

Still Buffering 482: Ready or Not 2 [2026]

Published May 23, 2026

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[theme music plays]

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

Taylor: And I'm Teylor Smirl.

Sydnee: Tey, it was— This past weekend was Eurovision weekend.

Taylor: Oh, yeah. You know, I still never watched that. I've never consumed that. I know that's a big thing in your household.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm. We always have a Eurovision party. Invite all of our closest family and friends in the area to come. We try to have an international spread of food. Now, I will say, we typically don't think about the food until the last minute. And then we are frantically trying to go through the list of finalists, and think of a food that we can get locally in Huntington, West Virginia [laughs] from that place. So for instance, we end up with pierogis. We got some biscuits.

Taylor: [chuckles]

Sydnee: Digestive biscuits. Some bagel bites. [laughs] Pizza.

Taylor: Is that for Italy?

Sydnee: Yeah. [laughs] I wanted to have some sausages, 'cause I was like, "That's Germany."

But Justin was like, "That's not a thing you just serve at a party." I'd made—I don't like just sausages. I made a charcuterie board, 'cause that feels to me like... I mean, French and also a bunch of cured meats felt Scandinavian?

Taylor: Sure, yeah.

Sydnee: So I had that. It was a struggle. [laughs]

Taylor: I think you can serve just sausages. If they're mini sausages. Or perhaps if you have a fondue pot.

Sydnee: A fondue pot. We didn't have a fondue pot. I did have Swedish Fish.

Taylor: Okay.

Sydnee: Does that count?

Taylor: I mean, not at all the same, but sure, that's good.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: That's nice.

Sydnee: There was enough food, okay? The underlying thing here [laughs] is we made enough food that everybody ate food, and was happy.

Taylor: That's good.

Sydnee: No, we love the Eurovision song contest because the music is great. Bulgaria won this year.

Taylor: I did see that song. I saw some compilations where people were comparing past winners to the current one.

Sydnee: It was great.

Taylor: Well, that's what I felt like the angle was. Like, "Wow, this winner doesn't stack up to the last one." And this feels exactly in the spirit of every other song that I recognize off this list. [laughs]

Sydnee: I don't know how you compare the songs that participate in

Eurovision. 'Cause some of them are like Bulgaria's winner this year, "Bangarangaranga." Which is, in my mind, this is classic Eurovision pop. Kind of weird, and club music, great for dancing. Immediately, when that song came on and they hit the chorus, everybody at my house was jumping up and down, like, "Yes!" We love this. I always think *that's* Eurovision.

But then sometimes, there are these big, sweeping dramatic ballads with somebody in a big dress, and wind blowing. And sometimes it's more of a sad thing. And then they always have this sort of death metal edge to some of 'em who were just out there in wild demon costumes, screaming with fire around them. I don't know how you compare these songs. [laughs] Like... You know what I mean?

Taylor: So it's— Now, I know, 'cause individuals around— It's like a voting system, right?

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: It's not like there's a representative from each country. It's actual viewers voting.

Sydnee: Yes. Actual viewers vote. Each country gets— Well, there's a delegation from each country that gets to award the points. And you award 12 points to your favorite, and then it goes down from there. Because the first round of voting, they have each country stand up and say, "Hello! And welcome from beautiful wherever. And our points," you know, "Bulgaria's 12 points go to... blah!" And then they go through like that. And then they have the viewer votes.

Taylor: Okay. Interesting.

Sydnee: Yeah. But I don't know— Again, I don't always understand the politics. And I don't know how you compare— I feel like that has to be playing such a huge role in it. Because it really would be like, okay, you have to pick your favorite meal out of these meals. And one of them is like— Not your favorite. Pick the best out of these meals.

And one of them is like, the best-cooked steak that anybody's ever made, the finest cut of meat, whatever. And then the next one is an incredible chocolate souffle that only a few chefs can ever accomplish. And then the next one is the most perfectly-cut sashimi anywhere. You know what I mean? And compare these completely disparate, maybe all incredible in their own right, things that you would want at very different times of day, and also depend on your palate. For instance, you would never pick the steak. You know what I mean? I feel like that's— I'm never going to like the band that's screaming with fire as much as—

Taylor: And I always am!

Sydnee: See? As much as the Euro pop thing, that's more my vibe. So I don't know how— How do you compare it?

Taylor: Well, I mean, I think there's still probably some— Whatever gets everybody excited the most probably has a lot of power to it. But in this day and age, I think it's one of those— And I even saw it described this way. I did listen to a, I don't know, news report podcast about this. They were talking specifically about the soft culture wars.

Sydnee: Ohh.

Taylor: The things that exist to sway popular opinion in favor of certain political alignments, and that this has become something. That's *why* it's become so politicized, is because leaders have seen it now as a way of— It's good PR.

Sydnee: Hmm. You would think— And I mean, it's everything. Sometimes, I think that in the US, especially those of us who feel like maybe the US is on the wrong track, [laughs] which—

Taylor: Wha— What?

