

Still Buffering 226: "The Bug Boy" (2004)

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[theme music plays]

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

Sydnee: I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Taylor: And I'm Taylor Smirl.

Sydnee: Hey, uh, did y'all see, uh, *Bill and Ted 3* yet?

Rileigh: I did.

Taylor: I did as well!

Sydnee: And?

Rileigh: Oh!

Sydnee: I know that's not what we're talking about. I just wanted to get a quick little... how do we feel?

Rileigh: Um, I enjoyed it. I cried a little bit at the end.

Sydnee: Yeah?

Rileigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: Cried a little bit?

Rileigh: Cried a little bit.

Sydnee: Tey?

Taylor: I—I also—

Sydnee: Any tears?

Taylor: —there were also tears. I, uh—I thought it was great. I thought it very much captured the kind of stupid fun of the original movies. Um, I loved the children. I thought that those actors were very talented. Um—

Sydnee: Billie and Thea.

Raleigh: And that Bill—yeah, that Bill and Ted named their daughters after each [through laughter] is very good.

Taylor: I know. [laughs] I really love that. I thought it was just a great, you know, just a really great movie. Like, you can think into it and maybe find some, like, nice reflections on getting older, or you could just watch it and enjoy the kind of fun stupidity of it, which... either way.

Sydnee: I would agree. Justin and I were both, I think, a little surprised at how good it was. I mean, and I say that. I am a big fan of *Bill and Ted* 1 and 2. So I was predisposed to love it. But I also know what these films are. [laughs quietly] And I did not expect it to be as good as I feel it was. I feel it was objectively well done. Um, and I also, uh—I also cried a little at the end there.

Raleigh: Yeah. I did expect more a *Veronica Mars* film. Like, this is for the fans. Like, here's a bunch of Easter eggs and funny bits from the previous movies. That kind of thing.

Sydnee: There were a couple.

Raleigh: And there—they were in there. But—

Sydnee: "Station!" [laughs]

Raleigh: Yeah. [laughs] That wasn't the whole movie.

Sydnee: No. There were a couple. And I felt like all the additions to the cast were great and, um, Charlie loved it. Cooper even watched the whole thing, if you can believe that.

Taylor: Really?

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: I love that.

Raleigh: Man. She would enjoy that.

Sydnee: As soon as it ended, though, Charlie went, "Can we watch it again?"

Taylor: [laughs]

Raleigh: Aww.

Sydnee: I was like, "Really?" And I didn't know if she'd follow, 'cause we've shown her *Bill and Ted 1*, but we never showed her their *Bogus Journey*, because...

Taylor: That's scary.

Sydnee: Yeahh...

Raleigh: It's a little scary.

Sydnee: I feel like when they go to H-E-double hockey sticks it's a little scary. [laughs quietly] You know? Um, it's intense, and I just didn't know if [through laughter] my six-year-old was ready for discussions of the afterlife!

Raleigh: That's fair.

Sydnee: Uh, I also think death is a little scary at first. I mean, like, once he starts talking and he's playing battleship and whatever, he's not so scary. But, like, at first it's a little intense. And then, like, there's a whole other conversation when they go to heaven, I guess, so... I just wasn't prepared for all that.

So she's never seen *The Bogus Journey*, so I didn't know how it would go over, skipping straight to *Face the Music*, but apparently—apparently she kept right up there. I don't know—I don't know who that guy is with the giant sickle, but he must've been in the band. [laughs]

Raleigh: [laughs]

Taylor: Or why literally everybody goes to—goes to heck.

Sydnee: I know! [laughs]

Raleigh: Yeah.

Taylor: There's also that.

Raleigh: Yeah!

Taylor: It's kind of a joke in the second movie. Like, "Oh, well, you know, they go to heck." But then, like, everybody does? It's like, "Alright!"

Raleigh: "Alright!"

Sydnee: Okay! Uh, but yeah. I thought... you know, you could always question the theories of time travel associated with *Bill and Ted* films, but... [laughs]

Taylor: Yeah. You really can't think too hard about this one. Um...

Sydnee: Handing instruments to everyone in every dimension. That was also...

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: ... fascinating. Um—

Taylor: And that part was real—just kind of, like, smooth and, like, a—you know, done in just a series of cutscenes. Like, okay. [laughs]

Sydnee: It was, uh—it was very earnest, in a way that I think movies are often lacking. It was—there was no cynicism. It was just, this is what it is. Let's just all rock out now.

Raleigh: Also, somehow Bill and Ted still sound exactly like Bill and Ted.

Sydnee: They do.

Raleigh: Like, what? 20 years later?

Taylor: Yeah. What I was surprised—

Raleigh: Longer.

Taylor: —like, Keanu Reeves has definitely aged. Alex Winter did not so—
[laughs]

Raleigh: Yeah, he kind of looks exactly the same. [laughs]

Sydnee: He looks—he does look very similar, I agree. Did you see, there's a BuzzFeed quiz where you can figure out which one you are?

Raleigh: [gasps] No!

Taylor: Oh, wow!

Sydnee: Yeah, I would—I'd recommend it. I was surprised to find I'm a Bill. I kind of—I don't know why I thought I was a Ted, but I assumed I was a Ted.

Raleigh: I would've thought you were a Ted.

Sydnee: I'm a Bill, according to the BuzzFeed quiz.

Raleigh: Well, I'm gonna have to—

Taylor: No, I don't—

Sydnee: Go figure.

Raleigh: —take that.

Taylor: —I don't know, myself.

Sydnee: When Justin and I dressed up as Bill and Ted for Halloween many years ago I was Ted, so maybe that's why I assumed I was Ted, but... there we go.

Raleigh: Alas.

