

**[Transcript] SmartLess / "Steven Soderbergh"**

Okay, guys, we're going to admit what our favorite pasta dish is on three. Ready?  
Yeah, okay.  
One, two, three.  
No.  
Chicken Alfredo.  
Steak.  
Welcome to Smarlin'.  
Smart.  
Blast.  
Smart.  
Blast.  
Smart.  
Blast.  
You seem so stressed out.  
Why are you so stressed out, Jay?  
I'm not.  
I'm really, I don't know why I'm tired today.  
No one wants to hear about it, though.  
This is probably not a great way to start.  
Why is it from the golf?  
From the early golf?  
It's just so much golf.  
You're right.  
Nobody does want to hear it.  
I just asked you why you were tired.  
I did have an early round.  
I shot 77 yesterday, Will.  
I know you don't care and you don't want to hear about it, but I'm very proud of it.  
I'm happy for you because you have the last couple of weeks and I can say this now that you've shot, you had a good round yesterday, you've had, it's been unlike you and you've had some mediocre rounds and I know you've been upset and you've had a few grumpier than usual days.  
Thank you for seeing me and hearing me.  
So I see you.  
Here's what the number 77 in golf means to me.  
That sounds really high.  
Well, the level par normal is 70 or 72.  
Yeah.  
Okay.  
Oh my God.  
So that's if you did everything perfect.  
Scotty and I have been watching Lord of the Rings.  
Okay.  
Moving on.

**[Transcript] SmartLess / "Steven Soderbergh"**

I'll tell you this.  
Speaking of Lord of the Rings.  
Are you guys being held hostage somewhere?  
What's going on?  
I've never seen any of them, but I bet they're great.  
Oh my God.  
They're so very good.  
Speaking of Lord of the Rings, Amanda and I have our anniversary coming up.  
I can say this because she won't, well, no, she doesn't listen to these.  
I have it in my calendar.  
Your anniversary.  
Amanda does not listen.  
She does not listen.  
So we have it coming up in a month or so and I thought about getting her a ring, this ring from this jeweler that she likes.  
How many years?  
I haven't bought her any jewelry in a long, long time and so this is, and I usually don't do it unless it's a pre-approved by her because anytime I try to like go rogue, I get slammed.  
Jay, I got somebody.  
Dude, enough with all the hot romance.  
It sounds so incredible.  
So I have somebody if you want somebody.  
No, no, no, I got that.  
He's got the person who was approved by Amanda.  
Amanda, this is a pre-approved person.  
I know the person.  
But we share a calendar.  
We share a calendar, Amanda and I.  
And so I had to put a reminder on my calendar to go to this jeweler today and because I'm going to get her a ring, I put as the prompt on the calendar as just Lord.  
Oh, Lord of the Rings.  
For Lord of the Rings.  
Nice.  
Now our assistant shares a calendar too with us and I'm waiting for her to say, where have you found to worship on Tuesday?  
Where are you going to church?  
Why are you worshipping on Tuesday?  
But I couldn't come up with a better prompt on the calendar.  
No, that's good.  
That's my Lord of the Rings story.  
Is that what Lord meant?  
Lord of the Rings.  
So I would remember, oh, go get that ring today.  
All right.

**[Transcript] SmartLess / "Steven Soderbergh"**

And did you get it?

Not yet.

It's after this.

I got to be honest.

It's not a great story.

Well, it's a long story, but I will say this.

That's my specialty, bro.

It begs a lot of questions from the other two people with whom you share a calendar, which I think is a mistake.

A.

B.

I have as many secrets as you.

Well, you have an assistant.

And if Amanda has a question about your calendar, she could say, hey, can you, how's he look like on this day?

Yeah.

B. But C, by putting Lord, it's begging someone to go, what's going on?

What's going on?

What's happening?

And what you should have done is done something like golf lesson or some stupid fucking thing like that.

But no, you didn't do that.

I guess I was so excited that I have like, well, tell me, what did you get or what kind of ring?

Nothing yet.

Oh, you're going to go pick it up?

Oh, you're going to go pick it up?

Yeah, it's some one of these vintage goddamn things that you know.

I know the lady.

How many years, Jay?

Yeah.

20 plus.

Wow.

But I better get the, I better find out before we hit 25, because 25 is silver.

25 is going to get like the real ring.

I nailed down the date, the number of actual years.

Right.

Yeah.

Just in case it comes up.

I think I heard, I think our guest has been laughing and how foolish we are.

I know.

We're wasting his time.

I know.

I know what I'm stalling because I'm really nervous actually.

## [Transcript] SmartLess / "Steven Soderbergh"

Are you?

I think that's why I'm here today.

Really?

Yeah.

Yeah.

It's so much better when it's not my guest because then I can just hit fuck it and I just roll in completely unprepared and I just get to respond like the thing that I am.

But today, I got, there's a hero here today.

Do we have, I can't wait to hear the, I'm so excited for your, your intro that you've written because these are my least, sorry, favorite parts about, go ahead.

Doesn't it sound like he almost said least, Sean?

It did seem like.

It did.

But I actually really like him, Jay.

There's thought behind them and they're always kind of funny.

Thank you, Sean.

You mean I don't wing it like lazy boy over there or me.

Yeah.

Or you.

All right.

Here he comes.

Today our guest might be the person I've most wanted to meet in this nutty biz.

He's a master filmmaker.

You've never met him?

I don't, if I have, I'm going to be really embarrassed.

I don't think I have.

I don't remember.

But he's going to tell me maybe if he remembers and we didn't.

Sorry.

I think we, I don't think we have.

He's a master filmmaker and incredibly prolific.

He's made, he made his first movie 35 years ago and has made 35 films since, not to mention as many, many projects for the small screen.

