

00:00:00 April Wolfe Host Hey, it's April Wolfe, host of *Switchblade Sisters*. Uh, popping in before the episode starts just to talk about the MaxFunDrive for a second. You know, we're in week four of our fund drive, and um, we know that it's been a tough time for a lot of people. A lot of people we know, ourselves included.

And um, we just want to say that is why we're extremely, extremely grateful for anyone who's been able to give and become a member this year. Because we know how hard it is, and we appreciate that you appreciate community. And uh, again, joining Max Fun is quick and easy. You can visit MaximumFun.org/join and you'll see all the different levels there, all the thank you gifts that you can get with each of them.

At five dollars a month, you can get the huge library of bonus content, including our episode on one of my favorite *Murder She Wrote* episodes. At ten dollars a month, you get to choose a cool enamel pin from your favorite show. *[Speaking close to mic]* The *Switchblade* one is the best. And then you'll have the option to purchase others with proceeds from additional pins going to charity.

And then twenty dollars a month, you get the Max Fun custom game pack, with Max Fun dice in a velvet bag, and the rocket logo, and a deck of custom Max Fun playing cards with podcast-inspired designs. So, you can check out all of that and more at MaximumFun.org/join.

And again, this is the final week of the MaxFunDrive, so this is your time to give. And if you can't, again, tell a friend, let someone else know about our show. Maybe they'll like it. Spread the good word.

And now for our show.

00:01:26 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.

00:01:34 April 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 uh, as you may already know, a reminder, we are remote recording. So you know, Chicken may come in. Right now, she's outside, but you know, a leaf blower may make an appearance. Um, I'm just warning you right now. Uh, the audio is likely going to sound a little bit different from our studios. Everything else is the same, except for our guest is different!

Today, I'm very excited to have—calling in from Greece—actor, writer, director Romola Garai. Hi!

00:02:16 Romola Garai Guest Hi. Thanks so much for having me on, April.

00:02:18 April Host Oh, thank you for joining us. And you guys can't see, but she—she's like, in a hotel room, and looks very ghostly right now, and it's very hot.

00:02:26 Romola Guest *[Laughs]* Sorry. The sun has just gone down. I've only had one beer, which took an unbelievable level of self-restraint to hang on to this.

00:02:36 April Host We—you know, I cannot thank you enough, but I also invite you to have another beer if you want. It's totally fine.

00:02:42 Romola Guest No, don't. Don't encourage me. I will.

[April laughs.]

I'll have had four by the end of this.

00:02:47 April Host Um, for those of you who need a little refresher on Romola's career, please let me give you uh, an introduction.

Um, she's a writer, director, multi-award nominated actor. She has extensive film, TV, and stage credits, including work with some of the worlds finest writers and directors, including Sarah Gavron's *Suffragette*, Joe Wright's *Atonement*, François Ozon's *Angel*, uh, Lone Scherfig's *One Day*, and Stephen Poliak—I can never pronounce his name.

00:03:15 Romola Guest Poh-li-ah-koff.

00:03:16 April Host Poliakoff? Ugh, I'm the worst. Stephen Poliakoff's *Glorious 39*.

00:03:21 Romola Guest Imagine his name and my name. Why wasn't that film a bigger success?

[April laughs.]

'Cause we can't say anybody's names who's in it or directs it.

00:03:30 April Host You know what, like yeah, just change it to like, Emma—

00:03:33 Romola Guest Yeah, White.

00:03:34 April Host —yeah, Emma White. *[Laughs]* And then everyone knows.

Um, so also, Romola has extensive lists of TV credits, including playing the lead in Marc Munden's tv mini-series, *The Crimson Petal a-b-c The White*. Um, on stage she has played major roles in plays for uh, *The Village Bike* for the Royal Court, *Measure for Measure* at the Young Vic, um, *The Writer* for Almeida, and uh, Queen Anne and Lear the Seagull for RSC. That's a big—that's a lot.

00:04:06 Romola Guest It's some stuff. *[Laughs.]*

00:04:08 April Host It's some stuff. It's a lot. Okay, and then extensive—all of these extensive performing credits. She's also known for her writing and

directing work, including Sundance fest short film nominee—

- 00:04:16 Romola Guest This bit won't take so long, 'cause it's just two things.
- 00:04:19 April Host This is like the—this is the phase two of your career.
- 00:04:23 Romola Guest *[Laughing]* This is phase two of my career. It's much, much more in its infancy.
- 00:04:26 April Host Okay, alright, so phase two, entering now. Her Sundance best short film nominated uh, *Scrubber*, and then we've got the feature film in development with UK top production company The Bureau and a number of TV projects that you're working on right now.
- But the thing that we're really gonna be talking about today is her feature film debut *Amulet*, which premieres everywhere, I think on VOD at least, and then in theaters in uh, select places depending on you know, how lucky you are with your government, um.
- [Laughs.]*
- But, *Amulet* is a uh, a slow burn horror film, that—it follows a young drifter with a mysterious past who moves into an old home to help a young woman who is tending to her dying mother. But, all is not as it seems.
- Um, so, Romola. The movie that you chose to talk about today is *Border* from 2018. Can you give us a little explanation on why this is one of your fave genre films?
- 00:05:26 Romola Guest I love this film more than words can possibly say, and disappointedly for me, I happened to see it halfway through editing *Amulet*. *[Laughs.]* So, you can imagine what it was like, when you're trying to make your own film, to see a film that you think is a total masterpiece, sort of in the world that you've made your film—your sort of debut feature in.
- Um, and I love this film for many reasons, but I think one of the main reasons is that it feels like it is a film completely about your body, and the way that your body dictates the course of your—of your life, and how the way that you look and your relationship with your body and your smell and your sexuality and your kind of like, um, the organs of your body and how they kind of dictate the kind of processes of your existence.
- And it's—it's a beautiful film. It's, I think, described on Wikipedia as a fantasy romance, and I don't imagine that that terminology is used that frequently. And I love it for its completely unusual, heartbreaking, beautiful, profound poetry about the human condition.
- And it's—it's a very—it's a film full of love, about forgiveness and um, and it's also about good and evil. And it is more brilliant and more profound and more wonderful than I have words for.
- 00:07:11 April Host I mean, we'll definitely get into getting some of those words together, but. *[Laughs.]*

But it's also—I mean, we'll talk about this too—it does go quite dark. And so, it encompasses a lot of things, as you're saying. But for those of you who haven't seen *Border*, today's episode will give you some spoilers. That obviously should not stop you from listening before you watch, because my motto, as always, 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 *Border* first, this is your shot.

