

Still Buffering 409: Agatha All Along

Published October 6th, 2024
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[theme music plays]

Sydnee: Hello, and welcome to Still Buffering: a cross-generational guide to the culture that made us. I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Taylor: And I'm Taylor Smirl.

Sydnee: Uh, Tey, I feel like we should follow up on some of the TikTok drama we've recently discussed.

Taylor: Okay?

Sydnee: Because I saw all of these people talking about on TikTok how angry Chappell Roan was about SNL.

Taylor: Was she angry?

Sydnee: No! [laughs]

Taylor: I think she just commented "hilarious" under one of the posts.

Sydnee: Yeah. I don't think she was angry. But it—they got me. They got me. They tricked me.

Taylor: Yeah...

Sydnee: Did you watch the sketch?

Taylor: I did. It was very silly.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: Um...

Sydnee: Bowen Yang—who I love, Bowen Yang—was dressed as a hippo. And was—

Taylor: Moo Deng.

Sydnee: Moo Deng, who's a popular hi—see, okay. I was not as familiar with Moo Deng, 'cause I realize—maybe TikTok... I don't know if it's by zodiac sign, or maybe gender. I don't know how you get shuffled into either the pesto camp on TikTok or the Moo Deng camp on TikTok.

Taylor: Ohh. You think there are two genders, pes—no, 'cause I—well, I was gonna say, I'm in both, but then, eh, well, eh... you know.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: I did trans my gender. I got the penguin and the hippo.

Sydnee: I don't know, but apparently I'm Pesto is my gender, because I know all about Pesto. I watch Pesto. I have shared Pesto with Justin and girls. Like, I showed everybody in my family Pesto here. I did not know about Moo Deng.

Taylor: You didn't know at all about Moo Deng?

Sydnee: I saw a couple TikToks that were, like, a picture of a penguin and a hippo together, and I didn't understand it. But—so I guess I sort of was vaguely aware there's a hippo somewhere in the world that people are talking about. But I didn't know anything about Moo Deng. I just knew about Pesto, the giant—which if any of this is unfamiliar to you, Pesto is a giant baby penguin... in Australia. At... I don't remember which zoo. Somewhere in Australia. Anyway.

And he's huge. He's, like, so much bigger than his parents. And he's grey and fluffy, and his name's Pesto. And, I mean, he's just cute. I don't know. People are flocking to this zoo in Australia to come see Pesto. You can fill me in on—where is Moo Deng? What's the deal with Moo Deng? It's a hippo, it's a baby hippo?

Taylor: Oh, where is—is he in China? Is he in—where is he? I don't actually...

Sydnee: Why do people love him?

Taylor: 'Cause he's... he's silly, I guess? There's a lot of, like, screenshots of him where he's just kind of in action, looking... crazed. I don't know.

Sydnee: That's it?

Taylor: He's a little—he's a little tiny baby hippo. And he's real shiny, and he's real cute, and he's real... he's a real wild, wild guy. And I think that's it. I think that's the appeal.

Sydnee: Okay. 'Cause I know—like, the appeal of Pesto is how big he is. That's, like, the funny thing about Pesto is, like, he's such a big boy.

Taylor: So, Moo Deng is in Thailand.

Sydnee: Okay. Yeah, I didn't—see, I had not followed Moo Deng. But, um, there's two animals on TikTok for you to watch videos of and love, if you so—if that's your thing.

Taylor: Well, I don't—I guess I'm on the right algorithm, because I get all the Moo Deng videos, and I get all the Pesto videos, and I also get whatever—you know how, like—less-desirable trend, the kids were really into the Skibidi Toilets a while ago?

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: Now they just like making... mix tracks about, uh, this Polish guy talking to a beaver. Uh... and it's just remixes of the Polish word for beaver with this—with different videos of... beavers. And it's... it's real good.

Sydnee: Oh, no. I do not know this.

Taylor: So, that's...

Sydnee: Okay.

Taylor: Whenever I—I feel like when I'm at my mentally healthiest, all of my For You page is just cute animals. There's some cats thrown in. There's, like, a cat family that adopted another cat that is very cute. Like, that's when I'm good. That's when I'm well.

Sydnee: I don't know what it says about me that most of mine lately, uh, is... people either talking about ACOTAR, like, acting out scenes from ACOTAR... [laughs quietly] I try to avoid any AI-generated ACOTAR content. Because there's actually, like, so much good, like, fan art and cosplay, and people who are just recreating, like—anyway, I prefer all that to any AI-generated stuff. But anyway, my TikTok is just like, "You like ACOTAR, huh? Here's some more. Here some more. Here's some more." [laughs quietly]

Taylor: Well, that's—that's gonna—I think that's just 'cause you talk about it so much, and your phone hears you. And it's like, "Well, this is all she's about right now."

Sydnee: Yeah... um... yeah. I also—I also got—I didn't know about MomTok. Do you know about MomTok?

Taylor: MomTok—it sounds like something I'm not allowed to know about.

Sydnee: Well, I mean, I don't really feel like I should be allowed to know about it. So, there are these—there's a show called the Secret Lives of Mormon Wives? Which I only watched, like, five minutes of and then said no.

And don't get me wrong. I love some trashy TV, right? Like, I am not saying "I am too good for this television." No. There's lots of TV that I am not too good for. Don't worry.

Um, but it just isn't the kind of—I never got into the Real Housewives stuff. And then when it's, like, about, "We're wild, but we're Mormon moms, but we're wild," or whatever, I don't know. There's just nothing about this that is appealing to me, personally. So I heard it was wild, I started to watch it and then just went, "Nah."

