

Still Buffering 454: Final Destination Bloodlines (2025)

Published October 15th, 2025

[Listen here on Maximum Fun](#)

[theme music plays]

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

Taylor: And I'm Taylor Smirl.

Sydnee: Tey, we've been back to Spirit Halloween. [laughs]

Taylor: Is this gonna be the structure for the month of October? We talk about a horror movie, and we start with you telling me what's new at Spirit Halloween?

Sydnee: I mean, I'm trying not to— Okay, we also decorated for Halloween.

Taylor: Alright. Well, I mean, you can tell me what's— I'm curious. I have—

Sydnee: There wasn't— Huh?

Taylor: I have access to Spirit Halloweens. I just haven't been, you know.

Sydnee: The big news for us, at our next visit to Spirit Halloween, we— There was more of the home goods section out. [chuckles]

Taylor: Alright.

Sydnee: So I got some really nice *Haunted Mansion* tea towels...

Taylor: Mm. Nice.

Sydnee: You know, like I have towels hanging over my oven thing.

Taylor: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: You know, like you do.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: And right now, they're like— [chuckles] Charlie and Cooper got 'em for me. They're these flowery-looking pretty tea towels, but they have profanity on them.

Taylor: Oh, I've seen those. Yes.

Sydnee: Yeah. Like, I can't say them on the show, but you get the vibe. I took those down, and replaced them with some spooky ones. And then Cooper found a stuffed Sam from *Trick 'r Treat*.

Taylor: Nice.

Sydnee: So now, she has a little Punkit she can sleep with.

Taylor: I love that.

Sydnee: Yeah. We have three little Punkits in the house. The one that hangs from the wall, the big one—

Taylor: Is that the one that you hide in weird places, to scare each other?

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: Okay.

Sydnee: Yes. 'Cause it's got a little loop on the top of its head, so you can hang it.

Taylor: Mm.

Sydnee: And then we've got the little guy who sits on the front porch, and

he's holding a plastic bowl that you can fill with candy. So he's a little friendly guy. And now, we've got a stuffed one that she can sleep with. So we've just got all the little Punkits— There was also a little plastic one that I think— More like a Christmasey-looking decoration, 'cause it looks like there's a light inside. Like, you put it on your front porch, and it's plastic, and it glows.

Taylor: [chuckles]

Sydnee: But I was like, "I think we have to— We have so many little Punkits."

Taylor: But I know I saw— I feel like it's new this year. Maybe it wasn't Spirit Halloween, but there's definitely an animatronic one that sits on a bale of hay and moves.

Sydnee: Ooh! See, I don't have that one.

Taylor: There is a movable Sam this year. I just rewatched that movie; I love that character. I love everything about it.

Sydnee: Yeah. Oh, I do too. And they also— They do sell the lollipop he carries, that's um... stabby.

Taylor: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

Sydnee: They sell lollipops like that too. And the girls wanted them, but we bought them for them last year, and they hated them. [laughs] So I told them, "You don't remember this, but you got these last year, and neither of you would eat them. And they just laid there on the counter, sticky, until you let me throw them away. So we're not gonna buy them again, but they're cute."

Taylor: They don't wanna eat them; they want to have them as weapons. That's—

Sydnee: Yes. [laughs] They just want the weapons. But the little stuffie was very cute. And I got Pestilence Pete. It's a little plague doctor...

Taylor: Oh, cute!

Sydnee: ... that talks to you.

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: Yeah, he's this little squishy plague doctor. And he sits. He's kind of a doll, but he talks. Like, you can push his tummy. And he's like, "Don't be afraid of the darkness inside you!" [laughs]

Taylor: Have you— [laughs] That's what it says?

Sydnee: That's one of the things— It says several things.

Taylor: I don't—

Sydnee: But one of it says something about the darkness inside you. It's very strange, 'cause he's a plague doctor.

Taylor: That's very strange bedside manner. Have you ever said that to a patient? "Um, alright. So... take two, call me in the morning, don't be afraid of the darkness inside of you."

Sydnee: I'm gonna start saying that, and see what happens.

Taylor: Yeah, just tack it on.

Sydnee: Maybe it'll be better.

Taylor: I feel like that's a costume you could do. I know you were talking about how you and Justin don't know what you're gonna be. You could be a

plague doctor, and Justin could— He could have the plague, *or*— Or he could be a rat.

Sydnee: Ooh! That would— See, that would really take him facing his own fear, though. 'Cause he's terrified of rats.

Taylor: That's true.

Sydnee: He's, like, phobic of rats.

Taylor: But that would be— Yeah, embracing it.

Sydnee: Yeah. Become the rat.

Taylor: Become the rat.

Sydnee: That's how you get over your fear, become the rat.

Taylor: Be the rat man.

Sydnee: [chuckles] We asked Alexa for a rat fact the other day. I don't remember what led to that.

Taylor: [wheeze-laughs]

Sydnee: But we were like, "Hey, Alexa. Tell me a rat fact." And she didn't. Instead, every day at 11:00 AM, I get an alert that says, "Rat fact." That's it.

Taylor: Well, I think you— You didn't use that right, I don't think.

Sydnee: I didn't. [laughs]

Taylor: That's not... That's not the best use of your [laughs] artificial intelligence.

Sydnee: So if you're in our house at 11:00 AM, any day, you'll hear...

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: "Ding, ding! Rat fact." That's it.

Taylor: There's—

Sydnee: Nothing else. No explanation, nothing.

Taylor: It's reminding you to do your own research.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: It's encouraging you to use your brain. Go look up a rat fact every day, at 11:00 AM. By the end of the month, you're gonna know four rat— No, 30 rat facts.

Sydnee: You're gonna know all about rats, basically.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: I mean, how much could there be to know?

Taylor: I think there's a lot. I think there's plenty of rat facts, if you want to learn— If you want to take the time.

Sydnee: There's— Yeah. I can handle mice; mice don't bother me at all. Rats are a little bit much. I don't really— I don't want to hang out with rats.

