host Yeah. And I think that like, a lesser film might have tried to make the ghosts, like, feel more surreal or more non-real, by like, doing something like, you know, putting a filter over the lens or some kind of special effect that makes them glow or be, you know, semi-transparent or something like that. And the fact that they just made the decision like "We'll paint people's bodies and have them just kind of stand spookily in doorways or up on rocks in the distance" was a very effective choice. Like, it—they're genuinely creepy every time you see them.
- 00:33:52 Adam Host A creepy contact lens does so much work in scenes like this. Wes Borland knew it.
- [John and Ben laugh.]
- You put in a weird contact lens, and it changes your humanity.
- 00:34:04 John Host I thought that you were—
- 00:34:05 Adam Host It turns you into something else.
- 00:34:07 John Host I thought that a weird contact lens was some kind of film technique, like "What kind of lens is that, Adam?" And then I realized you're talking about contact lenses.
- 00:34:15 Adam Host Right. Yeah! I mean, it's one thing to paint someone's body, but when you take something away—
- 00:34:21 John Host Put a milky lens in there.
- 00:34:23 Adam Host That milky lens was creepy as hell.
- 00:34:26 John Host The fact that Kim Nguyen worked on this film for ten years, and not with a huge budget and not with a huge, like, back-catalog of success as a filmmaker—like, this became a passion project, obviously. It's a—I think it's a beautiful movie, and narratively an accomplishment. I never felt lost in the narrative. And I felt really... like, guided through it. It was only as we neared the conclusion—one of the things about *Beasts of No Nation* is that it kind of ended in a place where we were with the very rare child soldier that ended up in a nice place. It's hard to end a movie like this with just the child soldier just being hacked to death.
- 00:35:17 Ben Host This movie was substantially less harrowing to watch. Though, you know, there are obviously like, really grim and upsetting parts to it. It just—it didn't—it wasn't pegging the needle the entire time the way *Beasts of No Nation* was. And I think that *Beasts of No Nation*, had it not had some... you know, [chuckles] some valve to let that pressure out, would have just felt like an assault, and not a work of art. And I think the arc of this one is—you know, it doesn't get as crazy, and it also doesn't get—it also doesn't end in a way that like, makes you feel a little bit better about what happened.
- 00:36:02 Adam Host *War Witch* is grounded in romantic love, in a way that *Beasts* is not.
- 00:36:07 John Host Right.
- 00:36:08 Adam Host I think that does a lot of work.

00:36:10 John Host Right.

00:36:11 Clip Clip *[A child(?) singing in Lingala or French.]*

00:36:14 Ben Host You really feel that this is a male filmmaker writing and directing this. Because you know, like we—we see her suffering, but it—it's... it doesn't feel as like, personal, somehow. I wonder if that's just because he couldn't quite get inside her head as much.

00:36:30 John Host Or whether she was so... cauterized, on her way into this war.

00:36:36 Ben Host Or maybe that's my experience as a guy watching it! Like...

00:36:39 John Host Right.

00:36:40 Ben Host Maybe if I was a woman I would have a different take on that.

00:36:44 Adam Host If the tree sap is psychoactive, like, how much of her real feelings are you ever going to get? Like, I wonder if that was a technique.

00:36:55 Ben Host Right.

00:36:56 John Host 'Cause it—there's psychoactive and there's also numbing.

00:36:59 Adam Host Yeah.

00:37:00 John Host Or emotion-numbing.

00:37:01 Adam Host Yeah.

00:37:02 John Host It depends on which branch of brown-brown sir—sir—what was it? Syrappa—sirrapity-dap?

00:37:08 Adam Host Sizzurp.

00:37:09 John Host Sizzurp?

00:37:10 Ben Host *[Laughs.]* Sirrapity-dap.

[John laughs.]

Yeah.

00:37:12 Adam Host That's what it should be.

