

Still Buffering 452: Peacemaker (2025)

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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: Well, Tey, we're still here.

Taylor: What? Yeah? We're supposed to go somewhere?

Sydnee: Well, it's September 24th. And my understanding was that on the 23rd, the rapture was supposed to happen.

Taylor: Oh, yeah. Well, I just— I didn't think that concerned me.

Sydnee: Okay. Well, let me clarify. Everyone's still here.

Taylor: Oh, all right. [laughs] Yeah, I don't... if it had occurred, which, you know, unfortunately it's not, there's gonna be a lot of like free cars and empty houses or like... that would have been a little helpful to those of us left behind. Left behind with a free car sounds pretty good.

Sydnee: It was really interesting. So, I guess there was like a preacher in South Africa who predicted the rapture would happen because of some trumpets on the 23rd. Is that the Feast of Trumpets?

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: And so, a lot of people on TikTok— and now, I don't know, I could not tell, and maybe your algorithm was more precise. I could not tell sometimes if the person who was talking about the rapture on TikTok was

like legitimately talking about prepping for the rapture, or if they were kind of joking, like poking fun at prepping for the rapture. After a while, I could not tell the difference between the two, and which means I just assumed they were all jokes, but I don't think they were all jokes.

Taylor: No, they definitely weren't. I was, I was a little annoyed at that though, because I just wanted to like, as a blanket statement, like, hey, the people that are legitimately believing this are funny enough. You don't need to do a skit about it. Get out of my way. I want to see the real ones.
[laughs]

Sydnee: Yeah. No, I, because what, what started to become a theme that I do think some people... I mean, I saw some like really intense preppers that I really, I think were legit. And they, there was a theme that emerged that I, I guess, because I don't know, like... we didn't talk about the rapture being raised Catholic. Like, do you remember talking about the rapture a lot?

Taylor: No, I mean, I don't... you know, this is, I'm far removed from any biblical studies, but I'm fairly certain the rapture is not like a... they're only certain sects of Christianity, they get all up, all up over the rapture, right? Like, it's not like a biblical thing, actually. It's a...

Sydnee: Right. Well, it was a, it was created long after... like it came about, it was one of those late-stage inventions of Christianity. Kind of like how at some point, Christianity became solely about stopping abortion. But it didn't used to be. It's sort of like that. Like the rapture...

Taylor: Yeah. The add-on.

Sydnee: Like, I don't know, it goes back to like the 1950s or something.

Taylor: Now, see, I don't think that should count. I think everything Bible-y has to come from the era of the Bible. You can't just keep adding stuff into it. I mean, they do, and they will, but...

Sydnee: Yeah. No, I do not, I do not... Okay. I'm just making sure I'm not wrong. I feel like all those years of Catholic school and CCD and catechism

and then like, the Newman Center in college, I feel like, I was a Eucharistic minister. I should know if Catholics believed in the rapture.

Taylor: Well, no, because we've got our own, we've got, you know, it's like how a video game has multiple endings. We've got— the Catholic ending exists. That's revelations. That's where we all go.

Sydnee: Yeah. But even that, like, is a, it's metaphorical. It's not literal. You know. But yes. So, okay, we were not, we did not, I, we don't... Catholics don't believe in the rapture. I was never taught about the rapture.

I don't, my understanding of the rapture solely comes from like a passing familiarity with the Left Behind series. Which I never saw or read, but I am aware of because it's kind of funny that it, that it exists. Right? It's just kind of, there's this whole book series about that you could read that Kurt Cameron would want you to read, but...

Taylor: I just like, I don't, I don't know where the, the focus on it comes from. I mean, I guess I can, I can imagine it, and it's very sad. Like the weird hope that like your life is going to end abruptly.

Sydnee: It is, that sort of longing for the end - and that's not just like rapture centric faiths. There are quite a few like apocalyptic, you know, sects of Christianity and probably other religions too, but that's what I'm familiar with. That are like really yearning for end of days. And I don't, I don't understand that personally, either. Even if you believe in all that stuff, I really don't understand that.

But here is what struck me. That a theme emerged, several people suggested that when the rapture happens, it's not just like what I assumed, which is people just disappear. Like you're sitting there, you know, having lunch with your very Christian friend who's much more holy than you. And you're like, mid, like, bite of your salad and you're looking down, then you look back up and your friend's gone. Right? Like that was kind of what I assumed the rapture was like, was...

Taylor: Spontaneous human ascension.

Sydnee: Like I think, I think in the movie, I haven't seen it, but Justin was telling me about it. I think in Left Behind, like, planes fall out of the air because the pilot just vanishes. Right. Like, that, that would be a big issue. Really. If you think about it, that's a big one.

But the, what several people on TikTok suggested is that it's not so much a vanishing as a floating into space as like... Like you are physically floating up into the sky.

Taylor: Uh-huh. I'm going to go stand outside all day because I don't want the ceiling to get in the way because if I'm inside and when it happens, if I cannot get to an exit, I'm just going to be stuck on the ceiling forever.

Sydnee: You're just like an old helium balloon trapped in the ceiling of a Billy Bob's. [laughs] Until eventually you deflate? I don't know. But that I, as I was watching these people, I started, well, I mean, you don't really think you float. Do you? And then I was watching more and I was like, oh, I think they think they float. They think they're going to literally float. Like this is a literal thing where I will be standing there and all of a sudden, it's like, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa.