00:07:40	Music	Music	"Score" by Christoffer Berg and Martin Dirkov
00:07:41	April	Host	And now that you're back, let me introduce <i>Border</i> with a quick synopsis. Written by Ali Abbasi and Isabella Eklöf—who, oh, love her. Directed <i>Holiday</i> .
00:07:50	Romola	Guest	I mean, where do you even start with the brilliant people involved in this film? Impossible.
00:07:53	April	Host	Oh, yeah. Oh my god. And uh, it's also uh, based on the John Lindqvist short story, I think it was about thirty, forty pages, so novella I would say. It's also directed by Abbasi for release in 2018. <i>Border</i> stars Eva Melander as Tina, a strange-looking Swedish customs officer who has the unique ability to smell guilt. One day, she discovers a memory card with a bunch of child pornography, and the police recruit her to help in their investigation to find who is making it. Then, another day, this guy, Vore, who looks a lot like Tina, comes through customs. Tina can smell something on him. Maybe guilt, maybe something else. They inspect him and he just has maggots in his bag. Weird. He comes through again, and he's inspected more thoroughly. It turns out he has female genitalia, and a scar on his tailbone, which piques Tina's curiosity even more. Tina visits her ailing father, who looks nothing like her, and asks him one more time why she has a scar on her tailbone. And he lies. She Vore at his hostel, where the two eat maggots together.
00:09:01	Romola	Guest	<i>[Cracking up]</i> No one's gonna want to watch this once you do this.
00:09:03	April	Host	I know! Like, I promise you, it's a beautiful scene, but they <u>are</u> eating maggots. <i>[Laughs]</i> She brings him back to her secluded, woodsy house. He moves into the back house, and Tina's quote-unquote "boyfriend", Roland, gets very suspicious. Tina then successfully helps the police sniff out the source of the child pornography, but can't figure out who's trafficking the babies who get abused. Back at home, Tina and Vore hide from a thunderstorm, then frolic naked through the forest and have sex, where Tina realizes she actually has male genitalia that suddenly grows from her body. Vore tells Tina that she is a troll, and most trolls live a hidden existence in Finland. Tina then goes to Vore's cabin when he's

away and finds a troll embryo that looks like a human fetus in his refrigerator. Tina is very suspicious, even though Vore says the embryo will die soon if unfertilized.

Then Tina's suspicions are confirmed when Vore kills one of the pedophile suspects to project his identity. It is Vore who has been stealing human babies and replacing them with troll babies for the operation, as revenge for all the experiments humans did on trolls like Tina.

Back at home, Tina's friend's baby is dying, but Tina realizes it is actually a troll embryo replacement. Oh, the baby's gone. Vore is gone, presumably having taken the baby with him. She tracks him down to a ferry and she confronts him. To be compassionate is also to be a troll, not just to be human. Vore, however, escapes. Tina quits her job and lives out her life in the woods in seclusion, until one day she receives a package. It is a troll baby with a postcard from Finland.

Okay. That is the end.

00:10:50 Romola Guest

No one is going to go and watch this film now.

[Both laugh.]

Can you imagine pitching that film in like, a Hollywood meeting room?

00:10:59 April Host

No.

00:11:00 Romola Guest

Saying the word "troll embryo"?

00:11:04 April Host

Uh, no. No, that's not something that would be in my—*[She breaks off, laughing]* by lexicon for a pitch.

One of the things I think, you know, that you're making hitting on or dancing around is the fact that um, this film, even though it is weird, he—uh, Abbasi was very interested in making sure that it was actually just a very simple love story in the central part of it.

He said, quote: "I've watched this movie many times now, and still every time I watch it, what sticks with me is the love story. And this is what I was thinking about when I thought about how to treat its characters. So I thought, 'There's got to be some sort of strange romance', and I don't mind it being part of the mix, but it's got to be something that keeps all the other elements together. If you have a strong love story, you can build other things around it." End quote.

Um, and I do believe you know, that's one of the last pieces of research that I did when I was writing the script for today's show. And I was like, "Oh yeah, that's right of course. Everything is a love story. I wish that would've been the first thing that I came across when I was formulating my thoughts about it." *[Laughs.]*

00:12:05 Romola Guest

Yeah, and that was absolutely—that was—I mena, the film is great on many levels, but the crime—the crime element involving the kind of discovery of the child pornography is, you know, my least—

personally my least favorite part of the film.

The part of the film that just set me alight was the meeting of these two people, the sense that you've been seen for the first time in your life, and the sense that you've been held for the first time in your life, and the release that comes from that, and the kind of joy that comes from that. And then the sacrifice of having to—to give it up at the end, um, which—it just—I mean, I cried and cried in the cinema. My husband was like, "What is happening next to me? I don't understand."

But I found it so powerful about love ,and so kind of um, revealing about the uh, you know, the deep human need to be—to be recognized, you know, and to be kind of—and the validation that comes from that.

00:13:14 April Host

I feel like we should probably get the dark stuff out of the way, because I am curious about this in terms of you know, how you're approaching this as a filmmaker, or even as an actor in your own movie.

But Abbasi, when he was you know, how dark he could go, um, it was—he didn't want it to be dark for the same of being dark, you know? He did uh, actual research on you know, what was happening in the EU, and—and um, you know, child pornography, and what that all meant, and you know, kind of tried to meld it with um, troll folklore, of you know, like, stealing human babies.