00:37:13 John Host Yeah. *[Laughs.]*

00:37:14 Ben Host Tragically Pimp C of the Underground Kingz passed away from an overdose on sirrapity-dap.

[Ben and John laugh.]

00:37:20 John Host But you know, if you're—if it's like, just a psych—I'm sorry, a psychedelic drug? *[Stifling laughter]* It could really heighten.

00:37:28 Adam Host Yeah.

00:37:29 John Host I mean, depending on what that tree sap does, you could be out there being a real, uh, *Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers* scene. You could be Phineas Phreak. ...I'm sorry.

[Ben laughs.]

That's a reference for nobody. *[Laughs.]* There's like 11 listeners who are like "Yeah, Phineas Phreak!"

00:37:44 Ben Host What is happening?!

[Ben and John laugh.]

00:37:46 John Host Um—

00:37:47 Adam Host I've always believed that there's someone out there for your reference.

00:37:50 John Host Thank you.

But that—but it does seem to have a numbing effect on her.

00:37:54 Adam Host If you are unable to coax a performance that shares this knowledge, or if you are unable as a... as a creator, to construct a character that makes you feel a certain way, if you instead choose the drug, in order to paper over an inability to create the sort of relationship that, Ben, I think you're saying that you weren't able to have with our main character here.

00:38:26 John Host But I mean, her performance is very internal.

00:38:28 Adam Host Yeah.

00:38:29 Ben Host Right.

00:38:30 John Host And we really celebrate actors who give us extremely internal performances.

00:38:34 Adam Host This is not a performance problem.

00:38:35 John Host Right. Right. I mean, I—

00:38:37 Adam Host It's a choice by a storyteller.

00:38:39 John Host Yeah. Yeah. But to choose to make your main character so impassive—I mean, I—to your point, Ben, about the fact that we're male viewers in addition to watching a film that's been filtered through a male view... whether a woman going into this would have—as a viewer, would have more anxiety, or maybe less, even.

00:39:09 Adam Host Mm.

00:39:10 John Host Because we are so... as men, so attuned to also having a kind of protective instinct.

00:39:16 Ben Host Right.

00:39:17 John Host When we see a young girl at the start of a film. We don't—you know, we don't wanna see her brutalized because it makes us feel powerless to protect her. Whereas maybe a female viewer would have a completely different sympathy, and go into it with a different expectation.

00:39:37 Adam Host Try to imagine what Kathryn Bigelow's *War Witch* would be.

[Ben laughs.]

How different would it be, you think?

00:39:43 John Host Oh, it'd be full of torture that had—that was trying to validate the US war machine.

00:39:48 Adam Host Oof.

[All three laugh.]

00:39:51 John Host I just got in there before Ben could.

00:39:52 Ben Host Wow!

00:39:53 Adam Host Yeah, you just—you had that answer ready!

00:39:54 John Host I just took that right outta Ben's notebook.

00:39:57 Ben Host Yeah. John, I'm looking through the script that we write before every episode. I'm pretty sure you just said my line.

[John and Adam laugh.]

00:40:03 Adam Host Let's take that again.

[John and Ben laugh.]

00:40:08 Ben Host But like—I mean like, take a scene like when she's really sick from the... razor-blade avocado pit that she's put in her vagina.

00:40:18 John Host Which—which—

00:40:19 Adam Host That was my favorite Bush album, by the way.

00:40:21 John Host *[Laughs.]* Really, you have to watch the film to understand that. I don't—I don't think we're—*[laughs]* we need to describe it any further. 'Cause that was it, in a nutshell!

00:40:28 Adam Host That was it in a nutshell!

00:40:31 John Host Ohhhhh.

[Adam and Ben laugh.]

Where's my bell? I don't ring my bell on myself.

00:40:36 Ben Host She goes back to the—I mean, she's taken by the—that police guy back to the butcher, and I guess it's the butcher's mom that—?

00:40:45 John Host Yeah.

