

Still Buffering 492: Interview with the Vampire (2022)

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[theme music plays]

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

Taylor: And I'm Taylor Smirl.

Sydnee: Tey, there's a lot of exciting stuff going on.

Taylor: Yeah?

Sydnee: I think we gotta jump right in with Victor.

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: I really think that's where...

Taylor: Have you been— What do people call themselves, victims? Are you a victim?

Sydnee: Is that what it is?

Taylor: Have you been victimized? Yeah.

Sydnee: Well, just because you sent it to me.

Taylor: That's true. Oh, wow. I victimized you. But Justin had already seen it, correct?

Sydnee: Yes, Justin had seen it. 'Cause you sent it to me, and I was sitting there, and I opened it. And Justin started laughing, and he was like, "That guy's great."

And I was like, "What? How do you know— What is this? What am I looking at?"
[laughs]

And now, my algorithm, though, has caught up. And it's like, "Oh, you like Victor,

huh? Here's some more Victor."

Taylor: Yeah, if you look at it— If you get curious and just look once, he's there forever.

Sydney: Yeah. You're stuck with him. Do we know backstory? Like, Victor's a guy who's just kind of dancing around to songs.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydney: That's it. [laughs]

Taylor: And it's always— Often, the songs repeat. I think it's supposed to be, "Wow, what a dreamy guy," 'cause it's always some sort of love song, you know.

Sydney: Yeah.

Taylor: Sometimes, he's holding a flower, and he's always looking at the camera, so he's seducing you. But it's not creepy?

Sydney: No.

Taylor: I don't... You know, I don't know a backstory, and I don't think I want one. I feel like this is a classic example of a milkshake duck situation, where I get a little chuckle every time one of his videos comes across my feed.

Sydney: Yeah.

Taylor: I don't— I really would like it just to stay that way. I don't wanna know any deeper lore about Victor.

Sydney: No. No, you're right. This is really a chance where, if we find out anything else, it could be disastrous. So let's just say these are fun.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydney: He seems— I mean, they seem earnest. He seems like he's not doing it out of any sense of irony.

Taylor: No, no. But it's also... It's not creepy in a way that you would think. Like, it's a guy lip syncing to a love song, and trying to seduce you through the

camera. 'Cause it's so— There's a goofiness to it that kind of makes that impossible. He's not particularly— He doesn't know the lyrics to the songs, most of the time.

Sydnee: No. It is not—

Taylor: So he's just kind of...

Sydnee: It's not seductive.

Taylor: Might be saying watermelon, for all we know.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: Just the classic lip syncing... [laughs]

Sydnee: Right. Yeah, I don't know that he knows the songs. And I don't know that— I mean, he certainly does not seem to mean harm. Now, what his intention is, I think is up for debate. Like, is it seductive? I do not find it seductive.

Taylor: No.

Sydnee: Is it just to bring you joy? Perhaps. Is it kind of a joke? Is it like, "Ehh, we're being silly here. Aren't we a little silly, guys? Isn't this silly?" Maybe it's that? I don't know.

Taylor: It's hard— You know, so often, especially nowadays, we're used to content that is created specifically for the algorithm that I think we've forgotten that when a truly unique expression happens, the algorithm doesn't matter. That's what real art is, right? It's not you looking at the world, and deciding what to make based on what you think will sell. It's you finding something inside of yourself, and putting it out there.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: And I think that's what Victor has done. It's not our job to understand it. It's just our job to enjoy it. [wheeze-laughs]

Sydnee: It's kind of like yesterday, we went to dinner at Mom and Dad's. And Cooper insisted on wearing her pajamas, which is fine. We're just going up to Mom and Dad's for dinner. And at the dinner table, she proceeded to pull out of

her pajama pants – which do not have pockets, this is key – four small apples and a bag of Funyuns. And say like, “Well, I guess I don’t need these now, ‘cause we’re eating dinner.”

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: And I felt like it was a performance that I was witnessing. Like, this was art happening. I don’t know why— The journey from our house to my parents’ house is, you know, 30 seconds. It’s down the street. So it wasn’t food for the journey. We were going with the purpose of eating dinner, so food was at the other end. And also, if she had said, “Can I take an apple?”

I would’ve said, “Yeah, sure. Whatever. It’s an apple.”

Taylor: But if she’d said, “Can I take four apples and a bag of Funyuns?”

Sydnee: “In my pants?” [chuckles]

Taylor: “In my pants?” Yeah.