Sydnee: Which I would say that we on this podcast feel that way. And I like to believe that the majority of Americans now feel that way, that the US is on the wrong track. Even if they voted in a way I wouldn't approve of, I feel like people we're on the wrong track. But I tend to think, "Ahh. And we're

the worst of it.” And then, I don’t know, I see Eurovision song contests, and I think, “It’s too pure. It brought us ABBA. It would never be touched by all these ugly politics, and whatever sentiments.” But obviously everything can. The US isn’t the only place where bad stuff happens. [chuckles] Clearly.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: And sometimes, I think, “We’re the worst! We suck! Everybody else is wonderful, and they all just dance around at Eurovision. It’s beautiful.” But clearly, there’s...

Taylor: No. Unfortunately, that’s not... [laughs]

Sydnee: No.

Taylor: Unfortunately, that’s not the case.

Sydnee: No.

Taylor: Yeah. ‘Cause, I mean, they banned Russia for invading Ukraine.

Sydnee: Yes. That’s a good move.

Taylor: A great line to draw in the sand. You cannot dance around in a silly costume at our...

Sydnee: At Eurovision.

Taylor: ... at our competition if you are actively destroying another country. I just think maybe they should make that an across-the-board rule.

Sydnee: I mean, yes. Yes. And that would mean the US can probably never participate, but we can’t now anyway, so...

Taylor: And that’s fine. Yeah. We can’t— [laughs] We don’t have a horse in this race, I guess.

Sydnee: Yeah. Well, it's interesting because [chuckles] we were all debating this. Somebody was like, "Well, the US obviously can't participate because it's Eurovision."

And I was like, "Well, yes, but Australia's there."

Taylor: Yeah... I guess— I feel like Australia's one of those— I mean, I was about to say Australia's generally on the right side of history. There are complex issues *within* Australia that is, you know— It's not that nobody's perfect, it's nobody's good. Everybody's got evil, that's just the face of the world. But I do think that Australia's kind of, if you were having a personified party of the nations, I think most people go, "Ehh, Australia can come. Just invite Australia."

Sydnee: That's fine.

Taylor: "I would like Australia to be there." Doesn't matter what it is.

Sydnee: Australia can come.

Taylor: [laughs] Like, yeah, I think that's generally— I feel like that's how it's worked in most wars. They weren't involved, they completely had nothing in it that they were invested in. But they were like, "Yeah, we'll show up. Yeah, yeah, we'll roll through. Why not?"
And everyone's like, "Yeah, yeah. Australia, roll through."

Sydnee: Well, that's what— We were having this whole debate, like, "Are they invited because they're part of the British empire still?"
And I was like, "Probably not. I don't think that's— Like, can Canada come? I don't know."

Taylor: You're the professional. You're the expert. [laughs]

Sydnee: I don't know. I mean, the thing is—

Taylor: Professional Eurovision watcher.

Sydnee: I think, here's the thing. It doesn't matter if the US could ever participate, because there are multiple rounds before you get to the final televised competition. And the US would never— [chuckles] We'd be eliminated in the first round, 'cause again, it is political. And who wants the US to win anything? [laughs]

Taylor: But also, I mean, I feel like I saw a compilation of all of the different World Cup opening acts for the last couple years, compared to the song that is, now that it's in America, what they're leading with. And it was like, years of all of these beautiful, colorful celebrations, multilingual, different classical— You know, you've got different types of styles of music being represented, styles of dance, these joyous celebrations. And then the American one is just like, Jelly Roll singing some song about like, [singing] "Oh, yeah, America!" It's like, yeah, that's— That's not all we have to offer, but for some reason, that is what we get personified as, which is unfortunate.

Sydnee: Yeah. I think if we have a negative worldview— If the view of us across the world is negative right now, that's totally fair. I do not begrudge anybody that.

Taylor: Oh, no, no. I don't disagree with the way people view us. I think it's more that the powers that currently control us propping up what good art and music is, that is what gets pushed forward.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: It's like, nah, America's an amazing, fertile land of talented musicians and creators. It's just in the current administration, that's what's gonna represent us. That's just how it's gonna be.

Sydnee: Oh, well, we made it 250 years. [chuckles]

Taylor: That's the expiration point, right?

Sydnee: I think. I think that's what all the memorabilia that is being made, I think that's what it's indicating. It's like a born and death date. [laughs]

Taylor: Just Balkanize, right? That's an option. Is that on the table?

Sydnee: What is it?

Taylor: Balkanize?

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: Just break us up into little pieces?

Sydnee: Sure. No—

Taylor: In in New York. We'll do our own thing.

Sydnee: I'm not in favor of that, because of where I would end up. [laughs]

Taylor: That's fair.

Sydnee: Yeah. And I still want to live in West Virginia.

Taylor: No, but I don't know. I think, in that not possible inevitability, I mean, that's not actually gonna happen.

Sydnee: No.

Taylor: But in a theoretical sense, I think West Virginia would say— Similar to how I feel about New York, West Virginia would say, "We're gonna do our own thing. We're just the United State of West Virginia."

Sydnee: Yes. I do think— Yes, West Virginia would want to be its own entity.

Taylor: [laughs] It would just be— And you know what? In that sense, it would probably become the Australia of America. Like, yeah, West Virginia can come. They're always just doing their own thing. [chuckles]

Sydnee: A state entirely peopled by criminals.

Taylor: [laughs] Hey. But cool criminals!