Um, but it was still a thing where he just wasn't sure how far he could go. He said, quote: "There is always this question when you do a movie about this kind of heavy, serious subject, which you only touch upon. You ask yourself, is it right to do so? Do I have to take it very seriously and dedicate the movie to it, to go in depth and so on? I think our answer was yes, it is a very serious subject and so forth, but this is not what the movie is about. I think we handled it respectfully, not in a too deep, domesticated way though." End quote. Um.

00:14:19 Romola Guest

I think that, yeah, I think that that feels uh, that—that attempt that he made to show due diligence and respect to the very serious subject matter, which is always a challenge in a genre film. It is a challenge I also faced with my film, because it is about war and rape. Um, but I think that you know, that you can do service to the deep um, important subjects that you want to talk about in a genre film, by ensuring that the film is never uh, never uses its kind of voyeurism around that topic.

So you kind of fence off part of the film to talk about, you know, in his case, child trafficking um, for you know, porn—the making of child pornography. Or in my case, you know, the horrors of war and rape as a weapon of war. And use that as—essentially make a different kind of film around that topic, and separate it from what could be you know, fifty percent of the rest of the film.

And the mixing of folklore with modern day concerns, I never felt uncomfortable watching that film, the way that they were combined.

00:15:33 April Host Um, I want to talk about the idea you know, I had brought up earlier that Abbasi didn't want to work in Hollywood, but in this film in particular, I want to get further into the performances for a lot of this discussion. Because the performances here are amazing. Eva Melander is perfect in this role.

00:15:53 Romola Guest I mean, the acting is just, oh, it's just stupendous acting.

00:15:58 April Host Um, it's also extremely difficult acting, and we'll get into that when we talk a little bit about prosthetics. But something that, you know, Abbasi really stood by was the fact that his intimate set allowed for more experimentation from the actors.

He said, quote: "Part of what makes it easier for us to have these great performances with Eva and Eero was also the fact that it was a small set. It was an intimate production, compared to how productions can be. Still, we're talking about, 20-30 people there, right? But that is something else in comparison to a couple hundred people that work on a Hollywood production. I still think that there is this element of intimacy, where everybody comes to work, but everybody knows everybody, and after awhile I think that really helps in terms of being comfortable and so forth." End quote.

00:16:41 Romola Guest Yeah, I mean, I'm an actor, and you know, there's the sort of love scene in this film where they finally have sex, and her genitals that had, up until this point in her life, been a source of profound shame to her and confusion, you know, become engorged, and she's able to make love for the first time in her life. I mean, she's crying, he's crying, you know, the courage and intimacy that it must have taken for those actors to work together in that way, the trust in the director, the trust they must have had in each other, you know, it really is a testament to what he's talking about.

It's that, you know, you can't—you can't make films that carry a kind of vessel of real emotion like that, you know, if you're dealing with 150 people who are stood around in the background all eating cheese and crackers. You know, like, you just—you can't do it like that, you know, so—

00:17:41 April Host I'm just imagining like, "Oh, wow that looks really cool, the sex," snacking on a snack bar.

00:17:45 Romola Guest Yeah! You just know that nobody was like, eating a protein bar in the background, you know?

[April laughs.]

It just must have felt like a very supportive environment, for those actors to be able to give themselves wholeheartedly to that—to that scene, and you can really feel it when you watch the film.

00:18:02 April Host Well, I think also, I mean, if I'm thinking about your film as well, the um, uh, genre allows for over-the-top performances, I think, in many ways. And when I say over the top, I just mean like, very kind of theatrical, like they show off on the screen.

00:18:19 Romola Guest Absolutely, melodrama, yeah.

00:18:20	April	Host	Yeah, they're terrifying, and you know, like they're very you know, fantastical and wonderful. And um, I do see that in your film, and in, you know—how big was your crew?
00:18:31	Romola	Guest	Oh, yeah, really small. I mean, yeah, 20—20 people? 20—I mean, I would say even less than that mainly on a sort of day to day level. You know, and also we were filming a lot in a very small house, so you know, we didn't—we didn't physically have the capacity to have a lot of people on set. I mean, mainly people were having to like, standing the street outside, you know? And that did, you know, allow the actors to have a sense that they really, you know, along with myself and the cinematographer, Laura Bellingham, you know, we really did control the space around the set. Which, you know, hopefully did feel like, that they were, you know, their working environment was protected. You know, people talk a lot about that these days in relation to kind of iflming sex scenes an dstuff, but even just doing emotional things, you know? You don't want to feel ashamed when you're doing that, you know? You want to feel free and you want to feel supported, and you know, it's not kind of wishy-washy or like, artsy to kind of ensure that people feel that when they're at work doing their job. And a small crew absolutely allows for that.
00:19:30	Music	Transition	"Switchblade Comb" by Mobius VanChocStraw.
00:19:35	April	Host	We're gonna take a quick break. When we come back, we'll talk a little bit more <i>Border</i> , and also uh, we'll talk some of Romola's film, <i>Amulet</i> . We'll be right back. <i>[Music ends.]</i>
00:19:47	April	Promo	Hey, it's April Wolfe, host of <i>Switchblade Sisters</i> , the show that you are listening to right now, and I'm here to talk again about the MaxFunDrive. Um, I wanted to bring in um, again, our really fabulous producer, Casey, who's just had a hell of a time the past few weeks of the MaxFunDrive. Casey, I'm checking in with you. What's going on?
00:20:09	Casey O'Brien	Promo	<i>[Groaning]</i> Hi, April. Um, as you know, I've been stabbed, uh, bludgeoned, uh, strangled by someone, and every time it happens, I lose my memory of who it was. And it's been difficult. <i>[April affirms.]</i> Somebody stole my Fabergé egg. That's uh, the big thing. But I don't quite understand why they keep coming back to hurt me. Um, so it's been tough. So I'm up at uh, the lakehouse.
00:20:35	April	Promo	That's weird.
00:20:37	Casey	Promo	I'm up at the lakehouse, just trying to be safe and away from other—
00:20:41	April	Promo	Oh, the lakehouse? Oh, fantastic.
00:20:44	Casey	Promo	Yeah. Um, so yeah, I just wanted to—

[Heels clicking.]

Wait a second. Someone's—did they follow me here?

