

00:00:00	Music	Music	“Switchblade Comb” by Mobius VanChocStraw. A jaunty, jazzy tune reminiscent of the opening theme of a movie. Music continues at a lower volume as April introduces herself and her guest, and then it fades out.
00:00:08	April Wolfe	Host	<p>Welcome to <i>Switchblade Sisters</i>, where women get together to slice and dice our favorite action and genre films. I’m April Wolfe. Every week, I invite a new female filmmaker on. A writer, director, actor, or producer, and we talk—in depth—about one of their fave genre films. Maybe one that influenced their own work. Today, we also have something special for you. We have <u>two</u> great guests on the podcast.</p> <p>A little later on, I’m going to speak with Miriam Bale, the artistic director of Indie Memphis Film Festival. We’ll talk briefly at the end of this episode about all sorts of things. Programming a festival that captures the spirit of Memphis, inviting film critics of color to her festival, and of course, ghost and genre films.</p> <p>But, before we get to that, we must get to our first guest. Today, I’m very excited to have writer-director Gigi Saul Guerrero here. Hi, Gigi!</p>
00:00:50	Gigi Saul Guerrero	Guest	¡Hola! How are you?
00:00:53	April	Host	Great! Um, Gigi’s—
00:00:55	Gigi	Guest	So excited to be here. Thank you so much.
00:00:57	April	Host	<i>[Laughing]</i> Oh no. She’s—she’s calling up from Vancouver, where uh, they’re getting dumped with snow, and we’ve got like 75 degree temperatures down here. So, we’ve just got very different moods, I think.
00:01:08	Gigi	Guest	I think so, and very different clothes, too, right now. <i>[Laughs.]</i>
00:01:12	April	Host	<p>I know. Although, I get cold very quickly, so I’m bundled up. Um, for those of you who aren't as familiar with Gigi’s work, please let me give you an introduction.</p> <p>Gigi is a Mexican director and actress living in Vancouver, Canada. She has been described by Variety as “part of the new wave of Latino talent”, and has been praised as one of the top emerging directors in the horror genre by Empire, Dread Central, and Bloody Disgusting.</p> <p>But a lot of her career in film started when Gigi co-founded Luchagore Productions in 2013 in Vancouver, with Luke Bramley and Raynor Shima. The company is commonly known as La Muñeca del Terror. That’s when she wrote and directed a handful of genre shorts like <i>El Matador</i>, <i>Feliz Cumpleaños</i>, <i>Madre De Dios</i>, and <i>El Gigante</i>, which is streaming on Shudder right now. Um, the last one, you said, <i>El Gigante</i>, that one’s streaming on Shudder right now?</p>

00:02:03 Gigi Guest It sure is.

00:02:04 April Host Okay, great. Uh, she also has some viral hits like *A Luchagore Christmas*, and *Evil Dead in 60 Seconds*, and in 2014 Gigi participated in the Mexican horror anthology, *México Bárbaro*, which, uh, with its *Day of the Dead* segment, while still in film school. Her series with Warner Brothers Stage 13, *La Quinceañera*, won the Audience Award at the 2017 Morbido Film Festival.

All of this led up to Gigi's feature debut, *Culture Shock*, starring Martha Higareda as a young woman who crosses the border into the U.S. and wakes up to a stepford nightmare, including Barbara Crampton, former guest of *Switchblade Sisters*. The film was part of Blumhouse's *Into The Dark* series and is available to watch on Hulu right now.

Gigi also directed an episode of *The Purge* season two, and you can see her work in three upcoming anthology films, *The Source of Shadows*, *Aztech*, and *28*.

Um, so Gigi, you're not too busy is what you're saying, right?

00:03:00 Gigi Guest Yeah, no, I mean, I don't really know what sleep is right now.

[Both laugh.]

Thank you. Thank you for that lovely intro. I think you need to introduce me all the time. You made me sound so wonderful.

00:03:14 April Host Oh yeah, and I think that also, uh, before, er, after I wrote this bio that you also had a new announcement coming out. Is that correct?

00:03:22 Gigi Guest That is very correct. Very correct.

00:03:24 April Host And can you tell our listeners where you're headed next?

00:03:27 Gigi Guest Yeah. Uh, I'm very, very lucky. I started the year 2020 with an awesome, gorey blessing, I guess you could say. Um, I'm directing my first theatrical debut, a horror movie called, as of right now, *10-31*, with Orion Pictures and produced by Eli Roth.

[April responds emphatically.]

So we're—you know, I just jumped right into it last minute, and we're working on it right now actually, here in Vancouver. And I'm very happy, because not only do I get to work where I live, and work with many of the fellow storytellers here in Vancouver, but I was able to bring along my long-time producing partner, Raynor Shima from Luchagore into the project as well. So, he'll be co-producing.

Um, I'm so excited. This movie is a total throwback to, you know, the holiday we all love of Halloween, and just a very, very different take on the holiday. And uh, I really look forward to it.

00:04:30 April Host That's awesome. Um, Gigi, the movie that you chose to talk about today is *Don't Breathe*.

[Gigi affirms and laughs.]

Could you perhaps give us a little explanation on why this is one of your fave genre films?

00:04:41 Gigi Guest Oh man. Well, when I first saw the director's film, the remake of *Evil Dead*—um, the director's name is Fede Álvarez—I was like, "Who is this crazy guy?!" And it had been so long since I'd seen such, not just elevated gore but just such cringe worthy shots, and I'm a big fan of that. I'm known in my work to have some pretty insane graphic violence, in a lot of my short films, and it had been a while since I had seen anything like that in the theaters.

So I was very excited to see *Don't Breathe*, and he just proved to show that he really is not just a master of gritty gore and horror, but he's incredible with the suspense, and the thriller genre. I think *Don't Breathe* really taps into both thriller, uh, suspense and horror. And I think Fede is absolutely incredible.

