

The Tim Ferriss Show Transcripts

Episode 98: Robert Rodriguez

Show notes and links at tim.blog/podcast

Tim Ferriss: Hello, ladies and germs, puppies and kittens. Meow. This is Tim Ferriss and welcome to another episode of the Tim Ferriss Show, where it is my job to deconstruct world class performers, to tease out the routines, the habits, the books, the influences, everything that you can use, that you can replicated from their best practices. And this episode is a real treat. If you loved the Arnold Schwarzenegger or Jon Favreau or Matt Mullenweg episodes, for instance, you are going to love this one.

We have a film director, screen writer, producer, cinematographer, editor, and musician. His name is Robert Rodriguez. His story is so good. While he was a student at University of Texas at Austin, he wrote the script to his first feature film when he was sequestered in a drug research facility as a paid subject in a clinical experiment.

So he sold his body for science so that he could make art. And that paycheck covered the cost of shooting his film. Now, what film was that? The film was *Element Mariachi*, which went on to win the coveted Audience Award at Sundance Film Festival and became the lowest budget movie ever released by a major studio. He went on then, of course, to write and produce a lot, and direct and edit and so on, a lot of films. He's really a jack of all trades, master of many because he's had to operate with such low budgets and be so resourceful.

But he went on to do films like *Desperado*, *From Dusk Till Dawn*, *The Faculty*, *The Spy Kids* franchise, which was huge, *Once Upon a Time in Mexico*, *Frank Miller's Sin City*, and many others. The show notes, of course, can be found at fourhourworkweek.com/podcast; all the links, all the resources, etc. Just go to fourhourworkweek.com, all spelled out, forward slash podcast.

And one last thing, very important, Robert Rodriguez is also the founder and chairman of El Rey network, which is a new genre busting, English language cable network. El Rey is carried probably on whatever you already have. It's carried on Comcast, DirecTV, Time Warner Cable, Cox, and Dish. I have watched some of my favorite Kung Fu flicks on that channel. I've also seen

all sorts of other action films and just incredible gems that he has sourced and put on his network.

So check it out, El Rey network and without further ado, please enjoy this conversation with Robert Rodriguez. We dig into so many things, his early days and how he planned for low resource, high yield movies and filmmaking, what he's learned from Frances Ford Coppola, Tarantino, etc. Dark times and how he's overcome them, his parenting style, his exact journaling style and method; it goes on and on.

This was a real blast for me and I hope it is for you, as well. Enjoy.

Tim Ferriss: Robert, welcome to the show.

Robert Rodriguez: Hey, how you doing, man? Good to finally meet you.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, it's great to finally meet. As I was doing homework for this and trying to digest everything that is related to you, I checked out a couple of the Director's Chair episode. And I had seen clips before, shorter clips, but I hadn't sat down and really taken in three to four hours. And I did that. And I'll tell you, I've been not having anything to drink for the last two weeks. And I got about halfway through the Frances Ford Coppola episode and I was like, fuck, this guy's really good at interviewing.

And I had to have a glass of wine. I didn't go too crazy but these episodes are such a fascinating window into the processes of these masters. I just wanted to thank you, first of all, for putting them together because I was planning on going to bed early, and I went through three hours straight.

Robert Rodriguez: Wow, that's amazing.

Tim Ferriss: Then I woke up and I also jumped into the Zemeckis episode this morning, which is just fascinating.

Robert Rodriguez: That's a good one.

Tim Ferriss: And what really struck me was how different these approaches can be. There are so many ways to skin the cat. Before I jump into method questions, though, I wanted to ask you about your journal and journaling. Because one of the constants in all of these interviews is the journal. And it seems like you write a lot down. I have a compulsive habit of note taking. I have shelves of notebooks.

Robert Rodriguez: Do you have them handwritten? How do you keep track of them if you want to access them later?

Tim Ferriss: That's going to be my question for you, also. I have a lot of handwritten notes that I will scan and put into Evernote, which will then allow character recognition to pull things up if I want to search for them. So I just have to keep my handwriting a little clean.

You also are really specific in dates, times, places. How do you use journaling?

Robert Rodriguez: Journaling, it's interesting. I started with the word processing way back when I first started filmmaking, when I sold *El Mariachi* and Columbia hired me. The first thing I asked for was an Apple laptop computer, which was the very first one that came out. Nobody knew what it was. I was the only one on the plane with one. I was writing my screenplays in it, and I would continue my journal which I had started by hand writing it. It really started in college. My dad gave me a date planner, one of those date planners. And I started using it.

You would write the things you were going to do on the left side, and then you would write what you ended up doing that day on the right. And even though I was in college, I tried to push myself pretty hard. I would look and I'd go: wow, I didn't have very much to write about myself at the end of that day. I'm going to have to give myself more things on the left so I have more to write stuff on the right. It really made you reflect on your day and realize I didn't do much today.

So those got really full, and I became a filmmaker right away. *El Mariachi* got made. And during the process of *El Mariachi*, I remember keeping a really dense journal because it was an experiment; it was really a test film.

Tim Ferriss: That was during all parts of the process?

Robert Rodriguez: All parts of the process. Because I thought, if I'm going to go take on this endeavor, I know a lot of things aren't going to work out. It's my first feature film. No one's intended to see it; it's really a learning experience. I'm just going to go make it, and I'm going to give a look back on my journal and see where I messed up. So it was really going to be a document so I wouldn't make that mistake again. I could go back and track why did the exposure not work?

And I'd be able to go back and go, oh, I didn't do this and I didn't do that.

It was really going to be a record of failure, rather than a document of success in any way. It was really about recording the methodology for a specific project. And as the process went on, right away as I started editing, I kept track of that. I sold it pretty quickly. And then I was in Hollywood, and then I was like: now I've really got something to write about.

I was writing down all the weird stuff that was happening. Finally, I decided to put out a book on just the making of *El Mariachi*, and I kept journaling from then, everything.

Tim Ferriss: Which was *Rebel Without a Crew*?

Robert Rodriguez: *Rebel Without a Crew*. And I would find that you meet the same people over and over again. I wrote down specifics of people I would meet casually in Hollywood, knowing we would run into each other again. They ended up being great collaborators ten years later, or showing up in things. And I'd be able to go back and read them stuff from the early days and that would blow them away.

Tim Ferriss: So when you write these down, for instance...

Robert Rodriguez: They all go in the computer so I can find them, and I do it by year.

Tim Ferriss: So do you do it by hand and then input it into a computer?

Robert Rodriguez: No, I do them all in the computer. I have a little alarm that goes off at midnight, because around midnight is usually a good time and I'll write something down. Because I found that even when I just wrote some items down, I could go back and fill them in later because I would remember, and it always would shock me. What kept it going is when I would go back and review the journals, and how many life changing things happened within a weekend.

Or things that you thought were spread out over two years were actually Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and that Monday. So many occurrences happened in chunks that could blow you away; things that kind of define you.

Tim Ferriss: Do you use Word? Do you use a different application? How do you capture it?

Robert Rodriguez: I always just used Word because that was the first thing I had on my Apple laptop. They're sometimes 1,000 or 2,000 pages per year of journal entries.

Tim Ferriss: Wow. So you're doing a few pages per night, on average?

Robert Rodriguez: Yeah, a few pages, sometimes some of them hardly anything, and some things are bigger. And sometimes I'll clip – sometimes I cheat – sometimes I'll clip reviews or conversations I had that have been written down somewhere else and I'll throw them in there, too. Everything goes in the right date. And so I can search by date, and I can kind of cross reference stuff. Which, I have to say for anyone who is a parent, it's a must.

It's a must because your children – and you – forget everything. Within a few years, they'll forget things that you think they should remember for the rest of their lives. They'll only remember it if it's reinforced. And I'm a real family man so I really love every birthday. I'll go tell my kids again, because they forget by the next year, what their first years were like. Because I'll just read through the journal entries.

And it blows them away. Or they'll say: hey, we should go camping again. I go, camping? Oh yeah, remember that time we went camping and I put the tent in the backyard and it had electricity going through? We had fans, and we were watching Johnny Quest and we were playing... I must have a journal on that, and I must have video. So year by year, I just search camping, camping. Oh, May 4, 1999. We went camping. Oh, it's on tape 25 of this particular tape. I go find the tape and show it to them. After I'd show them the tape, they didn't have to go camping again. They just relived it.

Tim Ferriss: They relived the entire thing.

Robert Rodriguez: They relived it and it was better than we even remembered. So encapsulating stuff like that is really important.

Tim Ferriss: That reminds me of something I don't think I've ever talked about. When I was 15, I spent a year abroad in Japan. It was my first time overseas. I was in a Japanese school. I was the only – you know, where's Waldo – American kid in the entire, 5,000 student school. Japanese family, and of course I assumed at the time I was going to remember everything that happened.

But my mom, to her credit, every time we had a phone call, would get off the phone and write down what I had said. So she has this record of my experience in Japan that I have no record of, and of course I don't remember any of it without that kind of cuing.

Robert Rodriguez: I think part of that came from I read a diary my mom tried to keep of when we were really little. It had very few entries. But one of the most defining moments was when she pushed me into a pool because I wouldn't go jump in. She knew I just needed a push. And I felt totally betrayed and totally angry with her. It was in there, but it had her side of the story. And of course it was correct. But I wish she had written more.

So I thought, I'm going to make sure I write. And now it's become an addiction and it's just so necessary. You ask your girlfriend or your wife, what did we do last year on your birthday? They won't remember. A year goes by and you will not remember the details. You go back and you see the journals, it's even better the second time. You live through it again and you realize the importance of it.

Tim Ferriss: When you meet someone you think might be a recurring figure in your life, or you meet someone who ends up being a teacher of some type, how often do you go back and review the notes? Is it really just in time information, not just in case so when you realize oh, my God, I'm going to be meeting, say, Frances Ford Coppola for the second time, I should probably go back and look at what happened in the first meeting. Or is it something that you proactively review?

Robert Rodriguez: It's only on a need to no because there are so many things. I tell myself I want to be the guy looking through the windshield, not the rear view mirror.

But sometimes you can see better through the windshield if you look through the rear view mirror and look at some of the stuff that's gone on. And seeing it kind of makes sense of where your relationships are going, or what you've learned. And it blows me away. Sometimes I'll just go ahead and look somebody up that I'm about to meet with. I just met with Jim Cameron. We hung out and we talked for four hours. We hadn't seen each other in a few years. And I looked up old stuff.

And I was like, oh, my God, do you remember when we did this? Because I met him 20 years ago and we'd been friends over the years. And he totally forgot that when I went and showed him

Desperado for the first time, before it came out, just to see what he thought, he watched it in the screening room and he gave me two little manuscripts. “Here, I watched your movie; you go read a couple of my treatments.” One of them was for *Spiderman*, and one was for *Avatar*. This was in 1994.

Tim Ferriss: Wow.

Robert Rodriguez: That’s how long ago he had that and how much that was going in his head. I thought, wow, to keep something that was that visionary in your head that long, waiting for the technology to come; those kind of things made me realize some of these projects I've had for ten years, I should go bring them back up, I wonder. And I have. I have since then dusted off something that I had for 15 years and sold it. Now I've just finished the screenplay for it.

Tim Ferriss: You mentioned Jim Cameron. I met him very briefly through the XPRIZE, and Peter Diamandis and those guys. And as part of the experience, it was a fundraiser for the XPRIZE, we all got staff or crew shirts from *Avatar*.

And the shirts said something along the lines of “Hope is not a strategy, failure is not an option, luck is not a factor.” Jim is known for being very demanding, not in a bad way. But I thought that shirt spoke volumes, I think, in so many different ways about his processes, his mentality. How do you keep morale high when you’re working with a crew? And maybe like you said, you’re doing an exterior shot in Austin and people are just suffering and sweating and fatigued.

Robert Rodriguez: It’s so hot in the middle of August.

Tim Ferriss: Do you have any tricks or approaches that you use over and over again to keep morale high and get the best out of people?

Robert Rodriguez: I've worked with the same crew, some of them for over 20 years. So they kind of know already the philosophy I tend to have. And I've learned this not through filmmaking but through other disciplines sometimes, working with painters and sculptors and musician friends.

It’s kind of why I do so many different jobs because creativity isn’t job specific. If you know how to be creative, you can literally jump from job to job with no training and do them pretty well. Because the technical part of any job is 10 percent. 90 percent of that is creativity. If you already know how to be creative, you’ve kind of

got the battle half beat, which is you don't need to know. You don't need to know what note specifically you're going to play when you get on stage and do your solo.

Everybody will go, what did you just play? And you're going to go, I don't know. I asked Jimmy Vaughn that: "How do you know what you're playing just now?" "I don't even know what I played." "Well, it was fantastic. Did anybody tape it?" "No." That's another one that goes off into the air. Ask any of the greats, painters. I studied under a painter, Sebastian Kruger. I went all the way to Germany to watch him paint, to figure out his trick; how does he do it? Because I tried to do what he did and it looked like garbage.

He must have a special brush; he must have special paint and a special technique. And I go and now, he starts with a mid tone, starts knocking in some highlights, a little bit on the chin and then he goes to the eye. And I go, "How do you know where to go next?" He goes, "Oh, I never know; it's different every time."

That drives me bonkers. What do you mean? How come I can't do that? And I'd go sit down and suddenly I could do it. It blows you away. So I take those lessons back and I teach my actors that; I teach my crew that. You don't need to know.

Tim Ferriss: Sorry to pause but this is so fascinating to me. So what clicked? What was the realization when you sat down and suddenly...

Robert Rodriguez: You get it in your own way. Thinking that you needed to know something, a trick or a process, before it would flow. If you got out of the way, it would just flow. What gives you permission to let it flow, sometimes if you take four years of schooling or you study under somebody, then you've suddenly given your permission to let it flow. And I know you're a guy who likes to take a shortcut in. Here's the shortcut: just get out of your own way.

You're just opening up the pipe and the creativity flows through. And as soon as your ego gets in the way, and you go I don't know if I know what to do next; you've already put "I" in front of it and you've already blocked it a little bit. I did it once but I don't know if I can do it again. It was never you. The best you can be is just to get out of the way so it comes through.

