

Still Buffering 484: Euphoria Finale (2026)

Published on June 7, 2026

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

Taylor: And I'm Teylor Smirl.

Sydnee: Tey, there was some TikTok discourse that I felt like you would have some expertise on.

Taylor: Ooh, okay.

Sydnee: Did you fall on the side of TikTok where they were debating coffee pricing?

Taylor: Oh, this is—I feel like this has been an ongoing thing. 'Cause I think most recently—are you referring to the Prickly Pear situation?

Sydnee: And the split cup. Yes.

Taylor: Yes. That is, I feel like, not that long ago there was a whole thing about a, uh... another, like... was it—I feel like it was a ten dollar latte that someone was freaked out about. So now this is a 12 dollar not even a coffee.

Sydnee: Not even a coffee. But it's because it's a split cup, so you get two—two—two drinks in one.

Taylor: That is not—that is not how a split drink works. Like, when I make somebody an Arnold Palmer, I don't charge them for an iced tea and a lemonade. I charge them for half a glass of iced tea and half a glass of lemonade.

Sydnee: Okay. But why—why—let me take it a step back. Before we talk about how much it should cost, can I ask why a split—why? When I go to get a beverage, I just want to get a beverage. I've never thought, "I'd like to drink these two beverages that would not mix well together at the same time, though."

Taylor: I mean, I'm assuming that it is a drink that they offer, right? Like, that is a... she was describing it as kind of like a refresher type thing. Where it's juice, but it's, like... I mean, it's a menu item. It's not like you walk into a shop and go, "Hey."

Or like—like, imagine going to a bar and be like, "Can you give—" no, that would happen. I was like, if someone said, "Yeah, give me, like, a bee sting. Give me, like, a, you know, like, a cider cup with a Guinness or something," I would go, "Yeah, I can do that." And I would charge you for one drink. So that happens.

Sydnee: Well, but this is like a cup—like, okay. Do you sell those cups? Have you ever worked in an establishment where they sell those, the cup?

Taylor: Wait. Is it literally, like, a cup that's split down the middle?

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: That's insane. Why do those exist? That's—I hate that.

Sydnee: And there's two—so, they're for two separate beverages. They're not mixed together. Um, and they said that typically it's for coffee on one side and matcha on the other is, like, the—like, that's usually—that was the—that they envisioned people typically ordering coffee in one and matcha, I think. And then you could put two—

Taylor: Why are you doing that?

Sydnee: I don't know. So the whole argument is about she got two different refresher flavors, and so one side was one refresher flavor and the other was another refresher flavor because she wanted to try two different flavors. I don't engage with beverages this way. This is very odd to me. 'Cause that

part—I kept hearing "split cup" and I kept thinking, "I don't understand what I'm hearing here."

And so then I had to look at a picture of it. And I was like, "Why is this a thing?"

And then when they were like, "So you can get coffee and tea."

I've never wanted coffee and tea. I have wanted coffee. I have wanted tea. Less, less often. I'm a coffee drinker. But I've never thought, like... what is happening—what are we do—what are—how—we're engaging with fluids wrong, as a society. [laughs]

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: We need to reevaluate our relationship with liquids.

Taylor: I... I hate that it's become—I'm sorry. You almost said it. But that SNL skit that's Tucker Carlson that has gone—like, what are we doing? What's happening? I hate that that keeps running through my head every, like... [laughs] that is the correct response to this.

Sydnee: [laughs] What are we doing?

Taylor: [laughs] I mean, I think some—like, that's, like, late stage capitalism right there, right? Like, what if you could get two drinks at twice the price? But I can already do that!

Sydnee: And, like, here's the thing. I'm not—I am not gonna take either side of this argument, because I don't understand—like, I feel like I would have to have some ability to empathize with the need for the split cup in order to take a side. You know what I mean?

Taylor: Yeah, no. I didn't realize that was an element of it. There was other—wildly enough, there was other coffee drama. So there's just... you know.

Sydnee: This is distinct coffee—and that's—I can't take a side, 'cause I would never order a split—there's never a—the only thing I've ever thought is, "I should probably drink some water with whatever I'm wanting to drink right now." So there are times where I've thought, "I should also drink some water."

But I've never thought, "I need two distinct beverages at the same time, please."

Um, but that's fine, if you do. That's fine. I don't care. I have no opinion as to how much that should cost. I really don't know. But the person, like, breaking it down who worked there was like, "Well, listen. If you've got—first of all, the cups cost more, 'cause they're these weird cups," which is probably true, right?

Taylor: Sure.

Sydnee: There's more plastic in there, 'cause it's divided. So the cups cost more. And then you've got all the ingredients on each side, and it all adds up. And it depends on what you're putting in there. Like, what milk did you add, or what sweetener, what syrup, whatever the heck. So, like, I get—at the end of it, it's like, okay, and then you gotta make a profit on that. Okay. I mean, I understand that math. [laughs quietly]

I still have no feeling on any of it. I don't know how to feel about any of it. I am sorry that you had a bad experience. And she only liked one of the two flavors of refreshers, so that's a bummer. Sorry about that. [laughs]

Taylor: I don't—yeah.

Sydnee: I don't know!

Taylor: I'm against all of this. I'm against all of this. [laughs] Like, I don't—in a world where we're all drowning, our lungs are full of microplastics, our hearts are full of microplastics, why as a business owner would you make the choice to take on more plastics? I already, like... like, out front, have to just ask that.

