

Still Buffering 214: "The Hunger Games" (2012)

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[theme music plays]

Raleigh: Hello, and welcome to *Still Buffering*: a cross-generational guide to the culture that made us. I am Raleigh Smirl.

Sydnee: I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Taylor: And I'm Taylor Smirl.

Sydnee: So, you all havin' a good week so far? Anything exciting going on? Any new... anything? Anybody goin' anywhere? No. Anybody doin' any... at home fun hobbies?

Raleigh: [sing-song] Every week is the same.

Sydnee: [laughs] It is. I—I've had moments where I've woken up in the morning, opened my eyes, and thought, "Is it a new—is it another—"

Raleigh: "Again?!" [laughs]

Sydnee: "—another—" [laughs] "Is it another—" [laughs quietly]

Taylor: Yeah. Have you, like, missed the weekdays by, like—not just, like, "Oh, it's—I thought it was Thursday, it's Wednesday." But I definitely had a day where it was, like, Friday, and I thought it was Tuesday.

Raleigh: Yeah.

Taylor: Like, it just—like, my brain stopped counting at some point. I had some busy days where I had a lot of work to do and I was like, "Oh. I don't know. It's—it's the end of the week! Who knows? Who can know?"

Raleigh: "Nothing matters." [laughs] "Time is an illusion. Especially it doesn't matter now."

Taylor: If I were an alien, I would be abducting people like crazy right now, 'cause nobody knows about the time loss! You could just go, like—

Sydnee: [laughs quietly]

Raleigh: That's true.

Taylor: "Woo hoo!" [laughs quietly] Just get all the humans you want right now! They don't know what's goin' on!

Raleigh: Yeah. Like, the aliens—apparently the government's—you know, everything's happening and the government's like, "Yeah, also aliens."

And then also, NASA's like, "Yeah, there's also a parallel universe where time moves backwards."

Sydnee: I thought that was a myth. I thought that was not—

Raleigh: I—I mean, I'm sure someone on the internet, if they hear me say this and I am wrong, will tweet at me and tell me I'm wrong. But I read an article that was, like, interviewing NASA people talking about how they had found these particles, and they moved backward—I don't understand physics or science. But, like, they were talking about how they move backwards, so it had to indicate a—I don't know.

Sydnee: I—okay. I—I saw that, but I saw—by the time I saw it, immediately after it was tweeted "No, NASA did not discover [through laughter] a parallel universe—"

Raleigh: Okay.

Sydnee: "—where time runs backward." So I don't—but I didn't read either article. I just thought, "Well, I'm... I'm just gonna stay outta this one!" [laughs]

Taylor: Yeah. I—I saw that headline and I was just like, "You know what? No. I'm still not fully processed—"

Raleigh: [laughs]

Taylor: "—on the aliens and the murder hornets, so I'm gonna save that one for next time unit that is immeasurable." [laughs]

Rileigh: Now, maybe... I did read the article, and it said, like, "This is *an* explanation."

Sydnee: [laughs loudly]

Rileigh: They were saying it's probably not true, but this could be it. And then I think people just took that and kind of ran with it, because it was, you know, people saying "Oh, there could be a parallel universe where time runs backwards!"

Taylor: [unintelligible 3:08]

Rileigh: And also it's good—it's good content—uh, resource material to be able to tweet about, you know, the parallel universe version of yourself.

Sydnee: The—I—I like—I like this approach to things, though. "This is *an* explanation." It's like, "Well, uh—hey, Cooper. Why—why is your cup of milk empty and there's milk all over the floor?"

"Uh, well, um... obviously a, uh, rogue... werewolf came running in. [laughs] Scared us, dumped my milk out, and ran out."

Taylor: That's an explanation.

Sydnee: "Ran out." That is—that is *an* explanation! [laughs]

Taylor: I—I like this—I like this explanation, though, because it implies that perhaps *Benjamin Button* is a sci-fi novel, and he is, in fact, an alien [through laughter] from the parallel universe where time runs backwards!

Rileigh: [laughs]

Sydnee: Please get to work on this—on this piece of work you have just described immediately. *Benjamin Button*: the sci-fi novel.

Taylor: I think—

Sydnee: Could you make it a musical, please?

Taylor: Absolutely.

Sydnee: Could it have songs?

Taylor: I think all of the above. Parallel universes and sing songs. [laughs]

Raleigh: Okay. Now I looked it up because I really didn't want a lot of people tweeting at me—

Sydnee: [laughs]

Raleigh: And telling me I was spreading misinformation.

Taylor: Yeah, don't do that.

Raleigh: I really didn't want that. So, uh, this article from sciencealert.com is talking about the real science behind it, and says that it started where, uh, there were scientists that had found some particles—I don't understand science, this is me paraphrasing—in Antarctica, and what these could mean for a speculative cosmo—cosmological model that posits there's possibly an antimatter universe extending backwards from The Big Bang.

That was where it started. And then other articles picked that up and ran with it, saying that it was a parallel universe where time runs backwards.

Sydnee: Okay.

Raleigh: So it's not entirely false. But it's not entirely true. [laughs]

Taylor: Well...

Sydnee: We're gonna have to start fact checking your—your tweets now, just like the President's.

Raleigh: Hey! I didn't tweet about the parallel universe. [laughs] I just *read* many tweets about the parallel universe.

Taylor: That's fair.

Sydnee: I think the fact that we live in the universe where we *do* have to fact check the President's tweets, uh, is enough evidence for me to want to embrace a parallel universe theory.

Taylor: Yeah, I'll—I'll go there.

Raleigh: Yeah.

Taylor: I don't—I just really wanna know his—his big threats of—he's going—"serious action is going to happen," or "something is going to happen." Like... well, okay. [laughs] Are you gonna—are you gonna just—just end Twitter, because you know what? That's maybe bad, maybe good. [laughs]

Sydnee: Yeah, that may be something—may be something you can't do. Um, on that note, I would just like to say, I voted by mail this past week.

Raleigh: Me too!