But anyway, I guess they created, like, MomTok, which is like... I don't know what it's supposed to be. But what I got surfaced were videos of moms dancing, like, to a song, while their child was in distress, which I guess was a spoof of one of the videos that the moms actually did, where she was dancing in a hospital room while her kid has RSV in the background. And she was, like, dancing about it.

And so there are all these people who are making, like, parody videos of this with, like, their kid laying at the bottom of the stairs, pretending like their kid just fell down the stairs and they're like, "My kid just fell down the stairs," and they're doing a TikTok dance to it. Like, "I'm waiting for EMS," dah, dah, dah, dah, dah.

Like... [laughs] and it's all a joke. But I found all this and I was like, "What am I seeing?! I don't understand!" And then people were like, "Well, you gotta watch Secret Lives of Mormon Wives. And I was like, "Well, I'll never watch that. So I guess I'll never understand this one."

Taylor: That's dark. [laughs]

Sydnee: Yes! So that's out there.

Taylor: I thought that was going in a more wholesome place, 'cause sometimes I get, like, the TikToks that are like lists of TikTok incidents. Just, like, I don't know, quote-unquote "cringe" TikToks from the past. And there was one compilation that had a video, and it was—I feel like it was called just, like, Moms of TikTok or something, and it was just a bunch of moms, like, out at a restaurant together, drinking their wine and doing a little dance. And I'm like, "Nah, this is great."

Sydnee: That's fine.

Taylor: But what I liked was—when I went to the comments everyone agreed, like, "This is not—no. Don't come for the moms. Don't come for the moms having their wine night. [laughs] Let the moms have their wine."

Sydnee: That's fine. I have no problem with that. I'm not a wine drinker, but I have no problem with that. This is something else. [laughs quietly]

Taylor: That is distressing.

Sydnee: This is another thing. Bring me back—just take me back to ACOTAR. There are people, Taylor, who just dress up in full, like, ACOTAR cosplay.

Taylor: Sydnee—cos—it's just, yeah, cosplayers. [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: Well, but then they're just doing these videos, like, at their homes or whatever.

Taylor: Yeah!

Sydnee: Like, they're not at a con or something. They're just, like, making the videos.

Taylor: Sydnee, I've done cosplay videos at my home. I—

Sydnee: Well...

Taylor: It's just interesting. [wheeze-laughs]

Sydnee: I just mean, like, they're just acting out the scenes in the book.

Taylor: Yeah, no, that's what cosplayers do on TikTok.

Sydnee: Oh.

Taylor: We have very different algorithms.

Sydnee: Yeah. See, I've never seen just—like, I've seen cosplayers out at cons. And I've seen pictures of people where I'm like, "Wow, that's a really impressive cosplay."

But not just like, here's, like, a hot dude pretending to be a fairy, and he's got really—I mean, like, the wings are really impressive. I don't know how they're building these wings, but they're wildly impressive.

Taylor: You've been missing out on a lot of TikTok if you're just now discovering that hot cosplayers get on there and cosplay, and just post thirst traps.

[both laugh]

Taylor: That's the other—that's the other element of my healthy mental For You page. There's a series of cute animals, some rescue kittens, and a hot cosplayer just being Jojo. And I'm like, "Yeah. Do it." Not Jojo Siwa. Different Jojo. Don't worry about it.

Sydnee: No. No, no, no.

Taylor: We can't get into that.

Sydnee: This is what I'm saying. Here's my last—this is the last thing I'll say about it. I get surfaced a lot of this stuff, and at first it was a bunch of AI-generated, and I was like, I don't know. It's all weird-looking. It's all, like, sort of human but not.

And then, like... idealized in a way that feels like—I don't even know what I want to—like, I don't want to read this. I don't—[laughs quietly] like, I don't—there's something about when they make people look... too perfect, that they start—they stop being attractive to me. 'Cause then it's like, I don't even know what that is anymore.

Taylor: It's just like AI-generated pictures, or, like, videos?

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: Pictures? Yeah.

Sydnee: Like, pictures of, like, the characters and the settings and all those kind of stuff. And like, with the characters, it's like, all the women have these, like, wrist-sized waists.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: And these eyes that are, like, half the size of their faces. And, like, I don't know. It's like, I don't even know what to do with this anymore.

So when I stumbled into, like, the real people who, like, look—they're real people. They're very attractive people, but they're real people. They look like actual humans that you might meet on Earth, somewhere.

Taylor: I just can't—I can't wrap my head around that this. I know you know what cosplay is, but this feels like you're discovering cosplay for the first time. [laughs]

Sydnee: I just thought it was a thing you did at cons!

Taylor: Alright. [laughs]

Sydnee: Anyway, I just... what I'm saying is, we can't let AI take over art. Because it's not as good at it. It's bad at it. It's not as good. Let's, like—the cosplay is so much better, and the fan art, and the goofy little—like, sometimes people do, like, the quick little sketchy cartoons where they're, like, acting out a scene, and it's like a little quick cartoon? Like they haven't—you know, it's just pencil and they haven't, like, colored it in and stuff. Those are so cute! All of that is so much better than the AI junk that just looks like those, uh... Thomas Kinkade paintings. [laughs quietly]

Taylor: Yeah. That's like some—I have to always, uh—I'm not interested in this, when I get these. The dark fantasy AI-generations of, like, any... any fictional property ever. I'm just like, it's never... it never looks like The Labyrinth. It just looks like bad AI with a dark color palette.