00:20:51 April Promo Oh, no. Not again. Not—

00:20:53 Casey Promo I hear footsteps!

[Heel clicking continues.]

00:20:55 April Promo Are you kidding me?

00:20:57 Casey Promo It's—oh my god, it's—

[Door creaks open.]

It's—

00:20:59 April Promo Who is it? Who is it?

00:21:00 Casey Promo Drea Clark!

00:21:02 April Promo What?

00:21:03 Drea Clark Promo Oh, my—hello, Casey!

[Dramatic noir flick music swells.]

00:21:08 Casey Promo Agh, Drea, I—I—I don't understand. So, you stole my Fabergé egg?

00:21:14 Drea Promo Yes. Definitely. I love that egg.

00:21:17 Casey Promo But then—wh—but then why—why did you then come back and s—s—bludgeon me and strangle me?

00:21:26 Drea Promo Well, Casey, I think it's important that you know a few things. One, this year I made a real commitment to myself that I would get involved in playing the Most Dangerous Game with a coworker. I decided you would be that coworker, and that I would hunt you unknowingly. And then two, I really wanted your Fabergé egg. And three, it's very insulting to me that you kept forgetting it was me harming you, so I kept coming back. I will not be forgotten, mister O'Brien.

00:21:58 April Promo That does check out. That does check out, yeah. You know, I think Casey, I think honestly you owe her an apology. Um—

00:22:04 Drea Promo Right?

00:22:05 April Promo Let's bury the hatchet so we can get into some MaxFunDrive. Are you guys—

[Casey sighs.]

—well, not a literal hatchet. You don't have a hatchet with you, right?

00:22:09 Drea Promo *[Excitedly]* I have a hatchet! Yes!

00:22:11	Casey	Promo	<i>[Sighing deeply]</i> I—Drea’s an important part of one of my podcasts, and she’s frequently on this one, so... I guess I’m sorry.
00:22:20	Drea	Promo	Thank you. That is what I was waiting for. I’ll put this hatchet down. Feel free to continue. <i>[Hatchet clatters to the floor.]</i>
00:22:25	April	Promo	Okay. Alright, because we’ve got some important MaxFunDrive stuff to get to. Um, first off, I just want to, you know, to segway, I want to say we’re so lucky to have this podcast right now as our outlet, a way to connect with each other in hopefully <u>not</u> harmful ways, Drea. Um, and to feel you know, like maybe that we’re helping our community and providing companionship and some diversion in a very difficult time. Um, still, it does take technology, time, funding to keep everything going, all the wheels oiled and moving on this fast-moving train. But, if you are joining or upgrading your membership, that enables us to keep doing this instead of maybe other things.
00:23:10	Casey	Promo	Yeah. Drea, you’re on our—you’re on <i>Who Shot Ya?</i> , you’ve done this before. Since you’re here and frightening me, would you mind uh, telling people how they can give?
00:23:22	Drea	Promo	Um, I won’t mind. I’m glad you remember that we work together, since you didn’t remember when I tried to kill you. Um, I <u>can</u> tell you. <i>[Casey agrees sarcastically.]</i> If they want to join, and they should, and I hope they do because I love April and <i>Switchblade Sisters</i> , and it’s worthy of all kinds of support. And you can provide that support, even starting at baseline levels like five dollars a month, which will get you access to bonus content that I’m also on, if you want to hear my creepy <i>Most Dangerous Game</i> voice, you can in numerous ways. Um, ten dollars will get you the bonus content and a pin, and <i>Switchblade Sisters</i> has probably my favorite pin. Sorry, I love my pin too, but also yours is my number one, with the bullet.
00:24:06	April	Promo	<i>Who Shot Ya?</i> pin is pretty good.
00:24:07	Drea	Promo	It’s pretty good. Yours is, oh, it’s so good. It’s just tasty. Um, yeah, and you can do all of this very easily on a computer or a telephone with computer access at MaximumFun.org/join . It’s super easy. It’s as easy as following someone to the woods, breaking into their panic room, and harming them physically for the third or fourth time.
00:24:33	April	Promo	Some—yeah, some may even say it’s easier than that.
00:24:37	Drea	Promo	Oh yeah, I mean like, it’s easy for <u>me</u> to do both. But you’re right, it might be easier for some to just join Maximum Fun, yeah.
00:24:44	April	Promo	Yeah, for sure. Um, and you know, also this week we should mention the fact that you can get a subscription for a friend for a year, too, so um, you know, you can enjoy all the swag, give a gift subscription to maybe someone who is—had to cancel theirs

because of COVID. Maybe you can kind of fill in for them.

Um, and uh, you know, you get the anonymous Max Funster check on the box, and you can fill out the online form, again, at MaximumFun.org/join.

- 00:25:12 Casey Promo I just want to—I just want to pop in here and uh, you know, say thank you to all of our listeners and people that uh, Tweet at us and listen to our show, and pass the show on to friends. *Switchblade Sisters'* community is a unique and wonderful community and it's awesome seeing people get inspired to become filmmakers.
- And I'm also thankful for working with April Wolfe, who is such a great podcast host, and such a great uh, collaborator on this podcast, and is doing such good work on this show. I mean, every guest comes on and says her research is so incredible, and she just makes the show super fun to work on and super um, fulfilling. So, I just want to say I'm thankful for her as well.
- And I said something I was—I said I was thankful for Drea on *Who Shot Ya?* and I'm kind of—I might have to take that back.
- 00:26:09 April Promo Oh, come on! The hatchet's buried! It's, you know, in the ground. I—I—
- [April and Drea both stammer.]*
- 00:26:15 Casey Promo I see the hatchet, it's not buried!
- 00:26:19 April Promo *[Laughing]* I'm thankful for Drea. I'm thankful for her being our biggest um, uh, brightest star so many times on the show. You're up there with Chicken, who is a lot of our listeners' favorite, and that's—that's a high compliment.
- And again, I want to thank Casey, because he's so patient when I'm very frustrated with technology and heat. And you would be surprised at how impatient I can get with technology and heat!
- Um, but we thank all of you guys for listening. Everything that you do for the show is amazing, and all you do, also, is elevating women creators. And I think that that's so important. The marginalized creators of our time are finally getting a voice, and it's just so cool to see everyone coming together to give them their due.
- So, again, if you want to support what we do, if you want to support what Drea does at *Who Shot Ya?* which has some amazing film criticism and amazing discussion, you can just go to MaximumFun.org/join.
- 00:27:20 Casey Promo Uh, Drea? Since you admitted your crime to me, could you give me back my Fabergé egg?
- 00:27:28 Drea Promo Yeah, no way, man. I'm gonna cash that in, 'cause I'm running off with Nana's caretaker.
- 00:27:32 April Promo Totally hot.