Taylor: There he go.

Sydnee: And you start floating, and I saw like people recommending like don't hold on to anything, which I guess that makes sense, because you want to go. Don't—

Taylor: What if you don't want to? It's like that scene in Twister when they're when they're in the in the middle of the cone.

Sydnee: Yeah. And they like strap themselves to the, with the belt. No, but the other thing is, one woman suggested that your clothes will vanish, and they will be left in like a neat little pile below you, because she was like saying make sure you wear clean underwear, because then when people find the pile of your clothes, you don't want to be embarrassed.

Taylor: I guess, but that that that that doesn't make sense, because if you're floating away like your physical body is floating away. Why would your clothes stay on?

Sydnee: I don't know. I don't know why they wouldn't. And I also don't know why they want to imagine that at the end of days, they will float naked...

Taylor: Into space.

Sydnee: Into space. [laughs]

Taylor: Like, that just doesn't even work geographically, because the earth is— well, the earth is round. A lot of these... there might be a cross section here, the people that don't believe that statement. But everybody would be going off in different directions.

Sydnee: I just don't... floating...

Taylor: It's a really... I just, I, the idea that that this must insist upon the belief that heaven is up in the sky, like in the cloud layer. That is where... that's God's house.

Sydnee: Like a literal place right there.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: No, it's— that part really, really threw me. Like a lot of it, I was like, man, I felt the same way you do. I never understood why people long for that. I don't... I mean, and that's, again, I feel like a lot of it is influenced by how you were raised. And we were, you know, raised in the Catholic church, and there isn't this huge focus on like, life sucks and everything's miserable and won't it be great when we die? Like, you know what I mean? That definitely, you know there's a reward, but also, you're supposed to be like, doing good things while you're here. And so, that sort of yearning for end of days was never like... I didn't know a lot of adults who felt that way,

you know? But I definitely get that vibe from people who are excited about the rapture.

I still don't understand, even if you feel that way, why you hope that it will be just your naked butt flowing up through the trees like— it's going to get cold, after a while. Or do you not feel cold anymore? Do you— do you lose awareness of your— of clothing? Like, you go back to like pre tree of knowledge and you no longer aware of your nudity?

Taylor: See, I think specifically, I have been a heathen my whole life just so I won't have to float naked in the sky with other people, because that sounds like my worst nightmare.

Sydnee: It sounds awful. I mean, it sounds awful.

Taylor: I was also surprised that how many people seem to be mourning that they would not see their kids anymore. And I'm like, what? How bad are your kids that you decided you're going to go float up to heaven, but sorry kids.

Sydnee: That's, that's really weird. Yeah, I mean, I did see... and see, I don't know some of these. It was a joke like, somebody messaging like, their friend who was gay and saying like, will you watch my dog when I'm raptured?

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: Like assuming.

Taylor: I would hope it was a joke, but you know what, I don't have I don't have that much faith in the people that were participating in this.

Sydnee: Well, and I don't know, like... there was— supposedly, someone sold her car in her house in preparation.

Taylor: Now, that, you know, that's the thing that makes me upset. It's like, if more people have put their money where their mouth was, I would have—

I would have at least had some respect for that. Like, okay, if you think you're a good Christian and you think you're about to be raptured, why wouldn't you donate all your money to your local homeless shelter, or... yeah, sell your house, sell your car. Give it away.

Sydnee: Well, that... because I think— I really think, like, if all you believe is that this life is supposed to be suffering and yearning for the next, then you can't be very concerned with people who are suffering more than you, right? Because it's like, part of the thing. So, you don't have to worry about donating to charity or helping people experiencing homelessness or feeding the hungry. You don't have to worry about all that stuff. Jesus did, because suffering is part of it. And so, it's fine. It's like, expected. And that's why you see the people who like, the way that they were taking care of those who would be left behind, was like, leaving out a stack of Bibles on their kitchen counter for people who, I guess come live in their house when they disappear.

Taylor: Is there like— is the rapture like, multiple rounds? Can you, can— once it has occurred, can you qualify for it, like... let's say you do, you go— the rapture person is raptured their house is empty. Their little pile of clothes is there. You go in, you move in, you read the Bibles they leave out for you. If you like, get it, then do you... do you also get... Is there a re-rapture?

Sydnee: This is... okay. I don't, again, I don't— I've not— I don't know all the particulars. But it also kind of feels like people just made it up. So, I think it's fair for us to guess. I think it's supposed to be like *The Stand*. This is, this is— So, if you imagine that in *The Stand*, the Stephen King book, all the people who die of Captain Trips, all the people who die of the sickness in the beginning. Imagine that that's sort of a rapture analogy. They all get to escape what comes next. Like they're just, they're done, they're with God. Instead of floating into the air naked, they died a horrible tube neck death. So that sucks.

But, same idea. They're all gone. And then after that, there will be two camps. Like, you will either join the anti-Christ, the bad guy, Randall Flagg, or you will follow... oh, mother, mother... crap, I forgot her name. You know the one.

