

Still Buffering 479: Good Luck, Have Fun, Don't Die (2025)

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[theme music plays]

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

Taylor: And I'm Teylor Smirl.

Sydnee: Uh, Tey, it is still MaxFunDrive!

Taylor: MaxFunDrive part 2! Woo!

Sydnee: Woo hoo! That's right. This is the time of year where our network, Maximum Fun—of which we are a part, obviously. Why else would I be saying this? You knew that. You knew that!

Taylor: Our network.

Sydnee: Our network. We say it every ep—I say it every episode: go to Maximumfun.org. I don't know why—anyway. The point is, once a year, we ask for your help! We could not survive, our podcast, our network, without donors like you who give some of your hard-earned money to us to make the shows you enjoy, to make them better, to make more content. We depend on you. And so once a year we say, hey. If you're in a position to become a member, to become a donor, please. This is the moment. Join us, Maximumfun.org/join. I'll be saying that a lot.

Help us out! Because we love making these shows for you, and we so appreciate that when you enjoy what we do, you're willing to give some of your own money to help us keep doing it. This is our second week of the MaxFunDrive this year. During the MaxFunDrive, if you become a donating member or upgrade your donation to the next level, we give you presents! We give you gifts.

Um, for as little as five dollars a month, you can become a Max Fun member and get access to a ton of bonus content. And there's other stuff, and I'll go over that later in the show. But we just want you to know, this is the MaxFunDrive. It's really exciting for us to be a part of this network. It's really exciting for us to get your support, and to be able to make this stuff we love to do for you, and hopefully you love listening to.

So, Maximumfun.org/join. We'll tell you more about that at the next break. But don't miss this opportunity. Maximumfun.org/join!

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Yeah. Tey, the girls went to a birthday party this weekend.

Taylor: Okay.

Sydnee: It was a very cool birthday party. It was at Safety Town, first of all.

Taylor: That's very cool.

Sydnee: Very cool. Safety Town, if you don't have one in your town...
[laughs quietly] Safety Town is [crosstalk].

Taylor: If you don't have a very safe town!

Sydnee: Then you don't. You have an unsafe town. Safety Town is a tiny town that kids can go—usually, like, in second grade, your class will go to Safety Town if you are in this area once in the year. And you'll learn, like, you drive little cars around a pretend town, and you learn traffic rules. And then, like, basic safety stuff. Like, you have to—one of the things they tell you before your kid goes is like, make sure they know their home address, 'cause then you're gonna learn how to do, like, a 911 call. [laughs] And stuff like that.

And they have, like, the—like, the fire chief comes and talks to all the kids about fire safety. I don't know. [laughs] Anyway—

Taylor: Did that all happen at the birthday party? 'Cause that seems like kind of a bumper birthday party.

Sydnee: No. At the birthday party, all they did was drive around what Cooper described as "The bumper cars."

They are not meant to be bumper cars. [laughs quietly]

Taylor: I like that Safety Town has figured out, like, a secondary use. Like, alright. Yeah, we can educate kids on traffic safety, or also, we could let them... learn the opposite of that.

Sydnee: Bumper cars. No, she did, um, while she was at the birthday party, Cooper drove around. They have a little Cybertruck now. [laughs quietly]

Taylor: Oh no.

Sydnee: Which she did make fun of. She drove it, and then made fun of the fact that it was a Cybertruck.

Taylor: Is that—

Sydnee: And saying—

Taylor: Oh, go ahead.

Sydnee: Have you heard that song? It's like, somebody on TikTok made it up.

Taylor: Oh, yes, I think I've seen this.

Sydnee: "[singing] There once was a truck that something—the name was—"

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Yeah. Yes. Uh, so she did sing that song while driving the Cybertruck. So, she acknowledged, like, "I hate this truck." [laughs]

Taylor: So it is educational in many ways. Traffic laws, and also, kids, you should always make fun of Cybertrucks.

Sydnee: Yes. Yes. Just... that's what—I saw somebody say when the Cybertruck first came out, "This is what happens when you take the A out of STEAM. [laughs]

Taylor: Yeah. Yep.

Sydnee: This is what you get. [laughs] This is why. But it was fun, because we were trying to decide ahead of time, what do we get? Usually when, like, your kid goes to a bir—this is something I've learned as a parent. Your kid goes to a birthday party and you're like, you get a chance to ask the other parent, like, "What's your kid into right now? 'Cause I want to get you—I want my kid to get your kid something useful."

And when your kids are little, they don't always really know. You know? They'll tell you something vague like they're into dragons. And it's like, "So, what kind of dragon thing?"

And my kids will be like, "I don't know. Like, a stuffed one?"

And I'm like, this kid does not want a stuffed dragon. Like, what do you mean? [laughs] What kind of dragon stuff?! Like, what do you mean, they're into dragons?!

Taylor: I feel like that makes sense.

Sydnee: Like, they probably don't want to read Fourth Wing! [laughs]

Taylor: They're into dragons. Get 'em some dragon stuff. Find a cool dragon.

Sydnee: Well, I asked this time. I was like, "What—what does this kid like? What should we get them for their birthday?"

And Coop was like, "I don't know. They like Jimmy Buffett." [laughs]

Taylor: I love that.

Sydnee: And like, here—

Taylor: This is a—a 53-year-old child.

Sydnee: What do you get an 8-year-old that's Jimmy Buffett-themed? That quandary—'cause it's like, we also love Jimmy Buffett, so we have lots of Jimmy Buffett stuff. But let's be honest, what is most Jimmy Buffett paraphernalia geared towards?

Taylor: Drunken adults.

Sydnee: Yeah. Drinking! It's a lot of drinking stuff! So I'm like, I don't think, like, themed margarita glasses are appropriate. [laughs]

Taylor: Just like a little margarita glass sippy cup. Just like a little plastic one with a like attachable lid.

Sydnee: But, like, what do they make? I'm sitting there, I'm like, do I get, like, a stuffed parrot? Like, what do I... like, I don't wanna—I don't know this kid well enough to get 'em, like, clothes. Like, that would be weird. Like, here's a Jimmy Buffett t-shirt?