00:05:38 April Host Yeah. Uh, we're gonna get into a lot of that in the main discussion, but for those of you who haven't seen *Don't Breathe*, today's episode will give you some spoilers. But that shouldn't stop you from listening before you watch. Um, my motto is that it's not what happens, but how it happens that makes a movie worth watching, and as many times as I've said it, I still believe it.

So, still, if you would like to pause and watch *Don't Breathe*, go ahead. This is your shot. ... Now that you're back, let me introduce *Don't Breathe*.

Written by Fede Álvarez and Rodo Sayagues, and directed by Álvarez for release in 2016, *Don't Breathe* stars Jane Levy as Rocky, Dylan Minnette as Alex, and Daniel Zovatto as Money. Three friends in Detroit who get by by breaking into houses. Money gets a tip that there's \$300,000 stashed in a house with a blind veteran whose daughter got killed in a car crash.

00:06:29 Clip Clip **Money:** Story goes some preppy girl a few years ago ran over this guy's daughter.

Rocky: Jesus.

Money: Daughter died, and this primpy, rich ass family pays him off. Gives him a big ass "settlement".

Alex: Settlement.

Money: Blow me, your honor. Alright? This guy is sitting on at least—

[Sound of rapping on wood]

—\$300k. Boom.

00:06:54 April Host They break into the house thinking this is going to be their big haul, where they can live out their dreams and stop breaking into houses,

but they can't find the cash. Money finally sees a locked door, and he shoots at the lock, but this also wakes up Norman, the veteran, played by Stephen Lang.

Norman overpowers Money, while Rocky and Alex hide.

00:07:12	Clip	Clip	<p>Norman: How many of you are there?</p> <p>Money: What?</p> <p>Norman: How many? Huh?</p> <p>Money: Just me, man, alright? Just fucking me. Let me go! Please.</p>
00:07:25	April	Host	<p>Money says he's alone, then Norman kills him. Rocky spies him checking his money in the safe, and steals the money after Norman has gone back. But Norman trips over Rocky's shoes, and realizes that there are others in the house, and thus begins the big action. Rocky and Alex flee into the locked basement and find the wealthy woman who killed Norman's daughter chained up—</p>
00:07:48	Clip	Clip	<p>Rocky: She's the one who killed his daughter. We have to get her out of here.</p> <p>Alex: No, no. Rocky, we don't have time. We'll get out of here and we'll call the cops.</p>
00:07:56	April	Host	<p>—where Norman has been attempting to artificially inseminate her to give birth to his <u>new</u> daughter. Norman shoots at them, but ends up killing the woman instead. Norman shuts off the lights, and now they're all in the dark. Alex eventually knocks out Norman, and they run back upstairs. Then the dog wakes up and chases them into the barred bathroom. Rocky escapes through a ventilation shaft, but the dog attacks Alex, and then he falls out a window.</p> <p>Norman attacks Alex with garden shears after shooting him down from this glass ceiling. Norman captures Rocky and chains her up to replace the woman he shot. He prepares to inseminate her.</p>
00:08:34	Clip	Clip	<p>Norman: I'm not a rapist.</p> <p><i>[Sounds of chains being pulled.]</i></p> <p>Norman: I never <u>forced</u> myself on her.</p> <p>Rocky: Stop.</p> <p>Norman: I promised I would set her free just as soon as she gave me a child.</p> <p><i>[Low, metallic thud, and heavy breathing.]</i></p> <p>Norman: Now she's gone. But I'm done waiting.</p>
00:08:57	April	Host	<p>Alex, however, survived by tricking Norman, and saves Rocky. But as they leave, Norman breaks free and shoots and kills Alex. Then Rocky is contending with the dog, which she traps in a car truck,</p>

and which burrows to get her. And then she has to go back into the house, but turns on the alarm system, confusing Norman, before pushing him down the stairs and escaping with the money. She takes off with her little sis to Los Angeles, as news reports Norman's alive.

00:09:24 Clip Clip **Anchor:** Last night, two burglars broke into his home and attempted to rob and brutally attack him. This visually impaired man was able to defend himself, shooting and killing both his attackers on the spot. Now the man did sustain some injuries, but doctors say he is in stable condition. He'll be released from the hospital soon and able to return to his home.

00:09:43 April Host But no mention of Rocky and the missing money, so it's a little open ended on that. That is the uh, the basics of *Don't Breathe*, but as Gigi was saying, a lot of this has to do with the way that Fede is bringing out the terror and suspense of not knowing where someone is, and being kind of lost in the dark. Um, one thing I would like to start with is casting, because the producers at some point, you know, Alvarez was—

[April takes a deep breath.]

Everything was ready to go, and yet he still didn't have his Rocky. And he had asked Jane Levy before if she was available, but she ended up having to be in a different movie. And so, he was casting other people, and he was reading other people, and no one seemed to fit the role. He just couldn't find the right person. And then he said, quote: "At the last second, I saw that Jane had become available because she posts a photo on her Instagram showing that she's home, because her other movie had fallen apart. I asked her if she wanted to come do *Man In The Dark*, which was the title at that point, and she was like, 'Fuck yeah, let's do it.'"

"She got on a plane, and was there seven or eight days before we started shooting. Those days were pretty intense, going through the script and having a discussion about motivation in every scene. Why would you run this way, or that way? To have those conversations in pre-production and not on set because, you know, it takes a lot of time, and everyone gets pissed because the crew is just waiting for you to reach a conclusion, and that's no good."

So, there's a lot in that quote, but let's get into the casting part of that. For you, what do you think is, kind of the hardest part of finding that leading person in your films?

00:11:20 Gigi Guest Yeah, definitely. I mean, it's really interesting, I actually didn't know that about Jane Levy, and I think she's incredible. I actually use her as a reference in a lot of stuff. In a lot of the conversations.

00:11:30 April Host Oh, you do?

