

Still Buffering 453: Weapons (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: Tey, I haven't shown you this so far. We've been chatting before we started recording, and I was saving this to show you, so you can react while we're recording.

Taylor: Okay...

Sydnee: I went to Spirit Halloween.

Taylor: Oh, okay.

Sydnee: 'Cause it's open now. In Barboursville, up near the mall, in the old... you know, old Toys "R" Us, then it was the trampoline park, and now it's just a Spirit Halloween a couple months out of the year. [chuckles]

Taylor: Wow.

Sydnee: You know.

Taylor: Gets haunted by Spirit Halloween, as many empty buildings do.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm. Yes, yes. The rest of the year, as far as I know, it's still just a closed trampoline park. But...

Taylor: Why don't they just make a year-round Spirit Halloween? I feel like there'd be business for that. Me, I'm the business.

Sydnee: I'm the business. We talked about this, when we were there. But I *did* find these slippers...

Taylor: Okay. [gasps] Those—

Sydney: ... that I wanted to show you.

Taylor: Those are amazing. Now, this isn't— This is the problem with a podcast; it's not a visual medium. So we have to describe— This is a Gir.

Sydney: Yeah.

Taylor: It's a Gir for your foot from *Invader Zim*. But it's so big! Like, it's not even properly shaped like a...

Sydney: Oh, it's a huge... Yeah.

Taylor: Like, I feel like you'd trip over those. That's fantastic.

Sydney: I do trip over them a little. So there are these big Gir slippers, and I love them. I saw them, and I was like, "I have to get these." And Justin brought them to me before I could even get them; he was like, "You have to have these."

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydney: But they are too large, and I trip on them. And also, they terrify the cats. Every time I come walking down the hallway, because they're so big, they go running from me now. [laughs]

Taylor: [laughs] Well, that's fun!

Sydney: 'Cause they're like, [holding back laughter] "What are these giant green, furry animals walking towards me?"

Taylor: And also, "Why did mom put animals on her feet that she's now stomping...?"

Sydney: Yeah. [laughs]

Taylor: "Is this a threat to us? You better be good, or you'll end up like this dog here!"

Sydnee: But I do love them. It was a very successful Spirit Halloween trip, in addition to my Gir slippers. They had— You know, I always go to get my socks.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: That's where I buy my socks, Spirit Halloween.

Taylor: I wait until the Halloween section of Five Below every year, and get new socks, so I feel that.

Sydnee: I got the— They had a two-pack. 'Cause I like the little ankle socks, the little no-show socks.

Taylor: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: I got a two-pack of *Halloween*-themed – like, Michael Myers *Halloween* – *Halloween*-themed ones. And then they had a six-pack of *Saw*-themed socks.

Taylor: Oh!

Sydnee: Yeah! So...

Taylor: That's cool.

Sydnee: I got some *Saw* socks. [chuckles]

Taylor: That's a little brutal.

Sydnee: And— Yeah, they are pretty brutal. But I really like 'em. I will say, here's the thing— and I mean, I guess they know what they're doing. The socks that I get at Spirit Halloween [laughs] every year, which I love, they last a year. They don't last any longer.

Taylor: Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

Sydnee: All the ones I bought last year, 'cause I have— And I don't remember which year I got which. There were MTV-themed ones that I really liked? And then there were *Nightmare Before Christmas*-themed ones. And most of those,

I've had to toss 'cause they have holes in them, or the holes aren't big enough that I haven't tossed them yet, but like... They're on their way out.

Taylor: But the thing is, I think that's just the nature of socks. Like, I don't know. I bought a bunch last year that are now— They had a whole lot of *Child's Play* socks. So I had a lot of *Chucky* socks that I got last year.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: That are starting to wear out, but I also— there's— I don't wanna say the name of the company, but some expensive horror movie socks...

Sydnee: Mm!

Taylor: ... that were really cool, that I ordered off the internet. And they developed holes anyway. So it's like, "Why am I gonna buy the 13-dollar pair of socks, when the 2-dollar pair of socks lasts pretty much as long?"

Sydnee: This is true. Maybe we're just hard on socks.

Taylor: Well, *I* definitely am. I mean, I run three miles every day, and then I also work on my feet all the time. So socks stand no chance. Socks run from *me*, when they see me coming. Like, "Oh, no!"

Sydnee: [chuckles]

Taylor: "Not that one."

Sydnee: I will also say, part of it is the kind of sock. I know I do this to myself. I like a thin sock; I don't like a thick sock.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: And so I'm selecting for socks that are probably gonna wear through faster.

Taylor: That's fair.

Sydnee: Because I'm already putting gel insoles in my Chucks, and so I can't have a big thick sock too. There's just not enough room.

Taylor: That's a lot going on in that. That little paper shoe is just gonna rip on its sides. [laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs] They do stretch as you wear 'em, but only some— Like, they don't get longer. [chuckles]

Taylor: Well, yeah, no, they're— Yeah.

Sydnee: They get wider, but...

Taylor: Not the sturdiest of shoe.

Sydnee: No, they're not the sturdiest of shoe, but I do love them.

Taylor: No, I got—

Sydnee: But yeah, I got—

Taylor: Oh, go ahead.

Sydnee: No, no, no. What were you saying?

Taylor: Well, I was saying, I have some of the proper Doc Marten socks that are meant to go inside your boots. And I got some, thinking, "This is a good idea." And they just— It's too much on my foot. My foot has a panic attack. Not the rest of me, but my foot's like, "No! I can't move!"

Sydnee: Are they compression-y, in some places?

Taylor: They're just really thick. Like, you know, they're like...

Sydnee: Oh.

Taylor: Nice, thick socks. And they do have the tight ankle. But it's the whole— The whole experience for my foot is bad.

Sydnee: I don't like a thick sock very much. Well, and I really like, except for very select— Like, if it's super cold, I might put on— I have a few pair of knee-high gym sock things...