If you were to order two, like, eight ounce teas, like iced teas—like, I don't know what the smallest iced—usually an iced cup is 16 ounce. But that thing looks like it's what, like, a 20 ounce situation?

Sydnee: Well, that's what—she took it home and, like, filled it up and then dumped it into, like, the large—like, a large Starbucks cup, basically. Like, it was literally a large Starbucks size. Like, the biggest Starbucks. And it didn't fill that. So that is less than the largest Starbucks.

Taylor: Without ice or with ice?

Sydnee: Without ice.

Taylor: Okay. That's—see, that's—ice is part of the volume.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: But... [sighs]

Sydnee: I don't know.

Taylor: I mean, if you got two separate drinks. If you said, "Can I get a hibiscus iced tea and a lemonade?"

And I'm just using those 'cause those are—I don't know what these refreshers are. I've not worked in a place that sells those. But I'm trying to think of something approximate. Could the ticket price be around 10 dollars? Yeah, probably. Like, that would—probably that is, like, a six dollars each situation.

We can argue about, like, why is that how much you're paying for, you know, what you're getting, but just because you stick the two cups together in some weird Cronenbergian cup situation doesn't change the fact that you're getting two beverages.

Sydnee: Well, I also—I'm gonna... I think—again, this is why I don't know that I should have an opinion on this. Because I don't... when I—I drink coffee. I like coffee. I drink coffee in the morning and I don't put anything in

it nine times out of ten. Every once in a while, like on a holiday or something, I might toss a little Baileys or something in there if it's, like, a fun—but, I mean, generally speaking, I don't want any other flavor in my coffee but the coffee. I want a good coffee that tastes good on its own. And I don't put cream or sugar in it, or anything like that.

So for me, the whole enterprise starts to fall apart because I don't want any of the things, I just want coffee. But my children frequently will want one of those tasty new beverages from Starbucks or whatever. And they're all, like, different colors, and they're pretty, and they have beautiful names, and they sound very attractive. I have tasted many of them because of this. So I have tasted a lot of these refreshers and other type beverages.

And as far as I can tell, it's just, like—it's just, like, juice? It's, like, different juices? And, like, they taste like the fruit that's—like, whatever—they taste like what the fruit on it says. Like, if it says strawberry, it tastes like strawberry, and if it says coconut, it tastes like coconut, or whatever. Like, it tastes like that.

And I've tasted all those things in my life. I don't—I feel like we're paying a lot of money for fancy juice. Like, it's just—we've just rebranded juice again.

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

Sydnee: Is that what it—like, it's just this is the newest iteration of juice. I know there's other stuff in there, but, like, essentially it's juice.

Taylor: Yeah. Well, and, like, I... but that's not even fair because, like, I don't know. Like, my corner store does fresh—like, they make the juice in front of you. Like, they have a juicer and they make it. And that I get. Like, it's a lot of work that goes into it. You might pay—I think their juice is, to be fair, I think their juices are, like, six to eight dollars, depending on the size. But it's fresh juice, like, squeezed in front of you, extracted in front of you. You can pick five different, you know—ginger, and carrot, and spinach, and beet, and orange, whatever you want.

Like, it's a lot of work. That price seems to offset it. With that, it's concentrates. They're definitely buying, like, premade concentrates that they

are diluting and serving you. So there's not an—like, I don't... I don't know this particular coffee shop. But, like, I hate that my—I think my honest response is it's bad on both ends. It's probably a garbage product that went viral on, you know, an app, and that's why people think they want it, because that's how we all make our decisions now. We don't actually look inside ourselves and say, what would make me happy today? What would appeal to my palate?

We go, "Oh, this is the thing I'm supposed to try." And so the—you know, whatever garbage sugar water concentrate situation is put in the cup, and you chose to spend the money on it. And everybody involves sucks. The coffee shop sucks. The person that doesn't have an opinion about what they want and just buys the stupid thing sucks. Everybody sucks in this situation. [laughs quietly]

Sydnee: I just don't... I feel like—it's weird to me, because there are—I have children who are young enough that occasionally we still have, like, juice boxes or, like, Capri-Suns pouches and stuff in the house.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: So, like, if I wanted juice—either juice—'cause some of them are actual juice. Like, we buy juice boxes that are literally juice. And then sometimes we're buying things that that's not juice. Like, it's a flavored—it's a Kool-Aid-y situation, right?

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: So, like, those are all accessible to me at any time. And they're cheap. You get a lot of 'em for not a lot of money if you buy in bulk. They're, like, shelf stable. Although they're better if you cool 'em down. But, like, I don't—I feel like we already did this. Like, we already figured all this out, and now we're rebranding it and selling it for a lot more money at adult beverage stores.

Taylor: There is this weird thing happening across the lands—the culinary landscape in America that scares me. And I don't think we have enough time, 'cause we have a whole other topic we have to talk about.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: But—to fully understand what it is. But I'm seeing it and I'm like, this isn't good. Because we used to—you know, like, going to a coffee shop and, let's say, paying for a properly prepared matcha... like, which, you know, you have to buy, like, certain quality tea. You have to prepare it in a certain way. You have to have certain tools. It takes time. It takes skill.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: I think that's an experience that rewards you for having the patience for it. There's quality there. There is this, like... like, we are charging the same prices for garbage. And it's kind of this babyfication of the American palate. Like, I don't know. Like, there are these restaurants that are opening in New York where their menu items are glorified, like, Hot Pockets and pizza rolls. And, like, here's, like—like, I'm looking and I'm like, yeah, it's funny to have that food on a menu, but it shouldn't be that expensive.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: And I do think we should challenge our palates as adults. I do think we should have an understanding of, like, quality products versus, hey, that's fun as a little sweet treat. You shouldn't pay 20 dollars for that. [laughs] Like, you shouldn't...