His films have made over \$2 billion and received 14 Academy Award nominations in 2000.

He won the Oscar for best director and his odds were good because that year he was nominated for two films.

He's come a long way from writing music for game shows and holding cue cards.

He's got a couple of kids, a wife named Jules, and we're born on the same day, January 14th.

Please welcome the one and only Steven Soderbergh.

Oh my God.

Mr.

We're born on the same day.

Yeah.

Now see, I, I track you.

**[Transcript] SmartLess / "Steven Soderbergh"**

You don't track me.

That's all right.

Wait a minute.

Yeah.

January 14th.

It's, I shared a birthday with you, LL Cool J and Dave Grohl.

Whoa.

Okay.

That's great coming together again.

I would like to see, I would like to see that grouping together.

Steven Soderbergh, welcome to SmartLess.

What a thrill.

This is so cool.

It's so nice to meet you.

I'm going to be the most boring person here.

How does this work?

No.

What do I do?

We're just going to bullshit.

No.

Listener, you should know that we're starting with-

When we stop recording, we will tell you who the most boring people.

Yeah.

Okay.

I'm kidding.

Listener, we're starting with a great Soderbergh piece of composition here.

He's got a frame left or frame right.

He's got a spiral staircase cutting up through the ceiling.

It's like a cool shot.

Yeah.

And it's a low angle.

We've got a nice palette going.

Steven, it's just, you never stop being great, right?

This is the bunker.

This is the bunker.

This is the bunker.

This is the bunker.

All right.

Now, Steven.

Where do we start?

I know.

I could go-

There's a lot-

Because he would say 9,000 questions for you or 17,000 questions.

## [Transcript] SmartLess / "Steven Soderbergh"

And for all the listeners I see, people always go, Sean always says I've got 9,000 questions or 17,000.

You know what?

He does.

So F off.

So Steven, I've often felt like, and I feel like I've seen this out there before.

So maybe it was informed by that and maybe it wasn't my original idea.

But I've often felt like when people talk about independent film, in independent film the 90s where it's real heyday, that was sort of the genesis of the, you know, we had the auteur from the 70s, but then the 90s where it was like a whole new movement.

And I feel like you were sort of on the cutting edge of that.

Sex Lies and Video Tape was late 80s, I'm going to say like 80, 89, 89.

Sex Lies and Video Tape really was the kicking off point for, and it was the beginning of this sort of golden age of independent film.

And you were really, really in a lot of ways the godfather of that.

And then you went on to make so many unbelievably incredible films.

Some with bigger budgets, some not, but you've always maintained, there's something about the way that you've kind of kept that sort of independent spirit within the framework of the studio system.

And I don't know if you agree with me or disagree with me, but is that something that was always, I don't know, is that something that's part of you, the way that you approach making films?

It's a terrible question, but I think you know what I'm getting at.

Yeah, I think I do.

I think it comes down to all of the films that I saw that influenced me, that I felt were great, had a signature.

They were made by, they felt as though they were made by an individual.

And so my goal, coming up on the heels of what's often called the American New Wave that followed the New Wave that came from Europe and other parts of the world.

That was what made this feel new.

We knew that there were studio films made by certain directors that had a certain signature.

But the idea that that, over time on a percentage basis, yielded better, movies was not an idea that emerged until this new wave showed up.

And people like me who wanted to make movies were watching these movies and feeling like there was a difference between something that felt made by a person and something that felt made by a company.

That I just felt, well, I want to do that.

That's what I want to be a part of.

And I've tried to maintain that and also sort of brainwash other people around me and behind me to sign on to that idea.

But you also did this thing where you, sorry, Jason, but I just want to sort of still on this where you made all these films and all of them very different from the next.

And I find that a lot of filmmakers have a signature style or a thing that they do that makes, you know, but that you have been able to sort of constantly change, not necessarily the way you make films, but certainly tonally the way that you really lean into whatever

it is the film that you're doing and you make it unique to that.  
They're all very, very different.  
And I think it's such a testament to, I don't know, a lack of originality.  
No, no, no, no, no, you can't pigeonhole you.  
You can't like, no, but that's, that's, I'm a synthesis.  
I mean, I can tell you that right now.  
I'm a synthesis.  
I know the difference between somebody who's a true original and somebody who's a synthesis.  
I've seen it.  
I've met them.  
I'm a synthesis.  
I, I, I don't look at anything I've done and gone, well, I did that first, like, that's not true.  
My, what I do and what I like to do is see as much as I can see and, and attach to as much as I can attach to that I think is really compelling and then put it in a bucket and, you know, stew it around as I'm envisioning whatever the next thing is and go, oh, okay, I can use that.  
I can use that.  
I can use that.  
I'm going to save those other things.  
They don't work for this.  
I'll kick those down the road, but I'm just taking in anything I think is good, a shot, a line, a transition, an idea, a font, anything.  
Yeah.  
I'm just, I'm looking for anything.  
So you don't see, I've, you kind of already just answered this, but I was going to say, so you don't, you don't consciously seek out like, I want to do a big gigantic franchise for a studio because I have dollar signs in my eyes or whatever.  
You'd rather go for, for idea for whatever, whatever speaks to you personally, right?  
I mean, it's a dumb question, but you kind of just said it correct.  
Well, I'm looking potentially through two different lenses.  
If there's nothing immediately in front of me, I'm just watching things to pick up new ideas and new information.  
If there's something then that I focus on, oh, I'm going to do this next, then I start to telescope that toward things that I think have been really good in that space.  
Yeah.  
Because I think what's fascinating is when, with somebody like you and your brain is like, I think I, I'm sure lots of people want, we always ask this of people that are as successful as you is like, we try to get inside of the head and be like, what informs your decisions because they seem to be always correct.  
Like that's what's fascinating to me is like finding out what, where that comes from inside of you rather than, this is a great story, I've never seen it.  
It's got to speak to something even deeper than that.  
And I'm always fascinated with people with your track records is like, God, you get it

**[Transcript] SmartLess / "Steven Soderbergh"**

right time after time after time after time.