Taylor: Oh, I—

Sydnee: Rat facts are fine, but...

Taylor: Look, I have a cat. I love my cat. I've had my cat for 16 years, and

he's my best friend. But I know— And I will never be able to have another cat, I don't think. 'Cause I had my cat. This is my cat. I think I'll go straight to rats after— Maybe a rat and a bird? But like, I— Every time I see somebody that's got a pet rat, I'm like, "I think that's my vibe. That's old Teylor vibe. That—"

Sydnee: Rat?

Teylor: That weird guy with a rat. That's me! I think that's— You gotta know who you are! You gotta know yourself. And I think I'm— I think *I'm* a rat man.

Sydnee: What about— I saw this guy on TikTok who got pulled over by the cops. And when they walked up to his window, he had 100 guinea pigs in his car.

Teylor: No... No.

Sydnee: Just like, free roaming around him while he was driving.

Teylor: I mean, good for him. I'm glad that he knows himself to that degree. But I don't know, guinea pigs and me don't mesh. We don't spiritually see each other.

Sydnee: Ah. I see.

Teylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: No guinea pigs.

Teylor: No. But I see myself— Rats, maybe a pigeon. Maybe a rat and a pigeon.

Sydnee: I really like— Cooper has a fish.

Teylor: Okay.

Sydnee: A betta named Stovetop Stuffing.

Taylor: Perfect name.

Sydnee: And— Yeah. I don't know— You know what's weird? She named it Stovetop Stuffing. We don't really eat stuffing. Like, this isn't— You know what I mean? It's not like that's a frequent meal in our house.

Taylor: I was gonna say, when was the last time you bought stovetop stuffing?

Sydnee: I don't know if, since we've had— As a parent, I don't know if I've ever bought stovetop stuffing.

Taylor: That's like a relic of the 90s.

Sydnee: It is, and it's also— So this is a weird thing, 'cause I was thinking about it. 'Cause I was trying to figure out, "Where did she hear about stovetop stuffing? 'Cause we don't eat it at home." I'm not anti-stovetop stuffing. I just don't— It's just not something we buy. And there really aren't commercials anymore, because of the way kids consume television. We don't watch commercials.

So I don't know how she has learned of stovetop stuffing. But she has, because she named her fish Stovetop Stuffing. Which also, people will ask me, "Oh, does she really love stovetop stuffing?" And I'm like, "I don't even know if she's ever eaten it." [laughs] Like, literally—

Taylor: Where did she hear that?

Sydnee: [laughs] I don't know.

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: But it's a cool fish! I like this fish. This fish is really smart. If you

kind of get close to the tank, it immediately goes up to the little hole where the food comes in, and waits for you there. Like, "Bloop, bloop, bloop, bloop!"

Taylor: Ah, yeah.

Sydnee: "I know what you're here for!" He's a really smart little guy.

Taylor: Hmm! Well—

Sydnee: I like this fish.

Taylor: It's a good fish.

Sydnee: [chuckles] Yeah!

Taylor: I thought usually, fish aren't that interesting.

Sydnee: No! I've never been a fish person, 'cause that's— Well, I will say, I wasn't a fish person because Cooper really initially wanted those glowy fish, the tetras.

Taylor: Mm.

Sydnee: You know, they're neon colors.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: And here is what I've decided. I've done a lot of internet research on [laughs] tetras, because we bought lots of them. And they did not last long.

Taylor: Oh, yeah. You kept— Well, I was gonna say you kept killing them. That's not fair. They kept dying. [laughs]

Sydnee: We did all the things. We did the water temperature, and pH, and

we got the strips, and we did all the things they tell you to do. We followed the instructions to a T.

And when all the first ones died, we talked to the pet shop person, or the person at the fish counter, like, "Please talk to us about this, so we don't keep killing these fish." 'Cause it was— We all cried. Justin and I sat there sobbing, 'cause we killed these fish. [laughs] I don't know. [laughs] Clearly, other things were going on inside, right? Like, I know it wasn't just the fish.

Taylor: Maybe they just had bad fish. They had some sick fish that they were just pawning off on ya.

Sydnee: Well, the more I read about it online, the more there were other people who went through similar things. And everybody just said, "These aren't great fish." [laughs]

Taylor: Leave those fish in the ocean, or wherever they live.

Sydnee: Are they— I don't know this, so I'm asking a question— I really don't know anything about this, so I'm gonna show my ignorance. They're like neon pink, and neon purple, and neon yellow, and neon blue. They're very— They're brightly— Are they bred like that? You know what I mean? Are these GMO fish?

Taylor: [laughs] Are they artificially colored?

Sydnee: Well, I mean—

Taylor: They're just injected with Red 40?

Sydnee: Right? I was—

Taylor: Probably not!

Sydnee: I really was looking at them, thinking, "Did we make these?" [laughs]

Taylor: That's why they're so weak, genetically? They just—

Sydnee: Well—

Taylor: A bad experiment? Eh...

Sydnee: Maybe? Did we— You know? I don't know, and probably not. But there's a fish expert listening, going, "No, Sydnee. We didn't make the fish; they just look like that." I mean, I understand that there's lots of tropical fish that are very beautiful, and colorful, and they probably do occur in nature. They just look like something we made. They look like artificial fish.

Taylor: I'm sorry to the fish expert that is screaming at their computer or their listening device right now. I'm sorry.

Sydnee: I know. [laughs]

Taylor: We don't— Bad fish podcast! [clapping] Bad fish podcast.

Sydnee: This is a bad fish podcast.

Taylor: Knows nothing about fish, yet talks about fish.

Sydnee: I shouldn't talk about— I'm asking the question. I am not sharing any information about fish. I am *asking*, are these arti-fish-ial?

Taylor: [devious laughter]

Sydnee: Get it? They— They just look like GMO fish. And that's not a slam on GMO. I think I have said before, I'm very pro... you know, we need to feed the world.

