

00:00:00	April Wolfe	Host	<p>Hey, this is April, host of <i>Switchblade Sisters</i>, popping in before the episode to talk to you a little bit about MaxFunDrive. We are in our third week of fundraising, and first off I want to thank you for all of your support, all of your telling your friends to listen to our show, it's so wonderful. But, also, we know, we've heard from a lot of people that there's, you know, so much bonus content that it's keeping them so happy, and so busy during all of these darker days.</p> <p>And so I would like to remind you that we do have some bonus content for you to listen to, um, if you are a member joining at the five dollar level or above, and ours includes Joelle Monique, Emily VanDerWerff, and Drea Clarke, all talking about <i>Murder She Wrote</i> and dissecting one of my favorite episodes, and you cannot, cannot miss it. And that's available for you when you join!</p> <p>Um, so, you can become a member easily at MaximumFun.org/join, choose the amount that fits within your monthly budget. It could be five dollars a month, it could be ten dollars a month, or maybe 20 dollars a month, you know, whatever you want. Maybe more!</p> <p>And whatever level you choose, your support combined with all the other Max Fun members that are just like you coming in to make sure that we get to keep making our shows, we just appreciate you. Every little bit counts. And, again, go to MaximumFun.org/join to sign up and see all the cool gifts available in thanks for your support.</p> <p>Now, to our show.</p>
00:01:28	Music	Transition	<p>"Switchblade Comb" by Mobius VanChocStraw.</p>
00:01:36	April	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 filmmaker on, a writer, director, actor, or producer, and we talk—in depth—about one of their fave genre films, perhaps one that has influenced their own work in some small way.</p> <p>And uh, as you may already know, we are remote recording now, um, so audio is going to be a little bit different. I'm in my bedroom, the cats are playing today, so Chicken and Zoli are uh, a little frisky.</p> <p>Uh, audio's just gonna be a little different from our studio. Um, everything else is the same, except for—we have got two guests today. I'm very excited to have EP writer-director Mel Eslyn, and then EP director Sydney Fleischmann here. Hi guys!</p>
00:02:18	Mel Eslyn	Guest	<p>Hi!</p>
00:02:19	Sydney Fleischman n	Guest	<p>Hi, thanks for having us!</p>
00:02:22	April	Host	<p>So, let me give a little introduction to both of you and your work through a bio, "this is your life" type of thing.</p>

Uh, Mel Eslyn is a film and television producer, writer, and director, and president of Duplass Brothers Productions. On the small screen, she produced HBO's doc series *On Tour With Asperger's Are Us*, and frequently writes and directs for HBO's *Room 104*, on which she also serves as executive producer.

Winner of the 2016 Independent Spirit producer's award, she's produced such festival feature favorites as the 2014 Sundance hit, *The One I Love*, Clea Duvall's debut *The Intervention*, Lynn Shelton's *Outside In*, Miguel Arteta's *Duck Butter*, and Jeff Baena's *Horse Girl*, starring Alison Brie.

And, we can see a lot of those on Netflix, is that correct?

00:03:11 Mel Guest Yes. Almost all of those.

00:03:12 April Host Yes. So I mean, that's great quarantine viewing.

00:03:15 Mel Guest Exactly.

00:03:16 April Host *[Laughs.]* And Sydney Fleischmann is a film and television producer living in Los Angeles, California. She has worked on films including *The Overnight*, *Blue Jay*, and *Asperger's Are Us*, and the acclaimed HBO television series *Togetherness*. She is currently an executive producer and director on HBO's *Room 104*, which will premiere its fourth and final season in July. I think it's here when this airs. It's here. It's already there.

00:03:42 Sydney Guest Hopefully they're watching it right now.

00:03:43 April Host Yes. Yeah. Um, And Sydney is originally from Lexington, Massachusetts. A "Masshole", is that what they call you guys?

00:03:50 Sydney Guest I am a Masshole. I am actually in Massachusetts right now.

00:03:53 April Host Oh, wow!

00:03:55 Sydney Guest Uh, yeah. My husband and I drove across the country, and we are now quarantining in Massachusetts.

00:04:01 April Host There are worse places to quarantine, I'd say.

00:04:04 Sydney Guest Definitely.

00:04:05 Mel Guest This is the first time I've heard you call him your husband, I got very excited.

[Everyone laughs.]

00:04:09 Sydney Guest Well it's funny, he and I were talking, um, I will obviously—you're going to introduce the movie, but, he and I were talking about an experience we've had with this movie, and it's filming locations.

00:04:20 April Host Please make sure that you share some of those things with those things when we talk about it.

[Sydney laughs.]

Um, so, Mel and Syd, you guys joined together, teamed up to choose the movie to talk about today, and you chose *Beetlejuice*. Can you give us a little explanation on why it's one of your fave genre films?

- 00:04:35 Mel Guest Uh, well, it was hard, because we had to both agree on a movie. And I think we both come from different ends, and there was a bit of overlap, and I think we were able to agree on two things. It was like, we love everything *Twin Peaks*, and we love *Beetlejuice*. And so, *Beetlejuice* made the cut.
- 00:04:52 Sydney Guest It's funny that that's sort of our Venn-diagram of genre and action is *Beetlejuice* and *Twin Peaks*.
- [April laughs.]
- 00:05:00 April Host Well, I mean, you have to find your common ground.
- 00:05:03 Sydney Guest Exactly. Uh, yeah, I mean this is a movie that I— I don't even remember the first time I saw it. I was definitely young, and it definitely scared the crap out of me. But it was also just so visually stimulating and exciting and fun, and it has—to me it has sort of like, all of the things that I like in a movie. The sort of social commentary—which, I mean, obviously I did not get that as a child, but now upon recent viewings I get.
- 00:05:34 Mel Guest There's a lot there does that.
- [Sydney affirms.]
- Yeah, I saw it at such a young age, uh, because it came out when I was five, I think, um, and I just remember it being so scary and exciting, but what made it okay was that *Mr. Mom*, also an outdated movie, uh, was playing *Beetlejuice*. So, that was—I just remember being like, "Oh, the guy who played Mr. Mom in my other favorite childhood movie is playing the scary guy, and it's okay."
- 00:06:01 April Host It was—I mean, it was definitely a very big career move for him when he took that role. And we'll talk about that later, too. Just like the risks that you're making. But taking *Beetlejuice* on was not exactly, like, the most commercial thing for like, a handsome young comic actor. Um, but—
- 00:06:21 Mel Guest Yeah, it was crazy.
- 00:06:23 April Host For the most part, for those of you who haven't seen *Beetlejuice*, today's episode will obviously give you some spoilers, that shouldn't stop you from listening before you watch, as always, my motto is that it's not what happens, but how it happens that makes a movie worth watching. Still, if you would like to pause and watch *Beetlejuice* first, this is your shot.
- 00:06:37 Music Music "Main Title" from the album *Beetlejuice* by Danny Elfman
- 00:06:39 April Host And now we're back, let me introduce *Beetlejuice* with a quick synopsis.