Taylor: Yeah. [laughs]

Sydnee: You know, the good woman. The good one. Or the “good” one. The Jesus stand in. You'll follow the good one. And then, you will stand— There will be a final stand between good and evil, and those who stood with the good side will get to go to heaven in that second round. Like... You didn't make the first cut, but you made the second cut.

Taylor: Gotcha. Now, are we sure that the rapture didn't occur at some previous time, and we are now in that phase of things? Because I think that makes a little bit more sense. Maybe God looked down and went, nuh-uh, none of you. None of you qualify. None of you get through the first round.

Sydnee: Well, okay. Let me say this. I think that if you were really determined to buy this rapture narrative, you may believe that the pandemic...

Taylor: Ah, okay.

Sydnee: But the problem is that I bet you that the people who believe in the rapture and the people who think COVID was a hoax... I bet that Venn diagram is a circle.

Taylor: Yeah. Yeah.

Sydnee: So, you can't. You can't both believe that that, you know, was God stepping in and taking people home. And also, it was fake and doctors made it up with Fauci and China and I don't know, whatever the... whatever the deep state narrative is on that. I'm not really clear.

Taylor: It's so interesting to me. I mean, this is where... this is where me and religion, I guess, part ways, is that like... think of it—let's do an analogy. Disney World. Right?

Disney World is really cool. There's a lot of fun stuff there. You can eat, drink. You can you can see shows. You can go on rides. Disney World has all

this cool stuff to do. You wouldn't buy a ticket to Disney World and then blindfold yourself and sit on the ground. Like, if Walt Disney looked down from... where is his head frozen? It's in the Cinderella's Castle?

Sydnee: I believe. Yes.

Taylor: If he looked down at the thing he created, and he saw you sitting there like covering your ears and covering your eyes and going, "La la la la la!" Like...well, you're wasting a ticket to Disney World. I did all this work making Disney World, and you're ignoring all of it. And you think that's going to make me happy? No. Enjoy the thing that I put all this work into making.

Sydnee: I feel very similarly. I've never understood that piece of it. Like, even if you think... even if you truly believe that, the sort of the like, vision of... I was thinking like, heaven as like in... in the Care Bears movie.

Taylor: Oh, heaven as portrayed in the Care Bears movie. It's been a minute. I haven't had my monthly viewing of the Care Bears movie in a while.

Sydnee: Well, I don't mean like, they don't show heaven in the Care Bears movie, but like where the Care Bears live in Care-A-Lot looks like what I, as a child, I imagine heaven looked like. You're just kind of walking around on clouds and you can float from place to place up there, and it's all pretty and there's rainbows and... you know, if that is your— if that is your heartfelt belief, even if that, and that looks beautiful and wonderful and there's Care Bears there and that's great.

You still have all this time here, and like, exactly, like, if you believe God made it for you... Don't you owe it to him to enjoy it? And it doesn't have to be in a heathen way. It doesn't have to be in a like, so live it up and party. I'm just saying like, and I don't mean that I believe that's heathen. I'm saying, from that perspective.

Taylor: Right. Yeah.

Sydnee: Yeah. Like you could in a very, like— go on hikes and look at his creation, or eat food grown in the earth. I don't know. Whatever. Drink water. Whatever the healthy things are, whatever the healthy version of all this is.

Taylor: That's what I think healthy people do. They eat plants, drink water, and hike.

Sydnee: I think so. And like, enjoy each other and sing songs and dance and love one another, and like, enjoy all that, knowing that Care-A-Lot awaits. That feels to me like that makes sense.

Taylor: Well, but that... I mean, yeah, but that trips the system, because ultimately, specifically, Christianity has been hijacked by people that... if you think that the best thing you can do is accept whatever you're handed in life is toil and suffer, then you're not going to be too demanding about what you are and aren't provided by your government or the people in control. If you're a better person by accepting struggle and bad conditions, and like you said, it disqualifies caring about your fellow man, because we're supposed to struggle, so why would I help people when they're doing exactly what they're supposed to do? It's just really useful for rich buttheads that want to control us.

Sydnee: It's, you know, I... I do feel... obviously, I'm not sad that the world didn't end. I don't want the world to end, so I'm... and I also don't believe it does, but I'm not sad about that. I am sad for people who are sad today. I am sad for those who like, long for that and plan for that and feel that deep disappointment. I'm sad on many levels.

Not, again, not because the world didn't end. [laughs] I'm quite pleased that we're here and I hope to be here as long as possible, but... I, but that is very sad. And again, I'm not like... everybody has a right to their beliefs as long as it's not... as long as your belief isn't harming others, and taking, you know, agency away from others.

I believe a lot of things that people might think are bizarre, and so I think that's fine, right? But I do I do think that if part of that belief is that you

float naked into the sky, I am surprised. I am surprised to learn that that is an aspect of it. That's all I'm saying. I just assumed it was a disappearing act. I never fathomed that it was a literal flotation situation.

Taylor: I don't know. [laughs] I... yeah, I want to have... I want to have sympathy. It's just hard when that's... when that's the element that was involved. It's also, I don't know. It's a bit like, God's judgment on who goes and who stays. So, I think all these people, they're like, I know I'm in. I know I'm in. I think that's a little audacious. I think it's audacious to say I'm in, and I'm addressing people that will definitely be out. Like...