00:27:33	Casey	Promo	Aw, shit.
00:27:34	April	Promo	Very hot. Well, that was a lot of drama. Now, back to our show!
00:27:37	Music	Transition	“Switchblade Comb” by Mobius VanChocStraw.
00:27:42	April	Host	Welcome back to <i>Switchblade Sisters</i> . I’m April Wolfe, and I’m joined today from Greece by Romola Garai, and we’re talking about <i>Border</i> .

Um, so I wanted to bring it back to something that we had talked about before, which is these performances and how we can kind of see them through these very heavy prosthetics, how that makes things quite difficult. Let’s—let’s talk about the creation of those prosthetics, because it’s a thing where, I mean, you know, when Abbasi did like, *Shelley*, his other—he wasn’t like, doing a ton of prosthetics before.

He wasn’t—like, this was kind of new to him, and he was very honest about that when he was talking to Göran Lundström, who was the designer, the make-up designer for um, for Eva and Eero. And um, he really didn’t know exactly what he wanted. He was kind of trusting um, Lundström to help him and guide him.

So, Lundström said, quote: “We did the test make-up for this, and it gave Ali something for him to work with. I based the design on what I could get out of him. Even though he didn’t have a good idea, they were talking about make-up that would take less than an hour, and then when I started investigating what he wanted, I started to get an idea that he wanted more and more and more. We ended up having nine prosthetic pieces covering the face. Once we got to that point in the design, they asked, ‘Can we make the make-up time shorter?’ When it came to actually designing it, I think I got a sketch that looked neanderthal. My job became how to make her look something close to that but not neanderthal and not too fantastical.” End quote.

So, it was a really collaborative effort, but even though Abbasi didn’t know exactly what he wanted, you know, he had so much great trust in Lundström to make this work, and to find it there. And I think that that’s like, a huge leap of faith. *[Laughs.]*

00:29:29	Romola	Guest	Yeah, and I think that the—the make-up feels like it’s done with real humanity, you know? Like, exactly as you kind of described in the quote, you know? It was important that she, you know, had the appearance of something definitely other, but there’s a beauty in it as well, and you know, there’s a complete sort of—also I love what, uh, the work that they did with her body. You know, her body has hair on it, but it’s very delicately kind of drawn, the hair on her body.
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And uh, and I just feel like the whole thing was done with a lot of respect, you know? There was never any othering being done with her as the kind of central character, and I’m sure the actress fed into that, as well. Um, and there is a real sense that these departments were working respectfully and closely together, and showing sympathy for the central character.

00:30:21 April Host I—you know, the—the prosthetics that you have in your film, was that kind of a trip to figure out? Was that um, was that like a learning process for you?

00:30:33 Romola Guest Well, I—so, the prosthetics that we had on the mother in my film, I mean, that, to a certain extent, that was a very, very old woman who is revealed at the end, you know, to be something other than that. And in that sense, that part of it wasn't too difficult. You know, I've seen that kind of aging being done, I knew what was required, I knew what would work and what wouldn't work so well.

The big challenge for us was the deity figure at the end. That is a full prosthetic suit. I didn't want the entire image of the deity at the end to be visual effects. There are visual effects in the film. We've kept them to a minimum. Mainly it's practical effects. I wanted it to be Carla in a physical suit that we could, you know, physically see moving.

I mean, the eye, for all visual effects, brilliance, you know, we can still detect that difference, and I wanted people to know that it was—that it was her there, and also it meant that Alec could actually respond to her, you know, in the scene.

And also I thought it was, you know, it was important in a way—although it's a kind of uh, some of the background around her is visual effects—but you know, he's inside a physical object, the shell is a physical object, her suit is a physical object. You know, I am a great believer that we're still, you know, predominantly as human beings, you know, we have a different relationship with physical objects. We can detect them, you know, and it changes performance, and it changes the uh, audience's relationship to things, and that felt very important to me.

00:32:07 April Host I—this actually—I mean like, if you—if you listen to any of the commentary too, like, it's a full collaboration. And one of the things you know, like it became a collaboration like, the second that Eva Melander had auditioned for this. Um, first off they were having a really hard time finding anyone for this role, and—

00:32:23 Romola Guest Yeah, 18 months, I heard.

00:32:24 April Host *[Sighing]* It was like, really tough, because a lot of people didn't want to get ugly. And you know, we can talk a little bit about what Eva Melander had thought about that. But, um, in the audition process, you know, Eero had already been cast as Vore, and so Abbasi just had, you know, women come in and play against him.

And um, so, he said, quote—*[Laughs]* This is after he said like, “I want you to come in and say—and then just like, you've met this love of your life and you didn't know. Like, you—all of the sudden, everything is awakened to you.” And he said, quote: “She just blushed. It was this little thing that almost made me cry. She had an inner life that the other characters didn't have, and that the other actors didn't have.” End quote.

And I thought that was really lovely, that she's just, um, like he gives

her this direction and she blushes. And it was not something that he had really thought about before, because he said, quote: "Eero, who plays Vore, was already cast, so I used him to choose the girl. So I told Eva to concentrate on that part. You see him, and you've never seen him like this before. You fall in love, but you don't know what love is because you haven't realized it. So, you're more shocked than romantically attached. And she did this take, and he came and he looked at her, and she blushed. She was red all over the face, and I started blushing, too. Suddenly it became so awkward, that situation. I hadn't thought about it being awkward. I thought it was funny and a little bit weird, but I hadn't thought about that scene being awkward and serious." End quote.