Taylor: I feel like—why would that be weird? It's not crossing a boundary.

Sydnee: I don't know.

Taylor: It's not like buying them underwear. That'd be weird. Don't buy other peoples' kids underwear.

Sydnee: No.

Taylor: But a t-shirt would be fine.

Sydnee: Well, that's what—as we were looking, like, what do we have in the area? 'Cause also, we live in Huntington. So it's not like we have endless

options for Jimmy Buffett stuff, like, readily available, especially all year round. You know?

Taylor: Yeah. I mean, what are you—I don't know your lead up to this, how long you had. But you do have access to the internet, Sydnee. [laughs]

Sydnee: Yeah. We are bad about—we put off... like, we knew—we put it off. We waited too long. I thought it would be easier. I thought it would be like a, we'll get, like, a cool Lego set. Like, usually we can do something like that. Something we can find locally pretty easily, right? Or, like, a game. That's always fun. Get a board game that our kids really like that, like, I don't know. We have lots of board games we're in—I'm not into board games. My husband is.

But, like, that kind of stuff is usually easy. Jimmy Buffett really stumped me.

Taylor: Well, but I feel like—I don't know. My thought would be, you could spin that into anything pirate-related would still sort of go under the Jimmy Buffett umbrella, right?

Sydnee: That's a good point.

Taylor: There's lots of pirate-y kid things.

Sydnee: Well, and I—you know, that would've been a good direction. Because the theme of the party was Goonies.

Taylor: This is a—this kid has some... fun—

Sydnee: This is a cool kid.

Taylor: Fun taste, yeah!

Sydnee: A cool kid, right? A cool kid.

Taylor: That's a cool kid.

Sydnee: But anyway, I don't know. We—like, Justin's trying to put together, like, a funny gift. He's like, "What if we get him a pack of Juicy Fruit gum."

Taylor: Okay. I'm getting that.

Sydnee: "A bathing suit. A grapefruit."

Taylor: Okay. [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: I'm like, no, no, no. He's eight. He's not gonna enjoy this. No. I mean, 'cause like, you just don't normally get... like, 'cause we could've gotten Margaritaville-themed swim trunks. But, like, that feels weird!

Taylor: Here is a pack of those stick-on mustaches, but specifically the pencil thin variety.

Sydnee: Right. Like, I don't know. It was... we eventually gave up on the entire Jimmy Buffett themeing. Because I've just—here is what I've realized. If you know an adult who loves Jimmy Buffett, there are endless gifts you could give them.

Taylor: Yes, yeah, absolutely.

Sydnee: That have to do with Jimmy Buffett. If it is a child who likes Jimmy Buffett, there is not as—like, he already had a copy of Jolly Mon. This is how we knew that he was into Jimmy Buffett is the book that is for children that Jimmy Buffett wrote, Jolly Mon, he already had, because he brought it to school to show Cooper, to say, "Look, I also like Jimmy Buffett. This is something we have in common."

So... once we got out—I didn't know. I was like, "I don't think he wants a copy of A Pirate Looks at 40."

Taylor: [laughs quietly] "This is for later, kid. This is for later. But you're gonna need it. But it's for later."

Sydnee: [laughs] But it's just like, this feel—it was one of those things where it felt like, "Oh, Jimmy Buffett? We love Jimmy Buffett! This should be so easy!"

And then it was like, this is actually the most difficult gift-buying mission I've ever been sent on. [laughs quietly]

Taylor: Well, what did you land on?

Sydnee: We just got a fun game called Spikeball that the kids really like. You ever played Spikeball?

Taylor: I don't think so.

Sydnee: We've, like, played it outdoors, and I think it's, like, meant for, like, beachy. So that was sort of the connection there. Like, you could play it at the beach. 'Cause you like—you can dive around. You know how, like, volleyball's good at the beach, 'cause you can dive, and it's sandy, and you don't get hurt? Spikeball is good at the beach, 'cause you can dive and it's sandy.

Taylor: That sounds good.

Sydnee: I don't know. I hope—I hope it goes—kids don't open their presents at birthday parties anymore, so you never know if it was a good idea or not.

Taylor: Well, but that's even better, because then you don't have to know.

Sydnee: That's true. But it's weird. Don't you remember that being a thing when we were little? Like, that everyone would sit in a circle. And we do that, I will say. And we've debated if we need to stop it. 'Cause when the girls have birthday parties, they do. We have everybody sit in a circle, and they open their presents, and then go thank people. Like, "I love this. Thank you so much." And say something nice. And, like, we've practiced all this ahead of time, so that they're gracious. Although with Charlie you don't really have to. But we've practiced all this ahead of time, and... [laughs quietly]

But that's not a thing anymore. They just skip it.

Teylor: I mean, I feel like that's probably for the best. I could see how, you know, as a generation aware, more in tune with things like social anxiety, uh, that can be really hard in either direction, you know?

Sydnee: It is.

Teylor: Like, imagine you're the kid that's like—who has parents that maybe aren't as financially secure as other parents, and you didn't get a present that you were worried is maybe not as nice as other presents. And, you know, you've gotta watch everybody else's, the reaction to every other present, but then maybe you're worried, "Oh no, what if mine's not as good?"

Vice versa, when you're the birthday kid it's like, you've gotta be in control of your expression the whole time, and be worried that you make some people feel bad, or better than others. You don't look grateful. That can be a lot. That's a lot, I think.

Sydnee: It is. I mean, I understand that, in that I hate, like, opening presents in front of people. Like, I'm very grateful. It's not that I don't like getting gifts. I just never... I always feel like I'm not grateful—like, I don't express it enough. Like, I always, like, question myself after. Like, was that enough expression of gratitude? Do they know that I am grateful? Do they know that I really do appreciate, whatever the present is, that you got me a present? Did I show that enough? Are their feelings hurt?

