

00:00:00 Music Transition “Switchblade Comb” by Mobius VanChocStraw. A jaunty, jazzy tune reminiscent of the opening theme of a movie. Music continues at a lower volume as April introduces herself and her guest, and then it fades out.

00:00:08 April Wolfe Host Welcome to *Switchblade Sisters*, where women get together to slice and dice our favorite action and genre films. I’m April Wolfe. Every week, I invite a new female filmmaker on. A writer, director, actor, or producer, and we talk—in depth—about one of their fave genre films. Perhaps one that’s influenced their own work in some small way.

And as you may already know if you’ve been listening to this show, for the past couple of months, we are remote recording, we’re not in the studio anymore. Um, I’m in my bedroom. Again, you might hear Chicken, she is asleep at the moment, we’ll see what happens. Parents just left. Not sure what will happen with that, either. Um audio is just a little bit different.

But, we’re very excited to have speaking over any parents and any cats, our special guest all the way from Australia, we’re excited to have writer/director Natalie Erika James with us. Hi!

00:00:56 Natalie Erika James Guest Hi! Thanks so much for having me.

00:00:58 April Host So, for those of you who would like a little refresher on Natalie’s career, let me give you her life. Um, Natalie Erika James is a Japanese/Australian writer, director, and producer, born in the U.S.A. and based in Melbourne, Australia.

For a long while, she worked as an assistant director and producer, and a director of music videos. But in 2016, a short she wrote and directed, *Creswick*, premiered at the Melbourne international film festival, and has gone on to screen at 50+ festivals, including New York Film Festival, Fantastic Fest, Fantasia, and the Atlanta Film Festival. Putting her narrative work on the map is what that did. Um, *Creswick* was also awarded the 2017—Is it AWGIE, or do you guys say it like, “Augies”?

00:01:41 Natalie Guest Aw-ghees, it is.

00:01:42 April Host You say it Augie? Okay.

[They both laugh briefly. April pronounces AWGIE phonetically, from here.]

It was awarded the 2017 AWGIE award for best short form screenplay by the Australian Writer’s Guild. In early 2017, Natalie was awarded a Film Victoria funded director’s attachment on Leigh Whannell’s sci-fi thriller, *Upgrade*. A fabulous film, and I’m sure that was probably an amazing experience, too.

[Natalie agrees.]

Hopefully we can hear some more about that. Uh, her next project,

a short called *Drum Wave*, was funded by the highly competitive Screen Australia Hot Shots Plus fund, for both development and proof of concept short film. Her day job is directing commercials and music videos through Melbourne production company, Fiction, for which she also won an Australian music video of the year award at the 2015 Triple-J awards.

But, it is Natalie's debut feature film, *Relic*, that had everyone talking at the film's Sundance premiere this year in 2020. The story is an extension of *Creswick*, I believe, isn't it?

00:02:37 Natalie Guest

Different story, but yeah, similar themes, yeah.

00:02:40 April Host

So, it's following a woman played by Emily Mortimer, whose senile mother may or may not be infected by a malevolent being in the house. And I don't want to give too much away, but there is a "is she-isn't she" kind of thing, and then also a family drama of grief and strangeness, of how to deal with this person who doesn't seem like you know them anymore, or that they know you.

Um, so, Natalie, the movie that you chose to talk about today is *Thirst*. Uh, can you give us a little explanation on why this is one of your fave genre films?

00:03:17 Natalie Guest

Yeah, I actually, um, I saw *Thirst* when I was at film school back in 2009, at the Elven International Film Festival. And, it kind of just blew me away, and I quickly—I think it was the first film of Park Chan-wook's that I'd seen, and I quickly kind of just consumed his whole, you know, library.

But, I love in this film, how masterfully he balances tone, and how there is such a comedic, absurd edge to this really disturbing psychological horror. Um, and also an erotic kind of, romantic element as well. So, yeah, I uh, I really admire the way that he can maneuver through these different tones and balance them so seamlessly.

00:04:04 April Host

Yeah, and we'll definitely talk a lot about that, his thoughts and how'd he do that, and why he did it. Um, for those of you who haven't seen *Thirst*, today's episode will give you some spoilers. Obviously, that shouldn't stop you from listening before you watch. My motto is not that it's what happens, but how it happens, that makes the movie worth watching, but still. If you would like to pause and watch *Thirst*, this is your shot.

00:04:23 Music Music

"Thirst Cantata" by Johann Sebastian Bach, performed by Yong Jung-Min and Cho Young-Wuk.