Sydnee: Yeah, that's... I mean, but see, again, I think that comes from our background. I think that if you are coming from a more evangelical background, you do have that certainty, because if you've been saved, you're good. Like if you... You believe in Jesus, that is the thing. Whereas we have more of this like, but are you showing it? [laughs] That's, but what are you—but what are you doing? What have you done for him lately?

Like, I think I think we had a little more focus on that. But I don't know. I will also say like, talking to Justin about it. Justin didn't... I don't think the rapture was a big part of his, you know, evangelical raising. Certainly not like the floating naked part. So... and if you are somebody who is like, biblical fundamentalist, they tell you that you can't know the day or the hour like that.

Taylor: And that is in the Bible.

Sydnee: Yes. That is impossible to know. And then if someone comes and tells you that they know, that that... that they are lying. So, do with all that what you will. I mean, I, again, I think that the world is fascinating if everyone has their own beliefs that move them through life in a meaningful way and bring them joy and, and you know, fill their... imbue them with purpose and a sense of... whatever. Like, I think all that is wonderful, as long as those beliefs don't infringe on others' rights to exist and believe and be peaceful.

I don't care what they are, and they can be what someone else would think is weird or bizarre. That's fine, too. I just, I never imagined that it was floating naked. I never in all of my concepts of the rapture. I never thought that was it.

Taylor: Well, it just got the wrong date. I think I think a lot of people have settled on another one.

Sydnee: Well, that tends to be the way of it. That reminds me that episode of Parks and Rec where the doomsday cult keeps reserving the park for the next year on the day that the world's going to end, and then it doesn't happen. So, they come in to reserve the park for the next year on the day the world's going to end.

Taylor: I think I already got one video of someone saying like, that's the wrong date. There are other dates that also align with it. So, you know.

Sydnee: I wondered if those people were just going to stay off TikTok for a while to make us all wonder. Like, well, they haven't made a TikTok. Did it happen? [laughs]

Taylor: That's the thing, like maybe it was a really like a VIP situation. You know? There's just... only a few people got through. I don't know. You know anybody that passed away yesterday, there were— at least somebody in their circle be like, well, maybe.

Sydnee: Maybe. Yeah. I mean, if you don't... if you don't buy the literal floatation thing...

Taylor: Yeah. I don't know. Yeah, I don't want— I would— I'm going to live my life extra bad so I don't ever have to worry about that happening. That sounds awful.

Sydnee: Yeah. I don't, that... that part... really, just like, go back to the disappearing thing. That's more palatable for sure.

Taylor: I'm going to covet so hard to avoid being naked with strangers.

Sydnee: [laughs] I didn't think conservatives were that big on nudity. It really shocked me.

Taylor: You know, I think it's a pretty safe statement that most things that conservatives rail against, they're actually way into.

Sydnee: Any... I don't know. I don't have a transition. I don't have a... we're going to talk about Peacemaker.

Taylor: Yeah. Very excited to talk about Peacemaker with you.

Sydnee: Yeah. We just started... So, Justin had tried to convince me to watch it when the first season came out. And for some reason, I just, I don't know. I didn't think it would be my thing. So, he finally convinced me to try it again last month, and we just tore right through the first season in time to catch up with the second season. And I love it.

Taylor: Yeah. I went through the same thing, where I did not watch it when it first came on, because it was so recent after when I saw the Suicide Squad, the one... the James Gunn Suicide Squad. And I hated him so much, because I liked Rick Flagg. And I, you know, I don't like this character. He killed Rick Flagg. Why does he get a redemption? But enough friends finally told me, but you'll like it. You'll like it. The whole thing is about that. You'll like it. And I do.

Sydnee: No, it's very good. It's very smart. I wonder... it got me wondering, as I watched it and I started figuring out like, oh, okay. I mean, I don't know the history of this character. Right. Like, the official you know canon around Peacemaker. But I could guess that he is like, that his stand-in as the United States of America, him as a, you know, an allegory for that is intentional. I have to assume that this predates this TV show.

Taylor: Yeah, I think so.

Sydnee: Like that that— it's not like— they're just leaning into it and making it part of the storyline. But I didn't... I also wonder how many people

started watching it without realizing that that's what the commentary was. Who are just like, you know, ooh, John Cena, big, tough, beating up on people.

Taylor: Yeah. Well, and it's... I mean, that is very much the character that he played in Suicide Squad, was a little bit more one note. It was just, you know, peace through any means.

Sydnee: No matter how many men women or children I have to kill to get it.

Taylor: Yeah, like that. You know, just following orders. Like, literally why he commits murder. Like, that is... a very different, you know, this series is almost a deconstruction of that character.

Sydnee: Well, and I think that, I mean... so are we spoiling it, I guess? Although I don't know how to spoil the second season, because I don't feel like we've gotten the final...

Taylor: No, we can make guesses on what it's going to be. There are a lot of popular guesses, but yeah. By the time this episode goes up, we will know what happens. Somewhat.

Sydnee: Oh, I guess... I assume. If they give us more info in the next episode.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Basically, the plot plot is that Peacemaker is being used by, you know, Argus, by like a secret Black Ops operation.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: To end Project Butterfly, which is, you know, a bunch of aliens that look like butterflies that are taking over humans and infiltrating the Earth in order to take it over. Because we suck at taking care of the Earth. And so, they're going to take it over and do it the right way. Because we're stupid.