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: ... if it's really cold in the house. But for the most part, if I'm leaving the house, I'm wearing no-show socks. I just don't— Those are the only kind of socks I like.

Taylor: I like a crew sock. You know? [crosstalk]—

Sydnee: You like a crew sock?

Taylor: Yeah. A little bit higher than, I don't know, mid-ankle?

Sydnee: That's what the kids wear now.

Taylor: Is that what— I couldn't— I don't— There are so many TikToks about what is and is not cool anymore, related to socks. And I couldn't keep up with it. But you can show it— You can have a sock showing, you just can't fold it down. Right?

Sydnee: No.

Taylor: Which I nev—

Sydnee: I don't think you're supposed to.

Taylor: I never folded my socks. But I like those that hit just right... right above the ankle.

Sydnee: [chuckles] Coop doesn't like to fold her socks down. And it's funny, 'cause she still likes— You know the little kid socks that have the ruffle?

Taylor: Oh, yeah, yeah.

Sydnee: Ruffle socks? She loves those, but she's not gonna fold 'em down.

Taylor: Mm!

Sydnee: So, if you imagine what that would look like, it's not coming to a height that any sock really comes to naturally. Because they are designed to be folded over, so that the ruffle is right around the top of your shoe, right?

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Not just sort of... mid, lower shin. [chuckles]

Taylor: She's developing the *next* trend in socks that...

Sydnee: Yeah. [laughs]

Taylor: ... we will be judged for not following. [laughs]

Sydnee: I don't know if that's good parenting or bad, at this point. But I don't— If there's something like that that is functional, and my kids just have a preference, like, "I like to wear my socks this way that most people don't," I don't really care.

I don't tell 'em, "Nobody else does it." [laughs] Like, you are going to get noticed for this. And I do not know if it will be noticed in a good way or a bad way, by other children. But I just say, "If that's your... bag, baby go for it." I don't know. [laughs]

Taylor: I mean, I— I don't have kids.

Sydnee: Is that *good*?

Taylor: Well, that's— I can't weigh in; I don't have kids. But I always appreciate when I'll be at the store, and I see there's a kid there that's just randomly like, Superman. And a tired-looking mom. And I know that there was a conversation, like, "You can't just be Superman." And then the mom said, "Yeah, you know what? You can. You can just be Superman. It really doesn't matter." [through wheezing laughter] And I like that!

Sydnee: I will say, our kids' school has a dress code that extends to accessories.

And so hair things are not supposed to be— I don't know. Coop used to wear the ones with cat ears on 'em all the time, little headbands that have cat ears.

Taylor: Oh, yeah.

Sydnee: That was her favorite thing. Not so much these days, but things like that you can't really wear to school. And she will push the bounds of that all the time. And I'll be like, "I'm not sure... I think you're gonna get dress coded for that." And she's like, "Okay. Then, I'll take it off." She has *no* problem with that.

So I don't know if, at some point, I'm gonna get an email from the principal like, "Could you stop... [laughs] Do you not use *any* discretion at home? You're just like, 'Well...'"

Taylor: I think it's good. Like, self-expression is important. And you know, you learn that not everyone in the world will accept it. But it's good to have the confidence to do it.

Sydnee: It's a very, like, "I fight authority. Authority always wins, though." 'Cause she comes home, and it's like, the headband or whatever is in her backpack.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: She was like, "Yeah, they made me take it off."

Taylor: She's figuring out her—

Sydnee: "Were you upset?"

"No." [laughs]

Taylor: That's wild for me to think about, just because of what a nervous kid *I* was, and how that would've been my greatest nightmare. *Now*, I don't care. But it took me a long time to get to the point of not caring. It's good that she's starting out ahead of the pack, if that's where she's already at.

Sydnee: It's really— Raising children in this day and age— And I mean, I'm certain that this has been true at numerous points in history, but this is the only one I know about, 'cause it's the one I'm living in.

Taylor: [chuckles]

Sydnee: [laughs] It's the only one I can say from experience. I want my kids to have a healthy ability to question authority, and to defy authority when it is necessary.

Taylor: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: I want them to have that value. Because I think we are living in a time where, on a nation-wide level, the authority is bad and dangerous. And that doesn't mean "So overthrow the government." Of course I'm not— I'm not endorsing a coup. But what I *am* saying...

Taylor: Eh...

Sydnee: Is that if somebody is trying to make you follow a rule that is unethical, you shouldn't follow that rule. I want them to know that. Now, I don't think it's unethical to say, "You can't wear cat ears [laughs] to school." This is not an ethics thing. But the seeds of that are being planted now, the dissent that may be necessary for them to stand up and say, "I will not take part in this!"

Taylor: Well, I mean, it—

Sydnee: I'm planting those seeds.

Taylor: I think that those are ultimately seeds of just thinking for oneself, versus... you know, the whole "Why can't I do this?"
"Cause I said so." Like, I'm...

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: Again, I have no place to talk. I don't have kids. But I feel like that's a very bad way to raise a child, is just, "I'm not gonna tell you why this makes sense. I'm not gonna tell you why I asked you do this. I'm just gonna tell you to obey authority without question." And I think that's... you know, that's not a good way to go through life.

You should think for yourself. And even if you land on the decision, “Hey, this doesn’t make sense, *but* this is being what I’m told to do,” at least you thought for yourself.

Sydnee: Yeah. And I think that we are moving past the idea that just because a person is in a position of authority means that they deserve respect.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: They don’t, inherently. They *might* deserve respect, but they don’t *inherently, because* they got that job.

Taylor: Well, and every decision they make isn’t good and fair just because of the position they hold. So it’s okay to call them into question.

Sydnee: Yeah. So I don’t know, if that starts with “I don’t know if this headband’s gonna pass the test today...”

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: And I will say, when her teacher tells her to take off the headband, she takes off the headband and puts it in her backpack.

