

Still Buffering 469: Stranger Things (2016-2025)

Published on Feb 15th, 2026

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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, the groundhog saw its frickin' shadow.

Taylor: How could— I mean, did it even need to see a shadow? Wasn't it just like, frozen in its hole? And it was like, "Yep, that's it. That's the prediction."

Sydnee: This felt like the least surprising— like, the least... [laughs] I don't know. Didn't— we all knew, right?

Taylor: Groundhog didn't even bother coming out. He just sent a text message. Said, nope. Nope. [laughs]

Sydnee: It's freezing outside. It is eight degrees here. Yeah, no, I, obviously, obviously, we knew it, Phil. Thanks, Phil.

Taylor: Yeah. Yeah, I don't, I don't even know. He's frozen in there. I don't think he could come out if he wanted to. He might be dead.

Sydnee: No, no, I watched it. I was— the girls were out of school all last week, *all* last week. And then this morning to cap it off, we had a two-hour delay. They are at school now. They did go to school.

But before they went, they were like, "We have to know!" So we watched the video. We didn't watch it live. I'm not getting up at dawn to watch a groundhog.

Taylor: How, how, like... how good are this groundhog's predictions that we pay attention to it anymore?

Sydnee: They're... okay. I saw somebody sharing...

Taylor: What are the statistics on this, this groundhog?

Sydnee: There are statistics, Tey.

Taylor: Oh, great.

Sydnee: That, okay. Listen, I, I, I'm going to joke about— I'm joking about this. And I am frustrated because it's cold. But all that aside, I love that we do this. It's so dumb. And I love it.

Taylor: Yeah. No, I agree with that. Both that it's dumb, and that I also love it. [laughs]

Sydnee: Yeah. No, no, I absolutely love it. And there are statistics. People do, do, uh... oh man, sorry. Justin just texted me. I left my simmer pot on again. Man, I do this... I do this. I— do you know how many pots I've destroyed with my simmer pots?

Taylor: Syd, that's so dangerous!

Sydnee: I know.

Taylor: You could burn down the whole house!

Sydnee: I know.

Taylor: That is the opposite of the good luck and intentions you want with a simmer pot.

Sydnee: Oh man. Oh, yeah. Well, it was— last night was Imbolc and, you know, Brigid's Day.

Taylor: Oh, that's right.

Sydnee: Yeah. So, okay, everything's okay. Anyway, let me give you groundhog statistics. [laughs] Yeah. Did you, did you put out a scarf for Brigid?

Taylor: No, I didn't.

Sydnee: I always, yeah, I put out scarves for all of us, and then we hang them in our rooms to bring us protection and to remind us that— well, it is not spring yet. The beginnings of life are stirring deep in the ground. Life is coming back.

Taylor: You know what? I'll do all that stuff tonight. I totally forgot. But the one thing I like about most practices is that you can kind of be a little sketchy with the day. You know, it's like the full moon. Get it the day before, get it the day after. Just, you know, it's fine.

Sydnee: Close enough.

Taylor: All right. So, the groundhog. [laughs]

Sydnee: Groundhog statistics. So like, when I looked that up, like, immediately they want to tell me about the West Virginia... my Google search is like, what you want to know about French Creek— French Creek Freddie.

Taylor: No, what? No.

Sydnee: There are a bunch of groundhogs. It's not just... grading the... Oh my gosh.

Taylor: Now wait a second. Hold on. This is, this is new information for me. So I know there's the one. There's what, Phil?

Sydnee: Punxsutawney Phil.

Taylor: Phil, we're on a first name basis. Second... second name basis. Phil. You're telling me that there is competition in the job field of groundhog that predicts the weather?

Sydnee: Yes. Listen, last year, in the National... Weather Service? No. Who put this out? NOAA. Who's that? That's a... National Center for— no. What does that stand for? Anyway, the government.

Taylor: The government.

Sydnee: [laughing] Put out rankings. And in order to qualify, you have to have been prognosticating for at least 20 years. And they had to be active as of 2024. The most— the, well, I don't know. Should I start with the most?

Taylor: Yeah. Who's the best at it?

Sydnee: Or do you want me to go down? Okay. Yeah. Let me give you some. Listen, in Nevada, they use a tortoise named Mojave Max.

Taylor: There's a tortoise? So this is not about— this is not a groundhog-specific skill.

Sydnee: Punxsutawney Phil is only number 17. 35% accurate, Punxsutawney Phil is.

Taylor: Wow! That's not, that's nothing. You could flip a coin and get better stats.

Sydnee: No, exactly. He is the longest running. There's Woody the Woodchuck. He's down there. There's a bunch of taxidermied groundhogs.

Taylor: Now, I don't know how that works.

Sydnee: I don't, I don't love that. We're going to skip through those. There's Dunkirk Dave and Holtzville Howe. Those are all, those are New York groundhogs.

Taylor: Where do they even find these?

Sydnee: I don't know. Let's get up to the— French Creek Freddie is a West Virginia groundhog that's 55% accurate. Buckeye Chuck, bet you could guess where that is.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: That's Ohio.

Taylor: Ohio.

Sydnee: Yeah. Let's see. Woodstock Willie, Jimmy the Groundhog. Thank you, Wisconsin.

Taylor: Ol' Jimmy the Groundhog.