Sydnee: Yes. It was easy. It was convenient. I will say, I also felt like I did a better job, because there were a ton of local elections, and I try to keep up with those, but I always get caught off guard by somebody on the ballot where I'm like, "I didn't know this *position* existed. Let alone who these candidates are for said position."

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: 'Cause there are lots of—

Raleigh: Like someone running for, um—was it something of agriculture?

Sydnee: Yes. Something—something in—

Raleigh: Commissioner?

Sydnee: —local city government, or county. Something in local government that had to do with agriculture, and I did not know what this position was. So, I took the time—

Raleigh: You were able to look it up!

Sydnee: —to look up the position, to look up the candidates, to do a little bit of reading, and feel like I actually made a decision, as opposed to what happens when you go vote in person, which is—

Raleigh: "Oh no! I guess!"

Sydnee: "I guess?"

Taylor: Well, and you know, it's—I can see where the problem here is, though. Because, you know, usually when people vote and they're uninformed, they vote via name recognition, and that's usually just based on who spent the most money on their campaign.

Whereas if you have it at home and get to do the research and actually engage with the candidates, I guess that works against the people that just had a bunch of money to throw around. Hm, I don't know why we're against this.

Sydnee: The only reason you'd be against more people voting is if you thought you'd lose when more people voted.

Taylor: And especially if more people voted with, like, some information at their disposal.

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: Yeah. So, I just thought I'd throw that out there. I thought there was nothing dangerous or concerning about voting by mail.

Raleigh: It was very helpful for me.

Sydnee: And if you hear—if you hear some story coming out of West Virginia about voting fraud—have you heard this?

Raleigh: No.

Sydnee: There was apparently a mail carrier in one of the other counties here who changed, like, six... uh, voter applications, ballot applications, from requesting Democratic ballots to Republican ballots.

Not—this was not voting fraud. They did not change the... ballot. These people had not received a ballot. They had sent in applications for a ballot by mail, which I did as well, and they requested Democrat ballots, but this mail carrier said he—he admitted to changing a couple of them to Republican.

Now, I don't know any other details of this case, but it is being widely publicized, and I bet you it will be picked up by very loud voices on a national level who will want to use this as proof of voter fraud.

Raleigh: And do away with mail-in voting.

Sydnee: Yes, who will want to end mail-in voting based on this, uh, very specious argument, of this one mail carrier in rural West Virginia who maybe changed a couple of ballot applications from Democrat to Republican.

Um, no one—no one received undue votes, but you're gonna hear a lot of noise about this.

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: Very frustrating.

Raleigh: Which, if it was me, and I didn't have to request a party ballot 'cause in West Virginia, you know, I was registered a Democrat, so I got the Democratic one. I guess if you're an independent you pick which one you want? Is that how it works here?

Sydnee: Yes.

Raleigh: Um, but—

Sydnee: I believe. It's different in every state. I think in West Virginia if you're an independent you get to pick.

Raleigh: Yeah. Um, but I mean—I guess—I feel like I would've noticed if I would've gotten the wrong ballot, and then I wouldn't have voted, so it doesn't necessarily—

Taylor: [simultaneously] Like, "through laughter] Who are all these people? What?!"

Rileigh: —entirely lead to voter fraud. [laughs]

Sydnee: I—I don't—yeah. I don't know what—I mean, obviously there will be a case. Our attorney general is a... [extended pause]

Rileigh: [laughs]

Sydnee: I—[laughs] I had to—[laughs]

Taylor: Oh no! What words are you allowed to say on this podcast? [laughs]

Rileigh: Oh no!

Sydnee: *Bad person.* And will, uh, make lots of hey about this, and has already, because this mail—this poor mail carrier has [sarcastically] perpetrated a great fraud against the citizens of West Virginia.

Rileigh: Right.

Sydnee: [sarcastically] This is definitely the worst thing that's ever been done to the citizens of West Virginia. Oh, wait!

Rileigh: Yep, yep.

Sydnee: Oh, wait! [laughs] Have you seen our water? Have you seen our mountains? They don't have tops anymore!

Taylor: [laughs] Oh!

Sydnee: Um... never mind. Uh—[laughs] but you're gonna hear about this in the news, and you're gonna remember, Sydnee told you it was not the big deal that, um, perhaps the President will make out of it.

Rileigh: [through laughter] Remember, Sydnee told you!

Sydnee: Remember, Sydnee told you. Uh, speaking of authoritarian governments—[laughs quietly]

Taylor: There you go.

Rileigh: Let's talk about *The Hunger Games*! [laughs]

Taylor: Smoothest transition yet. [laughs]

Rileigh: Honestly!

Taylor: Ouch.

Sydnee: It's really easy to go from right now—

Rileigh: To *The Hunger Games*!

Sydnee: To *The Hunger Games*!

Taylor: Yeah...

Rileigh: Which is scary!

Sydnee: Terrifying, even.

Rileigh: Um... I do want to talk about *The Hunger Games*, though, because it was my... I think favorite book series, as a tween and a teen. You know, came out—first book came out in I believe 2008, and then one came out in 2009 and one came out in 2010.

Um, and I read them a few years after because of you, Sydnee. You read them, and then gave them to me. Said, "I think you will like these."

Sydnee: Do you know who encouraged me to read them?

Rileigh: No.

Sydnee: Grandpa Dan.

Rileigh: Really?

Taylor: Oh!

Sydnee: Yes. That is where—

Rileigh: If you knew our Grandpa Dan, you would know [through laughter] how surprising this is!

Sydnee: Well, it's already surprising that our Grandpa got us into a teen dystopian—

Rileigh: A YA novel, yes.

Sydnee: Yes. But, uh, he read them and really liked 'em, and kept recommending them, and I had heard so much buzz about them, so I read them.

Rileigh: Wow.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Rileigh: Um—but yeah, I—

Sydnee: [laughs]

Rileigh: —read them when I was in middle school, and immediately became very... obsessed with them, honestly. Like, everything in my room became Hunger Games and Katniss. When the movie came out in 2012, I went to the midnight premier and went in full Katniss cosplay. Like, dyed my hair dark brown, made the jacket, put, like, fake cuts and dirt on my face and stuff to make it look like I was in the Hunger Games, made arrows.