Sydnee: No.

Taylor: Like, also, I don't know. I don't care how you choose to spend your money. But don't let the restaurants charge you that much for garbage that you can get at the convenience store.

Sydnee: Yeah! Well, I mean, that's what it really, like—I have had to say, like, I mean... I'm not, like, a huge—I don't hate on Starbucks. This is not, like, my anti-Starbucks screed. But I've never been a huge Starbucks fan. But again, it's just because I drink just coffee. And so I can make better coffee at home. I don't mean this in a braggy way. I just—or at least let me

say that the coffee I make at home for me and my palate is indistinguishable from plain black coffee at Starbucks. You know? So, why am I gonna go buy it?

So, again, not the ideal consumer, here. Clearly not the intended audience. But my kids love it, 'cause they have a lot of colorful drinks that I think are supposed to be for adults, but kids want them too, because they look like kid drinks, 'cause they're pretty and they're very sweet, a lot of 'em. They just taste like sugar. Sugar flavor sugar. And then they have boba in them now, so many of them.

So now you've got, like, candy in the drink. And I don't... and so now I've had to say, like, "Well, no, we can't—" I mean, these are marketed towards adults but, like, the amount of sugar that's in this, this is something... if it were marketed to a kid, I would tell the girls, like, "Well, we can have this sometime. This is like a sweet treat. This is a special treat. This is not an everyday thing."

But that's not, I feel like, how they're marketing them at the Star—and I'm just using Starbucks as an example. But, I mean, there's lots of these places. Like, "Have this every day." And it's like, that's a dessert. I don't understand what's happened. It is! It is like a—we're—it's a return to childhood. [laughs] With our adult palates.

Taylor: We were at least sort of lying to ourselves when there was still coffee involved. Like, okay, there's caffeine. I need some caffeine to start my day.

Sydney: Yeah.

Taylor: Some of us have, you know, dysfunctional mornings where we don't get to have breakfast, so okay, yeah, there's some sugar in there. There's some calories. But, like, that's fine. I didn't eat breakfast. But now it's like, we're not even—we're not even getting the caffeine. [laughs] It's just sugar water. Which is fine. I don't care how anybody chooses to consume, but why are—we're—why are we charging that much?

Like, those prices were established because there was a moment in America that I think we're sadly moving past where we kind of respected the culinary arts. And we understand, like, hey, like, if this coffee shop—like, I work at a place where our coffee program—like, we work with our farmers. Like, we buy, like, very ethically sourced coffee program. Everything is very careful and curated and our prices still aren't—you're not gonna pay 12 dollars for anything in the shop. But, like, there is a trade off.

Yeah, you're maybe paying a little bit more than if you got a cup of coffee from the bodega. But there's a lot of thought and reason that that price is that. And somebody saw those price points and said, "What if we charged that same amount, but we go back to selling people garbage?"

And everybody just went along with it, 'cause it looks good!

Sydnee: Yes. It's just glorified Kool-Aid.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: And it's—I mean, which is fine, again. I'm not—I think it's just like, I don't understand—it's in the wrong place. These feel like dessert treats for children, except sometimes they have, like, an Alani in there or something, so be careful!

Taylor: Yeah, no.

Sydnee: That's the other thing. It looks like it's for a kid, and then it's got, like, 200 mg of caffeine in it. And you're like, whoa, whoa, whoa! That's not for a kid! Whoa! What is this beverage?

Taylor: I don't—that's—I... [laughs quietly] it's bewildering on all sides. I still, you know—and I'm always the one that even despite the fact that I work in customer service, I'm gonna side with the customer, because I think we should—it's your job as a business to try to provide your customers with quality products at fair prices.

So that's the initial failure, is, you know, this business model that is, make something that looks cool and goes viral, and sell it at the highest price

possible with the lowest quality possible. That's the problem. That's the business model of most things opening these days. But that's the problem.

But then, you know, hey, customers. Have some discernment. If you walk in and they're trying to charge you that much for two drinks... don't buy it.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: You don't need that.

Sydnee: Well, and just think about what it—I mean, 'cause, like, it was early days of Starbucks when I realized, like, yeah, they have something on the menu that's basically just a milkshake. [laughs] Like, they're selling it as a coffee beverage, but there's no coffee in it, and you're drinking it in the morning, and it's a morning milkshake. Which, you know, some mornings you need a milkshake.

Taylor: Yeah, sure.

Sydnee: But... but it just—like, it's weird. But then, I don't know. We also eat donuts, so.

Taylor: Well, I think—it's not the health. Like, I'm not judging about the health. I just—I... be as decadent as you want. But, like, have quality decadence. [laughs]

Or, or, if you want trashy decadence, which I also love, you shouldn't be charged through the nose for that.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: Go get a—a Sunny D from your, you know, corner store. Delicious. Delicious garbage water. Every now and then when I'm really hung over, a Sunny D hits. And I don't—I know what I'm drinking, and I'm not paying for anything above and beyond.