Sydnee: Well...

Raleigh: You were wrong.

Sydnee: I, uh—if you haven't seen it, I would recommend it. It was... [laughs quietly] highly enjoyable.

Raleigh: It was highly enjoyable.

Sydnee: Uh, it was just the kind of thing I felt like we need right now. [laughs]

Raleigh: That's very true. It is the kind of stupid thing you just need for your brain.

Taylor: It felt very timely, though, in the sense that it was like, "Well, they—the whole universe is collapsing very soon. [laughs]"

Raleigh: [laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: Ah, yeah, yeah. That's... that's on the nose.

Sydnee: Yep. Yeah, it doesn't—that did not feel odd. Yeah, yeah, definitely.

Taylor: No, yeah, [crosstalk]—

Sydnee: Of course. Right? End times, yep!

Raleigh: I am also a Bill.

Taylor: Did you take it that fast?

Sydnee: [simultaneously] That fast, huh?

Raleigh: It was only, like, five questions. [laughs quietly] six questions.

Sydnee: It was, yeah.

Raleigh: Just letting everyone know.

Sydnee: Raleigh is of the generation that can take a BuzzFeed quiz faster than anyone else. That is one of the hallmarks of your generation is how fast you can take internet personality quizzes. [laughs]

Raleigh: There are only so many times you can be asked, like, "Which one of these is your go-to snack food?" Before you're like, "I know my answer."

Sydnee: [laughs]

Raleigh: If you're giving me, like, pizza, a burger, soda, or chips, I know what my answer's gonna be every single time.

Sydnee: See, those of us who were raised on, like, Teen Magazine and [laughs] Seventeen Magazine quizzes, we're not prepared for this sort of speed.

Raleigh: Yeah. Or, like, if they show you—like, one of the questions is, "Which wild stallion would you want to ride with?" And it's just four pictures of horses. Like, I'm just gonna pick the one that immediately I'm like, "That one." [laughs]

Taylor: Wow.

Sydnee: See, I'm used to thinking into them so that I can get the answer I want.

Raleigh: That's not—Sydnee!

Sydnee: I know.

Taylor: You're not supposed—yeah, that's not the way you're supposed to do it.

Sydnee: [loudly] I know!

Raleigh: Obviously that didn't work, 'cause you're not a Ted!

Sydnee: Well, there you go. I wonder if we're—are we all three—are we a trio of Bills?

Taylor: Well, now I'm taking it.

Raleigh: I wanna know.

Taylor: Talk amongst yourselves. i gotta take this quiz now.

Raleigh: [laughs] Um, this is our first podcast episode that I'm... 20.

Sydnee: Does it feel different?

Raleigh: I feel like an adult. [deep voice] I feel sophisticated.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm?

Raleigh: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: That's how adults talk, too.

Raleigh: [holding back laughter] I know.

Sydnee: [deep voice] We—we falsely lower our voices, to sound more sophisticated.

Raleigh: [deep voice] I just want to sound fancy.

Sydnee: Oh, okay! And then a little bit of a trans-Atlantic accent kind of thing goin' on there. Okay!

Raleigh: [crosstalk] I'm not very good at accents. It's whatever—whatever gets in there.

Sydnee: [laughs] Alright, okay.

Taylor: I am a Ted.

Raleigh: Alright!

Sydnee: Alright!

Raleigh: We've got two Bills and a Ted. [laughs]

Taylor: "You are a chill person with a rock star soul. You're easygoing, but still confident in your abilities." I don't know if I trust this quiz. [laughs]

Rileigh: [laughs]

Taylor: But I'll take it, because I like Ted.

Sydnee: Welcome to *Still Buffering*. We are two Bills and a Ted.

Taylor: [laughs]

Rileigh: Will that be the name of our podcast now? Two Bills and a Ted?

Taylor: Two Bills and a Ted! [laughs]

Sydnee: There's probably some, like, copyright issues with that. [laughs]

Rileigh: What if we spell them slightly differently? [snorts quietly]

Sydnee: How—

Taylor: What are—yeah.

Sydnee: —how—go ahead. Explain. Please.

Rileigh: Bil with one L.

Taylor: Oh, and Tedd with two Ds, yeah.

Rileigh: Yep! [laughs]

Sydnee: I don't think that's...

Rileigh: Or if you spell them phonetically. Like, you spell out, like, the pronunciation? And maybe, like, two is, like—

Sydnee: How else—

Rileigh: T-O instead of the correct one, and a Ted is, like, a U-H. Like uh Ted, not a Ted. [laughs]

Taylor: Uhh...

Sydnee: [laughs] Nobody's—this is gonna—

Taylor: Nobody's gonna get this.

Sydnee: This is reminding me of that thing you do where—like, the Oneeders.

Rileigh: Yeah. [laughs]

Sydnee: "Why are you called the Oneeders?" [laughs]

Rileigh: [laughs]

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: Uh, well...

Rileigh: [quietly] It was just an idea. [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: That's—we're not talking about *Bill and Ted*, although you should—if you need a pick-me-up, it's a good film. You should go watch it. Uh, what are we talking about this week, Tey?

Taylor: Well, we're talking about, um, Hideshi Hino's *Bug Boy*, which was my offering this week. But before we start talking about it, I wanna give a quick shoutout. Um, if that's okay.

Sydnee: Oh! Unusual.

Taylor: Yeah, I usually don't this, uh, but there's a specific listener by the name of Ned. Uh, it's a kitten.

Sydnee: Ohh!

Rileigh: Hmm.

Taylor: Who's been listening to some of our podcasts, uh, as they're trying to, I think, get socialized. Um, perhaps part feral, or not comfortable around humans yet, so I just wanna say, you know what, Ned? I totally understand. As someone who's also not particularly comfortable around humans yet, um...