00:40:46 Ben Host Uh, takes it out of her. And you know, scolds her for putting the baby at risk.

00:40:53 John Host Although she uses the avocado pit with the razor blade to surprise her torturer and erstwhile husband long enough so that she can murder him. *[Laughs.]*

00:41:05 Ben Host Yeah. Yeah.

00:41:06 John Host I mean, it's a great conceit!

00:41:08 Ben Host She bisects his penis lengthwise with that thing.

00:41:12 Adam Host Do you not get catharsis from that scene? By—by turning away? The camera leaves the scene! For his death.

00:41:18 Ben Host Yeah.

00:41:19 Adam Host Did you not wanna be there? When the—when Great Tiger's commander is killed by Komona, I was shocked at the violence that was shown, and then that bit of violence that was not.

00:41:29 Ben Host Right.

00:41:30 John Host He was her tormenter from the very start. He's the one that made her kill her parents.

00:41:34 Crosstalk Crosstalk **Ben & Adam:** Yeah.

00:41:35 John Host Maybe pulling away is the way—I mean, we saw—we—I mean, not

to constantly reference *Beasts of No Nation*, but it's really the—it's really a very, very similar—the two films could go together as a boxset.

00:41:47 Adam Host The rating system for this film is in one to five *Beasts of No Nation*.
[John and Ben laugh.]
Not to skip to the end.

00:41:53 John Host But we see that—we see that used there, too.

00:41:55 Adam Host Yeah.

00:41:56 John Host That the camera pans away from certain violences, but—oh, you know what it is? Is that that violence was so intimate that it would have required a special effect.

00:42:06 Adam Host Mm.

00:42:07 John Host Right? Like, he is—and—because we turn away from the murder of her parents, too. We don't—we never see it. All we see is the holes in the backdrop.

00:42:16 Adam Host Right.

I think another aspect to that scene is that, for as angry she is justified in feeling... there is a rage that is absent from it if you turn away from the kill shot, in that way.

00:42:32 John Host But al—

00:42:33 Adam Host And I wonder if that changes your feelings for Komona, if you were to be in that with her and see her fully feel that, like, off the syrup. Like, ready to kill.

00:42:43 John Host But is it—I mean, I—is it rage, or is this just her one shot at freedom?

00:42:48 Adam Host Yeah. Yeah.

00:42:49 John Host And so is she killing him because he's tormented her? Yes. She spends a lot of the film talking about how she's—she's desperately pleading with the spirits that she not hate her baby. Because her baby is her tormenter's.

00:43:07 Adam Host Right.

00:43:08 John Host Is it motivated just by rage, or is it motivated by like... "I'm out. I'm finally out."

00:43:14 Adam Host I mean, there are moments where she and Magician are talking about leaving Great Tiger's army, and Magician is trying to convince her of that. It takes killing the commander for her to fully... like, does she stick around in order to do this? Is that why she doesn't leave the army up until that point?

00:43:34 John Host That's one of the questions about what it actually is like if you—if the army, and regular people, and the rebels, are all just sort of...

00:43:46 Ben Host Yeah, there's permeable barriers between those three things.

00:43:49 Adam Host Yeah.

00:43:50 John Host Right. Depends on what uniform you have on, or what town you're in, or whether or not you're carrying a gun. Can she ever leave? Because she's not—in this movie at least, she's not from Kinshasa.

She's not able to disappear in the city. She's living in an archipelago of small villages where you're recognizable. Where you can say like—

00:44:09 Ben Host

Right.

00:44:10 John Host

"Do you know who the butcher is?" And the guy says "Yeah, come with me." Which happens in the film.

00:44:14 Adam Host

Right.

00:44:15 Ben Host

What do you guys think the message is here? Like, it doesn't feel like this is a war film that is just here to be anti-war, full stop. You know, it's like—it's a small story that happens within a war, but it doesn't seem to be saying anything about the war, or war, per se. I mean I guess maybe the goal is to present a—you know, a human being in a context like this, that we can connect with and maybe understand what people in the Congo are going through, as Westerners. But is that—is that a reason to make a movie?