Sydnee: Yeah. No, I did— I felt even more confused this year by Eurovision. But I also think that's because the US is becoming more isolated. I did think Bulgaria's song was great and deserved to win. I thought there were several other groups. They were not my pick, but that was just 'cause Croatia's was very witchy, and I really liked their vibe. And I was like, "I love this witchy vibe that Croatia's bringing to the table."

Taylor: Well, see, that was the only thing that got me anywhere close to ever engaging with it, was what was it, last year the Irish performer was super witchy?

Sydnee: Mm-hmm. It was great.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: It was great, yeah. Yeah, I like that vibe. Sometimes, the Eurovision performance bring that. I don't know, it was fun. And then we had, I feel like it's worth mentioning, we had a field day. I feel like that's a classic— This is not just an American thing, I learned this. There's another name for it. At least, there's a British name for what field day is. I don't remember why I learned this. Anyway, field day where our children stand in a field and play games.

Taylor: It sounds like there's not as many water-based activities as there used to be.

Sydnee: There's some. There is a sponge thing where you have to soak a sponge in a bucket, and then run across the field and squeeze it into another bucket. And then whoever's bucket gets full first.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: And in the interim, the children squeeze the sponges over their heads. They don't have to.

Taylor: They just do 'cause it's hot.

Sydnee: It's just ritualistic. [laughs]

Taylor: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: They feel compelled. It was very hot, it was like 90 degrees and there was no shade on this field. So it was a very hot day. As Charlie pointed out to me several times, the bucket of sponge water looked quite gross. And she was concerned that they were all going to get sick from squeezing the bucket of sponge water over their head.

Taylor: Where did the sponge water come from? That's upsetting.

Sydnee: I think it was just from so many child hands reaching in the bucket.

Taylor: Ahh.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: Probably dropped the sponges a lot.

Sydnee: Yeah. And it was the entire elementary school all there together.

Taylor: Ugh.

Sydnee: So yeah. K through 5, all the kids, all the classes. It was so hot that one group got to me, got to our station, and this little kid looked up at me, this little first grade, and was like, "Can I please just lay down there in the shade, and not do this?"

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: And I was like, "I mean, that's fine with— I'm just a volunteer. I assume that's fine. [laughs] I assume participation in the wiffle ball relay [through laughter] is not compulsory."

Taylor: You don't graduate first grade if you don't. You're being judged.

Sydnee: I assume you can take a break. So then I went over to her teacher, and I was like, "Is this okay?"
And she's like, "Of course." Like, looks at me like, "What is wrong with you?"
And I'm like, "Well, I don't know! I don't know what the *rules* of field day are! I *assume* if they're hot, they can sit in the shade and drink some water. I would hope! My kids go to school here."

Taylor: I remember doing the field days, but I always felt like it was sort of there are things you *can* do. If you also just want to sit down somewhere and watch other people do things, that's fine. Or else maybe I was just a weird kid, and they let me do that. It could have been that. [wheeze-laughs]

Sydnee: It's very regimented. They come in, and each teacher has a schedule of where their class is supposed to go. And they have a map of the field, so you know where that station is on the softball field. And you wander to that station, and then there's a whistle that blows to indicate it's time to switch stations. And the entire time, a Kidz Bop version of popular music songs are blasting over the loudspeakers on the field at full volume. And it's 90 degrees. [laughs] Anyway.

Taylor: I remember field—

Sydnee: This is field day.

Taylor: Field day was a reward. It was kind of a big, outdoor party. This sounds like the opposite of that. This sounds like a punishment, or some sort of gauntlet.

Sydnee: Well, and our kids had to walk from the school to this field. It was like a ten-block walk, and they were pretty wiped. [chuckles] They did get a

Popsicle at the end of it. That was like, "You did field day. Here's your ice pop."

And I was like, "Oh, guys, you're gonna need more than an ice pop. These kids are melting."

Taylor: Wow. Things have changed.

Sydnee: It's an intense experience, [laughs] field day.

Taylor: That's a serious field day. I don't know. I'm glad everybody survived, I guess? That's—

Sydnee: Yes, all the children survived. I do— I love watching the progression. 'Cause you get to see, like I said, K through 5 there all at once. And you watch the different— 'Cause I remember participating in school activities at different ages. And the little ones who are like, "I don't know why I'm here or what I'm doing, but they put me in a matching tie-dyed shirt with my classmates, and I'm running around."

To sort of the middle grades, who are intensely trying to participate in these activities, and there's a lot of gender rivalry, like, "Boys versus girls, who's fastest!?" And a lot of that intensity. And then by the time you get to fifth grade, you have at least a couple who are like, it's 90 degrees out, it's field day. They are straight-up wearing jeans anyway. [chuckles] 'Cause like...

Taylor: You gotta look cool.

Sydnee: 'Cause adolescence is coming. And they are like, "Ugh. Ugh! Ugh." [laughs] Just "I can't be bothered." Like, "Ugh!" And I love watching them. [laughs] From clueless, "Ah, I'm running around!" to "I must win this wiffle ball relay!" to "I can't believe my mom here, making me do a wiffle ball relay." [laughs]

Taylor: Where did your children fall on that spectrum?