Written by Michael McDowell and Warren Skaaren, and directed by

Tim Burton for release in 1988, *Beetlejuice* stars Gina Davis and Alec Baldwin as perfect newlyweds Barbara and Adam in idyllic Vermont. They die tragically, and then go home to realize that they are ghosts who cannot leave their house, lest they get devoured by sand worms.

00:07:03	Clip	Clip	<p>Adam: “Handbook for the Recently Diseased.”</p> <p>Barbara: “Deceased.”</p> <p><i>[Music swells ominously.]</i></p> <p>Adam: ... Deceased.</p> <p>Barbara: I don’t know where it came from. Look at that publisher.</p> <p><i>[Sounds of pages flipping.]</i></p> <p>Adam: “Handbook for the Recently Deceased Press.”</p> <p>Barbara: No... I don’t think we survived the crash.</p>
00:07:25	April	Host	The house is immediately sold to the Deetz family, consisting of hysterical sculptor Delia—
00:07:30	Clip	Clip	Delia: This is my art! And it is dangerous! Do you think I wanna die like that?
00:07:34	April	Host	—short-on-nerves Charles—
00:07:35	Clip	Clip	Charles: I’m here to relax, and clip coupons. And damn it, I mean to do it.
00:07:39	April	Host	And their goth teen daughter Lydia.
00:07:41	Clip	Clip	<p><i>[Music swells]</i></p> <p>Lydia: I could live here.</p>
00:07:43	April	Host	Delia quickly begins transforming the house into a modern meets Bauhaus monstrosity, driving Barbara and Adam mad. So, the ghosts consult their handbook for the recently deceased, and visit the underworld to meet with their harried case worker.
00:07:58	Clip	Clip	<p>Case Worker: Okay, have you been studying the manual?</p> <p>Adam: Well, we tried.</p> <p>Case Worker: The intermediate, interfaced chapter on haunting says it all. Get them out yourselves. It’s <u>your</u> house.</p>
00:08:09	April	Host	Unfortunately, they have to stay in the house for 125 years. So, they try to scare the new occupants out. Sadly, they fail miserably at being scary. Lydia then finds the ghosts’ handbook, and when they return from the underworld, she can see and speak to them.
00:08:24	Clip	Clip	Barbara: You know, if I had seen a ghost at your age, I would have been scared out of my wits.

Lydia: You're not gross. Why are you wearing sheets?

Barbara: We're practicing.

Adam: You can see us without the sheets.

Lydia: Of course I can see you.

Adam: How is it that you see us, and nobody else can?

Lydia: Well, I read through that Handbook for the Recently Deceased. It says, "Live people ignore the strange and unusual." I myself am strange and unusual.

00:08:53	April	Host	And she wants to help them terrify her parents. The ghosts have one last resort, one they've been warned against: summoning Betelgeuse, a bio-exorcist who specializes in scaring away humans. They summon him by saying his name three times, and he is an immediate lewd and lecherous nightmare.
00:09:09	Clip	Clip	Betelgeuse: You know what's beautiful about this? You two kids picked me—you didn't have to, but you picked me! It makes me wanna kiss you guys, come on, give me one— <i>[The sounds of Betelgeuse and Barbara struggling.]</i>
00:09:18	April	Host	The ghosts decide not to go with him, and try to ruin the Deetz's family dinner by possessing them, and making them dance to "Day-O"—
00:09:24	Music	Music	"Day-O (The Banana Boat Song)" by Harry Belafonte
00:09:25	April	Host	But the Deetz only grow more intrigued with that, and they're not scared. Charles pitches the Vermont town as a tourism hotspot for paranormal activity, and their friend Otto performs what he thinks is a summoning spell. But, it's actually an exorcism, and Barbara and Adam begin rapidly decaying before Lydia's eyes.
00:09:45	Clip	Clip	Lydia: They're dying! Charles: They're already dead, they can't feel a thing. Lydia: That's not true! Look at them! Charles: That's enough, now. Can you stop this? Otto— Otto: It's too late, Charles. I'm sorry.
00:10:01	April	Host	Lydia calls Betelgeuse for help, and he agrees, so long as Lydia becomes his undead bride. Betelgeuse disposes of the Deetz, and then the Maitlands save Lydia from a ghastly marriage, and send Betelgeuse back to the underworld. Time passes, and we see the living and the dead have found a way to cohabitate in the house peacefully, and everyone is happy, even Betelgeuse who, despite it all, is a ray of positivity.

That's the movie.

[Laughter.]

00:10:26 Mel Guest What a pitch, if you heard that.

[Everyone laughs.]

00:10:30 April Host I mean, it's something that I was uh—realizing, um when I was writing out the synopsis is that the structure of this is very, um... god, it doesn't make sense. Um—

00:10:46 Sydney Guest Yeah, it's really strange. I mean, to have the two main characters die within the first ten minutes, and then you don't meet the title character until 25 minutes in. It's—it doesn't really make any sense on the page, but somehow just works perfectly on the screen.