Sydnee: Yes. That's how it looks. And it's like—it's not... there's something about it. I mean, it really—like, man, as I said Thomas Kinkade, that is exactly what it is in my head. It's like, I'm not saying those colors aren't pretty. I'm not saying that the flowers don't look like flowers. Like, I'm—you know? Like, the elements should together to something, but they don't. And I'm not interested in looking at it, and I also know that it's not being made by artists who are, like, working really hard to make things. Right? So...

Taylor: Yeah. Well, you know, I do think that... not—won't go too deep down this road, but, uh—we got a different road to talk about. But, uh, I think humanity is an essential part of making art that connects with people.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: Even if it's something as simple and silly as fan art or cosplay. And I think that... I'm not saying that there's not a day that the computers will not be able to properly mimic humanity, but they're not there yet.

Sydnee: No.

Taylor: We've still got a—we've still got a while for them to figure that out.

Sydnee: Absolutely. No, I think you're right. And I think—I mean, I do think, like, part of it is that we—I mean, even if they could perfectly mimic it, there are other problems, right? Like, it's not just that it's not as good. But I still think, like, that is part of the argument right now. It's not as good. You can feel that it's missing. There's something missing.

Taylor: As an artist, I should be more concerned about it, but my main anger with it is just like, I want the robots to make pieces about what it is to be a robot. I want to see AI angst. I want these creative... digital monsters to be able to create whatever it is, to be what you are and have all this power, but no authority in the world, no agency. That, I think, would be cool. Stop trying to do the dumb stuff we do. Do whatever is in your twisted brain, robot monster.

Sydnee: Yes. See, that is much more interesting to me, too. And let's leave it to humans... to make these batboys with purple eyes. Oh my gosh. How do they even do it? It's so incredible.

Taylor: [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: [laughs] It's just... it's just incredible.

Taylor: It's just prescription—it's just contacts. Maybe not prescription. Just contacts.

Sydnee: I don't know. They look like they glow. They do look like the night's inside their eyes. Like, the whole night. [laughs]

Taylor: Alright. Alright. [laughs]

Sydnee: Anyway. [laughs] It's just incredible.

Taylor: It's like—it's like somebody just discovering, I don't know, like, the state of Ohio for the first time in their life after living in America.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: Like, yeah, it's always been there! It's always been there! What are you doing?

Sydnee: I didn't get—I have never seen—I mean, like, really. Any time I would say cosplay on TikTok, I assumed that they were just, like, on the way to a con, and they're like, "Look at my costume." And it's like, "Great! Aww, that's cool."

Taylor: Yeah, well, Syd, some of us love to make costumes, but we have social anxiety, so we do it at home!

Sydnee: I don't know! I never got those TikToks of people who were just, like, chilling at home in cosplay. Until now.

Taylor: [simultaneously] Welcome to the world. [laughs]

Sydnee: And they're all hot fairies! [laughs] [sighs] Okay. Um...

Taylor: No more fairies. On to witches.

Sydnee: On to witches. So, I had you watch Agatha. I keep... Justin won't even correct me anymore, how many times I've called this show Agatha All the Way.

Taylor: [wheeze-laughs]

Sydnee: And Justin's like... "All Along." Like, right. Agatha...

Taylor: Agatha All the Way!

Sydnee: ... All the Way! So was it confusing having not seen WandaVision?

Taylor: Oh yeah. I guess I—I still have not. I mean, I think I've seen enough of WandaVision and everything that followed WandaVision to not need any... fill in the blanks.

Sydnee: Okay. You get the gist.

Taylor: Yeah. I watched some of WandaVision, and then, I don't know, I saw, like, the Doctor Strange—the, you know, multiverse. I know Wanda's storyline.

Sydnee: Okay. I mean, I think—so, like, we watched the show, and then Charlie and Cooper had shown interest in watching the show, and so I gave them, like, a 30 second rundown. And then I felt bad that I hadn't given you, like, the 30 second rundown on, like, who is Agatha and why is she in, like, a police procedural at the beginning of the... [laughs]

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: ...of the show.

Taylor: I knew that Wanda had left her as, like, a—like, trapped in the role she played in WandaVision.

Sydnee: Yes. Okay. Well, then that—yeah. That's it. So I had to explain that. And then once she breaks out of that, I don't really think—if you are somebody who hasn't seen the show and hasn't watched WandaVision and you're like, "Will it even make sense to me?"

I think if you just know that conceit, you leave that so quickly that I don't think it really matters.

Taylor: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: I mean, is that fair to say?

Taylor: Oh yeah. Yeah, I feel like the plot develops very quickly. I mean, there's only three episodes out now.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: And it's a very fast-moving plot.

Sydnee: Which we will be spoiling, I should say, as we're talking about it.

Taylor: Yes.

Sydnee: Okay. The first thing I want to say is, before I started watching it, everybody on TikTok was like, "This... this is the gayest show. This is... this is for... " How did they say it? How do the kids say it? The shes, the gays, and the theys?

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Yeah. [laughs] You're shaking your head.

Taylor: Sure. [laughs]

Sydnee: Um, and I started—and so I was like, "Well, now I'm intrigued." And Aubrey Plaza's there, so I have to watch this.

Taylor: The thing that sold me on it was similar in that someone said "You know what we were promised with Thor: Love and Thunder? This is actually it." [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: It—and so then I've seen, like, this competing discourse, where people are now watching it. And, like, I think if any of the characters are supposed to be overtly... gay...

Teylor: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: I don't—I mean, no relationships have been built. So, like, I don't—

Teylor: I mean, I don't think we need to underplay the moment where Aubrey Plaza licks, uh, Agatha's hand. Licks the blood off her hand and says "I have a black heart, and it beats for you," or "My heart is black, and it beats for you."