Teylor: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: So I do worry. So I get that. It's just weird, 'cause it was such a thing. I feel like it was such a—like the birthday party structure is everyone kind of awkwardly arrives, and you try to get them funneled into activities and things, and then you get to the loose part of the party where people are having fun. Like, what I've learned—this is what I've learned, 'cause my kids like to have parties at our house.

If you have a kid's birthday party where they're still young enough where the parents might stay, 'cause they still do. Some of the parents stay. Even at Charlie's age, some of the parents stay. We have the front fridge where we've got sodas and waters and juices, and we have the kids' cooler laid out clearly. Like, here's where the kid drinks are.

And then in the mudroom, I got the back fridge. And I'll look at the parents and go, "We also have some other beverages if you'd like in the back fridge. Help yourself."

And that means, "If you want a beer, I got beer in the back fridge. And I'm not gonna judge you."

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: "'Cause you're at a kid's birthday party with a bunch of adults that you only kind of know because their in the same class as your kid, right? That's our only connection."

So... and I have learned that a lot of parents are like, "Well, I mean, as long as you're offering!" [laughs]

And everybody has a better time!

Taylor: I mean, you could've—like, you could've—if the kid's a Jimmy Buffett fan, then I would assume the parents are. That is the source of that.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: It would be very strange for—

Sydnee: Well, they have to. [laughs]

Taylor: Right? [laughs] This kid just stumbled upon Jimmy Buffett? Parents are like, "I don't know! He's some young musician that our son is into."

Sydnee: "We only listen to Mozart." [laughs]

Taylor: Uh, so you could've, you know. Like, "Here is the kid present. And since I know you like Jimmy Buffett, here's some tequila, Jimmy Buffett parents."

Sydnee: Can you imagine—that's a big swing.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: I mean, it probably would go over—I would appreciate it. If somebody did that to me I would be like, "Man, that's cool! Thank you!"

Taylor: I mean, I feel like that is one of the few—I am sure that there are sober Jimmy Buffett fans, and I respect that. But that is one of the few safe bets. If it's like, oh, you like Jimmy Buffett? You probably... enjoy drinking a margarita, from time to time. I think I could make that bet.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: I could put money on that. [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: Well, it's such an easy thing—there's so many branded, like, drinking, alcohol paraphernalia, you know? If somebody likes Jimmy Buffett, I mean, just endless things in that genre. But they're not for eight-year-olds, is the point.

Taylor: No, that's true, that's true.

Sydnee: You know Charlie came to me yesterday and said, "I found this song that I really like that I think is from your generation." And do you know what she played for me?

Taylor: Tell me.

Sydnee: Buddy Holly.

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: I said, "Yes."

Taylor: Has she not heard Weezer before?

Sydnee: So, I think she kind of knew. Like, I think it was... "I just discovered this."

Taylor: Yeah, okay.

Sydnee: "And I know Mom's gonna like this, 'cause I think I know Mom likes this band."

But she had not heard most of the songs, I will say. She found it—I don't even know how she found it. But then she was like, "Here are the songs I like."

And it was really cool, 'cause she played me some Weezer songs that I was very familiar with from, you know, Blue Album and Green Album. And then she played stuff from their newest album.

Taylor: Oh, yeah, yeah.

Sydnee: That she really liked. And I was not as familiar at all. But she knew all the words, 'cause she's listened to it a bunch of times. I had this wonderful little moment where I'm sitting there on the floor folding clothes while Charlie and I talk about Weezer songs, and she plays the ones she likes for me. And I played like—'cause I thought she'd like the Green Album. I was like, "This is gonna be her vibe. She'll dig—" you know? That just feels like Charlie. And I played Island in the Sun, and she was like, "Oh, I like this."

I was like, "Ah, I knew you would!" [laughs]

Taylor: That's really sweet. It is—now that they're back on tour, I think it kicked up some Weezer discourse again. Who doesn't love some Weezer discourse? But I saw, like, some TikToks of—clearly much younger than me, talking about how they're not—like, the new Weezer they don't enjoy as much as the Weezer they grew up with. And I'm assuming it's gonna be, you

know, like, that is always Pinkerton and the Blue Album. And they were talking about, like, what is the one? In Dreams? Is that? Or the...

Sydnee: Oh, yeah?

Taylor: And, like, Maladroit. And I was like, oh, wow! Like, those were—

Sydnee: How is that...

Taylor: Those were, like, the—in my mind, those are still the new Weezer albums. Those are close to 20 years old now, probably.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: But it was wild that this young person was reminiscing about old Weezer, and I'm like, this is just...

Sydnee: About Maladroit.

Taylor: This is just what we do, I guess. Whatever generation of Weezer you're born into, that's... you will reminisce about the old Weezer. [laughs]

Sydnee: Weezer—Weezer has a very—I know that's not what we're talking about this episode. But it does seem to have, like—I remember they did the SNL sketch, I don't know if you ever saw it, where it's Matt Damon and Leslie Jones arguing over—

Taylor: You sent it to me, yeah.

Sydnee: Yes. 'Cause it does, like, evoke this kind of response in people, where you become very protective of Weezer, and a very specific gen—like, a very specific era of Weezer. And, like, "This is the best one." But you can't—but you're never gonna—you're not speaking ill of Weezer. You might, like, be a Pinkerton person who sees it as superior to the Blue Album, but you're very protective of Weezer. Like, it's a thing. Like, this is—this is very ingrained in—why does Weezer do that to people?

Taylor: I think it's—to me, 'cause—I don't know. The best worst argument never really tracks for me. I feel like it's, like... it's, I don't know. Not like choosing your Harry Potter house, 'cause we don't support that in this—on this podcast.

Sydnee: No, no.

Taylor: But the concept of like, which one speaks to you? That's telling you something about yourself, you know?

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: Like, I feel like there was a period of my life where Pinkerton was the one that spoke to me. And then—and things were really bad then, 'cause I think that's—Pinkerton is the album for when things are really bad.
[laughs]

Sydnee: Yes. Yeah.