00:11:04 April Host Um, and I think that that was also part of the risk of this movie, and one of the reasons why people really enjoyed it. But, can you imagine pitching that? In that structure? Of just like, "There's no hero's journey, there's nothing." Like, what do you do with this?

00:11:20 Mel Guest Although, there is a clear, "What the main characters want," which is to get the Deetz's out of their house. But yeah, it's a bonkers journey. Yeah, I mean, listening to you summarize it, I don't know what the logline is. Or at least a logline that fully captures the bizarre range that the movie covers.

00:11:43 Sydney Guest Nothing can capture Beetlejuice in one sentence.

[Everyone laughs.]

00:11:49 April Host But I think that um, we should note that Tim Burton had done the Pee Wee movie before this, and um, that was kind of enough for a studio to be like, "Well, let's see what he does with this movie."

Um, and the way that Tim Burton had gone about it, was that he was very interested, in the beginning of his career, just wanting to push every person's buttons. Because he was just like, out of animation, and like, you know, he just wanted to do something different, and like, hated like the kind of Disney-staid kind of thing that he was in.

But he said, quote—and this is right after the movie came out, quote: "I've been enjoying the bad reviews. These bland newscasters, they have to say the word 'Beetlejuice', and they have to show a clip, and I don't care what anybody says, it makes me wanna see the movie. It's really funny, it's like you're watching some hallucination, like somebody's putting something else behind them, that they don't know about. It was like the feeling I got when I saw Andy Warhol on *The Love Boat*." End quote.

00:12:50 Sydney Guest Oh my god. I love him so much. *[Laughs]* It's amazing. I know he grew up in Burbank, and Burbank is such a strange moment in time, if anybody—if anyone's ever been there, it has like, brand new Targets next to like, really old like, donut shops. And it just has this like very strange vibe to it. And so I know—I know in his experience,

he really bumped up against that like, idyllic suburb.

[April agrees.]

And you can like, really feel it in *Beetlejuice*, that like, the pushback that he has. It is cra—I heard that, too, that he, you know, he was early in his career, and he was looking for something weird, you know, or imaginative. And that speaks so much, I think, to the way we work as filmmakers, and writers, and directors, too. Um, within Duplass, I think Syd and I, you know, separately do, it's just like, that one beautiful gem of weirdness, like we can hang a whole entire episode on that, you know? Which really feels like, you know, kind of what he was doing with this, and I think what's always been interesting to me is because I know that it started as a—well, I think a darker film, if I recall, and he kind of did his, kind of, Burton-izing of it, or whatever.

Which is what I've always loved, because there's this like, underlying dread and excitement, but then it's okay, and it's telling you all these outsiders have a place. And, like, it's like a—it lives in this, like, zone of weirdness, that is so comforting and exciting.

00:14:23 Mel Guest Well I think that's the thing, because it's like, *Beetlejuice* is rea—I mean, the character is terrifying, he's disgusting. But it is a really fun movie, like, there's just so much that's like visually interesting, and there are so many amazing lines, like Catherine O'Hara has like, amazing line after amazing line. So it's this like, creepy story, I mean, about like—there's an exorcism in it, they're trying to scare people out of the house, it's like a haunted house story disguised in this very strange, funny package.

00:14:56 April Host I mean, do you guys—do you have discussions at all, in terms of whether it's Duplass world or outside of it, in your own separate spheres, of how dark you can go with something before it becomes, just, unwatchable?

00:15:12 Mel Guest Probably not as much as we should, maybe.

[Sydney agrees]

I mean—I think we can go pretty dark.

00:15:18 Sydney Guest I think, to me, as long as it has, like, something grounding it, whether it's like, an emotional core, or there's like, something funny about it, as long as those things are keeping it sort of tethered down to the ground, then you can kind of go as dark as you want.

[Mel agrees.]

But I think it does have to—it has to have that human connectivity thing.

00:15:53 Mel Guest Absolutely. Which I think is ultimately what warms my heart by the end of *Beetlejuice*, because it is such a story of a home, I think you said the co-existing, of the living in the undead. It's such a beautiful, like, I remember watching it as a kid, and being like, "Oh my god, that's what a true family in a home can look like!"

[She trails off into laughter.]

It's just this, like, love, coming together, and I think that that is—I think you're right, Syd, I think if there's that grounding—as long as you find your footing somewhere, I think you can really go to some dark depths. As long as the rope is attached to something, so you can climb back up when you need to.

00:16:25 April

Um, I wanted to get into something real quick about Larry Wilson, who was the original, kinda, co-writer. He got a “story by” credit for this, and he was an executive before that. But he talked about how he got into, um, screenwriting, and I think that it's worth thinking about, in terms of what you guys do.

Um, he said, quote: “I'd been a screenwriter, but I was also working at Paramount as a story analyst. I suffered a real case of writer's block, and I had a chance to become a studio executive for Jeff Katzenburg and Michael Eisner. I saw that as the sort of doorway out of screenwriting, which I was feeling very up in the air about, and wondering if I could really do it. And I became a studio executive for a couple of years at Paramount, and then I went to work for Walter Hill,” the great director Walter Hill, “as his head of development, and there were series of incidents that made me realize then, that I was actually giving away my best ideas, and giving away my talent in a way that I was no longer comfortable with.” End quote.

[Laughter.]

Um, I mean, can you guys relate to something like that, or just like, you're giving away your best ideas to other people's projects all the time, at some point in time you have to save them for yourself, right?

00:17:33 Mel Guest

Uh... Syd, you go first.

00:17:34 Sydney Guest

You know, it's a funny—I don't, I don't consider myself a writer, and I think that I—like, I've tried it, and I feel like for me, like, writer's block is as far as I go. That's just, like, all I am. If I was a writer, I would just be writer's block. And, I think there is this strange thing in the world that we work in, of like, picking a lane and then sticking with it.

And, I think for me, I've like given myself that label of producer, and I've tried to do the—this season of *Room 104*, I've directed an episode, it was just like an eye opening experience of like, “Oh, this is what this other role is like. This is what it actually feels to do this.” Um, and I guess as a, like, as a producer, I never feel like I'm giving away my ideas, I always feel like it's for the benefit of the project, and I guess that's, just, validation that I am a producer, and not a writer.