Taylor: [chuckles]

Sydnee: She doesn’t fight, she doesn’t argue.

Taylor: Coo—

Sydnee: I don’t want her to go terrorize teachers. I am not in favor of *that*. But I do appreciate that she’s willing to push some boundaries. And then when it’s too far, she’s like, “Okay, okay! I thought I’d give it a try. It’s just worth a shot.”
[laughs]

Taylor: Coop fought the law, and the law won. It’s alright.

Sydnee: Yup. That is Cooper, though, that is— She gets it, honest.

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: She gets it from me.

Taylor: [through laughter] That's fair.

Sydnee: I got it from Dad. I mean, you know, this is not hard to track.

Taylor: Yeah, no.

Sydnee: We know where this came from. [chuckles]

Taylor: That's fair.

Sydnee: But it was a very— I will say, it was a very successful trip to Spirit Halloween. They are still putting things out. It is so early...

Taylor: Mm.

Sydnee: ... that I was watching them stock the shelves while we were in there. Which I don't know, it's interesting to me that they went ahead and opened. And the whole house ware section was mostly empty. And they were out there, putting the stuff into it as we were shopping around. So I mean, I know I'll be back. Because they were just putting out the *Haunted Mansion* stuff.

Taylor: Ooh.

Sydnee: And I don't even know what's there. So...

Taylor: See, I just— As much as I prefer Halloween to Christmas, I wish that Halloween could have the same Halloween creep that Christmas has. Where Christmas stuff starts going up...

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: I mean, November 1st, you get Christmas stuff. I am ready for Halloween to start going up into stores at least September 1st.

Sydnee: I think so. Once it starts to get just a little chill in the air, the leaves

start to turn... I'm ready for it. I mean, we've got a 16-foot Mothman in our front yard, so...

Taylor: That's just gonna live there, though. That lives there now. Right?

Sydnee: Yeah. That's our new friend.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: We also have the *Haunted Mansion* ghosts on our front porch already. So we're doing a Halloween creep here, I guess.

Taylor: See, I just decided last year that my Halloween decorations make me happy. And my apartment's already kind of spooky anyway, so I'm just not gonna put 'em away. I'm just gonna integrate them into my décor.

Sydnee: Yeah! I get that. Cooper has kept a few, all year long. Her find— Which, by the way, we got a M3G4N 2.0 costume.

Taylor: Nice.

Sydnee: Charlie found a Taylor Swift costume.

Taylor: Alright.

Sydnee: But we also— Cooper found— You know in that *SNL* sketch where Kristen Wiig has the tiny hands?

Taylor: [laughs] Yeah.

Sydnee: Cooper found a set of tiny hands.

Taylor: Nice.

Sydnee: And this is her new obsession. So this is great. I mean, this is very hilarious in our house. So...

Taylor: She's already got tiny hands! She doesn't need *tinier* hands!

Sydnee: These are tinier hands!

Taylor: Wow.

Sydnee: Yeah. So it was a very successful [chuckles] Spirit Halloween venture for our first one. I have to go back, because they didn't have all the throws out, the blankets.

Taylor: Mm.

Sydnee: And there's always some new Halloween throw that I just desperately need. [laughs]

Taylor: That's fair.

Sydnee: And then there's usually a new property in the HomeGoods that I find, like, "Ooh, I need some decorations from *that* scary movie."

Taylor: Yeah. That's Halloween.

Sydnee: Cooper did try to buy a *Terrifier* mask for quite a while.

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: And I just kept saying, "No, honey. No, I can't— This is— I am drawing a— No."

Taylor: Of all the properties...

Sydnee: She's never seen it, I would like to reiterate. She's never— She has *no* familiarity outside of we saw a little baby...

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: ... you know, Art the Clown. And we have it, and we put it on our front porch, and she loves it. But she does not know anything about the movie. She did want some of the other scary babies, and I told her we could get 'em, but she

couldn't decide which. So she wants to come back later, and reconsider. They have all, like, the zombie babies.

Taylor: Mm. Like the little— I've seen your little— What, you got a Jason, and you got a *Scream* guy?

Sydnee: Jason, and uh...

Taylor: Ghostface?

Sydnee: Yes, we have a Ghostface, and a Dracula. And then we have the little Art the Clown that crawls.

Taylor: Oh.

Sydnee: Well, it doesn't crawl. It looks like it's crawling.

Taylor: [through laughter] Oh, God.

Sydnee: They do have a zombie baby that crawls there now.

Taylor: Nice.

Sydnee: It's like a cute little baby, with a sprout of hair, but then it's got a scary face. And you can turn it on, and it [laughs] crawls to you. And Cooper had it, like, she was down on her knees in the store, turning it on, and then going, "Come here!"

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: "Come to Mommy!"
And I was like, "Ahh!"

Taylor: I feel like Cooper's one of those kids— I got on Halloween Horror Night's TikTok somehow. It was a good place to be, and I enjoy it. But I'm always amazed to see kids there. 'Cause you can take anybody. There is an age suggestion, but you don't have to follow it.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: And seeing the kids that just eat up the scare zones always makes me very happy. I feel like Cooper would fare well in those.

Sydnee: She does. She's really tough about it now. 'Cause they have all the— In the middle of Spirit Halloween, they have all the things they set up.

Taylor: Oh, yeah.

Sydnee: The stuff you can put in your front yard that's actually pretty scary, some of 'em. And they used to really freak her out, but they don't anymore. A lot of 'em are just too scary for me. I would— The one that I wish— We don't have a big tree in our front yard to hang anything from. But they have the little girl on the swing.

Taylor: Oh, I've seen that, yeah.

Sydnee: And I feel like that would be such a fun, creepy one.

Taylor: [chuckles]

Sydnee: But I don't know where we would hang it.