Sydnee: Cooper's super competitive, full-on, "I will win. I am—" And I will

say, she's one of the tallest in her class. She kind of towers over— I mean, she's tall for her age. And she is *in it*. 100 percent competing, full-on. Charlie is competitive. She's definitely a competitive kid. And she's not like, "Ugh." She likes me being there. She's not embarrassed by Mom being around. But she's definitely look around like, "Why are we still doing— We are not having fun." She's more questioning kind of what we're doing right now. Like, the "What is the point of this? It is very hot, and we are tired, and I don't want to play wiffle ball relay right now. And I don't understand why these adults [through laughter] are making us do this as a reward."

Taylor: Yeah, that's— She's figured it out. She's on the right side.

Sydnee: Yes. [laughs] That's what— She's not embarrassed. She's just confused, like, "Why is this happening to us? What did we do wrong?" [laughs]

Taylor: Correct me if I'm wrong, and maybe they just weren't as strict about [laughs] attendance back in our day, but wasn't it optional? I feel like it was the last day of school, and it was optional. You didn't *have* to come to field day at all. And if you did, you didn't have to participate.

Or you could choose— I remember specifically that there was— Because we had the four-square things on the ground at Geneva Kent. I didn't want to run around in the grass, I didn't want to carry an egg. Why would I want to do that? But we could play four square, so it was like, "I'm gonna play four square, and I'm gonna drink a lot of fruit punch." And that was like, yeah, great day! Wonderful day. [chuckles]

Sydnee: So I think that— Okay, first of all, they don't have it as the last day of school, but that's just 'cause at our school, the last day is always a half day. I don't know why; it just is. And also, the last day is Clean the Classroom Day. [laughs]

Taylor: Oh, okay.

Sydnee: So they are going to spend Friday, half of it, cleaning their classroom. Which is fine; I don't blame the teachers for doing that.

Taylor: Yeah, that's cute.

Sydnee: My kids are messy. I— Sure.

Taylor: I feel like you can check off two days. Clean classroom, then do your thing outside.

Sydnee: The number of activities that are end-of-the-year activities has grown substantially since we were in school. Like, the last month. So we got a special calendar for the last *month* of school with all of the activities that our kids would be participating in, and special events. And specifically things that parents are supposed to come to for the last 30 days of school. I mean, no joke.

And there are multiple different days where you either bring something special, or you have to wear a certain thing. It's like, dress up as this, or wear your favorite this. There are multiple days where like, bring flowers for teachers on this day, bring a present for... There was Principal Day. There was do— I don't know. There are so many different special days. Field day is just one among many now. Each class has its own picnic, so there was a— I had to take time off for both a fifth-grade picnic and a second-grade picnic. And there are things you're supposed to bring to these events. Or I volunteered, so I had to lead a scavenger hunt for one.

There's just so many days. There's field trips, there were multiple field trips at the end of the year. And then there's some field trips that some kids get to go on and others don't, like if you hit your AR goal, your Accelerated Reader goal. Then you get *another* field trip. [laughs] There's just a lot of days. There's Step-Up Day. Today is Step-Up Day, so Cooper will be checking out the third-grade classrooms, and meeting the third-grade teachers, and finding out what third grade's all about. Charlie is stepping up to middle school, so she'll be headed over to the middle school to meet the middle school teachers, and check out what middle school is all about.

Taylor: I mean, that's cool. I think they should just let your school end a month earlier.

Sydnee: I think that we're eroding away the school year. The last month doesn't— It used to be the last day didn't count, then it was the last week, and now it's kind of like the last month. I'm not complaining. I don't have a problem with it. I got my kids' standardized test scores. They're learning how to read and do math, and I am very happy with their progress, and I am A-okay with [chuckles] whatever they want to do. So I'm— This is not a complaint. But I do feel like [laughs] the school year has kind of been shortened by another month by default.

Taylor: Well, but I feel like it got longer. When we were growing up, it's like, if you had snow days, it wasn't a big deal. You didn't have to pay for them in the way that kids have to now. I don't know, I feel like school started in September and it ended in... end of May.

Sydnee: End of May.

Taylor: Yeah. But that was— Now, I feel like those borders have expanded a bit, and they're so much more intense about having to be there X amount of days. Which I understand. You've gotta, I guess, have a system for it. But you just— Maybe that's just you don't want to be in school anymore, 'cause you did too much school.

Sydnee: Well, I do think part of what we're starting to realize is that continuing to do this summers-off agrarian-based [through laughter] school calendar... is wild. And nobody understands—

Taylor: You're telling me that the children are not helping in the fields in their summer break anymore?

Sydnee: That's what I— I realized Charlie and Cooper had never asked about, until just last week. They were like, "Why do we do this for school? Why is this the way school works? I don't understand." And that's a fair question, if you're not familiar with the farming basis of school. And so we explained it. And Charlie was like, "I don't help in the fields." I was like, "Well, we don't have field." [laughs]

Taylor: No fields.

Sydnee: [through laughter] "No, you're— No field."

Taylor: Mommy's greenhouse?

Sydnee: Yeah. Like, you have to help Mommy in her— [laughs] In her greenhouse this summer. I was like, "Well, yeah."

And she said, "Well, then why don't we go to school year-round?"

I said, "Well, do you want to?"