So when an actor comes to me or a crew member and he goes, I'm not sure I know how to play this part. I go, that's beautiful because the other half's gonna show up when we're there. They say

knowing's half the battle. I think the most important part is the other part; not knowing what's going to happen but you trust that it will be there when you put the brush up to the canvas. It's going to know where to go. And the further you're out of the way of it, it'll just happen.

Tim Ferriss: So the trust comes first.

Robert Rodriguez: The trust comes first. You have to trust first, and then it will happen. And I always point it out when it does. I point it out. You'll see and I'll point it out when it's just going to fall in your lap, or I'll just call upon you to come up with something and you will. And I'm going to point it out, because that's the magic. You're just going to be open to it. And it's all attitude. There's nothing wrong that could ever happen. I remember on *From Dusk Till Dawn*, the film, the special effects guys put too much fire in the explosion.

And the actors come running out of the building. It's in the movie; you see the building blow up, the bar at the end and the fireball, if you were to continue but I cut away; it just kept going and it engulfed the whole set. And that was the first shot. We still needed lots of other stuff to shoot with it.

And we were like, okay. Everyone else was freaking out, the production designer was crying; that was all their work. And my assistant director, he comes over and he goes, "Are you thinking what I'm thinking?" I go, "Yeah, it looks good the way it is. It's all charred. Let's just keep shooting and we'll do the little repair that needs to be done for next week and we'll shoot that exterior next week. But let's just keep shooting." Sometimes you use those gifts. Because nothing ever goes according to plan. Sometimes I hear new filmmakers talk, they talk all down about their film, and oh, nothing worked and it was a disappointment.

It's like oh, they don't realize yet that that's the job. The job is that nothing is going to work at all. And you go: how can I turn that in a way to turn it into a positive and I get something much better than if I had all the time and money in the world? And I love those experiences so much that I would purposely – and I talked to Michael Mann about this. Michael Mann in the *Director's Chair*. We talked about *Manhunter* once, years ago. And he retold me the story. He didn't have money, he'd fired the effects crew.

Some of the really cool staccato editing was really to cover up the fact that they didn't have effects and I didn't know that I always

thought it was a stylistic choice. And he goes: no, it's because we didn't have any money or time. I had to almost cut it in myself and I was throwing ketchup on the guy between edits. It was like oh, my God, I thought that was a brilliant stylistic choice. No! I said, I'm going to do that for all my movies now.

I want all of them to not have enough money, not enough time so that we're forced to be more creative. Because that's going to give it some spark that you can't manufacture. And people will tap into it or they'll go: I don't know why I like this movie. It's kind of a weird movie but there's something about it that makes me want to watch it again and again because it's got a life to it. Sometimes art should be imperfect, in a way.

Tim Ferriss:

The point you made just a minute ago about creativity transferring from one area to the next, to seemingly unrelated skills and areas I think is really important. I cannot recommend highly enough that people check out *The Director's Chair*. One of the terms that jumped out that you mentioned in your last example was the gremlins.

How do you embrace the gremlins and turn them to your advantage? The example of the ending of *Back to the Future*, and how the church tower and all of that was because the studios just refused to finance this more spectacular ending.

Robert Rodriguez:

Things you would think were planned for years were created at the last moment. I couldn't believe that myself. That's why I enjoy doing those interviews. I truly want to know these things because they still blow me away. The creative process blows me away. And it applies to so much that even if you're not a director or a filmmaker, you watch that and you see people talking about the creativity and the creative process. And you see how it applies to anything that you do; how you raise your children, how you cook food, how you run a business.

Creativity is so much a part of that. When people say: oh, you do so many things; you're a musician, you're a painter, you edit, you're a composer, you're a cinematographer, you're the editor. You do so many different things. I go, no, I only do one thing. I live a creative life. When you put creativity in everything, everything becomes available to you.

Anything that has a creative aspect is suddenly yours to go and do. And there's no separation between work and play. I mean I work, quote-unquote, in my house. That's why I write my scripts, come

up with my ideas while I'm playing with my kids, while I'm cooking them a meal, which is a creative exercise – art you can eat – in itself. And then you go upstairs and do some editing. You edit a scene you like and can already hear the music for it. And I'll walk over to this room and I'll do music for it. Then you go hmm, I'm not sure about this character.

I'm going to get into this character's head. Maybe I'll paint him first and kind of see visually what he looks like, or musically what he sounds like. And you can work completely nonlinear that way because you realize I can do anything I want because everything can be creative. Even the bisexual call, suddenly. You go, this is kind of out of my league but let me add my creativity to it and maybe that'll solve something no one else would be able to solve. And sure enough, you can always rely on creativity to sort of win the day in a lot of areas.

Tim Ferriss: And with, say, *El Mariachi*, I've heard a couple of different versions of this financing.
I'd love to know how you've financed it because I've heard experimental medical procedures, I've heard selling your body to science. How was that financed?

Robert Rodriguez: That's one of those strange things. The legend kept growing around *El Mariachi*, and it's one of the few times you'll hear a legend where it was all literally true. It was as crazy as it sounded. But back then, I was from a family of ten kids. There was no borrowing from Mom and Dad to go make a movie; that was on me. I was already paying my way through school, and I already had two jobs. I had a job as a cartoonist and I had a job working at the university and barely making rent and tuition.

So to go make a movie, even though people would say \$7,000, that's so cheap for a 16 millimeter movie. Well yeah, you got \$7,000 sticking out of your pocket? Who has that. So you had to kind of take down a score, and the only way you could actually go do a big number was to go to one of the biggest universities in the country at the time.

They had this thing called Pharmaco, which was a medical research facility. And it's only like a fourth stage, where it's already been tested many times and this is the final before they get FDA approval.

Tim Ferriss: You're not replacing the guinea pigs.

Robert Rodriguez: They're not mixing a couple things together, giving it to you saying okay, let's see if it works. But they need healthy, young specimens between the ages of 18 and 24. And so that's college students, and they all need money. So you go in for a weekend and make \$500. But you become a pin cushion. I would go in there for the longer ones that were like a month. Where you would be paid for your time rather than your pain. So I would write scripts while I was in there. And you make \$2,000, \$3,000 in a month.

Tim Ferriss: It's real money.

Robert Rodriguez: Real money when you're not having to pay for food or rent or anything.

Tim Ferriss: Oh, so you were housed there?

Robert Rodriguez: Yeah, you were housed there and you can't leave. And you've got to eat and shit and pee at a certain time.

Tim Ferriss: I guess that's another benefit, though, right? Because they're covering some of what about would otherwise be your expenses.

Robert Rodriguez: Yes, it was a great deal. So I did a couple of those. One of them was a drug that's on the market, Lipitor, the cholesterol lowering drug. That's the one I was on.

So I got to eat bacon and all kinds of stuff. I got to eat a high cholesterol diet. I used that money to go and make the film because I had an idea that we could sell it for at least double of what we made it if we kept the budget really low. I didn't know. So I had to just make it for as little as possible and most of that money went to just the film stock. I really didn't think anyone was going to see it. It was really just a test film. That's why I did it in Spanish; I did it for the Spanish market.

I already had a bunch of award winning short films but I needed to practice telling features so I thought let me just make a bunch of features for the Spanish market just to get some seasoning, do all the jobs myself because I couldn't afford a crew and that way I'll learn them all. If I can sell it for twice what I put in, that's like the best film school. I'll learn every job.

I'll do two or three of these things, cut them all together, take out the best portions and use it on my demo reel and then use the money that I make to go make a real first film, English language,

American, independent film. The first one got released by Columbia Pictures and I was shocked.

Tim Ferriss: How did that happen?

Who took a chance on you, or how did you increase the odds of that happening? Because it was Sundance, was that the trigger?

Robert Rodriguez: No, it was already bought by Sundance.

Tim Ferriss: It was already bought by Sundance. So how did that happen?

Robert Rodriguez: I had this crazy idea. I had made this short film by myself with a windup camera. It was eight minutes long. It was called *Bedhead*. It's online. I utilized it to use slow motion and all kinds of things that I couldn't use on a video camera. I really wanted to show off what I could do with that little camera. It was a World War II camera, the little windup ones; a piece of junk but it could do stuff I couldn't do with video. I shot that, put it in festivals and it won a bunch of festivals. And I was like, wow, I did that all by myself with \$800. That's eight minutes. If I did that times ten, I could do an 80 minute movie for \$8,000 or less, because it would be dialogue scenes.

It wouldn't be wall to wall action like that short film. I could pad it out; I could probably do it for 5 grand. I felt like I was getting away with something, coming up with this idea, thinking how come no one's ever done this before? Let me go try it this summer, try it for the Spanish video market because they make them for like 30 grand. But I guarantee no one sees it. I'll call it *El Mariachi*, which is basically if you're going to the action section, you won't buy or rent a movie called *The Guitar Player*.

That promises no action at all. I had a sense of humor and I thought, I don't really want people to see it; I just want to be able to test out these ideas and see if it's possible. Shot, shot, shot, cut it, cut it, cut it. Went to sell it in LA because that's where the distributors were for those U.S. distributed Spanish language movies. I just looked at the video box and all the companies were on Wilshire Boulevard so I drove up here with my friend Carlos. The in I had was there was going to be a 25th anniversary of they Texas Film Commission in Austin with a bunch of people from Hollywood that Governor Ann Richards was trying to invite in.

I saw the list of people, and one of the agents from ICM called Robert Newman was going to be there. I thought, maybe I can try

and slip him my short films. Well, the whole thing got cancelled and it fell apart. So when I was in LA, I called ICM up cold. I looked them up in the phone book, called them up – this was in 1992 – and asked for Robert Newman’s office and they put me right through. He was a new agent there. He didn’t have any directors, yet.

I called up his assistant and said, “Hey, can I talk to Robert Newman? He was going to come down to this 25th anniversary thing.” I hooked up on the phone with him. He said, “Yeah, what happened with that? I was all ready to come down.” I go, “Wow, I don’t know but I was going to show you my film and I’m here in town; I wanted to drop of my award winning short film and a trailer for a movie I made for \$7,000.” “Okay, drop it off.” I couldn’t believe it. I dropped it off. He called me back up the next day, “Hey, the machine ate my tape.”

He actually watched it. I couldn’t believe it. I went and made another tape, gave it to him, waited over the weekend. I got the call and he says, “I love the short film but I loved the trailer. The trailer for this movie, the Mariachi movie, it’s like a world class trailer.” I knew people couldn’t watch the whole thing. I’m a pretty good editor. I cut this really snazzy trailer that just made you want to watch the movie.

He said, “How much did it cost again?” I said, “\$7,000.” “That’s pretty good; most trailer cost 20 or 30.” “No, the whole film cost \$7,000.” “Aw, come on.” I said, “No, the whole thing. I shot it really low budget but can I come up and talk to you?” So he had me come up.

I told him I planned on making two or three of them, like a trilogy of these guy with a guitar case as just a test and I’m wondering what else I should put on my demo tape because my award winning short film has been doing well. He goes, “Oh, kind of like a Dollars trilogy.” He goes, “I can get you work right now off of this.” Really? He goes, “Yeah, I’ll send this to the studio. Just put subtitles on it and I’ll send it to them.” So I subtitled it and sent it and he got me a two year deal right away with Columbia Pictures. Not to even release Mariachi. Mariachi was just a calling card. But it happened so quickly. I was really young. I was what, 22, 23.

I really thought I was going to make some test films first and have a chance to come up with what my big idea was. And I was in no rush. I really wanted to be prepared. I really wanted to learn every job and really know what I was doing. So this suddenly caught me

by surprise. Because now they're asking, well, you're a film maker now. And he even wrote me down as a writer/director. A writer/director? Well, I guess I wrote the script. Yeah, I guess I'm a writer/director. I never really thought of myself that way. And I was suddenly some kid plunged into this world.

And I suddenly had to come up with a bunch of original ideas because this was my shot. It was too quick. I was not prepared.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah big leagues.

Robert Rodriguez: So I thought, you guys liked El Mariachi, why don't we just remake that? Remake it with Antonio Banderas in Spain and we'll just cast it up and remake it. And they said okay, that's a good idea. But we want to test screen El Mariachi first to make sure people don't think it's a downer when the girl gets killed. So they made a film, printed and tested it, and people liked it the way it was. They decided to take it to festivals. And I completely protested. I was like, this is my practice film. No one was ever supposed to see this. Give me \$2,000 –

Tim Ferriss: This is my debutante ball. Don't put this out for the world to see.

Robert Rodriguez: Don't put this out. If I knew people were going to see it, give me \$2,000; I'll go reshoot half of it just knowing people were going to see it as my first film. And they said, "No, you don't know what you have, here. This is very special." And they took it out and it went to Telluride, Toronto and the head of Sundance came to me at Toronto and said. "Don't show it at any more festivals and you can bring it to Sundance and put it in competition," because he knew it would do really well there. And it won.

So I was already bought by Columbia. I was one of the few films that already had a distributor. We took it and I had a great little talk I would do before to set it up, because I had to disclaim why it was the way it was. And I said, "When you see the Columbia logo come on in the front – that logo probably cost more than the whole movie. So watch out for that and just know how I did it." I wanted people to know how I did it. I really wanted to deconstruct how it was done.

Because I would have wanted to know that. As a film student who felt, coming from a family of ten kids living in Texas, people constantly saying: you want to be a filmmaker; you need to move to LA. That you could stay where you are and come up with something that could be sold, I just wanted to get up on top of a

mountain and tell everybody. That's why I put out a book, and that's why even before each screening I would explain how it was even possible, because I knew they would be wondering, because nobody had ever really done it.

And it wasn't that it was impossible; just nobody had done it before. Nobody ever thought that way. People kind of forgot that that's how movies really started. It was always like a couple of guys with a windup camera and Buster Keaton in front. It wasn't a business, yet.

When it became a business, suddenly everyone had a job and you needed 200 people because it was now an industry. But that's not what the art form was, originally. It was just the manipulation of moving images, and you could do that with two people; one person. That was a breakthrough idea. And so being able to tell them, I just took stock in what I had. My friend Carlos, he's got a ranch in Mexico. Okay, that'll be where the bad guys at. His cousin owns a bar.

The bar is where is going to be the first, initial shootout; it's where all the bad guys hang out. His other cousin owns a bus line. Okay, there will be an action scene with the bus at some point, just a big action seen in the middle of the movie with a bus. He's got a pit bull; okay, he's in the movie. His other friend had a turtle he found; okay, the turtle's in the movie because people will think we had an animal wrangler and that will suddenly raise production value.