00:04:25 April Host

And now that you're back, let me introduce it with a quick synopsis, just to remind you what you just saw. Written by Jeong Seo-kyeong, and Park Chan-wook, and directed by Park for release in 2009, *Thirst* stars Song Kang-ho—everyone's beloved, beloved favorite Korean actor at this point, I think, right now—as Sang-hyun, a Catholic priest who volunteers at a hospital, and who sacrifices himself for a medical experiment to test out possible cures for a terrible disease. On his deathbed, he's given a blood transfusion, which wakes him from the dead, and seemingly cures him.

Upon his return, everyone begins worshipping at the altar of Sang-hyun, asking him to cure their ailments. He's the special guy, the only one to survive out of 50 or 500, depending on who you ask. One such person is an old friend from Busan, who has cancer, and whom we'll call "The Idiot". Sang-hyun goes to The Idiot's house for dinner with his mother, and wife Tae-ju, played by Kim Ok-bin, who a lot of our listeners will probably remember also from *Villainous*, which is, I think, a very big favorite of a lot of our listeners.

And that visit sparks memories from Sang-hyun's time in an orphanage as a child. So, Tae-ju was also orphaned, and taken in by The Idiot's mother when she was a kid, but simply became their family slave, and then ended up marrying The Idiot. So she went from sister, to wife. Pretty gross. Um, Sang-hyun feels something weird. Suddenly this priest, he's attracted to Tae-Ju, and then later finds he has to hide in his wardrobe from his sensitivity to sunlight. Turns out, that blood he got was vampire blood. He begins drinking blood from patients at the hospital. Not too bad. Sang-hyun and Tae-ju make passionate love with lots of bites, but she runs in fear when he reveals that he's a vampire.

00:06:21 April Host

Eventually, she does come around, wondering what life could be like with the powers that Sang-hyun has. Sang-hyun notices she has stab wounds on her thighs, and Tae-ju blames them on The Idiot, and offers that, hey, maybe they should kill him, and then just be together. On a night fishing trip, Sang-hyun drags The Idiot to the bottom of a lake, and traps him in a house down there, with a rock over a door, or something he's in.

After, The Idiot's spirit will not let them alone in a series of comedic and terrible, terrifying moments, where even making love, he is there with them. And then Tae-ju reveals she lied about The Idiot abusing her. Sang-hyun then kills Tae-ju for betrayal. But, he quickly transforms her into a vampire, because he doesn't want to be alone for the rest of his eternal life. The Idiot's mother, now in a psychosomatic coma, watches all of it.

When the couple have guests over for dinner, the mother is able to signal that the couple killed her son. And when they're found out, Tae-ju goes on a stylized violent murder spree through their bright, white house. Sang-hyun then decides it's time for them to leave. They pack up and drive, but Tae-ju wakes to find they're in the middle of nowhere, with no place to hide from the inevitable sunrise. So, Tae-ju desperately tries to make a way to hide from the sun, while Sang-hyun systematically removes all possibility of survival, until they must succumb to their deaths in each other's arms, in a very beautiful, and fitting ending, that is also kind of funny.

00:07:56 April Host

Um, so, that's the movie, uh, it's real hard to describe, as many of these movies are. But this one in particular has so many hard left turns that you're like, "What am I just watching? That is not at all what I expected to happen." It takes a lot of risks with the narrative. Um, but I want to begin with the fact that this is a movie that had started off in Park Chan-wook's brain ten years earlier.

Um, and he said, quote: “Although I’d say that this has been a film ten years in the making, I’ve not necessarily spent all those ten years making the film, of course. At the beginning, I didn’t think of it as something very serious, I didn’t give it that much of a thought. One night, I thought of the idea of a vampire film, and I just wrote it down on a couple of bits of paper.” End quote.

I think that’s, maybe, where a lot of filmmakers start. It’s just, like, having a kernel of an idea, and then realizing that they can’t do it right now. They have to put it aside, it’s not ready, it has to kind of percolate for a little while. And I think this is—I mean, this movie is all the better for it, and we’ll get a little bit further into that process. Because, he didn’t make a vampire movie in the way that we see vampire movies whatsoever. It’s very different.

[Natalie agrees.]

Yeah, and it starts its own kind of lore, of vampire. And, I was hoping we’d talk a little bit about that process, of realizing a story is not yet ready to tell.

00:09:20 Natalie Guest

Yeah, and sometimes it—I feel like when you write a film, it always relates to the issues that you’re grappling with in your own life. Um. and so, sometimes certain issues become more pressing.

Um, for example, I’m working on another—a new project that I actually started writing for *Relic*, and that was a really simple idea about a woman who’s terrified by even the physical idea of pregnancy, and also the identity of becoming a mother. And, who marries into this island where they worship a fertility goddess.

[April hums assent.]