Taylor: Syd. Syd, you already— Okay.

Sydnee: Genetically modified food has let us do that, but—

Taylor: You made it clear you know nothing about fish, yet you talk about fish, and now you're promoting GMOs. We are going into dark waters.

Sydnee: [gasping laughter]

Taylor: [laughs] Can we pull it back?

Sydnee: Next, let's talk about the new Taylor Swift album!

Taylor: No! Ahh, I'm leaving! Goodbye! Alright, it's over! [away from microphone] [singing] "Baby, you change your mind far too many times, over and over again—" Oh, it's over! Look, it's done.

Sydnee: [laughs] No, I won't. I won't do any of that. I'm not gonna talk about any of that. We put up our 25-foot Betelgeuse.

Taylor: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: That's out front. He's right there, with our— What is he, 16-foot Mothman.

Taylor: Yep. [chuckles]

Sydnee: And Jack Skellington's pretty good. He's like a solid 12 feet. So...

Taylor: I like that you're outclassing your Jack Skellington with all these bigger dudes.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: I saw that Mothman. And once I saw it in your yard, I was like, "No, that can't fit in my apartment." But I had a moment— 'Cause I keep my apartment decorated. My apartment's just decorated for Halloween, year-round. If something spooky goes up, it stays up.

I was like, "Can I put that, just in the corner of my living room? And be hunched over?"

Sydnee: No.

Taylor: No.

Sydnee: Now, I could look and see— If he could bend at the waist.

Taylor: Yeah...

Sydnee: But then, I mean, his legs are gonna be real long.

Taylor: Yeah. That's— I don't think he'd fit. I don't have— I mean, I have roof access. I could just [through laughter] put him on the roof.

Sydnee: [laughs] That would be terrifying. He's really— The way we've got him up here, 'cause we're on the cul-de-sac, and so he's just— And he's under the street lamp on the cul-de-sac.

Taylor: Mm-hmm. Beautiful.

Sydnee: So he's just this terrifying— At night, it's really quite scary. It works. We've had several cars come up and just sort of linger, and I realize, "Oh, people are starting to come up and check out the Mothman. I love it."

Taylor: You have to promise me— I know we joked about it, but you have to promise me that you keep him around year-round. You just decorate him, like the people that have the geese on their stoop. You know?

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: When they put the different clothes on.

Sydnee: Yeah. The porch geese.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: You just make him a new— You know? After Halloween, you dress him up like a turkey, or a pilgrim, or something. And then you dress him up like Santa Claus, or Krampus would work also.

Sydnee: I don't know if our neighbors would complain, but I'm willing to give it a try and see how long we can get away with it.

Taylor: Give it a go!

Sydnee: People do that with those giant skeletons, too. I've seen several people around— Maybe— I don't know if this is a Huntington thing, I don't know if it's a West Virginia thing, or if it's all over. But there are multiple people in Huntington who have those really huge skeletons. You know what I'm talking about?

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: The Home Depot skeletons, they're huge. And they keep them up all year long, and decorate them for all the holidays. There are multiple people that I know who do that.

Taylor: I mean, if I had a yard, I would be one of those people. I am spiritually one of those people.

Sydnee: So I don't know why we couldn't do it with a Mothman.

Taylor: I think that's fun. I think that's actually more— [laughs] That's more culturally accurate for a West Virginian.

Sydnee: It's appropriate. [laughs]

Taylor: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: We just need to put a Mountain Dew in one hand, and a pepperoni roll in the other, and...

Taylor: I love it. Absolutely.

Sydnee: He's celebrating our culture.

Yeah, we actually, [laughs] for our kid's school trunk-or-treat, they do a during school hours trunk-or-treat situation every year. And it's not really trunks, 'cause they don't really have a parking lot where we could all park and do trunks. It's just—

Taylor: You do tables, right?

Sydnee: Yeah. They set up tables around the gym, and each— You can sign up as a parent group to be responsible for decorating each table, and handing out candy, as the kids parade around the gym in their costumes. Which is fun, because it's all the elementary school kids parading around a gym in their costumes. And I love to see— I mean, it's hilarious, always. This year, our table theme is Mothman.

Taylor: Oh, that's awesome.

Sydnee: Yeah. Very excited.

Taylor: I mean, I feel like you could do all of the West Virginia cryptids and stuff. As a group costume.

Sydnee: Ooh! I already have a stuffed Braxie.

Taylor: Ooh.

Sydnee: Yeah. We could. We could do Mothman, and Braxie.

Taylor: And then there's the...

Sydnee: That's the Flatwoods Monster.

Taylor: The Grafton Monster is [crosstalk].

Sydnee: The Grafton Monster.

Taylor: Yeah. He's the big, hulky dude with no neck.

Sydnee: With no neck. [laughs]

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: He barely has a head! He's just got a slight lump in the middle of his shoulders.

Taylor: Yeah. It's just kind of a head on his chest.

Sydnee: Yeah. I love that. Those are the big three. People— Listen. If you were listening from the Pacific Northwest, I know that Bigfoot is yours. I've never tried to take him.

Taylor: No.

Sydnee: I don't know why people in West Virginia try to take Bigfoot. He's not ours.

Taylor: Do people try to claim Bigfoot?

Sydnee: Yes. Listen, I went up towards—

Taylor: [wheeze-laughs] "Listen."

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: What else is there to do?

Sydnee: Okay. I was— [laughs] We went on a little friend group trip, out to the ski area of West Virginia.

Taylor: Sure.

Sydnee: Timberline.

Taylor: Yeah, the ski area.

Sydnee: Yeah, you know, the ski area. It's near Snowshoe. You're getting— You start to get towards where DC people can drive there.

Taylor: Oh, no!

Sydnee: And so it's like bougie West Virginia.

Taylor: Are those the ones that are claiming Bigfoot? The bougie transplants?