00:11:32 Gigi Host Yeah, I think she's—she's absolutely amazing. And it's really cool to see when a director, you know, brings that final girl into a horror film, and just really believes in it. I think that's so, so important, and I'm just glad Fede went with his gut. For myself—

00:11:52 April Host Yeah, because, you could have any actor, right, but then if you—like, you have to have your heart set on a lot of actors at some point, you know, and be disappointed.

00:12:01 Gigi Host 100%. 100%. And for me, for myself, I started my career in acting. So, I feel I've always had that wonderful advantage that, I really understand what's going on on the other side. And there's such a big part in—the big element that I look for is that trust between a director and an actor, even in the casting room, or in the chemistry read. That's the first thing I look for is, is this actor trusting me in what I'm telling them? Are they trusting in the direction that I'm advising them to take? And also, am I trusting them when they call me out? When they call me out?

Because, I think one of the most important things that I've learned, and advice that I've gotten, is that really good actors, they're like lie detectors in a way, too. Like, they can very much understand when it doesn't really fit in their world, in the reality of their character, and they can call you on that. So you definitely, on the director's side, you have to trust that they'll tell you. You know?

00:13:14 April Host There's also the trust of working with an after multiple times, too, because Alvarez had worked with Jane in *Evil Dead*, and that was one of the reasons why he had immediately thought of her, is this person that you already know can carry the movie, and that you already have a shorthand with because you've gone through the hardest parts in first film.

And I'm, you know, I think that that seems like a) just really practical but b) you know like you would like to hopefully develop a relationship with actors and—between actors and directors for long term. I mean, a lot of the greats have done that, and I'm, you know, I'm curious, is that how you feel about working with your actors?

00:14:02 Gigi Guest 100%. Once you build a relationship and that trust, you can only imagine like, what other incredible characters are going to create with them. You know, one of the excited actors I've worked with this is everyone I worked with on *Culture Shock*. You know, I had the opportunity to really work with with—like, Blumhouse gave me that chance to work with such professional actors. Not that I didn't before, but this was such a high-caliber of acting that I didn't have when I was making my short films, or when I was in school. When I worked with Martha Higareda and Richard Cabral, the leads of *Culture Shock*, man. You get so excited and pumped up when they bring that to the camera, you know? And uh, I only imagine what else are we going to do together, you know? Same—I was so incredibly excited to Barbara Crampton and Shawn Ashmore, all those guys. But I think once you have that feeling, what else are we going to create together? It's it so—it's like waiting for that cake to come out of the oven like, "Alright, guys, let's eat this together." It's exciting. It's so exciting. I think, as a storyteller, my most favorite is is working with the actors. It's such a beautiful, beautiful thing that happens on set. It's really cool

00:15:29 April Host Well, I mean, so, Alvarez in this interview, he also—er, in this um,

this question, the answer that he had given—he also talks about th—doing the work so so much and pre-production with your actors, so that they know everything single motivation, every single reason for why they're saying or doing things in scene. And he's talking about doing that before because everyone is mad if you're stopping to try to figure it out in the moment. I know that that's not always necessary for, you know, lower budget films. Sometimes you have to figure things out on set, but it does seem like that's um, you know, preferable, to have that prep with actors.

00:16:12 Gigi Guest I mean, I would agree with that. I haven't had that opportunity. I've had to just, again, really establish, you know, and walk with your with the right foot, you know, into the door that the actor and you are going to really look at each other and trust each other to figure it out, you know? And uh, of course if you have that opportunity to prep it before, incredible, but we don't always get that chance.

00:16:38 April Host Yeah but how do you do that on—how do you do it in a way that feels like you're not stalling the production, if you have to do it on set?

00:16:47 Gigi Guest For my experience, I think keeping everyone updated is the most important element. That's one of the most important things for me. I've never felt anybody waiting on me before, because I'm—I like to—I like to say out loud what we're doing next. I like everybody to know out loud what my blocking is, what my plan is, what the—the scene is going to feel and look like.

I know for a lot of the directors they like to do their blocking more internally and more quietly. It's just you, the actor, first AD, and the cinematographer.

00:17:23 April Host Mm-hm, and then everyone reacts to that.

00:17:24 Gigi Guest I'm Latina, baby. Like I do it loud. Like, I do it loud, and I do it excited.

[April laughs.]

Like, I want everybody involved, especially something like *Culture Shock*. You know, we really didn't have time. Like, that 16-day shoot, two weeks, and a little bit of prep, you know, it's it—it's not a lot. So far me, I need a crew that's going to trust me as much as the actor. And that's, you know, it's my responsibility to show up incredibly prepared, and I have to know the script back and forth.

So my goal, you know, if it's with the actor, the first thing I will remind them is exactly what just happened before in the story and exactly what's going to happen next. I find that really helps, especially when, again, if I don't have the opportunity, like Fede, to prep it before, that's—that's one of the key points that I will bring up to the actor. This just happened, this is going to happen, let's talk about it.

00:18:26 April Host Okay. I'm imagining you with a bullhorn, on like a stool.

00:18:33 Gigi Guest *[Laughs]* Yeah, you pretty much described me, right. On the set of

The Purge, they let me hold onto—how'd you say—a megaphone? Oh, big mistake, baby. Big mistake.

[April starts laughing.]

Because I was like, “Oh, my God, I can use this?” And I did, and they took it away from me a few days later. Yeah, it was too much. It was too much.