So that was an idea I had way back when I was 22, or something like that. And now, 8 years later, I’m writing that now. So, I feel like, maybe just because of how my schedule’s worked out, but also because I’ve just hit 30 as well, so now, the question of motherhood is suddenly more pressing. Um, so yeah, I’m sure that’s a consideration as well.

00:10:21 April Host

Yeah, all of a sudden, it switches, and you’re like, “Well, I guess this is what I should be doing right now.”

[Natalie agrees.]

You know, in the interest of, like, Park Chan-wook and his personal life, he did—he was raised Catholic, and was raised very Catholic. And um, he talks about the idea with spirituality that he came to a decision when he was an adult when he was like, “Oh, I don’t have to be Catholic if I don’t want to.” And he’s just like, “It’s fine if anyone wants to be,” And he’s just like, “I’m just not anymore.”

And it was like, a weird decision to understand that he could say that he didn’t want to be anymore. And I think that some of that kind of stuff plays into that personal bleeding into this weird story about a vampire, and a priest who realizes, “Maybe I’m just gonna make this

choice, I'm not Catholic anymore.”

[April trails off laughing.]

00:11:09 Natalie Guest

Yeah! Yeah, no, it's a total identity crisis, isn't it?

00:11:13 April Host

I want to talk about the way that Park Chan-wook approaches creating dynamic characters, and characters that are appropriate for a story that moves the story along. Um, and in terms of, specifically giving them a moral problem that dissects their entire being.

Um, because he said, quote: “Here is one identity by which its very existence can be looked at as evil. A vampire, who takes other people's blood in order to survive. On the other hand is the priest, which by the very meaning of the vocation, is a vocation where you devote your life to others. Living your life in service of others. Between these two identities, there is a huge ethical gap. The huge moral chasm. You have the moral height of being this noble priest, and the moral downfall to where you become a vampire, taking another's blood. It's such a height to take such a fall, and on the way down, there are bigger scares and more thrills that you have to go to, that there is a bigger sense of vertigo that you feel.” End quote.

So, he's talking about, like, I mean, no one can accuse Park Chan-wook of not just diving in and giving it everything, and just like, whole kitchen sink of just like, “Oh, well let's make it the extreme.” So the extreme, for him, is what he's gravitating towards for the character. There's not really much subtlety, I would say, in those choices. Where it's just like, a priest becomes a vampire, and there are so many parallels of like, drinking blood that the priest does, that like—

[Natalie agrees.]

—you know, that kind of thing. So, uh, I think that's his process in general, is to challenge those characters with the exact epitome of what would dissect their entire being. And, I know that there's more subtle ways to approach character building. But I'm curious how you see that, if you've ever kind of approached in the same way, or if you're a little bit more careful about that.

00:13:07 Natalie Guest

Yeah, I would say it was a little bit different for *Relic*, but, certainly in the one of the scripts I'm writing in the moment. Uh, as I mentioned in the idea of someone's biggest fear becoming their reality, and kind of building a character around that, I think that, um, is something that I'm kind of exploring in this current script. You know, with this kind of fear of motherhood, and then being, kind of, thrust into this environment where motherhood is the expectation, and the character actually ends up, through a bunch of mysterious means, falling pregnant herself, so having to confront that fear in a really visceral and intense way.

00:13:53 April Host

That is very Park Chan-wook! That is like, yeah, alright!

[They both laugh.]

00:13:58 Natalie Guest Yeah, well, I would say this film in particular, as well, has more of an ensemble cast, and toes the line between having—straddling a few different tones. So, yeah, he’s clearly... I’ve only just realized through this podcast that he’s been such a massive influence on me, but uh—

00:14:20 April Host He’s on your mind!

00:14:21 Natalie Guest Yeah, yeah, absolutely.

00:14:24 April Host I mean, are you—if you’re thinking about those characters, I mean, do you ever do, like, diagram sketches of a character, and you know, just write it out for yourself of like, “Here’s this person, this is their greatest fear, this is their greatest achievement.” Like, those kinds of things to break it down for yourself?

00:14:38 Natalie Guest Yeah, sometimes we do like—because I have a co-writer, so we are often in the room together plotting out at least—plotting out the plot points in the script, and stuff. And, sometimes we’ll have what’s happening—you can see my kind of pages behind me—

00:14:57 April Host Oh, yeah! It’s like a wall.

00:15:00 Natalie Guest —externally, uh, the plot points above the line. And so we’ll just divide the page into half, and it’ll spread across the whole wall. And then underneath, what’s happening to the character emotionally, as well. And so, we kind of plot out the characters, or at least the protagonists, in terms of what emotional points they’re hitting, so maybe someone’s going from like, hate to love, and what are the emotional points that you hit to get to that point. And what causes that change in the character, so.