Sydnee: Jimmy the Groundhog. Gertie the Groundhog. Thank you, Illinois. Concord Charlie, that's also West Virginia. 65% accurate, Concord Charlie. Lander Lil is third. Prairie, she's a prairie dog statue. Why is that something? She's 75% accurate.

Taylor: I don't, I don't think that dead animals should count.

Sydnee: So, top two. Number two, coming in second, is General Beauregard Lee out of Georgia. And it is 80% accurate.

Taylor: He's got more advanced training. That's a little bit unfair. He's a general.

Sydnee: He's a general. That's true. But he still can't beat, with 85% accuracy. New York's own Staten Island Chuck.

Taylor: [laughs] Staten Island Chuck!

Sydnee: Staten Island Chuck is the most accurate groundhog as of 2025. Now I don't know if they've updated now, since last...

Taylor: Staten Island Chuck.

Sydnee: Staten Island Chuck.

Taylor: Man, I'm, I'm glad he can, he can predict the weather so well, but I, I know who Staten Island Chuck voted for. I don't, I don't care— I don't care how well he predicts the winter. [laughs]

Sydnee: So yeah, there's a whole bunch of groundhogs out there predicting the weather. I'm assuming— like, I don't understand why you don't just sort of look at what the weather service is kind of saying. Like, look over the next couple weeks, and you could probably guess or use the Almanac or something. Right?

Taylor: Yeah. Like, weather is not that much of a mystery to us anymore. There are people that are not groundhogs... eh... that have trained in this for a very long time. [laughs]

Sydnee: I mean, and I get it's not perfect. Like, we didn't know— our initial forecast was that we were going to get like, a foot of snow. But then the warm wedge, as the meteorologist called it, shoved warm air north, and we fell into the warm wedge, and we got ice instead of snow.

Either way, it didn't matter. The point is we got stuck on our frickin' hill for a week. I mean, same outcome. It was really cold and the roads were bad. *Are* bad.

Taylor: Yeah. Well, I don't, like... I feel you could just kind of catch the vibe of the winter. I don't know. Do the groundhogs run on vibes? Because like, I could— I'm not a groundhog, but I could say the vibe of this winter is it's not going anywhere anytime soon.

Sydnee: No, no, it's going to be cold for a bit. I think we're getting the warm weather here for a few days, at least— when I say warm, I mean like, above freezing. I think it's going to get up to 40 later this weekend. Hopefully the ice melts, because I mean, we're still— like, listen.

The roads still have like, these giant— so they've tried to dig trenches in the ice for people to drive in, but on either side are just these like, walls of ice boulders. Like, and the way they did it, they blocked a lot of people into their side streets and driveways when they plowed the main road. So there's just like, ice walls blocking you in wherever you are.

Taylor: Yeah. That's similar up here. Back when I used to bike to and from work, this was always my favorite time, because they push all of the snow off the roads into the bike lanes. So it's just a mountain of snow. Like, this is not usable anymore.

But it's— and also just like, half of the sidewalk is just a wall of ice. I was trying to put the recycling and garbage out last night at work. And, you know, we've got like, six big bins that have to go— very tight

regulations on where you can put trash out. And I'm just like, it's just a wall. So I'm just hurling trash bags on top of the ice wall.

Like, this is good? Is this fine? I guess. But I looked up and down the street and that's what everybody else had done. So it's like, well, I guess this is what we're all doing.

Sydnee: I have enjoyed... Have you seen any of the Boston parking wars on TikTok?

Taylor: No.

Sydnee: So I don't— I don't— this is all new to me. I guess... I guess there are very specific rules, because a lot of people are parking on the street. There are very specific rules about the use of like, a space saver. So, if you, if you take the time to dig your car out, which is quite a feat with some of the weather that people got, right? Like, you're digging your car out of ice and snow. It probably takes you several hours to, if your car was parked on the side of the road, to free it from its spot. Right?

So if you put all that effort into getting your car out of there and then pull out, you don't want somebody else to take your spot. And then you pull up and there's nowhere to park because somebody else didn't take the time to clear a spot. Right?

So I guess you can put something in that spot to save your space, for up to, like— and I don't know because I'm just getting this from people talking on TikTok. So I didn't read the law, but it's like 48 or 72...

Taylor: Well, it's not a law.

Sydnee: Well, I think this is like, technically for like 48 hours— or maybe it was 72— or I think it was 48 hours after the end of a snow emergency, that space saver is still good.

Now, outside of that window, the space saver holds no value. You cannot, like... you can park wherever you want. But up to 48 hours after a snow emergency has ended, you can put a space saver in your space. And the space saver is just whatever you want to put in it to save your space.

So I've watched all these TikToks of the variety of things that people in Boston put in parking spaces to save their space. A chair is— seems to be like, the standard.

Taylor: That makes sense.

Sydnee: You just put a chair out there, like a folding chair. A lot of beach chairs, you know, like deck chairs, that kind of thing.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: I saw somebody put like, a giant stand up fan. Several people have like, lugged out whole benches. Somebody dumped a dishwasher, like an old dishwasher into the spot. I don't even know where they— I don't— I'm assuming it wasn't the one they were actively using.

Taylor: That seems like a lot. I pass a lot of easy things to carry to get to the dishwasher.

Sydnee: Somebody just put a Dunkin cup in the middle of the spot, which I appreciate...

Taylor: [laughs] Ah, the Boston traffic cone.

Sydnee: I appreciate the theming. High marks for theming. But I think the problem with that is you can just drive right over it.