Sydnee: Sunny D is delicious. [laughs] I can't drink it very much because I'm old and I have acid reflux, but oof, it's good. [laughs]

Taylor: No. Like, a Sunny D when you're just dehydrated and you need... Sunny D cut with a little seltzer water? [laughs] There's my—there's my trash man mimosa.

Sydnee: Yes! I don't know. It also just sucks as, like, a parent who worked really hard to get my kids to drink water. Because we were not raised to drink water, and I am trying to reverse that. And so, you know, for the longest time, my kids just drank water. Like, the option for "What do you want to drink?" Was water, once it was no longer, you know, boob milk. So that—they were very good.

And, like, I'm not saying I never let my kid have, like, a Capri-Sun or anything. Of course, occasionally, we did. But for the most part in our house, we drank water. And then all the sudden it's like, Starbucks is like, "Hey, kids! Check out over here! Aren't these beverages beautiful, rainbow colored, magical? They're sparkly, and they've got boba in them, and they're gorgeous, and they're all for you! And they've got such great names, and they're so pretty, and—" it's like, oh, man. [laughs] Stop! You're killing me over here! I'm trying so hard to get my kids to drink water!

Taylor: Well, and I mean, I feel like there was a considered effort in, like, the 90s and early 2000s to be like, "Hey. These things that are marketed towards kids but are really bad for you shouldn't be marketed towards kids."

But I guess with all of our cutting of regulations, that's just... yeah. Just sell... sell sugar, pink sugar in a cup. In two cups! Merged together.

Sydnee: Pink sugar in a cup and, um—

Taylor: 20 dollars. [laughs]

Sydnee: And one steak for every carrot you eat, or one carrot for every steak. I don't know which. Either way.

Taylor: I think you can consume garbage if you want, consume expensive things if you want. I just don't think garbage should be expensive.

Sydnee: Yeah. I agree. And I do think we need to take a step back and look at all of these weird drinks and say, "Wait. Do I really want that?" I know what it's gonna taste like. You know?

Taylor: It's really important to have internal discernment and say, do I want it or have I just been convinced that I want it because people on social media have been paid to tell you you want it?

Sydnee: Yes. 'Cause sometimes it's just sugary fruit. [laughs quietly]

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Um... so, Tey, I had a wild ride last night.

Taylor: Yeah! Uh, so, you watched one singular episode of Euphoria, and it was the series, question mark, finale. Now they might be backtracking that and they're gonna make another season. That's awful. They shouldn't. But this was—

Sydnee: How?

Taylor: [sighs] I mean, all of the big stars—we're gonna spoil things, obviously.

Sydnee: Yes. We are definitely spoiling Euphoria.

Taylor: 100%. All of the biggest stars, I feel like, maybe demanded they be killed off. [laughs] That was my—like, Jacob Elordi and Zendaya went, "Please. I won't do any more of this. Kill me."

Sydnee: Please. I—okay. I... I realized—Justin and I sat down and started watching it, and as I was watching I said, "I do think we have seen one episode of this." I think maybe way back in the beginning we watched the first episode and said, "Eh, not for us." And then never watched it again. So—because I was vaguely familiar with some of this.

I... I have to say, I didn't enjoy that episode. [laughs quietly] Let me get right out in front and say I wouldn't—I didn't have good feelings while I watched it.

Taylor: No?

Sydney: [laughs quietly] No. Um, obviously part of it was the confusion of, like, "Well, now who are they?"

Taylor: Well, we—yeah, I mean, that's... that was gonna happen. Even if it was a well done finale.

Sydney: Yeah. Um, but I think overwhelmingly my problem, though, was, like, just the way that they—clearly this character, Rue, is addicted to substances, and is currently in recovery. And then overdoses and dies.

Taylor: So—I mean, I have—I have lots of big thoughts about this show. But that was one thing that I really was... I don't want to say offended. It made me think about why we tell stories at all. Like, if you have the finances and the platform to tell a story, what are you gonna do with that? I think you have a responsibility when you have the opportunity to tell a story that lots of people are gonna see.

Um, and I saw an interview with the creator, Sam Levinson, where he said, "Look. You know, like, I've struggled with addiction and, like, that's truth, is like, addicts rarely make it out. They usually die."

It's like, well, we all know the reality.

Sydney: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: Of addiction. And if you have actually—and I'm not questioning his struggle. But, like, if you've gone through it and you've survived it, you've come out the other end, don't you think it's your job when you're given the incredibly privileged position to tell a story in front of the entire world to show people a way out? I was devastated. And I knew with everything going in that she probably wasn't gonna survive, but I was devastated with the ending they gave her.

Like, she'd been clean for the entire season.

Sydnee: I thought it was so cruel. And also to treat it like the inevitability of addiction is dangerous and false. And she didn't overdose because she's a drug addict. She was murdered.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: She was intentionally given fentanyl. She took one—the bottle is there. She took one. She took the appropriate dose. She was killed! So I don't know why—you know? Like, it doesn't even make sense in that internal logic.

Like, "Well, you know, this is the truth for many addicts is that they end up overdosing and dying."

Well, no, she was dosed with fentanyl and murdered! So, no, that's not the inevitability.

Taylor: I mean, it reasserts the very dangerous false idea that addicts are beyond help. Like, "Well, it doesn't matter, right? Like, this is how everybody's story ends. One way or another."