[Everyone laughs.]

00:18:31 Mel Guest

I would disagree, because I think you are also a writer, and you

should give yourself more credit. Um, no, I'm in an interesting position because I am sort of weirdly— that whole quote was—I'm like, "Oh, you're mapping my life and my trajectory, and that's freaking me out a little bit."

[April laughs.]

Um, as much as I love running Duplass Brothers, and—and it is! Especially with our show *Room 104*, me stepping into writing and directing really came from—I never meant to run a company. I never even meant to produce, and I just, you know, made myself available to a lot of things, and then you find crazy paths, and I ended up in this position where I am, like, my job has largely been for the last ten years to make other people's dreams come true. And to creatively support that, which is very rewarding. But there is, like, the little person on my shoulder going, "But you had other things you were gonna do!"

And so there is—like, *Room 104* has become this way for me to say, "Okay, I am running this company, and I'm making all these things happen," and I don't feel like I'm giving myself away, because the title of producer is a very—a title I think all of us should be very proud to have, because we know what goes into that. Um, but *104* became my outlet, while running the company, to be like, "I'm gonna go write a crazy episode, and go direct it," and be able to be like, "I have preserved some of this that's just for me, you know, to make my own thing."

And so I think it's really been about navigating that, the balance of like, all the lanes I'm trying to be-straddle all at the same time, which like, you know. I guess sometimes I do think about what Syd said, and I'm like, "Maybe I should just find one lane, because that also sounds really nice, and maybe a little less, uh—I could be less tired."

[The other two laugh.]

Yeah. It's uh, it's simpler being in one lane. I think. Or, one lane and sort of dabbling.

00:20:31	Sydney	Guest	Yeah, sticking your toe in every once in a while over in some other water.
00:20:36	April	Host	Uh, we're gonna take a quick break, and when we come back, we'll talk more <i>Beetlejuice</i> , and also Mel and Syd's own projects, we'll be right back.
00:20:41	Music	Transition	"Switchblade Comb" by Mobius VanChocStraw.
00:20:46	April	Promo	Hey, it's April, and I'm here to talk about the MaxFunDrive, which has been ongoing for a couple of weeks, now. And uh, I'm also joined today by uh, Casey who's in—where, where are you? What is that?

[Sounds of metal clanging in the distance.]

00:21:02	Casey	Promo	April, I'm in my panic room, because I'm getting a little pissed off.
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O'Brien Uh, I've been stabbed, I've been beaten over the head, and uh, I'm just sick of it. So I've—I'm—

00:21:12 April Promo Yeah, yeah you have, yup.

00:21:12 Casey Promo So I'm in my panic room, just to make sure that no one attacks me anymore. Especially because my Fabergé egg was already stolen, so I don't even know what's going on anymore.

00:21:21 April Promo Oh, all over a Fabergé egg! Oh!

00:21:24 Casey Promo All over a Fabergé egg. I have it down to a few people, I still don't know who it is, but I think it's either my ex-wife, my ex-wife's nephew, my step-brother, the caretaker at Nana's house, or of course, Drea Clarke, of the *Who Shot Ya?* podcast. So I've kind of narrowed it down to those people.

00:21:39 April Promo Oh, my god!

00:21:40 Casey Promo But! That's not why I wanted to talk to you today. I wanted to talk to you about the MaxFunDrive! That's still going on. It's the most exciting time of year, it just kind of shows how awesome our community is, and how awesome our listeners of *Switchblade Sisters* are.

Um, I know all of our listeners are always telling their friends about our show, they're contributing, and becoming members to support our show, and it's really—like, the community, I know this sounds sort of trite, but we literally cannot survive without our members, and uh, the people that support us.

[April agrees.]

So we're just so thankful for those folks.

00:22:18 April Promo It's not trite, it's facts!

00:22:20 Casey Promo I was nodding enthusiastically, but I was agreeing.

00:22:22 April Promo Yeah, yeah I mean you guys can't see, but he's definitely enthusiastic.

00:22:26 Casey Promo Uh, yes, from my panic room. Um, April, do you want to go over how to be a member? How to join, how to support this show?

00:22:34 April Promo Yeah, I do. I do, because it's actually pretty easy, um, all you have to do is go to MaximumFun.org/join, and there you can choose the membership level that is good for you, because you know, you can do five dollars a month, and for that you get bonus content.

And um, a bunch of, like, hours, so many hours, hundreds of hours of all of this stuff to listen to from all of our shows. Including our episode where we go through a *Murder, She Wrote* episode that is very close to me, with some wonderful pals. And some people are able to give ten dollars a month, or 35, some people even give 50 or 100 dollars a month.

But it's most important that you just, you know, you look at your

budget, and you can give what's comfortable for you. And we think that, you know, you'll like being a member, and we want you to stick around, so we wanna give you things, we wanna, you know, make it worthwhile for you.

00:23:29 Casey Promo Absolutely. And I know some of those bigger numbers might sound a little daunting, but honestly, the most important one is five dollars a month. If you can just support us five dollars a month, that like, really helps April and I continue to make this show. Um, because this show takes a lot of time to put together, you know. Editing it and booking the guests on my side, and April, you do so much research on this show it's insane.

00:23:56 April Promo It takes up a lot of my life, I'm happy to do it, and I hope that we inspire a lot of our listeners, who, maybe wanna be filmmakers, or maybe wanna understand film better. Or just want you know, do their part and try to get more into women filmmakers that may have slipped through their grasp over the years.

And um, you know, one of the cool things, too, that—we did a pin, this year! We designed our own pin. And uh, if you donate at the 10\$ a month level, it's good news, because you can choose our very cool pin. Which, you guys should go to the website, MaximumFun.org/join, and take a look at the pins that are available. But definitely choose ours.

Um, and then at that level, if you're giving \$10 a month, then uh, you have the option, also, to purchase additional pins from the store. And all those proceeds of the additional pins go to charity, and there's, you know, again, so many great ones to choose from, but ours might be the best this year, so I'm very excited.