Taylor: That's trash. Yeah, you got to get one of those big coffee boxes and put it there or something.

Sydnee: Yeah, something. And then a lot of people will put little notes on it. "This is a space saver. If you take this spot, I'll kill you." You know. [laughs]

Taylor: See, that's— I mean, that's not new to me because that's like... that is, outside of weather emergencies, a system of organizing parking in New York City that I'm sure has no legality to it, but it is enforced. Like, the spot directly in front of my building is always reserved for one of the old guys that lives, I think... I think the next building over.

But he just has two traffic cones that like— there's always a bunch of old dudes out on the street, like hanging out. And so, when he drives off, those old dudes move those those traffic cones into the spot, and it stays that way with those two traffic cones there until he comes back and then someone pulls them back out, or he'll get out and move them. For the longest time, I thought we had construction going on in front of our building, like, what is always happening there?

And it was like, no, it's just this guy decided this is his spot and everyone on the block agrees with it. And I would not want to be the soul that decides to park there and move those traffic cones.

Sydnee: I mean, I do think that there is wisdom in, we all have to park on the street. Let's all sort of decide where our spot is, and then just stick with it. I can see the wisdom in that for just like, keeping the peace. You know? That makes sense to me.

I did... There were several where I saw like, somebody cleared out a spot and then someone took their spot. And like, in one case, the guy dug out behind just far enough to get his car wedged in behind the car that stole his spot and trapped them in.

There was another where a woman dug her car out and like, the person across the street had like, a Ring cam or something that caught it all on... This is how people are catching this all on video.

So she dug out her car for like, hours. Like, it took her like, three hours to dig her car out of ice and snow. She pulls out, and it's gone for just like, an hour. So I don't know, get food or groceries or whatever the heck. And when she comes back, somebody has taken her cleared spot. So she then proceeds, for the next several hours, to put all the snow and ice back around the car that stole her spot.

Taylor: [laughs] Fair. Fair.

Sydnee: Just like, completely encase this car in snow. I just— and then like, make a video of it like, eat this, you MFer. This is what you get!
[laughs]

Taylor: I think that is... I think that's as fair as you can get. Y'know?

Sydnee: I love that. I love that level of— I don't know if I have that much petty energy in me.

Taylor: Oh, I could be that petty. And I mean, what can they say? They can't say it's like, property damage, 'cause like, the snow was already there.

Sydnee: They just put it back.

Taylor: It was just out there. I've seen the— and I don't know if this is the same. I'm not sure if this is for the same reason, but people icing cars. Because it's so cold out, you just dump a bunch of water on the car and it destroys it.

Sydnee: Why?

Taylor: Because it freezes so fast. Well, I'm not sure why some cars have been the target of this. I think other cars, perhaps that have an association with ICE. Not the weather phenomena that's plaguing us all. The man-made phenomena that's plaguing us all. And I mean, hey, who knows how that— how that frozen water got there. Anything can happen outside. Au naturel.

Sydnee: Too bad. That's too bad.

Taylor: I think we can all agree. We'd like the ice to go away. We'd like the ice to just be gone.

Sydnee: Yes. No more ice.

Taylor: We just need something to come along and just melt it all, destroy it, send it back to the... send it back to the watery depths.

Sydnee: To whatever sad subreddits you were on before.

Taylor: Yeah. Yeah.

Sydnee: Yeah, I'm assuming that's what they were talking about at the Grammys last night, all those celebrities.

Taylor: They were talking about the weather. Yeah.

Sydnee: They were talking about the weather.

Taylor: It is too cold outside. Get rid of all this ice. This ice sucks. This ice has never been laid, ever. Not once. Ice. Ice.

Sydnee: We hate ice. [laughs]

Tey, during our long week at home... Which, again, like, I really— I'm not— I love having extra time with the kids. I worry a lot about the structure of our society, that I go to work, my kids go to school... like, I always want more time with them. I always feel like I'm not getting enough.

So, it's not hard. It was hard to be stuck in the house. It started to feel like COVID times. So, that was hard. I wanted to go out and do things with— I want to be with my kids, but I also want us to like, leave the house together. Not, you know. But, we did take advantage of this opportunity to finish Stranger Things.

Taylor: Nice.

Sydnee: Yes. Which is—

Taylor: It took a long time for all of us to finish Stranger Things, right? Like, how many years did that show exist for?

Sydnee: It came out... Oh, I don't remember. How long has it been? I don't know. We just... finished it. I mean, it finished this past— end of 2025, but...

Taylor: Let's see. 2016?

Sydnee: Geez.

Taylor: Was it 10 years to get what, five seasons?

Sydnee: Yeah, 10 years.

Taylor: Wow. Yeah.

Sydnee: Yeah. Well, I mean, COVID happened in there.

Taylor: Well, yeah, but it was a lot of, a lot of space. Yeah. Those kids started out as kid kids. And then by the end, they were adults playing kids. Which, far more in line with the '80s theme of it all.

Sydnee: [laughs] Now it was— so, Justin and I had been watching it all as it came out. So when this last season came out, we were going to just watch it, but Charlie and Cooper had both shown a lot of interest in the show. And at first we were like, it's probably too scary. But then I think it was the last set of snow days actually was when we started it.

We had another almost whole week out of school back in November. And they were like, "Please, can we just watch one episode and see what we think?"