Taylor: And then I, like, accepted that, like, I think—I think I'm back to Blue. I think I'm just young and hopeful and like simple, like, joyous things. I feel like I've... I've shifted. [laughs]

Sydnee: I do think... I do think there is something there. And, I mean, it's very generation specific for me. Well, I don't know. Maybe it just keeps going.

But I do think there is—like, I pretty quickly—I listened to Blue first, and then I listened to Pinkerton. 'Cause then, you know, immediately you listen to Blue Album, and anybody who was, like... [sighs] back in that era, late 90s, early 2000s, anybody who was into music would tell you, like, "Oh. Well, if you think you like Weezer, you have to listen to Pinkerton." You know, I mean, it was a, "Okay. Okay."

And I did. And I realized, like, I like the Blue Album better, and to this day it's my favorite, and it always will be, probably. And it was sort of telling. Like, I don't think I'm... I think this is as sophisticated as I get. I think this is where I land, and I'm fine with that. I think this is who I am, and how I feel,

and... it is! It's weird! Weezer did that to me. I had that moment where I was like, "I'm not that cool. I won't be Pinkerton."

Taylor: I think that... again, we aren't talking about Weezer. But, uh, it makes sense that people get so up in arms about it, because I think that they've cracked the code to writing, like, perfect pop songs. I mean, I know it's rock, but it is—it has the pop DNA, as far as something that, like, feels incredibly familiar to your lived experience while also being incredibly universal.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: And they got a lot of crap for that when they would do that. You know, on, like, the Green Album, so many people were like, "Oh, they're trying to pretend that they're just like young kids making music in their garage again."

Like, well, I just think they've always kept that mentality through whatever. And they continue to make music that speaks to that specific—like, you're young, you want to know who you are, you want your experiences to matter. And they keep making albums that speak to that specific moment in your life.

Sydnee: And in the parlance of today's youth, I think they also realize that it's not that deep. It's music. It's fun. It, you know—I mean, I feel like there's always this sort of, like, winky-ness to it. Like, "Don't get too serious."

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Like, even when we're being serious, don't get too serious. You know? This is still fun. This is music. This is rock. Like, enjoy it.

Taylor: Yeah. Well, it's, you know. Like, when they released Beverly Hills and it was all about wishing that you could be in Beverly Hills, and this was after they'd had, you know, multiplatinum albums. I was like, I think you can go there, Rivers!

Sydnee: I know.

Taylor: I think you—I think you can stay there! But that doesn't matter, because it was with the understanding of, like, yeah, when you're young and you dream of, like, being somebody. That song's a good song for that.

Sydnee: It is, it is. No, I think that's what—it continues to speak to youth, obviously. 'Cause Charlie found it on her own.

Taylor: Love that.

Sydnee: And brought it to me. I know, it was very nice. Um, that is not what we're talking about, though. I will always—see, this is a trap you fall into if you start talking about Weezer. It's like, okay, well, now we have to.

Taylor: Yeah. You need a bell that can, like... "Stop talking about Weezer" bell.

Sydnee: Stop. I know. [laughs] Uh, but that's not what we're gonna talk about. We're gonna talk about the movie Good Luck, Have Fun, Don't Die.

Taylor: Yes.

Sydnee: After we talk about the MaxFunDrive.

Taylor: Yes.

Sydnee: So you have to stay tuned. [laughs quietly] Um, because it is—it is, as we've mentioned at the top of the show, it is the MaxFunDrive. It is the one time a year where we are so excited to come to you and say, "Hey, we love what we do, and we love making this show for you, and so does everybody else on our network, and we have such a wonderful network of supportive people who work so hard to create all of this, and we need your support to keep doing it.

We need you, our listeners, to, if you can, give us some of your hard-earned money to help us keep making the shows that you enjoy. The majority of your donations go directly to the artists that you listen to, that you support.

You get to choose what shows you listen to when you sign up to donate. And most of that money goes straight to those creators.

And this is the time of year to do it, because you get gifts. And, um, I want to tell you some more about that gifts, but before I do that, Tey, could you talk a little bit about why it is so important to us as creators on the network that people donate?

Taylor: Uh, yeah. Well, I mean, I—I mean, I speak from personal experience when I can say that, you know, I—this podcast, we've been doing it for—it's close to a decade now, right, Syd?

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: Yeah. Through all of the ups and downs. You know, I continue to work full time in the food service industry, but that is not the most consistent work. And having this as a backbone to my life has been—it's been life-changing. Like, you know, as someone that is always trying to carve out time to make some art and do the thing that actually brings me joy, I would not be able to find that time if it wasn't for this. You know, the costs of living have just gone up, and the money in my industry has stayed exactly the same. So working, you know, five, six, seven days a week has become the norm.

And even to maintain any quality of life, I don't think I could do that without this. Uh, and I just am grateful for any time that you all—you've gifted me money, but you've gifted me time, really. That's it. Like, you've gifted me time to have a quality of life, and I will, even if it stopped tomorrow, I will be grateful for that forever.

Sydnee: Yeah. We so appreciate it. I think, you know, we live in a society that doesn't always monetarily value artists as high as other fields, even though that's—you know. It's not fair. But it's so nice to see art supported. If you like something that you're listening to, that is being given for free, to say, "Hey, I would like to, you know, chip in a few bucks to keep this going, because I do appreciate it and I get a lot of joy and a lot of, you know, satisfaction from it."

It's really meaningful. And I think we try to do that. And so it's really nice when our listeners are willing to do that for us as well.

And there are all kinds of donation levels. You can start at the five dollar a month level. That's the most popular. And you get all the bonus content if you do that, so right now if you sign up, if you join, five dollars a month, you get hours and hours, endless hours of bonus content from all the shows on our network, for all the years that we've been doing this.

This most recent bonus episode that we have available this year, Charlie, my 11-year-old...

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: ... is on it. And she fills us in on the youth of today. Like, all the inside scoop.

Taylor: It's wild.

Sydnee: Yes. Specifically, like, the brain rot stuff?