Sydnee: [snorts]

Raleigh: [laughs]

Taylor: But you know, if you just—you trust 'em little by little, you'll find that some of 'em are worth keeping around and trusting and getting close to. So just keep at it, and, you know, getting comfortable with your humans. And before you know it, you'll be part of a family. So, you know. You're in good hands, Ned.
[laughs quietly]

Sydnee: It—it worked for Teylor. We would leave—

Taylor: [laughs loudly]

Sydnee: —a trail of cat food outside of their door [laughs] to our room, until eventually they followed it to us. [laughs]

Raleigh: Yeah.

Taylor: Yeah. [laughs] "Hey y'all, I don't eat cat food, but I just wanted to let you know. Okay, goin' back inside." [laughs]

Raleigh: [laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs] Uh, I don't know anything about cats, so I don't really know how you do that. [laughs]

Taylor: You know.

Sydnee: I'm just saying. I'm not a vet. I'm not a cat professional. Uh, what else are we talking about, Teylor?

Taylor: Alright, yes. So, the comic I brought to the table was, uh—by a Japanese artist by the name of Hideshi Hino. Uh, the specific comic is *Bug Boy*. Um, it, uh—it's sort of like a weird, like, body horror, uh, child story take on—

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: —Kafka's *Metamorphosis*. [through laughter] Like, it's—[laughs] uh—

Sydnee: That's—you're really sellin' it. [laughs]

Raleigh: Yeah.

Taylor: Yeah! I mean, okay. So, I should—so, the story follows the journey of Sanpei, who's a young boy who is kind of an outsider. He loves collecting bugs, and he doesn't really like doing his schoolwork, and he's kind of a weirdo, and he's very ostracized for this.

People pick on him, and make fun of him and, you know, his family is constantly disappointed by him. And, uh, he, over the course of the comic, after he—he barfs up a little bug that then stings him, he transforms into the titular Bug Boy. And, uh, you know, kind of becomes a bit of a monster in society. But, uh, you know, it's... it's a sad story, definitely.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: Uh, I came across this story in college, my sophomore year in college is when it came to me. And basically, uh, there was just a little stack of comics in the back of one of my classrooms, and it was two comics by Hideshi Hino. It was this one, and another one that I'll call *Heck Baby*. You can figure out the real name. [laughs]

Sydnee: Ohh.

Taylor: Uh, and I noticed them, like, two weeks in a row, and I'm like, "Oh, those look cool, I wanna read 'em." And so finally I, like, took them from the classroom one week, and then brought them back the next week. Just—but, uh, but this was one that really, really stuck with me, 'cause it a very kind of dark, sad, lonely time in my life, and I think that's why this comic resonated with me so much.

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: Okay. Yeah, I, uh—so we have both read it, too. And I felt the same way, in that—I mean, obviously on the surface it is—it is sad. It is a dark, I would say, story. But, um, it was—I felt like it had a lot to say about, you know, that feeling of being an outsider, of not being accepted, of people being afraid or disgusted by what you are, or that sense that people will be, I should say,

moreover—not necessarily—I know literally in the book people are afraid and disgusted by a giant bug.

But, like, that fear that people will be afraid or disgusted if they find out about you, or get to know you, and that kind of thing. Um, I felt like it had a lot to say about that, and what that journey can be like, to being yourself.

Raleigh: And can I just say, the—on a just—a less serious note, the creator, who decided that this is the kind of bug that—that—that the boy would be, did a great job of picking what would be most terrifying.

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: Is that the creepiest of bugs to you?

Raleigh: For me, yes.

Taylor: Like a little worm guy?

Raleigh: It's just, like, the—the... the—the squish... of it? [laughs quietly]

Taylor: Yeah. It's like a squishy caterpillar.

Raleigh: The smooshiness of it all. Yeah! Like, I hate those—like, the big caterpillars, Syd, that, like, you had living on your plants for a while.

Sydnee: Oh, really? Did those bother you?

Raleigh: The just... I—there's something about them that I just don't trust, because they look very like they would be soft and nice. Like a little, like, squishy toy. But then you know, no, mm-mm.

Sydnee: See, I think, like... in my head, because on the cover he's pink... [laughs quietly] like, a big, giant pink bug doesn't seem as scary to me. I think if he had been white and looked more maggoty...

Raleigh: Hm, okay.

Taylor: Hmm.

Sydnee: ... I think that would've been a lot more upsetting for me personally, to picture, like, a giant, spiky maggot coming at me.

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: Is that the worst thing that could happen? [laughs]

Raleigh: No. [laughs]

Sydnee: A giant spiky maggot coming at you?

Taylor: [crosstalk]

Sydnee: Is that the next thing that 2020's bringing? [laughs]

Raleigh: I mean, maybe.

Taylor: But if it had, like, big, cute googly eyes, like Sanpei the bug does... I don't know. I think it's pretty cute.

Raleigh: I will say, though, that, uh, it did kind of remind me of, like—you know, Spider-Man was like, "Oh, he got bit by a spider and got all these powers, but he's not an outcast. He's a normal teen, but he also saves the world."

It's like, no, this is—this is probably... this felt like a more accurate—yes, darker and sadder, but this is, like, a Spider-Man story but it's like, no, if you got bit by a bug that changed you, it's not gonna, like, turn you into a cool, world-saving superhero. Like, the... you know?

Sydnee: Right. You've never seen *The Fly*.

Raleigh: No.

Sydnee: Okay. [laughs]

Taylor: I was gonna say, it's a bit more of a—a Jeff Goldblum in *The Fly* situation than [crosstalk]—

Sydnee: Yeah.