00:18:55	April	Host	<i>[Laughing]</i> Oh, um, we're going to take a quick break. When we come back, we're gonna get into Lang's process, and into Levy's process, and into Alvarez's process, and sound design, and all these other things. Sp, uh, stay with us. We'll be right back
00:19:10	Music	Transition	“Switchblade Comb” by Mobius VanChocStraw.
00:19:15	Promo	Promo	Ben: Alright, Adam. Maximum Fun wants us to record like, a promo to tell people that they should listen to <i>The Greatest Generation</i> . You want to do that? Adam: No! I am tired of all the extra work. I just want to talk about <i>Star Trek</i> with my friend. Ben: I think it—it would be good to like, try and get some new listeners by appealing to the audiences of other shows, like this—this will only take a minute or two. It could be good for us. Adam: We sit down for an hour every week and talk about a <i>Star Trek</i> episode and make a bunch of idiotic fart jokes about it. It's embarrassing. If it got out that we made this show, I think it would make us unemployable. Ben: Adam, I—I have bad news for you. We have tens of thousands of listeners at MaximumFun.org . Adam: Oh, my God. I think I'm gonna throw up. Ben: <i>The Greatest Generation</i> , a <i>Star Trek</i> podcast by a couple of guys who are a little bit embarrassed to have a <i>Star Trek</i> podcast. Every Monday on MaximumFun.org . Adam: I'm really gonna be sick.
00:20:02	Music	Transition	“Switchblade Comb” by Mobius VanChocStraw.
00:20:09	April	Host	Welcome back to <i>Switchblade Sisters</i> . I'm April Wolfe, and I'm joined today by Gigi Saul Guerrero up in Vancouver, Canada, and we're talking about <i>Don't Breathe</i> . <i>[Gigi makes 'bum bum bum' sound. April laughs.]</i> Thank you for the sound effects.
00:20:23	Gigi	Guest	Hey, I got many more. Just let me know, I'll queue it up.
00:20:27	April	Host	There's gonna be an air horn coming up later on. You got all of your own tools back there. So, I wanted to get into a little bit more about

how Lang was preparing for this character, who doesn't speak, and who can't see, and who is going through quite a few emotions while he's performing action.

So, Alvarez said, "He was wearing lenses to make his eyes look like they look in the movie, and that would impair 70% of his sight. In low conditions he actually couldn't see anything. He didn't have to fake most of the blindness most of the time. He couldn't really see. When he walked on set someone was carrying him by the hand, avoiding cables. They would put him on the side and he would stay there idle like a character in a video game."

"I would go and piss him off. I'd go and tell him, "These fucking kids, they're breaking into your house. They're somewhere in the house. You don't know where they are, but they have your money and that's the last thing you have, and that money is your daughter, man. They're taking the last thing represents her. I'll be back in a second."

"And he was like, 'Fuck them, fuck them, fuck them.' He was mouthing all these hate words toward them. Then all I had to do was scream 'action' and let the leash go."

Gigi, what the fuck!

00:21:42 Gigi

Guest

I'm so pumped you told me this. I'm not going to—I'm not trying to sound like crazy or anything, but I'm so pumped you're telling me this, because I do the same thing. I do the exact same—oh, that is so cool. You know, it really gets—man, like as an actress, like I had that experience once, where they director is literally yelling me what's up. And you get so anxious, and like, it gets under your skin sometimes, and it really helps.

Man, that's so cool. Dude, it works. Anybody listening, you know, just be careful how much swearing you use or how intense you are, but it it really works. I tell my students here—'cause I teach directing here at Vancouver Film School, and I shared that with them. Really use the environment, really get into your actor's skin sometimes. It really helps them get there.

I remember on *Culture Shock*, the one day of press, okay? The one day the press came to the set was—again, spoilers, if you haven't seen *Culture Shock*. So, watch out. The one day that pressed decided to show up, and I didn't know that they were there yet, but they were you know put in video village to watch. And it was right during the death scene of Marisol's rapist, and I was yelling at the top of my lungs, "He raped you! What you going to do? What you going to do now? Fucking kill the bastard!"

Like, I was—I was yelling at the top of my lungs. And then, for his coverage, I was like—I was like, "Threaten th—threaten that bitch! Threaten that whore!" Like, I was—but it was in Spanish, so luckily not everyone understood. But you know—you know like novellas, right? We sound way more intense, you know? Like, we sound a lot more intense. That's why dating Latinos is really hard, because everyone thinks we're super dramatic.

So, when I was yelling, “AMENAZA LA CABRÓN! HIJO DE TU PUTA MA—”. Like, I was just going. And so I walk back to video village, and all the press guys are there. Dread Central, LA Times. They're all just sitting there with their eyes wide, and only one of them was a Mexican journalist, and she was like, “Amen, sister.” That's all she said to me. I was like, “I'm gonna go back to set guys, welcome. Uh, see you later.” I had no idea that they were there. But it work, long story short. I'm just so happy I'm not the only one that would do that.

00:24:26 April Host Oh, this is a great thing for me to segue into the next point, because he has some really great thoughts on the sound design of a jump scare, too.

He said, “Most of the jump scares in this movie don't have a music sting. Most horror movies will give you a big orchestra hit because they're scary. We do it in a different way. I think about the dog in the window, the first jump scare. There's no music, it's just the sound of the dog hitting the car and the metal. That creates a big scare usually. The guy coming out of the cellar right in front of a character. There's no music there, just the crack of the door sounding very loud. It was another leap of faith, and let's hope that it works without music.”

[Laughing] And I think it did work without music, yeah.

00:25:08 Gigi Guest Totally. I mean, heck, like it's just—he's exactly thinking, how do we get scared in real life? I'm not walking around with music playing.

00:25:16 April Host Yeah, there's no Bernard Hermann. [Laughs.]

00:25:17 Gigi Guest I mean, they did that on *Family Guy*, that he's always walking with a song, and they make fun of that. But in real life we don't, you know, we're not blessed with our own soundtrack. So what do we get scared of is real sounds, real things, you know, a metal hits or something falls, is exactly what makes us scared. And I think, you know, movies like *Don't Breathe*, movies like, you know, *Funny Games* or even *No country for Old Men*, you know, they don't rely on just a diegetic sounds in the screen. And, you know, if they play from diegetic and non-diegetic, the sound designers and the directors just really know which ones are going to be more amplified than the others.