Taylor: It was a compelling discussion of culture for me. And it was hard to, like, walk the line of this is so fascinating. You're also 11, so I'm trying to not ask you questions that are, like, complex, like... "Unpack how this psychologically affects your generation as a whole."

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: It is—yes. It is—it's hard not to see her as, like, you know, like a cultural anthropologist for... [laughs quietly] you know, for—

Taylor: Which, to be fair, she...

Sydnee: —11-year-olds.

Taylor: —she did very—I mean, she did wonderfully. She, you know.

Sydnee: She did. She did. I mean, she basically was telling her fellow preteens to touch grass the entire time! [laughs]

Taylor: Yeah, yeah. I was not expecting the 11-year-old to be the one that's like, "I think we're all on our tablets too much." [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: Yes!

Taylor: Yeah. [laughs]

Sydnee: I know. It was a lot of ammunition for me. But anyway, you can hear. She breaks it all down. The clothes, the movies, the snacks, the whatever. Whatever you're curious about, what Gen Alpha is into.

Taylor: And—and shades both of us for our age several times, which is fair, and correct, as it should be.

Sydnee: Yes. Absolutely. You have to continue that. Uh, so at the five dollars a month level, you get access to all that. Not just that episode, every episode that all of our shows have all done for years now of bonus content.

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Taylor: Thank you.

Sydnee: So, Good Luck, Have Fun, Don't Die.

Taylor: The name of the movie—

Sydnee: That is the movie.

Taylor: —but also, same to you. [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: Yeah. That was—I know, that was weird. It sounds like I was saying that to our listeners, which I do—like, I would say that. But that's not what I... that's the title of the movie we watched recently. Which you had suggested, and that was a ride. I was not prepared for how... um, it's a really fun—okay. The premise is there's a time traveler who has to go to a certain point in history to collect just the right sort of team of individuals to help him stop the world from becoming, like, just an AI wasteland.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Basically. Because there is a child who's creating AI, sentient AI, and he has to stop him.

Taylor: Um...

Sydnee: Although I guess it is the AI. Spoilers. It is the AI creating the AI.

Taylor: Yeah. Uh, and it was very much a future, but perceivable future, believable future.

Sydnee: Yes. Yes. I mean, I think that's the thing is, like, the... it's all—I mean, it becomes dystopian, like the future that he has to exist in that we're not really in. We're in the past, which is the present. Don't get confused.
[laughs quietly]

But he's in a moment where we could tilt humanity in a different direction.

Taylor: Right.

Sydnee: And so he has to do so.

Taylor: And as we are introduced—so, like, the characters that he ends up—he gathers—it opens up with this little diner where all these people are. Also kind of give us flashback tableaux that show us more of the world. Like, this sort of Black Mirror-esque world that these people are inhabiting.

Sydnee: They do. Each of their little stories could be a separate episode of Black Mirror almost, yeah. Um, there's definitely a lot—I really—I liked the, like, VR becomes where you'd rather be storyline. Where you just, like, abandon reality to virtual reality. Although I don't know that VR is at that point right now. [laughs quietly] That was the one thing. I was like, "Well, we're not there with VR, I don't think."

Taylor: We could be there soon, though.

Sydnee: They've gotta make those helmets more comfortable.

Taylor: Well, but what if the helmets included, like, a little needle that stuck into your head and made you not feel the discomfort of the helmet? And you didn't have to move your arms and legs around, you just could feel like you—like the disconnect you have from your brain to your body when you're dreaming, where you can move around in a dream.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: What if it has a way to hijack that system? So you can move around in the VR system, just with your brain waves, and not your actual physical body.

Sydnee: I mean...

Taylor: That's the idea behind a lot of that stuff.

Sydnee: You could do that. Um... if you did—I mean, like, there would be a way to—'cause, like, your body intentionally paralyzes itself while you're sleeping so that you don't act out your dreams. Because people who sleepwalk and stuff, there's, like, something—there's, you know, a dysfunction. I don't wanna dysfunction. I'm not saying your dysfunctional. You know what I'm saying.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: There's something that's not working, 'cause it's supposed to make you paralyzed while you're sleeping. So... I mean, I guess you could. Just, the complexity of tapping into that kind of, like, neuronal pathways, I just don't think we're there.

Taylor: Oh, no, I don't—[laughs] I hope we're not there. I hope we never get there.

Sydnee: Well, because I think if we were there, there are so many, like, neurological diseases that we would've cured, then. Right? Like, I can think of several things that, if we had the ability to do that, I feel like we would've cured this.

Taylor: Yeah. Well, I mean, I don't... maybe I'm more of a cynic than you, but I would say probably not, though. Because how much money are we making on those neurological diseases currently? And would it behoove us to cure them easily?

Sydnee: Well, I mean, that's the human condition, though, right? Like, we could do this, but that sounds boring. Let's make a robot.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Do we need a robot? Do we need a robot to cook us a burger? Like, do we need a robot that cooks a burger?

Taylor: Sydnee, the rowboats are here!

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: [through laughter] Did you see that Melania clip?

Sydnee: Why... who's managing her?

Taylor: What is she—the robot, I think.

Sydnee: I don't know!

Taylor: The robot was right there.

Sydnee: Oh, the robot?

Taylor: I think the robot is.

Sydnee: You think the robot—

Taylor: The rowboat.

Sydnee: Honestly, that would make more sense than anything. If the robot was like, "You should read this book to children to Christmas."

And she was like, "The one where Santa wears night vision goggles?"

"Yep, that one."

"Okay."

"And then also, you should do a speech where you walk out with me, the robot, and we talk about robots."

"Okay."

"Also, you know how nobody's talking about the Epstein files right now? You should bring 'em back up."

Taylor: Yeah. I like this robot, actually. It's spicy.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: Big ideas. [laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs] The robot's on our team! Surprise! Oh my god, it's Terminator! This is the plot of Terminator 1! 2! This is Terminator 2! He's come back.

Taylor: I remember the movie being way cooler. [laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs] No, this is the plot! He's come back, and he's like, "I'm here to save us from the robot future. Even though I am a robot. I'm one of the good ones, and I'm on the side of humanity."