Sydnee: You posed very seriously, too. Like, if you see all the pictures—

Rileigh: [simultaneously] Posed very seriously, mm-hmm.

Sydnee: Yeah, you are not smiling.

Rileigh: No.

Sydnee: No.

Rileigh: Well, because Katniss never smiles! You watch those movies, Jennifer Lawrence doesn't crack a smile once.

Sydnee: Nope, you are the girl on fire.

Raleigh: Yeah. Um, had my Mockingjay pin. Very serious about it. Um... and I—I recently revisited them because the prequel book just came out, that Suzanne Collins released about two weeks ago. So I revisited all three books and thought, "Well, I should give these a reread, because it's probably been a decade since I've read any of them, and I should rewatch the movies."

And I realized, not only does the—the story still pretty much hold up as a good story that I enjoy—you know, there are some parts that I'm like, "Well, I enjoyed that a lot more when I was 13." But it's a very, uh, I think timely story and future setting to discuss.

Um, if you don't know, *The Hunger Games* is a dystopian YA novel series about the future North America that's split into Districts, and it takes place on the 74th annual Hunger Games, the first book does, which is this awful tradition they have in this new North America called Panem where they pick two kids, a boy and a girl, from each District, of which there are 12, and send them to a battle to the death, basically, that they televise for entertainment, called the Hunger Games.

Sydnee: And the reason they do this is to basically remind all the citizens that the capital is in control, resistance is futile.

Raleigh: Right.

Sydnee: We will do this to your children as a regular reminder that you live at the mercy of us, and if you try to rise up against us, we will... destroy you.

Raleigh: Yeah. And it sounds very dark, but because—and it is.

Sydnee: I mean, that is. [laughs]

Raleigh: But because it's a YA novel, of course there is teen romance.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Raleigh: So... that's also an important part, as well as the, you know, [holding back laughter] dystopian battle royales, and—and government rebellions.

Sydnee: Uh, yes, that is true. There is a—

Rileigh: [laughs]

Sydnee: That was the only—that was the only part that didn't age as well for me.

Rileigh: Yeah, I agree.

Sydnee: Is that I was like—I just—like, it feels—I know it was always part of the whole thing, but the—the love triangle starts to feel very strange towards—

Rileigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: —especially towards the very end when it's so much about, like, war and propaganda and authoritarianism and all these different themes, and then it's like, "But also, who will she choose?" [laughs]

Rileigh: [laughs] It's just—I—it's a—it's a crucial part of every YA series, right?

Taylor: Yeah.

Rileigh: You have to have some dreamy—usually boys, that your main female protagonist is choosing between. Um, which, again, it's just wild when you think that, like, "Oh, Katniss was supposed to be 16 years old in this first movie," [through laughter] and she starts this whole rebellion against the authoritarian government. Um... it's—

Sydnee: Which is a—which is an inspirational—like, that's the thing. *The Hunger Games* has been re-purposed in so many different ways that I think sometimes you lose how, like, powerful it was—something like that that's, like, an original kind of idea. It loses its effect after a while.

Rileigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: Um, but it is a really cool thought that, like, she's just a regular person. She's a regular person who has the ability to inspire and do great things, you know? Which is... which is almost what *Star Wars* was about, I guess—[bursts into laughter]

Rileigh: [laughs]

Taylor: Aw...

Raleigh: Aw, man!

Sydnee: Oops, sorry. I didn't say that. [laughs]

Raleigh: Um... what did you all think? 'Cause I know you all—well, Sydnee, a long time ago you read all the books, but watching the movies in preparation for this—this episode, I'm interested to know what you all thought, because I still remember them very fondly as how I remembered them when I was, you know, 12, reading them for the first time, watching them for the first time. But I have to imagine you all have a different view of them and opinion of them as—as adults.

Sydnee: Tey, do you want to start off?

Taylor: Uh, I mean, I—I feel like they—they hold up as very entertaining movies. Uh, I don't know. I—yeah. I think they're very moving. I just re-watched them in preparation for this episode and, uh, I was—I was surprised by just how—how moved I was by, you know, Katniss's character and all the—the sacrifice.

Uh, I can't—I was looking at the Wikipedia article earlier, but the inspiration comes from what the, uh—the sacrifice to the Minotaur that the—oh, gosh. It's a—it's a Roman myth, right?

Raleigh: Yes. Um...

Sydnee: Hmm.

Raleigh: It's the Greek myth of Theseus and the Minotaur.

Sydnee: Oh.

Raleigh: In which, as a punishment for past crimes, Minos forces Athens to sacrifice seven youths and seven maidens to the Minotaur, which kills them in a vast labyrinth.

Taylor: Yeah. I—

Sydnee: I didn't—I knew that story, but I didn't know that was the inspiration.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: It also makes sense as to why the Capitol has that very decadent Roman feel.

Raleigh: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: But I guess in the—in the original myth there's, you know, one person volunteers to enter in, and to free them. And so I like that it's sort of a, you know... like, a bringing back sort of a lost heroic story, and giving it a modern setting. I don't know. I—

Raleigh: Yeah.

Taylor: —I love that sort of reinterpretation of it, but... yeah.

Raleigh: Yeah, I agree.

Sydnee: Um, yeah. I mean, it's—they're good movies. It was cool to see—the books have so much stuff when you read them that obviously would lend themselves to amazing visuals, that it's neat to see that realized on screen. I think most of the time it doesn't disappoint.

There were little things that I, like, in my head I felt like I would've liked to see more than what the interpretation was on the screen, but, I mean, they're little—they're nitpicky things, nothing major. Um, I do think key to the movies being so good is casting.

Raleigh: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: Because you have to buy this idea that Katniss goes from being... kind of a—I mean, even though she's obviously very, like, athletic and skilled and principled, and all those things, and tough, uh, she's not exactly, like... great at giving speeches.

Taylor: [laughs]

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: Like, you know? I mean, she's not supposed to be a charismatic figure.

Raleigh: She does have flaws. Like, she is very stubborn, and she doesn't like being in front of people, and she's not willing to, like, follow along what other people are saying.