00:44:55 John Host

So many of the war movies—most, I would say; I would say almost all of the war movies we watch in this film depict wars that are organized. Where they're—the lines between the sides are clear, technology is employed. Even Napoleonic wars, we're watching wars where it's a war of technology, of strategy. And we're not used to considering what total war is like. Even the American Civil War, even most civil wars—the civil war in the Balkans—lines are drawn. Technology is employed. The American Civil War, it's not like you walked through the streets and you didn't know if somebody was gonna shoot you out of the window. You were in a Confederate town or a Union town.

But total war is a state of reality for a lot of people in the world, and a lot of people throughout history. Where war just descends like a cloud, and the war is on, and it's on all the time, from all sides. And it's not—and the technology is just like "Well, we have weapons." What the weapons are—I mean every once in a while there's a rocket launcher in this movie, but basically the weapons are all very personal. Like, because a gun is relatively personal. We think of it as less personal than a machete, but it's still pretty per—*[chuckles]* it's a lot more personal than a bomb. Or a drone or something.

00:46:24 Ben Host

Right.

00:46:26 John Host

And so we watch these movies where people—we've seen quite a few lately where people are watching the movie largely on television! As they hunt for the bad guys. And watching this movie, I thought about—you know, the tension in America right now that... that there are lots of people in the United States who are, at this moment, kind of relishing the prospect of armed conflict with their neighbors. And it's not just the militia types who are marching around in—*[stifles laughter]* in weird army cosplay. There are also a lot of people I think on the left that imagine that the only way that they'll ever get justice is by some kind of revolutionary overthrow of the systems that govern us, because they perceive those systems to be intractably unfair.

And when you consider what actually happens when you depose all governments, and are left to... to street fights with your—with people who had formerly been your neighbors. So you watch a movie like

this and you think like, "Well, what happens if—what happens if the liberals of Portland go to war with the conservatives of Pendleton, and you have a war in Oregon?" And it doesn't have—there are no jet airplanes. There are no drones employed, except like... the drones of the gamers. Who are like "Dude, I'm gonna send my drone into the rebel base!"

[Ben laughs.]

When it's really just like "What guns can you get together?" What—I mean, and if you were in Pendleton and you were fighting a war against people in Eugene, what would be the goal? To capture Eugene? Nobody wants Eugene! The goal would be to just go to Eugene and kill people.

00:48:22	Adam	Host	The people of Eugene don't even want Eugene!
00:48:24	John	Host	<i>[Laughs.]</i> No, they don't! And the people in Eugene, you know, are they gonna go to Pendleton? I mean, the only reason you would is just to kill people.
00:48:31	Ben	Host	Right.
00:48:32	John	Host	To imagine that you're going to create justice by <u>eliminating</u> the people that—
00:48:37	Ben	Host	Like, to improve your political advantage by killing the people that disagree with your political opinion.
00:48:43	John	Host	Right! And so total war is... is never <u>not</u> on the table, kind of. Even in all these technology wars. Like, we went into Iraq with this whole system, and what it ended up being was we created a state of total war in Iraq! And all of our missiles, and all of our airplanes, couldn't... they're <u>useless</u> in <u>total</u> war. Because really it's—at that point it's just house-to-house. It's like... We don't get as much representation of total war as probably we should. Because filmmakers aren't interested in it. As—because it's hard to depict!
00:49:23	Adam	Host	And expensive to depict.
00:49:26	Music	Transition	Brief clip of "War." <i>War!</i> <i>Huh!</i> <i>Yeah!</i> <i>[Music stops.]</i>
00:49:29	Adam	Host	Well, if total war ever broke out, I know one thing. I'm gonna be hoarding my avocado pits. Hoping I know the right moment to keister that baby.
00:49:44	Ben	Host	<i>[All three laugh.]</i> Millennials can't buy houses because they put too many avocado pits in their orifices.
00:49:49	John	Host	<i>[Laughs.]</i> Hey, Adam, if you wanna be Gen X—if you wanna be Cusp X—then you have to...
00:49:55	Adam	Host	Yeah, I gotta—
00:49:56	John	Host	You just have to start getting harder.