Taylor: Well, which is, I mean, that's... you know, for the movie, it's the same premise, right? We like this idea of—

Sydnee: That's true.

Taylor: You know, any time time travel is involved in a movie you just kind of have to put logic out—out of—outside.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: Because obviously if you're successful at your efforts, then your efforts aren't needed, and then that creates a time paradox, because how do you fix the past to fix the future if the moment you fixed the past the future changes, and then you never had the tools to fix the past?

Sydnee: It also, like, if you're not dealing with multiple reality—or multiple, like, dimensional, like, time pathways, you know what I mean? Like, you need to get into some Loki stuff for this to make sense. Because, like, every

time—so, when it doesn't work he just zaps himself out of it and he goes back to the beginning. But all these other people are still left in whatever—wherever they—you know what I mean? Like, that reality continues on.

Taylor: Do you think that—well, I mean, or is it he just keeps going back to that same point and resetting what happens from there?

Sydney: Well, is time one fixed line or is it a branching series of decisions?

Taylor: Well, um...

Sydney: So, that's why I said you need Loki to [crosstalk].

Taylor: I was gonna say, I got my degree in comic books. Which, you know, if you're invoking Loki, maybe that would be good. [laughs] But...

Sydney: That's what I'm saying! I'm saying, that's all I can—I kept thinking about. 'Cause at the end—I mean, again, we're spoiling the whole movie. So, like, the big thing you find out at the end is that one of the members of his team is his mom, from the past. So she's, you know, younger than him. She's pregnant with him at the time. And at the very end, like, he's about to die, because of, you know, they finally defeated the AI, and they're gonna win, and they've saved the world, and she's holding him, and he's about to die.

And then he realizes, like, this all looks too good to be true. This can't be real, either. I haven't fixed it. I have to go back again. And he goes back, but you see, like, after he disappears, the world is still happening. You know what I mean? Because then more wacky stuff happened that proved he was right. It was AI all along.

Taylor: Well, I think—so there was an interpretation of this movie that I thought was obvious. Um, and I was surprised, because after I watched it I was like, surely I'm not wrong on this. Like, and I was appreciative that it was a movie that was nuanced enough that I didn't feel it was so on the nose that they felt the need to tell us.

But then I, like, you know, went on, like, Reddit threads about it, and no one had really said that. And I don't think I'm having a unique thought. I think I just watched it, like, the week it came out. But I was wondering if you picked up on the same thing.

And that's that it doesn't make sense that—so, as, you know, you get your big—they're going in to try to get the AI—the child that's making the AI. And there are all of these—things get—reality gets stranger and stranger.

Like, he talks about how they always have to fight some big monster, and they propose, like, it's based on what you think in that moment. And so they think of kittens, and then there's, like, the big cat monster. It's like, well, this is not reality. And if you roll back, his whole backstory of—the character that's his mother is allergic to technology. So she secludes herself entirely from technology.

And when they're like—his memories of his childhood, they're, like, living in a bunker. And he wanders outside, and he finds a VR headset, and he puts it on. And the first thing he looks up and—and you see him take it back off, but we know he put it on, right? And the next thing he sees is, like, a plane bombing the bunker that his mother's in. And that's, like, the inciting incident for, like, his whole quest to defeat the AI.

I feel like it seems kind of obvious that he put the VR headset on and he never got out of it.

Sydnee: That's what—that is what I thought we were leading to as well. Because it also makes sense in the concept of generative AI that it's pulling from what everybody is thinking and talking about. And creating a reality from it. And it looks weird, and just off. And that's exactly what generative AI is, right? It just pulls from everything that's on the internet, and creates something. And sometimes it seems real, and other times it's like, that feels like a robot wrote it. And there it is.

Taylor: Well, and you could say, is this his game that the VR has devised for him? Like, this is your personal simulation. Or is he—is it more of some sort of like a lobby situation? Because the backstories we see for all the other characters, you could think, like, oh, these are just—this is like the nuances

of these sprites, or these, you know, NPCs. Or is this a lobby of people that have also, because there's lots of stuff going on in their lives, are they also players in a game that they don't realize they're playing?

Sydnee: Which would make sense, if they always start off in the diner.

Taylor: Yeah. Like, this is his game, but other people can play along with it.

Sydnee: And I do think—I mean, I think that's a more interesting interpretation of the whole thing.

Taylor: I mean, it becomes a bit The Matrix at that point. But like a fun one. [laughs]

Sydnee: Yes. Yes. A fun one. And it's not... um, it's interesting, though. Because by not committing to that, there's a hopefulness about the end. Because he does go back—he realizes, as beautiful as this moment is, and as perfect as it would be, it's not real, and I want real. I don't want the fake happy ending. I want the real ending, whether it's happy or not.

And that's kind of hopeful. Unless he is just stuck in a virtual reality helmet the entire time.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: In which case it's pretty nihilistic.

Taylor: Well, and I mean, that's—is that—I don't know. If the—it's a great movie to think about, because the idea that, like, you put on this helmet and it—you lose the understanding that you're in a virtual reality, which would diminish the believability of it, right? Like, that's part of what it does is this is your reality now. Like, would there be a way to break out of that?

'Cause the director, it's Gore Verbinski, has said that he wants to do a sequel to this. And it kinda sets up for it at the end. But it's like, is that—are they gonna realize that they're—it's like, are they gonna realize they're in a simulation? Is that—how Matrix-y are we gonna get? Is it like, do you accept the harsh, sad world where you don't have control outside of this helmet?

Where presumably, which we learn in the movie early on, that people that live in these VR helmets, they just sort of waste away.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm. Well, 'cause they can't take care of their bodies. I mean, they do not—so they're—unless, I guess, you pay for some sort of system where you're hooked up to a bunch of tubes, ahead of time.

Taylor: That's sort of a parallel for addiction, I feel like, you know.

Sydnee: It's used very much like that. Um, in Red Dwarf, one of the two endings of the book series goes in that direction. That, like, VR becomes like an addiction, and you wear these helmets to escape how hard life is. And some people become addicted to them, and they just waste away. And that's it.