Rileigh: See, I just—I just thought of Spider-Man. Like, you got a—you got a young boy. He gets bitten by a bug. And I'm like, "Oh! Is he gonna save the world?" No. [laughs]

Sydnee: No, no.

Taylor: There is that kind of intro of, like, "Oh, he's kind of nerdy too and, like, maybe this is gonna go in a good direction!" And then it does not. [laughs quietly]

Rileigh: No, it does not.

Sydnee: I had that feeling, too. I thought "Well, maybe once he embraces that he is a bug—maybe that's the story." Like, just embrace... your own... strangeness, and be that. And then you will find happiness. But that was not the direction the book was going [laughs quietly]

Rileigh: Yeah.

Taylor: Well, and that's—I mean, I think that there's a point where there is almost a happy ending. Because, you know, like, he transforms fully into a bug. His family—I mean, they aren't sure if he passed away 'cause he, like, leaves behind kind of a cocoon that looks like his human form, so they think he's died.

And then they chase the bug away. But he goes and kind of, like, finds a happy, albeit somewhat lonely life in, like, the sewers. But he's very free. So there is that moment where you think this is the happy ending. Like, he's kind of found his place. He's—he's fine. He's still kind of himself.

And then, you know, you see that his continual run-ins with humans drive him to be sort of—feel, like, less safe, and angrier and angrier, until he truly becomes a monster. Even though he's looked like a monster for a very long time, he hasn't behaved like one. Which I think in a lot of these stories where we have the sort of, you know, ostracized loser type, they're always kind of played as the innocent, and we leave out the part where a life of abuse often leads to you becoming that kind of—that monstrous thing that people always treated you like anyway, which is a very sad, you know, other part of the story.

Sydnee: I found that, too. I was thinking about that, like—like, the phrase, "Hurt people hurt people." Um, seems very, uh, relevant at that part of the book, where he—he does quite literally begin hurting people. Um, physically hurting, killing people.

And, uh, that is exactly the way he was treated for so long, as if he was already that. Um, that just by virtue of being different, he was a monster. And eventually just says, "Well, if I'm going to be—if this is all I've ever been seen as, if this is all I will ever be seen as, I may as well just be the monster. I mean, what is the point? It doesn't—no matter what I do, or how or bad I ever am, this is all I will ever be, so... "

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: "I might as well just live that part."

Taylor: And I think that that was one of the aspects of the story that spoke to me, because I felt—you know, at the time that this came across my—across my awareness, I was still very, very much in the closet, and still very much struggling with my identity.

And I think that it—partially because, you know, you feel like—being, like, a young queer person, there's that feeling of, like, I—there's something wrong with me that people can't know. I have to hide it. Or, like, if they know this, they'll see me as a kind of monster, or maybe they do. Maybe they've figured it out about me before I've been able to pin it down.

And that feeling of, like, internal monstrosity, uh, is something that I could really relate to. And the fact that the bug that bites him comes from himself, you know? It's not some, like, weird outside thing that transforms him. It's literally something that he vomits up, and then it bites him and causes this transformation. It's something inside him that made him into a monster.

Sydnee: That's a really good point. I hadn't thought about that piece of it, but it isn't—it isn't, like, just bad luck or coincidence or something. It is quite literally of his own making, in a sense. Um... yeah. And you really begin to hope, though—I—I still, even as he kind of took that dark turn, like, oh, now he's a monster, now he's killing people, now's harming people—I had still, like, kind of hoped. Like, "Well, maybe, though, this is just a phase." [laughs]

Taylor: [laughs]

Raleigh: [laughs] It's just a phase!

Sydnee: We're supposed to see this as just—it's a bad time. You know? I mean, he had a lot of anger to work through.

Raleigh: Sure.

Sydnee: Like you said, he had been a victim of abuse, and so he needed to work through that rage he felt.

Taylor: Well, and initial people that he attacks are bad people. They're people that have imprisoned him. And so it's kind of like, you know—it shows where it's like—it seems justified at first, but then he just realizes that he can—he has strength and power to get revenge. And it's sad, but that's also so often something that plays into the actuality of abuse, you know? Like, once you grow up and have agency, then you become the abuser.

Sydnee: It starts off you think he's gonna be like a Dexter. Like, he's gonna take a turn there, and only—

Raleigh: Except a—a bug Dexter.

Sydnee: —a bug Dexter that only kills bad people.

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: But... [laughs quietly]

Raleigh: You know, I think after finishing *Dexter*, I would've preferred that at some point Dexter in the final season became the Bug Boy. [laughs quietly] And then was a bug Dexter, than how *Dexter* actually ended. [crosstalk]

Sydnee: [crosstalk]

Taylor: That would've been a better ending.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Rileigh: Yeah! Instead of being, like, a lumberjack. [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: [laughs]

Rileigh: That would've been better.

Sydnee: I didn't watch the end. Is that what he turns into? A lumberjack?

Rileigh: Yeah, right?

Taylor: Yeah.

Rileigh: He just, like, is in—what? Alaska or Canada or something? And he grows a beard and wears, like, a—like, his whole thing is now he's just, like, wearing a beanie and a flannel, and he's a lumberjack. Or, like, works in—

Sydnee: Somewhere cold and beardy. [laughs]

Rileigh: —on boats or something, yeah. And that's his thing now. This would've been better. [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: Well, I definitely want to talk more about Dexter, and the end of the show I didn't see, but...

Rileigh: [laughs]

Sydnee: [holding back laughter] But before we do that...

Rileigh: Let's check the group message.