Sydnee: And also, it was treated—it was treated like a release. Like she was released from this awful struggle of life, and given, like, at the end there, this beautiful—like, she's smiling at the table and she's I guess with god, or whatever religious stuff is happening. There seems to be some religious stuff happening towards the end of it that I was not expecting. And that's an awful way—what? No! No! That is not the end of that story! I hate that!

Taylor: I mean, it just goes without—like, the first season definitely, and the second season maybe a little bit more, but not nearly as much as this—the weird propaganda about god, and America? Like, I don't—like, that coming in? Like, that was not the show that I started watching however many years ago. And that whole... I don't even—like, again, like, you're responsible for the stories you're telling. Like, what is—what are we to take from this?

Okay. If you're an addict, you're as good as dead, so why care about them? Alright. That was established. Uh, the only—you have Ali, who his whole story is that he's somebody that's there for people in recovery and supports them. And I guess the conclusion to his story was it doesn't matter how much empathy he has. It doesn't matter how much he tries to help addicts. At the end of the day, the only answer to a bad guy is a good guy with a gun? That's—the correct solution is for him to go on a violent, murderous rampage.

Sydnee: And then go join this homesteading... family?

Taylor: And sort of find god, right?

Sydnee: Yeah. And, like, pray with this big—was this, like—okay. What is this family's deal?

Taylor: So, the very first episode of this season, Rue is trying to come across the border with some drugs, and her car gets jacked up for various reasons. She ends up just kind of wandering through the desert, and she finds this family.

Um, and they take care of her, and then, you know. That's her thought of, like, I want to get back to this place. Like, that's where, if I can just put all of what I'm involved with behind me, I'm gonna go here. This is the promised land, so to speak.

Sydnee: Oh, god.

Taylor: And, I mean, the whole thing, it's like... the weird—there was a whole religious overlay in this season where she was sort of finding her faith, and that was helping her stay clean. But I thought it was—and it was almost—it almost felt like they were aware of the hypocrisy of this. Of like, you know, this way out of addiction is through surrendering to god. Like, at the very—in that last episode when she puts on her headphones, she's listening to the very first passage in the Bible. So it kind of made me think, like, she hasn't gotten that far in her belief. Like, she hasn't...

Sydnee: No.

Taylor: ... like, it's not—it hasn't come through for her in the end. It's just...

Sydnee: Well, yeah. I don't understand. That really bothered me. This, like, biblical overlay, sort of. And then addiction, and then America, and then violence, and I don't know. Again, the homesteading family was really freaking me out, 'cause it was giving me strong, like, "This is the way America should be. Do you see this, like, you know, this family with tons of kids and an American flag, and they have the Bible right there? And, like, this is America."

That was creepy. But then, like, the conversation between Sydney Sweeney and the other girl about the Bible was the—

Taylor: Oh yeah! Just felt like—like [laughs] propaganda! Just...

Sydnee: That was the wackiest—

Taylor: "Have you read the Bible?" [laughs]

Sydnee: "It's beautiful."

"What?"

Taylor: While Sydney Sweeney polishes a dildo! I'm like, I don't... what is this?

Sydnee: I don't know. I didn't understand what I was supposed to take away from it. Like, who—

Taylor: And that's the thing that makes her go, "No, I don't think I'll help you write plot lines for your sex work. The Bible saved me."

Sydnee: 'Cause the Bible. Also, like, that sounds like, to me, someone who hasn't—and I'm gonna say, full disclosure, I have not read the entire Bible. I've read bits and pieces here and there, and we were raised Catholic so I had it read to me. [laughs quietly] Several times. But I haven't read the

whole thing. But I am familiar enough with it to say it's—there's a lot of boring parts, too. Like, there's a lot—like, you wouldn't just read it first brush and go all the way through it and be like, "That was beautiful." You would not.

Taylor: Well, and the idea, "It's about, like, you keep going no matter how hard things get," or whatever. Like, that's not what the Bible's about.

Sydney: Well, not the whole thing. Like, which part? Like, it's a—it's a gigantic religious text that you need to study to understand. It's not a storybook. So what is she talking about when she's like, "The message of the Bible is you keep going even when things are hard."

It is?!

Taylor: No, it's not. It's that you don't keep going. You surrender yourself to a god and hope that daddy god will come through for you. That was the part that just felt like—I felt like from the beginning, like if you go back to season one, which I know you didn't watch—but I think that there was an idea. Again, like, I think you have to be responsible. If you have a platform, if you can create media that people are gonna see, if you can tell a story, what are you trying to do? Our stories create the world we live in. What world are you trying to create with the story you're telling?

And I thought it was very much in the title itself. It's about addiction. It's about American addiction. It's a very American show. And in the first season, yeah, you meet Rue, who's addicted to drugs. But you also meet, like, Cassie, who, you know, her father left her at a young age. Like, abandoned her family. And she is addicted to male approval. You know, Maddy is all about independence. She's addicted to this idea of being, like, free on her own.

Um, Jules. Like, I don't—like, she's, you know—like, the way that they wrapped her season is like, in the first season you meet her as, like, a young trans woman, but her narrative's not about being trans. It's about, like, trying to find herself and, like, I don't know. Like, it felt very—like, addicted to sex, addicted to approval, addicted to love. Like, that seemed like a very

clear narrative about it. The euphoria we feel when we're high off of the thing that's also controlling and/or killing us.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: Where did that plot line go? [laughs] Like...