[April assents.]

Yeah, we do do kind of some visualizations like that. Definitely.

00:15:34 April Host I uh, I think we’re gonna take a quick break. When we come back, we’re gonna talk a little bit more *Thirst*, and a lot more of Natalie’s other projects, so, we’ll be right back.

00:15:44 Music Transition “Switchblade Comb” by Mobius VanChocStraw.

00:15:49 Promo Promo **Music:** Inspiring music throughout.

[The “testimonials” clip between different VOs. They are not talking to one another.]

Speaker 1: I started listening to *Oh No Ross and Carrie* shortly after I broke my arm and the doctor had told me I’d never walk again.

Speaker 2: I was allergic to water.

Speaker 3: *[Ashamed]* Addicted to wheatgrass.

Speaker 2: I knew it was time to make a change.

[Music swells hopefully, to a dramatic crescendo]

Speaker 4: There's something about *Oh No Ross and Carrie* that you just can't get anywhere else.

Speaker 1: They're thought-leaders, discoverers, founders.

Speaker 2: Healers.

Speaker 3: Luminaries.

Speaker 5: Ross and Carrie don't just report on fringe science, spirituality, and claims of the paranormal. They take part themselves.

Speaker 6: They show up, so you don't have to.

Speaker 2: But you might find that you want to.

[Music swells unbearably]

Speaker 1: My arm is better. I can walk again.

Speaker 3: *[Choking up]* Six months, no wheatgrass.

Speaker 7: Just go to MaximumFun.org.

Everyone: Thank you, Ross and Carrie!

Carrie Poppy: *[Hurriedly]* *Oh No Ross and Carrie* is just a podcast. It doesn't do anything. It's just sounds you listen to in your ears. All these people are made up. Goodbye.

00:16:41	Music	Transition	"Switchblade Comb" by Mobius VanChocStraw.
00:16:47	April	Host	Welcome back to <i>Switchblade Sisters</i> , I'm April Wolf, and I'm joined today from Australia by Natalie Erika James, and we're talking about <i>Thirst</i> .

So, um, let's get into some of the stuff that directors have to deal with on set. Certain approaches, things like that, directing actors, all that. Because, for Park Chan-wook, really the only uncontrollable variable in the way that he makes his films are the actors. Everything else is very controlled.

He said, quote: "I thoroughly prepare storyboards. In fact, I prepare a storyboard for an entire film from start to finish. This is a means of controlling my production as much as I can. I try to plan ahead as much as I can from the earliest pre-production stages. However, an actor's performance is the only element that cannot be calculated

one hundred percent. Often your film will depend upon your actor's performance, ability, and passion. Amid all these things that I've predicted and prepared for and the plans I've set in place, the only thing that still holds an element of surprise is an actor's performance. It's by always being ready to be surprised by an actor's performance that I'm still able to be tense during a film shoot.

"If it weren't for that variable, shooting film would be a boring process where everything is predictable and everything goes according to plan. Just for the sake of argument and not because I think directors are God, but if directors were God, would this God prefer a world where every human acts in accordance with his will, or would this God find it more interesting to watch over a world where humans are given free will with which to act?" End quote.

I love the way that he—that he talks and answers these questions. He turns into the Catholic priest.

[Natalie laughs.]

He just—he just gave like a little sermon.

00:18:27 Natalie Guest

So true.

[Both laugh.]

Love it. We're all a bit uh, um, we're all kind of control freaks, directors, I think. Um, yeah that's really fascinating. I would say I'm quite similar in that I love to plan, and have a plan A and a plan B.

Though I will say for *Relic*, I certainly, um, you know, it's a step up, going from directing shorts and commercials to doing a hour and a half long film. So just because of all the moving parts, a lot of stuff that we had planned kind of fell to the wayside, and I had to kind of embrace improvisation a lot more than I would usually do. But that was quite gratifying in its own way.

In terms of actors, apparently I am very demanding, which I didn't realize myself because you know, you just—

00:19:19 April Host

Oh, really?

00:19:20 Natalie Guest

Yeah, yeah. When we were doing press for Sundance, um, all three of them were kind of in a nice way, just saying you know, "She's very particular with what she wants." Um, which is a surprise to me. I always feel like it's um, you kind of nudge a performance in the way that you think. But it's always a collaboration as well, um, I do go for quite a few takes. Not unreasonably, not like weirdly, but um—

00:19:49 April Host

How many takes?

00:19:50 Natalie Guest

Uh, it depends on the shot of course, but maybe five to nine kind of range, yeah.

00:19:57 April Host

[Natalie affirms multiple times while April speaks.]