What is that secret sauce?

I look, if I knew what it was, I would tell you, but I, no, no, because I'm, honestly, I'm the, I'm the son of a teacher.

I'm an open source person.

I don't keep anything that I've learned private, even when people wish that I would.

So, you know, it's, it's, it is purely a question of taste, which is developed by what you grew up around.

And then your sort of willingness to kind of grind it out to get to the good version of something.

Yeah.

And, and while doing that, in my view, and this is really important, creating an atmosphere of creativity, you don't do this shit by yourself, creating an environment in which people are thinking about the thing.

They're not thinking about you and how you're behaving.

They're thinking about the thing.

And so you're in this continual sort of conversation about what is the thing?

What, what is the best version of this thing?

Right.

If it's, if it's going good, you go with that and it's flowing.

When it pushes back at you, what's your sort of checklist for why?

And, you know, it's pushing back why it was going fine.

Now we've hit a bump.

What's the, what are the questions I need to ask to get to the solve?

Yeah.

There's no shortcut to that other than being on the floor.

Right.

Right.

So you, you, you very humbly say that you're more of a synthesizer than, than, than, than something else.

But what would you say to anybody out there listening that might be thinking about becoming a director and weighing the, the, the, the effort of, of education, you know, in that space and taking, you know, directing classes or the equal of that, whatever that is, like how much of what you do is technique that you've learned.

And how much of it is, as you say, just synthesizing different elements that you've observed, liked.

And then now you're just executing taste and, and putting together a combination of all those things and reacting on the fly.

Well, whenever I'm asked, should I get a film school or some parent asks, should my child go to film school?

My response is that, look, if only to be part of a gang, it's worth it.

Yeah.

You know what I mean?

I don't, I don't think, I don't think anybody's going to teach.



## [Transcript] SmartLess / "Steven Soderbergh"

If they're good, they're good.

Um, and they will, they'll be fine, but you need a gang.

Like you need a group.

You need, I had it.

I just was lucky.

I had it in high school instead of in college.

Yeah.

So I just got lucky, but we were a gang.

We were a gang of people that wanted to make movies and we're making short films, doing everything on everybody's projects.

And so if that's the only thing you got out of going to film school, that's huge.

Yeah, actually.

I said, yeah, I would say that about college is like college was more taught me more about socializing.

Yes, exactly, exactly.

And we will be right back.

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You know, I remember when I was younger, uh, auditioning for jobs as an actor and not getting them and you kind of start to doubt yourself and think about your path that you choose the right one.

Am I supposed to be doing this at all?

And what got me through it is the belief in myself and the confidence.

And how I got that was actually talking about it and being vocal and vulnerable and honest and communicative.

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## [Transcript] SmartLess / "Steven Soderbergh"

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So I have the ripstop pant, which is great because it has a little pocket on the side and you just throw my keys in there.

So when I'm running outside, boom, go my keys.

I'm set to go.

I got a new pair in Sesame.

That's the color you heard me.

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And now back to the show.

Speaking of a gang, you often work with the same people or you've worked with the same people a lot, two of which are past guests on this little chat show.

George Clooney and Matt Damon.

## [Transcript] SmartLess / "Steven Soderbergh"

Why do you think those two have managed to work so much, given their limited level of talent, if somehow wiggled through all of the barriers?

Yeah. So you're partly to blame for this.

But why was it that you said yes to them so many times?

Do they have stuff on you or what is that?

It's, it's, it's craven.

Yeah. It's it was funny because in the case of George, you know, we we met at a time where both of us were viewed as kind of question marks.

It was we hadn't was that was that out of sight?

Was that when you guys were pre out of sight?

This is pre out of sight.

So I've after sex, after sex lies, I've made five things that nobody saw and not a lot of people liked.

And George was becoming a giant TV star and making movies that were that were doing OK. But for whatever reason, didn't seem to be capturing the essence of what makes George George.

And so we were both in this kind of weird, you know, transitional space.

It was a thing that I was not front of line.

I had to wait for people to pass.

And I felt like I knew what it was like.

I just felt like I knew what it was.

And I went, George was already attached.

And I said, here's what I think it is.

And they agreed with that.

And and it was a Jersey Films and George support that got me that job.

I could not have been colder at that point.

And, you know, that kind of for both of us just took the narrative in a different direction. Yeah, you know, sidebar when you go ahead, I was just to say, behind the candle, I know we're allowing sidebars, by the way, because part of our show.

Yeah, but go ahead, sidebar.

No, I was going to say Matt Damon and I were having dinner right before he started shooting behind the cantalabra.

And he said to me, I'm going to get this wrong and he's going to kill me.

But it was something like, Sean, I don't know what to do.

How what do you think about me making out with Michael Douglas in this movie?

Like, so he goes, are people going to be able to lose themselves in my role?

I was like, well, of course, he's like, are people going to write about like that part? Something like that.

And I said, well, of course, you guys are both brilliant actors.

But no, the press is definitely going to take photos.

And, you know, the stills, I'm going to say, Matt Damon and Michael Douglas are making out in this movie.

Like there's no, you can't avoid, avoid that.

It was so funny.

**[Transcript] SmartLess / "Steven Soderbergh"**

And I'm like, why are you not going to ask you, how do I really, how do I kiss a man?