Sydnee: So I felt like it was some sort of happening that I was witnessing, like this was an art piece that we were all— ‘Cause she waited ‘til we were all seated at the dinner table for her to be like, [as fanfare] “Ba-da-ba-da!” [laughs]

Taylor: Well, so it was definitely planned.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: She definitely thought, “You know what’ll be funny? If when we all sit down at dinner, I pull four apples and a bag of Funyuns out of my pants.” I love that.

Sydnee: I loved it. It was original, it was earnest. I don’t know what else it was— I mean, again, I think it’s up to interpretation. [laughs] I think it depends on you, now. Now, *you* interact with the artist, and decide what *you’re* gonna take [through laughter] from it.

Taylor: Well, and you know, I know that they’re— ‘Cause when I first sent it to you, we had a brief text exchange like, “Is this— Are people finding it funny?” Kind of, “Are we laughing *at* this guy, or are we laughing *with* this guy?”

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: And I'm like, it seems pretty solid. He's in the comments of most of his videos, responding to people saying things. Like, "Victor, we can't keep meeting like this," or "Victor, not again," or "Victor, it's too early in the day."

And he's always just sending smiley faces with thumbs up, or whatever. He's clearly, you know...

Sydnee: He's in on it.

Taylor: Reacting to— Yeah. Well, and that's like, I don't even— "In on it" implies that there's something afoot. It's like, no, I just think whatever. No one's laughing *at* him. This is not a, what is it, like a lolcow situation.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: It's just like, "What is this weird guy doing? But you're weird in a way that I vibe with!"

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: That seems to be it. [laughs] This is weird in a way I vibe with.

Sydnee: I do think it's positive. I think it is a mutual— We don't know what this is, but we are liking it. And he's like, "Well, I like that you're liking it, and I'm also not going to give you any more information. So good luck."

Taylor: Yeah, like who's behind the camera? That's who I'm assuming is the mastermind. I mean, maybe it's Victor himself, but I think the person behind the camera.

Sydnee: Taylor, if we find out that this is like the bunnies on the trampoline, and it was all AI, I'm gonna be so sad.

Taylor: Oh, God, what if it is?

Sydnee: Oh, man. This just hit me. This—

Taylor: No...

Sydnee: The idea that it's AI just hit me. Please, no. Please, no, Victor.

Taylor: I just— Could AI ever be that, like— The one that cracked me up the other day was, he was in a swimming pool holding some flowers, right?

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: But it was clear he didn't really think about, "The flowers, if I put them in the water, they're gonna be wet." So he was turning to the camera to like— I think it was that one song that like, "I see the light in the sky," or whatever. It was that one, but he was pulling the sopping-wet flowers from the pool. And it was a very shallow pool, like it might have been an above-ground situation.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: So the water was doing that thing on him where he looked really short.

Sydnee: [holding back laughter] Yeah.

Taylor: And it was just like... [wheeze-laughs] There's nothing— This is like, sexy man seduces you in pool with roses. That feels like the prompt, but that's just not what would be spit out. [laughs]

Sydnee: That's true. Because AI would get the flowers wrong, I bet.

Taylor: Yeah, and I bet you'd like—

Sydnee: I bet you'd pull them out, and it'd be like Ariel's hair situation. Like when she pops out of the water, and her hair still has volume.

Taylor: Right. It'd be super clean. He probably would be in a— I mean, I don't think we'd be able to see that he's in about three feet of water.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: But I don't know! God, this could be the beginning of the end.

Sydnee: Don't— Aw, man.

Taylor: Victor, please. You could— I was about to say, that's the worst thing that could come out about you. Probably not, unfortunately.

Sydnee: No.

Taylor: But that's why I don't want to know! I don't want to know.

Sydnee: I don't want to know, either. That really— I feel like those bunnies on the trampoline, shame on us as a species for not seeing that and saying, "Stop AI. Stop it now. Stop it now."

Some of us fell for it, and now some of us are sad, because we feel stupid, because of course the bunnies weren't jumping on the trampoline! Of course they weren't. What are we thinking? Of course— Bunnies don't jump for fun! That's just how they move. [laughs]

Taylor: Yeah. I mean—

Sydnee: [laughs] Like, it's not a hobby!

Taylor: I will say, I think I got the video, and I looked at it once, and I'm like, "That's *weird!*" And then I looked at it again, and I'm like, "Oh, that's AI." So—

Sydnee: Well, but other people fell for it.

Taylor: A lot of people fell for it.

Sydnee: [chuckles]

Taylor: Maybe somebody else in this conversation. Not saying *who*.

Sydnee: [laughs] Maybe—

Taylor: Wasn't me! But not saying who.