Which might be slightly more for indie film kind of thing, because you know, people are so used to being like, “Okay, we’re like, we gotta go, we gotta go.” Like, you’re lucky if you get five kind of thing.

00:20:06 Natalie Guest

Yeah, these are for more me to use scenes as well, not just you know, turn—like walking across the hallway.

[April affirms and laughs.]

Um, so yeah, but apparently very particular in terms of, yeah, the angle of holding something as well for certain horror movies. Like, Edna’s walking down the hallway with a knife, and um, stuff like that. So, yeah, and I always like to kind of—if we have the time, which we often don’t—um, give them one where they can kind of just do whatever they want as well.

00:20:44 April Host

Are you—are you sharing your—your storyboards with all of your actors as well? Do they—

00:20:50 Natalie Guest

Generally not. We—we didn’t storyboard all of *Relic*. I kind of just do rough sketches, and I’d be embarrassed if that was handed around the crew, cast, to be honest.

[Both laugh.]

But uh, but we did storyboard, you know, with an artist, all the uh, the more action stunt heavily the effects prosthetic sequences, so.

00:21:15 April Host

Yeah. That’s pretty needed. I mean, because essentially you’re just trying to get everyone on the same page, but at least with the actors you can, you know, put them where you need them to be. *[Laughs.]*

00:21:25 Natalie Guest

Yes, yeah.

00:21:27 April Host

Like little dolls. Um, I want to talk about how Park Chan-wook uh, never takes the easy way out in his movies, when he’s writing them or directing them. There were easy outs that he could have had with this movie, and he said, “No, I’m not gonna do the vampire trope.”

But he said, quote: “I first visualized that moment of realization of when he understands he’s a vampire as taking place in the bathroom, where Sang-hyun would catch his reflection in the mirror and realize what he was actually doing. But I didn’t actually like using this device of the mirror, because it was the easy way out. Anyone could think of using a mirror in this situation. I felt the character, the mother-in-law, um, Lady Ra could stand in for the mirror. Rather than use the actual mirror in the bathroom, I could use her observing eyes. When Sang-hyun’s eyes meet hers during this scene, reflecting her shock and horror, he realizes what he’s doing. As an audience member, you might consider this a minor detail, but for a filmmaker like me, it’s possibly one of the most important decisions made making this film.” End quote.

So, that’s a big thing. We’re talking about reveals. First off, I mean in a horror film or magic, realism, any of this, you don’t want the reveals to be exposition first off. Like, you need to have it be like,

the characters coming to a realization through something visually. So, it has to be there. Again, the mirror is the easiest way to do it, that's the way we've seen most often. Um, but for him, he'd rather use a human prop essentially, you know? Like, this is—like, use your characters. Like you don't always have to have like, an object. It can be reflected back in someone else.

I think a lot of films we see like, where uh, a child comes to a realization, and through a child's realization, them acting as a mirror helps and helps a character understand what's going on. But I'm curious about the moment of realization in any kind of genre film, because there is one. There's a thing where you realize what's happening and your characters accept it and understand it and then have to carry on from there. But how do you even devise that, um, in a creative sense?

00:23:47 Natalie Guest

Yeah, we definitely tried to. Uh, for example, when Bella's character, Sam, discovers the labyrinth in the house, we consciously, in the writing of it, we're trying to make it feel the most realistic, I supposed, you know, the closest to how someone would react in real life. And there's always that uh, I suppose the cliché of, you know, "Turn on the lights!" or, "Don't go in there!" when you're watching a horror film, and there's a murderer upstairs.

So we were consciously kind of going, okay, let's create a space in which you can turn on lights so that you would realistically explore further. Because I always put myself in the position of the characters and think, "Would I do that?" And if not, then it's probably—it's probably not gonna track. Um, so yeah, and then you know, Sam's character—Bella's character kind of bails as soon as she hits something that's kind of uh, really unsettling, and just kind of says "fuck this" and leaves.

So it's a consideration for sure, um, in what your characters are willing to accept, and um, you know, it was a great exercise for us though, because I think so much of the film is about shifting perspectives, and it kind of mirrors what—when you are with someone who suffers from alzheimer's or is going through dementia, and their ability to um, uh remember and you know, their kind of logic and comprehension is degrading, uh, your normal quickly shifts.

So you kind of start to accept, "Okay, this is the new normal, this is the way things are." Um, and it's this kind of downward slide into something much scarier if you were—if you were to take a step back and look at it. So, we tried to kind of reveal the horror slowly in the same way, until it's almost too late for the characters, and they're trapped in this house.