Sydnee: Uh, so I know a lot of us are workin' from home these days. Um, or are maybe going in to the office occasionally, but a little less. But I still like to get dressed, whether I'm workin from home or I'm going in to work. I still like to get dressed for work, so that I feel like I'm in that headspace. Like, that work place. Like, I'm ready to go. It makes me feel like I'm ready to take on the day.

And, uh—but I wanna be comfortable too, you know? I wanna be able to transition quickly from, like, doing my work life, doing my mom life, whatever I'm

gonna do. And that's why I like Betabrand's dress pant yoga pants, because they are super comfortable to wear while you're working. Um, that you can move in 'em, you can—whatever you gotta do, goin' straight from, like, for me, a busy day of, like, rounding in the hospital, coming straight home, rolling around on the floor with the kids, getting tackled, that kind of thing.

Raleigh: Mm-hmm, sure.

Sydnee: Betabrand has you covered. Uh, because their clothes are so functional and comfortable. They feel like you're wearing workout gear, but of course you're not, you're wearing dress pants. Uh, they're just wrinkle resistant, and made of this stretch knit fabric that's perfect for going straight from work to home to whatever you gotta do.

Um, I'm a huge fan of Betabrand's dress pant yoga pants. I have been wearing them for a long time. Um—and, uh—I can't—I can't speak highly enough of 'em. So Teylor, if our listeners want to check out Betabrand dress pant yoga pants, what should they do?

Teylor: Well, right now our listeners can get 25% off their first order, if you go to betabrand.com/buffering. That's 25% off your first order for a limited time at betabrand.com/buffering. Find out why people are ditching typical work pants for Betabrand's dress pant yoga pants. Go to [Betabrand.com/buffering](https://betabrand.com/buffering), get that 25% off.

Sydnee: So, I wasn't really gonna talk more about Dexter.

Raleigh: Yeah.

Teylor: Yeah, yeah.

Raleigh: I didn't think so.

Sydnee: I didn't think—

Raleigh: That just seemed like a transition.

Sydnee: Yeah. I didn't think we had much more to say about that. I am sorry for anyone [through laughter] that we spoiled *Dexter* for!

Rleigh: Man. You know, everyone complained about it so much online. I can't imagine that was news for many people.

Sydnee: I was gonna say.

Rleigh: Um, Tey, this is kind of manga in general, like, a broad question for all manga. Um, is there a reason why they're made this, like—reading this way as opposed to, like, American books?

Taylor: Uh, yeah. That's just how—that's how Japanese books are composed.

Rleigh: Interesting.

Taylor: That's across all publications.

Rleigh: Okay.

Taylor: They're done that way.

Rleigh: I was just—I—[laughs quietly] I have read manga before so I knew this was the way that it was read, but it'd been a very long time. So when I first opened it up to read it, I was like, "Wait a minute. This—hold on."

Taylor: Is there—there's usually, like, a little panel. 'Cause I—this—this is the second volume in, like, a whole series of Hideshi Hino's comics, and they all have a little standalone image that's like, "Wait! This is the back of the book!" Like, in the front of the book. What you think is the—

Rleigh: Yeah, there's a little—[laughs quietly] there's a little, um, bug actually, in the top right hand corner of every page, with arrows pointing in the direction of, like, the way the bug is moving, but also that you're supposed to be reading the book.

Sydnee: That's—it's funny. Uh, Justin read it too, uh, when you lent it to me to read. And he tried to convince me for a good bit there that he had read it backwards. And he was like, "I just don't understand why the book starts with,

you know, the bug, like, dying, and then goes backwards." Or—you know? And all this, and—

Rileigh: Goes back to the beginning. [laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs] I was like, "What? No! No. You know this, right? Oh, you know this, right?"

And he—he really got me there for a minute.

Taylor: Aww.

Rileigh: Yeah.

Taylor: Yeah, they—when they first started importing manga back in, like—I don't know. It was the 90's. They would make a big point of flipping them, so they would read the way that we're used to reading them. And, uh—but, I mean, 'cause it's not even just, like, you know, the pages are reversed. It's, like, the art physically has to get moved around. So it's like—you get a better experience. You get it the way the artist intends it when you read it that correct way. Uh, they also took a lot more liberties with translations back the day. They just were—these are pretty—you know. Nowadays you can trust it's pretty solid but, uh...

Rileigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: But I do wanna just give a bit of context to Hideshi Hino, because I do think it leads to an interesting, like, kind of thought about where this comes from in, like, from Japanese culture. Uh, 'cause he was born in I think '46? Uh, '45 or '46. Uh, his parents were Japanese, but they were immigrants to Northern China, and they had to flee at the end of the war. Um, when the Soviets invaded. Uh, and so they were back in Japan, post World War II, and young Hideshi Hino would have been witness to a lot of truly traumatizing, horrific, you know, post war destruction.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: And I think that you can kind of, you know—you can really—a lot of his work has these creatures that are sort of... they have this mashup of, like,

innocence, and then total, like, specifically body horror. Like, specifically this sort of, like, just—just destruction and melting of their physical form. And, I mean, that's, you know—and, like, these characters. Like, there's *Bug Boy*, but there's also the *Heck Baby*.

Uh, there's another story that I really like that's—uh, I can't think of the character's name. But, like, he's this painter that's covered in boils, and he's—he's, you know, forced to go live all on his own, because people are terrified of looking at him. But out of his boils comes this paint that he can then use to paint these beautiful works with. So I think that there's just so much of the psychology that comes from his childhood that then comes in to his work.

Raleigh: Mm-hmm.

Sydney: Mm-hmm. It also—I think a lot is said, not just about the character, the main character through the book. But, like, the society around him. To, like—as we're talking about being the outcast and, you know, being sort of abused by—not just, like, your family, but by society as a whole. Um, and continuing to be treated differently.