Sydnee: It's so wild. Because as somebody who's— I've lived in West Virginia essentially my entire life. Pretty much my entire life. And my cultural understanding of the place where I live is so different than when I go to— We went to these towns where there is a really heavy tourism industry there.

Which is great! I mean, that's wonderful. West Virginia, we need all the help we can get here, so that's awesome. If you come here to ski, or do outdoor adventure sports, and you spend money, and enjoy our mountains and our pepperoni rolls, thank you.

Taylor: [giggles]

Sydnee: But it is a kind of weird feeling, to walk into a tourist shop. And it's like— It's stuff about West Virginia, but it's through a totally different lens.

Taylor: Right.

Sydnee: It's like, it doesn't look the West Virginia *I* know. It's much prettier. [laughs] Just the iconography of it. It's very refined, and there is— There's a lot of stuff about cryptids, of course. That's a big part of West Virginia and Appalachia in general. So there's a lot of stuff about mountains, and the beautiful— I mean, it is. The scenery stuff is all true. Like, come here; it's gorgeous here.

But then there's Bigfoot on stuff. And I'm like, "This is not— Guys, we can't do this. We don't get Sasquatch! We don't get him too; he's not ours."

Taylor: Well, now, I agree with you that I think we should embrace our unique cryptids, and put them to the forefront. I also think, when you're dealing with the Appalachian Mountains, they're older than our concept of a Christian God. The Appalachian Mountains are so old.

Sydnee: They're older than the ocean.

Taylor: Anything could be there. I— Maybe we got a Sasquatch or two. Maybe we do! Eh, you know, if I were Bigfoot, and I was looking for a place to move, where I could just be left to my own devices, I would consider the Appalachian Mountains. I agree, he's not part of the identity of West Virginia. *But*, eh, maybe a couple. That is the place to be, if you're a cryptid and you want to be left alone. Because especially in West Virginia, people will leave you alone.

Sydnee: That's true.

Taylor: Yeah, there's somebody that lives in the next holler, he's covered in fur, or he's got a 10-foot wingspan and glowing red eyes. I don't know. Seems alright. Doesn't bother me! [wheeze-laughs]

Sydnee: That really is— I mean, that really is true. In a lot of places in West Virginia, it's like, "Listen. I may not agree with what my neighbor's doing, but by God, as long as he's keeping to himself, I don't care. Leave *me* alone, 'cause I'm doing my *own* weird stuff."

Taylor: Yeah. [laughs]

Sydnee: "I'm into all kinds of weird stuff over here! And it's none of his business, either."

Taylor: "I'm making illegal moonshine. You're a 16-foot-tall cryptid. We each just take up our space."

Sydnee: Yeah. Everybody just do your thing, and be quiet about it.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: So that is— Yeah, that is true. There's lots of places to hide and get lost in Appalachia in general. And then West Virginia is entirely in Appalachia, so... you know.

Taylor: Yeah. The only state that is.

Sydnee: Yeah. No, that's true. It's interesting to see— That's a big thing on TikTok, are all the rules of the Appalachian Mountains. You see those.

Taylor: I see those, and I think they're fun. Sometimes, it's like, as someone that grew up there... Y'all are doing a lot. [laughs]

Sydnee: Yeah. It— [laughs]

Taylor: Yeah, it's— I don't know, there's creepy areas, but also, just normal people live there. [laughs]

Sydnee: When you're out— I mean, definitely, when you're out in the

woods, there's a presence to it. You feel— Like you talked about, they're so old.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: You *feel* it. You feel how old this land is. I don't think— If you go out, and you sense that presence, you're not wrong. But we don't see skin-walkers on our Ring cameras all the time. That's not— [laughs] That's not something that's happening every night. [laughs]

Taylor: Yeah. Well, and I mean, talk about a cryptid that I don't think we have the right to claim. Even— [laughs] I'm superstitious enough to like, I won't say those words, and I won't claim it. That's not our culture. That is a specific indigenous American thing.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: But let's not even invoke it.

Sydnee: Right.

Taylor: Let's not invoke it. [laughs]

Sydnee: No. That's not— Yeah. That's a weird— And also, close your blinds? Well, I mean...

Taylor: Not like you can't look outside at night.

Sydnee: I don't know.

Taylor: I mean, we lived— The house we grew up in was up on a— It was surrounded by woods. We had a spooky backyard.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: But I was the scariest kid ever, so *I* was scared, but I don't think most people were. [laughs]

Sydney: No. I wouldn't go— I probably wouldn't wander in the woods at night, because I might get lost or fall. But not because I'd be worried about— I don't know. I guess if I did hear someone whistling, I would not answer. I would ignore it and walk the other direction.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydney: I will say that.

Taylor: A lot of it just feels like common sense. If I heard someone go, "Hey!" And I was out in the woods. My first thought wouldn't be, "Oh, no, it's a mimic." It would be, "There's some weirdo in the woods! I'm gonna run away!" I'm not gonna say, "Hey!" back. [laughs]

Sydney: Yeah. But I do think a lot of that is to give us more mystique. I don't know. If that makes you wanna come visit here—

Taylor: Well, that— Mm.

Sydney: It's worth it! It's great here, but... [laughs]

Taylor: That's the thing. It's like, as much as I kind of roll my eyes at it, it's like, hey. Appalachia could absolutely benefit from some tourist dollars. I think those of you there should buy into that. Make as many spooky attractions as you can! Have haunted trail walks. Get someone to dress up as the Mothman and scare people on a hike. Do it. Lean into it.

Sydney: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: Get that money into the state, 'cause you need it.

Sydney: Yeah.

Taylor: Everybody loves Halloween—

Sydnee: And when you come—

Taylor: Oh, go ahead.

Sydnee: Yeah. Well, and when you come, you're gonna wanna come back. 'Cause there is— Especially if you're an outdoors person. There's a lot of outdoors here. [laughs] Like, if there's tons of outside—

Taylor: [through laughter] There's a lot of outside.

Sydnee: There's way more outside than inside here. [laughs]

Taylor: More outside per capita than most places.