You know, "This is what's best for you right now. This is how you should do this. Just get through this right now and then, you know, go about your life."

She is not very good at doing those things. Kind of—not close-minded in a bad way, just very... focused on her own ideas.

Sydnee: To see that character grow into, like, the figurehead of a revolution, to somebody that you could put on a screen and that would encourage people to revolt and rise up in arms and risk their own lives for a cause, it's like—that's a huge... that's a tall order, you know? To place on the actor who's going to play that role, and, I mean, it's Jennifer Lawrence, so... [laughs quietly]

Raleigh: Yeah. Of course she did a great job.

Sydnee: So obviously she was up to the task.

Raleigh: Yeah. I, uh—I do think that's one of the funniest parts of any of the movies. I believe it's in the—oh, gosh. I can't remember whether it's the... no, it's the third movie. Um, when they're trying to get her to film, like, propaganda—

Taylor: Oh yeah. [laughs]

Raleigh: —clips for their revolution, and they give her this script and put her in front of a green screen almost, and just over and over again she is just so bad at being on camera and following a script, and they are just so—and you know it's Jennifer Lawrence, who is a great actress, acting as someone who is a very bad actress.

And it's just such, like, a good—I don't know. It's very funny, because it's very awkward and uncomfortable to watch Katniss try to be a—on TV, I guess.

Sydnee: It—it does have that kind of humor and relatability at times, um, early on. I will say that as the story goes on, it gets so dark it's hard to find that.

Raleigh: Sure.

Sydnee: I can't say I cracked a smile in the last movie.

Taylor: No.

Rileigh: Yeah. Um, I do think that's what hard about these kind of series is, you know, it starts, and you have the beginning of—I mean, it always happens in the dystopian novel series. Like, *Divergent* is another one that comes to mind that I read that's kind of similar, where you have a young person starting this revolution against the government that is, you know, hurting people or dividing people or doing something harmful to the country as a whole, and then you have the whole battle to get there.

And you know, because it's a YA novel, at some point they're gonna get there. It's probably not gonna end with, like, you know, nothing good came of it. But you always have, like, some important characters—

Sydnee: [laughs]

Rileigh: I know. You always have some important characters that get lost along the way, or some really depressing plot points along the way.

Sydnee: Sure.

Rileigh: Um, because, you know, they're not gonna—

Sydnee: It's gonna come at a price.

Rileigh: Yeah. You can't have a good... I don't wanna say "realistic" but, like, somewhat believable story line where you don't lose anyone, or lose anything.

Sydnee: Now, if I were writing the books...

Rileigh: Right.

Taylor: [laughs] Nobody dies, everybody's happy! This is a good book! [laughs] I think that's fine.

Rileigh: Actually, *more* people come in to it! Everyone just has babies!

Taylor: Yeah!

Sydnee: They don't—[laughs] they don't need to have a war. They just write some really strongly worded editorials—

Taylor: Oh, yeah.

Sydnee: —that are published in papers, that really change minds—

Raleigh: Uh-huh.

Sydnee: —and really get people to think.

Taylor: Boy, that worked.

Sydnee: And then President Snow is like, "Let's hold an election. You're right."

Raleigh: "I'm wrong."

Sydnee: "I'm wrong." And then somebody else gets elected President and, like, they stop the Hunger Games, and... I mean, he should probably go to jail.
[laughs]

Raleigh: Yeah.

Taylor: And he does, willingly.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: He goes, "Okay, jail now. It's fine." [laughs quietly] It's—

Raleigh: "Here, put the cuffs on me."

Taylor: "Yeah, you're right." Yeah, that would be real nice, Syd. I'd like that.
Um...

Raleigh: [laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: You know.

Sydnee: Where is that book?! [laughs]

Taylor: But they do—man, there are some great characters that, uh—that meet some pretty... pretty unfortunate fates in this series. I don't know.

Raleigh: I would argue that some of the best characters that are the supporting characters, that aren't, like, your main—you know, your Katniss and Peeta and Gale?

Sydnee: Sure.

Raleigh: Are the ones that meet the worst ends.

Taylor: I—I would agree with that.

Sydnee: I want... I want you to both elaborate on this.

Taylor: But first...

Sydnee: But before we do that...

Raleigh: Let's check the group message.

Sydnee: Uh, so I want to tell you both about Raycon, because whether you're working from home right now or you're workin' on your fitness... Justin has a t-shirt that has a picture of a pizza and it says—

Raleigh: [snorts]

Sydnee: —"I'm working on my fitness. Fitness whole pizza in my mouth."

Taylor: Oh!

Raleigh: I would like to point out that it is from the Great Wolf Lodge, and has a wolf eating the pizza.

Sydnee: That's true, that's true. Uh, Raycon has you covered.

Raleigh: [laughs]

Sydnee: Whether you're—like, actual fitness, or just fittin' this whole pizza in your mouth. [laughs quietly] Uh, you—you need—you will need something to listen to, right? Everybody needs—you need to stimulate that—that—all those—all that neural activity. You need those neurons firing.

Uh, you should check out the wireless earbuds from Raycon. They're stylish, they're discreet. They start at about half the price of any other premium wireless earbuds on the market, and they sound just as amazing as the top audio brands that you already know about. Uh, the great thing I love about Raycon is that they don't fall out of my ears!

Raleigh: Mm-hmm. That's the worst, when—

Sydnee: Yes.

Raleigh: —your headphones fall out when you're trying to jam.

Sydnee: Yeah. Especially if you are—if you're like—you know, I'll often do it when I'm, like, working around the house, like, doing dishes or laundry or cleaning up or picking up, so I'm walking all over the place; or if you *are* exercising... good for you.

I'm not, but if *you* are... [laughs quietly] uh, Raycon is great because you get this quality, you get a lower price, and they're not gonna fall out, 'cause my ears must be weirdly shaped. And if yours are too, this is a problem.

Raleigh: [laughs]

Sydnee: Uh, their newest model, the everyday E25 earbuds, are the best ones yet. They have six hours of playtime, seamless Bluetooth pairing, more bass, and a more compact design that gives you a nice, noise-isolating fit. They're so comfortable, and they are perfect for conference calls. Or, if you wanna listen to your favorite podcast!