I wrote everything around what we had so you never had to go search, and you never had to spend anything on the movie. The movie cost really nothing. It was really just the fact that I wanted to shoot it on film instead of video so that it would look more expensive, and try to tell people I made it for \$70,000 and try to sell it for \$70,000.

Instead, it ended up going to Columbia and getting released. When we won Sundance, the Audience Award, my acceptance speech said, "You're going to get a lot more entries next year. When people find out that this is the one that won, a movie made with no money and no crew, everyone's going to pick up a camera and start making their own movies." And it's been flooded with entries since then. It was a real change in the paradigm. And it was only out of necessity.

It wasn't my big idea that it could be done. I really just thought, I don't want to take anyone with me. Even my best friend wanted to come help on my movie shoot for *El Mariachi*. I said no because I've got to go to Mexico, and this camera I borrowed, it's probably going to break down the first day. I'll jinx it if I start bringing too many people down. And I don't mind failing; I just don't like failing in front of a bunch of other people. So when they go back and say Robert tried to make a movie for no money, idiot.

Tim Ferriss: Got stranded in Mexico.

Robert Rodriguez: He got stranded in Mexico. So I really didn't think it would work and I was surprised. And that's the best thing I tell people is just be naïve, stay naïve, throw it away. Don't over think it.

I didn't over think it at all because I would have treated it completely differently, had I thought I would ever even show it to anybody. Had I thought it would go to a festival and I would submit it, I would have spent ten times as much. I would have gone and borrowed money. Instead it was like one take, one take; everything was one take, even if it didn't work because the film's so expensive.

And it was a noisy camera, and it was a soundless camera. It would make so much noise, you couldn't record sound. So I had to record sound the way you're doing right now. So I would shoot a take, put the camera away, get the sound out, put the mike up close...

Tim Ferriss: For those people, yeah, we have two mikes attached to a little recording device.

Robert Rodriguez: I would put the mike as close as you have it. So I got great sound but it was out of synch. But you kind of talk in your own rhythm. So if I say, "Hi, my name is Robert," you put the camera away and okay, now you do the audio: hi, my name is Robert. You can pretty much get it to synch. Because I don't like rubbery lips. If you look at *Mariachi*, it's all in synch except where it started to get out of synch, I cut away to the dog, or I cut away to a close up.

Tim Ferriss: Or a turtle.

Robert Rodriguez: It created this really snappy editing style, but it was really just to get it back in synch because I couldn't stand it.

But that was the whole idea; just let me try and do all these things myself and see if we can put it together.

Tim Ferriss: It reminds me of Jack Ma. It's very consistent among these people who seem to come out of nowhere and build something very big. Of course, there are exceptions but Jack Ma, Ali Baba, he said we had a couple advantages when we started. We had no experience, no money and no plan. Every dollar we spent, we had to consider very, very carefully.

Robert Rodriguez: I had a really good plan. This is what the plan was. I'm going to go shoot one take of everything because the film is the most expensive item. If I shoot two takes, one just in case; I've just doubled my budget. So one take. I'll cut it together. The stuff I need to come and reshoot, we'll only reshoot that. We'll only get those shots. You never come back and reshoot. By the time you get back up there, back to Austin, you figure out a way to cut around things that were not done right or a little slow. And I never came back and reshot anything. You end up just working with what you've got. But it got me off the hook from being too precious.

Because of knowing I had that safety net, which I never ended up using. So if you can do that for yourself in area that you're in, try to just go free with abandon. Sometimes they say that for writing a book or writing a script; just write. Don't keep rereading each page and going oh, it's not good enough and tear it up and throw it in the trash can. You'll never get anywhere. You've got to just get momentum and keep going, and then come back later with fresh eyes and look at it again.

Tim Ferriss: Now that you have access to so many resources, what are practices you have or principles for maintaining that scrappy creative mindset? Because you don't have to have many constraints if you don't want to, at this point. Are there ways you try to simulate that?

Robert Rodriguez: There are a couple of things with that. There's freedom of limitations; it's almost more freeing to know I've got to use only these items: turtle, bar, ranch. You're almost completely free within that. You almost can do not anything, because that would be almost too many options.

But you're just put into a box. One of my favorite movies I did with Quentin was called *Four Rooms*. The said, we're all doing short films; we'll all have the same criteria. It has to be set in one room. It has to be New Year's Eve, and you have to use a bellhop. The freedom of limitations was enormous. You watch that short and it goes all over the room. By the end, we burn it on the room.

It's almost more exciting to know that you were in a box and you could be creative within that box.

So now that so many things are available to you, you want to limit yourself in a way. So I try to limit time, I try to limit money, so that we can really still keep that essence of creativity and deliver on the screen something that just looks much bigger, so you can retain your creative freedom. Because if you start spending more money, suddenly the financiers, rightfully so – the studios or executives – will be over your shoulder constantly questioning every move you make because they want their money back. But if you keep the budget low, it's a win-win situation.

If the movie does great, it's a great success. If the movie doesn't do great, it's still a success because it didn't cost very much and it'll make back its money over time. That's kind of where I've lived and breathed. I'm about to jump out of the box a little bit more and do some things that are a little bigger, just to learn more because you just learn more when you go and do other kind of assignments.

But where it's really the most fun, and that's why you asked how do you keep the morale high; the morale is always high on the set because they know we're just being creative; that's the name of the game. It's not looking for a result. It's like how can we just keep ourselves jazzed about this?

Tim Ferriss: If you were to go back and rewrite *Rebel Without a Crew* at this point, what would you change? What would you add? What would you remove?

Robert Rodriguez: You know, I haven't read it since I wrote it, actually. It's really funny that you ask. People come up to me a lot with copies ready for me to sign. A lot of people have read it. And they say that it helped them.

Even if they weren't a filmmaker; it helped me open my own business, it helped me do this. And they would mention a quote, and I'm thinking, I don't remember ever saying that. I've got to go reread that. I was smart back then; what happened? I said some really good stuff. They'd give me these quotes that sounded like... I need to go reread it just so I can follow what I used to tell myself. Because there's something that happens, and you know when you go to lecture or you go to teach, it's kind of like you're opening up that pipe.

You go to talk with the intention, and it's all intention based, of giving people who are looking for answers and looking for strategies something they can use. And out of your mouth will come things that you are then going and cribbing and writing down yourself going, that's pretty good advice; where'd that come from? That's because you're letting it flow. It's not you. You've gotten out of the way at that point. So that book was very much like that. There are a lot of things in there that even I'm surprised popped out that seemed right at the time, that were very knowing without me knowing anything.

So I really do like that about it. I wouldn't think I would rewrite that book. What I've been trying to figure out is how to write the ones after because so much happened after that, and the diaries are so dense that it's almost hard to know how to focus. I think I've figured out how to do it by doing a creativity based book, where any time some of these events happen to do particular with creativity or the process, then those things like hanging out with Jim that time, or doing this with this person, would fit into it.

Then you can get some of those journal entries in a way that was organic to the whole creative process. That seems to be mostly what I'm about now; not specifically film related. If film died tomorrow, I would be sculpting or painting or playing music or something else that involved creativity. So really what I am is someone who lives a creative live, not even just in work but also when he's not working.

Tim Ferriss: You mentioned earlier you had two jobs in college. One of them was cartooning. Was that Los Hooligans?

Robert Rodriguez: Yes.

Tim Ferriss: Okay. So you had Los Hooligans, which then later became the name of your company, which has changed. So I have two questions. One is how has cartooning helped you in your various creative endeavors, but maybe specifically film? Did you use your drawing ability for, say, *El Mariachi* or any of these others? And then the second question, which we can get to, is why you changed the name to Troublemaker Studios.

Robert Rodriguez: I'll answer the first one, first. Los Hooligans was a name of these little troublemakers. It was about these little kids, based on my family in the comic strip. Los Hooligans was to show that they were Hispanic. It was one of the few Hispanic strips in that paper. It was a very big paper and we had a big comics page. It as very

popular; very famous people came out of there. Berk [inaudible] came out of there, Chris Ware, who's a Pulitzer Prize winning cartoonist and has amazing books out. A lot of that first, early work he did was from his college work. He is just bonkers great and made everyone around him good.

That's the other thing, if you surround yourself with masters, which I still try to do, that's the main trick. Because even when we're filming, I'll have master painters and master sculptors come visit so the artists can just get off on what they're doing and apply it to their area, because it's like your mind explodes. And you want to always be training and always be learning. And that's kind of what that page was for me. The cartooning made me realize a lot about the creative process. I remember I used to come home and I'd have to do a strip a day.

And it would take sometimes three or four hours. And I would sometimes just not feel like facing the blank page so I would go lay down and try and figure out if I could create this method where I could just come lay down, stare at the ceiling and it will just appear, fully formed. And then I can go and draw it. And I never could get that to work. I'd be running out of time. I'd run back to the table and I'd realize the only way to do it was by just drawing. You'd have to draw and draw and draw.

And then one drawing would be kind of funny or cool. That one's kind of neat; this one kind of goes with that. And then you draw a couple of filler-ups and that's how it would be created. You had to actually move.

And I applied that to all my other work; filmmaking and everything. Even if I didn't know what to do, you just had to begin. And for a lot of people, that's the part that keeps them back the most. It's like, well, I don't have an idea so I can't start. Because I know you'll only get the idea once you start. It's this totally reverse thing. You have to act first before inspiration will hit. You don't wait for inspiration and then act, or you're never going to act because you're never going to have the inspiration; not consistently.

Tim Ferriss: So true.

Robert Rodriguez: You can consistently perform and act and get there and sit and draw until it comes out, and it comes out. And if you trust it, and you get out of your way – and that started teaching me that, too. You don't have to ever sit there and go: well, I don't have any

ideas; I don't know if I can draw one today. Get your ego out of it. It's not you, anyway. The sooner you shut up, the sooner it will come through. Get out of the way, let the pen glide where it needs to go and it will be there, and you'll be amazed and you'll be going, how did I do that? The creative spirit will be like: bastard taking credit for it again.

That applied to that and to everything that I do. And sometimes it helped to be able to draw or to show somebody really quickly: this is the shot I have in mind; let's go get this.

And I'd be able to sketch it out, so that would help. But mostly, it was really just what I learned about the creative process that early; I was 18, 19 at the time. I'll show you some of the strips. I look back at them and I'm like, oh, my God, I drew better then than I do now; what happened? Because I was practicing every day. And that was the other thing. It showed you mastery. If you spend four hours a day on anything, you're going to get pretty frigging good, even if you have zero talent.

One of the cartoons that Chris Ware gave me one day, he goes. "Oh, my God, my teacher told me this. Your drawings have jumped in leaps and bounds within a day. It's not a gradual up. It's like suddenly from one day to the next, and I just saw that in yours." I had done a strip that was really different from anything I did and it went to that level. So I apply that a lot to people; don't get frustrated. Keep going, keep practicing, keep at it. Put in the hours and it'll come to you.

And I've had it happen everywhere in sculpting, in music, in filmmaking where suddenly it just jumps.

Tim Ferriss: You just hit this inflection point.

Robert Rodriguez: Yeah, it jumps by a lot and it blows you away. And you're like, what's different? Nothings different. I just kept applying myself and it finally clicked. Troublemaker Studios, I had this studio. I didn't know what to call my production company. I was an independent filmmaker who was getting to put his company in the front of the credits. So I had to just come up with a company; I didn't have one. So I just used Los Hooligans so people would know it was the same guy who was making cartoons. But the sediment was kind of cool. I hadn't quite figured it out. Then one year in 1997, I was going to go to Europe to do some publicity. I went into this place where Stevie Ray Vaughn used to get his cowboy hats, to get a cowboy hat.

I walked into their place and I said: I need a cowboy hat because I'm going to Europe, and every time I go to Europe, they always say: you're from Texas; where's your cowboy hat? So I'm going to go there this time with a cowboy hat. And so I said, what have you got right now? And the guy ran to the back and he looked at me. They kind of size you up, Texas hatters, and they fit something to your head. And he goes, "This is called the Troublemaker." The Troublemaker? Wow, that's a cool name for a hat.

Gee, I'm going to call my studio the Troublemaker Studio. It's kind of the same as Los Hooligans but done in a really cooler way. So yeah, my thing of wearing a cowboy hat and the name of my studio was born that one day.

Tim Ferriss: I love it. When I've made companies, like LLCs or whatever, and I'll be on the phone with a lawyer and they'll say, what do you want to do if such-and-such name isn't available? And I'll just look around where I happen to be sitting, kind of like the Kobayashi moment in *Usual Suspects*, and I'll be like, it's pillow serious, just tagging things together.

Robert Rodriguez: Right, things that are around you.

Tim Ferriss: And I'll be like, try that; no one's going to have that.

Robert Rodriguez: One of my favorite LLCs, and this is the sentiment to sometimes why you go, and you probably can relate to this, sometimes when you try to get help from people and they don't quite see the vision and there's negativity involved. One of my companies is called Never Mind, I'll Do It Myself Productions. And it always motivates people. When people say hey, could you bring me this or bring me that?

And they go, well, I don't know... I go, never mind, I'll do it myself productions. And they go: okay, okay, I'll go do it. They don't want to be labeled that. It's a great motivator.

Tim Ferriss: That is hilarious. I love it. So speaking of Troublemaker and just being a rabble rouser, one of the things I wrote down from your conversation with Frances Ford Coppola, who by the way, obviously he spends a lot of time in Nor Cal and he's got the winery. He's also got some restaurants. For about a year, I was writing and I just went to his restaurants hoping he would walk in.

Robert Rodriguez: Which restaurant?

Tim Ferriss: It was in North Beach. It was right at the corner. I think he owns the entire building but the restaurant I went into most was actually in Palo Alto, and I'm blanking on the name. I want to say Blanco Elroso. I thought it was like white and red. But I would go and I'd sit in there, just in the off chance that he'd walk in. It never ended up happening, but I never gave up hope. And that's where I wrote, actually; I probably edited half *The Four Hour Workweek* in that restaurant. I drank way too much coffee. But one of the things he said is, "Failure is not durable."

The next thing he said was, "The things that they fire you for when you're young are the same things they give you lifetime achievement awards for when you're old." And so I wanted to know, what did you get and how did you get yourself in trouble in the early days? Were there ways you created friction or conflict in ways that you don't regret, or that you do regret?