I don't know what your version of flirtation is. But that scene... [wheeze-laugh] on the nose for me!

Sydnee: Well, okay. This is what I'm saying. So... yes, I think if you're watching and you're like, "Nobody's kissed yet," that's true. This is a true statement. No one has declared, like, "By the way, let's go around the circle and call out our sexuality."

Like, nobody has done that. [laughs]

Teylor: I'm really glad they didn't do that. [through laughter] I'm really glad.

Sydnee: [laughs] But I—but so there's this discourse on TikTok where there are people saying, like, "I don't know why this is a gay show."

Teylor: Um...

Sydnee: And what I'm saying is, if you know, you know.

Teylor: Well, that. And also, I think—one—well... one, witchcraft? Always... almost always... gay.

Sydnee: Queer culture, yes.

Taylor: A little gay.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: Um, as I think of it I'm like, well, you know what? Those were very straight witches in Practical Magic. But I don't know about the aunties, and also it's still gay culture, 'cause the gays adopted it. But—

Sydnee: The aunties have strong... lesbian energy. But yes, carry on.

Taylor: Rizzo and her... her... yeah. [laughs]

Sydnee: Yes. Yes.

Taylor: Come on. Uh... but witchcraft, almost always kinda gay. But also... it's sad to say. I think any piece of media where there's more than a token women, and those women have agency, feels... gay. Because that's part of the... the—the fantasy, right? Women. [gasps] With agency.

Sydnee: [laughs] I—no, I think that—I think there is so many things. You're right, witchcraft, inherently gay. Uh, women who are just doing their own thing. Not waiting for, like, the guy to show up and say, "That is a good plan, ladies. Go for it." [laughs quietly] That's gay.

Taylor: Like, there is a guy here, and he's called pet. [laughs]

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: And Teen. He doesn't even get a name.

Sydnee: And who, like, is very much coded as a gay character. Again, no—

Taylor: Well, I think he—I don't think he's coded. I think he is. Like, I think his boyfriend calls at some point.

Sydnee: Okay.

Taylor: And he says, "He worries." That had to be what that was, right?

Sydnee: Did—okay. Did his boyfriend call?

Taylor: Well, I don't—if not, they didn't explain it.

Sydnee: Well, okay. But that's... so that's what I assume, but I, you know. I don't know. Like, a lot of times in shows we don't need the characters to say, like, "By the way, in case anybody's asking, I am gay." [laughs quietly] Um, but the scene between Aubrey Plaza and Kathryn Hahn is one of—I mean, like, are you telling me that's not... sexual tension? Are you trying to tell me this isn't, like, an enemies to lovers thing? Like... how do you not feel that? If either... that's the problem.

Listen, straight people.

Taylor: [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: If one of those characters had been a man and you watched that scene, you'd be like, "Ooh."

Taylor: I don't think it—I think if one character licks another character's hand and says "My heart beats for you," we...

Sydnee: Well, yes!

Taylor: I know media literacy is not great these days, but... [laughs]

Sydnee: I'm just saying it's a very gay scene, and there are people who aren't reading it that way. um... I just think, like, Patti LuPone's there! It's gay culture! Patti LuPone is there!

Taylor: That's just—I—I love how... I don't know. I feel like she was not as active in, like, televised media for, like, a lot of our young life, and now she's just popping up everywhere, and I love this. I love this Renaissance of Patti LuPone.

Sydnee: She's hilarious. Have you seen the TikToks where Aubrey Plaza talks about living with her?

Taylor: Yes!

Sydnee: It's incredible.

Taylor: I... I saw the one—I think it was last night. I got the one where she was—she's on some talk show. She's talking about Patti LuPone having an IV guy.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: Like, of course she does. And of course you shouldn't have said yes to the Patti LuPone IV. [laughs] Rookie mistake, Aubrey Plaza!

Sydnee: [laughs] She comes in and she says she's mid-Benadryl, like, getting tranquilized. And Patti LuPone—she says she walks in, dripping in diamonds, and says "No, darling!"

Taylor: "I'm gonna make you a piece of.."

Sydnee: English muffin with peanut butter.

Taylor: With butter—with peanut butter.

[both laugh]

Taylor: That's... that's the thing that keeps the hat man away.

Sydnee: And she says, "Patti, why is this happening to me?"

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: "Because I'm trying to make you strong, for the stage. You're on the stage now."

Taylor: Patti LuPone—I mean, again, Patti LuPone has rolled deep in gay culture for her entire existence. I would be terrified of what she could withstand, from a chemical basis. [laughs]

Sydnee: Yeah. There's another one where she says that every day she comes down and there's a new piece of meat thawing on the counter and she's making her dinner. And she said—did you see the one where she's carving a whole turkey?

Taylor: She's—yes, 'cause she was going out of town for something and she was like, "You're just gonna have turkey sandwiches every day." And whatever host that she was talking to was like, "There's nothing more disturbing than somebody carving a turkey on a day that's not Thanksgiving."

You know what? Yeah! [laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs] It really is. No, it's—but, like, all of that, it's just all very... gay. I don't see how people don't see how gay it is.

Taylor: I mean, I think—I think... I don't—I think the detractors are just those people that feel the need to detract from any... like, there's a lot of romantic subtext in lots and lots and lots and lots of media. It's just when it's not between—like, when it's not hetero, people feel the need to be like, "No, I don't see it. You're making things up." Like, well, it exists. The show doesn't need to center around it.