Yeah, I was like, I said, do you want to run lines?

Like I asked Brad to workshop it real quick.

Do you, um, that was that the that's the end?

That's just my little story.

He was like, how do I, how do I, how do I avoid the press of that?

I saw him the day before we started shooting.

And he said, he said, I had this terrible dinner with this actor.

Sean, Sean, who's initials are Sean.

Hey, who's initials are and that's all I hear from Jason and Will.

Yeah.

Um, and he goes, I, I want to be clear about where I should be pitching this.

And I said, I think tomorrow, when you put the whole thing on, you, you'll know exactly what it is.

Yeah.

It's, if you're an actor, this is why I tried desperately to not engage in sort of intellectual conversations with an actor about a scene that we're trying.

It's, it's physical.

If the physical stuff's right, it's going to be right.

And so that starts with the wardrobe.

Literally it does.

Like, what are my shoes?

What am I like, what?

Yeah, because it helps, it helps so much.

Are you, are you happy in what you're wearing?

Are you not happy in what you're wearing?

Like, it's a part of the fact I want to make it physical.

And I just said, when you put that hair and the stuff on, you're going to be that guy.

That's right.

Yeah.

Jason, do you see yourself arguing with Stephen on set if you're working together because he won't intellectualize.

And I know that you like to grind people to a fine nub with your stupid questions.

Do you find as art, sorry, let me just start that again.

As artists.

It could be further from the truth.

No, that's true.

I know, I know, I know, I'm fucking with you.

Okay, but let me, Jason, let me ask you a question.

So George, George subsequent to us working together, then became a director.

Confessions of a Dangerous Mind.

Great director.

Yeah.

And Matt would be a great director, too.

## [Transcript] SmartLess / "Steven Soderbergh"

I think so, too.

Yeah, for sure.

He's waited a long time, isn't it?

It's coming.

Um, but I will not repeat what George said to me after having directed his first film about actors.

Yeah.

Oh, come on.

You've got to say it.

Well, I don't, I just said it.

Like, yeah, I can imagine, you know what I mean?

He was, he, he just had a very, he's like, wow.

I, he goes, sounds obvious and like a cliché, but I have a very, very different view now of what happens when somebody comes at me as an actor.

Yeah.

But, but Jay, Jay, you said that similarly to me here and outside of here, where you just like, I want to engage, I want to do.

You don't appreciate how, um, how helpful a helpful actor can be.

Oh, dude, can save your ass.

Until you direct, because it's between action and cut.

The director is completely helpless.

You are fully reliant on the operator, the dolly grip, the actor, the boom operator, everybody to not fuck it up and just try to make everything coalesce and be aware that you're dancing with other departments.

It might not be on camera, but like it's all got to work.

And if you can kind of keep half an eye on the process and all that, like, so somebody like, like George or, or, or Matt, who both have like the huge, you know, set IQs, they can help while things are rolling.

And, and, and George certainly, once he started directing, probably realized that even more, but he's, but Jay, you said something really smart.

They're like, I don't, I think it was on here where you used to see something like the, the more, and I'm looking at my calendar.

Yeah, no, hopefully it's recorded.

You said I share a calendar with Jason's wife.

That's how you do today.

That's happening.

No, what I was going to say, you said something about like double-sided.

I was like, working with actors about like, you, there's a line where you, you'll have these great discussions with them, but you know where to end them.

Because if you engage too long, you reach a point where you're just talking in circles after a while or something like that.

And ultimately, like it's not up to you, director.

Like the actor's going to do what that actor can do the best they possibly can do it.

And I've read Steven that you've said that, and I'm paraphrasing here, obviously,

but basically the spirit of it was you have a very light touch because you realize that the best results will come from the atmosphere of comfort and confidence and, and, and safety.

And you will encourage them.

I think you said something like, I want to make sure everybody's okay.

And then you'll keep them all on the, on the rails as opposed to a more sort of prescriptive version of directing, which is, you know, I see you going up on this word and maybe come back down at the end of the line and then sit down over here. Like it happens all the time.

No, but it has to be, there has to be a structure.

There has to be a decider.

What, what my goal is to just have the process feel like it's evolving organically.

But it's, it's really a trust issue that if it all comes down to when I say, no, that doesn't work, you believe me, right?

It's not, I'm not shutting you down for any other reason than I've gamed out all the versions of this with that in it.

Right.

I'm telling you, it's, it's an or that needs to be extracted.

That doesn't fit that we have enough of a relationship because you've usually been spot on, you know what I mean?

When you go like, Hey, what if I do, what if the, and I go, yes, that's good.

Chase that.

Right.

But when I go, no, that doesn't work because of X that then we move on.

And I'm sure you carry a lot more credibility than other directors do with some actors because you're actually oftentimes holding the camera and you have written it and you're going to be editing it.

Like you, you've got your arms around completely around all the projects that you do in the, in the best way.

And I was so envious that you know how to operate and that you know how to edit and know how to write and all that stuff.

It's correct.

Yeah.

So I was going to ask you, well, I was going to ask if I could, Sean, because you've had two sidebars and three questions.

You derailed the entire thing, just a sidebar.

And now we're on to loose quotes that Jason's got of Steven.

I think you once said.

No, we're actually putting words in his mouth.

This is just an absolute affront to the man.

I, when I, when I wanted to get back to just, just because you touched on it before and you talked about when you were early on, when you and George got together and you started and you'd been making some films that nobody knew that nobody had seen or whatever, you're a very, as a director, you're very prolific.

**[Transcript] SmartLess / "Steven Soderbergh"**

Unusually so, I would say, to the extent that not two of the better directors, American directors in the last 30 years are you and Todd Field and Todd's made five films.