And he's got to kill them all and stop it. And that's sort of the, that's the plot plot.

Taylor: Yeah. But the, on a deeper level, it's Peacemaker coming to terms with his family. He was raised by a horrible racist who goes by the super name White Dragon. Yes.

Sydney: He's very much, I mean, he is very clearly like the KKK in a person.

Taylor: Yeah. And I don't know, regaining trust from, earning the trust of the people around him, one of which is Harcourt, who is best friends with the man that he killed. You got Amanda Waller's daughter out of bio, sort of put in charge of him.

Sydney: And I think, I think the juxtaposition of Peacemaker, who is... I mean, okay. I was looking at it as sort of like generations of America, and especially like, the masculine presence, which overlaps with like the dominating social power and political power, right? Because it generally was a masculine presence.

Like, if you look at the history of Peacemaker, his dad, he's a literal racist, a literal open, hostile, hates everybody who isn't white and straight and cis and just like... just hate. There's nothing nuanced about it. There's nothing. He is, he is like, you know, the grandfather who's glued to the Fox News, just becoming more angry and filled with hate every second of every day. And he's open about it. And that is the history of America.

And then you get to Peacemaker who's like, no, I mean, I don't hate anybody. I'm just like, I, yeah, I don't, I'm not racist. I'm not sexist. I, I just want to do the right thing. And, you know, the right thing is, is to follow the law and be a good person. And if you commit a crime, you should get killed for it. And that's pretty normal. And, you know, like...

Taylor: Well, and even like, especially in the movie more than the series, he's like very insistent on his, he just happens to be superior. Like he's just,

he's just better than most people. So that's why he has the power, and that's why he gets to make the decisions.

Sydnee: Yeah. And it's not, and it's not like, he didn't mean to, he didn't choose to be a white guy who gets to do this. It's just what happened. And it's not his fault. And, you know, and I do think it's interesting if you then look at the character of Vigilante, who's, I would say younger, right? He kind of, he kind of reads as like a younger dude.

And like, you get to this sort of like, I don't know, nihilist kind of like, not only will I kill anyone who breaks the rules. I've been given the rules by my predecessor, Peacemaker, who I worship and love and adore and want to be best friends with. He told me all the rules and I will follow them relentlessly. And I feel nothing about any of it. I don't, I mean, he, he will kill anyone. It's funny. It's a joke. It's, it's very much like internet culture. It's very much like a little incel-y, you know what I mean?

Taylor: Hmm. Interesting.

Sydnee: Like it, it very much, and I think he grows. I mean, I think his character grows and changes and you see more of him as it goes on. But initially it's like, the way he's willing to, you know, in the, I don't remember what episode it was, but when they're seeing aliens who have taken over the bodies of children and so...

Taylor: Oh, right. Yep.

Sydnee: You're killing aliens, but they look like kids. I mean, he feels nothing about that.

Taylor: Well, that's interesting, because I wondered why the change. I mean, part of it just because it's a more fun character. The change is so serious from him in the comics versus him in the show. That was part of why, you know, it's not the original. There was a different actor that was cast as Vigilante, and they shot several episodes with him. And so, a lot of times in that first season when it's, when Vigilante is in the suit, it's the other actor, because they could still use that footage and just dub over the

new Adrian's voice. But part of it was that that original actor just didn't fit the tone that James Gunn took it in, which is such a silly character. Like he's a silly, goofy guy.

Whereas in the comics, Adrian Chase, Vigilante is very dark and brooding. He has— he's a Punisher copy, you know, like he lost his whole family to violence and that's why he dons the costume and fights for good. And he's not quite like Batman, because Batman has those sort of moral laws that he sets up for himself. His no kill laws. Punisher will murder people because his people were murdered. And so that was more, there was a passion and an idea behind it. Whereas this Vigilante doesn't seem... that isn't that is not who we get on screen. [laughs]

Sydnee: No, no, I mean, it very much feels like... I know, I mean, there are rights and wrongs in society and there need to be people who enforce those rights and wrongs. And to me, like, whether you're jaywalking or committing murder, you're doing a wrong. And so, you should be punished for it. And that's just I mean, there's a there's a kind of like matter-of-fact... Like, I mean, there really is. I mean, if he if he feels any way about it, he doesn't show it.

Taylor: I mean, he even says like in the script that he doesn't process emotions like other people. Like implying, I think... there was even— I don't want to misquote it, but there was a discussion with James Gunn about what the perspective was on that character. And he said what personality disorder he sort of writes him from. I think it was antisocial.

Sydnee: That makes sense. Antisocial would be my guess. The idea that he doesn't feel guilt. He has no conscience. But it's not— he just doesn't— he can't. Like it's not that he you know, it's not a choice. It's not that he's choosing not to feel bad about it. It's that is not something that he is capable of experiencing.