Sydnee: Yeah. No, and I mean, they do a musical number.

Taylor: Yeah, there's also that.

Sydnee: Yeah. They do a whole musical number. [laughs quietly] That's gay.

Taylor: Yeah. I don't know how you could argue that it's not. At least it's made with a very specific audience in mind.

Sydnee: Um... I love it. I—I think that whatever—so, what Kathryn Hahn is doing is so fascinating to me. I mean, she's really great anyway, right? Like,

she's a good actress. It's not like "I can't believe she's so good!" I mean she's good anyway.

But there's something about Agatha that isn't wholly human, which I think would come from being alive for however many hundreds of years, right? Like, you would start to be a little less human, because of—you're losing that mortal thing.

And she has that. And it's, like, unsettling. And you can't—like, she's supposed to be your main character that you're rooting for. But you don't trust her fully, because... you can sense there's—I don't know. Like, what she's doing is so interesting to me, 'cause I really want to be on her side and root for her, but there's a part of me that's like, "Uh-oh. Uh-oh. Should we let her do this? Should we let her finish this road?"

Taylor: Okay. Well, I think it's because... you know, similar vibe. It's kind of the same quandary with Loki, right?

Sydnee: Yeah!

Taylor: It was a great show. Another chaotic bisexual character. [laughs]

Sydnee: Yeah, mm-hmm.

Taylor: Where it's like, you... he's capable of very bad, evil things. But you just want him to win anyway.

Sydnee: Yeah. Yeah, and you kind of forget—I mean, like—now, granted... Agatha I believe in the—I did not read the comics where Agatha Harkness is a main. Right? Like, I don't know her whole story outside of WandaVision and then this show, but I know she is a character within the Marvel canon.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: And I am assuming she's probably done some bad stuff?

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Like, they call her witch killer. Which I guess, like, is that a rule? Witches can't kill other witches?

Teylor: That seems like, at least in this iteration, what they're inferring with the conversation between Aubrey Plaza's character and her. That they can't kill each other.

Sydnee: Yeah. But they call her witch killer. So she must have broken the rule.

Teylor: I'm assuming that the Salem Seven are the witches who... well, we said spoilers. The witches that maybe she's killed, that she killed her former coven? I don't know.

Sydnee: Oh, did she kill her whole coven?

Teylor: I don't know this. These are the rumors on the internet about what this specific iteration is doing with her character.

Sydnee: Well, so similarly, like, Loki did bad stuff.

Teylor: Yeah, he absolutely tried to conquer the world a few times.

Sydnee: You know what was weird to me is I watched the TV show Loki having not watched any of the movies with Loki in them. [laughs]

Teylor: Did you ever go back and watch?

Sydnee: I did! And I was like, "Oh, man! Loki! You were a bad guy!" [laughs]

Teylor: Yeah... [laughs]

Sydnee: It was a weird—it was weird, 'cause like, I had this very, like, sympathetic—like, I really loved Loki and was rooting for him and totally on his team. And, like, really shipping him and Owen Wilson. And, like, totally on board with this whole thing.

And then I went back and watched the movies that he was in and I was like, "Ohh... oh... "

Taylor: Having somebody that watched that in sequence, I still—I still had... sympathy for him and shipped him with Owen Wilson, so I don't know. I don't know what that says. [laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs] Um, but yeah. So, I mean, similarly, like, somehow that TV show made you root for Loki, even if you were somebody who watched all the movies and saw him as, like, I mean, a bad guy who did categorically bad things.

Taylor: But I think that there's a reason that we're drawn to these type of characters. Not just we, like you and I, but like, people in general. And I... it's Disney, it's Marvel. They're running an algorithm, and they're making the content that they know will sell. And something lined up. They're like, "You know what people love? A sexually ambiguous chaotic character that could be good or evil, and is kind of a god but not really. Can we do that again? Oh, yeah!"

Sydnee: We can do it again.

Taylor: It's purple instead of green this time.

Sydnee: No, but it's great. And it—well, I mean, I guess it's... and maybe this—I don't know. Usually these kinds of things, especially when it comes to sci-fi or fantasy or, like, superhero, whatever you want to put that genre—I don't know if it's sci-fi, fantasy, or somewhere in between. Comic... stuff. I don't know. Where does that fit? Anyway.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Somewhere in there. Um, it's usually a reflection of, like, the cultural psyche. Like, we're seeing—we're playing back to ourselves where we are. Whether you're talking about, like, a country-specific thing or a time period or whatever.

So I don't know what it says about us, then. [laughs quietly] But I think this sort of need for redemption, the idea that no matter how evil or how bad, somebody could find their way back to a place of—maybe we need that in our country. Maybe we need to believe that no matter how terrible we are, we could find our way back to a place of redemption?

Taylor: I could believe that. I think also, like, on a deeper level, there's a cultural understanding of the hero myth as being something that comforts us. It's the same story told over and over again, because it makes us feel safer in an unsafe world.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: But if the hero myth makes us feel safe, we're not the hero, but people are out there that protect us. I feel like the anti-hero myth makes us feel empowered. Because none of us can really see ourselves, at least in current age, in the hero. But we can definitely see ourselves in the person that has made some questionable decisions. Maybe hurt some people. Maybe caused some damage. But we'd like to think we could be good one day.

Sydnee: Right? Well, I mean, I think it's like the—it's like the Superman Batman thing, right?

Taylor: Is it the Superman Batman thing? 'Cause at the end of the day, even though Batman—he's a human, he's still, like, a billionaire human. I would almost say it's like the Superman, like... uh, like, Deadpool thing or something. Like a... you know, a mercenary who turns good, or... Harley Quinn! Why is Harley Quinn so popular?