Raleigh: Oh, there it is.

Sydnee: Like *Still Buffering*.

Raleigh: [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: I said it, just in case you didn't get the... subtext.

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: Teylor, [through laughter] if our listeners wanna check out Raycon, what should they do?

Teylor: Now's the time to get the latest and greatest from Raycon. Get 15% off your order at buyraycon.com/buffering. That's buyraycon.com/buffering for 15% off Raycon wireless earbuds. [Buyraycon.com/buffering](http://buyraycon.com/buffering).

Sydnee: Alright. So, you wanna tell me about all of the great characters that... meet unfortunate ends? Well, obviously I don't—we never said spoilers but, like—

Teylor: Yeah, spoilers.

Raleigh: [simultaneously] There are spoilers.

Sydnee: Obviously we're spoiling this.

Raleigh: I guess we haven't spoiled too much up to this point, but—

Sydnee: No, we kinda just shared the plot, so...

Raleigh: Yeah. There will be spoilers from now on. Um, I won't spoil anything about the new book, because that's very recent, but the movies have been out for a very long time, and are all available to watch, and so are the books... to read.

Um, I think that one of the most disappointing for me, and I think you both will agree—perhaps the most disappointing is Katniss's younger sister, Primrose, who—

Sydnee: Yes.

Rileigh: —is especially disappointing, not just because she's young and because she's a good-hearted character and person, but because the whole point of the beginning of the plot of the series was that Katniss doesn't want her younger sister to die in the Hunger Games, so Katniss volunteers to take her place.

And then... the whole series ends—within the last, like, 15 minutes of the last movie, or the last book, Prim dies.

Taylor: Well, and I think—

Sydnee: Yes. I—I felt like that was very unfair.

Taylor: That's one of the things that—I don't know. That I—I find very interesting about Katniss, and the—just how this—how the story is told, is—she never seems to want to be an icon or, you know, like, lead a revolution. She just wants to keep her family, and namely Prim, safe. Like, that is her driving force through all of this.

She's a very reluctant leader, and she goes along with the whole rebellion because it's—she's got so many people kind of forcing her into that role. But I think that's the great tragedy of the book, is the—everything is driven by her desire to protect Prim, and that is the one thing that she—it's the big thing that she loses in all this.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Rileigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: Yeah. It—I—it was hard. I mean, I think—I think that the message that is being sent with all that is an honest one. Is a truth that, like, is uncomfortable because it's a truth. Which is that at the end of the day, that kind of, like, war and devastation, there aren't real victors.

Taylor: Yeah.

Rileigh: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: I thought it was, uh—as I was re-watching the last film, I thought it was very, uh—such great writing. I don't remember if this is straight from the

book, or if this was, like, reworked for the screenplay for the movie. But when, um... Evie?

Raleigh: Effie.

Sydnee: Effie.

Raleigh: Yes.

Sydnee: Couldn't remember her name.

Raleigh: Elizabeth Banks.

Sydnee: Elizabeth Banks's character. When Effie wishes Katniss a farewell as she's finally, like, going back home, when all of the death and destruction is over, uh, she says, uh, "I hope you finally find it."

And you think that she's gonna say "Happiness," when Katniss says "What?" And she says, "The life of a victor."

Raleigh: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: And it's so well-written. 'Cause it's like, it's not necessarily happy. Like, at the end of this, it's not—you can't find happiness, 'cause so much bad has happened. And in this, she lost, obviously her sister, but, like, a big chunk of who she was and what she cared about, and, you know—

Raleigh: Her home.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Raleigh: Her entire home District.

Taylor: And that—that same sentiment—I forget who says it, but it's in the second movie. Uh, said there were no—"There aren't winners. There are just survivors." And... like, in reference to the games, but I think that applies to the story as a whole.

Raleigh: Yeah.

Taylor: Um—

Raleigh: Which I think, like... the plot of the whole second book and movie is so smart, moving forward in the series. Because it's not just, like, a continuation of, "Oh, Katniss, you know, made it, so both of them won—" again, spoiler—"the first games." Peeta and Katniss both were able to win, and it really upset the Capitol, so let's see how she continues to fight back.

The second movie is all about, now, the 75th Hunger Games, the third quarter quell, is all victors from past Hunger Games that are forced to fight against each other. And because District 12, where Katniss is from, only has one female victor, and it's her, she has to go. And of course Peeta is one of two male tributes, and he volunteers to go as well.

And then you have all these victors, who have already been through this once, that are forced to do it again do each other. That all have kind of lived this life as a victor where they've realized, "Oh, this is, like, a horrible world that we live in, and I don't even like that I'm taking advantage of the victory of this. It doesn't feel like I've won anything, and now we're here doing it again."

And there's not even a desire in most of them to fight anymore, because it's just like, what—what's the point?

Sydnee: Well, and I—I think it—I think—there's so many things that, like, they're taken to an extreme for the purposes of, like, writing, of making it a good story. But that's such, like, an author—authoritarian playbook.

Like, "Alright. There are only certain ones of you who get to win. Okay, actually, even you don't get to win."

Raleigh: Right.

Taylor: Right.

Sydnee: Yeah. 'Cause at—'cause at the end of the day, only the Capitol wins. Only the Capitol is in charge. None of you will ever really be victorious, even on that level.

Taylor: Well, and as you get to know, uh—some of my favorite characters come from the victors in the—in the sequel, the second book. Finnick and Johanna—like,

they're—they're great characters, but you—you realize that a lot of the previous victors are still kind of—I mean, they're, like, prostituted out by the Capitol.

They're—they're—you know, they're treated as objects. And that even after winning their Hunger Games, their lives have not gone on to be necessarily good lives. They've still continued to be tools of the Capitol.

Raleigh: Right. You get this really weird relationship between what they call the career tributes that come from, like, Districts 1 and 2, which I think the—the way it's pretty much worked is that the further down you get on the number of Districts, the, like, poorer they are—so Districts 1 and 2 are still pretty wealthy and are closest to the Capitol and then you move out. Which we haven't mentioned yet, but I think that's probably why I like them so much, is because Katniss is from District 12, which is in Appalachia, West Virginia.