Sydnee: So come see all the outside! You'll love it. That should be our new state motto. I'm gonna—

Taylor: Wild, and wonderful, and so much outside. [laughs]

Sydnee: So much outside. I'll call the governor. He's a real jerk, but I'm gonna call him. [laughs]

Taylor: Don't call him, call Babydog. Is Babydog still in power?

Sydnee: [holding back laughter] They banned Babydog from the Senate.

Taylor: What?

Sydnee: Yeah. They won't let Babydog go with Big Jim to the Senate anymore.

Taylor: Uh—

Sydnee: I don't know! Decorum? I'm not really sure.

Taylor: Hey, uh—

Sydnee: It was the only thing we had going for us. We had a gimmick here, and it was that our senator— one of our senators brings his dog to work, but—

Taylor: We had one thing.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: And it was Babydog.

Sydnee: Babydog believes in vaccines, so he's got that over several other people in Washington.

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: [wheeze-laughs]

Taylor: Hey. I'm done with reality for now. Let's talk about fiction. [laughs]

Sydnee: Yeah. Well, Tey, I do wanna talk about fiction. But before we do that, we actually have to check the Group Message.

Taylor: Oh, we just talked through the whole first half. Alright.

Sydnee: I know. I know, but we have a special message for our sister Raleigh.

Taylor: Yes!

Sydnee: Yes. So from Joe and Sarah Whittaker, they want to congratulate our sister Raleigh on passing the bar!

Taylor: Woo-hoo!

Sydnee: Wait, I'm supposed— Am I supposed to read it— I'm supposed to read exactly what Joe and Sarah wrote.

Taylor: Yes.

Sydnee: Hold on. "Congratulations to the youngest Smirl sibling on passing the bar. Now to start a law podcast with your dad and uncle. Good job!"

Taylor: That's a really unique concept.

Sydnee: Yeah!

Taylor: I don't know, maybe you should try that out.

Sydnee: [laughs] Yeah, Riley did pass the bar.

Taylor: Uh-huh.

Sydnee: And she's— So you get to be a lawyer when you finish law school, she told me. But when you pass the bar officially, you can be an *attorney*.

Taylor: Oh. I didn't know there was a difference there.

Sydnee: I didn't, either! I know! So I learned that. So she is now a lawyer, and an attorney, and an esquire. I don't know which one that attaches to. But either way, she's all those things.

Taylor: I mean, I guess if you're gonna give up being a podcaster for something... That's fine.

Sydnee: Yeah. Being a lawyer seems like— That's a decent one.

Taylor: That's an upgrade.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: Alright.

Sydnee: Congratulations, Ril-o.

Taylor: Strong work, kid.

Sydnee: Alright. So fiction. *Final Destination Bloodlines*.

Taylor: The new— A soft reboot, I guess, of the *Final Destination* franchise.

Sydnee: Yeah. I think a really clever way to go about it, though.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Because previously, it was just kind of like, “I don’t know. Death’s coming for you all.”

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: But the idea of— The whole premise is that there is this tragic accident that is supposed to kill a ton of people. But then it doesn’t happen. And so now, Death has to come not only after all the people who didn’t die in the tragic accident, but all of their offspring, and offspring’s offspring, and so on, throughout time.

Taylor: Right.

Sydnee: Death has to right the wrong of you being born. [laughs]

Taylor: It is a unique— I mean, even in the older *Final Destination* movies, it’s always a very unique interpretation of Death as this very obsessive, he’s got the books to keep! He’s coming, [laughs] he’s got the boxes to check.

He's like, "No, no, no! This won't do. I must right this." [through laughter]
It's a very—

Sydnee: He's owed a debt!

Taylor: He's very, very concerned with tiny, individual lives.

Sydnee: [laughs] Very fastidious, is Death.

Taylor: He is! I mean, this Death feels like a— I don't know, like a very controlling GM for a roleplaying game. Like, "No, no, no! This is the way the story is supposed to go, and you went outside of the way I wanted it to go, so I have to redirect you! And it really—"

Sydnee: "Those aren't the rules!" [laughs]

Taylor: "It's not how it was supposed to go! I was telling a *story*!"

Sydnee: [laughs] Oh, man. I feel like that would be the reaction— I've only ever— You know I've only ever played D&D like one time, briefly, or maybe twice, but not very often. And I feel like that's always the reaction I get from any dungeon master. [laughs]

Taylor: Yeah, well, that's— I think that—

Sydnee: 'Cause I don't like to pretend with rules. I just wanna pretend, and I get in trouble a lot.

Taylor: I feel like that's a lot of D&D players, actually, is the goal is to antagonize the DM. Not to actually [through laughter] try to play the game.

Sydnee: Like, "Oh, I know I rolled this. But wouldn't it be more fun if it worked?"

Taylor: "Well... The Rule of Cool—"

Sydnee: “Come on. Just let it work. Let it work!”

Taylor: The Rule of Cool does not come into play in the *Final Destination* land.

Sydnee: No.

Taylor: You will be punished for [laughs] operating outside of the rules. But I love— All of the movies in the previous iterations of the franchise are very smart in how much they layer on— You can kind of see everything that’s gonna happen with the details of the staging. And this one, more so than any other. It’s really fun.

It’s a fun movie to watch multiple times. Because then you look back, and go, “Oh, I know how this person is gonna die.” And they actually set that up at the beginning of the movie. [laughs]

Sydnee: Yes. I think that’s the other level it works on. So the opening scene, the big tragedy that then you kind of rewind, and you see didn’t happen, but should have happened is— I mean, it’s basically the Space Needle.

Taylor: Right.

Sydnee: It’s not, but it looks like the Space Needle, and a rotating restaurant on the top of it. And through a series of [laughs] catastrophic situations, everybody in there dies. And it falls over, and there’s fire, and explosion, and people splattering on the ground, and whatever. It’s this horrific accident that’s supposed to kill... how many people? I don’t remember.