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: Harley Quinn is a redeemed villain.

Sydnee: Yeah. I think we do like redeemed villains. I guess I just meant, like, a superhero who doesn't always get it right.

Taylor: Hmm.

Sydnee: 'Cause, like, Batman... kills people sometimes.

Teylor: Well, he's not supposed to. He has a code.

Sydnee: But he does. [laughs]

Teylor: Superman's killed people too.

Sydnee: But he does—well, but her never means to.

Teylor: Well, well, no. [laughs] Long canon we're talking about.

Sydnee: Okay, okay. I just mean—

Teylor: No, I guess what you're saying.

Sydnee: —like, the idea—the idea of superheroes that none of us could ever live up to, as opposed to superheroes that we can see ourselves as. And then there's this other layer, though. Because we're not talking about people who are flawed. We're talking about people who, like, went on murderous rampages and then felt bad. [laughs] Which is another—I mean, like, that's a whole other—and I do wonder, like, if that's kind of where we are.

We don't just see ourselves as flawed but as, like, grappling with a long, horrible, murderous history, and trying to find a way to still... like, find a way to exist as what we are, but a better—like, is there a better? Can we ever make rec—you know? Can we ever reconcile where we are? Can we ever make up for what we've done, for who we are?

Teylor: It's interesting how in the, like, trends in the comic book world that kind of tracks, like, chronologically. From, like, the golden age and, like, superheroes were superheroes. They were good people that set a standard for... like, high goodness is what you should try to achieve. And then if you look at, like, the late '80s, '90s, that was the era of the anti-hero. But it was still a good person who did good things.

Maybe something unfortunate happened where they were part of something bad, and so they, like, wear a leather jacket over their superhero suit. That was—that was it. And I do think we're kind of in the era of the redeemed villain. Where it's like, no, it's somebody that's done irredeemable things that is seeking redemption in some form.

Sydnee: I just wonder if that's not how we see ourselves. Like, we realize we're not the heroes. Well, maybe we're the anti-heroes. Nah, 'cause we didn't always mean well.

Teylor: We're the bad guys. [laughs]

Sydnee: Maybe we're the bad guys. And then the hope is, but maybe we don't always have to be.

Teylor: Yeah. But then I don't know. And I think the thing that sells also with Loki, and I think with where Agatha's going, is... neither of them are specifically concerned with redeeming themselves.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Teylor: It happened at the end of Loki, in a really heartbreaking way. I don't know where Agatha's gonna go. If that's the formula they're playing to, we might expect something similar, but right now, Agatha just wants her power.

Sydnee: That's true. She just wants her power back. And she—I mean, and we know she was—she was willing to sacrifice anybody in this group she's assembled. She was willing to steal their powers, had she gotten away with it.

Teylor: Well, and we know she sacrificed a son, which—the identity of Teen has not been revealed yet. But there's a lot of... there's a lot of stuff out there that's spoiling it for people, I guess.

Sydnee: Did she definitely sacrifice her son? Is that canon?

Teylor: Yes.

Sydnee: Okay. I didn't know if we were gonna—

Taylor: Whether, like—I don't think it's necessarily, like, murdered, or just handed him over to Mephisto. I think that's gonna be—that remains to be seen.

Sydnee: Um... I've only had one thing spoiled for me, and it was just by a hashtag somebody put on a TikTok I was watching, so.

Taylor: What was that?

Sydnee: Oh, I don't want to spoil—it's, like, future spoil. The identity of a character. Not Teen.

Taylor: Oh, okay. Well, there were—there were apparently Funko Pops that spoiled a lot of character identities. [wheeze-laughs]

Sydnee: Oh, really?

Taylor: Of all the things! Why—what? I own... what? Uh, one? One Funko Pop that somebody gifted me, and it was somebody that I care about, so I kept it. But I don't understand the appeal of the Funko Pops.

Sydnee: No.

Taylor: But I don't know why you would trust your highly-guarded secretive media property with the Funko Pops that release—they release the names of characters, so they released a series of Funko Pops with these characters. And they had names that were secret names up until now. I mean, they've been—they're still secret names.

Sydnee: Well, and that's—so, this is what I wonder about that. Uh, because... Disney doesn't do anything without careful calculation, right?

Taylor: That's true.

Sydnee: Especially when it comes to making money, Disney has thought it through. I wonder if it's not because—when I was watching WandaVision and it—as I—'cause I—we watched it as it was coming out. And so in real time, trying to puzzle out what is happening, and then it starts to dawn on you that the Agnes character—there's something going on with her. Who is she?

Okay. I don't know enough about the Marvel universe to have any clue—like, if you had said, "Well, she's Agatha Harkness."

I would've said, "Okay? And that is, uh, who?" Right? Like, I would have no concept of what that meant. So releasing that character's name wouldn't mean anything to me.

I wonder if what they're banking on is that there a lot of people watching this TV show who are not familiar with the Marvel universe, and revealing a character's name, while if you are familiar you might be like, "Oh my gosh, this is who it is!"

But there's gonna be a lot of us out here who are like, "Oh. Okay."

Taylor: That's fair.

Sydnee: I don't know. This is—I wonder if they just ran that math and said, "Eh, it's worth it to get the merch out there."

Taylor: And, I mean, also probably all the response videos that that stuff churns up just gives more engagement for the show.

Sydnee: I mean, I will say, I know that, like, during WandaVision, I was doing deep dives researching Agatha Harkness to try to figure out what was going on. And then, like, becoming more interested in these properties, so that then when they were like, "We're gonna do a spinoff with her," I was like, "Yes!"