And in *Don't Breathe*, it's exactly what you're saying. You know, Fede's talking about the door, the actual dog, the actual metal, like the actual stuff in the environment is what's going to cause us to jump, because that's the reality of things. We—our brain can already, you know, like we already know what, like, that sound is gonna trigger us.

00:26:24 April Host And it adds an additional texture, too. It's—I feel like it gives a kind of three-dimensionality to the movie. You know, those those things where you feel like—almost tactile in a sense, because you're hearing the the objects move in the picture. You're hearing and seeing these specific things, that it feels like you can touch them,

because they're being used so organically within the movie. I think that, you know, jump scares are a thing that people cons—I'm okay with jump scares. I think that they are, you know, the horror genre has always had jump scares. I think sometimes you can't rely only on jump scares, but why not, you know? But a lot of people think that they're kind of cheap or cheesy, and I'm wondering what your opinion is on them and how to build them?

- 00:27:16 Gigi Guest Yeah, I mean, I feel like you. I don't mind them. I think it just—it depends so much on the kind of movie, you know, the kind of horror movie you're watching. Like, there's so many subgenres out there, and some definitely should have and some shouldn't. It really depends on the approach.
- Like, for me—and I'm about to share my deepest weakness, but—like, for me, as a true Catholic Mexican girl, I'm terrified of movies with that with religion and demons and the devil and possession. I have a serious, serious fear, 'cause I believe in all of it. Ghosts. You tell me.
- And I believe movies like that, because it's not a real thing for many people, it's kind of movies that you can create the jump scare. You can create a world that we can't all relate to. So for me, jump scares in that sense, unjust—not just for paranormal kind of movies, but in movies where I find there's no actual reality to it for many people, I personally think jump scares are great.
- Don't rely on them always, but it just depends, it depends so much on the storytelling. 'Cause you can't just throw jump scare after jump scare, you know? And that's all you rely to? Then yes, I'm gonna feel the same as others that, "Oh, that's just a cheap way to do it."
- 00:28:49 April Host Yeah, it becomes fatiguing after a while if it's—if it's too much. So it's finding that kind of right—yeah.
- 00:28:54 Gigi Guest Exactly. You gotta find a good balance to make it work. And many movies do a great job! Do a really good job.
- 00:29:02 April Host And I think, I like—but the thing is, I love Álvarez's kind of commitment to a jumpscare here, and a commitment to an earned jumpscare.
- [Gigi affirms.]*
- And everything is—it doesn't have to be just like a person popping up, it's a sound cue that is, uh, particularly, um, frightening, specifically for this environment. In the same way that he has, you know, kind of changed his style of directing and writing to fit this particular movie, as you're talking about, their subgenres, it's really crucial that a director can kind of, um, reorient themselves in and find a new way into a script and their process.
- 00:29:50 Gigi Guest Yeah, totally, 'cause that script analysis is really up to that director. It's really up to that storyteller to break it down and give it to us. You know, none of us can really tell them which direction to take, really. So it's up to them.

00:30:04	Music	Transition	“Switchblade Comb” by Mobius VanChocStraw.
00:30:06	April	Host	Uh, we’re gonna take another quick break. When we come back we’re gonna get into a little, um, a little more of the process of how they were scripting out the kind of intense twists and turns within the single location. And then also a little more about the process of some of the actors and their general idea of, um, camera work, and how to make it work in such a limited environment. So we’ll be right back.
00:30:38	Promo	Promo	<p><i>[The sound of radio static punctuates the conversation, overlaid by a distant, ringing note.]</i></p> <p>Rocket Ship One: Mission control, this is rocket ship one. Come in mission control.</p> <p>Mission Control: This is mission control. Go ahead.</p> <p>Rocket Ship One: We have incoming and it looks big.</p> <p>Mission Control: Can you identify?</p> <p>Rocket Ship One: It looks like—[the beep of electronics] some sort of pledge drive. Affirmative. It’s MaxFun Drive.</p> <p><i>[The clicking of a keyboard.]</i></p> <p>Mission Control: That’s a verified MaxFun Drive. Countdown to MaxFun Drive is initiated. Can you project a time to intercept?</p> <p>Rocket Ship One: Based on the current trajectory, MaxFun Drive will be here from March 16 to March 27.</p> <p><i>[The clicking of a keyboard.]</i></p> <p>Mission Control: March 16 to March 27, Rodger. Rocket ship one, can you confirm a visual on common MaxFun Drive phenomena, such as the best episodes of the year? Bonus content and special gifts for new and upgrading monthly members?</p> <p><i>[The beeping of an electronic readout.]</i></p> <p>Rocket Ship One: We have a visual. Great episodes, bonus content, premium gifts confirmed. And more. It sure sounds quiet down there. Mission control, what’s your status?</p> <p>Mission Control: All systems go, rocket ship one! Just catching up on our favorite MaxFun shows so we can tune into MaxFun Drive episodes between March 16 and March 27. Over and out.</p> <p><i>[The clicking stutter of communication being cut off.]</i></p>
00:31:40	Music	Transition	“Switchblade Comb” by Mobius VanChocStraw.
00:31:47	April	Host	Welcome back to <i>Switchblade Sisters</i> . I’m April Wolfe, and I’m joined today by Gigi Saul Guerrero, and we’re talking about <i>Don’t</i>

Breathe.

- 00:31:53 Gigi Guest *Don't Breathe.* I almost said it in Spanish, but I won't challenge the listeners too much.
- 00:31:58 April Host Say it in Spanish.
- 00:31:59 Gigi Guest *No Respires.* But, see, it sounds sexy, and anything you—anything you say in Spanish, we're gonna make it sound really sexy.
- 00:32:07 April Host Um, well, yeah, this movie is very sexy, if you guys haven't seen—
- 00:32:11 Gigi Guest Definitely the ending, too.
- 00:32:13 April Host Yeah. People are gonna be so disappointed when they like, "This is not sexy at all. This makes me feel really bad and weird."