Taylor: It’s like 100-and-some? Yeah.

Sydnee: Some— Yeah. A lot of people. And it is prevented because one character has a vision, and so she stops it all from happening. So now, all

these people have to be killed. But I think that what's cool about it is, I like puzzles. [laughs]

Taylor: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: And I imagine a lot of people watching are reacting to that same thing I do, where my brain starts trying to— 'Cause I know the premise. I'm trying to figure out, "Oh. Is it gonna be the fire? Is it that glass that's gonna crack? What's that penny doing over there?" You know what I mean? I'm trying to piece together all the clues, to figure out what is gonna be the thing that figures it. Like, where does the mousetrap start? And I think there's a lot of people reacting to these movies on that level.

Taylor: Well, that's— That initial setup, and then the first death that you see that is actually the kind of— What's that rat trap game? What is that game? *Mouse Trap*!

Sydnee: *Mouse Trap*.

Taylor: It's kind of like that.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: "What is— What's gonna fall?"

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: Where all of the family is in the backyard, having their little barbecue. And you see the glass shard, and you see the grill, and you see the rake. And there's all this stuff. And there's so much misdirection that you think it's gonna happen, and then it happens. There's something about that that's really satisfying. I bet it's really fun to write those scenes, but it's also really fun to see those scenes. [laughs]

Sydnee: It really is. And I think that's a really interesting mechanism. 'Cause I think it does two things. One, while I'm watching, there's the plot of the movie, the follow-through. But I'm also— I'm focused on the puzzle,

which is gonna be the thing that kills people. How is Death— It's like Death is trying to trick me.

Taylor: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: "What is Death trying to do this time?" So there's that aspect of it. But then there's also, because I am somebody who— When it comes to scary movies— Which I guess this is a scary movie. It's a different kind of scare, but it's a scary movie. The deaths have to be presented in a certain way for me to not get sad, and then not want to engage with the movie.

I know that sounds weird, 'cause I do really like horror movies. But if a death is too sad, if it's too real, if it feels like I should empathize a lot with the characters, it's hard for me to have fun with the movie. And these movies have to be fun, right?

Taylor: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: I mean, that's the whole premise. If they're not fun, I don't know what they're doing. But that sort of puzzle solving makes it feel silly. It reminds me, "This is a movie. This isn't real. Nobody's actually dying. I don't have to feel sad about anything." So it really helps somebody like me, who, eh, if the death gets too real, I'm out.

Taylor: Well, and I think this movie, more than previous entries into the franchise, does— I was thinking about this. Because they do a good job of making every character somebody you care about. I liked every character that bit it in this movie.

Sydnee: Yeah!

Taylor: It's a family. That already is gonna be emotionally, you know.

Sydnee: Sure.

Taylor: You can be involved with that. But they're all really likable. And

sometimes, a horror movie is a bit— I lose interest, because it's just like, "I don't care what happens to these people." You do have to care, but you also— I agree with you, you can't be so sad by their deaths that you lose interest in the movie. It kind of has to have that fun to it.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: And it really— It's almost like an uncanny valley of you like the characters too much, so now it's sad. But the deaths have to be cartoonish enough that it pulls you out of that. It's a hard needle to thread, and I don't know. For as much as I like these characters, they were really— From the first one that you really see, Julia, the girl who goes out jogging, and she gets knocked into the—

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: That is a graphic, horrible scene!

Sydnee: [giggles]

Taylor: But it's so funny, because the whole conversation they have leads up to that.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: It's so ridiculous that it feels like a *Looney Tunes*.

Sydnee: It does. It does. That feels like a *Looney Tunes*. The MRI machine...

Taylor: [laughs] I saw somebody say, "This is gonna make people be afraid of MRIs." It's like, no, that *can* actually happen. So it's okay, you should be afraid of that. [wheeze-laughs] It's terrifying!

Sydnee: Well, yes. Not to make light of anything, but it did— There was a very similar...

Taylor: Right?

Sydnee: ... tragedy that happened not— It was around— Was it after the movie? It was around the time the movie came out.

Taylor: Absolutely.

Sydnee: So it was very, you know. Yes, that is a real fear. Now, I will say, as somebody who has worked in hospitals for a long, long time, generally it is not easy to end up in a room with an active MRI machine.

Taylor: Sure.

Sydnee: You can't just happen into that, stumble into that accidentally. Generally speaking, there are lots of precautions put in place. If you are in an MRI machine, or in a room with an MRI machine, it is because you have been— You need an MRI, you've already been checked out for all the metal, or you are a tech who works there and you know. You can't stumble into that.

Taylor: It wouldn't be through one swinging door across from a vending machine.

Sydnee: No.

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: No, no, no. No, that— [laughs] The MRI machine at the hospital where I worked is like— It's behind several layers of doors with giant signs— Like, they're painted with yellow and black caution stripes, and it says "Do not enter." And then you have to release a lock on them before you can let people in or out. And same for the room where you would actually— You turn it on in the room next door.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Right? So you can't even turn it on from within the room. You have to be in the room next door, and have the patient in it. It's a whole thing. It's a whole thing. [laughs]

Taylor: Well, but it makes for a great *staging* for a ridiculous death scene.

Sydnee: Yes. It does! It does. Which, I mean, I think— *I* think that those kinds of things are useful. Especially in our culture, where— There are some cultures around the globe where death is something that's talked about more. It's something that is not so uncomfortable, or taboo. It's more part of daily life to understand that that's part of it, mortality.

Here, it's not. You know? Very generally speaking, right? So I do think this is helpful to— I mean, [chuckles] it's silly, it plays with death, it plays with the idea of what death is in a way that makes it not scary, but almost like— It's ridiculous. I think that's a helpful conversation.

Taylor: Hmm. Interesting. I mean, I do agree with you. I think that we have a very individualist culture in this country, so that means that your life has to have some poignant arc to it, like your death has to have meaning. And that's just not reality. Death does come—

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: It's what we all have in common, right? That's the one thing that unifies us all. We all end uniquely, but the same. We all die!