00:49:57 Adam Host I need to pick a side.

00:49:58 John Host Yeah.

00:49:59 Adam Host Yeah...

00:50:00 Ben Host I wanted to address the fact that I have not had a pedantic moment in this episode. And that is because... I did a lot of reading about this movie, [*chuckles*] and couldn't find anybody pedantically quibbling with anything about it. And, uh, I don't feel like I know enough about this milieu to provide my own pedantry. So... I mean, I guess that's just a consequence of the fact that like four thousand people have ever seen this movie. [*Laughs.*]

00:50:28 Adam Host I'm glad we did!

00:50:29 Ben Host Yeah, I am too! I think that this is one of those—this may be the smallest movie we've ever watched, in terms of worldwide gross box office. But I would encourage people to check it out.

00:50:41 Adam Host No shortage of interesting objects to construct a rating system out of. I was joking earlier; we're not gonna make it a scale of one to five *Beasts of No Nation*. Though... you could. And that might be fun. But famously, we do not compare war films to each other. That's the main rule of *Friendly Fire*.

00:51:04 Ben Host We're very famous for that.

00:51:05 Adam Host No more important rule than that. [*Laughs.*]

I think the thing I liked most about *War Witch* was that... that romantic component! Between Komona and the Magician. And one of the parts of the film where you get a little bit of a break from the horrors of things is during those moments where Magician is seeking to seduce and win over Komona. One of the ways in which Komona resists Magician's overtures is by telling him "You're just gonna have to find a white rooster. That's the rule. Everyone knows the rule around here. If you wanna get with me, you gotta get that white rooster."

A white rooster is the hardest animal to find in that part of the world. I was hoping your moment of pedantry was going to be the statistic about the white rooster; I don't know whether or not that's true, in that or any other part of the world. But I was ready to believe it.

[*Stifles laughter.*] So many scenes are constructed around the search for this white rooster. And all of them made Magician look great. And in a part of the world, and in a culture, and in an army, where you just take what you want, whether or not that is a weapon or a woman, you understand Magician's inherent goodness in not just taking Komona because he wants her. I thought that made him great.

So from a scale of one to five white roosters, we will rate *War Witch*.

00:52:46 Adam Host This movie made me think a lot about the many other war films that we watched that asked us to forgive, or remember, or understand the difficulties of... let's just say an American soldier, who comes back from war and has to continue living their lives. How interesting is it that we watch so many films set in Africa, where the end is never a main character asking for forgiveness, or wondering whether or not

they are good or bad, but they just... try to live on. And... I don't know what that means! And it made me want to see more films of this kind, to figure out whether or not that is an essential trait to a war film set in Africa.

Our main characters don't care about achieving that kind of forgiveness, or catharsis, or whatever that you see so often in other war films! When their war is over, they're hopefully able to set down their guns and try to construct some semblance of a normal life. But you never—we have not gotten the sense from the few African war films that we've watched that that's either possible or... or something that our characters even want. And I'm gonna think a lot about that quality to war films as we continue our *Friendly Fire* project.

I thought the film was very well made, given its many challenges in making it. Maybe the greatest challenge is the casting of Komona, and what Rachel's life brings to that character. I think that's a magical aspect to this film. I thought she was great in it. I also loved the Magician.

I was there for it! I thought it was good. It didn't hurt like I expected it to. It still hurt a great deal, but maybe that is one reason why I liked it as much as I did. But I'm gonna give it the four—white rooster treatment. I'm back on my four-thing business with *War Witch*.