So we watched the first episode. They loved it. And we just kept watching all through the holidays. And so, we did not watch the new season until they had caught up completely. And then we watched it with them for the first time.

Which was a little tricky, because I knew the scariest parts, you know? And so I could kind of like, say, hey, look away, or like, skip a little bit ahead. Also, Cooper is really triggered by puking.

Taylor: Oh. There's a lot of... vomit-adjacent things.

Sydnee: And there was no like— there are a lot of handy websites out there kind of like doesthedogdie.com. There's a lot. There's that for emetophobia, the fear of vomiting.

Taylor: Really?

Sydnee: Yeah, you can look up and see where— not just like, is there vomit in this movie, but exactly where and what time it happens. And so, we can just sort of like, artfully skip ahead 10 seconds or whatever.

Taylor: What does she call vomiting, splatto? What is it?

Sydnee: Splatto.

Taylor: Splatto, okay.

Sydnee: I believe that's a Junie B. Jones thing. Junie B. Jones calls it splatto. So, but yeah, so we couldn't do that for season five because they didn't have all the emetophobia warnings out. Or at least there were some, but not a complete... anyway.

It was fine. It worked out fine. But that is always a wor— that, I didn't know how much she hated vomiting until I made the mistake of showing her Pitch Perfect.

Taylor: Oh, God. Oh, I don't... I mean, are you sure that wasn't the thing that traumatized her against vomiting? Because I can't... I love those movies. They're such fun movies. I cannot handle that scene.

Sydnee: It's awful.

Taylor: It's terrible.

Sydnee: Yeah. I don't have emetophobia. Like, I have a job where I watch people puke sometimes, where I'm cleaning up their puke and it doesn't bother me. But yeah, that's rough.

Taylor: Yeah. I don't... I don't know why that to make like, a comedy that features mainly women legitimate, we have to have some sort of despicable grossout scene. That seems to be a thing. I think that women can be funny without puking or pooping themselves.

Sydnee: I know, right? It's like the Bridesmaids diarrhea scene.

Taylor: Oh, I hate those scenes.

Sydnee: Yes. Yeah, I feel the same.

Taylor: There's not such egregious puking in Stranger Things.

Sydnee: No, no. And most of the time it's not— like, there is— okay, Hopper is the biggest offender. If you want to know now, I can tell you. Hopper pukes the most by far.

Taylor: That surprises me. I would have thought it was all of the kids being— like the black goo, like, being puked up.

Sydnee: Well, here's the thing. When the kids puke, it's like, well... Will has the little worm thing fall out of his mouth a couple times. And then the kids will expel like, the cloud of black mist, but it's not like puking, you know? Hopper, anytime he's getting like, tortured, or he's been beaten up or something, there's always a scene afterwards where he's barfing. [laughs]

Taylor: Oh, is that just the David Harbour special? Is "I just, I got— I'm really good at pretending to puke. Throw it in there."

Sydnee: I guess, I don't know. I wouldn't— I don't think it's the kind of thing you would notice unless you were a parent on the lookout for it to protect your child. But like, yeah. But it didn't bother her, like when Will just opens his mouth and just sort of like, a slug falls out. That was not... That doesn't bother her. Yeah.

Taylor: The magical puke is fine. Real puke is bad.

Sydnee: Yes. Yeah.

Taylor: Okay. Good to know.

Sydnee: There wasn't a lot of it in season five.

Taylor: I mean, to jump right to the spoilers, I don't think we need to rehash the plot of Stranger Things for anybody out there. I feel like if you're listening to this, you know. It's every... sci-fi fantasy '80s movie rolled into one thing.

How did you feel about the ending? It was controversial, right? I mean, a lot of people had strong opinions about it.

Sydnee: So I got to be honest. So, I loved... let me say, overall general impression. I loved the show. I loved the story. I liked season five. I felt like it was getting a little sweaty there with like, there's a wormhole. And also, I think another planet that's being sucked through the wormhole.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: And that, like, I understood the wormhole concept because of in season four, when they are in the upside down, Nancy goes into her house to look for her gun. And there's no gun, but there are shoes that she had worn like, several years ago, kind of hinting, like, this is another time. It's not another place. It's also another time.

So I thought that was going to be it. Like we've connected the past and the present through a wormhole. That made sense to me.

I don't know why Vecna had his own planet that he was colliding with the planet. That started to get weird.

All that being said, I have no problem with a show where you have a ton of characters that everybody loves and you decide for the most part, we don't want to kill off people. I have no problem with that. However,

there is this whole sort of theme in this last season where clearly Hopper is ready to sacrifice himself so everybody can have a happy life.

And El figures it out and is mad at him and is like, "No, that's not— that is not okay. That's not loving. That's not— like, you are not helping me by causing me the pain of losing you. Like, that is not heroic. We should be able to do this together."

And he internalizes that message enough that then he has to tell her that. "Hey, I know what you're thinking of doing. You're going to sacrifice yourself."

And what they're talking about, I think, at least the way I interpret it, the way I see it, they're talking about trauma. Everybody in this has been traumatized.

El, I think you could make the case along with Kali and the other, you know, children the most right? Like, they've had the most trauma. And to end a cycle of trauma, you don't, like, die. You live a life that is, you know, happy and full and healthy, and you put love— and like, that's how you end trauma.