[Gigi affirms.]

I wanted to talk about, again, like, the scripting of the choices these characters are making, because the choices that the characters are making feel natural. They don't feel like they are kind of, um, kind of forced upon these characters. They feel like they are something that someone may choose to do in this—a particular situation like this, as kind of heightened as it is.

Álvarez said, "The characters tend to behave like you would behave in normal life, and the decisions they make are pretty clever most of the time. When you want to yell advice like 'go the other way,' they'll go the other way, but it ends up really bad. So you end up running out of advice for the characters. What I love about this particular scene—" and talking about them going back into the basement, "— is that you don't know what to tell her to do. She's inside the car now, the money is outside, the dog is outside, no keys, so what now? And then she gives you a solution you hadn't thought of. I thought the solution was pretty clever, it's one of my favorites as well."

So the ending is just like, "What the hell does she do? Should she go into the basement, does she go into the house?" You know, like in the original script, he had had that she doesn't go into the car, that she runs away into an abandoned church and the whole thing is—plays out and it's big and nutty and it's a huge kind of almost like, 80s throwback. And he ended up throwing that out the window and getting a little bit simpler with this—not just because of budget, because they did have a hard time finding a place where they could actually shoot in a church and all that—but it just felt more realistic to the story and the—this character had limited choices.

So, what would she do? She'd be in the car, and she figures it out. And I was curious, you know, what were you thinking when you were watching this movie? I mean, were you one of those people where he's talking about trying to yell advice to her?

- 00:34:25 Gigi Guest Oh, yeah. I think—you know, I think that's not a bad thing, when you're yelling out the advice, like that truly means that you're engaged, good or bad.

[April affirms.]

For me, I was stoked when she was running out. I think Fede is so smart, like he—and also the way he shot it, he really made it—like, the shot is on her, running towards camera, when she runs out of the house. Like, you don't know what direction she's gonna go until they reveal that she's gonna go towards the car. So I really didn't know where she was going until she reached the car and that's why I was like, "Oh my god, just drive," you know? And he kept presenting actual things we can relate to. No keys, the stuff outside, the dog's outside, it's just more plausible.

[April affirms.]

Like it could totally happen. So her solution—I'm so stoked that he changed that, because the solution of how she gets out of the car and all that is really damn smart, and possible. And doable.

One of the things in film that, you know, that I've learned, that I love to teach the students here is, whoever your hero is, make it really believable that they can do that in their journey. Like, are they that person? Because at the end of the day nobody's perfect, but how can you get them to do that incredible obstacle course that they will get through? How do they do it? And this is exactly it is a very cool challenge for Jane Levy's, uh, character, and it's more intimate. Of course she's gonna go back to the car. What else does she know at that point, right? So when we don't think—when we're under pressure, we just think immediately to the stuff we know. So it made total sense.

- 00:36:19 April Host I wanted to talk about one of Álvarez's favorite processes, which is telling your actors one thing, but actually doing another. He said, "I think Jane arrived on set, and five minutes later she realized this might've been a mistake. A lot of that suffering you see onscreen is real. This movie was very hard to make on the actors. On *Evil Dead*, it was more the physicality of it all, like being covered in blood every day, and makeup and all that."
- "On this one, this was a bit more of the psychological torment of what's going on and what she was going to be put through. You have to make sure that the actors are not too relaxed or not too comfortable. You misdirect the actors sometimes and you tell them 'you're gonna walk down this hallway, and the guy's gonna come from the left,' and you prepare for that. But, at the last second, you change it, and make him come from the right. You get great reactions out of them. Then they just scream at you, but that doesn't really matter."
- 00:37:14 Gigi Guest *[Laughing]* Could not agree more. I'm known to carry a—an airhorn in my purse. I use it. I use it.
- 00:37:24 April Host Wait, you really do? I made that joke earlier.
- 00:37:27 Gigi Guest I sure do. I sure do. But, heck, like, that's the thing. If you—again, you have that trust, that you can do that to an actor. Don't go too

crazy, like poor Shelly Duvall in *The Shining*.

[April affirms.]

That was some serious suffering. But it works. You can totally do that. Heck, they've been doing that for many years. Even to the children actors in *Willy Wonka*, they—they didn't show to them the set of the chocolate factory until the day they saw it for the first time. They rolled the cameras for that reaction.

00:38:04 April Host Yeah, or *Alien*, even. They didn't uh, show the actors the alien until they were in the scene, and then all of their faces of awe were real.

00:38:14 Gigi Guest 100%, and you can actually see—like I'm so stoked Fede did that, and you can totally tell. Jane Levy and all of them, all of the cast, the three robbers. They're really—they're really into it. It's really good.

And, I mean, even the new *It: Chapter One*, they didn't show Pennywise to the act—to the kids for months into shooting. Until—if you watch it—don't worry, this is not a spoiler, to the listeners—but when one of the little boys, he broke his arm, and he's on the ground, and he sees Pennywise come right at him for the first time, that's a real scream. Like, that's—he for real screamed at the top of his lungs. I mean, they are just children, but I—I'd scare children like that too.

[April laughs.]

But—but they really got those kids, man. You can—you can tell the poor little boy like, peed himself. Like, you can tell that was absolutely terrifying to him, to see Pennywise. You can tell in the shot. But yeah, that's really cool. You can totally tell with Jane Levy, in many of the moments. Uh, you know—

00:39:25 April Guest Oh, she is terrified. Like, very clearly terrified in a lot of those shots, and she sells that kind of panic survival mode, like injured dog kind of thing, you know. She just has to get out of this situation as quickly as possible. Um, and very, very quickly, as a last point, I wanted to talk about Alvarez's commitment to every character having shady morals.