00:24:53 Casey Promo It is—it is the best. So yeah, this is a special thing they're doing this week for members, if you're giving ten dollars a month or above, you can purchase additional pins—from the ones that you already got from the prize, you can purchase more. And those proceeds will go to charities. So that's just a cool thing we're doing this month, so make sure you get on that!

Um, and yeah, I guess I just wanna close up by saying we're just so thankful for our listeners, and for the people who have supported us, and you know, like, we were at Fantastic Fest last year, and there were so many awesome people that came up to us and talked to us about the show, and it's just a really special community that we wanna help grow and continue to foster.

So, just thank you to everyone who is a part of it.

00:25:44 April Promo Yeah, our hearts have exploded.

[Casey laughs.]

00:25:47 Casey Promo That's correct! Well, um, April, I'm gonna go, um, you know, I'm just trying to stay busy in my panic room, but uh—

[There is the sound of a hatch opening, and a distant alarm siren blares.]

Wait is—April, I can hear—someone is unlocking the door outside of my panic room. Who—I don’t even—I didn’t even give the—

00:26:08 April Promo Who has the key to your panic room?

00:26:09 Casey Promo I don’t know! This is—I’m just frustrated and pissed off.

[The noises cease, and footsteps approach Casey as he speaks.]

Oh. It’s you! Oh my god, I can’t believe it. I told you, I don’t have the Fabergé—

[Casey is strangled.]

00:26:19 April Promo Casey. Casey! Oh my god, Casey’s been... strangled!

[Dramatic noir flick music swells.]

Ugh! Well, you’ll have to tune in next week to see what happens with Casey and his Fabergé egg drama. And now back to the show.

00:26:34 Music Transition “Switchblade Comb” by Mobius VanChocStraw.

00:26:40 April Host Welcome back to *Switchblade Sisters*, I’m April Wolfe, and I’m joined today by Mel Eslyn, and Sydney Fleischmann, and we are talking *Beetlejuice*.

Um, so, Michael Keaton, we mentioned kind of briefly at the top, and I’d like to get a little bit into how he made this. Because, again, he doesn’t show up until very late in the movie, and yet he kind of steals everything as he’s meant to do.

[Mel agrees.]

But he’d originally turned the role down. Um, because he was getting—he just didn’t understand it, and also he was just kind of bored with everything, at that time.

00:27:14 April Host He said, quote: “I turned down the role because I didn’t quite get it, and I wasn’t looking to work. In the original script, Betelgeuse was underwritten, vaguely middle-eastern, and more evil. But I went home and thought, ‘Okay, if I would do this role, how would I do it?’ You clearly don’t create him from the inside out. Meaning, what motivates this guy, his childhood or whatever. You work from the outside in.

“It turns out the character creates his own reality, so I gave myself some sort of voice, some sort of look based on the words, then I started thinking about my hair. I wanted my hair to stand out like I was wired and plugged in. And once I started getting that, I actually made myself laugh. And I thought, ‘Well, this is a good sign, this is kinda funny.’ Then I got the attitude, and once I got the basic attitude, it really started to roll.” End quote.

Um, so, he created that entire character, which I find fascinating. I mean, anything—every writer and director tries to go to the actors

with a very complete character, you know. This is what they are, they're on the page, you know exactly what this is, we have a look for them.

But this was a very opposite process, and the actor was allowed to essentially kind of make what Betelgeuse is, and then, you know, Tim Burton just kind of rolled with it. Um, and I'm not sure that that's typical for a movie with this budget, necessarily. But, do you guys feel like you would prefer to work in that way? Um, having the actors kind of create things from a very vague description, or?

- 00:28:58 Mel Guest I think it depends. I think so much of—it's, I don't know, it's easy to sort of generalize when you're talking about filmmaking, but so much of it is about the specific relationships, and how the director connects with the actor, or how the actors connect with each other.
- And I think that there are certain situations where that, like having the actor be a full-on creative collaborator, navigating who the character is, and what they're doing, and all of that, "We're going down that path together" really makes a lot of sense. And I think there are other times where it doesn't make as much sense. And certain actors want, like, "Give me as much information as you can, as the writer or the director about who this person is, and then I will sort of—we'll meet in the middle, of like what that looks like."
- 00:29:50 Sydney Guest Yeah, like, "Give me the mold, and I just wanna fit into it," basically.
- 00:29:52 Mel Guest Yeah, uh. Um. I think that that's just, like that's just the creative process for different people. I think some people like the space to explore, and other people—especially like, I don't know, I'm thinking about projects that move so fast, and I think like, with *Room 104*, there are definitely actors who come in, and are like, "I want all this space to play," and then there are people who are like, "I'm only here for a short amount of time, like, let's be really specific and deliberate about how we're gonna do this together." Um, and so it's just, I think it really depends on the specific individuals.
- 00:30:28 April Host Yeah, the um—something that I found very interesting, too, is the fact that the kind of improvisation of, uh, Michael Keaton didn't stop when they got to set. I mean, he was encouraged to go wild.
- He said, quote: "At some point, you show up on the set, and just fucking nuts. It was rage acting. You rage for 12 to 14 hours, and then you go home, tired and beat and exhausted. It was pretty damn cathartic."
- 00:30:55 Mel Guest Wow, you totally see that in that—what is the rant he does, where they're like, "What are your qualifications—"
- [Mel agrees enthusiastically.]*
- and he starts with like, "Harvard educated," and the next thing you know it's like "seeing the exorcist 650 times."
- 00:31:05 Clip Clip **Adam:** What are your qualifications?
- [Betelgeuse starts speaking calmly, and devolves into unhinged*

screaming by the end.]

Betelgeuse: Oh, well, I attended Juilliard, I'm a graduate with the Harvard business school, I travel quite extensively. I lived through the Black Plague, and I had a pretty good time during that—I've seen *The Exorcist* about a hundred and sixty seven times, and it keeps getting funnier every single time I see it! Not to mention you're talking to a dead guy, so what do you think?!