You, you know, stop the pain and suffering and violence. You don't perpetuate it by sacrificing yourself, and everyone else then lives in suffering and depression because they miss you and they love you and they lost you to violence.

And I felt like that was the message we were sending. And I think that's a really positive, beautiful message. And then she's gone. Maybe.

Taylor: Maybe she's hiking in... Peru?

Sydney: Alone! I mean, that's the other thing. Like, even if, even if we believe that like, the story that Mike tells at the end that she's out there alone somewhere... which I mean, like, that's nice, but she had to leave

everyone she loved and knew. And they all hurt because they miss her, and she hurts because she's away from them. And that's the... fairy tale ending?

Taylor: Yeah, I don't... I didn't have as quite of a harsh read as some people did that were just like, "Oh, this was terrible. The ending, you know, didn't do the show justice."

Like, I agree that I'm like, there seemed to be kind of a formula to the tragic death of each season prior to that. They would give you one character that you would 100% fall in love with. And that character would be sacrificed to the narrative.

Sydnee: Bob Newby. Never forget.

Taylor: Yeah. And then, and then what's his name?

Sydnee: Eddie.

Taylor: Eddie. Yeah. Like, and they had like, that so that you had that emotional weight to each season. And I mean, Hopper in the season that you thought he died, like, that was kind of that, you know. You had those moments, but it felt pretty clear that they'd established like, this isn't about, like— this isn't Game of Thrones. We're not having the red wedding. We're not going to slaughter all your favorites and like, devastate you with reality. This is still kind of a sci-fi fantasy pastiche that the heroes do win in the end.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: So I was not— I was not disappointed. I didn't want Steve to die. Like, I don't want to have to— "Oh, it's— it would be the right thing to do."

No it wouldn't. I don't mind that. I was really sad about both why, like, that El got that ending, and the Duffer Brothers just kind of saying like, "Well, this show is about childhood magic and she represented childhood magic. So childhood magic has to go away at the end for everyone to grow up."

It's like, that was never her narrative. I don't think that is— like, I think you just kind of pulled that out of the air to explain it. She couldn't have been depowered, was their thing. Like, "You couldn't have El without her powers. We showed that." It's like, no, you could have.

Sydnee: Yeah, you did. And, no, I really didn't like that. I don't... I don't like that idea either. That El had to go away for them all to grow up is a really... that's a sad use of this character that we had all come to really care about and who, again, has had a life of trauma. I mean, has had very little opportunity to live a fulfilling life and make choices for herself because even, you know, she's completely controlled obviously in the lab. And then she's hiding from the government.

So like, her and Hopper have this like, they love each other, but it's also really contentious, because Hopper is trying to protect her above all else when she wants to grow up and live a life. But he is so terrified of losing her that he is, you know, he has to like, try to control her. And then even Mike, he loves her, but he's also like... she's a superhero to him.

It's a very childish kind of like, "I have cast you in a very specific light." Everybody has given her limited options. So I would like to see, and I think that this sort of fulfills that, she's given endless options at the end.

She is now under no one's control. She is not Hopper's second daughter. She is not Mike's girlfriend. She's not, you know, Dustin's superhero. She's not Will's savior again. She's not, you know, Max's best friend. She's not anybody's anything. She's not Papa's experiment. She is just her. But I don't know that that works if she also cannot have the love and aff— and, like... I don't know.

Taylor: It's interesting because that, I mean, everything outside of, I mean, Papa's experiment, everything you just explained. I think that's one of the lessons you learn that actually is the transition from childhood to adulthood, is that we think that we're going on a quest to figure out who we are. That there's this big thing that you're supposed to be.

And I think becoming an adult is the realization that you are just a collection of all of the things you are to other people, and to yourself. But like, that is— it's like the onion metaphor, you know? Like, you just peel it away until it's nothing. You are the layers that make you.

You are the people that you're friends to and family to and confidants to and heroes to. Like, that is where your identity comes from. And it seems a little almost juvenile in a way that it's like, "No, no, no, now she gets to find herself."

She was, she— that was her. She was all of those things. And it seems kind of— it's one of the most egregious offenses against women in fantasy is the, you know, the fridging. You've heard of that phrase? Where...

Sydnee: I had that thought.

Taylor: You kill off a woman to give motivation to men. And it sucks because it kind of— at the end it does feel like that. Like, it shows all of the other characters going on and living their life somewhat inspired by her or because of her. But it's like, why did she have to be removed from the narrative for them to proceed with theirs?

Sydnee: Yes. Yes. I mean, because I mean, it's really— you believe that Mike goes on... I don't know. I feel like the way that Mike looks and the way that they show him at the end, I feel like we're seeing like, "And Stephen King was born." You know what I mean?

Taylor: I know. [laughs] "And he's the writer now."

Sydnee: Yeah, like, it felt very much— I mean, I have to imagine that was kind of like, a little nod to that.

Taylor: Well, as an aside, I will say, as I've gotten more into the Stephen King universe, I was inspired by like, the retelling of IT and then now like Welcome to Derry, so much of this is just Stephen King reheated. So much. [laughs]

Sydnee: There's clearly— like you can see, I mean, there's a season that is very much inspired by Nightmare on Elm Street. And I think there are moments— like, there's a very clear Halloween moment where they push Vecna out of the house and they come running outside and they see the grass where he was laying and he's gone. And I mean, there are so many nods to different movies.