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: And elevating death to a— Maybe that's part of the release of horror movies, is elevating death to something cartoonish is somehow freeing. It's so silly that it reminds you, like, yeah, it is. It is all kind of...

Sydnee: It's all ridiculous.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: It's all silly. Yeah, and I think— I think that's a useful thing to do. And it is a way of, I don't know, if you're somebody who occasionally lays in bed, terrified, staring at the ceiling at night thinking about that, like, "We are mortal." If that fact, every once in a while, creeps up in your brain, and like, "Hey, remember this? Remember this? Did you wanna persevere on this for several hours, before you fall asleep tonight?"

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: Movies like this, I think, are cathartic. Because it puts it in your face, and makes you engage with it so intensely that at the end, it's like a release. It's like, "Okay. I don't have to think about death for like a year now!"

Taylor: Yeah. Well, yeah, 'cause I think— I don't know. And this is a trope— I think this has happened enough in horror movies that it is a trope at this point. Where there's a character in the middle of a poignant speech, something meaningful, and it's cut short because they just die in a graphic, but hilarious way.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: Like the mom character?

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: "I'm gonna stay alive as long as I can." And then she's just squashed like a cartoon character by that light post. [laughs] Like, it's so shocking and awful! I mean, the same happens with the grandma in the opening scene.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: Where she's just shot through the mouth with that post. But my

reaction to both of those moments is to laugh. That's what I do. And that makes me feel like, "Why is that my reaction?" 'Cause there's something innate in my brain that's like, "Yeah. It's ridiculous." [laughs] That's how it goes!

Sydnee: Well, and I do. I think that's why movies like this appeal to so many people. Again, I think it works on multiple levels. A lot of people, the gore of horror movies, they like those kind of movies. It works on that level. It's the puzzle thing, it's the trying to solve "How is Death gonna come get you?" The visuals of it are really well done, and all that kind of stuff.

But I think that's the other thing, is engaging with death as a concept. 'Cause what's the bad guy? What's the villain, in this movie? It's Death.

Taylor: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: It's the actual force of death.

Taylor: The inevitability.

Sydnee: That's a wild— Yeah!

Taylor: Well, and I think it's interesting that— So you've got your two characters that kind of evaded death the longest, which is the grandmother character— I love the callback to the guy that works in the morgue. That was a repeated character in the earlier movies. You saw him a few times. And you never—

Sydnee: Oh! Yeah, yeah.

Taylor: It was never understood why he knew so much about the way Death works. So to give an understanding that he was alive through all of this because he was in the system, he was in the program, I love that that kind of put a bow on his story. But both of them were dying of cancer. That was— Death came for them eventually. It found a way in, both the grandmother and him.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: And I think that's interesting, the idea that, do you want your death to be quick, and you don't even see it coming, or do you want it to be long and drawn out? Like... What's the better death there?

Sydnee: Well, yeah. And in the grandma's case, what are you willing to sacrifice?

Taylor: I mean, she's lived isolated, alone, in that cabin, like...

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: That seems like—

Sydnee: Terrified of everything. Terrified of a window being left open, or a breeze coming in. Terrified of *everything*. So it is, on a deeper level, it is talking about that. What are you willing to sacrifice to keep yourself safe, to live one more day? And the thing you're fighting always wins.

Taylor: Right.

Sydnee: That's the other message of it. Which, I don't mean to be a bummer, but that's part of the dramatic tension of the movie. The thing you're fighting, I mean, eventually. [chuckles]

Taylor: Well, like you said, I think that's also part of the release. That's part of why we enjoy— I think that's why we enjoy horror movies in a whole. Because it does force us to [laughs] engage with— A lot of horror movie villains work as a personification of death. Look at Michael Myers, Jason, they are these— They're always behind you. They walk, you run.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: But they will catch up to you in the end. And they always do. That's death in different fonts. I mean, *It Follows* is a great example of that.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: It's always behind you. Maybe it's two years away from you, maybe it's 50 feet. But it's always walking behind you. It is comforting to confront that mentally, in a 90-minute film, and then be like, "Yeah, alright. I walked away from it." But also, it's the thing we never want to think about, that it makes you think about.

Sydnee: Yeah. Which is— Again, it's a very useful thing. Because if you— I mean, the contrast is you think about that alone, in those dark moments, and it's much more horrifying than a log truck. [laughs]

Taylor: [laughs] The fact that they did that as a wraparound, though.

Sydnee: Oh, my gosh.

Taylor: 'Cause that's not the first movie, that's the second movie, right?

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: The one that has the log truck?

Sydnee: I believe so, yes.

Taylor: So it just became such an iconic thought, such an— That's what everybody took away from the original run of the franchise. Is how many times have you been behind the log truck on the highway, and you're like, "Oh, no. What would happen?" And you think about that scene. So to bring it back to that [wheeze-laughs] is just—

Sydnee: It was— I mean, it took the movie from "This was really well done," to I wanted to stand and applaud.

Taylor: Right?

Sydnee: That level of meta understanding of why you like this, and what you took from this, and what this franchise means to you, to bring the log truck back. 'Cause it is! It is the thing that I remember most from all the movies, from all the wild, weird, whatever— The machines. What am I trying to? I always say “Joseph’s Machines.”

Taylor: Machinations? [laughs]

Sydnee: The machines, what are they called? That do an easy thing in a hard way? You know what I’m talking about.

Taylor: Oh, I know the— Oh, gosh.

Sydnee: There’s a creator who makes them all the time, and they’re called Joseph’s Machines, but they’re not named for him. He just makes these kinds of machines. I can’t think of the name. But for all of that, the thing that stands out to me always, is the log truck.

And I’m not the only one, I know, because there’s so many memes about it. There’s so many TikToks about it. There are so many people who talk about, “Ahh! I’m on the highway, and there’s a log truck in front of me.” So I really think that was smart, to bring it back to that.