[Laughs] He said, "You want characters with shady morals. Think of Alfred Hitchcock's movies. Most of the characters have shady morals. Jane Lee stealing money at the beginning of *Psycho*, and in *Vertigo* and in *Strangers on a Train*, everyone would do bad things. I think those characters are a lot of fun, and I love them."

And I think that that's something that you were talking about early on, where your allegiances are shifting as the movie goes on, because everyone is doing bad things. [Laughs.]

00:40:20 Gigi Guest Well, I mean, nobody's perfect. Man, like we all have to learn from our mistakes, whether it's a big one or a small. Like, we all—look, we've all lied, we've all done shady morals for our own benefit. We've all done it. Some much more major than others. Some are

little white lies, but at the end of the day, you have to learn from that mistake, because that is how we humans are, you know? And um, I couldn't agree more. I love characters with flaws. All of them. Every single one of them.

I actually met the actor that plays Money, um, we were both on the *Variety* for the Latinos to watch. Um, who plays Money, and he was talking about that, that he really enjoyed going into the mind of someone so dark. His name's Daniel Zovatto, and uh, and him and I were talking a lot about how cool it is to really be a flawed character, because that's the first thing we're gonna relate to.

We all need money. Maybe we don't all need to steal, but we all know the struggle of having no money, right? Like, it's already—there's little checkmarks in there for us to somewhat feel with these guys of why we're following them into uh, into this home. You know, I think it's really smart. Fede showed us a glimpse of Jane Levy's character, Rocky's life in that trailer with her little sister and that awful, awful relationship with the mom, who's an alcoholic I believe. I think I remember.

[April affirms.]

Um, so even just, literally the smallest scene like that was enough for me to be like, "Oh, well, she's just put in a bad situation that's not in her control." Um, so yeah.

00:42:15	April	Host	And also, you know, Lang's character. You know, Norman's—
00:42:18	Gigi	Guest	Exactly. Oh, man, like— <i>[Laughing]</i> Damn! Like, that ending is <u>so</u> disturbing, and it's like, I—he has a reason to be so disturbing at the same time. It's just brutal. My god. Yeah.
00:42:36	April	Host	Oh, that's a great place to wrap up. It's just brutal. Thank you so much for joining me today, Gigi.
00:42:41	Gigi	Guest	Thank you for having me! And let's do this again. Thank you so much.
00:42:46	April	Host	Let's remind people where they can see your stuff. <i>El Gigante</i> is on Shudder and <i>Culture Shock</i> is available on Hulu, and uh, we're gonna keep an eye out for your next feature film. Do you have any idea when that's gonna be? Is it 2021?
00:43:01	Gigi	Guest	If all goes well, hopefully this year.

[Both laugh.]

If all goes well. Yeah, so, you know, people can follow me on Instagram. I'm—trust me, I'm like the only Gigi Saul Guerrero out there, so it would be very easy to find me on Instagram, Twitter, as well as Luchagore Productions. You can easily find us on Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook, and I'll be posting tons of cool stuff coming up, so definitely follow me there and stay tuned.

00:43:30	April	Host	Awesome, thank you so much, Gigi.
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00:43:32	Gigi	Guest	Thank you so much!
00:43:34	April	Host	And now for my chat with the artistic director of Indie Memphis Film Festival, Miriam Bale.
00:43:38	Music	Transition	“Switchblade Comb” by Mobius VanChocStraw.
00:43:42	April	Host	I wanted to have a special experience for listeners today, so we're having a call-in guest to do a little interview with us. We have Miriam Bale on the line, who is a film writer and also the artistic director of Indie Memphis Film Festival. Hi, Miriam!
00:43:56	Miriam Bale	Guest	Hi April, how are you?
00:43:58	April	Host	Wonderful. One of the things that we wanted to talk to you today about is the idea of working on these smaller kind of regional film festivals, and what that means to the ecosystem of the community. Can you talk a little bit about your experience at Indie Memphis?
00:44:13	Miriam	Guest	Sure. I am in a really unique place at a regional film festival in Memphis, because Memphis is just such a special and strange and wonderful, and obviously has this long creative history, especially in music. Um, so for what I do at Indie Memphis, I am really inspired by this city. I've been to other regional fests, and they could be, like, almost anywhere. You know? There's a sort of, what's played at other major festivals, and then they come to the cities to, um—these smaller cities, and that's important. That's important to get these screened. But, for me, the—it's—when I visited those, it, again, feels like it could be anywhere. In Memphis, it's, like—just—I mean, I just—you have to go.

[April laughs.]

Anyone who hasn't been should go, because it's got this—we had Jim Jarmusch there this year, and he wrote *Mystery Train* before he had been to Memphis, just inspired. And he hadn't been back since he made it, and he was talking about how he went to, you know, Beatle street, and it was all touristic, and you know, kinda sad. But it's got these musical notes on the pavement, like the stars on Hollywood boulevard, and he was talking about how you just still feel the ghosts of these musicians, and that they're everywhere there.

And he said—he said in this conversation that the funny thing about ghosts is you can't kill them, because they're ghosts. They're just always there.

And so there's that—there's obviously that wonderful history there, but also Memphis is a Black city. It's always been a historically Black city, and so I'm Black, I'm half Ethiopian, and so when I came to the—I'm from California—but when I came to work at the festival, a big mission was to make the film festival feel more like Memphis, both in its craziness, and excitement, and creativity, but also in being really strongly diverse, and really a Black film festival.

00:46:47	April	Host	I mean as an artistic director, I mean, that's something that you do
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have a little bit of control over. I know that even this past year, you guys had the festival very recently in October—at the end of October. And I think that I saw so many specifically African-American film critics, or people who are just fans who were going to your festival and talking about it. And it seemed like a different kind of experience than what I usually see at different film festivals, you know?

For instance, you are one person who has often called out Cannes for being not inclusive of asking African-American critics to even attend.