And you have to—you actually have to, like—our hero, Lister, has to liberate himself from his helmet, because he finally realizes, like, this beautiful, perfect life I have that I always dreamed of? Oh, this is fake. And then you have to come to terms with it fake, and then let it go.

Taylor: It's always one of those thoughts. 'Cause every now and then I mean, you know, you scroll on TikTok long enough late enough at night, someone pops up on your screen letting you know why you're in a simulation. [laughs]

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: Is it weird to say that the only—but I don't know. I mean, based on how you view reality, to make it feel weird, feel real, and not weird, is that it has to be believable. So I'm like, well, if I was, I feel like I would want a better reality than what I'm currently in. I don't think this would be my ideal simulation. But is this what I would project based on the way I view the world?

And if all of that was true, would it matter? Would it matter? This is what I know is reality, so would it matter if this is real or not?

Sydnee: I think... I know what you're saying, and I think on one level, does it really matter? The other thing too, and I think this is where, like, so many people in that sort of—'cause what we're... where we're dancing around in the, like, entrance hallway of is a really dark place on the internet, right?

Taylor: Yeah, oh yeah.

Sydnee: Like, this goes into, like, a really bad, you know—the whole black pill place, right? That's where this ends. And so to stay away from that, I will say, there are symptoms that we have identified in psychiatry of derealization and depersonalization. And the reason we have terms for these are that for as long as we've been studying human brains and human behavior, humans have had this—can go to this place, can develop this sense that this isn't real, that they're watching a movie, that there's another reality they're not part of, that they are not a human anymore, that they're just part of a machine.

These are sensations that humans have been experiencing for as long as we have been writing stuff about human behavior and human thought.

Now, it takes different forms depending on what the new fear is, right? Every time there's a new technology, every time society makes another leap, there's a different form that that takes. Now it makes sense that The Matrix was The Matrix, at the moment in history when The Matrix came to be. And it makes sense that now we would worry that we are living in a virtual reality that's completely being generated by an AI that's just responding to what it thinks we want. It makes sense that we would be afraid of that. And it is just as likely to be true as it ever was [laughs] in the past, which was it's not likely to be true.

Taylor: Yeah. Well, and I guess that's even—I mean, you know, I guess the opposite of the black pill direction is like, what would it matter? [laughs] Like, if I am—whether I am the creation of a... a godhead that doesn't particularly care what happens to me, but just created things and put them in motion, or if instead of a god it's a computer program, it just doesn't much matter, because all I know and all I am is this. And so this is where my concerns should be. You know, maybe nothing matters, but this matters to me.

Sydnee: I think—I mean, I think that's a healthy way of coping with it. And I do think that the alternative, like—I don't know. The argument is, "But we need the truth."

I think it's just too hard to grapple with like, well, no, it just—this is the truth.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: It just is.

Taylor: I would like to think I'd have enough discernment that if I thought, "Boy, wouldn't it be awful if I went up against a monster that was composed of a billion kittens?"

And then one appeared. I'd like, "Uh-oh." [laughs] Like, "Something's not right here."

Sydnee: Well, I mean, I think that's where the movie only makes sense in the way we've interpreted it. If what you're saying is that AI has somehow started to creep into reality, so these people are not wearing VR helmets, they are living in the actual world... I was about to say actual reality. "ACT UP. Fight AIDS." [laughs] "Check!"

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: Anyway, uh... [laughs] and then we quote RENT. But—

Taylor: Yeah. RENT and Weezer exist in the same universe where if you start talking about it—but in RENT you just keep singing it, so stop. We can't. I don't...

Sydnee: If you say any line from RENT accidentally—

Taylor: [simultaneously] We don't have another hour.

Sydnee: —you will continue—yeah, you will continue to do all of RENT until the end. You have to.

Taylor: The alternate reality where we just sing RENT the rest of this episode.

Sydnee: That's—see, that's how you know. This is how I know I'm not living in a virtual reality. This is how I know I'm not in the Matrix. If I was, the way my brain works, people would be bursting into song or singing lyrics. Like, I would be in a—

Taylor: You'd be in that Buffy episode.

Sydnee: —rock opera. I would! I would be, if I were in a virtual reality, it would be like that Buffy episode, because that is how my brain works. So obviously—or maybe I'm living in somebody else's. It's generating from somebody else's brain. That's worse.

No. I... [laughs] I think—if the movie is saying that actual reality has been infected by AI and it can create real things that exist in the real world... I don't know what... how?

Taylor: Yeah, like, what's the mechanism for that? That doesn't make sense.

Sydnee: Yeah. Is it a 3D printer, or... [laughs] I mean, like, what—

Taylor: Well, and I could see—

Sydnee: Like, what is happening?

Taylor: Like, is there maybe—'cause, you know, I don't have a—I'm not an AI. Is there—this is why I would be interested in a sequel. Does the AI have a... does it have to believe in itself? And it has an alterable history. Like, if these people actually succeeded at stopping this... this designed child from creating itself, would it destroy its creation myth? And then it would be null. I don't know. And so maybe it has. Like, if your brain was sucked into a computer program, right? You have a VR helmet on. You're in a computer

program. Is the only way out of that to tear it off your head? Or is there a way to short circuit the system from inside the system?

Which somehow has a parallel to the world we're living in right now, where it feels that way. Like you can't—you can't break a system that you're reliant on to survive.

Sydnee: Which is what they—you know, it's interesting, 'cause that nuance is included, which you usually don't see in a movie that—I mean, you know. It's kind of straightforward. Like, we're on a mission to stop a bad guy.

Well, no. They're trying to put controls into the system. They're not trying to destroy it. They're trying to put in a set of, you know, guides and parameters and controls that will keep it from destroying everything, but will allow it to exist. Like, the system is still gonna be created. It's just gonna have these sort of guide rails in place.