Taylor: Well, and it almost makes it feel like— Rube Goldberg machines, that’s what you were looking for.

Sydnee: Thank you, thank you.

Taylor: It almost makes it feel like Death has always been in control.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: From the very second movie, where we saw the log truck. That was

the symbol that ended up playing through in the final one. So he's not running around behind you, like, "Oh, what if I do this?" He's like— No, it's all in motion from the beginning.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: Maybe even including the premonitions.

Sydnee: Yeah. And you can't— Yes. Now, that's a scary— I mean, if you start to get that, "Oh, yeah, I let you— No, I let you run for a while."

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: "I let you know what was coming. I let you do that."

Taylor: And I think that has to— I mean, when you get to the point in the narrative where, like in this movie, where the brother brings the sister back to life. And Death lets them dangle for a while, up to the point that they get to prom.

And it's only when they realize, "Oh, I wasn't brought back to life. I was alive the whole time. So the restart of the system didn't happen, so Death is still out to get me." *That's* when it happens.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: Death was just sitting back, like, "Yeah, I know. I know, but you don't know. I want you to *know*." [laughs]

Sydnee: Right. Well, it is, 'cause it's more terrifying. It's like, "Yeah, we could've just taken you out when you didn't see it coming. But instead, we're gonna make sure you feel that fear before."

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: That's— Yeah. I don't know— I wonder where they are— Was there anybody left, that they could continue with? I don't think so.

Taylor: No. I mean, they—

Sydnee: Well, I guess we don't know if all 100-and-whatever people...

Taylor: Well, the one guy left his job, and said he was gonna live out the rest of his days. But that was it, that was the only one left alive.

Sydnee: Yeah. But I don't know, I wonder—

Taylor: But she was the second-to-last to die.

Sydnee: I wonder where they'll go.

Taylor: I mean, I wish— I've said this before. I wish they would bring back a *Final Destination* movie every Halloween. Like, just...

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: Make a new sto— Have them all link up. I [laughs] want it.

Sydnee: Well, I mean, that's really— There's an opportunity here to have an anthology. Every person who didn't die in that Space Needle went on to have kids, and grandkids, and whatever.

Taylor: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: And there's no reason you can't just retroactively say, "We missed one." [laughs] Like, "Oh, there was one more person, actually."

Taylor: Well, you could restart it every— You could start the new movie with the insane train accident that kills off the two remainders from this one. Was

there a person that was at that pre-prom party that had a premonition about it, that they didn't go?

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: It doesn't matter if it's cheesy; they're all kind of cheesy. [laughs]

Sydnee: That's true! This was a big mass casualty kind of event, too.

Taylor: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: So you could use this as the jumping-off point for the next one.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Ooh! Now, *that* would be a nice domino.

Taylor: Well, and the way that they wrap around. That was one of the smartest features in the original run of the movies, where they have the— The last one in the original franchise loops back to the plane crash that's in the first one.

Sydnee: Yeah!

Taylor: You can always play with the timeline.

Sydnee: That's interesting.

Taylor: Well, it's the same— It's the same joy you get out of the *Saw* movies, where it's just, "How is this death gonna happen?"

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: "How is it formulated?" That's the fun of the movie, you know.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm. And again, that helps you not persevere so much on like, "They're gonna die."

Taylor: I mean, I think— I've been watching a lot of horror movies. It's October, it's the time for it. And I've come to understand that what I like the most is when a horror movie kind of operates like a roller coaster ride.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: You know, you have that initial part. Usually, on a roller coaster, it starts off, you go up the big hill. You have a lot of time to think, when it's going, "Clink-clink, clink-clink, clink-clink."

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: And that's the time when you're understanding how this universe works, the rules of it. But once you go over that hill, it's just a ride. You know?

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: There might be some moments where you're going up another hill, but it's just you go, you go, you go. You're laughing the whole time, you're screaming and laughing, and then it's over. That's a good horror movie to me. And I think that this has that feeling, of just, you know...

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: You're not really thinking about— You're kind of scared, but you're laughing. That's the good pitch to hit. So you don't have long enough to think about, "Oh, it's kind of sad that that character died." [laughs]

Sydnee: Yeah! Yeah, no, I agree. Yeah, it was a lot of fun. I enjoyed that movie; I do hope they make more of 'em.

And you mentioned...

Taylor: Yes.

Sydnee: What are we gonna do next?

Taylor: Speaking of the machinations of death, well, we never talked about the *Saw* movies, actually.

Sydnee: Yeah. I would— And I am looking forward to— I have not gone back and rewatched the first one maybe since I saw it initially. So...

Taylor: I can't believe that, because it has Westley in it. And I know how much you love him.

Sydnee: That's true, I do.

Taylor: We're mainly gonna talk about the first one. That'll be our focus, but *I'm* gonna use this as a reason to rewatch all of them, so... [laughs]

Sydnee: Excellent. Yeah. I think everything but maybe the pit of hypodermic needles, I could watch again.

Taylor: Can't see that?

Sydnee: That's a rough one.

Taylor: That is a rough one, yeah.

Sydnee: That was a rough one.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Alright. Well, we will watch at least the first *Saw*, if not more, for the next episode. And if you don't mind, all these things we talked about, gore and death and all those things, *Final Destination Bloodlines* is a fun watch.

Taylor: Absolutely.

Sydnee: A fun horror movie watch. And thank you for listening. Thank you to Maximum Fun. You should go to MaximumFun.org for a lot of great shows that you would enjoy. 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 begins 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: I'm Taylor Smirl.

Sydnee: I'm still buffering.

Taylor: And I am, too.

Sydnee: I was gonna say, there are gonna be a lot of people [crosstalk].

Taylor: [laughs] I mean, [crosstalk]. It was so silly, but it was funny!

Sydnee: I know. I know, it was very silly. [laughs] The whole thing was silly.

MaximumFun.org.
Comedy and culture.
Artist owned.
Audience supported.