00:47:32 Miriam Guest Yeah, I mean Cannes is an extreme example. I was there, and they played the latest Spike Lee film. I did a callout asking for other African-American critics, and found like one person, which is not great for reviewing a new Spike Lee movie. And that's obviously—it's a problem in the states, too. Cannes is so far behind that they—there's so much radical work to do.

But, other festivals, they're trying really hard. It sometimes—those festivals that—it gets even a little bit more, um, tricky. Because, there are a lot of festivals now who are promoting diversity, but what that often means is—you know, I'm sure you've seen a Women in Film panel, or they'll have—they'll bring, you know, a token Black person on a panel, talking about things. And, it's just not very fun, and it just feels a bit like a hamster wheel. That kind of, like, not real progress is being made, even though the intentions are there.

So, what we've tended to do is, just, invite very—invite you know, don't invite—sadly, I like straight white men quite a lot, but I just don't invite many to the festival. I just I feel like they're represented enough, and invite a lot of other people, and when there's that many um, people of color, critics and filmmakers, it's great because they don't have to talk about diversity. They can just, like, talk about film, and talk about art, and um—

00:49:28 April Host So it's a relief, in a way.

00:49:30 Miriam Guest Yeah, it's just—it's um, I feel like it's how it should be. It just is—it's weird, April, because it gives people a chance to like—often times when you have a token person of color, that person has to represent their race. And, like, everybody is so different, and one of the people that was in this conference we do called the Black Creators Forum, and I don't have to speak *for* Black people when I'm talking *to* Black people. And, so we let people just kind of be their own weird selves, instead of having to represent their race or gender. And, so you're right, it is a relief, and it's also just a chance for people—it's a different kind of diversity, I think.

00:50:27 April Host Yeah. Going back to something that you were talking about with Jim Jarmusch coming to your festival talking about ghosts. I know that you had a kind of semi-formal focus on some kind of ghost stories within the last festival lineup of genre films. Can you talk a little bit about the role of genre films in your festival and in—or festivals in general and how this kind of came about?

00:50:55 Miriam Guest Sure. Um, part of this was accidental, as the timing. Halloween

happened to fall during our festival, so of course we had to do something. And it happened to fall when we were doing our Black Creators Forum, so we played the wonderful documentary *Horror Noire*, and then we played a film featured in that, *Blacula*. We also played a new kind of ghostly horror film, *In Fabric*.

And so we had this very Halloween theme, on October 31st. But, the other thing that was kind of accidental. We have—every year we have a retrospective of a kind of indie hero. We've had Abel Ferrara, and Hong Sang-soo, and this year, we had a filmmaker who's a little bit less known named Sarah Driver. And she's actually the partner of Jim Jarmusch. But having them both there was kind of coincidental. Um, and I love her work. I discovered an anthology a few years ago, and basically brought the retrospective that they did, including two ghost films that she chose, *Cat People*, and *Kuroneko*. I think I said that right. And—I hope I didn't—

[April laughs.]

And we, you know, and the thing about her films is they're so strange and weird and cool, and they're all kind of ghost films, some more explicitly ghost films. Like this movie called *When Pigs Fly*, from the 90's, with Marianne Faithfull as a barmaid ghost who kind of rescues a jazz musician. And um, this other film she made called *Sleepwalk*, which I think is a masterpiece.

00:52:58 Miriam Guest

And, it's so strange, it's almost hard to describe, but, they—a lot of her films are especially about the ghost of city life, you know? Like, you know, when you're in a city, you're in not just the space of so many people, but so much history in every space. And her films are really about that, but they're also about, sort of technically and stylistically, sort of, how film itself like, projection.

Especially the old school, like, topper ghost film style. Like, it's just, like a—that's what a ghost is, it's a projection. It's someone that—it's a person that both is there and not there, and it's just—they don't exist. And that's what all of film is. And her film really taps into that. She's also really influenced by, um, Jacques Rousset. Her films are so good, and I really hope more people will see them. They're not—I don't think they're available on streaming, but there's a DVD.

And the interesting thing in having both of them there, like, we had Jim Jarmusch do the ghost of Elvis is in *Mystery Train*, and there's like—we had his latest film too, the *Don't Die*, which is a zombie film, and before that was a vampire film, but in these kind of cheeky ways.

I probably shouldn't say this on the record, but I feel like you can feel Jarmusch's influence on Sarah Driver in some ways, and by this like very specific ghostly kind of style that she has. Um, so yeah, it really was influenced by her, but then it just came up in other things, we also had the new Maddie Diep film, *Atlantique*, which is also a ghost film. And, um, yeah. For genre, I'm kind of a scaredy cat, I'm definitely a watch between my fingers kind of person, but—*[Laughs.]*

I'm a bit of a—I'm not an expert there, but um, I love—I just can't get enough of ghost films, and Memphis is a city of ghosts.

00:55:27 April Host Uh, Miriam, I want to thank you so much for coming on and talking to me today about what you're doing at Indie Memphis, and how can people find you, and find the film festival?

00:55:37 Miriam Guest Um, the film festival, um, is online, Indie Memphis, I think it's just IndieMemphis.com. I am on Twitter @mimbale, um often—I've posted my favorite ghost films before, and probably will again. And um, yeah, it was so nice to talk to you, April, thanks so much.

00:56:00 Music Transition "Switchblade Comb" by Mobius VanChocStraw.

00:56:01 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.

Please check out our Facebook group. That's Facebook.com/groups/switchbladesisters.

Our producer is Casey O'Brien. Our senior producer is Laura Swisher, and this is a production of MaximumFun.org.

[Music fades.]

00:56:30 Clip Clip **Money:** ... some preppy girl a few years ago ran over this guy's daughter.

Rocky: Jesus.

00:56:35 Speaker 1 Promo MaximumFun.org.

00:56:37 Speaker 2 Promo Comedy and culture.

00:56:38 Speaker 3 Promo Artist owned—

00:56:39 Speaker 4 Promo —Audience supported.