Sydnee: Yeah, yeah. She's from the Seam, which is of course a reference to mining, and a seam of coal, I believe. And—

Raleigh: District 12's whole, uh, economy is coal-based, and they're the poorest of the 12 Districts. Um, but, uh—you have this really weird relationship where the career tributes from those wealthy Districts, like, enjoy the Hunger Games, and it's an honor to be a tribute.

I think it's even mentioned in the books at one point that it's not uncommon for them to volunteer there, because they want to fight in them, and they're trained for it their whole lives. It's not like, you know, a, um—a sentence to death. It's like, "Oh, this is where I get to prove myself, and I don't care if I have to kill people, and I've trained for this and worked for this."

So you even have that in the victors that come back. In the second one, the ones from those wealthier Districts were like, "Yeah, you know—" even one of the teams is a brother and sister that both had won. They volunteered to be there together, because they want to win again, and they don't care if they have to kill each other. Like, that's what they'll do.

And then the further you move out, you have people like Finnick and Mags, who is also from Finnick's District, who volunteered to take the place of Finnick's girlfriend.

Um, Katniss and Peeta and Johanna, who—Wiress and Beetee, also two of my favorites, who don't want to be there, just want to work together, even though they know at some point that's not going to work out.

Sydnee: Um, I think—I think the turn that they make that is really clever, uh, especially for, like, something that's aimed—like, a YA kind of book—is, uh, the—the good guys, so to speak, lead by Coin, the resistance, the rebels, um, are not all good.

Raleigh: Yes.

Sydnee: And they—they really dissect that idea that, like, if you're in power, even if you're in power in charge of the good side, that power can lead to corruption. And, you know, you see that play out, um, very obviously by the end.

I had—I had kind of forgotten, I think, what ends the battle, finally. How the war ends.

Raleigh: Right. Um, I mean, you go back and—and the Hunger Games have ended, 'cause they kind of end the Quarter Quell with all the victors early by, um, the head game maker, Plutarch Heavensbee helps half of them escape to save Katniss, to make her the head of their rebellion, and they finally defeat the Capitol, and they've made their way into the President's mansion and capture him, and are planning to execute him.

And then the leader, their President, Coin, says, "Okay, well, now we're going to have a symbolic Hunger Games with the Capitol's children, to show them that we won't, you know—we're in charge now, and to show them what they've done to us."

Um, which of course is not good. It's just repeating what has happened before, but they think it's good because it's under a different name. Um, so Katniss says she's going to execute President Snow, and instead executes President Coin, and lets all of the, um, people from the Districts and the rebellion kill Snow themselves.

Sydnee: Which is pretty brutal.

Raleigh: It's pretty dark.

Sydnee: Um, it also—it also—what the—the part that ends the—the battle is they think the Capitol bombs their own citizens to try to put off the rebellion, but really, disguised as the Capitol, the rebellion bombs a bunch of children.

Taylor: Well, and that's how Prim dies, so...

Rileigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: And, I mean, that's kind of—that's what ends the—that's what solves the love triangle, unfortunately, huh? I mean...

Sydnee: Yeah, 'cause that idea of, like, a s—an initial... which—it makes sense now in retrospect. When you're seeing these scenes playing out at first you're like, "Why are we talking about this?"

Like, these extended, like, strategy sessions among [laughs] the resistance. I'm sitting here like, "I don't care. Just move on with the story."

Rileigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: Like, "What—what weapons are we gonna use?" But Gale, who's one of the boys... [laughs quietly]

Rileigh: [through laughter] Yeah.

Sydnee: One of the aforementioned boys, um, lays out this plan of, like, a bomb that's smaller that will attract medics and other people to the scene, and then a second bomb that'll kill everybody, and that's basically what they do.

They drop some smaller bombs that injure a bunch of kids, and so a ton of people rush into the scene, including medics, including Prim, and then the second bomb goes off.

Rileigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: Which is all, like... pretty frickin' evil, Gale!

Rileigh: Yeah, very dark!

Sydnee and Raleigh: Gale!

Sydnee: But his whole District has been destroyed. I mean, like, these are... hurt people hurt people, and these are people who have been completely devastated.

Raleigh: Yeah. Um, which again speaks to, I think, Katniss's character, that she started the whole rebellion while she was in the Hunger Games and didn't even know it, to the point where after she leaves the first games, there are rebellions happening in every single District that Snow blames on her, even though she unintentionally rebelled against the Capitol just by trying to save both her and Peeta from the Games. Um, which then leads to all of District 12 being basically decimated, and destroyed, because they had an uprising.

Sydnee: It's all a—it's all a lot for a teen.

Taylor: [through laughter] Yeah!

Raleigh: It is a lot.

Taylor: It's like—'cause there—yeah, there is no... there is no bad guy. It's not like, "Here's the bad evil empire you have to overthrow. We're the good rebels!"

It's like, the rebels were kind of bad too. I mean, the lesson is such a bigger lesson about, like, those who crave power probably shouldn't have it. And, like, that's—that's complex. [laughs]

Raleigh: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: And I do—I do think it's rough that the, um—that the romance angle gets pushed into it. Um... I don't know. I mean, I understand. I think that from the setup of Katniss and Peeta not being willing to kill each other and willing to die together rather—rather than do so, I think it's hard—it's gonna be hard—and it's a really good, like, starting point.

Like, end of the first book, jumping off point for the rest of the series. So, like, I'm not criticizing that choice. I think it's a really good choice. It is really hard to avoid a romance there.

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: Like, that is a tough—I think for me, the harder part was the love triangle, because then it led to a scene—which, as it started happening I was like, "Well—[sighs] that's from frickin' *Twilight*, too." [laughs quietly] Where we have the two guys quietly discussing the girl while she's sleeping—

Raleigh: Nearby. [laughs]

Sydnee: —nearby. Like, "[deep voice] Which one of us do you think she loves? [holding back laughter] I—I think it's you, buddy. I don't know. I think it's you." [laughs]

Like, why do we have to have this—I mean, we had the same thing with Edward and Jacob! Like, "[deep voice] I don't know, you can keep her warm."