I don't, I call him Todd, I don't know him.

He's made five films and you've made sort of 30.

He's made three.

Maybe he's made three.

Is it three?

Yeah.

In the bedroom, little children and tar, that's it.

Is that it?

Yeah.

Features.

I mean, incredible.

1,000 commercials, guys.

That's really the best commercial.

Yeah, yeah, yeah, but, but, but, and then, and you've, and you've made a lot.

And again, maybe 30 or 25 or something like that.

And, and, but you've both made great movies.

Is there something to, for you as an artist, do you, do you enjoy that process of constantly creating, do you need to be constantly creating?

Because you're, you don't have to do it.

I guess you would just.

He's thought about not doing it anymore for a little while.

And then, then, then it was just a hiatus.

Yeah.

Yeah.

That was, boy, that was embarrassing.

Misquoted or, or overly quoted.

No, no, no, I was, that was the problem.

I was very accurately quoted.

Look, I'm in the volume business.

It's, it's, that's just my metabolism.

The, the, there's a big downside to that, which is nothing you do is an event.

Interesting.

But I don't, but I just, I can't let that stop me.

No, but you still, but you still make great.

We'll sort that out later.

But I, I.

You like, you like doing what you do.

So why not keep doing it?

Right? Yeah.

Well, well, by the way, maybe it's not an event in the sense that you've, you know, if you release a film and you've released a film a year before to the extent

**[Transcript] SmartLess / "Steven Soderbergh"**

that like, well, okay, he's got another, but you make a, you're consistently, you make really good films.

So you, that, that's not a strike against you or knock against you.

If anything, I just, I'm just interested in the process that some people like to do need that to do it more.

I love, I would love if people were like, he's Taylor Swift.

Right.

He's the Taylor Swift of cinema.

I would love that.

Nobody is saying that.

Just put a wig on.

We are going to say it.

It's our T's right there.

We got it.

That is our T's.

Wait, I have a dumb, dumb thing to say about Contagion.

Have people in the last 20 years just been like, did you know that when you made Contagion, there is going to be COVID?

Wait, by the way,

wait, how are you separating yourself from, that's what you're asking.

Yeah. Why do you make yourself sound like that?

But who is, where was that person from?

My head.

What's your hometown, Sean?

Chicago.

Yeah, it was, I'll bet, I'll bet you did a ton of research going into that film that, that, that the past administration could have benefited from just, just your, just your pre-production notes.

Right.

You know what, here we, there are a couple of things we missed.

The big one we missed was that the idea that the Jude Law character in Contagion would be the president.

Right.

That's what we missed.

We, we, we presented them.

We presented them as this sort of note in a larger cord.

We didn't imagine a world in which he's the court.

Yeah.

And so that's the big thing we got wrong.

But from a technical.

You weren't out to make a comedy.

No, but from a technical level, this is what everybody said.

This is how it's going to start.

And were you, were, are you a science guy?



**[Transcript] SmartLess / "Steven Soderbergh"**

Were you interested in any of that kind of stuff?

Well, I mean, I like it.

And the only reason I asked, because I'm going to ask next about Magic Mike, not that I've seen it.

Well, that's science.

That's science.

I mean, that's science.

Sean, would you like Will and I to just take a 10 minute break?

You go through all three of the Magic Mikes.

Sean wanted to, and Sean's going to be embarrassed to ask you.

And he's kind of, he's got a bit of an issue because he once said to me, he says,

I said, do you see Magic Mike?

He said, yeah.

And I said, do you like it?

And he says, yeah, I was okay.

I go, what's wrong?

And he said, there were no fucking bears in it.

And it was just slim muscle guys.

I was like, I'm out.

That's I'm out.

I'm out.

No, those are so.

No, I asked about like, you know, going back to my earlier question from an hour ago, which is like, what is what's the criteria for you to choose projects?

It's like, you go from like Jason was saying, you go from like Contagion, which is a science crazy movie to remaking the oceans or whatever the order is to strippers, Magic Mike.

I mean, it's so all over the place, which is so incredible.

It's so it's so.

Yeah, what's the thing that draws you to stuff?

Is it thematic or is it just based on, well, who brought me the script?

And who's the writer or where does it shoot?

Is it any number of things?

When I, yeah, when I saw you directing Magic Mike, I was like, Stephen, what?

Wait, it was so cool, though.

Yeah, I don't have a I only have one rule.

I don't have a rule in terms of where it comes from.

It doesn't have to be my idea.

I I'm really agnostic about that.

The only rule is if it's not a hell, yeah, it's enough.

Yeah, I like that.

Yeah, I love it.

Well, but I mean, and I mean, hell, yeah, I mean, as you know, when you say, yeah, I'm going to direct this, you know,

## [Transcript] SmartLess / "Steven Soderbergh"

what that means and it's it's it's that's rule number one.

Like it has to be a hell.

Yeah, I would do it for free.

I would do it for however long it's going to take.

You have to be that excited.

Yeah, for sure.

Would you ever would you ever what about if it was a hell to the is that?

And let me ask you how would I'm I'm I'm a young director.

I haven't done a lot, but I'm trying out this thing where the nothing about you is young. It doesn't need to be a hell.

Yeah, as much as just a yeah, because basically a double, because I feel like I can make it a triple during my work with it during pre-production and maybe even make it a home run during during shooting it. And then definitely by through through post through the editing and stuff.

So like, does it need to be like a like a hell?

Yeah, the beginning because you've got so much time with it to make it yours.

Well, two things.

Yeah.

I have the luxury of taking that position, which is not a small thing.

Now that came about through a set of circumstances that were, I think, pretty unique, the how sex lies happened.

Yeah.