00:25:51 April Host

Yeah, they're just trapped. *[Laughs.]*

I see that like, in a sense, you know, like I appreciate when a character says no to the supernatural first, instead of being like, "Yeah, I'm like, I'm all in!" Like, I appreciate that. And you know, because like if you look at Tae-ju in *Thirst*, she like, when he reveals that he's a vampire, he thinks that it's gonna be like, "Oh, it's so

romantic!” And like, as an audience member, I’m like, “Oh, it’s so romantic!” And she’s like, “Fuck that!”

[Natalie agrees heartily.]

“You’re drinking this guy’s blood! I’m so freaked out, I’m getting the fuck out of here!”

00:26:24 Natalie Guest A hundred percent.

00:26:25 Music Transition “Switchblade Comb” by Mobius VanChocStraw.

00:26:26 April Host And um, yeah, and there’s like a realism to the fact that like, she’s like, about to fight him, you know, like, over the toilet to get the fuck out of this house. So, I understand these things.

Um, we’re gonna take a quick break. When we come back, we’ll talk some more *Thirst*.

[Music ends.]

00:26:45 Promo Promo **Speaker 1:** I listen to *Reading Glasses* because Brea and Mallory have great tips.

Speaker 2: My suggestion for book festivals is just go for one day.

Speaker 3: I listen for the author interviews.

Speaker 4: I was a huge Goosebumps fan.

Brea/Mallory: Yes!

Speaker 4: R.L. Stein was totally my jam!

Speaker 5: I don’t even read. I just like their chemistry together.

[Clip from an episode plays]

Mallory: Literally if on the back it said like, “this book made me shit my pants,” I’d be like, “That’s—I’m buying this book.”

Brea: Yeah.

Mallory: Like, I think the problem with blurbs a lot of times—

Brea: I like that we both want to crap ourselves over books.

[Clip ends]

Brea: I’m Brea Grant.

Mallory: And I’m Mallory O’Meara.

Brea: We’re *Reading Glasses* and we solve all your bookish problems every Thursday on Maximum Fun.

00:27:22 Music Transition “Switchblade Comb” by Mobius VanChocStraw.

00:27:28 April Host Welcome back to *Switchblade Sisters*. I'm April Wolfe, and I'm joined today by Natalie Erika James, and we're talking about *Thirst*.

Um, so something that Park Chan-wook really enjoys with his characters that he got to do a lot in this movie is confining them as much as possible. He said, quote: "The movie is not in a single room, but in a single house. In *Thirst*, incarceration is psychological rather than physical. I like the motif of incarceration. That's because these places are miniaturized universes. These are the spaces where existential circumstances that people face are more clearly revealed. Also, it saves on the budget to shoot on sets like these." End quote.

Um, I appreciate that at the end of a lot of his interview answers, he—

00:28:13 Natalie Guest —re-sums with like, tongue in cheek kind of thing. Yeah. He's great.

00:28:15 April Host Yeah, there's like, philosophical long, and then he's just like, "I dunno, she was hot!"

[Both laugh.]

Like, we—

00:28:21 Natalie Guest Like his films, right?

00:28:23 April Host Exactly! That's so wonderful. But he, you know, I can see that it's a kind of theme in a—more than one of his movies, that there is a kind of incarceral or um, claustrophobic sense to these people, in that trying to you know, escape these things, it reveals all of their fears, desires, all of that.

And so, he's continued doing it, and he will continue doing it. And I was thinking about that in terms of your film and people who are also trapped in a house, and just the way that like, if you are trapped in close proximity with family, or a lover, or anyone else, then things fall apart very quickly. Which we are seeing right now in quarantine.

00:29:07 Natalie Guest Yes, no doubt, um, yeah it's an interesting one. I—there's obviously an element in the film, this labyrinth, uh, which one of the characters gets physically trapped in, and that idea came from, um, I think it was a documentary I saw about a guy who had Alzheimer's describing how he would often get lost within his own house. And so for us it was, um, yeah, trying to, I guess, physicalize that idea through this never ending uh, series of hallways that, yeah grew into the house.

And so, there's a physical element to it but then I think there's also a sense in *Relic* that the characters are trapped in the house because of their connection to Edna. And you know the love that they have for her and um there is no escape when, you know, you have a loved one who's declining like that.

And no matter how scary and how aggressive or how much they act out, it's, it's kind of—I guess the final moment of the film kind of

underlines how you, you can't do anything but sit, you know, be with them. And it's not something you can cast aside, so yeah, there is a sense of being trapped in multiple ways.

00:30:30 April Host

Yeah, love is a trap.

[Both laugh.]

I mean, I know if I look in *Thirst*, you know, like, there's that scene where Tae-ju goes on that rampage and just starts murdering everyone, and like the painted white house, and he's just like—like, Sang-hyun is just like, “I—ugh, fuck I do not want to do this.”