Taylor: And that's the odd point about the ending, because it sort of collapses on itself. If the guides were to make it, like, a friendly AI, not an evil AI, and then when you get the sort of fake happy ending it's like, okay. The programming's in place. Now the AI is serving up a nonsensical but picturesque, perfect ending. And that also doesn't feel real. Which is, you know, again, to make the Matrix parallel, that was the whole thing, right? That the whatever machine gods, the controllers of the Matrix—they're aliens? It's been a long time since I've seen The Matrix.

They tried to make a simulation for humans that was perfect, was a utopia, and we rejected it because we could not believe in that. So they had to make a world with flaws, and death, and disease, and horrible nightmares, because that's the only world we'd accept.

Sydnee: Yes. Hmm. I mean, it definitely—I think it—we keep thinking about The Matrix, and it makes sense, 'cause this is in conversation with The Matrix.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: I think it has to be. It is. A lot of movies that talk about that—yeah. I mean, there's a whole culture that does, so it makes sense. But I found it—overall, I thought it was enjoyable. I thought it was funny. I thought the characters are really well developed. It's a little long. I understand they want to give everybody a backstory but, like, I feel like it was having trouble building momentum a lot. Like, I don't know. I kept thinking, like, can we move forward? No, I don't wanna go back again! Move forward!

So I felt like there was a little bit of a momentum thing. But overall, like, I really enjoyed it, even if I felt the end was kind of like, eh, I don't know what you meant by that.

Taylor: Yeah. I would agree, in that I think that the gut punch of the one mother's backstory is so powerful. Again, it kind of felt like that—like a season of Black Mirror where you're like, well, that episode...

It's not that every other episode was bad. It's that that was so good it made every other episode feel, like, pale by comparison.

Sydnee: I almost wish instead of a movie these would've been separate movies, or a TV series, or something. Like Black Mirror, something like that. Because there is an entire school shooting storyline within this, and it is such a powerful thing they're talking about with that storyline that it really—it almost needs to stand on its—its hard to not let it take over the entire story for me. 'Cause if that—that is such a huge, powerful, intense story. I don't know how you just sort of, like, pop it into a larger picture.

Taylor: Well, I mean, like, that's—like, again, maybe there's a bigger—maybe there is a larger picture at work. Because if it is, if this is a grieving mother that enters into this VR system as some sort of relief for how awful life is, but because the AI makes a world that you can believe in, she still has to go through the same horrible thing, but in this world there are options for bringing her son back. That, you know...

Sydnee: That, yeah. That, yes. That is an intense storyline. And I feel like it's—maybe that was part of why, like, as much as I did enjoy the movie on some levels, there were other parts that kind of irked me. To have a

storyline like that up against, like, "All the teenagers in school are just staring at their phone all day and they're becoming zombies," is a little, like, well, okay. Yes.

Taylor: Yeah, I could see that.

Sydnee: You know what I mean? Like, I'm not saying it's bad. It's just like, it's hard to put—there's dissonance there. I don't know. For me, one is a very intense, truthful, scary story, and the other one's like, well, okay. [laughs quietly] Yes, I know. My kids too. I know. It's annoying.

Taylor: Well, it does play into, though, the idea of, like, you know, everything kind of mattering in the same equal note. Of, like, this is the future we're building, where we just don't—we don't connect with each other, so nothing—everything is losing meaning. And meaning is what you choose. I mean, that's kind of—Again, like, that's—if you're like, okay, maybe none of this is real. I am going to decide to care about the things in my life and try to live a life that has—I'm going to... if this is artificial, I am going to artifice meaning into my life.

Sydnee: Yeah. Which is a—I mean, that's a good takeaway, you know? And I do think it's enjoyable. And I always think a movie like this that can stimulate so much conversation and thought is always worth checking out.

Anyway, you should—I would recommend this movie. I think it was—I'm glad I watched it. I enjoyed it. You know, like I said, I think there are a lot of—it's well-acted. It's well-performed. It's well-written. It's thoughtful. It's interesting. It's different. So.

Taylor: And maybe we get a sequel!

Sydnee: It's all the stuff. Yeah, maybe they get a sequel. So I would recommend it. Check it out. Tey, what should we talk about next week?

Taylor: Well, I was reminiscing about Japan, and I thought—I wanted to go back and rewatch *Lost in Translation*. Which I actually don't know if it's held up, but it was one of my favorite movies.

Sydnee: That would be great!

Taylor: A decade or so ago. [laughs]

Sydnee: Well, let's watch it. 'Cause it was—I really enjoyed it too, and it's been forever.

Taylor: Alright.

Sydnee: Alright. Well, we'll do Lost in Translation next week. And in the meantime, last reminder, this is our final episode of the MaxFunDrive. Our final episode, not the. Just of Still Buffering, for the MaxFunDrive. And once again, this is the time where we ask you, if you can, to donate money every month to help us make the shows that you enjoy. The majority of your donations go directly to the artists that you choose when you sign up, that you listen to. And for as little as five dollars a month, you can become a member and get access to all of that bonus content that is so much fun to listen to. Just hours and hours and hours. So much extra stuff.

And it means so much to us. We really appreciate it. Um, we say it, and it's true. We are so grateful that you like to listen to our show, and that you like it enough that you're willing to share some of your hard-earned money with us so that we can keep doing it. And, um, thank you, overall. Obviously there's higher levels than five dollars. We talked about it at the break. You can check out at Maximumfun.org/join all the great gifts you can get. And, um, we just thank you. It just—it really—we can't say it enough. It means so much to us. So, don't delay. Right now. If you're thinking about it. Maximumfun.org/join. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

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 Taylor Smirl.

Sydnee: I'm still buffering...

Taylor: And I am too.

[theme music plays]

Sydnee: Whoever's outside there, I don't know if they're [unintelligible].

Taylor: Yeah. I'm sorry. I don't know what's going on. It's... New York City being [unintelligible].

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: They never sleep. And we have cars that we drive and we honk at each other. And it's, uh...

Sydnee: You don't drive any cars.

Taylor: I'm walkin' here!

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: Gotta get a New York slice.

Taylor: You go—[laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs]

[chord]

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