Taylor: There's a guy on TikTok that reviews Halloween animatronics. And he's got a huge collection, just in his house. But he brings up, "What's coming out this year?" and talks about the mechanics in them, and how the audios are and stuff.

Sydnee: [chuckles]

Taylor: And I love it, but he showed— He was showing that girl off, a while ago. And it was like, "Oh, that's pretty cool." [chuckles]

Sydnee: I love that— And it's named something like Soulless Spirit, or something? It's really weird. The name of it includes, like, "This does not have a soul." And I feel like that's a really intense name. Like, it's a spooky girl on a swing. But it was like, Soulless Swing Girl, or something. And I was like, "Woah! *Woah!*"

Taylor: You might not have trees in your front yard, but you have trees in your

backyard. You should just submerge her into the forest, and just have her [through laughter] out there. Just to see from the distance.

Sydnee: I like the idea of that as a security system.

Taylor: Yeah!

Sydnee: Like, it's just a deterrent.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: If you're gonna try to creep into our house from the backyard, you are gonna be freaked out. [laughs]

Taylor: Just fill the backwoods with animatronics that are unsettling.

Sydnee: I actually— I love that idea.

Taylor: Speaking—

Sydnee: No, it was our first venture, but we will be back. We will be back many times. I still don't have a costume, I have no idea what *I'm* gonna be.

Taylor: That's always—

Sydnee: There were—

Taylor: That's a joke in the cosplay community, that we spend so much time of our year making costumes. And then Halloween rolls around, and it's like, "I dunno! I got nothing."

Sydnee: Well, Justin and I usually have a show we're obsessed with, and we're like, "We gotta be characters from this." So we had that conversation about *Peacemaker*.

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: But Justin does not wanna dress as [laughs] Peacemaker.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydney: And I said, "If I'm Harcourt, and I'm not standing directly next to you..."

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydney: "... I'm just me, dressed all in black." Like, I *have* those clothes. It's just stuff I own. I could dress like her right now, so that doesn't really feel like a costume.

Taylor: No, well— Okay, well, *you* be Peacemaker, and he can be Vigilante.

Sydney: Oh, yeah, we could do that.

Taylor: [chuckles]

Sydney: I'd have to get, like, a big muscle [laughs] suit.

Taylor: Yeah, use a suit!

Sydney: [laughs]

Taylor: Or, what is it, Peacebreaker? There is a newer character that is a lady version of Peacemaker that exists...

Sydney: Oh, yeah?

Taylor: ... that you could do, as well. It is basically Peacemaker's costume, just with a girl in it.

Sydney: There were lots of sexy options, and lots of various...

Taylor: Well, you don't have to do it sexy. Just do it straight-up.

Sydney: Just straight-up.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: I don't know, we'll have to think about it. I'm sure we'll come up with something before then, but... We definitely are, for trick-or-treat, because the girls have requested we're going all as the *KPop Demon Hunter* crew, but...

Taylor: Nice.

Sydnee: But that wasn't gonna be my Halloween party costume. I will say, the Mira wig is incredible.

Taylor: Where did you get it from?

Sydnee: I'll have to— It was somewhere online— I'll have to send you the link.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: It was somewhere online, and I bought all three as a set. And they're the real deal. They're, like, nice wigs. And the Mira wig comes— I mean, it's *so* long. It's like... down to my thighs. But it's really well— I mean, they're really good wigs, so...

Taylor: Nice. That's hard to find.

Sydnee: I mean, as far as I know. As far as I know. I mean, they seem good. They seem, like, quality.

Taylor: [chuckles]

Sydnee: I'm not a wig expert, but they seem good.

Taylor: That's awesome! No, I've watched many cosplayers struggle with those wigs, talking about how they're making them. Especially that top braid, that whole bit for...

Sydnee: The Rumi wig?

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: It came in two pieces. So you have the under part, and then the braid attaches to it.

Taylor: Oh, is it like a clip?

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: Yeah, I like when wigs are built like that. I have a Harley wig that has the pigtails clip on like that. And it is so much more structurally sound than just trying to have 'em up, and look nice the whole time.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm. Well, and it's easier to keep— I've been able to keep the braid separate, because braids get all fuzzy...

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: ... you know, if you touch 'em too much and stuff. So it's been— Because we have them so much in advance. Anyway... [chuckles]

Taylor: Nice.

Sydnee: I'll send you the link.

Taylor: Yes.

Sydnee: They're good wigs.

Taylor: Yeah, thanks.

Sydnee: Alright. What uh— We were supposed to talk about a movie.

Taylor: *Weapons*.

Sydnee: *Weapons*.

Taylor: I keep trying to call it *Warriors*. It's not *Warriors*. It is not...

Sydnee: No. That was one of the— We're gonna spoil this movie.

Taylor: Yes.

Sydnee: I'll go ahead and say that. That— It was one of the most unusual movies I think I've seen.

Taylor: Yep! Well, that's what I— When we were talking about it last week, I was like, "I don't even think I can tell you the genre of creepy thing," 'cause that's really kind of held off there until the end.

Sydnee: Well, it is, and it... I didn't know what to make of it. For a while, I thought maybe I was watching just something that was pure allegory, or something?

Taylor: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: You know what I mean? Like, this was all going to— None of it is supposed to be experienced as real, maybe. And I'm still not sure if that isn't part of the effect. But obviously, by the end, it becomes quite literal what's happening.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: But yeah. At first, I was thinking, "Okay." The premise is, there's a third grade classroom of kids that disappears. So middle of the night, 17 children run out of their houses at 2:17 in the morning, and disappear. And there's one kid left in the class, and the teacher.

And the entire community's freaking out, nobody knows where these kids went, nobody knows what's going on. They blame the teacher, because that's the thing the kids all have in common. They investigate the student, 'cause like, "Why didn't— What was happening in this classroom?" Nobody can figure it out. That's the premise. Very spooky.