And so all of a sudden, she has this reaction that changes the whole trajectory of this romance and these two characters together in the audition process.

- 00:34:03 Romola Guest And it's such a testament to him as a filmmaker as well, that he's able to see that as well. You know, like he's not looking for someone to walk into a room and do grand gestures. He saw somebody who came into the room who instinctively was able to meld his note, which was, you know, show somebody falling in love, with an essential truth about the character, which is you know, somebody who is—has—feels that level of shame about themselves and their body. You know, it's not gonna be a grand gesture, you know?
- And the subtlety, the simplicity, the kind of um, purity for want of a better word, of her—of her as a character, you know, was perfectly described by this actress. And you know, and it was a testament to him, that he was able to kind of recognize that and then go forward with, you know, a true collaboration with her, because it really is the most heartbreakingly beautiful piece of acting.
- 00:34:56 April Host Have you had that happen to you before at all, where you're like, you come in and you like, make some choices and the director responds, and they're like, "Yes, you understand, like, make the character your own"?
- 00:35:04 Romola Guest Yeah. I have. And actually like, it's one of the best things that any actor—that can happen to an actor, you know? 'Cause I think, you know, there's a real—there's a real like, uh, I think longing in a lot of actors to be kind of recognized and seen by directors, and to feel like they're being, you know, that you're representing a kind of elemental human truth, you know, and that you're getting close to something that does that. You know, to contribute, for want of a better word. And uh, yeah, it's an amazing thing, if a director says, you know, "You've brought me something that I didn't see," or "you've introduced something to the performance that I hadn't known was—was there."
- 00:35:42 April Host Well, let me say uh, a quote from Eva Melander that I—you know, maybe you'd have some thoughts on. She said, quote: "When I started acting in Sweden, I always felt as if I had to create my own character, because I didn't feel as if they were there. They were just written from a familiar point of view. Girlfriend, wife, friend. The story

was always about somebody else. I think I'm quite trained in creating characters who have souls and lives, even if they're roughly written into the story." End quote.

Um, and you know, overall, you know, I think what she's trying to say is just like, that you know, marginalized actors might be better able to create characters from nothing, because they've had to do that for themselves with poorly drawn people their entire careers.

00:36:26 Romola Guest Yeah, that's absolutely true. And also just the completely demoralizing experience of being an actor who has profound talent and isn't being the opportunity to kind of utilize it in favor of people who you probably know for a fact are not that good. You know, the way that the industry works, you know, it's not fair and just in that way.

But the fact, if you stay with it, and you make it your life, you know, you're gonna have a kind of level of respect for and dedication to it as a job, and a sense that it's worthwhile. That it's gonna make you very detailed and hardworking and um, yeah, and contributory in a way that I think there are plenty—also the thing is, you know, if you haven't had as many opportunities, you really work your nuts off when you're given one, you know? Which is, of course, very useful.

00:37:18 April Host Um, and I think you know, when it comes to *Border*, you see a lot of um, Abbasi kind of letting his characters or letting his actors kind of go wild. For instance, that scene in the forest, when she's kind of like, communing and she's just like—like touching everything, like you know, seeing everything in like, a new light.

00:37:40 Romola Guest And they jump in the lake, and they're like, in the rain.

00:37:42 April Host Yes! Yes. Abbasi said, um, quote: "When she did her first take in that forest, we talked about it. That sensuality and connection that her character has and human beings don't have, and actually, what you see in that sequence, it's her interpretation of that. It wasn't necessarily in the script, but it was just another layer on top. Her contributions also how she walks, how she talks." End quote.

Um, and you know, he's also using the same word, contributions. You know, like how do you contribute to this character, to this production, to this story. And—and I love the idea that that wasn't in the script, that she like, communes in the forest. It was just like, alright, send her out naked, running wild, and see what happens.
[Laughs.]

00:38:23 Romola Guest Yeah. And the—and the—you know, I keep coming back to this moment, only because it's so beautifully acted and you know, that there's this moment where they make love, and she you know—I think it's something that I—I really found very moving, because when you're a woman, your genitals are like, mainly on the inside, you know? And so your sexual kind of journey is very confusing and you know, can last a lifetime for some women. But to see that moment where she understands what her genitals do and what they're for and like, has an orgasm. Like, she just—it's sort of like she discovers she has a clitoris, you know?

And it's so beautiful and—and you know, the actress, Eva Mendler, is crying, and they feel—it's very, um, profoundly moving. And it's not something that an actor can do unless they felt totally comfortable. It's one of the most kind of intense and revealing things I've ever seen on screen, and like, she's weeping in the scene, and I—it just, um, it profoundly affected me, because of the truth of it.

00:39:30 April

Host

Yeah, Abbasi actually fought to have that in there. Like, his you know, production was like, "This is gonna be absurdly comic." Everyone was laughing when he was like, "I want to see them have sex, and I want to see him give birth." Like, these are the two things that I want, and they were like, "This could go horribly awry." But he had enough trust in his actors to actually pull it off and to make it feel um, real and emotional.

Um, so something that has always stuck me about this film is the cinematography. Um, because it is a great deal of naturalism. It is um, you know, not exactly what you would expect from you know, like we said, a prosthetics-heavy movie, an effects-heavy movie. Um, a fantasy. And um, Abbasi had a very, very kind of strict idea of how he was working with cinematography.

He said, quote: "I've been working with my cinematographer, Nadim Carlsen, since way back. We were in the same year at film school together and we did my first little sketches at the film school together. We did *Shelley* together as well. Nadim aesthetically comes from still photography. He has a very specific taste. He knows what he likes and what he wants. He has a very experienced hand, even if he's not very old, and at the same time, he's not tricky to work with.

"This is my principle though. I'm not interested in making beautiful pictures. If you sit there and think the music is great from the beginning to end, then something is wrong. If you sit there and think, 'Oh, such a great actress, look at that silicone mask.' Of course at times you can think about that, but if you think about it all the time.