Where some people really supported me and let me do that the way I wanted to do it. And then from that point forward, that allowed me to do things the way I wanted them to do, I had no contractual power on sex lies.

I only had the power of persuasion of convincing people, I think this is the best version of this, and they they agreed.

And for my sister in Wisconsin, when you say sex lies, it's sex lies and videotape the big movie from 1990.

Do you think that's the tipping point for her?

Yeah, yeah, she she's like, sex lies, sex lies, sex lies.

Believe me, she likes to know these things.

She likes to know these things.

Yeah, so yeah, go ahead.

Then I take your point that depending on where you are in your life, in your career, there could be levels of hell, yeah, you know what I mean?

Yeah, yeah, but I feel like there's at least got to be one.

Yeah, it could be the person that's the lead.

Right in the right and you're like, look, there's some stuff on the edges of this that are really etched and jello.

But I love this person.

I've had a great experience with this person before.

Right. I feel I feel safe.

Like, you know, that could be a hell, yeah, absolutely.

## [Transcript] SmartLess / "Steven Soderbergh"

Can that can that be a crew member?

Can that be a first AD or a anybody?

Yeah, I think anybody that it has to be somebody that you feel is next to you the whole time, no matter how escalated any conversation gets about what this thing should be, you know what I mean?

Like, it's got to be somebody who you're I'm like, it's not just me, it's them too.

We'll be right back.

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I've talked about it ad nauseam and it's summertime, so it's super, super hot out.

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## [Transcript] SmartLess / "Steven Soderbergh"

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And back to the show.

You have such an incredible eye and aesthetic and taste.

And it's just it seems like you really enjoy cinematography.

It would seem to me like you would really

dork out in being able to hire the most incredible cinematographers available.

Yet your director of photography on a lot of your own films under a different name.

Well, how do you do you sometimes want to maybe like go call

Hoyte Van Hoyt and like, I mean, how do you I don't know.

It's it's a sacrifice.

I'm trading one thing for another.

I'm trading that I'm not as good as them for the I'm not bad.

And the level of intimacy that it gives me with the cast.

Sure, I would trade it even if I was bad.

Yeah, yeah, like I like that relationship.

And and so it would be impossible for me to insert a genius like Emanuel Lubecki.

Yeah, who I worked with in 1994.

Wow, it was his first job in the US on an anthology series for Showtime.

And if you were to watch it now, it's all there.

He was fully formed.

He was Chivo right out of the gate.

But I really need that.

I need that sense of just us in the room.

Right. It takes away a late once you put another person in there.

And again, these are brilliant people.

You feel like it removes a it just puts yet another barrier between you and the cast in that way that you've got to constantly run.

You there's a there's an added layer of dialogue that you have to have

with some other person rather than it just being you and the camera and the cast and working.

Right. Yeah.

And it's it's not like I'm saying that should be everybody's goal.

I'm just I'm just saying for you.

This is how I came up.

I was hanging out for four years of high school with these college aspiring filmmakers, I knew my way around a dark room.

I was a photographer for the yearbook.

Like it it it just was a very organic thing to want to be the nodal point for a series of decisions that constitute directing like that was.

And it just took me a while to work my way back to that.

But I feel like you make I feel like you make really sort of sophisticated

## [Transcript] SmartLess / "Steven Soderbergh"

films and you don't and you you have a lot of you sort of trust that the audience can meet you there.

That's one of the things that I really enjoy about your films.

I feel like they're like accessible, sophisticated films and you're not worried about alienating your the audience.

In fact, I imagine that you have and tell me if I'm wrong, but that you've had conversations with studios over the years where they've been worried that your films or thematically or the way that they look or the way that they set up or that they're worried that it's not going to connect with the audience and that I get this feeling from you that it's like it's OK.

I know what I'm doing.

I'm going to make this film.

Yes, it's going to have a sophisticated elements to it.

But I'm going to connect with the audience.

It does seem like you're always aware that there's a big commercial center of it.

You are giving something to the audience, to the studio.

But the execution is always elevated and sophisticated.

Well, the films that I like the most were both commercial and artful.

I mean, that was that was what the American New Wave did.

It fused a sort of aesthetic that came from outside of the United States of America, a sort of attention to style and character that people in other parts of the world were doing and then and then blended it with this very, very American desire to tell a clear narrative.

And that it was like the perfect fusion of these two.

That's what I wanted to do.

So, you know, the things that I feel haven't

worked have been the ones that have fallen too far into, wow, that would really work if it had subtitles.

But can you explain style to Jason and Sean?

Because they they lack of it.

It's just that they're on a smart list.

You should on there it is.

There it is.

Well, you did mention that All The

President's Men is one of your favorite movies.

I was going to say, what's your favorite film of all time?

Well, that's impossible.

But I think you ranked you ranked them at one some point and All The President's Men was number two.

I was very excited.

Yeah, when I was younger, I used to.

But I think, look, the in the summer of 1975, when I was in St. Petersburg, Florida, visiting my grandparents alone, I saw Jaws.

Now, I was just going to bring that up.

## [Transcript] SmartLess / "Steven Soderbergh"

Prior to this point, my father was a cinema fanatic.

He gave me the cinema bug and we watched.

He took me the like we all this was part of our bond.

Me too.

But that was the first time after that movie was over.

Ironically, this perfect piece of entertainment now made me not think of movies as just entertainment anymore.

So I had two questions.

What is directed by mean and who is Steven Spielberg?

So it turns out, you know, in any store that you walked into,

there was a paperback called the Jaws log that Carl Gottlieb wrote.

And it answered both of those questions.

And I carried this thing around with me and highlighted every section that mentioned Steven Spielberg.