00:30:48 Natalie Guest

Yeah, yeah, and that music plays!

00:30:50 April Host

Ugh, and it's just, it's the thing that he can't escape, because it's—he is immortal and now he's got only one other person who is immortal with him and it just happens to be this psycho, that he, he did not know how psycho she was but—

[Natalie agrees.]

—it's like his one true love, you know.

00:31:09 Natalie Guest

Yeah, it's amazing how you can kind of revel in her emancipation as well though.

[April agrees.]

It's—there's—there's such a joy to it too, even though yeah, you're almost having to like confront your own morality through it.

00:31:24 April Host

[Natalie affirms multiple times as April speaks.]

Oh yeah, oh yeah, um, uh, I do want to get into humor, something you brought up earlier and something that was really important to this film. Um, and something that was really frustrating for Park Chan-wook in terms of the marketing of this movie. Because a lot of people didn't realise it was going to be funny, didn't know that they could laugh in the theater, and that was really hard for him.

And he said, quote: “Despite the posters and trailers that give off a certain vibe, I wanted to emphasize that this film has quite a sense of humor as well. Song Kang-ho's role, *The Priest*, is an especially sincere one. The character is very earnest in his emotions and actions, but some find him very pathetic or laughable when looking at him objectively. And this is the important part, because whether one can laugh while watching this movie or not is really about what kind of preconceived notions did you have in watching it in the first place.” End quote.

Um, and I think that gets into something that is maybe a larger idea, especially when it comes to genre cinema, is uh, what do genre cinema fans want to see in theater. Like within, for instance, a horror film. So if your movie is built as a horror film and it's built out in that sense, and you play all at midnights and the posters are scary and all that, but it happens to be also, um, moving and

romantic and funny, you know, how—how are you going to reach the right audiences and get them to know that they can, for instance, laugh, um, at your movie.

You know, they can find things funny. I was thinking about that in the terms of Ari Aster too, in the way he like—his films were like not seen as funny but I was just like, he's a very funny man and a very funny writer.

00:33:05 Natalie Guest Yeah, yeah, absolutely. I think um, yeah, it's a really int—it's a tricky, uh, problem. And interestingly with *Relic*, it's not a comedy in any way. There's no, you know, funny scenes. But I have to say when I've watched it with people, I've laughed, at least, at certain... And, you know, Emily and I have talked about this a lot, actually that uh, um, it's almost so extreme that you can't help but laugh, because, you know, how else are you supposed to respond.

It's like this weird—'cause, so much of the film is so somber, and so then when you have these kind of really violent or extreme moments, I think—I think yeah, it's just a weird human response to be able to kind of appreciate it in the arena that it's in, you know, in the cinema.

Something like that. But yeah, um, I'm not sure what the answer is to how to manage audience expectation, 'cause yeah, certainly *Relic* is very much a slow burn horror. And there's, you know, real emotional kind of drama that's playing out in the—at the heart of it as well, um. But yeah, I think you just have to hope that you are true to what you're trying to say in the film, and that you don't pull your punches in the really genre moments. And then hopefully it comes together as this cohesive whole.

But certainly in the development of it, it's such a big consideration and something that, you know, people comment on a lot, when they're reading the script. And I found that in the States, consistently people were like, "Push the horror, make it scarier," and then weirdly in Australia, it was always like, "Reign it in, make it more about the drama." So, I don't know if it's a cultural thing as well.

00:34:57 April Host I guarantee it's probably a cultural thing as well, 'cause you know, a horror here, there's a kind of um, an expectation for U.S. horror, especially in mainstream, that you need to have a significant scare at least every ten pages.

[Natalie affirms multiple times.]

So, I mean, that's a very formulaic thing, but that's just kind of you know, the way the studios have decided that that's how it's going to be, because they don't want to lose a horror—a quote-unquote "horror audience", you know.

00:35:39 Natalie Guest Yeah, and I hear these days it's very based on um, algorithms as well, for streaming platforms. They can actually tell when people switch off the horror film, and so there's like a thing about, yeah, needing a big scare within the first twenty minutes, or whatever it is.

Um, so yeah. *[Laughs.]*

00:35:48 April Host That's great! I mean like, we are getting some amazing horror films outside of the U.S. just because there are fewer, I think, mathematical expectations on them, which is like, this number of pages and that. 'Cause you know, who would have thought that art didn't need to have restrictions? So, uh—*[Laughs.]*

00:36:07 Natalie Guest Totally. What a way to write a script, yeah.

[Both laugh.]