Robert Rodriguez: Any time you step out of line like that, it was that you get in trouble but you would just have people not understand exactly what you were going to do. And then for good intentions, not want you to go down the wrong path. I remember one of my teachers who became a great friend of mine, he asked me, "What are you doing this summer?" "I'm going to go make a movie, *El Mariachi*" "Oh, yeah? Who's going to be your DP?" "Well, I'm going to be the DP." "Oh, no, the actors will hate you. You'll be there setting up the lights the whole time."

Right away, he started telling me all the disadvantages to try to do something yourself. So I decided I'm not going to tell anybody what I'm doing.

I'm just going to go do it because I have a feeling it will work, and if it doesn't work, no one will know. And it worked, and when I came back and I showed him, he felt very embarrassed. And he goes, you hate to see these kids go out there with good intentions. But anytime you just did something that was against the grain because you just go, I don't know; I have a feeling I should just go this way, you should just go and try it. It's good not to follow the herd. Go the other way. If everyone's going that way, you go this other way. Yeah, you're gonna stumble. You're gonna stumble but you're also gonna stumble upon an idea no one came up with. That's one of my favorite quotes I say.

Tim Ferriss: I like that. That's great.

Robert Rodriguez: That's going to be in my book. Because when I do that in talks, people get all excited. Because it's like, you're going to stumble but you're going to stumble upon something no one else came up with because they're lined with gold over there. No one goes that way. It hasn't been picked clean, yet, and you're going to stumble upon something. And you'll stumble a few times but you're going to consistently stumble upon an idea no one's come up with by going that way. And so I tend to just kind of always have been that way. I was like, if everyone's going that way like they know what they're doing with purpose, I don't know what I'm doing.

I'm just going to go this other way. That way, at least it's a new frontier. And I always found success that way. I always found success by just going the opposite way. There was too much competition over there. If everyone's trying to get through that one little door, you're in the wrong place. And I hate saying that. Sometimes at a film festival when people say how do we break in, I go, the problem is you're at a film festival. Nothing wrong with film festivals but everyone else here is trying to get through that same door. And they're not all going to fit.

So you've got to think bigger than that. There's less competition up there. I always wanted to get into TV. But instead of going and competing with everyone else trying to get in on 7 p.m. on NBC on a Friday night, own a network. You know how many people are trying to own a network? Nobody. You're competing with no one, literally. When that network I got was up for grabs, El Rey, there were 100 other applicants. Now, that sounds like a lot. But out of the whole country, 100?

Really? How many actually had probably a solid business plan and an actual vision of something that could be implemented? Probably five.

Tim Ferriss: You're in the top five right off the bat.

Robert Rodriguez: So you're competing with the top five instead of the top 20,000 trying to get in on NBC on Friday or Saturday night. So I always say try to look bigger than that. And I feel failure. That's what I talk a lot about in Director's Chair, why I was bringing that up with Frances. I like talking about mistakes and failure a lot with these directors because people tend to think they just make no mistakes ever, or think that that's bad. Because I used to think the same way. That's why I did Mariachi by myself. I didn't want people to see me make mistakes.

I didn't want them to see me make mistakes because I thought that was a bad thing, but it's not. You learn so much. No matter what, even if I didn't sell *Mariachi*, I would have learned so much by doing that project. That was the idea, is I'm there to learn. I'm not there to win; I'm there to learn, because then I'll win, eventually.

Tim Ferriss: Right, eventually.

Robert Rodriguez: You don't have to win right now. You've just got to know I'm going to follow my heart, go that way. And sometimes it'll work for you. Sometimes it'll be the *Godfather*. Sometimes it'll be *One From the Heart*. Sometimes it'll be *Apocalypse Now*.

Sometimes it'll be *Jack*. You don't know but you've got to keep going that way, and that's kind of what he was saying. If you have that attitude: well, maybe in ten years this will be a success; it helps to have that kind of history. When I make a movie and if it didn't do well, I would go hey, maybe it's *The Thing*. John Carpenter made *The Thing* and it bombed; everyone thought it was terrible. They called it pornography. He went and buried his head in the sand for ten years until ten years later they announced it was a classic and it was a masterpiece.

Of course, he was wallowing in despair for ten years – thanks, it came late but eventually it would come. But if it doesn't, you're already on to better things. So as long as you always think it's not a bad thing; I always try to look at failure as a good thing. The Winston Churchill quote I like, "Success is moving from one failure to the next with great enthusiasm." You should just be willing to go fail. That means you're going on that way that's different. You're going into uncharted territory. And that's where you'll find, eventually.

Tim Ferriss: As long as you're learning something.

Robert Rodriguez: You're learning something. And sometimes, the only way to get across that river is by slipping on that first rock. That's the way there. And when you get to the other side, you look back and sure enough, I could only have gotten here had I done those things. I remember once I was giving a talk like that, and a gal holds up her hand and she goes, "Okay, you're real positive. But what do I tell myself when I just wasted a year and a half of my life on something that didn't work?" I said, "That's a real negative way to put it. Can you rephrase that for me?" And she goes, "I learned something good the hard way."

That still sucks. You've got to be able to look at your failures and know that there's a key to success in every failure. If you look through the ashes long enough, you'll find something. I'll give you one. When I did *Four Rooms*, Quentin asked me, do you want to do one of these short films called *Four Rooms*, the one with the bellhop, the one in a hotel room? And my hand went up right away, instinctively. Yeah, I want to do that. It's an experimental film, I'm there. Now, should I have answered so quick? Should I have been a little more studied?

Should I have gone back and researched and realized anthology movies never work? Even when it's Scorsese and Woody Allen and Coppola? They bombed miserably. They never work. Should I have researched, come back, given a different answer? And no one could answer that. I go, no, I would still go with my instinct. The movie bombed. And in the ashes of that failure, I can find at least two keys of success if I look back on that. On the set when I was doing it, I had cast Antonio Banderas as the dad, and had this cool little Mexican as his son.

They looked really close together. And then I found the best actress I could find, this little, half Asian girl. She was amazing. I needed an Asian mom. I really wanted them to look like a family, and I got this great little family. And it's New Year's Eve, because I was dictated by the script, so they're all dressed in tuxedos. I was looking at Antonio and his Asian wife and going, wow, they look like this really cool, international spy couple. What if they were spies and these two little kids who can barely tie their shoes didn't know they were spies? They get captured. I thought of that on the set of *Four Rooms*. There are four of those now and a TV series coming.

So that one. The other one was, after it failed I thought, I still love short films. Anthologies never work. We shouldn't have had four stories; it should have been three stories because that's probably three acts, and it should just be the same director instead of different directors because we didn't know what each person was doing. I'm going to try it again. Why on earth would I try it again if I knew they don't work? Because you figured something out when you're doing it the first time, and that was *Sin City*.

Tim Ferriss: Amazing.

Robert Rodriguez: So *Spy Kids* and *Sin City* came out of that. So you can always look back. If you have a positive attitude, you can look back. That's why what Frances is saying is correct. Failure isn't always durable.

You can go back and you can look at it and go, oh, that wasn't a failure; that was a key moment of my development that I needed to take and I can trust my instinct, I really can.

Because what is success? It's not necessarily measured in dollars. It could be measured in knowledge; what did I learn that I can now use later? And it may take me ten years to figure it out but it'll be there when I need it, and then I'll be able to look back and check a journal and go: oh yeah, this and that equaled together.

I'm going to keep following my gut. And Zemeckis said the same thing. He should not have even hired her, [inaudible]. He knew it was supposed to be Michael J. Fox. Except that your intellect tries to tell you different. Your intellect tries to tell you you can make anything work. But your gut is harder to explain to people because it's just a feeling. You can't always go to a studio and say: I know, but I just have a feeling. They'll be like, what does that mean?

That's the dilemma of being an artist, which is why I've always chosen low budget movies so that people don't have to ask me those questions. I'm in charge so I can just go: you know what, if it feels good, it is good, and that's what we're going to do.

Tim Ferriss: What book or books do you most frequently gift to other people?

Robert Rodriguez: It's been some years but for awhile, that book, *Start with Why*. I like that one a lot. Because I'd seen the talk on Ted Talk that Simon Sinek did. I would send that to people and say this is so important. I realized better what I was doing when I read that book, and I gave it to people to show them how to clarify what they're doing right and what they're doing wrong.

And it was a very simple approach that they should take every day. Like if you go to an actor and say, "Hey, I'm a film maker and I'm making a low budget movie and I kind of need your name as a marquee to kind of help sell it. I can't pay you very much and it's going to be probably a lot of work but if you want to be in it..." You know, you're thinking about only yourself. And it's like: no, get the hell out of here. Because all you're talking about is what you do and how you do it, which is I make low budget movies. Yeah, so what? It means you've got no money.

Alright. Instead, I always start with a why. I go to them, "I love what you do. I've always been a big fan. I've got a part that you never would get. I believe in creative freedom. I don't work with the studios. I work independently. I'm the boss there; it's just me

and my crew. It's very creative. Ask any of your actor friends." They'll say: go have that experience.

You're just going to feel so invigorated. I shoot very quickly so you'll be out. Robert De Niro in *Machete* in four days. I'm going to shoot you out in four days. You'll be on your next movie for six months; you're on my movie for four days and it's going to be the most fun you've ever had, and you'll probably get great reviews.

Your performance is going to be just really free because I'm going to give you that freedom. That's why I do it. How do I do it? Well, I work very independently. I have very few people on my crew; we all do multiple jobs. We do it with less money so that we have more freedom. What is it I do? I'm an independent film maker. Do you want to come make this movie? They're like, yes. Because it's all about what they can do, how it's going to fill them.

You don't have to mention: oh by the way, I need your name as a marquee to sell the movie. Because really, you really are interested in their talent and it does bring a level to the picture. You've really got to think about why is it I'm even doing what I'm doing?

Tim Ferriss:

One of my favorite things I read, and I hadn't realized this back story, was your experience with *Sin City* and Frank Miller and maybe battle is too strong a word but the decision to insist on the co-directing. Could you just elaborate on that for folks? As context, I don't know if I mentioned this before but I have about 10,000 comic books at home, all poly bagged.

I was a comic book addict for decades. I wanted to be a comic book penciller. I actually was an illustrator in college for one of the satire magazines. But I wanted to be a comic book penciller for a very, very long time. Could you give a little bit of the context around *Sin City*?

Tim Ferriss:

I'll give you a little context and the battles that you normally have when you try and step out of the line. Like, how do you get in trouble? You asked how do you get in trouble all the time? It's never intentional. It's just sometimes you're just ahead of people's time. So when Quentin and I were making these movies, even after I did *El Mariachi*, I went and did some other films. I didn't know if I wanted to join something like the Director's Guild.

There's nothing I dislike more than organizations because they're usually the most disorganized. Anything that's called an organization you already know they have other things in mind that

probably don't involve me and suddenly I'm in a box, and I don't want to be in a box. And George Lucas isn't in the Director's Guild and neither is Quentin.

I'm just going to stay out of the Director's Guild. Then they come after you after a little while and go, it's embarrassing that you're out making films and you're not in the guild. So I said okay, I can't really join because I want to do low budget movies; you all don't have low budget agreements. This is kind of my life blood. I need to kind of go do whatever I want. And they said we're putting some paperwork in, they were putting in some new rules that allows that.

So I did a film and they made me join, so I joined. In the very first film I go and make under it, it was *Four Rooms* which already didn't fall under their guidelines. So I already had to quit again. It had already cost me 5 grand to get into the damn organization. So it's like okay, now I'm in; now I'm ready to get out. Alright, I'm out; I'll just stay out. I knew it wasn't going to fit, me. So we go and we make movies for years and years, and they let me go.

They let me go because it was like alright, really, how long is this guy's career going to last? And then four or five films later, they come back because it's become embarrassing that I'm working and no longer in the guild, and it's all about their faith. And I'm an Hispanic film maker, of which they had very few and I'm not in the guild.

So they coaxed me back in. They said if you don't go back in, we're going to make it harder for you to get a job. So it's like oh, so it's going to get to that? Okay, well, I ain't frigging paying again so you guys are going to have to pay me in because you all welched on your deal. So I went back in. And I was always getting in trouble because organizations don't like hyphens. So if you're a writer and a director and an editor, they like having their name more prominent than the other.

So the Writer's Guild would be upset at the Director's Guild if me as a writer wasn't more prominent than director. This is stuff that you just don't care about at all. You're just trying to make your movie. So I remember having to leave the Writer's Guild, actually, after *Spy Kids* because they were demanding all kinds of stuff. And then the Director's Guild, again, was giving me hassle over having a credit that said, "Shot, chopped, scored, and directed by Robert Rodriguez in once upon a time Mexico."

So finally, I just had to separate it. I didn't want my name to come up 20 times because I was doing a bunch of job but each guild makes you put your name in there.

So I tried to combine them.

Tim Ferriss: You didn't want 12 consecutive screens with your name on it.

Robert Rodriguez: They kept wanting me to separate it so my name would keep coming back up. But it just looked real egotistical. But it was like no, no. Plus, I did the movie so fast. I'm not the cinematographer; man, I just shot it. I wasn't thoughtfully editing; man, I chopped it. I did the music; yeah, I can barely play and it's an orchestra but I scored it. Music composed by Robert Rodriguez; it's like cut out all the lofty things. They didn't like that. So I was always having to go in front of the board for something.

And when *Sin City* came around, that was like the final straw. And it happened very organically. I went to Frank Miller and I showed him this test I did for *Sin City*. I said, I know what it's like to create original characters and not to trust Hollywood, but this isn't Hollywood. This is something totally different. I made this on my own, and I'm going to offer you a deal. How about I'll write the screenplay, and it will be unremarkable because I'm going to copy it right out of your books. It's November.

I'll have the screenplay by December. We'll go shoot a test in January. We'll shoot the opening scene. I'll have some actor friends come down. We'll shoot it, I'll cut it, you'll be there, you'll direct with me. I'll do the effects, I'll do the score, I'll do the title sequence, fake title sequence with all the actors we want to be in it. And a lot of those ended up being in it. Like we put Bruce Willis, Mickey Rourke; we started putting names in the fake titles. And if you like what you see, we'll make a deal for the rights and then we'll make the movie. If you don't like it, you keep it as a short film you can show your friends.