00:55:00 Ben Host I will also give it four white roosters. I think this one is, if you haven't seen it or haven't even heard of it, really worth renting and taking a look at. I think she's a great character and really beautifully portrayed. It's a movie full of ideas and things that we just don't get to see that often, and you know, people we don't get to spend time with that often. And it's worth your time! So... yeah. Four white roosters.

00:55:35 John Host Yeah, I come in at four, too. What keeps it out of a higher rating is to some degree, like, the question of what this movie is meant to do in the end. The journey that we go on is left somewhat unresolved. Because we see her trajectory, but then in the end she has a child, and that child redeems her experience. It doesn't redeem her. But she buries her parents. She dispel—or buries, you know, their shards. And their ghosts go away. And in the end, she returns to the—you know, she makes a family with the butcher and his mother. And she has a baby, and we kind of fade on a scene where she's a—you know, we just imagine like, "Oh, I guess she got a job in a brewpub or something."

Like, the war—we don't see what happens. Is the war over? Is the war forever? Why is she safe now with the butcher, when she wasn't safe before with the butcher? What keeps the Tiger from returning?

00:56:53 Adam Host Especially because this is a movie where the Tiger does return, when everyone feels like they're safe.

00:56:58 John Host That's right. In this very location!

00:56:59 Adam Host Yeah.

00:57:00 John Host One of the worst things that ever happened to her happened with no warning. Why end the movie there? And why have it—why have the child be the frame of the film? Because she—because in her

voiceover she's talking to the child, or to God about the child.

00:57:18 Adam Host I have heard that children represent a hope for the future.

00:57:22 John Host Hm.

00:57:23 Adam Host Is that not a possible read?

00:57:25 John Host Hmm.

00:57:26 Ben Host I think you're thinking of robots.

00:57:28 Adam Host Mm!

00:57:29 John Host Robots are a hope for the future. That's right.

00:57:31 Adam Host I see. Yeah.

00:57:32 John Host Children are just future soldiers.

00:57:34 Adam Host Right.

[Ben laughs.]

That's what the—the Whitney Houston song was about that.

00:57:37 John Host Yeah.

[Singing] I believe children are future soldiers! Teach them well and give them cool guns!

[Ben laughs.]

[Speaking] I mean, right? Twelve years from now that kid could be—could also kill his parents. *[Laughs.]* And get conscripted.

00:57:54 Adam Host Yeah.

00:57:55 Ben Host Yeah.

00:57:56 John Host So all of that, I think, is filmmaker choice. And it's also... I think deftly handled by this filmmaker, which is why it's a four-star movie. And I think people who are thinking "I don't wanna watch this movie because it's gonna be too hard," I think we've covered that it's—that it is hard. You know, it's not like, sit down, cook a pork chop.

00:58:19 Adam Host "Hey, Jerry?"

[John laughs.]

"Uh, noticed you were watching *War Witch*."

00:58:25 Ben Host "Uh, we're trying to rent cars here. This is a Hertz, Jerry."

00:58:29 Adam Host "It's, uh—it's Leslie's birthday. We're gonna have a cake in the conference room, if you wanna pause *War Witch* for a moment."

[John and Ben laugh.]

00:58:39 John Host I think it's a strong, four—*Beasts of No Nation* movie.

00:58:43 Adam Host *[Stifles laughter.]* That's not what this is.

[John laughs.]

Can't skip over your guy, Ben. Who's your guy?

00:58:51 Ben Host My guy is the first person that, uh, Wizard goes and asks about a white rooster. This guy is like, at gunpoint, and Wizard is demanding a white rooster from him, and he just laughs and laughs! *[Laughs.]* Not Wizard—in Magician's face. And I—*[laughs]* I, uh... I mean I guess that he laughs and laughs because he basically has nothing to live for and no expectation that he will see his way through the day, because he's living in a state of total war. But that moment just really caught me off guard, and I liked that guy.