And then a year later, when we moved to Baton Rouge, Louisiana, where my dad was dean of education at LSU, I fell in with these college film students and got my hands on a camera and everything started to move.

That's amazing.

And if you say if you say both of your names fast, they sound the same.

Oh, I was just going to say, when you were saying, talking about like,

you know, Americanizing storytelling, I was literally I swear to God,

I was going to say like Jaws, I was going to say that.

But anyway, do you still go to the movie theaters now?

Or do you just watch everything at home?

No, I do both. I do. Yeah.

I still this is never going to go away.

It's it's too fun to see something with a lot of people.

Have you seen something out in the movie theaters that you love recently?

I think the last thing I saw in a theater and this is only because I've shot three things in a row in the last 12 months.

Last thing I saw in a theater would have been Top Gun, which just proves that Tom Cruise has saved the movie.

That's a few minutes. Yeah.

Now, I want to talk about full circle, but before we do, we first thing that comes to your mind, if I asked you what your favorite part of directing is.

The surprise that is the result of

arranging the elements in the right way that will result in a surprise.

Something typically something an actor does.

And where do you see that surprise?

Do you see it on the first rehearsal?

Do you see it on the first take?

Or do you see it when you when you when you put it all together in the editing room?

I'm open to any of that.

If it happens in a rehearsal, it's

## [Transcript] SmartLess / "Steven Soderbergh"

where we as long as it happens, we win.  
So you're open and excited to that which you imagine last night.  
There was there was a thing, a shot that we did in Logan Lucky, where Adam  
Deriver, something's shot out of a tube to Adam.  
And there's there's some lack of understanding whether the thing that's in his  
hand could actually blow up and kill all of them.  
And Daniel Craig is sort of he comes over and takes the thing from Adam  
and had a reaction on the first take that I ruined.  
I ruined the take.  
Too much laughing. No, I just ruined the take.  
Like it was something I didn't see coming.  
And how did you ruin it?  
It's in the movie, but I had to loop his  
vocalization just before he did it and his vocalization just after.  
Because I was laughing.  
Yeah. But what about have you with the camera shaking too?  
Because you were no.  
Thank God it was on a head.  
It was locked down.  
So I was touching it, but I didn't shake it.  
And that's a problem that can be solved in post.  
But no, that's that means we all did our job and created this sort of velvet  
lined shoot that led to somebody going, what if I did this?  
And you're like, that's that's better.  
It's better.  
How worried are you about AI?  
Well, that's a good question.  
Sorry, not just for filmmaking, just in general, because I feel.  
No, it's a good question, because I think this is at the center of a lot of what's  
going on right now, I can only speak of it as a creative person and go.  
It's an iterative tool.  
It's it's never going to get you in the end zone.  
It hasn't experienced anything.  
It's you know what I mean?  
Like it's it hasn't experienced anything, even to the point of it can look into your  
eyes, but it has no eyes.  
And so therefore it doesn't know what it means, you know, to be looked at by some.  
Like my mom, right?  
That's  
it's not that's what I was saying.  
And I think what you're describing potentially is what I I've just sort of  
blanket and use the blanket term of quirk.  
It doesn't have the advantage of possessing any quirk because it hasn't had any experience.  
Nothing's happened to it.

## [Transcript] SmartLess / "Steven Soderbergh"

Yeah, yeah.

But but Jason, I think to your point, to me, it's just an iterative tool.

There's that, you know, perfect explanation of how to solve things from the Ed Catmull book about Pixar or Creativity Inc.

Where the motto is be wrong as fast as you can.

So this is a tool.

This is a tool to just what I tell people all the time is just get to the end.

If this helps people get to the end of something, fine.

All right, tell us about Full Circle.

I know I watched the first episode.

It is typically unpredictably fantastic.

Another piece of great work from you.

The it's it's by design somewhat cryptic at the beginning.

And I'm imagining the future episodes, things start to slot into place.

So without giving away any of those satisfying things, what what is what is the theme?

It is it is a kidnapping that goes wrong.

But is there is there a thematic there at work that you'd like to play with often or or not?

Oh, sure.

I mean, you know,

buried things never stay buried.

Yeah, I mean, that's that's what this is about.

And in this instance, you know, it had been buried for long enough that people had literally forgotten about it.

And so it's kind of a rude awakening.

And you can run but you can't hide.

Yeah, and and it's it's absolutely privileged torture porn.

I'm I'm I'm a big fan of that genre.

I think I think Ed Solomon.

I think Ed Solomon found a really interesting take on that.

And so, you know, I love that nonlinear storytelling and and and and different perspectives, I can't wait to surprise that they come together and braid at some point. First of all, you do that so well.

I don't know anything about it, Stephen.

And I and I'm a big kind of Ed Solomon.

Obviously, he wrote Bill and Ted's and Men In Black.

He's another guy who's very prolific and done a lot of stuff that's very thematically different from the next one.

And a bunch of the stuff with you, Stephen.

Yeah, and a bunch of stuff with you, which is such a great pairing now that I think about it. Of course, you guys are both just clearly interested.

Not interesting people.