So we did it and he went for it. I said, you're amazing director but you're using a pen instead of a camera. The performances you get out of your paper actors, I would love to have you there. In fact, do you want to direct one of them? He said, I've always wanted to do a big, fat kill. I said man, you should be there for the whole thing. You and me, we should direct it together. I'm really just copying your thing right out of the book. I really want that just to move. So we should direct this together. I used to be a cartoonist. I know. It's

the same freaking thing. It's the same thing. You're telling stories visually.

You're already doing it. When you go to Hollywood, they think of you less because you come from the comic world. They don't realize you're telling stories visually better than a lot of them. So I want to put you where you belong. You're at that same level. You walk in and you're already going to be directing at the same level as another director. I'm tell you, that's what it is. Because I know; I jump around all these jobs. They're all the same. Creatively, they're all the same.

So he came and did it, and we were getting ready to go and a week before production, the Director's Guild calls. Oh, here I go, I'm in trouble again.

Tim Ferriss: Here we go again.

Robert Rodriguez: I don't even know why.

Tim Ferriss: Getting called to the principal's office.

Robert Rodriguez: Big time. They call and they say: you're very aware of our rules. What rules? They have a rulebook this thick. Like I sit there and read this thing?

Tim Ferriss: Phone book.

Robert Rodriguez: It's like a phone book. What rule is that, that you can't have two directors? How is that? I see two directors all the time. The Wachowski Brothers, the Cohen Brothers, the Hughes Brothers. No, they were a team before they joined the guild. What? What does that mean? Well, one of you can't direct this movie, and one of you has to produce.

And the next movie you do together, you can direct together because then you would have already established a working relationship. You have to be what's called a bonafide team. Really? I don't think that's going to fly. Why do I even go into the guild if you're already just going to tell me what to do? I think they though it was doing it on purpose. I really didn't know that was a rule. How could you know? It's just so convoluted; it seems so selective. I said, I don't think anyone will know that him and I have never worked together.

And couldn't you qualify it somehow and say if you're also the writer, director, editor, composer, you can also do this? And it was their suggestion that I should leave. Because I think they thought I was a troublemaker. They said, we think you should leave the guild if you're goin to do that, because we would not allow you to do it and we'd have to shut down the movie. So I was like, maybe I'll ask Frank because I know he won't want to shut down the movie. "Frank, how about you just be the director?" They don't care if I direct. I can direct; I just can't be named a director.

Some movies, like Peter Jackson does the Lord of the Ring movies and there's like five directors. But they only want one person credited because he can't be in all the sets. He has to have other directors out there with the actors. But they want the illusion that there's only one director, which isn't always the case.

Tim Ferriss: This is interesting. I just realized, is that why when someone guest directs a certain scene in a movie, that's why you only see one name in the credits?

Robert Rodriguez: Yeah. But people don't know that. The audience doesn't know or care about their stupid rules. So I said, no one's going to know. But anyway, okay, whatever. So I asked Frank, how about I just produce and you direct by name? I'll be there and we'll direct like always. They don't really care that we both direct. They even said: you can both direct if you want but only one of you is going to be credited. And I just don't like people giving you rules that are just made up in a box somewhere. I just always rub against that. I just don't like that. It breaks down the freedom and the spirit of what you're doing, and they don't understand that. They're just usually behind the times.

Like when we did that Four Rooms movie, they didn't know low budget movies were going to come in like a storm like that, and they weren't prepared. Eventually, they came around but they weren't ready then. So you just have to leave until they can get their shit together. So this was another case like that. They came back many times begging; it turned out very bad for them. They go so much bad press. So anyway, they said you should just leave. And I said okay, Frank what do you think? How about I produce and you direct?

And he goes, "That doesn't seem fair." I said, "What should I do?" And Frank said, "On my tombstone it will say 'does not play well with other kids.'" And I said, "Me, too. I'm just going to quit." So I called up and said alright, I'm out of here. I'm quitting. I'm going to stick by the artist; we're going to do this together. But we don't

have to tell anybody; we'll just keep it under the radar. I'll just leave quietly. I was always out of there several times and didn't make any noise. They leaked it to the press. They leaked it to this Hollywood reporter, my production.

Tim Ferriss: Oops.

Robert Rodriguez: I guess to screw up my production. They did it. Because I didn't tell them. I'm not in Hollywood. How else would they know unless leaky faucets had told everybody.

And it flipped on them. It turned really bad and suddenly everybody wanted to be involved in this movie that was a renegade, where the director was supporting the artist's vision so much that he gave up residuals, ever chance of getting an award. You just give up so much by leaving the guild. And they got beat up in the press for years about that for the same reason you said. Hey, you left. It became such a badge of honor to have left for the sake of this other artist.

And when I would go to get actors, I would show them that opening scene and the fake credits, like Bruce Willis's name was already in the credits, Benicio del Toro was on the credits. And they would go: I've got to be in this movie; I'm already in the credits. And then plus, what's going on with the guild, and Frank's really co-directing? It sounded so exciting. Actors get so into something that's pure and passionate and about the product only and damn the business, and all that can go to hell. Oh, man, they just jump on that train so fast. And so we had so many great actors jumping onboard.

Oh, so this is the big joke. Here's the topper. Because now I could do anything I wanted with the credits. So not only is it directed by Frank Miller and Robert Rodriguez, I had Quentin come and direct one scene. Special guest director, Quentin Tarantino. Now that looks like an official title. So now these guys are over there like oh, their whole illusion of a single director has just been squashed by a big movie called *Sin City* because they wouldn't play freaking ball. So now people think that's a genuine title. They go: but wait a minute, is this special guest director a real title?

I said no, I made that up. That's my creation. Because it went to Quentin, of all people, because he wasn't in the guild, either. So it turned into this really funny thing. So for years, they would come back and say you really should rejoin. And I haven't had to rejoin since. What they don't want, and this makes sense, is they don't

want some producer to go to a director and say, "I'm going to be your co-director or I won't finance the movie." You see how somebody could abuse that.

Tim Ferriss: Right, that could be turned around.

Robert Rodriguez: But that's clearly not what this was, but that's why their rules were so strict, and that's why they didn't want to bend the rules and they thought I was such a troublemaker. Better to let him leave.

And I thought so, too. Why fit me in that box? I don't belong in that box. I'm always going to be doing something weird you don't like so just let me go fly free. So that's really why that happened. Again, you'll run into resistance. If you're going to go that way, everyone else is trying to get in the guild. You're actually trying not to get in the guild.

You end up on the island of misfit toys along with George Lucas and Quentin Tarantino. I remember Jim Cameron came over to the table. I was sitting with George Lucas talking about look, I'm out of the guild. I'm like George. George left the guild long ago because they were bashing him for credits and things he was doing in the Star Wars movies that were really cutting edge, that they all ended up changing their rules, too. But back then, he was just so pissed he left.

Tim Ferriss: It's just not a fit for everybody.

Robert Rodriguez: Sometimes it's not a fit for everybody, especially if you're really odd. You should just be allowed to go out. Because it is odd to do that many different jobs but that's kind of how I started. Even when I went to do *Desperado*, I remember telling him: I want to edit this movie. And they said no, we've never had a director edit his own movie. It's just not done.

And I said: well, I edited *Mariachi* and you bought that. And they're like: okay, you can edit it but you have to edit it here in LA so we can watch you because we don't think you know what you're doing. And it helped set the precedent. I showed them the first scene I cut, and they were like: okay, okay, you know what you're doing. You can cut it. So they were really supportive after that. But at first, it was like any time you do something new, you kind of have to break a precedent in order to do it.

Tim Ferriss: Definitely.

Robert Rodriguez: And once you've got that precedent set, then you can kind of just do whatever you want.

Tim Ferriss: Then you can roll.

Robert Rodriguez: So now you go into a studio and they go: oh, that's that guy. He shoots his own movies. He edits his own movies, he scores his own movies; that's just how he works. It would be harder later in life to be an established director and say: suddenly I want to edit my own film and write it. And they'd be like: no, no.

Tim Ferriss: You have to set that precedent.

Robert Rodriguez: Yeah, you're going to have to set that precedent. So that's really what was the great thing about *El Mariachi*, is that it set a precedent for me doing every job if I wanted to. All of this became available to me later.

Tim Ferriss: I'm known as – I could say affectionately but I don't think it's terribly affectionate – I'm known as a problem author in publishing because I've sketched out and then hired my own artists and designers to do the covers, for instance.

This is like one of several dozen examples but you kind of have to start fighting early. And even though they might not accept all of your terms, the expectation is set. So the resistance is not futile but kind of lessons over time, it seems.

Robert Rodriguez: I've done all my posters since *Desperado*.

Tim Ferriss: No kidding.

Robert Rodriguez: Because on *Desperado*, it was the same thing. And it's not like the studio was doing it. They send an agency down anyway. It's not like it's their guys. The agency shows up. Antonio was sick that day and they were like, we're here only one day so we'll put his outfit on one of the other crew members and we'll paste his head on later. I'm like, that's not going to look right.

Nobody moves like him. Oh, geez, this is going to be awful. So we shot our own poster on the set, the famous one of him with the gun. I saw him doing that one day on the set and I went and took a little snapshot; that would be a great poster right there.

When we went to show the studio the posters, they looked like DVD covers, the ones the other guys did. And I put mine up there,

too. And Lisa Henson, the President of Columbia looked at all of them. She looked at the one that I had there and she said, we like that one. And I go, that one's mine. And she looks at me like, oh shit, had I known it was you, I probably wouldn't have said that. She goes, really? Oh, we didn't know. I'm glad I just put it up there along with the others and didn't say anything. And then that set a precedent. From then on, I could go to every studio and go, I do my own posters, too.

So you guys can go ahead and try and make one, but we'll try and make one. And the key also is to do it early. Do it while you're still shooting. First impression is everything. I'll cut a trailer while I'm still shooting and send it to a studio. They'll go and try to make their own, over and over, and they can't get that first thing they saw out of their heads. It's still not as good as the one we saw.

Tim Ferriss: Right, you've incepted them.

Robert Rodriguez: You've already stuck it in there. It's jammed in there and it's never going to be right. And it's happened consistently again and again that way, that you put in that first – it has to be a good idea at first.

If it's terrible, they'll do better and then you'll look greedy. It's not about who's winning; you just don't want to be stuck with a bad poster. So at least you have something that you really like in case, with all their team, they don't come up with something. And that's always kind of been the case with us. Because you're just coming from it with a point of view that's different.

I'm shooting the poster while I'm shooting the movie. I have a setup on the side so if we have Robert De Niro there only for four days, we're not going to get him later to do a poster. That's what they all do. That's why they don't look anything like they do in the movie in the posters because they haven't thought of that concept, yet. They do that much later.

Tim Ferriss: Oh, interesting.

Robert Rodriguez: I do it right then on the set. I'll pull them over to the green screen, shoot amazing photos of him in character – with all my actors – and I have him for when I go make the posters.

Tim Ferriss: Right, he's not in the middle of another movie.

Robert Rodriguez: It's from the moment they were filming and they're in character and it's perfect. It's really great, and you couldn't get a better

performance out of them. They're not trying to remember later where they were. So that's been a big plus, is just having my own production studios in Austin.

It's a studio that just makes sense. It's streamlined, and it's outside of the business so you question everything that doesn't work, come up with a new way that works better for today's times and that's how we've been able to pioneer a lot of things like digital photography, way before anyone was shooting digital. The first digital 3D movie was *Spy Kids 3*. I'm doing full on green screen movies like *Spy Kids 3* or *Sin City*; we pioneered a lot of that down there.

Tim Ferriss: When I was reading up on your bio, a couple of times in a few different versions of your bio it said then he took two years off, and then a few paragraphs down, then he took three years off and came back with X. Were you actually taking time off?

Robert Rodriguez: I don't think so.

Tim Ferriss: If so, what takes place? What do you do in between big projects?

Robert Rodriguez: Some years are more active than others. I remember one year, I shot *Spy Kids 2*, *Spy Kids 3* and then *Once Upon a Time in Mexico* came out.

I had shot all these movies that were all set down kind of at the same time because they weren't due, yet. Some of them have release dates that are later. So even though I shot *Once Upon a Time in Mexico* in 2001, it wasn't released until 2003. So sometimes it will look like there's inactivity when you're actually working on something and sometimes the movie is done and it sits there.

Tim Ferriss: It's just a different part of the process.

Robert Rodriguez: If they think the release date is better six months later, then that pushes it. Sometimes it will look like there are bigger gaps but usually, consistently, I'll shoot between one and two movies a year.

Tim Ferriss: Got it. That is very consistent. I can't eke out books any faster than one per three or four years. I just don't have the stamina. This is a question I'm stealing from your interviews in the Director's Chair. What scene have you taken the most takes of, or shots?

Robert Rodriguez: What scene have I taken the most takes of?

Tim Ferriss: Takes, excuse me.

Robert Rodriguez: You know, it's different. I shoot very differently because I've always thought as an editor, because I started that worry about.

In fact, that's why they didn't want me to cut *Desperado*. They'd seen the footage and it didn't look like daily footage they normally got. Where usually someone walks in the room, they come and sit down, they do the whole scene and then you cut. Me, I would only shoot him walking in the room and then I would cut. Because I knew that in a wide shot, that's all I was going to use because I was already seeing how I was going to edit it. And so it almost couldn't be edited by anybody else because I'd kind of only shot it one way.

And that's just because that's how I learned. I used to cut in the camera on *El Mariachi*. The camera was so loud. It sounded like all your money was going away. So I would call, "Action!" The guy would start running, then I would start filming because the first startup, I'm not going to use. "Action!" He starts running. "Cut." I wouldn't shoot through the action and cut, I would just shoot the little portion of that.

So I was literally shooting my edits. So I'm not as extreme now but I won't ever do more than a certain number of takes because as an editor, I'm already seeing what I'll use. Where sometimes somebody will shoot, thinking I've got to make sure the editor has enough to work with.

And so you're way over covering it, where I'm getting only specifically what I need and I can move so much faster because I don't need that.

Tim Ferriss: Let's say it's a problematic shot, like the one that Quentin brought up that was 34 takes or whatever it was. He was trying to get the blood in the Chinese condom to pop up over the shoulder with the swordfight.