She went, "No."

I said, "I think that's why."

I think 'cause a lot of people are like, "Oh, but I like summer..." [laughs] So we just don't!

Taylor: I think it's—

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: I don't know. I mean, I don't— I'm not gonna be pro-get rid of summer, 'cause I'm friends with some teachers, and I know how much they love their summers. So I don't wanna support that. But maybe, I don't know, maybe having just more time off. Let's just do more time off throughout the year.

Sydnee: Can I say that the one— I understand all the arguments for year-round schooling. I totally get it. And I get that our system—

Taylor: It just sounds so miserable.

Sydnee: It does. It does. But I get it. I mean— I think, though, that our— I really believe— And I know, in some places, they've switched to that. There are some school districts across the country that do year-round schedules. But I think that those places that haven't, like ours, it is really just, "We like summer, and we don't want to switch."

And in some ways, it is fighting capitalism. Because capitalism would prefer we send kids to school every day, because then, the adults who are working

can be more... I don't even want to say efficient workers. They can be at work more, and we don't have to worry about childcare, because school is childcare. So capitalism demands, "Send your kid to school every day." And there is something— I think there's just this little revolt where we're like, "But not summer." [laughs]

Taylor: Well—

Sydnee: Now, the flip-side of that is that it makes it super hard for all these parents. Because then, you gotta figure out how are you gonna take care of your kids all summer if you still gotta work. 'Cause capitalism still says you gotta work. But...

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: We're not gonna send our kids to school. [laughs]

Taylor: Yeah. I also think capitalism would love to say, "Hey, teachers. You're paid for a yearly job, so..."

Sydnee: "Go to work."

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: And then the kids are in school, and then— Yeah. No, that would be the most efficient engine for the market. But I don't know. We don't care about that.

Taylor: Well, I mean, that's like all the countries that have figured out— It's not like a luxury. It's like they figured out, "Hey, to have the most efficient workers, a four-day work week is better."

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: People just work— And they don't work very well over eight hours.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: A shorter work day, and less work days, somehow makes our work better. Because then people have quality of life, so they, you know...

Sydnee: And when they know they can take time off when they're sick, and when they know they can take time off if they need to for their family, or if they're gonna have a baby or whatever. Yeah.

Taylor: It's all, you know, I don't— Even if you're the staunches capitalist, I don't know why you would exactly ignore that information. But I guess it's because people don't wanna— Just the *concept* of giving people a higher quality of life, if you're not getting something directly in return, feels like an upsetting thing to a certain group of people.

Sydnee: I think we do have an innate drive to do something. I think most of us feel that sort of need, like I need to be doing something.

Taylor: Oh, sure.

Sydnee: At least a part of my time. I need to have goals to accomplish, or something to— An end to achieve, you know? I think we do have that drive, and I think capitalism takes advantage of that. It takes it, and it pushes you until you stop thinking about why. And you just think, "I must." Because there is that internal need, like, "I need to do *something*."

Taylor: Yeah, but I mean, as somebody that works in the food service sector, I've made peace with the fact that my passion in life is never going to be washing your dishes.

Sydnee: Sure.

Taylor: But someone's gotta do it. Somebody's gotta toast your bagel. Somebody's gotta make your coffee. Somebody's gotta make your martini. I don't mind doing it. It's an okay job. As long as it pays okay, and I can have a life outside of it, that's fine. But that's the caveat, is that— I have a compulsion to do lots of things. They're all things that I do when I'm not... doing that. The job that I need to keep a roof over my head.

Sydnee: Yeah, yeah. I'm surrounded by cats now, by the way.

Taylor: Oh, that's nice.

Sydnee: I don't even know how they got in. There were two shut doors, and then now the cats are here.

Taylor: Well, they do just sort of transport around.

Sydnee: I know. They defy boundaries. We need to talk about the movie we watched.

Taylor: Yes. You wanted to watch *Ready or Not 2*...

Sydnee: 2.

Taylor: *Here We Come?*

Sydnee: *Here I Come.*

Taylor: *Here I Come?*

Sydnee: *Here We Come.*

Taylor: *Here We Come.*

Sydnee: *Here I Come. Here...*

Taylor: How many?

Sydnee: Well, now, I don't—

Taylor: How many come? Who's coming?

Sydnee: I mean—

Taylor: *Here Sarah Michelle Gellar Comes.*

Sydnee: Here— Yes. Sarah Michelle Gellar, who's a bad guy.

Taylor: She is a bad guy. I do appreciate that they made her an almost-sympathetic bad guy.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: I think— Was there a clause in her contract negotiation, she's like, "Alright. But I don't— I'm still Buffy at the end of the day, so..."

Sydnee: *Here I Come.*

Taylor: *Here I Come.* Okay.

Sydnee: Yes. So if you saw the first movie, *Ready or Not*, the premise is that this woman marries into this weird rich family that worships the Devil. [laughs] And they have to play a game whenever somebody marries into the family, and she has to pick from a variety of games. Anyway, the game she gets is hide and seek. And so she has to hide until dawn, and if they catch her, they kill her. And if they don't play the game, or if they don't catch her, they explode.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Into like... blood. [chuckles]

Taylor: And it's not every time someone marries into the family, right? It's like, this is a specifically bad luck game to draw.