00:31:26 Mel Guest I mean, there is like—there's such an energy, and it does feel like he's like, "I'm here to fuck shit up, balls to the walls." But then, he could be so controlled in other moments. It is, I mean—it's making me realize, too, from a very early age, that that was the example I was given, as far as "This is what you can do with art," and just like, take it and make it your own, in such like a beautiful, fucked up, wild way.

00:31:54 Sydney Guest Yeah, and he operates—I mean, Tim Burton operates in this like, when his movies really work, he operates in this amazing space between reality and fantasy, where it's like, not really either. But also kind of both. And, like, to be able to balance those things, and then balance all of the, like, the light and the darkness, and everything that's sort of at play.

It's such a—it's such a hard balancing act, to find the through-line between all of those things. And, to me this movie is just like, the perfect example of like, something that's just so morbid and dark, being like really palatable, and just visually, like, so interesting!

Like, all of the sand worms, and all of the models, it's so arts-and-crafts-y, it's like what you were saying, Mel, it's a little bit messy but in a way that makes it, like, that much more accessible.

00:32:50 Mel Guest It does feel like there's a commitment behind it, and I think that's what, you know, even when I look at the CGI, it is messy, and it's not great, but it almost—everything feels like it has purpose, and intention, in a way that I can get behind it, you know?

It's, um, and I think that's the big thing, is that when you go wild and you go crazy, like, as long as you have a sense of the intention, which maybe he didn't, if they all showed up and said they didn't know what was going on, so. This is like throwing all my thoughts out the window, maybe, but, um, but it does feel—everything in this feels so intentional, um, even down to like, this is a very dark movie full of so many colors, and just like visually, everything.

You know, I think like, as a kid when I was watching it, trying to like, understand what it all meant. And now I watch it, and I'm like, "No, this all checks for me."

[She and April laugh.]

This all jives, I don't know.

00:33:50 April Host You know, there's um, there's two different sensibilities too, that are working on this. Warren Skaaren was the—well, he's passed, now,

but he was the writer hired to do the rewrite of this, and there's a whole story of that, of him being, you know, essentially one of the most respectful re-writers of scripts in Hollywood. And everyone's just like, "Oh, if he's hired, it's totally fine. Like, he'll get my vision, and you know, he'll just bring it out, like all the best parts."

Um, but, so Michael McDowell was coming from a place where he was kind of obsessed with Chinese and Japanese occult films, and those kind of shaped his sensibility, specifically for the terms of how the supernatural was treated in a very straightforward fashion.

And also, he was very interested in poking fun at Americans, and their kind of fear of death. He actually wrote a thesis for his—his uh, graduate degree, I think—called *American Attitudes Towards Death*. Um, and uh, then Warren Skaaren, the way that he had looked at it was that he was trying to craft a character in Betelgeuse who would receive fan letters, and he ended up—like, this fictional character did end up receiving mountains of fan letters.

[Laughter.]

And so both of them, I think, succeeded, but they were kind of working at opposite ends of trying to make this story workable. And I think you know, you've got someone who is coming from a more commercial aspect of, "Yeah, you have to kind of like this character. You can't like—they can't be hated." [Laughs] Like they have to be some kind of like, cad or something.

But I mean, how do you deal with like, unlikeable characters? I mean, what do—what do you do, how do you make them—how do you make them receive a fan letter?

00:35:43 Mel Guest That's such a funny way of thinking about it.

00:35:45 Sydney Guest I know. It's—

00:35:46 Mel Guest I think they just have to be going through someth—I mean, I don't know if—I feel like the characters that we have, especially in *Room 104*, are very different from *Beetlejuice*. Like, I remember as a kid like, being scared and repulsed by him, but also like, so engaged and like, I loved him and hated him. And that's such a weird—like, he's disgusting. He's just like—he's got like, mold on his face. He's so gross, and you're still like—

00:36:15 Sydney Guest I feel like you can smell that mold, too, through the screen.

[Mel laughs.]

Like it is—mm-mm. But I think you're—yeah. It's comedy, though. I really do think it's comedy. Because I think about it in the way, even when I watched *Succession*—which, I loved that show—and I'm like, "I hate all of you, but you're so funny, so I'm in." Like, I love it. Like, I'm in love with all of them because they're funny. Is that it?

00:36:38 April Host Like, you can forgive a lot—

00:36:39 Mel Guest It might be.

00:36:40 April Host —of things if they have—if they can tell a good joke, or a good story or something.

00:36:45 Sydney Guest Maybe that's not a universal way to move through life, but—*[She breaks off, laughing.]*

00:36:49 April Host It's not a good way to date. *[Laughs.]*

00:36:52 Mel Guest Sure, but we've all done it.

00:36:56 Sydney Guest It's also such a hard thing to pull off, because you can have somebody who's so, so terrible, and maybe they're funny but you're like, "They're just terrible. I can't see—I can't see past that." But, I don't know. It's like a charm. I think, to me, so many of the people on *Succession*, it's like, they're awful and they're, like, they're just like, greedy, backstabby people, but like, they are weirdly charming. And Beetlejuice is really charming. Except when he like, grab—there—oh my—I forgot how many grabs—

00:37:24 Mel Guest Oh yeah, no, he's horrible.

00:37:25 Sydney Guest —inappropriate grabs there are in this movie. It's crazy.

00:37:30 Mel Guest Oh, he—in like, the first minute he's on screen, he looks up Gina Davis' skirt. Like, he's just—he's gross.

00:37:39 April Host Yeah. He's disgusting, but he's so funny.

00:37:42 Sydney Guest He's so funny.

00:37:43 Mel Guest And he does have this—he does have weirdly human desires that I think—I mean, as fucked up as him wanting to marry Lydia is, because I think she's like, 15 in the movie. Like, that totally went over my head as a kid. Uh, but there is something about being like, "Oh, he just wants a partner," that I'm like, "I gotta—I gotta give it to him." Like, we all just want a partner in crime through life, right?

00:38:09 April Host Oh, wow. Mel, you're just uh, really forgiving him for a lot.