00:59:30 Adam Host My guy was the same. Honestly.

00:59:34 John Host The laughing guy.

00:59:35 Adam Host And for exactly the same reasons. Like—*[laughs]* he is approached by someone he doesn't know with a machine gun, asking for something insane. And I mean, he is not beaten off his doorstep with a broom. He's laughed at! You know, they say laughter is the best medicine, but... could it also be the best weapon?

00:59:53 Music Music Dramatic music sting.

00:59:54 Ben Host He's also—he's just got a great face. Great laugh.

00:59:57 Adam Host Yeah.

00:59:58 Ben Host Yeah! And like, I think that maybe in a scene—in a film full of extremely grim scenes, this is like, kind of a scene with a lot of levity that if you pause and think about for one more second is just as grim as any other scene, you know? Like, the devil-may-care laughing at the guy with the Kalashnikov is because you—like, this guy literally has zero control over whether he lives or dies. So he might as well laugh in this guy's face. Nothing he can say or do will change decisions being made by the Kalashnikov people.

01:00:34 John Host Right. Whether he gets shot next. Right, right.

01:00:37 Ben Host Yeah.

01:00:38 John Host Well, my guy is motorcycle guy. Motorcycle guy seems to live in a completely different Congo than everybody else in this movie. First of all, he has a killer motorcycle. Second of all he's wearing a—like a cool, hippie, sheepskin vest! Where do you get a sheepskin vest? Like if somebody was wearing that sheepskin vest and had that motorcycle in Seattle—

01:01:01 Adam Host You'd wanna hop onto the back of that guy's bike.
[Ben laughs.]

01:01:04 John Host I'd say "What's up, cool bro?"

And then he has a man bun. Or a—it's not quite a topknot, but it's definitely a man bun.

01:01:11 Ben Host This guy's living his best life.

01:01:13 John Host He is! And when Magician walks up to him and says "I'm looking for a white rooster," he recognizes that that's a thing. And he takes Magician to the world—to the like, special camp of albinos! Like, this guy with the motorcycle—

01:01:29 Adam Host Seems like the spot where you would find something white.

01:01:32 John Host Yeah! Right? Well, or they'd at least know—I mean, and that—it turns out that's where the white rooster was.

01:01:37 Adam Host Yeah.

01:01:38 John Host So motorcycle guy just—also he has a cool beard, where very few other people do. He's a... completely different dude, and yet he's super chill.

01:01:47 Adam Host He represents this paranoia I was talking about before, where like... "Why is he being so nice? When is the other shoe gonna drop? Like, people don't just do nice things for people out here in war."

01:01:59 John Host Right, the guy with Caprice—*[laughs]*.

01:02:01 Adam Host But he was never not cool. He was great.

01:02:03 John Host The guy with the Caprice Classic that he'd turned into a hearse?

01:02:06 Adam Host Yeah.

01:02:07 John Host I definitely wondered "Where did that guy get a Caprice Classic?" And he was not that psyched about employing the hearse as an ambulance! But motorcycle guy is just like... "Hop on my motorcycle! I was not doing anything, sitting around."

01:02:21 Adam Host Yeah.

01:02:22 John Host You know what they say about—in the United States... when you see a group of people standing around on the street corner, and they look like trouble? Somebody said this to me years ago. Group of guys standing around on a street corner looking like trouble, and I got into some confrontation with them about something. I don't remember. They called me poindexter and I didn't like it.

[Ben laughs.]

We got into a confrontation, and somebody I was with said... "You know, that was stupid! Like, they could've had a gun!" And somebody else that was with us, that I consider world-wise, said "If someone has a gun, they also have a car. Because the first thing you do with a gun is get a car."

So basically, if somebody's standing around on the street corner, they probably don't have a gun. That's not necessarily always true.

01:03:09 Adam Host Car is so much more difficult to get than a gun.

01:03:12 John Host You get a gun to get a car!

01:03:14 Adam Host Right.