Taylor: Well, and I think this is it's interesting that the line that you drew from, you know, the very obviously racist dad, the... Let's say accidentally, you know, toxically masculine Peacemaker down to Vigilante as like a progression, where the answer is still abject violence to societal problems that start from the ground up. It's interesting, because I will admit to being

drawn into it. And I think I'm not alone in that with how many Vigilante edits I've got. People love his character. Like, I think there's a good amount of the audience is like this. This kid's got it right. He's the one that's on the on the right side. It's like, well, no. And I mean, the show is aware of it. There's that great moment where they're talking about like what is... like, their secrets.

And he goes, well, I have to admit this. Like, you know, I like spiders, that makes me ghoulish. And Adebayo is like, you... How many people have you killed? Like, no, you're ghoulish because of your violence.

Sydnee: Well, and but I do think I think you're right in that. And you also like, in Vigilante, you really get he is removed from a lot of those like the inherent like racism and sexism. It is starting to fade somewhat. Right? Like you don't see that. Like those are not his big issues. I do think at times he makes... I mean, I don't know. I mean, I'm sure he makes comments that he's unaware of some of those biases. Right? But his issue is no longer— It's not, it's not as clear as like, White Dragon is a white supremacist. That's what he is. Right? And he wants to kill everybody who isn't of the right, quote unquote, right race. That's it. I mean, it's very straightforward.

That's not Vigilante's thing. And so, once you start to dissociate that sort of like, violence is the answer to maintaining the social order, from any kind of like definite political structure, you're going to see where the two sides circle back to meet. I mean, that's where the right and left can kind of go to... so far that they meet, which is, violence is fine. Violence is not only acceptable, but necessary and part of what we're trying to do.

Taylor: Well, and I think it even operates like, even expanded from there. It's violence, but in the name of justice. And I get to decide what justice is. I get to decide what's right and what's wrong. And we have to punish the wrong people, and yet to try to be the right person. I think that's really, I mean, when we talk about, we talk about America, I think that's... if you've gone through the deconstruction of your American identity, there's a point where you realize it's not just about this one aspect or that one aspect, be it historical racism, misogyny, homophobia, it's that we feel the need— And we live in a judgment-based society where it is we take it upon ourselves to decide what is right and what is wrong. And we have every right to

condemn, other, or murder people that we define as wrong. And that... that's kind of the last step that you have to unpack, like, you know, to actually get to peace is that...

Sydnee: It's interesting though, because then if Peacemaker is sort of the in the middle, it's like, and especially as we start to move into like other dimensions, like he can cross into other realities, other versions of the future or the present or whatever. It opens the door for, is there another path for us still? Are we locked into that future?

And I think that that's why Adebayo and his friendship is so like, central to the theme, because if she can accept him and get past all of that, and if he can learn from her, if he can build a friendship with her and grow from that connection. I mean, I think that's very intentional, right? Like, we have a black woman who has stepped in, a black queer woman, who has stepped in to save America, essentially, right? And that's, I mean, I don't think that there's, I don't think that's unintentional at all.

Taylor: No, of course not. Well, I mean, but the other world is so... I mean, I think, you know, this is where we get the spoilers, because we don't know what's up with the other world. But there are soft spoilers at least discussing what is there that we've seen. And in this other dimension, his, his, you know, because he kills his father in the previous season. So, his father is still alive. His brother, who he killed at a young age, is there. Harcourt is in love with him, and he's respected and he's loved and he's renowned.

Sydnee: The three of them are the top trio who go around doing some sort of good together.

Taylor: Which, a lot of people have put the puzzle pieces together that this is... I mean, they're, they're actually the big one in the comics. That is like the Nazi one world is Earth X. There's another version that's also like a white supremacist possible Earth. But that's what a lot of people are assuming. Like, that's what he's seen through the other dimension. He hasn't realized that yet.

But that's why, because, because if this is the top trio, then you have to assume this is a world where, like, where's Superman? Where's, where's Mr. Terrific? You know, where's, where's Hawkgirl? Where are the, the, the, even the diversity in like, supes? Where, where is it?

Sydnee: Hmm. Well, and I mean, Superman's an alien, so...

Taylor: Right.

Sydnee: Yeah. He wouldn't be welcome, I guess.

Taylor: Well, or perhaps he's seen some version of like the, what is it, the Ultraman, or the... no, that's not... There's, there is a, there is a Superman that instead of being raised by like, you know, the, the kind of Kents, he was brought up to be a tool of the Nazi party.

Sydnee: Oh, is there? I knew there was one where he was in the, where he was in, he was a Soviet.

Taylor: That's the Red Sun Superman. Yeah. Superman's been written as anything possible. [laughs] I mean, that's an interesting story point. Like what if he ended up anywhere else but with a couple nice old people in Kansas? Hard to say.

Sydnee: It, I think, though, that it's funny, because I saw pretty quickly like, oh, okay, he's America. He's like running around, spreading peace everywhere in the most violent, destructive way possible, with little regard for who else is impacted or how, or like anybody's perspective but America's. Like, well, this is what we think's right. So it must be right. We better go do it. Yay. We saved the day. Peace. Like you get that really quickly. There's no nuance there. But then the other part of it is, one, John Cena's really likable.

Taylor: Yes.

Sydnee: And two, he, he genuinely seems to be... like he believes that he's doing right. And as he is confronted throughout the series with the idea that maybe he's not the good guy, maybe he's not virtuous. He's, you can see

he's genuinely upset by that. That he was never trying to just harm people. But he did. And he can't just be, you know, we can't let that go. We can't just pretend like it didn't happen. But is there a redemption for him?