[Mel laughs.]

We talked a little bit about music earlier, but specifically we were talking about the score, and I wanted to get into the fact that um, that Harry Belafonte's "Day-O" uh, became a huge hit again *[Laughs]* because of this.

Um, and uh, you know, according to uh, Marjorie Lewis, who was a producer on it and who was kind of like, the key in helping get this movie made, um, she was saying that uh, when it came to the song that they were going to sing, it became so, so difficult. Because um, the—they wanted to do the R&B classic "When A Man Loves A Woman", pre-Michael Bolton, and everything was too expensive. And they kept throwing more and more songs out, and everything was too expensive. And she said, quote, "Every time somebody heard the words David Geffen, they raised the price." End quote.

[Laughter.]

Because Geffen was orig—like, the person who ended up buying and you know, making this movie, and so the second that they knew that his name was attached to it, they were like, “Oh, uh, we would like this much more.” And so the one song they could actually like, afford for the budget ended up being Belafonte’s “Day-O.” And you know, randomly turned into probably one of the better scenes of the film, I think, um, because of that song.

- 00:39:40 Sydney Guest Amazing. It’s definitely one of the most memorable. I mean, to have that song—and it goes on for so long. It’s not just like, a couple of seconds of it. It’s like, we’re gonna dance for awhile. But I think one of like, one of my favorite things about this movie and other Tim Burton movies is the like, timelessness of it. And I think if there had been a song that was more of the time or like, any pop music used throughout the movie, instead of the Danny Elfman score, if there had been any hint of that, it would just have such a weird—it would be really dated and it would just feel really strange. And I think that the—the Maitland’s being sort of in this like, 50s perfect relationship, there’s like—it makes sense that it’s an older song that doesn’t fit the time and is just like—it’s timeless.
- 00:40:36 Mel Guest It also feels like the—like, when Catherine O’Hara first opens her mouth, it feels like she’s so embarrassed. Like, it’s a song that yuppies would be so embarrassed to be singing and dancing to, which I think is so perfect. And if you watch that scene, I think that is one of the most phenomenally acted scenes by everybody in—I mean, like, they are lip syncing, dancing like insane—
- 00:41:01 Sydney Guest And fighting it.
- 00:41:02 Mel Guest And fighting it! And it’s like, comedy. I mean, it is—I love that scene so much. Even just like, turning the volume off and watching what they’re all doing with their bodies, it is such an amazing feat being able to pull that off and orchestrate that.
- 00:41:17 April Host Um, so uh, I wanted to also get into um, special effects. You guys have been dealing with quite a few, I would say, special effects on *104*, and you know, from—ranging from the big to the small. But this was kind of another level of special effects in a time when actors still weren’t quite used to it. Um, specifically like, these actors. And Gina Davis probably had like, the most experience of anyone though.

Alec Baldwin, however, said quote: “It’s difficult insofar as you really have to use your imagination to imagine things that aren’t in the shot at the time. Let’s say he’ll say, ‘At this point the four-headed reptile is rearing up to bite you, and you have to react to it.’ You don’t see anything. The other part is you have to do it many times. It’s a movie where you have to do a lot of takes, not performance wise, but technical, a lot of takes to get everything just right.” End quote.

And I think that became the kind of frustrating thing for the actors on set, and credit to them that they were able to keep it together for so many takes and still deliver uh, lines with great energy. Because at some point in time after you’ve said them, it’s really hard to get shocked again for the four-headed reptile that’s rearing up to get you that you don’t see.

And so it's—I feel like we've gotten to the point in special effects where we don't have to do as many takes. Like, we can get things right a little bit faster. But, I'm curious about kind of your experience in terms of like, trying to keep the um, the actors' energy up, even though it's just like, well, you have to reset, because the special effect we need to get this correct, or the timing of this, or like the framing, and you know, how to work that.

00:43:04 Mel Guest God yeah, it's so hard. It's so hard to just get that organic reaction, I think period, even on the first take when they're having to navigate whether they're talking to a c-stand or you know, like on a rig and having to land in a perfect spot, you know, and—I think in one episode we have like, a head that had to prop up on a c-stand uncomfortable. It's just like the—

00:43:23 Sydney Guest Oh my god, yeah. We had somebody, she had to rest her chin on a tennis ball, and I just felt so bad, 'cause it didn't—it was an uncomfortable scene just in terms of where the character was and the performance, and then for her to be physically uncomfortable was just—I mean, maybe that added to her, maybe that helped in some ways. But I think it's just—it must just be so challenging as an actor to have to navigate that. And you're already—they're already using their imaginations and it's just like, an extra layer of it.

00:43:58 Mel Guest Yeah, I mean, thankfully we have like, you know, special effects have come a long way. And I think also there's a little bit of you just have to be loose with it. I have definitely found myself you know, after like three or four takes of asking an actress to go “wow” to something that's in the toilet that's not there, um, you know, just being like, I'm not gonna be as precious. Because I know what I'm asking them to do and it's like, “You know what, I got three alt takes, we're gonna make this work.”

You know, and effects is usually the one running over being like, “But you didn't get exactly them looking at this point.” And I'm like, “We're gonna, it's fine.” Like, I'm gonna embrace a little bit of this messiness to you know, have more of the organic reaction um, you know. So it's a balancing act of you know, figuring out what you're gonna prioritize as well.

I mean, thankfully we're not creating like, whole worlds. Like, this isn't like, the new *Blade Runner* or something. *[Laughs]* Or like, you have to be so technical. I'm sure my tune will change in that regard.

00:44:58 April Host Once you do the new *Blade Runner*.

00:44:59 Mel Guest Exactly. When I do the next *Blade Runner*, I'll feel differently.

00:45:02 Sydney Guest Yeah, Mel's making an announcement.

[Mel laughs.]

You heard it here first.

00:45:06 Mel Guest Yeah. I mean, we also—we work with this—the effects company for *Room 104* called Barnstorm and they are—they're—they have the

same attitude as us on set, where it's like, we're gonna prepare as much as we can, and then once we get in it we're just gonna have to figure things out. And they're just so—they like—they're so flexible with us, which I feel very thankful for. But they make—they make the actors' lives easier to film.