And I thought, like, "Oh. Is this some sort of—" I'll be honest, for a while, I thought, "Is this a metaphorical approach to the school shooting crisis in America?" I had *that* thought from it for a while. But then it turns into something quite literal.

Taylor: I do think that that is under it, on a symbolic level. I think that is some of the fear it's engaging with.

Sydnee: Is that— There's the one scene where— 'Cause you've got the teacher. You've got one of the dads, one of the student's dads, who's trying to figure out what happened. And you follow several different characters' storylines. But as they're trying to trace where the kids went, and they're having these dreams where they're kind of figuring this stuff out, they see the clock that says 2:17. And it's on the side of a big gun?

Taylor: I felt like that was kind of on-the-nose, right? Like, that's... that's a clear suggestion. Also, I'm trying to— 2:17, the number is significant, 'cause I *think* that was the number of votes needed for some gun legislation that didn't pass? I think that's...

Sydnee: *Oh!* I didn't know that.

Taylor: ... where people have traced that to.

Sydnee: Has this been said? Like, is that— And the filmmakers, have they said this was intentional? Or is this just a theory that's out there? 'Cause I began to read that into it. But then by the end, what you literally discover is that there's, I guess, a witch is what she's supposed to be.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: I feel like the cultural connotation is, "A witch has come to town, and has put all these children in a basement in order to drain them of their life force, so that she can be healthy and young."

Taylor: Um...

Sydnee: That's the vibe.

Taylor: Yeah. Well, I don't— I think both things can be true. I think it can— Like all great horror movies do, it should prey on the fears of the time. I think it's using imagery and things that are in the current consciousness to make us— to tap into that fear, whether or not— I don't think it's trying to *address* it. I don't

think it's trying to make a commentary on it, outside of just, you know... "These things happen..."

Sydnee: It does look—

Taylor: "We attribute it to something mysterious, and strange. This just happens," versus something we can control.

Sydnee: And some of it is— Like, the teacher says at one point, she wants to talk to the one student who was there. And they're asking her why, and she says, "Cause we were the last two left."

Taylor: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: Which is a weird way to word that. And it sounds like a reference to a shooting. The display that they put outside the school, with all the pictures of the kids, and the flowers, and the banner... I forget the name of the school. Something strong.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Maybrook, something like that, strong. I mean, that's all— That imagery all feels very reminiscent of that. And then I do think it's interesting— So initially, the town kind of blames the teacher. And they even paint on the side of her car in red letters, "Witch."

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Which I think that that's part of it, too. She's a young, single woman who lives in town. She also— They allude to her maybe having a drinking problem, or at least drinking too much. She ends up sleeping with a guy who's with another woman, kind of seduces another woman's boyfriend or husband or whatever. I don't know, I feel like they're playing on some witch tropes there, with her.

Taylor: Absolutely. Well, yeah, she's sort of the outsider. She doesn't have any other connections, outside of the man she seduces. [laughs]

Sydnee: Yeah. Who's also a police officer, who's part of the authority, part of the whatever in town. And she subverts it by seducing him.

Taylor: Well, and I was just looking up what the director has commented, that it's more of a— I mean, it's a piece about trauma, more than anything. About how repressed trauma affects us, how trauma affects the people around us. It's a bit more vague, but I mean, even at the end, where they talk about the kids that are recovered, how not all of them start speaking again. That it's something horrific and awful that these young people have been forced to witness, and...

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: So I don't know, that's— If you just pull it back and look at it more as a meditation on trauma, it's funny, 'cause then there's a witch. [laughs] It's like, "Well, how does that fit? [laughs] What does the witch represent?"

Sydnee: Well, that was what was throwing me, was that the witch is quite— I mean...

Taylor: It's a literal witch.

Sydnee: She's— Yeah, and it feels like when you realize that she's a witch, and you see her doing her spells, where she's got a stick, and it's got thorns on it, and she pokes it so she's bleeding, and she's wrapping hair around it, and rubbing blood on it, and... Like, it feels very... I don't know, almost Grimm Brothers— like, fairy tale witch. Right?

We're calling back to some really... I don't know, it feels like a fairy tale witch at that point. I did not expect it to be that sort of literal, as like... I don't know, a witch. [laughs]

Taylor: Well, but I think even then, she's this old, decrepit thing that should've died a long time ago, that feeds off the youth of the innocent... unfairly. I think that— I think *that* still tracks as a current metaphor for our times, that the people that...

Sydnee: Sure.

Taylor: ... are in control of us. And she is quite literally in control of people, with her little machinations. Her twigs, and her blood, and her hair. The people that control us, that ravage us, and take everything from us should have stopped being in control a long time ago. But they won't relinquish control in a natural way, so we're still suffering from them.

Sydney: That is really interesting. That— I mean, if you take *her* as metaphor.

Taylor: Yeah. Just this... awful, old, evil thing that can still undermine our communities, and turn us against each other.

Sydney: Mm-hmm. Yeah, she does. I mean, she— That was hard. I don't know why— Why did we have to kill off the gay couple like that?

Taylor: [laughs] Yeah. Well—

Sydney: Aren't we past that? [chuckles]

Taylor: I mean, I did like the commentary that I saw a few people make. Like, "Of course it would be the gay— The gay couple would have this terrifying old woman in a bad wig come to their door. And they'd be like, 'Yeah, let her in! She looks fun.'" [wheeze-laughs]

Sydney: Yeah. Well, and I don't know if it was supposed to be a celebration of like... They're this cute gay couple in their matching Disney shirts.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydney: They've got a nice crudités, and they're watching like—

Taylor: Of seven hot dogs? [laughs]

Sydney: [laughs] They're watching a documentary about the Cordyceps fungus on a Saturday. And they're just— I mean, I don't know if that was like, "Isn't this sweet?" Or— I don't know. [laughs] Like, "Is this cliché? What are we doing here? What am I supposed to feel? I'm not sure yet." And then they get killed off, and so it's like, "Mm..."