Sydnee: Yes. They don't always have to play hide and seek, but she picked one of the worst ones.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: And the sequel picks up right after that, because the— It's interesting. I always wonder about that in— That's a common horror movie ending, is you have your hero, or your final girl, or whoever, who's sitting outside a burning building or whatever, a destroyed thing, and they're covered in blood. They're usually smoking a cigarette, looking just completely exhausted and triumphant and whatever. Traumatized, whatever milieu. And then the police are slowly arriving, emergency crews are coming to the scene, and then it usually just fades to black. And you always wonder, what did they say? [laughs] Like, "What happened here!?"

Taylor: All these rich people exploded. What else can you say?

Sydnee: Yeah. And this movie kind of answers that question. Like, well, nobody's gonna believe you. And they're gonna think you just burned this house down with all these people inside it.

Taylor: Yeah. I think that, in the reality of horror movies, a lot of our final girls and protagonists are unfairly thrown in jail after the credits roll, because how do you explain that, I don't know, you were possessed by a demon and murdered some of your friends, but then your friends were then possessed by the same demon, and so then you had to murder them back? [laughs] Rah!

Sydnee: [laughs] So this is— She's probably gonna be arrested. First, she has to go to the hospital, 'cause she's injured. But the only reason I think she— This isn't some sort of jury movie, some sort of trial, courtroom movie. Is that the rest of the family, the extended family, is activated to find and kill her. And so they have to drag her back to a new mansion, where she has to be hunted and killed by the extended family groups.

Taylor: And the additional dynamic is her sister came to the hospital.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: And now is wrapped up in the game as well.

Sydnee: Yes. And they were estranged, but now they must team up to

survive. And I think it's— I like it because it's scary, but it's also kind of ridiculous. I like the elevation to— I like the people exploding into blood.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: It's so ridiculous, this demon-worshiping Elijah-Wood-led... [laughs] He's not the leader; he's the lawyer of the cult. [chuckles]

Taylor: Well, he's the lawyer, but I also feel like— And especially just with the expression you get from him at the end, I think he is the Devil.

Sydnee: Maybe.

Taylor: I think he might be the personification, or at least the Devil's hand in this mortal plane. 'Cause he seems—

Sydnee: Kind of like—

Taylor: No, go ahead.

Sydnee: Oh, kind of like the Metatron as the voice of God?

Taylor: Yeah. Well, at the end – we'll get there, but – at the end, he seems very amused at how things worked out.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: In a way that I think the Devil would find this funny. Like, I don't know.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: Like, "Oh. You found a way through my system. And it still resulted in a whole bunch of sacrifices, so I'm cool with this!" [chuckles]

Sydnee: Yes. And people falling in a very gross pit. [laughs]

Taylor: Yeah. I will always enjoy— Any sort of “eat the rich” movie will always get a watch from me. And I liked— ‘Cause the first one, I enjoyed the first one, but the first one, there was a lot— You really felt for the bride in that it just—

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: You know, and even if we’re trying to make a character sympathetic, sometimes— Especially in horror movies, where it’s like, “Don’t worry! The girl’s gonna get her revenge. You just really have to watch her suffer for a while.” There is a point where it’s like, I don’t want to watch that, though. I don’t want to watch some girl just get *brutalized*, even if I know in the third act, she’s gonna get her revenge.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: And I feel like the shift happened way earlier in this movie, which I appreciated. The two sisters were kicking butt kind of from the beginning.

Sydnee: I agree. I feel like they understood the assignment a lot faster, which makes sense, ‘cause she’d been through it once.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: It also is interesting because what you have in the first movie is a woman protagonist who thinks the world is one way, and then is very shocked and has trouble adjusting to the fact that the world is not that way. The world is actually much worse, and bad, and terrible, and she had no idea. And in this movie, we have female protagonists who are like, “Yeah, no, we know what the world is like.”

Taylor: Right.

Sydnee: “We’re not shocked that this is what these rich people are like. We are fully prepared to handle that, because that is the world.” I do think that’s kind of a culture shift, you know?

Taylor: Absolutely. Yeah, there was—

Sydnee: And I appreciate it.

Taylor: It felt like almost an even playing field. Not that it was set up that way, but just by amount [laughs] of commitment the sisters had. It felt like an even playing field early on.

Sydnee: I like the conceit— So all of the different family groups have to use— In order to hunt the bride, they have to use weapons that were— The weapons of the time when their family made the deal with the devil.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: And so I like that— I think that was a clever way of not just having everybody carrying around a machine gun or something. You know what I mean? Something— That was smart, because otherwise, why would you use anything except a rocket launcher? I don't know, whatever. [chuckles] But I thought it was funny. Sarah Michelle Gellar, in one of her interviews, she said her character has to use a dueling pistol. And that when she was training for the movie, they had her come in for her day to practice with it. And so she practiced with the dueling pistol, and she said she instantly was hitting the target right away. And they were like, very impressed with her. And she's like, "I mean... You know." [chuckles]

Taylor: "I'm Buffy."