And, like, the fact that it's—a story where, like, somebody leaves their home and is able to instantly, you know, shake off kind of all that trauma that they've been through and be exactly who they are, and, you know, live that life fully, instantly, is not really a true story.

Because it neglects the fact that, like, when the Bug Boy goes out into the world, he's still a Bug Boy, and the world is still rejecting a Bug Boy, and still sees him as a monster, and still, like, society itself is the problem, you know? That—that his difference can't just be accepted.

Raleigh: Yeah.

Taylor: That's a good point. It's kind of like the transformation has already taken place. It's—you know. The idea of him becoming a human again is almost—he's almost past that point by the time he leaves his home.

Sydney: Mm-hmm. And it's sad, because they do have the part where he does long for a family again, you know? He does long for—it is very clear that he misses—even without really knowing what he's missing, that sense of, like, belonging and togetherness and warmth. Even though that's still—it's interesting,

'cause it's still kind of an illusion. He didn't really have that. He's missing something that he didn't have, but...

Rileigh: Well, I guess it's probably before he has to leave his—they make him leave. Um, where he's still in his room, and it's like the—the—he calls it his corpse, but it's like the shell of him that he's left behind, that he has to sleep in the bed with. And finally, like, they get rid of it and he's like, "Oh, good! This is like—this is my space now. This is great! This is everything I've wanted! This is perfect!"

And he thinks, like, "Oh, this is my home now. This is great!" But... then they kick—it's a very sad moment where he's like, "This is okay. Now I get this space to myself, and they brought food and left it in here." But then, you know.

Sydnee: I thought that in terms of symbolism, making him sleep with his...

Rileigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: ... the—whatever you wanna—the shell of—

Rileigh: Yeah, like a shed skin. [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: Yeah. I thought that was very, like, meaningful. The idea that, like, your family is trying to make you still be this other thing, to the point that you are—to the point that you're literally sleeping with your corpse. The corpse of what you once were. Because it is the only way your family is comfortable with you right now. Um—

Rileigh: Which—man. The—the art around—I was trying to find it. When there is his corpse there with him, and it's like they've made it look like not an actual complete person, but you can tell it, like, was a person, but it doesn't have, like, the arms or the legs, but it still has the face and the cl—oh, man. It is just... it is creepy. [laughs quietly] It is—it's very good at being disturbing. Yeah. They're just...

Taylor: Well, and that—yeah. Well, and that's—I think that the—you know, there are definitely in the—in the realm of, like, Japanese horror artists, you know, a lot of—I mean, like, now, like, Junji Ito is really big. And, like, you know, that's kind of really, like, beautifully drawn, and it's very specific and articulate. But there's something about the childlike quality of Hideshi Hino's art that makes it that

much more disturbing, and that much sadder. It's that there is that—like, it feels like this should be telling some sort of cute, childlike allegory, and yet it's being used to demonstrate something that's, I think—I think it's more relatable to—I mean, it's meant for adults, of course. But, like, it's definitely an adult story. It's definitely something I don't think you would understand until you've kind of had experience with life, and not belonging, you know?

Sydnee: Sure. Well, I think it also—that—that style adds to, for this specific story, the idea that it's being told from the perspective of a child. Because even when he's a bug and he's a monster and he's killing people, like—

Rileigh: He's still a kid.

Sydnee: —he's a kid.

Rileigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: And he's seeing, like, his parents and stuff, the way that—like, we're seeing them through his eyes, the way that a child would view everybody around him, which makes it even sadder. And, like, you feel the isolation. You feel the hopelessness. You feel... you can feel that, looking at it through that perspective.

Rileigh: Yeah. Well, I mean, I think it—it is important that even before he's Bug Boy, his characteristics and, like, his facial features are still very different than the rest of his family and, like, the people. He has, like, the bigger eyes and, um, his family all kind of look—they're drawn very similar. So, I mean, like, even before he's a bug, he's still different. And it kind of carries over to when he is in his bug form.

Sydnee: Sure.

Taylor: Well, and I think it's—you know, it's worth noting the kind of character development that's given pre-bug Sanpei. Like, you know—

Sydnee: [laughs]

Rileigh: [laughs]

Taylor: Yes, he's, like—he loves bugs, and he's kind of a weirdo, but, like, it shows his little underground lair. He builds this whole, like, hideaway where he

keeps all of his animals that he protects. Like, it really shows that while he doesn't fit in with what society expects with him, he has so much to offer in a different way. Like, he's loving, and he's creative, and he's resourceful, and he just doesn't fit in with the mold of what's specifically being asked from him.

And I think that that—you know, the sort of metaphor of the story works for a lot of different types of people that struggle with being different. But I think, you know, the kind of—the parallel with, like, the artist covered in the boils, that I think for Hideshi Hino it was about being outside of the box, creative-type, you know, different kind of thinker. Like, and not having a society around you that makes room for those kind of people.

Raleigh: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: Um, Tey, I know that this book—obviously it meant a lot to you in your younger years, because that's why you wanted us to read it and talk about it. Um, do you feel like it was disheartening, though? Because it's not—[laughs]

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: It's not a story of—'cause I—like you said, I imagine that part of reason you connected to this is 'cause you felt on the outside. You felt different. And it doesn't—it's not, like, reassuring. Like, "Don't worry." [laughs]

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: "Don't worry. You'll find your people, and it'll be okay, and, you know—" I mean, it's not that story.

Raleigh: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: I mean, it's kind of sad to say that I think that—you know, when you get to the end of this, there's this series of panels where he's—spoiler for the ending. He goes back to his family, and his family murders him, basically. They shoot him. And he gets away, but he crawls out to sea, and he's dying slowly. And he's finally at peace.