It feels like such a, as somebody who, I don't know, who experiences America the way I do right now, it feels like such an important question.

Taylor: Well, and I, I didn't make the original connection, but I've seen some people interpret it this way. And I think it's really powerful, because it's such a such a sad problem in society is that him deciding, no, like, I can't make this world better for me. I can't be a good man in this world.

So, think about it. I'm going to leave the people I love a note, and go somewhere where I can be with my dead dad and my dead brother and be somewhere where everything's perfect and no one can find me. But it's, it's a bit of an analogy for, for suicide.

Sydney: Now, I didn't really think about it that way. But yeah.

Taylor: That's giving up on his possibility for redemption in this world. Because you think that there would actually like, if you think of like, from that position, like actually, I mean, you know, when it's just a TV show, you're watching the plot. But if you put that in a, like a real situation, like, to choose to leave everything you know behind for some ideal version of it is a decision to leave your reality.

Sydney: Wow. I didn't really think about it that way, but it definitely... I mean, I can, you can definitely read that into it.

Taylor: And that's such a problem tied to, I mean, the male suicide rates are increasing. And I think that, you know, we have these conversations where it's like, I'm not going to, I don't want to have sympathy for men that make themselves miserable because they've allowed themselves to be indoctrinated into violent, misogynistic viewpoints.

But it is a... it's a problem that we have in society. And I think in a very smart way, in a way that the young men watching it won't turn it off and go,

oh no, it's woke. I think this show is also trying to engage with that. That sort of...

Sydnee: I think you're right. I agree with you completely. I, as I was watching it, I thought there are going to be people who keep watching this without like, immediately picking up on all of those things. Just because if you're not, if you're not always thinking about and engaging with like these ideas, you're not, you're not necessarily going to pick up on it right away. There are going to be, especially like younger people, younger men who are going to watch this and just think like, this is a cool show, but are going to be receiving these messages, which is positive. But I mean, it's a good point. We talk a lot about toxic masculinity, and it recognizes how damaging it is for everyone. For everyone, right?

Taylor: I mean, even the doctor that diagnoses Harcourt is a woman with toxic masculinity. Like that's what she's expressing. Like that detail is included on purpose because yes, you can, you can participate and echo a toxic masculine society without being a man. Yeah.

Sydnee: White women do it all the time.

Taylor: Uh-huh. And I don't know. I mean, I think that that is, it's, you know, how do you be, how do you be a good man? I think is, is the quest that he's on. And that is an important, an important question to ponder. I mean, and even like back to that, that idea that like, is it sort of a stand in for, for suicide? If you're familiar with Vigilante in the comics, that's how his story ends. He decides, I hurt more people than I can help. Everybody around me gets hurt because I'm trying to do good. The best thing I can do for this world is to leave it.

Sydnee: I didn't know that.

Taylor: Yeah. Well, that's why it's such a stark difference to have this kind of this happy go lucky, silly, goofy guy Vigilante, when that is his comic book narrative.

Sydnee: But I do think it's interesting, because I could still see that character taking that trajectory, just if you, if you see him in terms of sort of like modern internet culture.

Taylor: Exactly. Well, and that's usually where it gets like if your worth comes to you through your ability to express. I mean, you know, your worth as a man comes from this sort of codified toxic pathway. And you decide, well, I'll never get there. I mean, young men talk about that all the time online. It's terrifying, you know, this idea that like you're... all the terms. I mean, God, we've all been introduced to them this last like two weeks, right?

Sydnee: Yes, unfortunately. Yes, I have a lot of that on my TikTok algorithm as well.

Taylor: There's a lot of maxing, and there's a lot of, I don't know, are you a Chad? Are you chopped? It's a lot of this decision of your worth based on very, very white-centric features, very like cliché examples of what a man should look like, should behave like, should achieve. And that if you fall short on that, the only answer is oblivion.

Sydnee: I do feel like it will be interesting to see how all this wraps up, this seas— like, how it all gets tied up, because I feel like we're opening up giant questions that are incredibly current and relevant. And I don't know how you answer them when... you know what I mean, as a society, we haven't. We don't have the, I mean, I'm not saying nobody has the answers, but we have not collected the answers. We haven't actively decided on them yet.

Taylor: No, but I mean, I have, I have faith in James Gunn. I think that, you know, I think he's telling a story that is that needs to be told. He said that the next three episodes are going to be like, kind of kick into high gear. So I'm very excited to see where it goes.

But yeah, I don't know. I mean, even if it just brings up these kinds of considerations and conversations, it's good that there's a vehicle for having them. While also, you know, that's the trick, is like, you can engage. That's what good art should do. It should make you think you're having the original

thought, make you ponder these things without feeling like you're being, you know, you're not being speechified at. You're just watching a fun show that you enjoy and it's making you go like, oh, I like this, this big guy. I want him to win, but I also want him to redeem himself in a way that breaks from the traditional patterns that he's been indoctrinated into.

Sydnee: It helps that they keep making him look like a little boy by walking around in tighty-whities and a t-shirt.

Taylor: [laughs] Yeah. Well, he is... I mean, he's so big that something— I don't know. He's very good at making himself seem small, despite being such a massive man.