Taylor: They get killed off.

Sydnee: "I don't know about that one."

Taylor: Yeah, and in a horrible manner.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: Some of these subtle prosthetic use, and practical effects in this movie are so effective. Because I don't know if they did the sa— Because the one member of the couple that goes on a rampage, and chases down the teacher...

Sydnee: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

Taylor: The way that they have— I mean, I've seen him in a lot of things, he's a great actor. But his face, like... I don't know— 'Cause I know for the Gladys, the evil witch, they made her custom contacts that make her irises a little too small.

Sydnee: Hmm.

Taylor: So they do all these subtle things to make her look slightly off. I swear, they did something to his eyes. Because they looked... so disturbing. And I don't—

Sydnee: Well, they looked like they were bulging.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Almost like they would pop out of his head at the end, there.

Taylor: I was looking at some stills, and I'm like, "Did they also give him slightly smaller contacts, just for that effect? I don't know." Or some sort of subtle prosthetic. 'Cause for her, she has entirely fake dentures that make her teeth look *tiny*. And you only— They never make a point of showing it too aggressively. But if you watch her talk, her teeth look like they've been filed down to like... little nubs. It's very disturbing.

Sydnee: She is very disturbing. I had trouble sleeping last night, 'cause I kept

picturing her. Especially in those early flashes, before you really get to know the character.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: And you see little flashes of her in Justine's dreams.

Taylor: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: That scared the crap out of me.

Taylor: Well, and that— You know, you mentioned that documentary. And I don't know, I feel like any time— Maybe this is just how horror movies have kind of educated me. It's like, any time you have a class that's reading a specific play, or a TV show is showing in the background...

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: It's telling you something, you know? So that...

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: And you see her, like, they're watching that Cordyceps documentary, you see her sprouting in the forest at one point. And there is this whole, like...

Sydnee: Yeah...

Taylor: Like, "Is that— Is she—" Like, yeah, she's a witch. But is there something, this sort of weird thing from the earth, this force of nature, that's embodied in her? An infection—

Sydnee: Well, I wondered about that too. Yeah, infection. Because I think that that's a theme, too, when you've got the one character who used injection drugs.

Taylor: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: And there's the whole syringe thing.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: I felt like there was some sort of infection narrative maybe building through that. But it— I don't know, it was just kind of part of the milieu. It didn't really build to anything in particular, right?

I did— It was funny, Justin and I were talking about like— You know how they have a lot more on sets? They try to have people who would like— Like, authenticity consultants.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Who would talk to you about like, "All of you are—" I mean, I think probably a good example is like, "You're all a bunch of white people. [laughs] If you want to have people in your movies who aren't white, maybe you should talk to people who aren't white."

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: You know what I mean? Or "You're all straight. Would you like to have somebody who isn't, to maybe talk about this representation?" You know? I wonder, that character who was experiencing homelessness and using injection drugs, it's obviously a population of character— I understand that very well. Because that's my entire— Those are the people I work with. Those are all my patients. Not all, but a lot of them.

And I was wondering— I kind of took issue with some of the representation. It really bugged me that, when he doesn't tell the cop there's a syringe in his pocket, and the cop sticks his hand in there and gets poked with the needle, I really— That really bothered me. That's not something that— I don't know. I was sitting there, wishing, like, "You should've talked to somebody. My patients would never do that."

Taylor: I was curious—

Sydnee: They would never do that. Because they would know the cop's gonna find the syringe, and they wouldn't want him to get jabbed with the syringe.

Taylor: Yeah. That—

Sydnee: I mean, it's just that simple.

Taylor: That's what it felt— I don't know, there was a lot of inclusion in the movie that... it's like, "I feel like you're trying to say *something* about the current state of the country, but we're not—" And maybe it's scarier as a movie, because it lets the movie sort of play more than the politics, or the ideas that might be behind it.

Which I get is more effective as a horror movie. But that's what the inclusion of somebody that's suffering from addiction— And it's not— I mean, he wasn't a *negative* character. He was sort of heroic towards the end, but...

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: It was definitely a negative portrayal up front.

Sydnee: It was. That bothered me a little bit. It also— I don't know. I guess it's a horror movie, and so syringes are scary for a lot of people. And if they're used in a scary way in a horror movie, I can't really complain about that. I think once you start tying them to drug use, it always bothers me a little. Because it's very—

The syringe is such a politicized image, especially in the work that I do. You know what I mean? There's a lot— When you put a syringe in a movie, especially now – and I'm sensitive to this, 'cause of where we live – you're saying a lot by putting that in the movie.

Taylor: Right. Well, and there definitely is a repeated engagement with addiction in this. Which goes back to— The directors talked about experiencing having parents that struggled with addiction. And I think you see that with the little boy. And his two parents that just sit there, and he has to feed them soup... that that— It's horrifying. That whole household is just a terrifying design. But that's also a parallel to growing up with alcoholic parental figures that, you know...

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: ... *you* have to take care of, more than— Which maybe is that, I don't know, the sort of addiction, infection, this filth that creeps into your life and destroys it.

Sydnee: Yeah. No, I saw that parallel for sure. I definitely— I had that same thought. Like, that's what we're— The trauma that he is going through is, his parents can no longer be parental figures to him, and he must instead care for them. But he can't fix the problem; all he can do is try to sustain them.

Yeah, I definitely think that's all in there. It's good— I always like something that isn't that clear-cut. So you can think about it, and talk about it, and pull your own messages out of it. I think what I was just— There were a couple points where I feel like, you gotta be— I think it's good to be a little careful.

Taylor: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: But horror movies don't have to be careful, I guess. I don't know. Maybe that's the point. But it—

Taylor: Well, I mean, I— [laughs] I thought— It's not at all on the same level, but when you've got Justine, the teacher, going into the liquor store— And again, she's— Clearly, alcohol is not just a problem for the cop. For her, too.