Robert Rodriguez: Oh, yeah. Well, Quentin is very old school. He wants to do as much in camera and no CG. Where I would just do a CG fix.

Tim Ferriss: Got it, okay.

Robert Rodriguez: So when I showed him *Sin City* for the first time, and he sees Miho. She cuts the guy's head off and the blood sprays her face,

and her eyes don't blink, he goes, "That's an impossible shot." And I said, "I know but I shot it twice." So I shot her once with her eyes open, no blood on her face. And then I had her close her eyes and we sprayed her with blood. And of course she flinches. He goes, "She didn't flinch at all." I go, "She flinched but I cut that out." And I left her eyes open from the take from a few seconds previously.

"But that's impossible." I said, "Well, it's impossible but not for her; she can do it." A normal person can't help but flinch when they get something thrown in their face but that character can. The actress can't but the character can. See, that's what I'm talking about. We can actually be more true to the character using the technology, because you're trying to tell a particular story and get a story point across. That if you don't, sometimes embracing technology is good. But he likes to try to get it old school. I would never have done that. I would have been like, one take, alright, we've got that.

Tim Ferriss: CG.

Robert Rodriguez: Here, go ahead and spray the blood so we have a real reference of what it looks like and I can either combine it or not. Because I don't want it to look like CG. Let's shoot it, the real blood, so we can see what it would look like in this light.

Tim Ferriss: You just don't have to have all the components simultaneously.

Robert Rodriguez: Right. And that's why sometimes even with a squib, you put a squib on somebody...

Tim Ferriss: What's a squib?

Robert Rodriguez: A squib is an explosive that makes it look like a bullet hole. You never get that timing right, especially if you shoot in slow motion or something. Because by the time the actor reacts to the fact that he just got shot and then does the body movements, it's delayed.

So you never see it on camera. Because when you're editing, you'll cut to the point where he's going back. See, you have to put that in digitally anyway, or something. One thing my crew already knows; Robert doesn't like anything that requires a countdown. You have to go: alright, everybody ready: three, two, one, pop; that means there's some kind of an explosive, or some kind of a squib, or some kind of gag that's probably not going to work. And we end up having to rewire it. That's why it was there so long. Because

then once you're just going and going, now it's like point of no return.

Tim Ferriss: You're committed.

Robert Rodriguez: We might as well keep going. We're committed, now. No, I'm just kidding. I don't have that kind of money.

Tim Ferriss: Let me pause on that question. One of the things I've really enjoyed reading about – this is just my reference; I read so much – watching and hearing about in the Tarantino interview, I think it might have been part one, was talking about how in the novels that he enjoyed, like the Elmer Leonard, I think it was, they were non sequential

And you have something like *Reservoir Dogs* that starts in media rest. They would say in writing, right in the action which is something I do a lot in my own writing. And seeing how he would sort of take the best elements of a novel and create a cinematic version of that, I was just so happy to see the way you did *Sin City*. I love graphic novels, and they are so, like you said, so beautiful in some cases from a cinematic standpoint, even though they're on the static page.

Robert Rodriguez: Bold, bold shots that I never would have thought as a filmmaker.

[Crosstalk] Like wow, I never would have put the camera there. You know how to shoot; I'll give him that credit.

Tim Ferriss: But with *Sin City*, why did you gravitate to that so much so that you would do the test, and approach Frank who was very well known for not wanting to have his stuff adapted.

What was it that got you so determined to make that?

Robert Rodriguez: It was a book that I would buy over and over again. That's when you know something means something to you. It's like I'm really that dumb. I literally was buying the book over and over for ten years before I realized, wait a minute, I should be making a movie about this. I'm gravitating to this for a reason. Because that style in particular, that black and white style, and I had wanted to do a film noire for awhile but it felt like it would be too nostalgic.

This felt so modern and post modern film noire, and the style of it just was so stunning in black and white. The absence of information, seeing less, was so captivating. It's like there's hardly anything there and it's amazing how little you need to recognize a

human face, or a window. And I love the basic quality of it. I thought, that would be so amazing as a movie. And I know they're going to screw it up.

Someday, they'll try and make a movie of *Sin City* because they're captivated and they won't realize it's because half of it is because of the visual. And they'll go shoot it like a regular movie, and they'll wonder why it sits there and doesn't have the life that it did in the book because they're not going to shoot it like that. And after I did *Spy Kids 3* on the green screen, I went back, looking like I usually do for my next project. I looked through all my stuff that I have.

And I looked at *Sin City* again and I go: whoa, I know how to do this now. If I shot this on green screen, I bet I could make it look just like the book. Let me test it. And I'm real protective of my test stage. Not even my crew knew what I was even shooting. Because I have my own stages, and I had a green screen. So I just went and I asked a few crew members to come. I didn't even show them what I was filming out of. I was filming out of the book.

And I staged a few shots, took them back, did them in Photoshop, kind of applied it in 3D and it worked. It looked like you're looking at a static image of his and suddenly it moved. And so I took it to show him and he flipped out.

I said, this is how we're going to do it. We're going to do it exactly like your book. We're going to make your book move. Instead of taking your book and adapting that to film, we're going to take film and adapt it to your book.

Tim Ferriss: So cool.

Robert Rodriguez: We're going to switch it, and we're not going to change it. Because everyone, you hand them that book and they say: oh, now it has to be adapted into a screenplay. This is fine for a graphic novel but it's not the same as a movie. They're wrong. Visual storytelling is visual storytelling. I don't see why this should not work if it's just on the screen, and we're going to prove it. And that's what I was so excited about. And everybody who got involved in it was so excited about it. It just felt new and different and fresh and vital, and it got you so jazzed.

And I didn't think it would even be successful. Because I didn't care. I'm like, I can attract big stars to this because it's going to be so pure. And yeah, it's going to look so weird; black and white

anthology, all voiceovers; those are the three things you're supposed to not do. Probably no one will get it when they see the first trailer. They'll go, too artsy or too weird. But maybe they'll catch it later on DVD or whatever. I'm fine with that.

Let it be *The Thing*. You know, John Carpenter's *The Thing*. Let it be ten years from now people figure it out. I just really need to make it. And then it was successful the first time, but that might not have happened. It easily could have gone the other way; people think it's just too weird and that's it.

Tim Ferriss:

It was such a vindication for me to finally see it done right. I remember when the first Punisher movie got made and announced. I fought my parents tooth and nail to not go to summer camp because I wanted to see this movie so badly. And I was such a petulant, pain in the ass because then I got to summer camp, and I knew the movie was coming out. I wouldn't see it. We were required to send either daily or weekly letters home to our parents to tell them about summer camp.

And I was just bitching and moaning in every letter because I was still not going to see the Punisher movie. But then it came out, and they didn't preserve the integrity, the beautiful aspect of what drew me to the comic in the first place. So anyway. Kudos to you. I was just so thrilled to see that.

Robert Rodriguez:

Yeah, it was exciting, especially after all that. But it felt like that kind of a thing. It felt like it was the one. It was the fastest movie that ever got going. I literally had the idea to go show Frank that test as soon as I saw it. And I literally met him in November. I gave him the script in December. We shot the test in January. We showed it to a few actors like Bruce Willis, and we were shooting the real film by March. Just the fastest any Hollywood movie has ever taken off, by far. Because it was already written in the book, and we weren't going to adapt it, really. And the drawings were already done. And you would only cast per episode.

So I would shoot the first episode with Mickey Rourke. And if didn't have another actor, like the bad guy, Rutger Hauer, it's like it's okay; shoot it with me and replace me later because it's a green screen. I shot him eight months later. And he and Mickey swear they have a scene together. He goes up and he even kills the guy; puts his hands on his face and crushes him, and they never met. You know, things like that you can do. You were just so excited about all the things you could do, all the possibilities, all the people you could put in the movie.

It shut down for a week after each short story, cast the next one quickly. They would come down, we'd shoot their part. Shut down again, cast the next one, they'd show up. So we'd just do it in like three segments. It was fantastic.

Tim Ferriss: That's amazing.

Robert Rodriguez: It was the most fun shoot.

Tim Ferriss: When we were talking about *Starting with Why*, and you mentioned kind of starting your day. What does the first 60 minutes of your day look like?

Robert Rodriguez: That kind of changes. If I don't go through my list of things I want to do for the next day the night before, which I try to do, and I have long lists of things to do.

Tim Ferriss: This is in your phone?

Robert Rodriguez: It's on my phone, and I use notes, the notes that comes with it because it's faster. If I have to open another program, like an Evernote or anything, and it's got to load; that's too late. The idea is out of my head already. I need a scratchpad that's really fast. This one is called Bullet List 2015.

Tim Ferriss: Wow, you have a whole list for the year?

Robert Rodriguez: No, this is the year so far.

Tim Ferriss: Oh, I see. You just add to it. Okay, it's one document.

Robert Rodriguez: I just keep adding to it. That's the top portion of another list called "hit list," which has three parts. It lists one, two and three. So this is an offshoot of an offshoot of an offshoot.

Tim Ferriss: So what is it?

Robert Rodriguez: Every once in awhile I'll go through. But usually, I'll put at the very top – and then I'll put some Xs under it – stuff I need to do that day. Like things I know I need to do.

Tim Ferriss: And you just add it to the top of the document.

Robert Rodriguez: Yeah, the top priority thing. Like that was make a show and tell for Ferriss. Because I knew I was going to see you. So, tell Ferriss what time. Learn this guitar lick that I always wanted. I'm going to

drop that one down eventually, but at least it goes on the top right now. But I'll check my list to make sure that I'm not supposed to be doing something. And in the morning when I'm half waking up, usually what I like to do is try to work out in the morning.

Tim Ferriss: When do you usually wake up?

Robert Rodriguez: I just finished night shooting so I'm all thrown off.

Tim Ferriss: You're all thrown off.

Robert Rodriguez: Yeah, usually now I don't go to sleep until 6 in the morning. I'm trying to knock it back.

Usually, I'll go to sleep at 2 or 3 in the morning; sometimes 4 in the morning. I'll get up around 11; 10:30 or 11 no matter what.

Tim Ferriss: Got it.

Robert Rodriguez: I just kind of wake up. I'll go start, and if I can get a nap later in the day, then I will. But I'll go down and get some breakfast. I'm allergic to egg whites so that went out the door. I like those plant fusion protein shakes that are plant products. They're so tasty. It's like 25 grams of protein or something in one scoop; oh, my God. So I do two scoops of that. Then I'll either have beans, because I love your bean diet because I'm Mexican, so shit.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, that's easy.

Robert Rodriguez: I make fresh beans that are awesome that last me the whole week. I used to love beans and rice. I do cauliflower rice.

Tim Ferriss: Oh, wonderful.

Robert Rodriguez: I just make rice out of the cauliflower with kale in it. I season it the same way I do Spanish rice and man, you can't tell. It tastes so good. All day I can eat that. And then I'll have some other protein if I need to. That will get me going. I'll either work out, or if I have meetings, or sometimes if I just have to write or do something, I'll go try and knock out some things that I have.

And I always have something to write. I'm writing like four scripts right now so usually something is more pressing, and I'll try and knock it out during the day if not later on during the day. I try and limit meetings and things to a couple days so I can really have blocks of time to get some of these things done.

Tim Ferriss: Right, longer blocks of time.

Robert Rodriguez: Because now that I own a television network, these things keep popping up. So your list is never going to be accurate. Because later that day, oh, I've got to look at episode 207 for the new season of *From Dusk Till Dawn*. And I've got to go put eyes on nit. If it's not completely 100 percent, I'm going to have to go edit it myself; do some editing on it. So I've got to block out time for that. Then I'll have some other ideas for things.

My end episode, I've got to be editing on. I've got to start looking at that already, and start thinking about music and stuff, and score ideas. So that's going to take up its own time. So I've got to really jam when I start the day. Even if I think I've got a full day that's going to be dedicated to whatever I have on my list, five or six other things are going to pop up that are just as important that I can't get away from.

So it's really just chipping away at everything. I don't remember who I learned this from but I love to take on a lot of different things. I like to take on many different projects. I'll give you a list of the projects I have going right now; there's a lot. But if you just chip away at each one, you gain momentum on all of them and then you're living your dream. By the end of the week, you're living your dream. You're doing everything you want to do. You're not doing it all day; maybe 30 minutes here, 30 minutes there. But it's chipping away and it's gaining momentum and it's not just falling by the wayside.

Tim Ferriss: What are the hit lists?

Robert Rodriguez: It used to be called a to-do list and I needed to make another one to differentiate it. It's called hit list. It's things I have to do right now.

Tim Ferriss: So those more urgent things?

Robert Rodriguez: Just kind of like everything I've got to do; just more recent things I need to do or the most important from the to-do list went to the hit list.

And then as that just grew and became unwieldy, I just took the top section of that and moved it to a new one, and the top section of that and moved it to a new one.

Tim Ferriss: It's like pouring into a pyramid of champagne glasses; it just keeps pouring and spilling over to the next level.

Robert Rodriguez: It keeps going. And I try and keep a separate one for my kids. I pride myself most on being a great father; I have five kids. I apply all of this to being a father. So I'll keep a whole list just for them of things I want to tell them, or talk with them about, or show them, or do. And it's jam packed. When they come over on the weekends, we go through the list, boom, boom, boom. And everything I've thought of over the week, I've had a place to dump it.

And we get it all done. So you get this really concise, dense experience. More than if it was just spread out here and there; you really get to feel like you've spent real, quality time with them and none of the ideas that you've had that you want to share with them fly away.

So really capturing these ideas is the most important thing. And then as you go through it, you realize okay, this one I'll never do, this one I'll never do, you know, with your to-do list and stuff. Or it's already taken care of itself some other way. I don't fret too much about stuff that I'm not getting done. They always end up figuring themselves out so I tend not to stress at all. But it does wake me up at night sometimes and I realize, I've got to write that down or I'll forget it. I will forget. And then I'll be stressed knowing that I've forgotten something.

Tim Ferriss: Of course.

Robert Rodriguez: I won't know specifically what it is. This way, I know it's all captured and I can get through.

Tim Ferriss: With your network, what is the best way for people to check out the content on the network?

Robert Rodriguez: Oh, man. Right now, we're just in 40 million homes, which is amazing after a year.

Tim Ferriss: That's a lot.