"And especially with the cinematography, I have this thing where if a frame or a reel looks too good, then I cut it out. Because I don't want to get from the cinemato—cinema—sorry—cinematographic experience to a photographic one. That was our main ideology, so to speak." End quote.

You—was that—I mean, do you feel like you discovered a lot about your kind of cinematographic um, preferences when you were working on *Amulet*? This—you know, what you like, overall?

00:41:24 Romola

Guest

Yeah. I did want something that felt quite artificial and constructed, for one part of the film. One part of the film takes place inside an old, creaky house, and it—and the film is very consciously an effort to um, utilize certain tropes of the genre, in an effort to then exploit them. But then we also have a section of the film that takes place in flashbacks, which is shot in a completely different way. And actually, our original intention was to shoot—we did use different lenses, and

we did different things in the grey—but our original intention was to shoot part of the film on digital and part on film, 16 millimeters, so that we could kind of explore those distinctions even further.

Um, you know, that what—everything that takes place inside the house is very constructed. There's a lot of paranoid angles, it's a lot of you know, sort of slow slides and all of the things that we understand from kind of classic horror. And then there's this other part of the film which is you know, largely handheld and feels much more naturalistic and styling.

And so I suppose that's you know, that's um, in a sense that's developed my understanding of the different ways that you can use film to tell story. But also you know, I think with *Amulet*, I was very committed to the idea of the film having different aesthetics, and not attempting to make them cohesive necessarily, because I wanted the flashbacks to feel part of a very different time. And that sense—in that sense, when you watch, it can feel um, aesthetically jarring sometimes, because you're going between two different things.

But then I enjoyed that as well, you know, I think there's always a sense, whenever you make a film, that you—you go into it with questions, thinking, "I don't know if this is gonna work, I don't know if this is gonna be right." And when you, you know, through the process of making it, you, you know, you discover that it's—it's working maybe not in the ways that you'd expected it to.

00:43:17 April Host I think you know, it's an interesting thing, because Abbasi has some uh, quotes from—about flashbacks, when it comes to how he was adapting this, and he was really refusing flashbacks, because he didn't think—like, his flashbacks would have required a different actor, and I think that was the breaking point for him.

Um, he said, quote: "Generally speaking, flashbacks are a great literary device. They work well in literature, but not always in film. There are few people that can do it very well. Mostly it doesn't sit well. It feels like a foreign element to me, even when I see a film and I go, 'Oh, this is a flashback.' In literature, it works to have, let's say, a line like, 'When he was five years old, this happened or that happened.' Because you don't see the main character, you imagine him as a child and in that way you keep the continuity. Whereas in film, there is another actor playing that five year old kid, so it's actually not the character in your perception. At least, my brain works like that." End quote.

And I think you know, the—it's a different thing. You know, if he had had flashbacks in *Border*, it would've required like, a five year old troll actor.

00:44:21 Romola Guest And they wouldn't have been able to do the prosthetics on the child.

00:44:24 April Host Exactly. Exactly.

00:44:25 Romola Guest So they wouldn't—I mean, there's no way that a child could sit there for four hours while you did it. I don't think it would've been—I mean, yes, I think he makes a very good point, just technically,

about how flashbacks are less successful in film as a medium, as opposed to um, literature. But also, just technically, it wouldn't have been possible with this film. You know, you would have had to have been flashing back to her life as a teenager, which wouldn't have been enough of a distinction in time to make it you know, to make it useful.

- 00:44:53 April Host Yeah, there's—I—you know, and then if I think of—I would say your film is almost less of flashbacks and more of parallel storylines, um, of two kind of like, running parallel lines that intersect.
- 00:45:10 Romola Guest I mean, it's—they are—I mean, thank you. But also, they're flashbacks. And it is really hard. Like, the man speaks the truth, you know. It's really challenging, and it did make a lot more sense on the page, because exactly as he says, you know, what you say on a line of prose, you know, we cut to five years earlier, you know. You have to establish that in the visuals. You immediately have to kind of employ a whole set of devices to kind of reframe your film. It is very challenging, you know, and—
- 00:45:41 April Host Yeah, you just made your job harder. *[Laughs.]*
- 00:45:42 Romola Guest Yeah, I made my job a lot harder, and the edit was not easy. It was very difficult, and you know, finding the places to put those flashbacks, because the flashbacks reveal so much about you know, who he is in reality. You know, it wasn't easy. But it's a great thing to set yourself a significant challenge early on in your career, because you know, I wouldn't—I wouldn't change the experience of having to sit in that room with Al, my editor, going, “Oh god! What are we gonna do about the flashbacks?! The running time is three hours!”
- [April laughs.]*
- You know, um, it wasn't—it wasn't easy. But you know, it was um, it was a very instructive period of my life.
- 00:46:25 April Host Yeah, you should add a few kids and dogs in there next time.
- 00:46:30 Romola Guest Yeah!
- [Both laugh.]*
- 00:46:31 April Host I wanted to kind of back up to something, also that we were talking about, in terms of choosing locations. Um, because there was a very kind of specific guiding principle that Abbasi had in choosing his locations. 'Cause you were talking about the house and you know, like finding a very specific place. Um, but he was always over choosing the mundane over the extraordinary.
- He said, quote: “We were talking about how to bring life into the story, how to keep the realism so that the magical becomes more believable and plausible. We decided to approach this with a kind of naturalism. A little bit of a social realist approach. We were careful, we were still just following the actors around the room, but we wanted a little bit of reality present.

“Part of it has to do with cinematography, but part of it has to do with production design. The way we chose the police station, for example. We had a lot of choices for that location, and I had a lot of discussions with my production designer, because I wanted to go with the boring one. She said, ‘It looks like every other police station we’ve seen. There’s nothing special.’ But, there isn’t anything special about a police station. That’s what I wanted.” End quote.

And I think that’s a—that’s a risk, because if you are doing any kind of production design or location scouting, yeah, you kind of want like, the unique thing. And he was just like, “Give me the most boring shit you can find, and let’s book it.”

00:47:49 Romola Guest

Yeah, and you see it all the time in film. You see people turning up to you know, what should be, you know, a police station in a small town in England, and they’ve shot it outside the Commonwealth office in London. And you’re like—

[April laughs.]