Sydnee: She doesn't say, "I'm Buffy," but... "I'm Buffy." [laughs]

And they asked her, they pointed to the rest of the armory and they were like, "Well, you've got that. As long as you're here, is there anything else you want to play with? As long as you're here." Which is also a weird— I hear people say that, like, "Anything you want to play with?" in reference to guns or weapons.

And I always think, "No." [chuckles] But I guess maybe some people do. And they were like, "Anything here you want to play with?"

And she was like, "Well, I don't know."

And they were like, "Well, we got a rocket launcher. Do you want to try a rocket launcher?"

And she was like, "Nah, I've shot one of those."

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: And [laughs] she said there was literally nothing in the armory, except the dueling pistol, that she had not used before. Every other weapon in there, she had used at some point on Buffy, and so had had to train with, so she was familiar with.

Taylor: That's fair.

Sydnee: Which also makes me terrified of Sarah Michelle Gellar. [laughs]

Taylor: Fair! I mean, that's— Is it kind of the same thing as what, Noah Wyle has been a fake doctor so long that he might be able to do a bit of actual doctoring? Sarah Michelle Gellar was the Vampire Slayer for so long that she could do— She could slew! She could do a slew.

Sydnee: Yeah, I think so. I think so. And I bet— I wonder if it translates for Noah Wyle. I was thinking, "Well, certainly, they've mimicked CPR so many times, you must be good at CPR." But also, they're always doing it wrong. And this is not a criticism. You cannot do it right, unless it's not— Now, if it's a dummy that they're doing it on, they can do it right. But if there's a real person laying on that table, you can't do it right, 'cause then you'd break their ribs, and that feels like... not a sacrifice an actor should have to make for their craft. [chuckles]

Taylor: I guess, then, given the hypothetical situations of being in a vampire fight with Sarah Michelle Gellar, or having a medical emergency with Noah Wyle, [chuckles] I'll take a vampire fight with Sarah Michelle Gellar.

Sydnee: I think she would do well! I mean, from what she said, she knows how to use all the weapons now. And this movie filled in the last gap in her [through laughter] weapon knowledge.

Taylor: This must have been particularly difficult for you, because not only is it Sarah Michelle Gellar playing a bad guy, but it's also Dr.— The other doctor from *The Pitt*. The night doctor.

Sydnee: Yeah!

Taylor: He's the brother that's—

Sydnee: Dr. Abbot.

Taylor: Sarah Michelle Gellar has a brother, then they're both kind of— I mean, they're both evil, but he's the eviler evil.

Sydnee: Yes. Yeah, and I tell ya, I wonder if Sarah Michelle Gellar's character really did intend to not kill her. If she really was looking for a way out for her, you know what I mean?

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: I almost got the sense that— But I mean, ultimately no. But yeah, Abbot— Dr. Abbot. I don't know the actor's name. [laughs] He was really good. He was scary. He was actually, I think, the scariest of all the antagonists.

Taylor: Well, and I liked that him— This was sort of a soft *Faculty* reunion. Because he was the jock in *The Faculty* with Elijah Wood.

Sydnee: Oh!

Taylor: As the little nerdy guy.

Sydnee: Oh, I didn't realize that.

Taylor: Yeah. And he turned evil in that! I mean, he was infested with the alien parasite, but he had that great moment outside—

Sydnee: He was a very, very good evil.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Like, very scary.

Taylor: Well, I don't know. I always love a movie that has this sort of... It's kind of this— I think we talked about it, when we talked about *Labyrinth*, about how the fey, or mystical creatures with this sort of gray morality. Where it's not about good or evil; it's just there are rules, and you have to follow them.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: And as long as you follow the rules, we're good. I'm not gonna mess with you. I love a movie that has that caveat. [laughs] 'Cause it kind of feels like this is just a transaction for Satan, whatever demonic entity is behind all of this. It's like, "Look. These are the rules. This is how it's played out. If you find a loophole, that's fair too. I do it all the time. No hard feelings." [laughs]

Sydnee: Mm-hmm. Yeah. Yeah, if it's within the rules, that's fine.

Taylor: Yeah. 'Cause that turnaround. You know, and I felt it when he said that, "There's nothing against the rules about killing your family." I was like, "Oh, okay. That's important."

Sydnee: Yeah. No, I thought it was very well done. I found it— You know, with sequels like that, you never know— 'Cause they caught on a really interesting twist in the first one. So will a sequel work well? And I thought I actually enjoyed it, in some ways, more than the first one. Like you said, I like the idea of a female protagonist who is not walking in naive and then caught off guard. One who is ready to fight, covered in blood from the jump.

Taylor: Even stylistically, I thought it was— And that's where I kind of understood what the movie was gonna be, where they find an excuse to get her back in the wedding dress, that first wedding dress.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: 'Cause she's in a hospital gown. She's like, "I can't fight in a hospital gown." So instead of grabbing some scrubs, she just puts back on her burnt, blood-covered wedding dress. But the transition from in the first movie, where she's wearing the stark-white wedding dress, and then it gets dirtier, and by the time she puts it back on, it's almost black.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: And then at the very end, when she's agreed to marry the Dr. Whatever...

Sydnee: Yeah. The bad guy.