Sydnee: Right.

Taylor: But she's buying two bottles of vodka a night. It's like... That's—

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: I don't know if that's an accurate portrayal of what— I mean, that's a lot of alcohol [laughs] for—

Sydnee: I mean, I'm surprised she's not hungover, ever. As far as I can tell.

Taylor: They show her doing that multiple times. And it's clearly to make a point of like, "Look at what she's—"

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: To that, it's almost like, all of your main characters are in some sort of engagement with how they're medicating their trauma. And it almost puts it into— I don't know, probably because of new games out. You know how *Silent*

Hill exists in like, “It’s reality, but it’s also a manifestation of your own personal hell”?

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: Like, whatever you’re going through right now. It almost kicks the movie into that sort of weird, cerebral space of like...

Sydnee: Yes. Yeah.

Taylor: They’re all drawn into this.

Sydnee: I definitely— And that’s— I think, in the beginning, I had begun to think that was all it was.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Like, none of this is supposed to be taken literally, or real. The introduction of the witch... [laughs]

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: ... threw it for me. And then, I think, because then it becomes so visceral and graphic moving forward...

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Because the death scenes are very brutal, very visceral. When she makes the parents poke themselves in the face with forks, that’s rough.

Taylor: Ugh! Yeah.

Sydnee: That’s horrible. And then, of course, the final scene where the kids rip her apart is... very gory. [laughs]

Taylor: But it was— The way they shot that was *hilarious*.

Sydnee: [chuckles]

Taylor: Like, when the kids were chasing her, and it was just like, all of these little different families, standing around, having breakfast or whatever. [laughs] And these kids— The woman would crash through the window, and then all of these kids would [through laughter] crash through the window. And it was all in broad daylight.

Sydney: That's true.

Taylor: And there were some distance shots, like the guy mowing the lawn in front, in the foreground. And then in the back, you just see, "Ahh!" [laughs] Like... It was a very slapstick shooting of that scene.

Sydney: It was. It was. No, definitely. 'Cause I think they even— There's some shots where it looks like the kids are *eating her*, at the end.

Taylor: Yeah! Yeah, it was very like... *Night of the Living Dead*, like, zombie moment.

Sydney: Yeah. Which, I mean, is like, you want them to get her. Because she's been abusing them, and so... [chuckles]

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydney: I guess it's— I don't know, Justin had commented that he thought it was a good ending. And I was like, "I mean, it's still kinda sad." They say some of the kids still have never recovered from this, and the parents— How does she put it? "There's somewhere else, with..."

Taylor: Somebody else was—

Sydney: "... someone else feeding them soup?"

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydney: And he had to go live with another aunt.

Taylor: Yeah. Well, you know, the movie's title is *Weapons*. And I think that that's, however vague, and I respect if the person who makes something wants

to keep— It's not always fun to say, "Yes, I made a movie about these specific themes. Now, you know what to look for." I think art should leave space for you to...

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: ... root around in the dark, and see what resonates. But I mean, the movie's called *Weapons*, and it's... you know, the children end up being violent weapons to defeat the thing that controlled them, but they suffer for it. They are forever changed because of it. And that, I think, brings it back to reality.

Sydnee: Sure.

Taylor: As far as, you know...

Sydnee: Yeah. That's not hard to parse, in terms of "What are you saying?"

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: And I do think— All of that is in there, right? We're commenting on— I definitely think the school shooting undercurrent is there. That can't be an accident. You've got the dad who is in his dream of his son, who— The dad of one of the kids who ran away is saying, "I never told you I love you."

Taylor: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: "And I just want to tell you that I love you." So you've got this other toxic masculinity kind of thing. And he's attacking the single woman, and painting her car, and blaming her for his son going awry. "It's all this woman's fault."

Taylor: Well—

Sydnee: "She's the outcast, it must be her." You know? You've got like—

Taylor: And you see—

Sydnee: Go ahead.

Taylor: You see in the flashbacks that his son was a little jerk. Like, he had a really...

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: His son was a big bully. He was a...

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: ... a really cruel kid, so—

Sydnee: And you see, you've got obviously the theme of substance use disorder and addiction. You've got homelessness. You've got law enforcement interacting inappropriately with people, like he's arresting them, and then he decks them, and threatens them.

Taylor: He cuts his camera, yeah.

Sydnee: Yeah. I don't know, you've got— There's a lot of conversation going on. And maybe that's the only thing I would say, is I think that, if you're gonna talk about all those things, I think *you* need to know what you're saying with it. Maybe you don't tell us, but I do think it's important that you know what you're saying, so that we— I don't know. These are important things. It's an important time to be making art that talks about those things.

Taylor: Well, and I— I think it's not— I feel like if you choose, like, "I'm gonna interpret this what I think it means," I don't think it's hard. Because like you said, there's the dad that sort of represents one side, and Justine that's the other. And instead of targeting each other, they should target the thing that's actually to blame for the suffering and violence that their kids have to face. Which is an awful, rotted, decrepit thing in a bad wig.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: That's not subtle.

Taylor: No. Well, and again, it is a little— It makes it very horror movie, when it's like, "It's just a witch!" It's like, yeah, but it's a force of nature that has always been here. That, as long as we do nothing to fight it, *will* always be here.

Sydney: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: Will continue to suck the life out of our children, and turn us against each other.

Sydney: And turn us into weapons.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydney: Yeah. I mean, I definitely think that that— If that's the big takeaway, especially with the title, is the society and culture that has been created by radical movements, extremist movements and fascism, is turning people into weapons... I think that that's a really valid— That's a valid point to be making.

Taylor: Yeah. Well, and it's gotta be hard to thread that needle, where you can make a movie that won't immediately— I mean, how often nowadays does a movie come out that just happens to, I don't know, have a woman in it, and everyone's like, "Oh, it's woke! Oh, don't watch it!" You know? It's like...