01:03:15 John Host That's the progress.

01:03:16 Adam Host Right.

01:03:16 John Host The procession of orders.

01:03:18 Adam Host Hm.

01:03:19 John Host You don't get a car to get a gun; you get a gun to get a car.

01:03:22 Ben Host The gun is the kindling; the car is the log.

01:03:25 John Host Right. So in this case, he's got a motorcycle, and yet... doesn't need a gun? The motorcycle, like a sense of humor, is the weapon. Of peace.

01:03:38 Adam Host Alright!

[John laughs.]

01:03:41 Ben Host Wow.

01:03:42 Music Transition Brief clip of "War."

War!
Huh!
Yeah!

[Music stops.]

01:03:45 Adam Host What do we have coming up on the next episode, though? I imagine we're gonna get a four-hour super show.

01:03:51 John Host Yeah, let's hope the next episode is something really, really... nuts. Or maybe we'll get another comedy! Here we go. Rolling the 120-sided die.

[Die rolls for several seconds.]

Number 24! Twenty-four!

01:04:13 Music Music Eerie music plays.

01:04:14 Ben Host This is a 2006 film directed by Guillermo del Toro. It's *Pan's Labyrinth!*

01:04:20 John Host Whooooa!

01:04:22 Adam Host Okay!

01:04:23 John Host Whoa!

01:04:24 Adam Host I've never seen this movie.

01:04:26 John Host I have never seen it, either!

01:04:28 Ben Host I saw it in the theaters, and I really loved it!

[Music fades out.]

And I have not seen it since, so I'm excited to be returning to it!

01:04:34 Music Music "War" starts fading in.

01:04:35 Adam Host Great. Great!

01:04:37 John Host Great.

01:04:38 Ben Host Wow. Well, that will be next week. And I'm—if I'm reading the calendar correctly, I think next week will also be our first MaxFunDrive episode of 2020. So, uh, get your wallets ready, and support *Friendly Fire!*

In the meantime, we're gonna leave it with Robs. So for John Roderick and Adam Pranica, I've been Ben Harrison. To the victor go the spoiler alerts!

01:05:03 Music Music "War" continues at full volume.

Absolutely—
—nothing!

Listen to me!

War!

It ain't nothing but a heartbreaker—

[Song fades down to play quietly as Rob speaks.]

01:05:08 Rob Schulte Producer

Friendly Fire is a Maximum Fun podcast hosted by Ben Harrison, Adam Pranica, and John Roderick. The show is produced and edited by me, Rob Schulte. Our theme music is "War" by Edwin Starr, and it's courtesy of Stone Agate Music. And our logo art is by Nick Ditmore.

Friendly Fire is a podcast that's made possible by the support of our listeners like you! If you'd like to support *Friendly Fire*, join during the MaxFunDrive, from March 16th to March 27th. You'll get Drive-exclusive gifts, and you'll help us reach our goal. Stay tuned next week for more information.

If you wanna chat about our podcast on various forms of social media, just search for our discussion groups. Or use the hashtag [#FriendlyFire](#). You can find Ben on Twitter at [@BenjaminAhr](#). Adam is found at [@CutForTime](#). John is [@johnroderick](#), and you can find me at [@robkschulte](#). Thanks!

01:06:06 Music Music

"War" continues at full volume.

*They say we must fight to keep our freedom
But Lord knows there's got to be a better way
Oh!*

*War!
Huh!*

God, y'all!

What is it good for?

You tell me! Say it, say it, say it! Saaay it!

*War!
Huh!*

Good god, y'all!

[Music fades out.]

01:06:26 Music Transition

A cheerful guitar chord.

01:06:28 Speaker 1 Guest

[MaximumFun.org](#).

01:06:29 Speaker 2 Guest

Comedy and culture.

01:06:30 Speaker 3 Guest

Artist owned—

01:06:32 Speaker 4 Guest

—audience supported.