- 00:45:33 Sydney Guest Yeah, no, and that is what film—the best filmmaking is, is you just come to the table so prepared that you can keep moving when all the unexpected gets thrown at you, which it will, and you're never gonna do it the way you planned. And so you just gotta, yeah.
- 00:45:46 Mel Guest Yeah, it's the—we know what we're doing and we don't know what we're doing.
- 00:45:49 Sydney Guest Yeah. You know what's important to you and then you just try and keep getting that as much as possible, and then being okay when you don't.
- 00:45:57 April Host Um, and you know, we didn't talk anything about the set design, but I think that we should at least just cover that, because Bo Welch, who designed the sets, um, you know, obviously a fantastic artist. He *[Clears throat]* described the sets as, quote, "A hierarchy of reality that leads you into unreality. Tim would encourage me to push that border. I'd go a certain distance, and he'd say, 'Let's go further.' And I'd go, 'Ugh!' And then be thrilled when we did it." End quote.
- Um, and that's the kind of collaboration that he has too, is just kind of saying, "Can you do more?" Challenging his crew and his cast to kind of—to pull out all their greatest tricks, you know.
- 00:46:44 Sydney Guest God, what a balance though, because I do think there's times where you can push people too far, and then the artist sort of like, self-destructs. So it's like—I love that idea though, of being like, "Go further than the end of your line" but knowing when you're like, "Okay, you're too far. I got you, come back." It's like—and having somebody to have that trust in you to like, let you know, let them push you out past your comfort zone, that's amazing. I love that. Um, we all need to do that more, probably.
- 00:47:15 April Host Well, I mean, when you're pressed for time and you're pressed for budget, I think it's kind of hard to sometimes ask your crew to go further, to do more. And you know, you hope that everyone's kind of in the same boat, and they all want to do their best work for this, no matter like, how much they're getting paid or who's going to see it, and—but I still think it's—it's kind of an art to—to ask that of people, you know.
- 00:47:47 Sydney Guest Yeah. Yeah, we talk about it a lot on *Room 104*, because the whole premise of the show is limitations and restrictions. It's the—it's the four walls of the room, it's the budget, it's the time that we have to shoot each episode. And for me, I think, obviously having that, the mutual trust with our crew, it just allows us to be wildly creative and super imaginative. And that really feels like the one resource that we have an unlimited amount of. It's like, if we all put our heads together and everybody is willing to go that sort of extra mile to make it as wild as we want it to be, it really pays off.

00:48:27 Mel Guest But you have to feed them really well too, um.

00:48:30 Sydney Guest Yes.

[*Everyone laughs.*]

00:48:31 Mel Guest But I mean, I think it is um—I'm so glad you brought that up, because I think we can all, as filmmakers and as television producers get in a habit of talking about the creative within the tiny bubble of the writer, director, the actors, and it is—as we all know—filmmaking is such a bigger collaboration. And I do think it is—I love it when we're shooting a scene—and again, it's like having that confidence and trust in your collaborators, but also the self—you know, reliance to be able to listen to other people's ideas.

But I've had it where like, the boom operator is holding the boom, and suddenly comes in and is like, "You know what, I've been watching this scene and this thing should happen." And having this like, creative collaboration that can happen is so beautiful when you hit the right tone and you have the right people involved.

But you know, even on like, the bigger sets—like I think with *Room 104*, and you know, I've done this on a lot of the movies, but when you are pressed for time or you've pushed everybody and you've got like—you just want that one take you know, walking around and talking to everybody that you can and being like, "This is what I want."

And having like, a dialogue with the whole team is such a beautiful thing that I've experienced other directors do, and I've done myself as a producer, and it's been such a great way to, you know—and if somebody pushes back, maybe stop and listen and be like, "Do you really need this? 'Cause somebody's pushing back on it." Yeah, that's putting a lot of trust into your whole team and crew, which is you know, can be tough, but you know, I think it's interesting to have that dialogue with everybody involved when you can.

00:50:06 April Host Well, that's a great place for us to wrap up. Trust your cast and crew.

[*Everyone laughs.*]

Thank you guys so much for uh, joining me today to talk about *Beetlejuice*. And remind people they can watch *Room 104* on HBO, right?

00:50:19 Mel Guest Yes.

00:50:20 April Host And where else can they see your work?

00:50:23 Mel Guest Netflix. Um, Netflix and Netflix. [*Laughs*] Everything's on Netflix. No, Ama—I feel like everything's on Amazon too these days, right? But Netflix and HBO.

00:50:38 Sydney Guest HBO Max.

00:50:39 Mel Guest Yeah.

00:50:40	April	Host	Wow, yeah. There's another window. <i>[Everyone laughs.]</i>
00:50:44	Sydney	Guest	All the HBO's.
00:50:45	Mel	Guest	Open up any one of your apps and I'm hoping you'll find something.
00:50:48	Music	Transition	"Switchblade Comb" by Mobius VanChocStraw.
00:50:49	April	Host	I think they will.

And thank you for listening to our show. Um, and thank you so much if you are—uh, if you've become a supporting member of the show. We're truly, truly, truly grateful for anything that you've been able to contribute financially to support us.

Um, again, we are uh, a show that is listener supported, and we have a great deal of creative freedom because of that. And so, you'll notice that the format of our show, the way that we do it, it's hard to describe. It's different. You're not gonna see another show like it, and that's because you know, you've given us the blessing by supporting us financially or by telling your friends to listen to us. And we just cannot be more grateful for all that you do for us.

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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.]

00:52:08	Clip	Clip	Delia: This is my art! And it is dangerous! Do you think I wanna die like that?
00:52:13	Speaker 1	Promo	MaximumFun.org .
00:52:15	Speaker 2	Promo	Comedy and culture.
00:52:16	Speaker 3	Promo	Artist owned—
00:52:17	Speaker 4	Promo	—Audience supported.