Sydnee: Somebody says your body is made of balloons, or what did they say at one point? Why is everything? I don't know. It's funny. They talk about that on the show in ways that it's very funny. I don't know.

Taylor: I mean, I don't think like a, like a... I think having him be cartoonishly muscular, which John Cena just is. He's just a massive dude.

Sydnee: Yes, he is.

Taylor: It really, like he's... it's funny though, because I really love the character, and I'm curious if you ever, if you have a thought on how this fits into your sort of ordering the, you know, the masculine figures, like, because Economos is such a major character who exists sort of outside of that. You know, like he, he's doing, he's doing good. I mean, there have been key plot points that he saved the day, but not in some big heroic, violent way. He saved the day by his intelligence. He saved the day by his loyalty. And it's funny, speaking of bigness, like that dude is so tall. There is not a single person that's shoulder to shoulder with him.

Sydnee: That's true, but he definitely, I mean, I think that that's in those sorts of like, whether we're talking about superhero or in like, spy things or like that kind of action movies. The guy who does the computers is always like, outside of traditional masculine archetypes. Right? Like that's always like, I mean, traditionally, the quote unquote nerd. And I'm not saying he is,

but like, I think you get to be something else. You get to be a whole character when you're that, because you don't have, I mean, you're not the guy who beats people up. You're outside of it. And so that gives you more latitude.

Taylor: Well, and I, you know, it's, he does heroic things despite kind of giving himself that out. Like I'm not the hero. Like I don't, I'm just trying to survive, but he keeps putting his neck on the line to do the right thing, which... I don't know, is... it's interesting.

Sydnee: Oh, I talk a lot about like there are good, there are ways to be masculine that are not toxic, obviously. And I think that's one of them.

Taylor: Do the, do the computer stuff? [laughs]

Sydnee: Do the computers.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: The 1337 h4x0r [leet haxor]. I also, the dancing is great at the beginning. Watch the credits every time.

Taylor: The only no-skip opening. And I don't know, like, I did a rewatch of Dexter not too long ago. And as much as I love that opening, there's a point where you're like, yeah, yeah, you know, fun, fun, on my fourth binged episode. I don't need to see it again. I will watch the Peacemaker opening either season. And I think I like the second one better. It's grown on me.

Sydnee: Yeah? Like, I, yeah, I like the second— I like the ending. I think it's very funny.

Taylor: Well, I feel like it's just... I knew we were in for a more emotional season when that was the opening, because it's, it's a lot heavier. The first one's so silly. And I'm like, oh no. And then I think we're watching the season that perfectly matches the intro. So that's great.

Sydnee: Well, I, I'm glad that I started watching it. I'm glad that you wanted to talk about it because it really, Justin and I spend tons of time after every episode talking about it. Well, and it's just, I mean, it's so, it's entertaining. It's funny. It's moving. And then it also, like, there's just so much to think about after every episode. I really, I really think it's great. Highly recommend.

Taylor: Yes. Same.

Sydnee: Um, Tey, what's, what's next?

Taylor: Uh, I thought we could talk about... We, by the time the next episode goes up, it'll be October, right? That, that's, uh, so, you know, usually in October, we do a month straight of spooky things, spooky movies, spooky TV shows. So, I thought we should get on that.

Uh, Warrior— or not Warriors. Weapons is now streaming. Uh, new horror movie that I recently watched and I loved. And I think you should watch it, too.

Sydnee: Well, I will. Justin's been wanting to. So we will talk about Weapons next week. In the, in the meantime, um, assuming that the rapture doesn't happen...

Taylor: What if it catches us? I mean, they said that could have been a fake out so that we're all inside when it happens.

Sydnee: You're not supposed to know the hour.

Taylor: I know.

Sydnee: Yeah. Um, I don't think I'm going anywhere. I'm going to go ahead and say that.

Taylor: I mean, I don't, okay. Well, that's... I think between the two of us...
[laughs]

Sydnee: I'm just saying, no matter what happens, we'll both be back next week.

Taylor: Yeah. That's the thing. Don't worry about it. Don't worry about any interruption in your schedule.

Sydnee: Regardless of rapture, I can say that confidently.

Taylor: You might not be here to listen to it, but we'll be here making it. [laughs] We'll be podcasting through the apocalypse.

Sydnee: Yeah. Yeah. And I'm not going to come take your house. Don't worry.

Taylor: I will. I will. I will take your house. I will watch your dogs. I'll eat your food. You can leave, leave out a Bible, but leave out some like vegan, I don't know, snacks next to it. I won't read the Bible, but I'll take the snacks.

Sydnee: Um, so, uh, if you haven't watched Peacemaker, it's really good. I would recommend it. Yeah. And, uh, thank you listeners. Thank you, Maximum Fun. You should go to maximumfun.org and check out all the great shows there that you would enjoy. And thank you to the Nouvellas for our theme song, Baby, You Change Your Mind.

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

Sydnee: I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Sydnee: And I'm Teylor Smirl.

Sydnee: I'm still buffering.

Taylor: And I am, too.

[theme music plays]

Taylor: You know... Can, can God... God just give you like, rapture pants?
Can you have rapture pants that he... he... he magics onto your body?

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