You know, it’s like a massive building, you know, or, as he said sort of astutely before, you know, it’s the attempt to aestheticize everything, which makes seeing anything impossible. Because you know, if you put everything at the same level, you know, you’re never gonna see anything.

So, it was brilliant that he chose a really boring police station, because he then has a very beautiful house. Yes, it’s mundane, yes it’s shot in a social realistic style, but it is a sort of little, sort of pinpoint of life in this sort of extraordinarily dense and magnificent forest, you know?

So there are sort of, yes, naturalistic kind of choices, but—but there is a great deal of beauty to her sort of bungalow the woods, which you know, and it’s completely right that that is separated so distinctly from the boring police station, the nursing home, you know, the other—the—you know, the border office where she does her work. ‘Cause that does feel very grounded in reality, and then they move into something that feels more sort of magical realist when you enter the forest.

00:49:07 April Host

And you know, I’m curious in terms of like, finding—finding your special house. You know, finding—like, how—

00:49:15 Romola Guest

Oh, god. It was a nightmare. Ugh. It was awful. I mean, we got to like, two weeks before we were supposed to start shooting, I mean maybe three weeks, and it looked like we were just gonna have to—we were just gonna have to push the film um, and that it might not happen, you know, in the way that these things will just fall apart.

Um, and we’d done all the stuff you’re supposed to do. We found, you know, locations through a locations company. Uh, I just couldn’t find anything right. You know, you say old spooky house and someone takes you to like, a mansion in the middle of a field. And I’m like, “No, no, no, it’s—it’s in London.” You know, it has to be a row house, you know? Like, a terraced—it has to be a terraced

house, and—

But, you know, London is—every single terraced house in London is now like, in New York or whatever, is now um, you know, a three million pound house with a gym in the basement. So, it wasn't easy to find that, and eventually we just did this kind of weird thing where, I think the day before it looked like we were gonna have to push, I went on a property search engine and just put in some key words, you know. I was like "derelict", "recently exchanged".

You know, and we found this house, which um, had been lived in for 50 years. It had all the period detailing. It was completely empty. We could do anything we wanted to it. The very nice couple who owned it just said, "You can have it for a month, you know, and then we'll bring the builders in."

And it was—it was extraordinary to have that kind of freedom, because our amazing production designer, Francesca, we just went in, and she changed all the walls, she ripped up the carpet, she changed the glass in the windows. She just absolutely kind of was able to create what she needed inside the space.

It also meant that because we weren't having to shift locations—although we shot in, you know, four and a half weeks—we were able to do everything very intensely inside that house. The attic was a set build, because um, the house did have an attic, but you couldn't stand up in it. It wouldn't have worked. Um, but—

- 00:51:12 April Host Yeah, you can't ask for everything. Beggars can't be choosers.
- 00:51:15 Romola Guest *[Stammering]* No, but we were able to just shoot in that place, not move around, we weren't having to pack up the kit and go elsewhere, and um, thank god, 'cause otherwise I don't think we would've got film in the can.
- 00:51:27 April Host Well, I mean, from my own experience too, I realize that like, shooting in cities has been getting maybe a little bit, mm, maybe a little bit more difficult in terms of finding locations that don't feel polished, that don't feel gentrified in a way.
- And uh, and I think that that's getting harder in major cities. Sometimes you can find them in smaller cities, but it's you know, a trade off, where you can get the great crew and the great cast if you stay in a central place like London or Los Angeles or New York, but then it's really hard to afford all of the other things that go into it. So, there's like a constant trade off, unless you have, you know, some special place, like your house.
- 00:52:05 Romola Guest Yeah, I would—I would say that like, my number one takeaway from making my film was that you know, the minute I started writing the words, "it is a run-down, large, terraced house in London", I should've been trying to find that property. I should've been trying to nail it down years beforehand, you know? Because then I could have written to the space as well.
- I think that there's a lot to be said if you know the—if you know that

a location is gonna be like, significant in your story, write for it like it was a character. You know, find that place, work out where it is, speak to the people who own it. You know, just make it—commit—you know, because they are so incredibly important in filmmaking.

00:52:48	April	Host	Uh, so Romola this is about our time to wrap up, but I just want to thank you so much for coming on and talking about your film, your career, and <i>Border</i> , and sharing your love for that movie with us.
00:52:59	Romola	Guest	No, thanks so much for having me. It was amazing to get to watch it again, and you know, I hope that this means that some more people watch it, 'cause it's just such an amazing and beautiful film.
00:53:10	April	Host	Awesome. Um, and again, <i>Amulet</i> is going to be available VOD and in select theaters, some drive-ins too, um, what's the date that the—
00:53:18	Romola	Guest	It was actually the 24th. It's been out for a couple of days now.
00:53:22	April	Host	Okay, so it's the—released the 24th, so it's available everywhere. So, go take a look. <i>Amulet</i> .
00:53:25	Music	Transition	"Switchblade Comb" by Mobius VanChocStraw.
00:53:28	April	Host	Thank you so much for listening. Thank you, thank you, thank you. Did I say thank you? I can't remember if I said thank you. Thank you, thank you. Thank you for being a part of the show's community. If you've taken that extra step to join as a Max Fun member, extra thank yous for that. You are making the show possible.

And you know, please know that we are grateful for your support, we're grateful for your Tweets, we're grateful for you listening, for telling a friend, all of it. Um, it just makes our day brighter, and we hope that we can make your day brighter, too.

Again, if you haven't had a chance to become a member yet, this is the final week of the MaxFunDrive, so that you can do that. So, you can do it at MaximumFun.org/join.

Um, and if you want to let us know what you think of the show, you can tweet at us @SwitchbladePod or email us at SwitchbladeSisters@maximumfun.org.

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

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

[Music fades.]

00:54:33	Speaker 1	Promo	MaximumFun.org .
00:54:35	Speaker 2	Promo	Comedy and culture.
00:54:36	Speaker 3	Promo	Artist owned—
00:54:37	Speaker 4	Promo	—Audience supported.