And I don't know how to describe why, for some reason, that made me feel okay? Because that's not what—that's not a good ending. You're absolutely right. But

there's some sense of, like, he found peace somehow, you know? Like... I don't know.

[pause]

Sydnee: Well, that—I mean, I'm glad that it did that, but I—[laughs] that is not—

Taylor: No, I mean, it's definitely sad. But, I mean—but that's the thing. Like, sometimes—you know, I think if this story had whipped around and ended up with his family embracing him and loving him, I would've said, "Ah. This is—this is bullcrap. This isn't how this works."

Uh, sometimes, you know, stories... they just make you feel less alone, even if they're sad stories. And that's what this did for me. It's not that it gave me hope that things would get better. It just made me feel like somebody gets it. 'Cause that's—you know, that's what sad stories and sad songs, like—we don't always—we're not always comforted by reassurance and—you know. Sometimes positivity can be kind of toxic. Like, "Don't worry! Things'll get better!"

It's like, sometimes we just have to accept that the world doesn't have a place for us yet, and we have to learn how to find peace with that. That's not a great—that's not what I'm putting out there in the universe, but I think that's, you know, that... art just sometimes is another—another person there in the dark place with you is more comforting than, you know, people on the other side of it saying, "Don't worry! It'll get better."

Sometimes it's nice just to have someone go, "I don't know if it'll get better, but I'm here with you."

Sydnee: That's true. And I think it's a fair point to make that we're used to that message now, because I think depending on what—what your perspective is that makes you feel like you're on the outside, or makes you feel different, um, there are so many with the internet and, you know, with the world we live in today, there are so many more ways to find people who are—who you do feel are like you.

Who are, you know, people you can connect with on whatever level is making you feel outside. It's so much easier to see a picture of yourself living the life you want to live in a happy, healthy way in the future than it would've been at

different points in time. Like, there were lots of points in history where, you know, being born a certain way does mean you're never really gonna fit. And there isn't—like, at that point in time, there wasn't a future yet where that would change, so. I mean, it's a very legitimate point.

Taylor: I mean, that's true. Like, imagine if when he gets to the sewer, and, you know, use that [laughs] to mean whatever metaphorically you mean. If he met other bug boys and girls that had been also ostracized and changed and gone through a transformation, and that he found the community of his own that way.

Because when he starts reminiscing about how kind his family was to him, you're right, that's false. And that's why he goes back to them, because he thinks that maybe that—there's something still, you know—that's why he—that sadness still—that's his only idea of family, so that's the only thing he has to cling to.

But if he had found a different idea of family, would he have not taken that dark turn? Would he have not become that monster that the other people saw him as? And that's—I think that's—you're right. That's where the story—the narrative kind of hopefully has changed for a lot of us, because we're allowed to see [through laughter] that there are other—there are other people out there that are like us.

Even if they're not immediately in our neighborhood.

Sydnee: Yeah. I think it's a lot easier to see that version of the future that is a happy one. Whereas unfortunately in this book you—that's not a possibility.

Taylor: He just needed to meet another bug boy. Bug person.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Raleigh: That's what—that's what I was gonna say. I wi—I wi—[laughs quietly]

Taylor: [laughs]

Raleigh: My ending that I—[laughs quietly] I love—well, would've loved most, that wouldn't have made me so sad, was if it wouldn't have been his family coming around. Just, like, he finds... Bugtown. Bug—Bug Community. And it's just other people that have become bug people that are like, "Hello—welcome."

Sydnee: Bugtown.

Taylor: "Welcome to Bugtown."

Rileigh: "We are Bugtown."

Taylor: I agree, you know? If when he floated off there at the end, if suddenly he was rescued by the bug paramedics and [laughs] taken to Bug Island?

Rileigh: Yeah!

Taylor: We can pretend that's what happened in the epilogue, you know?
[laughs quietly]

Rileigh: Sure. Yeah, they show him just in the sunset, and that's how it ends. But instead it's just a little, like, helicopter net swoops down, picks him up.

Taylor: [quietly] Takes him to Bugtown.

Sydnee: Takes him to Bugtown.

Rileigh: "Welcome to Bugtown."

Taylor: And that's—like, that—

Sydnee: "We are bugs."

Taylor: [laughs] "We're here now." But that last image... I don't know. It's always stuck in my mind, that last image of just him floating in the ocean. And it's, you know, it's very beautiful the way it's rendered. Like, it's a very realistic seascape, and the sun, and it's a very beautiful panel, despite how sad it is. And I don't know. That's always, like... like, well, there's rest somewhere. There's release somewhere.

Rileigh: Yeah.

Taylor: I don't know. I also have him tattooed on me, so hey. [laughs]

Sydnee: Well, I—

Rileigh: Do you? I hadn't—I guess I didn't realize that.

Taylor: Yeah, I have a little Bug Boy right there.

Sydnee: Aww.

Taylor: It's when he's swimmin' and he's happy in his garbage dump.

Sydnee: [laughs] Well, I think it's a good point, though, that there is—we do get, I think, fixated too much in our culture on the happy stories and resolution. Um, and I think that when you're writing something that can be—that can so easily be adapted as, like, a metaphor for, like we've talked about, not really fitting in to a society that doesn't accept you. I think it's important to have stories that aren't, "And then everything worked out fine, and they lived happily ever after."

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: It's important because it's the only way that we reflect the reality, which is that sometimes that isn't the case.

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: And that's what drives us to make changes, and to make the world better, and to strive for something that we can reflect with a happily ever after and feel good about. Like, yes, this is reflective of an actual truth.