And I mean, I think this one had sort of a fairy tale ring to it, this most recent season with Holly and her little cape, and going off into the woods with her little bag of things to explore. Like, I mean, you know, there's so many parallels to all that.

And all of it has to do with like, the dangers of when you're growing up and like, childhood and moving on to adulthood and the risks and the things that lurk in the shadows and in the woods that can scare.

I mean, you know, that's all there. I see all that. But I agree. Like, the idea that all of this, the culmination is that Mike's going to write stories about it. Um, and then everyone else got to live.

Taylor: It would have been... you know, 'cause you're saying with the fantasy thing, it made me think like, yeah, it all started as a D&D game. And I think as somebody that's played a lot of fantasy games, a lot of D&D, it's like, part of what you're— part of what you're going through is

like... You're experiencing playing these characters that have these magical powers, but you're also kind of sifting through real world events in a fantasy setting.

But I do think that those kind of games allow you to sort of develop useful skills in life, like, apart from all the magic, you know? Just like, social interactions. I think it would have been so much more poignant to have her make the conscious choice, instead of like, the season where she lost her powers against her will, to put all that behind her and just, you know, move forward as a normal girl.

Like, isn't that such like— that's the Buffy quandary, right? Like, the desire to just be a normal girl. I think it would have been such a more powerful ending to have her make that choice. "I don't... I'm going to move forward as a regular human and live my life with this in the past."

Sydnee: I think I agree. And I think like, all of my concern for her story is amplified in Kali being brought back in this season. I guess just so somebody could die? Like, just because they needed— it wouldn't feel like a finale if somebody didn't die.

Taylor: Which I mean, that's so— again, it's so brutal. Because she's one of the other characters that was the most tortured. [laughs]

Sydnee: Yeah, I thought that was a weird choice. Like, bringing her back, okay, I understand. But then, just to kill her off. It really felt like they were sitting there going, "We got to kill somebody, and nobody could decide who we should kill. So let's bring back a character from before so we have somebody to kill off," is what it felt like.

We have to talk about the coming out scene.

Taylor: Oh, that's right. [sighs] I don't... How do you feel about it? You go first. [laughs]

Sydnee: Well, okay. I think— and I've said this for a long time. I think that Stranger Things— kind of like how I think Lost started off and was going to be about purgatory, and then everybody was like, "It's about purgatory!" And they were like, "Oh gosh, we got to come up with something else."

And that's why the rest of it was sort of muddled. I think this is not muddled in that way. But I think Stranger Things, in the beginning, I said from the start like, oh, this is kind of like, Will is gay. And he's struggling with this.

I mean, like the metaphor— like, you could see it all in the show. "There's this darkness. There's this thing I'm ashamed of, I'm scared of. I don't know how to talk about. I'm worried people— I'm worried I'll get rejected. I'm worried people will hate me. I'm worried people will see me as a monster."

Like, all of that is in there. But then the show became about so much more. And there were so many other characters that people cared about, aside from Will, that it couldn't just be about Will and about being gay. So it became about like, all of the trauma we have and secrets we hide and shame that we feel that holds us back, that makes us hate ourselves and torture ourselves and like, letting it go. And so, okay, so it's a bigger message. But I knew a coming out scene would have to happen.

I don't know why— and I understand like, the time pressure. I understand he had to do it before he faced Vecna. I get all that, mechanics of the story.

Okay, so he's going to come out to his mom, makes total sense. His mom loves him, has always supported him, has trusted him, seems like a good person to come out to. Jonathan I think kind of already knew. Like you can tell from his reaction. So, safe. And he needed to say it to

Mike, because as he talks about, Mike was his Tammy. He needed to say it.

All that being said, why was Murray there? Why did he have to come out to 15 people? It is 1986!

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: And this child has to come out. He doesn't even have the language for it. He doesn't even say gay because he doesn't even know what—

Taylor: [crosstalk] "I don't like girls."

Sydnee: He's still figuring out... and he has to say all this to Murray?

Taylor: I mean, my favorite were the screen grabs of Nancy's face during all of this. She's a very, very talented actress. You know, great character in the show. But like, her face just seemed to be saying, "What? Why am I, why am I here? What is this?"

Sydnee: Well, what are we doing? Nancy's like, locked and loaded. And now we're like, wait, hold on. We have to take 45 minutes for Will to come out to everyone.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: It wasn't 45 minutes. It was just very long.

Taylor: It felt 45 minutes. Like, I get that coming out can often be awkward. And a lot of people in defense of that scene said, well, yeah, coming out is always awkward. It's like, nobody does that.

Nope. As somebody that has come out, you, you kind of go person by person, and you wait till there's a moment that you could say, "Hey, I just want you to know this. You know, I don't want to make it weird. I just..."

Like, the idea of organizing... Like, "Everybody, sit down. There's a big monster that we all got to fight. But first..."

Sydnee: Yeah. Well, and I don't understand why it couldn't have been like, everybody else. Like they were taking two cars, and the first car has already left. And so you don't have to have Murray and Kali there. Or like, just some reason. Or like, they're still loading up the truck and they're outside. And so he pulls aside Mom and Jonathan and Mike, or something. You know what I mean? Like, I don't know. Why, why did he have to come out to everybody at the same time?

That must have been... talk about talented acting, to just sit there and know what your face is doing through that whole speech, and then try to think of, "How would my character..." Because some of the characters have to be thinking like, "I don't care. What are we doing?"

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: "Okay."