Sydnee: Yeah, I didn't get that from this episode.

Taylor: No! Well, that's like—I don't know what the redirect was. Like, I feel like I could see—like, even up to the last episode I'm like, there's a way they could pull this off, you know?

They could bring it full circle. Like, what if it in the end... like, Cassie chooses, finally chooses to help Maddy? So she's choosing, like, her friend that's been there the whole time over her addiction to male approval, which she's now getting from the internet en masse, you know.

What if Cassie chooses to let herself be—or Maddy chooses to let herself be taken care of? So, she's no longer addicted to her independence. But her and Cassie, like, are now a... like, a... they're working together. What if Rue puts down those pills and says it's a slippery slope, you know? You take some painkillers and then you open a door to further addiction. I'm just gonna let myself feel the pain that I'm in right now.

Jules could've gotten out of that weird apartment that—she was in that studio apartment the entire season painting. That was her whole plot line. What if she left? Just let her leave! [laughs] I don't know!

Sydnee: I mean... yeah. No, I didn't—well, they didn't have time to do all that, though, Tey, 'cause they had to show some more butts. I feel like I was looking at someone's butt for about half of the episode.

Taylor: That bad BBL got more screen time than Hunter Schafer!

Sydnee: Yes! Yeah. We were looking at that butt quite a bit. Like, following that butt around a club, a lot.

Taylor: I don't—well, and like, that whole showdown. Like, all of the characters that were featured in the finale were not in season one, two, or a majority of three. Like, it was like the whole cast was put aside, and there was just some weird, I don't know, Tarantino pastiche.

Sydnee: Yeah. And, I mean, I feel like... I obviously jumped in for the last episode, so I knew I wouldn't understand the whole plot. But I thought that we were trying to, like, stop them from trafficking girls? But I guess we were just stealing drugs.

Taylor: I mean, there was a—that's... you meet a character early on in this season who is, like... she's one of the dancers at the club. And she's too argumentative, so she gets sent for, like, "treatment," quote, unquote. And the implications is she's being trafficked. And maybe she's being murdered for, I don't know, her organs or something. There's a lot of dark implications, but they just drop that. Like, there was no resolution. All of the interesting women from the first two seasons were sidelined for this macho, guns-a-blazing plot line that I just don't... I don't know where that came from.

Sydnee: This show hates women.

Taylor: Oh, absolutely. I mean, I think that the... you know, I'm sure a single writer could write something interesting, but I think there's a reason that most shows have writers rooms that you should be bouncing your ideas off of other people. And this was a one-man writers room. And I think that shows very much. Like, we just got whatever—he got a bunch of fun toys to play with, and he played with them all season.

Sydnee: Yeah. I don't understand. I mean, I don't feel like any of the women got anything close to a fair treatment in this episode. Um, Rue is just used, I guess, to teach that guy a lesson.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: So that then he can go get vengeance and feel righteous about it. And then we're supposed to see her ghost and feel like, "And she's happy about all this."

That's... I mean, she was basically fridged.

Taylor: As the main character! The narrator of the whole show!

Sydnee: Yeah. I didn't understand that. And I think that's really... that probably bothered me more than anything else. I thought the conversation between Sydney Sweeney and the—who is that girl? Is that her sister?

Taylor: Lexi, yeah.

Sydnee: Okay. Their conversation was so vapid. And I don't know if that was intentional. Like, "Look at these stupid girls trying to talk about the Bible, and they're stupid."

Like, I don't know what it was supposed to mean, but it meant nothing. I got nothing from it. And then the only thing that saves Maddy, I guess, from ending up, like, pregnant with that guy's four children that he wants is that a guy with a gun comes in and shoots him. So I guess she gets saved by that? Are we happy that she's rescued by another person with a gun? I don't know.

And then—but all of it, all of it is irritating. But just the depiction of Rue's death, I think that... and maybe I'm hypersensitive to it because of where I live and what I do. But to use that image... god. I just—that really turned my stomach. Like, if you are gonna do this, use it for something important. Say something that matters with it.

Taylor: Well, that's—exactly.

Sydnee: If you're gonna use this narrative device.

Taylor: I mean, 'cause that's—if the conclusion is, "Every addict dies anyway," why did you make us care about her? Why did you make us know her?

And there were ways out. Like, I don't know. Like, I don't... I think anyone that has dealt with any form of addiction in their life knows that the answer

is not the person that you're in love with, or friends, or family, or god. The answer is you have to dig yourself out of that hole. You have to climb up inch by inch, bit by bit. And every inch you reclaim is a victory.

And I wanted that—I wanted that for Rue. I wanted her to have that. And you saw her doing that over the course of the three seasons. She was trying to reclaim herself. Why would you not—especially because, you know, the writer says he has personal experience with it. Why would you not give that to her? If you have found your way out, why would you not show other people the way with the story you're telling?

Sydnee: It really is, um—I mean, and the one character says it directly. But it is an argument against empathy. The whole episode is kind of saying, you know, "I know for a while there as a country we were trying to, like, take care of everybody and listen to everybody and make everybody have a place and everybody's valid, but we were wrong. Because there's right and wrong. There's black and white. Defined. Good, bad. And we need to return to a time where I guess the good guy's kill the bad guys."

Like, that was the... and then, like, if that's your argument, okay. Well, then who are the good guys? And as far as I can tell, it ends with god and guns and country.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: And so those are... I mean, was this whole thing just like a MAGA thing? Is he a MAGA guy? Was this, like, a big MAGA thing?