This character that I barely knew anything about, you know, a month ago, all the sudden I'm obsessed with. And I'm already looking at, like, they have new, um, Disney ears. You know they have all the different branded ears? They have Agatha—

Taylor: They have Agatha ears? What do they look like?

Sydnee: They're, like—well, they're purple, of course. But then they've got, like, the cameo in the middle of them, with the—with Hecate on it. It's the maiden mother crone on it.

Taylor: Oh, it's like her cameo.

Sydnee: Yeah, her cameo.

Taylor: Oh, cute!

Sydnee: I know! Which also, like, they've got Hecate merch at Disney World right now!

Taylor: Yeah, sure, why not?

Sydnee: Which is... cool, and wild!

Taylor: That's really awesome.

Sydnee: Right? I know. I was looking at these ears like, "I kinda... next time I go to Disney, I would like to wear those." Which I already—you know what? I'm the audience. I have Scarlet Witch ears, so... there it is.

Taylor: I was surprised... I'm curious, Syd, because I know you really latched on to WandaVision. And, like, I never really... I follow the Marvel stuff. I like it. I enjoy it. I never really saw you get *in* into it. And that was, like, the first property that you were the—you watched WandaVision and had big feelings about it. When I did not.

Sydnee: I did.

Taylor: And I was curious. Like, if this is a continuation of that. What is it about these properties that speak to you?

Sydnee: Um, I don't know. I don't know what... I don't know what Agatha will do. I know I like Agatha so far because it's a lot of the stuff I'm into. I mean, you know, I like witchy stuff. I'm always—I'm always into that.

Taylor: [wheeze-laughs] I like witches, I like the gays.

Sydnee: Yeah. Like, I mean, a lot of that stuff—I love a musical.

Taylor: [laughs] Love Patti LuPone.

Sydnee: I like to see, um... wildly liberated women. I like the idea of—I mean, when she comes running out of her house with her hair all over the place, completely naked, and, like, just no shame, there is—I mean, I don't really want to run around naked. But, like, there's a part of me that is very excited at, like, "Yes! Yes! We're free!"

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: So, I mean, there's just a lot. I don't know emotionally yet where I'll go with this. With WandaVision, it was a story of, like... immense grief and loss. And then deciding, like, "Oh no, I won't feel that, actually. I am so powerful that I am going to refuse to experience this grief and loss, and I am going to use this power to create an entirely new world for myself where I don't have to feel the grief and loss, because I refuse. I refuse to accept what the world has given me, and I'm gonna make it something else. And screw everything."

And I think there's something about that that I found, like, so—I mean, it's not human. Obviously she's, you know, a witch. But, like, it is human. It is human, if you had that power, and you experienced the kind of loss she did. Wouldn't you do that? I mean, like, how many of us can be sure we wouldn't?

And I think it's similar with, like, Loki, who's on this quest for, like, greatness, for what his purpose—glorious purpose, you know?

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Like, if you are, and your whole life has been about being second, and not enough, and bad, and the forgotten, and the leftover, and then you're on this quest for glorious purpose and you finally see it and it's so lonely, and it's so... it's so much loss, but it is what you've always wanted, and it's a sacrifice. I don't know. There's stuff in there that is very human. I think that's what it is. This has nothing to do with, like, big battle scenes. It's not big strong guys throwing things around. Nobody's shooting fire bolts at anybody.

Taylor: [laughs] Well, human stories are flawed stories.

Sydnee: Yeah. And I think, like, if you take a very human impulse—not even one of our better ones. Like, some of our worse impulses—and then you give us the power to, like, fully embrace it, what do we do with that? Is, like, a really interesting study of humanity, as told through these superhuman beings.

Taylor: That's—

Sydnee: And I don't know if that's what Agatha will be. Maybe.

Taylor: I don't know. I'm on board. It does seem to be the formula that they've locked into. And I do think you're right, and it is a current cultural reaction to, you know, the—the altruistic superhero or the gritty superhero or even the anti-hero. It's like, no. [laughs] Just give me bad guys on a road to redemption, which just not even a road to redemption. It's a road to power, but...

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: Um... I'm excited. I got my Disney Plus back just to watch this, so you better make it worth it, Disney.

Sydnee: I hope so. I hope so. I've—so far I love it. I'm very excited to see what the next—I also love this whole trope of, like, they'll come across these different challenges, and each—it's like an escape room vibe, right? Like, each challenge aligns with one of their powers, and it's going to, like, be a different—I don't know if they're all gonna be a different, um, cultural vibe,

or era in history, or what the, you know, aesthetic of each challenge is going to be.

Taylor: I just want more—I mean, I know that it's based on each kind of witchcraft, so they need a green witch, and so Rio has to come back, right?

Sydnee: Is that who Aubrey Plaza plays?

Taylor: Yeah. I need more of that character.

Sydnee: I am assuming that the heart that was on the piece of paper was not for Mrs. Heart.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: But was for the black heart that she referenced in that first episode.

Taylor: Yeah. There are lots of theories if that's... maybe Mrs. Heart is her in disguise, or lots of things. Who knows? [crosstalk]

Sydnee: Yeah. That is my guess, is that she is coming back. But I don't know.

Taylor: It's a very pointed line. That doesn't seem hard to discern. Like...

Sydnee: Right.

Taylor: "I have a black heart, and it beats for you." That seems very... on the nose.

Sydnee: Well, and it's also very clear that Sharon does not know what she's doing there.