Taylor: Well, I mean, at the part where he turns dark and murderous, I think that—you know, if you've ever been somebody that's been hurt, and there's that inkling of, like, "I just want—I want revenge." And, like, I think seeing that play out and seeing the sad end is actually important, because it is important to establish the link between, you know, the pain you receive, and how often—pain is kind of a virus in its own way, you know?

We get it from other people, and we pass it to people beyond us. It doesn't get it out of our system. We still are infected by it. We've just given it to somebody else, and that that's important to recognize. That, you know—that the only way the pain truly stops is by metabolizing it within yourself, not passing it on.

Sydnee: That's a good point.

Raleigh: Wow. All from *The Bug Boy*.

Taylor: Poor little Bug Boy.

Sydnee: Well, I have to say, I really—it was very sad, but I really did enjoy it. I thought it was—and, like you said, it is—it's grotesque at many times, but also beautiful. Um, but, uh—but was really well done, and cathartic, so.

Taylor: Yeah. I would recommend it if you can—if you have a stomach for body horror and, you know, kind of—if you're a fan of horror comics in general, and that's okay with you, it's a great story. If you're sensitive to that kind of stuff, maybe skip this one. [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: Mm-hmm. Yeah. But some—sometimes you need something that you know is gonna, um, take you there and make you cry a little bit and...

Raleigh: I wasn't entirely—

Sydnee: Not in a *Bill and Ted* way.

Raleigh: Right.

Sydnee: In a different way. [laughs]

Raleigh: Yeah. I wasn't entirely expecting all the emotions I felt, just because, like, I genuinely had no idea. I was like, "I know this is kind of like a spooky story, but I have no idea what else I am going into." But I did. I got very emotional, and I really enjoyed it. It was the first time I had really read, like, horror manga-type stuff. Very enjoyable.

Sydnee: I enjoyed it too, and thank you for sharing, Taylor. I know that—I could tell, reading it, that this was something very important to you, so thank you for putting this out there as something we could talk about.

Raleigh: Yeah. Thanks, Tey.

Taylor: Well, I appreciate you both givin' it a read. Thank you very much.

Sydnee: What, uh—what do you have for us next week, Raleigh?

Raleigh: [laughs quietly] Well, next I have something decidedly less, uh... meaning... ful. I think.

Sydnee: Okay. [laughs]

Taylor: [laughs] I think there's a fun pun there, though. [laughs]

Raleigh: Ah, yes. [holding back laughter] I want to do—oh, Meaning! Okay.

Sydnee: Ahh.

Raleigh: Um, so, a movie that came out more in your all's generation, but actually was one of the most important movies to my middle school, young adolescence, was *Mean Girls*.

Taylor: Nice.

Sydnee: Huh.

Raleigh: I watched it probably a hundred times. I know every single word. I can't believe I haven't thought to talk about it yet, but know I wanna talk about it, so.

Sydnee: Alright.

Taylor: Nice.

Sydnee: Well, that sounds good.

Taylor: I'm excited about that.

Raleigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: I will watch it again, and Charlie will watch it with me. I don't think Cooper could sit still for that whole...

Raleigh: Probably not.

Sydnee: No.

Taylor: Have you seen the musical as well, Raleigh?

Rileigh: Yes! Mom and I saw it when it was on tour several—I mean, many months ago, obviously. There has been no live theater any times recently. I think it was actually almost a year ago, but yes, I have seen the musical. I have listened to the musical. Um, so I'll probably be talking about a little bit of all of it, but we'll focus on the movie.

Taylor: Alright.

Sydnee: Excellent. Well, thank you both. This has been a fun and, um, meaningful episode.

Rileigh: Yeah.

Sydnee: [laughs] Um, thank you all for listening. You can tweet at us @stillbuff. You can email us at stillbuffering@maximumfun.org, if you have... [pause]

Rileigh: Questions?

Sydnee: Questions—

Rileigh: Comments?

Sydnee: —or comments, or—

Rileigh: Suggestions?

Sydnee: —[holding back laughter] suggestions.

Rileigh: There you go. [laughs]

Sydnee: If you're having word-finding difficulty, you're me right now. It's been a long week.

Rileigh: I get it.

Taylor: All the weeks are long. [laughs]

Sydnee: Yes. [laughs quietly] Uh, and thank you to The Nouvellas for our theme song, "Baby You Change Your Mind."

Rleigh: This has been *Still Buffering*, a cross-generational guide to the culture that made us.

[theme music begins in the background]

Sydnee: [holding back laughter] I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Taylor: And I'm Teylor Smirl!

Rleigh: [through laughter] I am still buffering...

Sydnee and Taylor: And I... am... too.

Rleigh: It took so much not to say "This has been Two Bills and a Ted."

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: Did you just forget your name?!

Rleigh: No! I almost said, "This has been a Bill." Or "I'm a Bill."

Sydnee: "I'm a Bill."

Taylor: "I'm a Bill."

Rleigh: [laughs] Oh, man. It's been a long week.

[music plays]

Justin: Hi, everybody! My name is Justin McElroy.

Sydnee: I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Justin: We're both doctors, and—

Sydnee: Nope! Just me.

Justin: Okay, well, Sydnee's a doctor, and I'm a medical enthusiast—

Sydnee: Okay.

Justin: —and we create Sawbones: a marital tour of misguided medicine.

Sydnee: Every week, I dig through the annals of medical history to bring you the wildest, grossest, sometimes dumbest tales of ways we've tried to treat people throughout history.

Justin: And lately, we do a lot of modern fake medicine... because everything's a disaster. But it's slightly less of a disaster, every Friday, right here on Maximumfun.org as we bring you Sawbones: a marital tour of misguided medicine. And remember:

Sydnee: Don't drill a hole in your head.

[music plays]

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