"[deep voice] Yeah, but she loves you."

I j—[groans]

Raleigh: And, like... aw, man. I don't know if—I watched all these movies in quick succession last week, one right after another. And you think Katniss and Gale—like, "Oh, the secretly love each other, they're from the same District, they've grown up together, they have this whole plan for their life together."

And then, um, she k—she comes back and she's been pretending to be in love with Peeta for the—the TV and the entertainment of it all. And then, um, she just keeps randomly kissing Gale... like, in random times.

Sydnee: [short hiccup-laugh]

Raleigh: Just like, "Oh, this feels like a good time to kiss you." And every time he's like, "I know you don't like me. [holding back laughter] why did you just kiss me?"

And then it just keeps happening! To a point where it's like there's not even anything left there, story-wise, for Katniss and Gale, but I guess we gotta keep this love triangle going till the very end of the series.

Sydnee: Well, but I think it's—and it's—again, in the book it was one way in my head. But, like, when you watch it play out, I think maybe it's a little more stark.

Rileigh: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: Katniss has a lot going on up there! Like, her brain is pretty full with—

Rileigh: Yeah! She's 16!

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Yeah, she's—she's young. She's had to survive these, you know, awful... child murder trials.

Rileigh: [snorts quietly]

Sydnee: Uh—[laughs quietly] you know? I mean, she's—she's also had to, like, keep her family alive most of their lives, you know? I mean, like, literally hunting for their food. Like, literally providing for her family, and then this.

And then now, she's supposed to be, like, this propaganda figure for a war. And, like, at the same time we're supposed to believe that she's devoting a lot of brain energy to which boy she's got a crush on? I mean, I—it—in the movie it was harder for me to buy. Like, "Oh, c'mon. Katniss does *not* have time for these boys." [laughs]

Rileigh: Yeah.

Taylor: Yeah. I do—I mean, I am, I will say, like... [laughs quietly] as I was re-watching, in the beginning I'm like, "Man, I don't—I don't like—Peeta's character is a little... I don't—I don't know how I feel about this character."

And then, you know, there's, like, the—

Sydnee: Uh-huh, yep.

Rileigh: Yeah.

Taylor: —second movie there's just an entire sequence that's just like, "Aw, Peeta fell down. Aw—aw, now Peeta's hurt again. Somebody—Peeta's heart stopped."

Like—like—[through laughter] this g—this guy—

Sydnee: [laughs]

Rileigh: And it really is the whole second movie! [through laughter] Was just—Peeta just keeps getting hurt and almost dying! It's up to Katniss to save him!

Taylor: I was like, "This is a lot."

Rileigh: Sometimes Finnick.

Taylor: Yeah, sometimes Finnick. But, uh—but I do think, like—'cause, you know, the big—the thing that happens to both of them over the course of the whole series is—they accrue an immense amount of trauma! And it's sort of—

Rileigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: —it's a sort of sad, but I think bittersweet end that they are kind of... at the end, they're right for each other because they're the only people that understand each other's trauma, and that's very sad.

But it's also, you know, that kind of ability to, like, comfort each other through their nightmares and—and, you know, for—for his, like—his, like, "Real, not real" thing is just so sad to me. But that Katniss can kind of ground him, and it's just... it's sad, but it's, like, they both just are kind of broken in the same ways, so they can keep each other together.

Rileigh: Right.

Sydnee: And I—it—it makes more sense, like, the more I think about it. It all fits, and again I actually think that that—that ending, for me, made more sense seeing it than it did—when I first read it I thought, like, "Well, it kind of seems like she still has the hots for Gale."

Rileigh: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: But—[laughs quietly] but she's just like, "Well, Peeta—Peeta is fine. Peeta will do. [laughs quietly] He's here."

Rileigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: And I—like, I really remember walking away from the books kind of thinking, like, "[doubtfully] Was that a love story? I don't know?"

Um, but then after seeing it play out, it makes more sense.

Rileigh: Yeah.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: And, like, it fits better.

Rileigh: Yeah. I—I do think it speaks to the—the time of, you know, all these very popular YA dystopian novels in, like, the mid-2000's, 2010's, that you had to have a female protagonist that had to have a male love interest, because that's just, like—it didn't matter what her overall story was, what the world was like. She had to have romance in there somewhere because that's just, like, what a teen girl had to have.

Which is no shade to Suzanne Collins. I will talk all day about how amazing of a writer she is. I mean, even—with the exception of Peeta, which I think about a lot, the names that she comes up with—

Sydnee: [laughs]

Rileigh: —for, like, these weird dystopian names that are just slightly different enough from names you would see commonly now, but aren't entirely unbelievable—except for Peeta. Because, like, he's a baker? Like pita bread?
[laughs]

Sydnee: Yeah, that—that one always—that one was the one that—that always bothered me a little. Like, so his parents are bakers, so they named him Peeta?
[laughs]

Raleigh: [through laughter] Yeah.

Taylor: See, I—I always thought it was like "Peter," but said with, like, a fancy British accent. "[British accent] Peter!"

Raleigh: "[British accent] Peter!" [laughs]

Sydnee: "[British accent] Peter!" [laughs]

Raleigh: Uh, I mean, like, the, uh—that's one of the things I—this isn't a spoiler about the prequel book. She—she has written 24—a list of 24 names, basically, at one point, that most of them end up not even being characters that we go back to, but she's just come up with all of these names, and this whole world building that she is able to do that makes it seem so... far off, but also at the same time has all of these realistic qualities to it where you can, like, see where a world would come to what the world has come to in *The Hunger Games*, which is terrifying and sad, but also, like, it's not entirely unbelievable, and it is built in reality, but expounded upon in a... I don't know. A great way. I just think she's a great writer, and... I love these books, still.

Sydnee: Oh, I think—uh, yeah. All these—all these critiques are more just discussing the way I think it impacted us, and changes as we age, and all that.

But I—I would stand with you and say, like, I enjoyed them. I think that they were very good. I think it, uh, is actually not just, like, as a teen or as a female looking for strong female characters, but even just, like, about authoritarianism and that kind of thing, I think it's actually a pretty good interpretation of that and, like, instructive in some ways.