Robert Rodriguez: We're on all the big carriers. A lot of people don't even realize they have us because it wasn't something they had to buy extra, so they should just look for it.

Tim Ferriss: So Comcast, or whoever?

Robert Rodriguez: Comcast, DirecTV, Time Warner, Cox, Dish. We're on Sling TV now.

We're one of the few channels in that offering where you can just buy a subscription and you can get 20 networks like that. El Rey is one of them, and that's doing really well. A lot more p have gotten that than we thought. And then individual programs, when you have a new network, you don't really create new shows for like five or six years. You just show old programming. I can't see making an original show for 20 years. It's really just old licensed programming; American movie classics.

We had four new shows the first year because we had to kind of make our mark and show people. The only way people were going to find the network is if they heard of these shows. Oh, *Director's Chair*, where's that? Oh, El Rey network, what's that? Oh, *Dusk Till Dawn*, a TV series; where is that again? El Rey? What's El Rey? And they'd have to go look for El Rey and find it.

So the only way to really draw people is by having programming that only exists there. And we only do stuff that we can do. Like no one could get the rights to *From Dusk Till Dawn*. They wanted it but Quentin and I controlled it. Well, he let me do it for my own network. Because he was like: oh, your network, it's like my network.

And he loves the network. He loves all the stuff. It's all curated content. That's what's so cool. We've got to use licensed programming. Well, man, what are my favorite movies? *Kung Fu*, genre films, action films, *Brass Knuckle Mondays*, *Creature Feature Fridays*; license the best of the coolest stuff to show people: here, these are the great ones. These are the ones you should know. This is why we curate them like that. So it's a real curated experience and then there's premiere programming. It's so fun having a network.

Sometimes you'll stumble upon an idea. Like I was going to have five John Carpenter movies in May last year. And I thought, I know John. I'll go film him introducing each one of those films; a little intro so it will be a little original piece of content to go with it. Well, shit, while I'm there just setting up the mikes and the camera, I'll just shoot the shit about directing. I'll call it the *Director's Chair*, try and do an episode of that and maybe that will be a show, and let's just see.

Tim Ferriss: Aha, so that's how it started.

Robert Rodriguez: But John isn't very forthcoming. He talks his stuff down a lot.

He's always like: oh, anybody can do it. Most interviews you read about him, they're not at all like the show I did. So I thought it would be a good test. I did the show with him and he was so profound, and so professorial, and so open that I thought, oh, my God, if this is John talking like this, imagine the other directors who are already like that? Friends of mine called and said – who knew John – I've never seen him talk like that, and I've known him 20 years. So there was something about a director talking to another director that was going to spark something.

Tim Ferriss: Very disarming.

Robert Rodriguez: A different level of conversation. And now that's one of my favorite things to shoot. And it's so quick. I'll research for about a week, week and a half sometimes, get to re-watch all of their films. Come in with like 30 pages of notes and ask them these great questions that I've always wanted to know. And the best stuff comes up. I just did a Michael Mann one and a George Miller one; those are really good.

Tim Ferriss: What have been some of the most surprising answers that you've received, or captivating answers?

Robert Rodriguez: You just never know. Zemeckis saying he thought he was making the worst movie ever in *Forest Gump*; those moments of darkness where you just question everything. Or that he was so punchy and in *Back to the Future* he almost cut the Johnny B. Goode sequence because he was just like, well, it doesn't really fit. I'm going to cut it before we even preview it.

Tim Ferriss: That's when his editor was like, just leave it in for the screening.

Robert Rodriguez: Let's just preview it.

[Crosstalk] He said we couldn't peel people off the ceiling; you never know. It shows that you don't know. I want people to hear those stories because when you feel like oh, I don't know if I'm doing it right; these other guys seem to know. No, they don't know. None of them know. That's the beauty of it, is that you don't have to know. You just have to keep moving forward.

Tim Ferriss: The freedom.

Robert Rodriguez: You have to go sit down and put pen to paper and realize it's not going to come to you if you just sit there waiting for it to happen. You have to act. And as soon as you step forward even a little bit, it starts sweeping you away, doesn't it? There's flow, and you're like how am I doing this? And then you're like, it's not you but you had to start. If you don't start, it doesn't come. It only comes if you start.

So that's the main thing; you've just got to start.

Tim Ferriss: When you think of the word successful, who's the first person who comes to mind for you?

Robert Rodriguez: That's a good one. Successful. There are so many different ways of defining success. I always thought my dad was successful because he was an entrepreneur in that he had ten kids, and he sold cookware door to door. The beauty of that was he'd come home, and my mom would say two of the kids need braces. He could calculate how many sets of cookware he had to sell in order to pay that, and he'd go sell that.

He knew he had a target. If he worked at a job where he got just the same amount of money no matter what, he'd be screwed. But because he could go sell harder, sell somebody on something; this is really strange but I have five brothers and none of them work for anyone. They're all entrepreneurs.

They all have their own businesses. One brother has his own pharmacy; he's already got two pharmacies. One of my other brothers sells life insurance and he's like the top salesman in the country. My other brother sells real estate. No one wanted to work for anyone else. Part of it I think is just part of the DNA, is that you just don't want to be under someone else's thumb. It's why when I come up against guild rules, I suddenly get abrasive. I don't know why.

Tim Ferriss: You bristle.

Robert Rodriguez: It's just because it's in the DNA; you just can't work for somebody else. I notice that in my kids, too. You're never going to be able to work for somebody else. I'm trying to teach them early how to innovate their own jobs because they're going to get more satisfaction out of writing their own ticket. As busy as I am, it's kind of fun to go back and look and go wow, I created every job I have right now. I'm my own problem. I have all this work to do because I created every job. No one's asking me for this; I'm

asking myself to deliver this stuff because I've put that responsibility on myself. That's a great freedom.

That feels like a great success to be able to live the life you want, carve out so much time for your family and relationships, and people can still come and say you're the busiest person I know. And you go wow, I'm not, really. I'm really finding a way to put it all together. I really learned that from my father. I used to go read these little entrepreneur magazines that he had and I thought oh, that sounds so cool. Wow, some guy put video game machines in the back of a truck and drove it around to the malls and made money doing that.

I was always inspired by these entrepreneurial stories of people finding another way to go instead of following everybody else and finding success and happiness. So successful people to me are those who kind of put it all together. Because you can have business success and job security and be miserable in your personal life, or have that always falling apart or some crisis always happening. And I'm eating it up. I'm loving it. And I got that from my father.

We had such great relationships in the family that spilled over. My kids now are getting older, and I love when they call me and text me and say: Dad, can we talk? And they want advice, and you get to go be Dad, and you give them all the strategies you've learned and now they make sense to them, even though you've told them as they grew up. Now, they can apply it and you're just like wow, I wish I learned this when I was their age. And look how far I got without knowing it? Imagine how far they could go?

And it's really being able to give that gift back to people, and your children, and the next generation that's been the most fulfilling, the most exciting. The most stuff I journal is about that. Like wow, really profound stuff. It's like shit I just learned last week I'm getting to apply to them, and they're getting to learn it and they're jumping ahead ten steps. It's like wow.

Tim Ferriss: If you could have a billboard anywhere, it could have text, visuals, whatever; where would you put it and what would it say?

Robert Rodriguez: These are the kinds of questions when I would do interviews.

I would ask the same question over and over and you get so bored with them. But then somebody gives you an original question and you're stumped because you're like, I'm not used to answering

original questions. Hey, let's go back to the easy ones. What's the best answer you've heard for that?

Tim Ferriss: What's the best answer I've heard for that? Let's see. I might be conflating two answers. I interviewed General Stan McChrystal recently; four star general who used to run JSOCS, so basically all the special forces in Afghanistan and Iraq. It might have been his favorite quote; I might be confusing the two answers. But he said, "The purpose of life is a life with purpose." I was quite a big fan of that. Brian Johnson started a company called Braintree and sold it for \$800 million in cash to eBay had a good answer to this, and I'm blanking on it at the moment. But what are your thoughts?

Robert Rodriguez: That was one that I said earlier, when you said oh, I like that quote. That's one that I say a lot to people, is "Don't follow the herd." And it's easier when people can visually see it but I'm pointing in one direction. And I say that when you hear me talking about the network and the network sizzle. I'll say, "If everyone's going that way – to the left – we're going to go this way, to the right." Because that's how you stumble upon new things, by just going down the unbeaten path. It's always rewarding. In any way you choose, not just business but life in general and everything; you just go that way.

And really cultivate your instincts. Cultivating that instinct so that you can always rely on that. Because if you always have to rely on the advice of other people, which is all good, when they're not there you're screwed. You've got to be able to follow that inner voice and cultivate that, and know when it serves you. And when it doesn't serve you, trust that it's not serving you just at the moment; that it's over the long haul it's actually in your best interest.

Tim Ferriss: Acting in your best interest.

Robert Rodriguez: If you have that kind of faith, then you're never stressed. You're never worried about anything.

One of the things I was teaching my son who was very upset about something, I was saying, I'm going to tell you some secret in life. You never have to be upset about everything. Everything is for a purpose. You just failed your driver's test and you're all pissed off. I couldn't be happier. I'd rather you fail with a teacher and take it 100 more times than to go fail in front of a cop, or make that same mistake and hit somebody. Now you're ten days in jail. I can't

even think of a negative reason why you failing that test is a bad thing. It's really how you look at it.

And the way you look at it is so important. If you can have a positive attitude and look at it and say, let me see what I can learn from this; why would you ever get upset about anything? And he's like, wow. That makes so much sense. And I'm so excited about that, I say damn, I've got to make sure I apply that to myself, though. Because I'm sure I'm going to still get upset about something and then there's no reason. Why, you're upset because something didn't go according to plan? It might be for a good reason.

[Crosstalk]

Let's take that and let's make something out of that. Let's take the good out of that. I still try and apply that all the time.

A friend of mine came to visit me on the set. We're shooting a television season finale for *Dusk Till Dawn*. It's huge. I had them add more and more stuff to it; I wanted it to be big, bonkers, more stunts than ever, really deliver. And he couldn't believe I'm sitting behind the monitor playing guitar, which I do on the set. I play the guitar because it keeps me from pacing and it keeps me from getting riled up or stressed. And I'm also writing score at the same time, subliminally. Sometimes it ends up being the score. People go: what are you playing? I like that. Oh, I don't know. Maybe it's the theme. Let me record it real quick.

He goes, I would be so stressed doing this. No, there's no reason to be stressed; why? Well, something might go wrong. So? If it goes wrong you figure out how to make it right. You being stressed isn't going to make it any better. In fact, you want to be cool breeze, otherwise you're not going to be able to think very well. Why not enjoy the shoot? Why be a maniac? And I realized how it's totally the opposite of what you would expect on something that fast, where you have to shoot that quick and every dollar counts.

That you would be playing the guitar kind of softly in between, soothing everybody and keeping the creativity flowing in between takes. That's why I have my actors paint. I teach my actors how to paint in between takes. Because sometimes they'll say I don't know how to paint. I say no, that's bullshit. You're creative already. You can paint just as easily as you can act or do anything. I'm going to show you. Here, pick any color. I'll show you different ways you can apply it; you can apply it any way you want.

Then I'm going to take a photograph of you in character and we're going to transfer a line drawing, and mostly your painting will come through in the face; maybe we'll smoke out the eyes or something and it will be done. It'll be a wrap present; us co-creating a character of yourself. I'll have to show them to you. They'll blow you away.

Tim Ferriss: That's amazing. Oh, I'd love to see them.

Robert Rodriguez: And they're blown away. And they just trust it, now. Because they've seen the other ones. Lady Gaga's, Bruce Willis's and they go obviously, this guy knows what he's talking about. And they're free. It's easier now. Everybody already knows they can do it because they see everyone else does it. And you don't have to train as much. It's really cool. People don't have to unlearn anything when you teach them a new thing like that.

It's a relief to know you don't have to be hesitant. And then you want them to bring that back to the set. Because usually, you call cut, they have to go to the trailer, they sit, they're not being creative. They're on the phone or whatever. Then you're having them come back to the set and suddenly be creative again. This keeps them in a creative flow. It's where they're thinking and solving problems with a different side of their creative brain that they're not even utilizing while acting. It's just amazing. It's a whole other side.

So when they come back to the set, you can tell. There's a problem here with the table; the cards slide all the way across and it's not going to work. You figure it out in two seconds because you've already been solving creative problems in the other room, much easier like what color to use, and which brush stroke to use. So that this is simple. Here, just toss them anywhere you want and we'll erase it there and make it land where we want. Or we'll put them in the place and they'll be fine.

Tim Ferriss: I love it. That's really smart. That's very clever. I want to be respectful of your time. I'm having so much fun, I could lose track of time. But I would love to ask some questions from fans who have submitted things.

Robert Rodriguez: How did you get the questions?

Tim Ferriss: I gathered the questions by polling them on Twitter and Facebook.

Robert Rodriguez: You sent out an announcement on Twitter and Facebook saying Robert's coming and they answered?

Tim Ferriss: I usually phrase it one of two ways. I'll say if you could ask @Rodriguez anything, what would you like to ask him? For instance, I might phrase it that way. I think that might have been what I put out. Then I will get answers back on both Twitter and Facebook. I've also done this via something called Google Moderator, which is going to get shut down. But people on Facebook can up vote the questions you like, so you basically get to see the top five most popular. So this question is from Mike Ellias: what do most people not realize about filmmaking until they become filmmakers?

Robert Rodriguez: How much work it is. I put out a book called *Rebel Without a Crew* to demystify the process, but also to say: here is a ten minute film school; all you need to know is in ten minutes.

It's not true but it is true, in a way. It's that you've just got to start. I didn't put in there the mind numbing work that goes into it, the soul crushing low that you'll experience trying to realize your vision. Because I know you'll figure that out on the way, and I know that it really will separate those from who are going to be doers and from those who are don'ters. You're going to either figure out this is for me, or this isn't for me. I remember my short film, *Bedhead*. A short film, eight minutes.

The credits are going. I'm finally finishing the credits. There were tears in my eyes; I was so spent. And it's a little, short film. So you can imagine how much it takes out of you to birth something from originally from your gut. It really takes a lot. You can never explain that, and so I don't try. I just kind of send people on their way, inspire them, and let them go. And they'll figure it out.

Tim Ferriss: Pretty quickly.