Taylor: Yeah. That's her way of working the system, is she's agreed to marry him. And so then he gets the seat of power, but then she immediately murders him to turn the tables on him. She's in that black dress. I just feel like, stylistically, the way they dressed her was really cool. That transition from the white, innocent bride to the all-black bride of Satan. [laughs]

Sydnee: Yes. No, I thought that was a really cool— It did. It felt like there were people who, after the first movie, said just what you called attention to. "Can we not have her suffer so much? Can we give her more agency?" And in the second movie, they were like, "Absolutely."

Taylor: Well, and especially having her sister on her side. I love the moments where they just were like, [laughs] wrapping their injuries begrudgingly and finding a random bottle of vodka. It's like, "Okay, yeah." [chuckles] You know, they're in this together.

Sydnee: They do! And they click into that really quickly. And I like that, and I do feel like it's sort of an acknowledgment that in a lot of ways, women do have to do that. Like, "Okay. These are the rules. I didn't get to make them. Men made them; I didn't make them. But if I don't learn how to survive within it, they'll destroy me. And so until I can change it," which she does at the end, "I'm going to fight."

Taylor: Well, and in the first one, there was Adam Brody? Let's see.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: His character, who he was a good sort of— He started off as— He wasn't the love interest; he was the brother of her— I think he was the brother-in-law?

Sydnee: Yeah. Brother-in-law.

Taylor: But he ends up sort of helping her in the end.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: Which I like that character, but it still kind of fell back on, "Well, there's a man to help her in the end." This very much did not have that. It was just [laughs] her and her sister against the world.

Sydnee: Yeah. I thought it was good. I would recommend it. I do think you should probably watch the first one, if you haven't, first. Just to put the whole story together. You could watch it out of context, I guess, but it would be more enjoyable if you watch the first.

Taylor: Yeah. I don't think you need a ton of understanding, but it's a better full story.

Sydnee: [laughs] The Devil stuff gets weird if you don't understand. The exploding and blood especially.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: It's weird if you don't understand— If you haven't watched the first one.

Taylor: Yeah. They really let people start exploding a lot earlier in this movie. That was kind of a big— In the first one, you really didn't know if

they even— You didn't know if these were just crazy rich people that believed crazy things. It did not feel like a supernatural movie. I think that also made the second one a little bit more enjoyable. The first one, there was that question, like, "I don't— It's just a weirdo cult."

Sydnee: Yeah. Like, are they just— Yeah.

Taylor: And when they started exploding, it was so funny that it just caught you off guard. So having that be an element the whole film was, I think, a little bit more enjoyable.

Sydnee: I like that. I like when it— And then, to me, it won't be sad. I don't have to worry, 'cause that's so ridiculous, it's like hyperbole.

Taylor: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: It's so surreal that— Yeah. So... Well, thank you for watching it, Tey. I really enjoyed it, and I thought you would too.

Taylor: Oh, yeah. No, it was great. And I love when Elijah Wood is a good guy, but I think I like him better when he's a bad guy. [laughs]

Sydnee: He's a very good bad guy. So I want us to do something a little different next.

Taylor: Okay.

Sydnee: So I know the Met Gala was like a week or two ago.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: And while it's not a piece of media, it's a cultural thing. It's a concept. It's permeated our culture. It's a thing that happens every year, and because we have social media now, all of us are aware of it. [laughs] And I think we should talk about it. 'Cause especially this year, there were a lot of interesting— It wasn't just the fashion itself. There were a lot of

interesting statements made, and I think we could talk about the last decade of the Met Gala. Not just this Met Gala, but the Met Gala as a concept.

Taylor: Alright. I have opinions on the Met Gala. That'll be fun.

Sydney: I'm sure you have more sophisticated opinions than me.

Taylor: I don't know about sophisticated. I don't think any of my opinions are sophisticated. [laughs] But I do have 'em!

Sydney: But as someone who will never attend the Met Gala, I do have thoughts.

Taylor: Hey, never say never. I don't know.

Sydney: I will never attend the Met Gala. [laughs]

Taylor: Alright.

Sydney: I will never— I mean, it's two separate things. I will never be invited, and I would never attend.

Taylor: Alright, fair.

Sydney: Yeah. 'Kay. Alright. [laughs] Well, Taylor, thank you. Thank you for watching that movie, *Ready or Not 2: Here I Come*. I clarified; it is *Here I Come*. And you all should check it out, it's very good. And you should go to MaximumFun.org. There are a lot of great podcasts there that you would enjoy to listen to. And 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.

[theme music plays]

Sydnee: I'm Sydnee McElroy.

Taylor: And I'm Taylor Smirl.

Sydnee: I'm still buffering.

Taylor: And I am, too.

Sydnee: I think I said, "For our culture."

Taylor: Yeah, you said that.

Sydnee: Or "Our cross-generational—" Yeah.

Taylor: [unintelligible]

Sydnee: I got it right.

Taylor: Well, it's "our" [unintelligible], "a." Like [unintelligible]

Sydnee: I know. Well, I— I was trying to— *You* say "our," don't you?

Taylor: A cross-generational guide to the culture that made us.

Sydnee: Aw, man. Aw, man, I broke it again.

Taylor: Oh, no. You have to forget this conversation by next week.

Sydnee: Okay. Alright. That's not a problem. [laughs]

Taylor: Right. [laughs]

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