And, um, I—I—I super enjoyed them, and would encourage my children to read them—when they're older!

Raleigh: Yeah. [laughs quietly] Not yet.

Sydnee: Not now.

Raleigh: Um, if you are a fan of the original trilogy, or are going to be a fan of the original trilogy when you read it or watch it because of this episode, because I promise you will be a fan, um, the prequel book, *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes* just came out, and is the story of President Snow when he was a teen,

and during the 10th Hunger Games, right after the war that led to the Hunger Games.

And it's a very good backstory, I think, not just for the character Snow, but for the world, and how it got to where it was in the original trilogy, and I would highly recommend, because it's just another continuation of, like, how far this story goes.

Sydnee: Can I also just say that Haymitch is another great character we never mentioned.

Raleigh: Oh, man! How did we forget him?

Taylor: I know. Haymitch is great.

Raleigh: He's maybe the best character.

Sydnee: I love Haymitch. He—he's my number—on that quiz everybody was taking about what fictional characters—

Raleigh: [holding back laughter] You got Haymitch, didn't you?

Sydnee: That was my number one.

Raleigh: [snorts]

Sydnee: Of all different—not just for *The Hunger Games*!

Raleigh: Right.

Sydnee: Like, of all different properties in that thing, of all the—however many hundreds of characters, apparently I am most like Haymitch. [laughs quietly] I don't know what that says.

Taylor: Well, I—I love, like, the weird parental figures of Haymitch and Effie that kind of emerge.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: I—like, Effie too. I mean, her—her change over the movies from somebody who just seems like a complete and total, like, vacant doll, to actually, like, really, you know... and, I mean, she switched sides, not necessarily because of her beliefs, because just because of the people that she loved, and I think that's really beautiful.

Raleigh: Right.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: And honest.

Raleigh: Yeah. And Cinna. We didn't mention Cinna, but he was also one of my favorites.

Taylor: Oh, Cinna, yes!

Raleigh: Katniss's, uh, designer for all of her "Girl on fire" clothes.

Sydnee: Yeah, 'cause there's so much about wardrobe that's really important to this story. The—I didn't—

Raleigh: There really is!

Sydnee: Yeah, I didn't—I didn't—

Raleigh: [laughs]

Sydnee: —I didn't always understand that when I read it the first time. Like, "Why are we talking about her dresses? [laughs] I don't care!"

But it was very important. It made sense. It was very important to the plot.

Raleigh: Yeah.

Taylor: Yeah. Well, and I—gosh, the—the visuals. I mean, the costume design in the movie—I think it's so cool just how everybody in the Capitol, they're so

decadently dressed, but they also look like their skin is just flaking off with makeup.

Raleigh: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: Like, there's something gross about the way that—all this beautiful opulence, and then also there's just this level of, like, just—like, sort of ghostliness to all of them.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: And, you know, Cinna of course stands out, because he doesn't—he doesn't engage with all that. He just wears his signature gold eyeliner and he's good to go.

Raleigh: Oh... he's the best. So many good characters.

Sydnee: Well, thank you for bringing this for us to discuss, Raleigh.

Raleigh: Thank you all for—

Sydnee: I think this was... a good choice.

Raleigh: —joining me. One of my favorites.

Taylor: Yeah.

Raleigh: Always will be.

Sydnee: Uh, next week... [laughs]

Raleigh: Yeah, what's next, Syd?

Taylor: Oh.

Sydnee: Oh, you're—you're both in for a treat! [humming the *Dawson's Creek* theme] [pauses] Do you know what I'm—

Raleigh: I mean, I know what you're going to say—

Sydnee: "[singing] I don't wanna wait!"

Raleigh: Okay.

Sydnee: "[singing] For our lives to be over! I want—" no. We're gonna watch Dawson's Creek. [laughs]

Taylor: Yeah we are.

Raleigh: Yay... [laughs] Hooray.

Sydnee: You don't sound excited, either of you.

Raleigh: [laughs] I can't say anything—

Taylor: We knew—we knew it was gonna happen.

Raleigh: Yeah. I knew it was gonna happen. I've never watched it before, so—

Sydnee: At least watch the Pilot. And then I'm gonna—I'm gonna handpick a couple episode to give you a sense. But, like, the Pilot does a really good job of laying out who everybody is.

Um—and, uh—and you can all join me in falling in love... with... with Pacey. One episode at a time. [laughs quietly]

Raleigh: Oh, good.

Taylor: Well... alright.

Raleigh: We'll be ready for next week, I suppose.

Sydnee: Aw, you're gonna have to jump ahead though, 'cause Busy Phillips shows up there eventually!

Raleigh: We'll have Syd give us a list of all the—

Sydnee: And she's great! [laughs]

Raleigh: —the best moments.

Sydnee: Alright.

Raleigh: And the important plot points, and we'll...

Sydnee: Alright, for next week, *Dawson's Creek*.

Raleigh: [crosstalk] Yes, yes.

Taylor: Give us an episode list.

Sydnee: I will—I will do so. Uh, thank you both. Um, this has been fun. Thank you listeners for joining us.

You can tweet at us @stillbuff. You can email us at stillbuffering@maximumfun.org, if you have thoughts or suggestions or... comments or questions or whatever.

And, uh, you should check out Maximumfun.org for a lot of wonderful podcasts that we think you would enjoy.

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: And Thank you to The Nouvellas for our theme song, "Baby You Change Your Mind."

Raleigh: This has been your cross-generational guide to the culture that made us. I am Raleigh Smirl.

Sydnee: I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Taylor: And I'm Teylor Smirl!

Raleigh: I am still buffering...

Sydnee and Taylor: [out of sync] And I... am... too.

Sydnee: That was re—that was a really dark movie. I might go back and—

Raleigh: It was.

Sydnee: I need to go watch something cheery. [laughs quietly]

Rileigh: Like *Dawson's Creek*.

Sydnee: [laughs] *Dawson's Creek*, the perfect antidote.

[theme music plays]

[gavel banging]

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[gavel banging]

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