00:36:11 April Host It's super fun. And speaking of Hollywood and the U.S., um, a lot of people were asking Park Chan-wook why his film was titled *Bat* in Korea but is, you know, titled *Thirst* in the U.S., U.K. And he said, quote: "There is a Hollywood film titled *Bat*, which even had a sequel and was quite successful in the U.S. And there's this famous *Batman* series too, if you've heard of it. So I was concerned that these would give unnecessary preconceptions about the film." End quote.

I mean, that's a silly kind of thing to talk about, but also titling movies internationally is hilariously strange. Um, I always think of Nia DaCosta, who came on our show last year, and she had a movie called *Little Woods*, but had to change it for the U.K. release because apparently it's a clothing store.

00:37:01 Natalie Guest Oh, I didn't know that. How funny.

00:37:05 April Host Yeah. I understand what he's saying. Like, you don't want to have your movie have anything that symbol—that symbolizes another movie, or relates in some way, like in someone's brain.

00:37:16 Natalie Guest I mean, people—everyone thinks it's a remake of *The Relic*, the '97 film. I have to say, *The Relic*.

00:37:23 April Host So, does that—I mean, does that annoy you, or is that a thing that people suggested maybe you should change, or—

00:37:33 Natalie Guest Uh, not really. Oh, I did have one person say to me very early on, "Oh, you know, this is, you know, a monster film from the 90s." And I was like, "Oh, okay." I hadn't seen it then, so I was like, "Eh, don't worry about it." I have since seen it, but um, uh, no, I don't think—I think there's been enough time since the film was made that it's, yeah, it can be its own thing.

I think in terms of the title, it's been there from the beginning, strangely enough. Um, it's—I guess it relates to you know, Edna in a sense. Just her idea of a precious thing from another time. So, it relates to the character, and then in the film there's also a stained glass window which is the physical relic or the literal relic. So yeah, fuck it. It suits the film.

[Both laugh.]

00:38:26 April Host I mean, it is actually a little bit rare. Like, it's rare for a movie that was in development to stay with the same title, though, like throughout.

[Natalie affirms.]

But perhaps that speaks to having a control about knowing what the story was about early on, knowing how to distill that view.

00:38:42 Natalie Guest Yeah, I think so. It's incredible how much um, the story has changed, or the characters have changed, but the actual essence of the film has remained the same. And the ending is—I guess emotionally, hits the same note, just since its very first draft.

00:38:59 April Host Um, I want to thank you so much for coming on the show and talking about *Thirst* and your own movie, *Relic*. And can you tell people how and when they can see *Relic*?

00:39:10 Natalie Guest Yes. Um, *Relic* is being released July 10th, so it'll be on VOD in the States. It's on Stan in Australia streaming. And we're also doing an advanced run in drive-in theaters across the States from July 3rd as well, so please go on. Yeah.

00:39:30 April Host Awesome. Alright, thank you so much.

00:39:31 Music Transition "Switchblade Comb" by Mobius VanChocStraw.

00:39:32 Natalie Guest Thanks so much.

00:39:33 April Host And thank you so much for listening to *Switchblade Sisters*. We're gonna start doing something a little different. As you know, we are recommending a movie for you to watch after every episode. Something directed by a woman. And so, I'm trying to kind of theme these together from choices.

So, the movies that I wanted to recommend to you today are actually Jeong Ga-eun's decisive comedy, *Heart*, or Yi Ok-Seop's super surreal comic-melodrama, *Maggie*. But here's the problem: *Heart* and *Maggie*, god damn it, they're not available to watch outside of South Korea. It is very sad. It's very hard to get distribution, I think specifically also for uh, women-directed films.

But I will recommend Lee Kyoung-mi's dazzling sophomore feature, *The Truth Beneath*, which beat out both *The Handmaiden* and *The Wailing*, two films I absolutely fucking adore, for best director in Korea, and for good reason. Um, even though in international awards they just kind of decided that she didn't exist.

Anyway, the movie is actually co-written by Park Chan-wook. It's a tense murder mystery about a mother tracking down her daughter's killer, and I think probably the closest um, like, approximation to that that people might be aware of in the U.S. if they haven't seen the movie is Bong Joon-ho's *Mother*. Um, obviously very different styles, tones filmmaking, but there's some similarities in both of those movies. Um, so if you like Bong Joon-ho's *Mother*, maybe also try out uh, *The Truth Beneath*.

00:41:05 April Host So, 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](https://www.facebook.com/groups/switchbladesisters).

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

[Music fades.]

00:41:33	Speaker 1	Promo	MaximumFun.org .
00:41:35	Speaker 2	Promo	Comedy and culture.
00:41:36	Speaker 3	Promo	Artist owned—
00:41:37	Speaker 4	Promo	—Audience supported.