Taylor: Yeah. Aww, Sharon.

Sydnee: So, yeah.

Taylor: Great character.

Sydnee: The scene—the scene, um—you've watched all three episodes?

Taylor: Yes.

Sydnee: The scene—I thought this was really interesting. Somebody pointed out—I didn't catch this, but on TikTok—the scene where she is hallucinating, and she's saying—

Taylor: Oh, and she sees Wanda.

Sydnee: That is a direct reference to the first episode to WandaVision.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: The black and white episode, where they're at dinner, where it's like Vision's boss came to dinner, and that's his boss's wife. That is a direct reference to what was happening in that scene where Wanda was making the boss choke. But you didn't know yet that Wanda was making the boss choke. You just thought the boss was—it was a weird scene. But you can overlap that, and that's what's happening in her mind.

Taylor: That was—it's interesting to see, like, the townspeople that, like, I don't know. You remember, it's in the Marvel world where superheroes and all this magic exists. So it's like, they're traumatized by Wanda. Wanda is the villain in their world.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: Agatha's just kind of the... the weird witch that kind of helped them out a bit?

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: But also had a battle with her? [laughs]

Sydnee: Right, nobody's quite clear on, like—I mean, well, they don't know that she is evil in any way, right?

Taylor: No, they try to help her out. They drop off covered dishes. [laughs]

Sydnee: Yeah. Yeah. As far as they know, she was also just really messed up by Wanda.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: So. Well, thank you for watching it. I know you hadn't initially intended to, but I just thought—

Taylor: No, I'm glad I did.

Sydnee: —this is the kind of thing you would enjoy too.

Taylor: Are you hoping—'cause you rooted for Wanda. Now you've got Agatha. Are you hoping that this ends with some sort of wraparound? Maybe Wanda's back in the universe?

Sydnee: I hope so. I hope Wanda isn't dead. I feel like there was a moment in the beginning where—what is the line? Agatha says something about, like... if you don't see 'em die, or you can never be too sure.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: There is something that she says that makes me think like, oh, that's a wink. Um, and I never thought Wanda was dead-dead. Like, we didn't see her die. We saw the temple collapse on her in the Doctor Strange movie, but we didn't see her die.

So I would like to see—I don't want to see these two face off, though. I don't want to see, like, some big battle between them. Um... 'cause—I don't know. I have empathy for both these characters.

Taylor: Maybe we're just moving towards another sort of Avengers situation, where witches [through laughter] have all of the... we have, like,

Yelena. We've got all of the—the new cast of Marvels that will align and kill something big bad.

Sydnee: And they're all women.

Taylor: They did that in the original, like, you know, big everybody assembles. They had that all-women scene. It wasn't all women, but they had the all-women scene. That was cool.

Sydnee: I didn't see that movie, so I don't—

Taylor: Well, alright.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: That's the thing that's funny. Just as much as you don't [through laughter] know that cosplay exists, you don't know that the Marvel universe exists outside of Loki, Wanda, and Agatha. Which, you know what? You're—you're getting the big hits, so don't worry about the rest of it.

Sydnee: I watched Thor: Love and Thunder. [laughs]

Taylor: Okay. I—

Sydnee: I watched Ragnarok eventually.

Taylor: Ragnarok is superior, but that's a whole other conversation.

Sydnee: It was good. But I did watch that eventually. And I went—I've gone back and I've watched some of the—I've watched the Doctor Strange stuff 'cause I love Benedict Cumberbatch.

Taylor: Yeah, you do—well, you also love an arrogant doctor.

Sydnee: I do love an arrogant doctor, yeah.

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: Uh, so I guess for next week...

Taylor: Well, but we're proper into October now, so I think...

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: I think we need to...

Sydnee: Would you like to pick something scary for us? Because I picked the original Buffy.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: And, um, I'm sure there are other old scary things that we have not discussed.

Taylor: Uh, alright. Well, um, Syd, I want to go way back. Uh, to—it's beyond both of our generations. But, um, I think an iconic Japanese horror movie. I want to talk about Hausu.

Sydnee: Let's talk about Hausu!

Taylor: [laughs] Let's get—

Sydnee: Perfect.

Taylor: Have a few drinks, pop some popcorn, and watch Hausu. [laughs]

Sydnee: That's perfect. Drinks, or if you're into other sorts of...

Taylor: The other things might be more suitable. [laughs]

Sydnee: The other things. Especially if you're in a state where that's legal.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Don't break the law.

Taylor: Actually, only if you're in a state where that's legal, for legal purposes.

Sydnee: Yes. If you're in a state where that's legal.

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: Please use responsibly.

Taylor: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: Well, thank you, Tey. I think that sounds great. I think that would be perfect. We'll watch Hausu for next week. And thank you to our listeners, thank you to Maximum Fun. You should go to Maximumfun.org and check out all the great shows that are there.

And you can email us at stillbuffering@maximumfun.org, and thank you to The Nouvellas for our theme song, Baby You Change Your Mind.

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

Sydnee: I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Taylor: And I'm Taylor Smirl.

Sydnee: I'm still buffering...

Taylor: And I am too.

[theme music plays]

Sydnee: Nailed it!

Taylor: Did it!

Sydnee: That was perfect!

Taylor: Seamless!

Sydnee: We just worked that out. Like, just now.

Taylor: The whole episode, like, "I'm not gonna—I'm not gonna get that right. That's not gonna happen."

Sydnee: I'm so proud of us!

Taylor: Great job. Great job, everybody.

Sydnee: Great job, everybody.

Taylor: [laughs]

[music plays]

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