Taylor: I mean, I get... there is the defense of it like, well, he had to, to protect himself from Vecna.

Okay. Like, let's look at that a little closer. I think he had to come out to himself. He had to come out to himself. I'm not saying he should have not come out to everybody else, but I think that would have been a more poignant scene of him accepting himself, and then realizing that now Vecna doesn't have that power over him, if he's comfortable with who he is.

Sydnee: It is, it is... Well, it's— I think what they were trying to do is say his fear was not even so much of what he was. It was, "How will other people, if I tell them who I am, will they reject me? Will I lose everyone here?"

Because that's what Vecna had shown him, is that he would lose everyone, and he needed to know.

I mean, but the thing is, like, it's a big risk, because it's not that he needs to know that he won't lose them. He just needs to face the reality that he might, and face that fear head on, and take that chance anyway. I mean, that's sort of the message. But like, I don't know.

I mean, I think like, yes, I understand mechanically in the story. I get it. Like, I'm not arguing like, "Why did he have to..." But it just was wild that it was like, all of the cast.

Taylor: Well, and it just went on. Like, I get...

Sydnee: Like, Vicky was there!

Taylor: I don't know. The speech that he gave, too, it's just like, it wasn't... the whole build up of like, "We all like milkshakes and we all like bike rides and we all like books and we all like television shows."

Like, yeah, we get it. We get, we all are very similar. There's this one thing that makes us different. Can, can I, can I go shoot a monster now?

Sydnee: Still, like, the world is ending.

Taylor: Let's speed it up a little bit, buddy. Like, as a queer actor, like, like the guy that— I mean, he's what— which one is that? I don't, is that Noah Schnapp?

Sydnee: Noah Schnapp.

Taylor: Yeah. Like he's, he's out, right?

Sydnee: Oh, I don't know. Is he?

Taylor: I'm pretty sure he is. Uh, so you would think he would have had been able to have some input on that. Like, "Hey, just so we're clear, in the history of coming out, no one has ever done this."

Sydnee: Well, I thought about that too. [laughs] Yeah, I thought about that.

Taylor: [laughing] Can we get like... like, you know, like on movie sets where—

Sydnee: He is, he came out. Yes.

Taylor: Okay. Like, you know, like when there's like a medical drama, they have like, an actual doctor that consults on set. They needed like, some actual gays to look at that scene and go, "Oh no, baby. No, no one would do that. No one would say that. Let's, let's change this. Let's think about this a little bit."

Sydnee: Well, and it's still 1986.

Taylor: Yeah!

Sydnee: I've heard a lot of people be like, you're telling me they couldn't give us one shot of Hopper's face being like, "Um, what? And we're fine?"

Come on. You know Hopper's thinking, "Um, am I... so we're all okay? We're not going to— we're just like, fine?"

Taylor: I mean, this is— how real do you want your '80s-set show to be? 'Cause that's the kind of guy that'd say, "Hey, don't ask, don't tell buddy." At best!

Sydnee: "I mean, don't tell anybody at school though."

Taylor: "Well, well, you better keep that to yourself. I've known some guys, you know... that's all right."

Sydnee: "Just don't talk about it, okay?"

Yeah. No, I, I mean, you know, it's lovely that he— obviously it's nice to see stories kind of like the Schitt's Creek thing, right? Like, just, what if we just show stories of acceptance and not the trauma? And I mean, I get that. But it's also hard when I feel like the trauma of it was part of the metaphor, at least early in the story.

So, you know, to pretend like it's a world without homophobia... well, you can't, because that was, that was kind of the beginning of Will's arc, I feel, is "I'm different and I'm scared of it."

Taylor: Well, and there were moments that kind of reinforced that fear. Like, I just think that that should have been a bigger plot point. If that was going to be a big crux of the narrative, like, you would think there would have been more. Like, I don't need egregious scenes of, you know, this kid witnessing homophobia and being terrified of it. But I do think that like, you got to choose what world you live in.

Sydnee: I mean, I thought the scenes where Robin is talking to him, where she clearly knows, and she's trying to help him... I thought those were really lovely.

Taylor: Absolutely.

Sydnee: I thought those are actually well written. As like, an older gay sort of giving somebody the freedom and the language and the understanding, especially in a time period where you wouldn't have known people who were gay.

Taylor: Well, and that's what's wild. And I know that there was some... I don't know everything that happened behind the scenes as far as the people that were creating and writing it. I know that there was another party involved that left the creation of it, like, for this fifth season.

But I do feel like there's such a like— the person that wrote Robin's coming out scene to Steve could not have been the same person that wrote this. Because that, by comparison, is so organic and so beautiful. And the play of emotions over Steve's face as— you can see, like, that feels set in a time where he's like, "Oh." But this is his friend. Like that's... that's how acceptance works in a lot of cases.

It's like, maybe the idea of it freaks you out. But once you see a person that you love and is real to you say this is who they are, that's when acceptance begins. And I think that felt... that felt real. That felt like a— how you come out. Here's somebody you're close to, you know, you let them fill in the blanks. Not a big like, "I have a prepared statement. Hi." [laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs] Yeah. Yeah. I mean, and I will say like, I did appreciate that this season, other than the final episode, the episodes were all like an hour. Whereas in season four, I felt like they were all... they just kept getting longer, like I was watching movies. And there was still some of the... I mean, and I think there have been a lot of jokes about it.