Robert Rodriguez: They'll come back with this look in their eye, like what the hell did I just go through? And they'll either be invigorated by that in some way, and inspired by that or they'll just know that's not for them.

And that's kind of what will separate them. I wouldn't want to tell people this is too much for you. Let them decide that. This is really tough to go on. You could spend a lot of time and money on something that's never going to get off the ground. Let them figure that out on their own. They'll figure that out pretty quickly.

Tim Ferriss: This is from Kuraz Sen. What do you have in common with the main characters in your movies, anything from family structure to outfit, etc.?

Robert Rodriguez: When you write an original character, very much is a reflection of who you are in a lot of ways. I'm a lot of the characters; I'm the girls, I'm the men. There are pieces of me in all of them. That's kind of why sometimes I like to do movies that I didn't write, just to get out of yourself for awhile, because you'll tend to write similar characters. They're always kind of rule breakers; they're always kind of doing their own thing. And they always have sort of this loner type attitude but they realize the greater cause and what they can bring to it.

From *Machete*, to *Desperado*, even the *Spy Kids*. *Spy Kids* are probably the closest to my family. I really wanted to make a movie based on my family; the experience of growing up with ten kids. My uncle was a [inaudible]. He was a special agent for the FBI. He brought down two top ten criminals. I based Gregorial Cortez, played by Antonio Banderas, on him. New York brother and my sisters' names are in there as the two brothers and sister.

My Uncle Felix, it's like my whole family is told in the *Spy Kid* movies. So that was very satisfying to kind of tell your family story hidden in a spy film. It's really how we got along with my siblings, and that whole dynamic and my family done in a way that sometimes it's very obvious like that, and other times it's kind of just hidden.

Everybody from the Johnny Depp character, where he rigs the games constantly so he wins; my kids say that's me all the time. That line where he says, "Hey, it's not cheating; it's creative sportsmanship." That's what my kids always say. "Dad's not cheating; it's just creative sportsmanship," when I beat them at a game because I bent some rule in my favor. They're entertained by that; they don't feel bad. They actually look forward to how I'm going to bend the rules.

Tim Ferriss: This is from Lawrence Favreau, ROT. Sounds like John Favreau. He was on this podcast, as well. Really fun guy.

Robert Rodriguez: He's great.

Tim Ferriss: He contributed some questions, too.

Robert Rodriguez: He's a great guy.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, great guy. What are you geeking out on right now? What do you think is fucking cool?

Robert Rodriguez: I'm trying to think of a good answer because there are so many different little things. Like I just figured out that all these other patches were available to me that I never noticed before, the amp settings on my portal setting for an amp function that I don't like at first because it replaced one that didn't get upgraded with a new system.

I was just pissed, and I was trying to record some music and get a sound that I was looking for. This thing seemed really limited and then suddenly I found a button I didn't know existed because I'd never read the instructions. And this whole menu of things that are locked – I have to go pay some price to unlock them. But it's just so tantalizing to go: oh, my God, what sounds are going to be there that I can use? So I'm geeking out over something that, I guess to summarize, when I first started I would take two VCRs and hook them together and edit my movies that way.

I would use every function, milk it for everything it could do. And people would be shocked at what I was able to get these machines to do. I would take any little function that was a positive, and I would use it in a way in my movies. Now, it's completely the opposite. You're only scratching the surface of every one of these applications. You could go down the worm hole and stay there for quite awhile just trying to figure out all the things that each one of these programs is capable of. It's mind boggling.

And you're never going to take full advantage of them. It's the complete opposite of how I grew up, where I was milking everything for what it was worth.

And now, no matter how deep I go into it, it can do so much more and it drives you crazy. There are just not enough hours in the day. There just aren't enough hours in the day to geek out over things. Stuff with my kids, the gaming world; we love playing games together.

Tim Ferriss: Any favorite game to play together?

Robert Rodriguez: We're still kind of playing some of the old games again and again. We've been playing actually the old Halos again. Some of the stuff we do is the nostalgic stuff because they come over to the house and they want to relive the old days. They love that some of our

favorite old games are now available, like even Mario 64, which they all grew up on, is now available in better quality HD. Same with all the Halos. We can go back and play all the Halo levels from one on that they learned on really crystal clear and big screen. So that's been fun.

Tim Ferriss: What do you feel filmmakers are getting better at, and what are they getting worse at? We can narrow that a little bit.

Let's not say the people who are out there at the prime of their career, but people who are just starting out. What are they getting better at and what are they getting worse at?

Robert Rodriguez: What I think is great about what filmmakers are doing today is how quickly they utilize new technology in new ways of communication. How you broke into the industry when I started is so much different than how you do it now. One of the guys from Ecuador who came in and worked on *Dusk Till Dawn*, he said there was no production down there. "I read your book and I went and made a little short film. I put it on the internet and within a day, it went viral. The studios were flying me up."

He got to make the *Evil Dead* movies and Fed Alvarez, the remake. I got him to direct one of my episodes. And he was like, "Wow, yeah, I was inspired that you just did it with nothing, and I was able to go do it in Ecuador. There as no film industry down there and we just did it, and I was shocked that I could just put it on the internet and get noticed by Hollywood."

No film festival, cut all that. It's actually just from another country, send something in, spreads everywhere, gets him noticed. I've seen a lot of people do that now where they shoot proofs of concepts of whole things, and then they put them out for everyone to see and they can make a deal that way with a studio who goes, this guy knows what he's doing. Just really clever ways. I think that's really great. How has it gotten worse? Gosh, I don't know.

Tim Ferriss: What skills are getting lost?

Robert Rodriguez: Skills? I was lucky in that I got to cut on film. I got to see all the limitations of the old system, at least. Kids today, they just learn the new system so they're off and running. But I saw the old system and saw just how much better the new systems were. I was the only guy cutting digitally on the Sony lot when I did *Desperado*. All the other editors were afraid of it. They were just afraid it was going to replace them.

Same with digital photography. I was the first to start shooting digitally. DPs were afraid that was going to be the end of their job. They don't realize it's just another tool. It's not the job. Technology is not the art form. The manipulation of moving images can happen on a machine or it can happen by cutting film. It's not the technology that is the art form, and people don't realize that. I think kids today, that's a good thing is that they know that.

They just accept any new thing, new tool, and they'll use it. They're not a slave to tradition the way the old generation was. That held stuff back. Because you would see people shooting digital cameras, way before they shot digital cameras in Hollywood. People were ten years ahead of Hollywood, always. It's so slow. That's why I don't live there. We're much more cutting edge in Austin just because we're not having any tradition around us saying no, you're not supposed to do it that way.

Tim Ferriss: You're not in the echo chamber.

Robert Rodriguez: We just rethink it. Why are we even doing it that way? That doesn't make any sense; this new way makes sense. So I think if anything, what people do wrong is when they don't embrace new technology early enough.

Like DPs, directors of photography were wrong not to try to embrace digital photography early enough so they can get in there and help try and define what the look of it would be, how the systems would be built. Now, it's too late. Now they're all switching over and complaining about it. But it's too late, now, because it's been adopted. And you weren't anywhere near it.

Tim Ferriss: You weren't there in the formative stage.

Robert Rodriguez: You went and stuck your head in the sand while everybody else was using it and developing it and now you're just kind of stuck with it. You could have developed a whole new way of photographing movies and you went and stuck your head in the sand for ten years. It makes zero sense. So instead, I was the guy telling them and that's why it has a hot dog holder next to it because that's what was most important to me.

Tim Ferriss: Last two questions. What advice would you give to your 30-year-old self?

Robert Rodriguez: Wow, 30-year-old self. Let's see, did I have anything figured out by 30? Any of the advice I've been giving my kids, I wish I had heard at 30, 35, even 40, 18.

I always learn new techniques, new ways to do things better and I always try to apply them. And I always wish I just knew more back then, being just more self aware. But again, sometimes you look back and you go being naïve and not knowing was probably the best gift; sometimes you know too much. You know too much and then you stop doing things. It's better not to know. There's that example of you ask a bunch of little kids who can do anything, who can be the president, who can write an opera, who can paint, who can be a filmmaker?

And they all raise their hands because they don't know. They all just believe they can. You ask the same kids in ten years and hands start going down. No life experience; they just stopped believing. I always try to be that kid who has his hand up in the air. It's like, can you write a score to a movie with a 100 piece orchestra, even though you don't read or write music? Sure. And you do it, and you're like how the fuck did I do that? Well, because you were being creative. The technical part is just 10 percent, and you can fudge that. Some of the best musicians don't know how to read or write music.

You can fudge all of that stuff if you know how to be creative; if you keep your hand up. Can you do this, can you do that? Yeah, yeah. How do I know I can't until I try it? Okay, maybe I'm not that good at it but I can still do it, and I can probably learn to be better. And if I surround myself by masters, I'll get better a lot faster. I guess I would just go back and follow my own good advice, more than anything. I think we all inherently know what we're supposed to do; we just don't always do it. So I think if we were just to open our mouths in a way to go teach somebody, we would end up giving some very profound advice that we would be writing down, going, I need to make sure I'm doing that.

Tim Ferriss: I remember someone said to me – or I might have read this, “Wisdom is taking your own advice.” It's like, wow.

Robert Rodriguez: It is, it totally is. Because sometimes you give advice. But that's why, because the advice doesn't really come from you. When you go to open your mouth and you move forward in a positive way to enlighten someone, the enlightenment comes and it's not from you; it's just coming through you. So you need to write that down. Because it's as much for you as it is for them.

That's why I love teaching, because I know I'll learn more teaching than from my students because it's not coming me.

Tim Ferriss: If you could make one ask or request of people listening to this, what would it be?

Robert Rodriguez: Besides look for the El Rey network and any of the programming that's on there, I would ask that you just try and live as creatively as possible, because that's the unknown. That's the gift you can bring to the table that could change everything. Even if you don't think you're creative; everyone inherently is creative. And there are people who block themselves immediately by saying oh, I'm not creative.

Well, of course you're not going to be creative if that's your belief in who you are. Apply creativity into everything and you'll see you'll just become more creative because you're applying it to everything. Everything is an opportunity to be creative. I'm creative all day.

There's nothing I do that doesn't involve creativity, from making a meal to satisfy my kids in a nutritious way; that's creative right there. I've got to figure out a rice dish that's not going to be rice that's going to be tasty, that they're going to crave, that's going to be good for them. That's creativity in itself. You can really apply creativity to everything. Just the games we play when we're stuck at the airport; you're being creative.

How you journal things, how you cross reference, how you present things to them, how you inspire your crew, how you inspire other people around you, how you inspire yourself; it's all creative. And if you say you're not creative, look how much you're missing out on just because you've told yourself that. So I think creativity is one of the greatest gifts that we're born with that some people don't cultivate that they don't realize could be applied to literally everything in their lives.

I found I'm the most fulfilled, happiest, most productive when I'm creative, and that's when I'm at my best. So I try and do that 24 hours a day, 24/7 be create. Think everything creatively. This is an opportunity to be here, sit down and be creative with you.

Be creative in how we presented ideas, how we got these ideas out to the audience and this is a full exercise in creativity. So I'm about to go meet with my goddaughter and try to be creative and figure out how she can learn some skills she needs to learn; she's a little

behind. And you go, this is an opportunity to creatively kind of inspire her to do stuff. You constantly are using creativity all the time.

Tim Ferriss: I love what you do. People should also check out your Texas barbecue recipe, video instruction; it's fantastic.

Robert Rodriguez: Oh yeah, the Sin City breakfast tacos. Did you ever see that one? That one's really good.

Tim Ferriss: I saw the Sin City breakfast tacos, as well.

Robert Rodriguez: Homemade flour tortillas.

Tim Ferriss: Where you show the time on them on the screen, when you're still cutting and it was like 4:36 a.m. I love what you put out in the world. So everybody, stay naïve, keep a journal, be creative because whatever you're doing in your life, you have that opportunity. Where can people find you online, find more about what you're doing?

Robert Rodriguez: I'm on Twitter, I'm @Rodriguez on Twitter. I'm on Elreynetwork.com. We're about to start a whole digital arm of that. There's a segment called the People's Network where people will be able to send in their own short films, ways to participate with the network, become part of the network and create content in a really cool way. Sometimes they come all the way to Troublemaker Studios. We just had three creators there getting to use all the sets, all the actors, all while we were shooting *Dusk*.

Tim Ferriss: Wow, cool.

Robert Rodriguez: And they get so inspired because their list of things that they have access to suddenly jumped. The little Rodriguez list of what they used to have suddenly jumped. It was a cool experiment and we're going to do that a lot more. And a lot of things, really the digital side of El Rey network now that we have the brand is really going to be where people can participate in ways they don't get to at a traditional network, and leverage that with that we're in 40 million homes is going to be pretty awesome, so we're excited about that.

Oh, and next year I'm going to be doing another \$7,000 movie with no crew. And other people are going to do it, too, for that same thing. We'll have an announcement about that later. It will be cool.

Tim Ferriss: Awesome. Whenever it's ready, I'll share that, as well. So guys, hope you enjoyed this as much as I did. For show notes, links to everything, El Rey Network, everything that we discussed in the show, just go to fourhourworkweek.com/podcast, and until next time, thank you for listening.

Robert Rodriguez: I want to add me and cut it in there somewhere. I just also want to thank you for what you do because demystifying the process so that others can jumpstart their lives in ways they thought they didn't have access to is something that I just always loved doing. I've done it consistently through the book, my DVD commentary to my special ten minute film schools, just constantly doing that.

When I saw you doing that in this room, and in all areas, so many areas, I always wanted to meet you because I thought there was a real kinship in what you do, which is the real gift that you give people by putting yourself out there. People always say, why are you giving away all the secrets? Well, because you'll come up with more secrets and then you give those away.

And it's because I would have wanted to know that. Me as a student, as a film lover, and as someone who felt like I was outside of the industry, not ever being able to get in, would have wanted to know there was a door, there was a method. And so I would have appreciated someone telling me that. And so that's why I do it. And I'm sure you're the same way. You're just constantly looking for that juice and wondering how can I get it, and then you go and you give that gift to people. So I think that's wonderful, what you do. That's why people are here listening.

Tim Ferriss: Thanks, man. That really means a lot. Maybe we'll do round two sometime.

Robert Rodriguez: Thanks, man.

Tim Ferriss: Alright, thanks.