Taylor: Hmm, I mean, I don't know, but that's how it felt. Like, it felt like the first two seasons were definitely written for a different America than this one. Or maybe there's a transition there. Actually, wildly enough, looking back, like, the first season felt hopeful and maybe aware of the world we live in, and the second season there was a transition, and then this was just all the current indoctrination.

And, I mean, again, like, I... I think that the idea that entertainment is just entertainment—you know, you watch your little shows, you watch your stories, and then you go about your life. Smart enough people that are in

control understand the connection between the media we consume, the stories we tell, and the world that we build.

We get our inspiration for the world we build from the things we see. The stories we read. And this feels very much like a strong redirect to reinforce the horrible world that we're being indoctrinated into, versus any sort of hope for a way out of it.

Sydnee: And I don't know—I mean, again, because I haven't watched the whole show, I can't—I'm not—

Taylor: It wasn't all like that, I promise. [laughs]

Sydnee: Well, I can't—there is a way for you to make it look like, "And this is how we got MAGA."

And you're not endorsing it. You're just saying, this is how we got here.

Taylor: No, it wasn't that smart. I think if anything, you know, in a weird way it circles back to our conversation about sugary drinks. It feels like you got a bunch of people hooked to something and then said, "And here's the answer. Guns and god."

Sydnee: I mean, that is very much how it ends. And I don't—I mean, to the extent, like, I guess the end for the other women on the show—because the only woman whose end we kind of know is Rue, and it's death. So, she gets an end. Um, the other women, like Maddy, the last we see of her she's, like, huddled in the corner covered in blood, terrified, right?

Taylor: Well, and I guess Bishop offers her a ride home. But, you know, it's another man that has saved her. She's, you know.

Sydnee: Yeah. So I don't know what that means. Like, are they together? Like, I don't know. And Cassie's, like, in—that shot of her up in the bedroom, like, from afar, like the house from afar, and she's, like, clearly like a—she's, like, in a birdcage. That's what it looks like. She looks like an animal in a cage. And I'm assuming that's intentional, that that's what we're trying to do with her.

And then I guess—see, I didn't know that Jules didn't leave that apartment the whole time.

Taylor: Oh, her—

Sydnee: But she's clearly longing for something that is gone, and she'll never have available to her.

Taylor: And that's—her whole, like, the reason she's there is that that man keeps her there. He's got a whole family. He's got a wife and kids. But she's his side piece, and he lets her stay in his expensive apartment and paint so he can come and hook up with her when he wants to.

And that was just—that was—I mean... that just never felt like what Jules's character desired. Like, she wanted to be an artist and, you know, a creator. And, like... she just is a kept thing. I mean, that's—it removed all of the agency from all of the women in the storyline.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: And put the guns in the hands of the men. Like, that was it. I mean, I guess, you know, Jacobs died. But even—like, I don't... I don't think that... I don't know. It didn't have anything to say about toxic masculinity, or, you know, women being liberated from sex work. It just said, "Yep, this is how things are." [laughs] "Fall in line."

Sydnee: "This is it. These are your options, ladies. Choose wisely."

Taylor: I mean, so much of the season had Rue working with, like, the DEA. And it's wild that people that make theories on the internet have a better sense of storytelling than the actual person in control. 'Cause it's like, a lot of people were like, what if Rue ended up in, like, witness protection? And then can go finally go live with that family.

Like, you know, find her promised land. Like, what if they did figure out that the pills were laced? And so she understands that Alamo wants her dead, so she's gotta go into hiding, but she gets to be free. You know, what if, like,

Cassie and Maddy do, like, a Thelma and Louise and run off into the distance, just taking care of each other. Hey, that'd be great. Give them some agency.

What if the whole thing ends with Lexi at the writer's desk, proposing this as an end to the story. And everyone's like, "No one wants that."

And she's like, "Well, I'm writing it. Buh."

Like, I don't know! You could've given a single woman some agency at the end.

Sydnee: Yeah. I mean, I guess Laurie had some.

Taylor: [laughs] Yeah, was that the only way out? Is that it?

Sydnee: Yeah. I mean... she wrote that for herself. She was like, "This is, um—I would like my character to do this. I'm bailing. I have bailed."
[laughs]

Taylor: Again, like, maybe there was enough pressure of, like, the big names. Like, "Whatever happens, we don't want to do another season of this."

Sydnee: No. I... yeah. I didn't know what the show was really about anymore. Again, I kind of thought it was like sexy Degrassi. But clearly not. I just—any of the messages that I took from this one episode I did not appreciate or enjoy. Um, I found it hard to watch. I found some of the scenes really long for no reason that I could discern. And I have no problem with, like, nudity or sexual content. None of that stuff bothers me. I'm not, like, prudish about it. But I didn't feel like I was looking at butts for any storytelling reason.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: I felt like it was just like, "Don't you want to look at this butt some more?" And, like, well, no. I'm trying to watch a TV show. [laughs quietly]

Taylor: And it was like—I mean, the fixation, I don't know, on the butt. 'Cause that was—that girl had a BBL, and it was, like, pointed that it was a stiff, weird-looking butt. I don't... yeah. Yes, women are expected to look certain ways, and they get driven to, like, getting certain surgeries because of those expectations. But it's not the woman's fault. Why are we—I feel like you're making fun of this... butt. [laughs] I shouldn't be that concerned. I shouldn't have empathy for this fake butt on a TV show. But I do. I feel bad. [laughs]

Sydnee: Well, because what we're doing is we're—I don't know if what they're trying to do is, like, simultaneously say, "This is what women are driven to do. And look, it doesn't even look that good. But also, you like looking at it, don't you? You voyeur."