Like, people are having prolonged conversations at moments where somebody's about to die or they're being chased or something. Like Holly, Holly and Max standing there staring at their portals to exit

Vecna's mind, but still not exiting. And just talking and talking and talking.

I was like, coming out of my seat because I didn't know what was going to happen. I didn't know they were both going to make it out. And so in that moment, I'm thinking, "Well, here, he's coming. Vecna's coming. Like, run! Why are you not— Why are you talking?"

They're just standing there talking and talking and talking! It's like, get out! [laughs]

Taylor: Yeah. At least in that sense, it does at least feel inspired by real D&D campaigns. [laughs] You know, you just want to get the good— the in-the-feelings speeches in. And it's like, well, okay. I mean, an action... in reality, there wouldn't be time for this.

Sydnee: I know we need to wrap up. I will say, I thought Holly was— the girls really liked that character. It was kind of nice to have somebody younger for them to sort of latch on to. And honorable mention for Derek, delightful Derek.

Taylor: Oh, yes. Very...

Sydnee: Just yes. Very entertaining. I think Justin's favorite character. Second to Bob Newby, Justin's favorite character.

Taylor: I could believe that. That is a very— that is a character made for Justin to like.

Sydnee: Yes. Yeah. No, I mean, overall, like, I enjoyed it. It was not... Lost was a series that I absolutely loved, and the ending made me so mad because it was just such a nothing that I felt betrayed. I do not feel that way about this ending of Stranger Things.

I have some qualms with it. It's not exactly what I would love, but overall, I don't want a bunch of people to die just for a, you know, story just to say, like, "Look, we killed people."

I like happy endings. I like overall when the characters you love live and go on to do something else. And I would want more for El, but overall, you know, it didn't kill my enjoyment of the series.

Taylor: No, I agree. I'm glad they had that possible out for her. I think it would have been cooler if it had been... maybe a little bit more believable. Like, a little bit more set in like, "This definitely happened. Like, we're showing you that she escaped."

That would have been cool. But I don't know. I love the reunion scene of the older kids at the end. I thought that was really sweet.

Sydnee: That was nice. Yeah. I thought that was nice. I don't know quite what I was supposed to think of Nancy quitting college and working at the newspaper and... I don't know. There was so much about like what, how she had really come into her own, and she was so cool and independent and strong and not just somebody's like, girlfriend. And then I wasn't sure what to make of that.

Taylor: She's forging her own path. I don't know.

Sydnee: Yeah. But no, overall, overall, I'm glad I watched it all. I'm not ready to rewatch it anytime soon, but I probably will someday.

Taylor: Yeah, it would be hard to go all the way back there. I don't—the age differences didn't seem that shocking, because there was so much time in between. I feel like watching it all at once... Well, I guess you all just did that... would feel a little bit more abrupt, yeah.

Sydnee: It was weird. It is, it is. That when they first come on screen in this last season, it is, it is like, whoa.

Taylor: Those are, those are grownups.

Sydnee: Those are adults. Well, Tey, what are we going to do next?

Taylor: Well, we wanted to talk about Bad Bunny, who's going to be the Super Bowl halftime show, but also just, I think it'd be fun to talk about some of our favorite halftime shows in general in the last couple of years. It's such an institution.

Sydnee: Yeah. I think that'll be good. Well, by the time we record, we'll have watched the next Super Bowl, so. I'm assuming you're going to watch it. I don't know. Are you going to watch the Super Bowl?

Taylor: I'll be working it. So it'll be on three giant TVs around me all night.

Sydnee: Green Day and Bad Bunny, so.

Taylor: Yeah. Amazing lineup. And then there's always—

Sydnee: And also, I think, football.

Taylor: Yeah. I don't know why we would have a football game between the Green Day/Bad Bunny concert, but I'm okay with it.

Sydnee: Yeah, it's fine. Can I tell you something? Hand to God, I don't know who's in the Super Bowl.

Taylor: I don't either.

Sydnee: Oh. Well, oops.

Taylor: We know who's— we know— we know who's making the music though. That's what we're here for.

Sydnee: Yeah. And I'm not like, anti-sports. Like, I go to the college football games here in Huntington, like every one. I like football, but I, I don't know what— there's just been other things. There's been other things.

Taylor: We'll figure it out by Sunday, probably.

Sydnee: Yeah. I'll definitely know when I sit down to watch it.

Taylor: I'm just going to ask dad who I'm supposed to root for. That's usually what I do. "Who should I like? Okay."

Sydnee: Who's in the Super Bowl?

Taylor: [laughs] Oh, are you looking it up?

Sydnee: Oh, is this right? Is it the Seahawks versus the Patriots?

Taylor: Okay. Maybe. Sure.

Sydnee: All right. Well, I think that's right. For some reason I thought it was more interesting. All right. [laughs]

Well, if, uh— thank you, listeners, for joining us. I'm sure everybody, everybody's seen Stranger Things. Isn't it... like, everybody watched that, right?

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: I think so. There's nobody left who hasn't watched it.

Um, and thank you for listening to our show. You should go to maximumfun.org and check out a lot of other great podcasts 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.

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]

Sydnee: I had this moment where I thought I can't express a preference of football teams. I don't know. Like I'm going to alienate our audience with football preference? Probably not.

Taylor: Oh. I don't want to... assume things about our audience, but I would think that they're not the biggest football fans.

[chord]

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