Sydney: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: I don't know, *Star Wars* has been doing great. All the shows that they've been making that are really great, engaging with topics around revolution, and you know, oppressive government. But they do cast a lot of people of color, and a lot of women, and that's enough to get it massive, purposeful downratings from people that never even watch it.

So it sucks, but to thread the needle where you can engage with the current landscape, and say something, but in such abstract metaphor that no one can call your hand, that's hard to do.

Sydney: And I do think that they undercut it all with the— I mean, really, once you get into this witch character, "This is how she casts spells, and this is literally

what she's doing," and you see her in her room, with her... whatever, her tree, and... [chuckles]

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: And all that stuff. And you see all that stuff, it *feels* very much like some sort of spooky folk tale, at that point.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: It very much removes it from, "Is this all a metaphor?" And it's like, "Ooh! Spooky witch." [chuckles]

Taylor: Well, and you could even say, "Ah, see? It's all those evil pagans, that's all the—" You know...

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: "'Cause she's not a good Christian." So I don't know, you could— I don't think that's what the movie's saying, but you know...

Sydnee: No. I think that they— You know, I almost wonder if Justine's character isn't called a witch, and given some of those classic witch tropes, as a way of not make— You know? 'Cause otherwise, I would prefer us not to all hate on a witch in a movie presented as a synthetic—

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: But you know what I mean? She's not that. That's not what she is. We're not talking about just a woman who lives outside society, and people get mad at. No, this is an evil force of malevolence that, you know, does bad things to children and adults, and is not a positive force. [chuckles]

Taylor: Right. Well, that's— There were no witches burned in Salem, just women.

Sydnee: Yes, yeah. But I think they do a good job of distinguishing that by having the Justine character, so...

Taylor: Yeah. It's— You could watch it at face value, and just kind of be taken on a wild ride... [laughs] And you could—

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: I think it's hard to ignore things like a giant, revolving, automatic rifle in the sky, and not say, "I'm supposed to see that, right?" [laughs] But...

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: You don't have to. You don't have to.

Sydnee: [laughs] That's what I said. "I think that's a gun."

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: Justin said, "Yeah, that's a gun."

Taylor: "That's very clearly a gun." [laughs]

Sydnee: But no, I was really glad I watched it. Anything that you can watch that you talk this much about it afterwards, and think this much about it, and pull it apart, and start seeing different things that you hadn't noticed before, I think that's always a good watch.

Taylor: Yeah. Oh, I just— Not that it matters, but the 2:17 also lines up with the door number in *The Shining*...

Sydnee: Oh!

Taylor: ... that has the evil woman in the bathtub. I think that's what the director has noted, as kind of, "That might've been in my mind, but—"

Sydnee: That's interesting. I don't think— I never think about things like that, like, "What did that number mean?" [laughs]

Taylor: Yeah. I don't know. Well, and other people have interpreted it as two

adults and 17 kids, 'cause that's who she— So I don't know. But yeah, it's also just... it's the time.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: That's when her magic happened.

Sydnee: It could just be that, yeah.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: That was just the time it happened.

Well, I am glad that you suggested I watch it, 'cause I really did. We enjoyed it. Like I said, I couldn't sleep, 'cause I kept picturing her on the ceiling, but—

Taylor: Oh, yeah. Yeah, just brilliant, brilliant makeup design for her.

Sydnee: Yes. Yeah, 'cause once you see her in the daylight, it's like, "Well, she's just sort of a... It's too much makeup caked on, and a bad wig, and stuff like that." But in the middle of the night on the ceiling, it was like, "Ah!"

Taylor: But even in daylight, like, the subtle— You gotta go look at stills. They attached her earlobes too low on the side of her—

Sydnee: Yeah, I gotta look at that stuff.

Taylor: There are all of these little things that are just like, "Oh, that's— That's something else *pretending* to be a human." Oh, and that's also— The director told the actress, "I haven't decided if you're a human who's just a witch, or you're something else pretending to be a human. You decide for yourself, and act it the way you choose."

Sydnee: Hmm!

Taylor: So I guess that plays into the ambiguity.

Sydnee: It does, yeah.

Taylor: But anyway. [chuckles]

Sydnee: Well, no, I really enjoyed it. And if you are someone who does not like gore, um...

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: It is gory.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: It is disturbing on that level, if that's something that you don't wanna see. And it is scary, but not like— I mean, it's not full of jump scares. But there are moments that are scary. So just those disclaimers, if those are not your cup of tea. But anyway, I enjoyed it.

What should we do next, Tey?

Taylor: Well, continuing on with the all-hallowed spooky month... I know we've talked about the original *Final Destination*, but we had a new one. *Final Destination: Bloodlines*, I believe, is its full title.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: That came out pretty recently. And it's sort of a reboot of the whole series, so it might be fun to give it a watch.

Sydnee: Yes. Yeah. I think that would be a fun one to talk about.

Taylor: Alright.

Sydnee: Alright. Well, we'll do that for next week. And I'll report back about what else I bought at Spirit Halloween.

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: 'Cause I know I'll visit it again.

Taylor: [through laughter] Alright.

Sydnee: In the meantime, thank you, listeners. Thank you to Maximum Fun. You should go to MaximumFun.org and listen to all the great shows there. You can email us at stillbuffering@maximumfun.org. And thank you to the Nouvellas for our theme song, "Baby You Change Your Mind."

[theme music starts playing in background]

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

Sydnee: I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Taylor: And I'm Teylor Smirl.

Sydnee: I'm still buffering.

Taylor: And I am, too.

[theme music plays]

[inaudible chatter]

Sydnee: That's the last thing I need.

Taylor: That would be a *great* Halloween costume for one of your kids. [laughs]

Sydnee: Uh, no.

Taylor: [through laughter] Imagine that.

[acoustic sting]

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