I'm sure you're both very interesting as well, but you're also very interested,



which is which is great.  
What is full circle?  
Because I know nothing about it.  
It's a show that's coming on max.  
Yeah, yeah, it's it's a it's a gigantic sort of New York.  
Sydney Lumet style melodrama.  
You know what I mean? Yeah, there's a there's a crime in the center of it that  
sort of takes you all over the city.  
And like I said, it's about karma.  
It's about something that somebody, you know, took a part in 20 years ago,  
forgot about it, and now it's come back.  
It's grown roots and and branches.  
And now they have to deal with it.  
And that's the kind of  
thing that I like I like.  
It was fun to make a real New York.  
Yeah, yeah. You know what I mean?  
Like it seemed like there's a lot of night work in that, Stephen.  
There was a lot of night work and  
if I were the studios, if I were the studios negotiating,  
I would give up almost everything to say like five percent night work.  
Like more. Yeah, like we're just we just hate it.  
Yeah. Now, a little talk about sidebars.  
Side job here for you.  
A  
Sigmani 63 is a beverage.  
Are you getting into the to the what's Sigmani?  
Oh, God, you guys business a little bit.  
Yes, Sigmani is a spirit from Bolivia.  
This is booze, guys.  
Yeah, it's it's booze.  
It's hard stuff.  
Anyway, I'm going to do this really quickly.  
When we were making Che,  
our Bolivian casting director gave me a bottle as a gift.  
It had never been out of Bolivia.  
It's the national spirit of Bolivia.  
And it's made from the white musk out of Alexandria grape, was a white grape.  
It's grown and distilled in this one  
twenty thousand acre area of southern Bolivia, six thousand feet.  
So it's a very, very it's hard to make.  
And I got this stuff and I loved it.  
And for the next six months while we were shooting,  
I created a mule train so that we could all drink it.

## [Transcript] SmartLess / "Steven Soderbergh"

At the end of that, some people pressured me to bring this to America, which I did in 2014. In February of this year, the Tax and Tariff Bureau, which is part of the Treasury Department and FDA and ATF, gave Singani its own category. This is something they don't do often. It's something they don't like to do. But they did it because it's a unique spirit. And this solved one problem when I was doing my Willie Lohman act, taking bottles around in a backpack and going, hey, what do you think? Not a great luck. Now, if legitimizes that when people go, well, what is it like? And I would go, well, it's not actually like anything. And now, finally, that's been legitimized. But it's let's just end with do not go into the booze business. Don't do it. Well, that's not what Clooney said. Yeah, or Ryan Reynolds. Oh, no, no. He knows how angry I am. I've told him. It's funny because I did some. It was quite more profit. I did some mulling out of Bolivia myself, but it was a different. Jesus, Stephen, it's such an honor to meet you. I've wanted to meet you forever. And I'm saying, we so appreciate you spending some time with us. I'm so happy to meet you finally. I'm going to hook up to this at the same time next week. If you guys are here, yeah, sure, yeah. Sadly, we'll be in the same scene. I want to see you cascade down that down that staircase. What a thrill. So much. Can't wait to meet you in person one day and have a great rest of your day, Steven. Thank you for coming. Thanks. Thank you, pal. All right. Bye, pal. There you have Steven Soderberg. There's a nice surprise, Jason Bateman. This man. How'd you get that? Yeah, I don't, you know, I've got my ways.

**[Transcript] SmartLess / "Steven Soderbergh"**

No, don't tell us what I'm talking about.

My God, I am very surprised I've never, have you guys ever run into him?

No, never, never, never not once.

He's not, he's not a man about town.

No, and I will say, I meant to, I really admire how prolific he's been.

I love the idea that he just takes so many, not just a lot of shots, so many different kinds of shots like Aaron Brockovich.

Aaron Brockovich, out of sight, sex-based videotape, traffic, just like Magic Mike, all of those things, all by the same guy.

But what about that?

Not since 1938 or 39, I think it was, had a director been nominated for two films in the same year.

He was nominated for Aaron Brockovich and traffic, best director.

And so he had two slots in the five.

That's incredible.

That's bananas.

That is bananas.

It is bananas.

How quickly, Sean, did you go, did you opening day to Full Frontal when that came out?

That was the next year.

That was the next year he did Full Frontal.

I pre-ordered tickets for that, yeah.

Hey, by the way, you know what I just learned yesterday, guys?

Tell us, Sean.

This should be good.

In Hawaii, did you know it's against...

Fuck, and then they put pineapple and macadamia in it.

No, listen to the whole thing.

In Hawaii, it's against the law to laugh really hard out loud in public.

Did you know that?

That's a bunch of bullshit.

You have to keep you have to keep it to a lo-ha.

Oh, man.

And I would just also like to say...

That took a lot out of me just then.

I would also like to say I love when I see you guys because we don't see each other.

And whenever we get together and we talk for a really long time, you know, it's like Time Flies by...

Oh, Will did not like that one.

They're just getting lazier.

You're just kind of...

Time Flies by is a good one.

Shoehorn in a father joke too?

## [Transcript] SmartLess / "Steven Soderbergh"

A dad joke?

I just heard it yesterday.

I thought it was gonna come really good.

His signature is just a bad joke.

And then he tries to shoehorn in a bye.

It's so...

That was a good one.

We've never used Time Flies by.

No.

Smart.

Smart.

Lass.

SmartLass is 100% organic and artisanly handcrafted by Michael Grant Terry, Rob Armjalf and Bennett Barbago.

Smart.

Lass.

This episode was recorded on May 30th.

Our next episode will be out in a week, wherever you listen to podcasts or you can listen to it right now, early on Amazon music or early and add free by subscribing to Wondery Plus in Apple Podcasts or the Wondery app.

Hey listeners, you need to know that Wondery's shocking true crime podcast over My Dead Body is back for a fourth season gone hunting.

This newest season covers the story of Mike Williams.

It was Mike's sixth wedding anniversary when he set off on a hunting trip into the gator infested swamps of North Florida.

He figured he'd be back in time to take his wife Denise out to celebrate, but he never came back.

Friends and loved ones feared he met his fate through bad luck and a group of hungry alligators leaving his young family behind, except that's not what happened at all.

And after 17 years, a kidnapping and the uncovering of a secret love triangle, the truth would finally be revealed.

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