Like, I don't know if we're trying to do anything smart like that. We didn't succeed. Um, that was the other thing I feel like that there were points that I think were attempted. But they fell flat. I don't think that you made them.

Taylor: Well, I... sometimes when I'm watching something—and to be frank, usually it's something that's wildly outdated—I just understand, hey. This was made without me being the audience ever considered. I was never supposed to be the audience for this. No one thought about people like me when they made this. And that's okay. That's why it's—you know.

Sydnee: Sure.

Taylor: But it's weird to watch something that's so modern and so popular where you're like, this isn't for me, or anybody that has empathy, or anybody that cares about agency, or women, or addicts, or... there's so many qualifications where, like, who is this made for? And I think this is made for the type of American that it's trying to appeal to at the end, which is pretty depressing.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: And as such a giant cultural thing, I think there's purpose there. I think there's an insidious purpose. If you don't align with this, if you don't feel like this is for you, then you're on the outside.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm. Yeah. I, um... I don't—I will be interested to see what people who watched the whole show as, you know, people talk about this ending and how they feel about it. People who are, like, invested in it. I don't know.

Taylor: I mean, I know we kind of—unofficial policy on this show that we don't talk negatively about pieces of media. Usually if there's something we don't agree with we just don't talk about it. But I feel like this is so massive in the landscape that... we had to. And the only the way to talk about it is negatively.

Sydnee: Well, and I just—'cause at its core, I didn't enjoy it. Like, I didn't... that hour and 40 whatever minutes of television, however long it was, I don't know. [laughs] I did not enjoy it. And I specifically—I at least feel like I have earned the right to say the way that addiction was handled, and that overdose death, I found incredibly insensitive, and thoughtless, and dangerous. I feel like I have earned the right to be able to say that.

Taylor: Well, and you know, along the same line, like, one of the things that drew me into the show is in the first season when you meet Hunter Schafer's character, there is this great exchange that she has with Rue where her and Rue are romantically involved early on. And she's just like, eh, gender, sexuality, who cares anymore, right? And I thought that was such a fresh take. As, like, giving a trans character a narrative that's not about them being trans.

She is just a young girl who's, you know, exploring her sexuality, her identity, and she's falling in love, and I loved that. I thought that was so cool. That was so good to have somebody presented that way. And in this season, the only moment of characterization that her character got was at some point Lexi invites her on set on the show she's working on to, like, paint a picture. And she paints a picture of a bunch of women with penises. And it's like, "Oh no, the trans woman painted women with penises! Oh no!"

And that's it. It's like, that was never her... that was never the way she was written, and it felt reductive. It's like, oh, right, because that's all that a—that's the only art that a trans woman could make is something that is

perceived as offensive and about the body. Where it's not the way the character was written.

Sydnee: That's really disappointing. Yeah, yeah. Well...

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: Tey, let's watch something better.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: It's Pride month. Let's watch something better.

Taylor: We're not just gonna watch one thing that's better. We're gonna—you know, for Pride, it's fun to watch and consume a bunch of queer media. But there's just enough things that we haven't talked about that also have the—my favorite intersection of queer media and horror.

Sydnee: Perfect.

Taylor: We'll have a month of queer horror.

Sydnee: So what's our first one?

Taylor: Well, I just watched the movie Whistle, which is a new release, which I thought was really great. It's just a great—if you liked Final Destination, if you like kind of ridiculous kills but also, you know, good plot, I think you'll enjoy it. Uh, and it's got a queer narrative that is just natural, which I really appreciated.

Sydnee: Alright. Well, I haven't even heard of it until you mentioned it, so I'm excited to watch it.

Taylor: Alright.

Sydnee: Alright. Well, we will watch that for next week. In the meantime, if you... [sighs]

Taylor: Don't.

Sydnee: If you never watched Euphoria, I can't say that I would recommend...

Taylor: Yeah. There are better things. Go watch Hacks. That just—you got five seasons of that to watch. That just finished.

Sydnee: Or there's always Degrassi. There's tons of that.

Taylor: [laughs] Degrassi is— isn't it sad that Degrassi is probably more progressive, despite the fact that it came out however many years ago? A couple decades ago? Yeah.

Sydnee: Started in, like, the 80s, didn't it?

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Yeah. So, watch Degrassi. [laughs quietly] Anyway.

Taylor: It goes there.

Sydnee: It goes there. Uh, thank you. You should go to [Maximumfun.org](https://MaximumFun.org) too, and check out a lot of great podcasts there that you would enjoy. 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.

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: [unintelligible] watch Degrassi. If you think you might like Euphoria, watch Degrassi.

Taylor: I really—I was hoping that there would at least be one, like, ridiculous [unintelligible].

Sydnee: It felt like—it did have a Quentin Tarantino kind of thing to it, which I don't always hate, but that wasn't what I thought this was.

Taylor: No. Well, it was like a, I don't know. Like, a bad mimicry of Tarantino, which is already problematic.

Sydnee: Yeah. Bad Tarantino. Yes.

Taylor: Yeah. Even worse.

[chord]

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