Sydnee: Maybe one of the hosts of this podcast fell for it. [chuckles]

Taylor: [laughs] Just to tell me, did you share it? 'Cause *that's* the real—

Sydnee: No.

Taylor: There are things that have crossed my feed that are AI that I take a moment and go, "Oh, no, that's AI." And I'm like, "Thank God I didn't share it." 'Cause *that's* where I would feel like I've done something wrong, if Victor is AI and I have spread the word of Victor. Now, I'm complicit, and—

Sydnee: Yeah. No, I think you're right. I think that— Now, I did not share it as in click share, but I did show it to my children. So I did share it, in *that* sense.

Taylor: Mm.

Sydnee: And my children said, "Mom, that's AI."

Taylor: Oh. Well, I'm glad that they have—

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: Is this like how the older generation gets scammed by Facebook posts?

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: This is— We need the younger generation to have the discernment that we lack.

Sydnee: I ask them, sometimes, if something's AI. If I'm pretty sure it is, but

I'm not 100, I'll show them, and they always know. They're always instantly like, yes or no. And then they'll explain to me how they know. Which is good! I mean, that's a good thing, that they can tell right away.

Taylor: Mm-hmm.

Sydney: 'Cause they don't enjoy AI. Generally, they're put off by it. If they sense AI content, they are pushed away from it.

Taylor: Yeah! Well, that's— I think – and I say this while I'm in the Victor question mark zone – but I think I can usually tell. 'Cause it's just there's an inherent creepiness. I guess it's the uncanny valley triggering in your brain, right?

Sydney: Right.

Taylor: Especially when they try to do humans.

Sydney: Yes.

Taylor: It's just there's always something that's like, "That human is too smooth. No human is that smooth."

Sydney: Yeah.

Taylor: "I don't like the smoothness of that human."

Sydney: No. You can tell, too— I've seen a lot of videos of those AI therapists, or AI interviewers, or when you're using AI for that kind of thing. You can also tell, because they only have so many listening faces and active listening responses that they are programmed or whatever, fed, to do. So they'll nod and go, "Mm-hmm," or "Hmm. Ah." At weird moments that don't track.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydney: Yeah, apparently AI is bad at faking active listening. This is something we've— Which, you know what that tells me, is that humans are bad at active listening. [laughs] It doesn't have—

Taylor: That's true! It's trained on us. [laughs]

Sydnee: It doesn't have enough input about active listening to know how to do it, you know, convincingly. So there you go. [laughs]

Taylor: Well, probably because— I think active listening is a subtle... There are subtleties that you couldn't understand. You would have to understand not just what's being said, but in the context of it, you know?

Sydnee: That's true.

Taylor: The way we shift against each other when we're actually listening to each other.

Sydnee: Right. And not just gathering the info in order to generate a response.

Taylor: Yeah. It's good at doing when you think someone's listening to you, and then you go, "Oh, you're not listening. You're just saying, 'Uh-huh,' every now and then." [laughs]

Sydnee: [deadpan] "Wow. That's wild."

Taylor: [deadpan] "Tell me more. And now did that make you feel?" [chuckles]

Sydnee: "Wow. That's so interesting. Wow."

Taylor: [laughs] That's what— I think it's a little better at doing the— There are a couple— I've gone down the rabbit hole of some AI fashion girls, or dancing girls that are on TikTok that have gotten big accounts.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: And it's usually just like they're showing off— I mean, this is really dark. When they're advertising for TikTok shops, and so it'll be a completely AI-generated girl selling you a drop shipped two-piece set. And those things are almost always garbage fast fashion.

Sydnee: Right.

Taylor: And at *least* when the quote-unquote “real influencers” get it, they try it on and can give an honest review. Or you can at least see it on a human body.

Sydnee: And know, yeah.

Taylor: And even if— Yeah. They might have been paid to say, “This is amazing. I love it.”

But you’re looking at it, going, “That looks terrible on you, sweetheart.” This gets around that, because it’s an AI girl wearing AI clothes that you could buy.

Sydnee: Mm. So they’re gonna fit well, and look good.

Taylor: [chuckles] By the AI drop shipping company that’s run entirely by robots.

Sydnee: That’s very dystopian.

Taylor: It’s very sad. [chuckles]

Sydnee: That is very dystopian.

Taylor: There are no real humans in the mix. Somebody’s getting paid, and some garment is being purchased from, let’s be real, probably a sweatshop.

Sydnee: Can I tell you— I will say, speaking of dystopian, so I had to go to Charlie’s middle school orientation yesterday. ‘Cause Charlie is starting middle school. And a lot of— I mean, I’ve been nervous about it, because my middle school experience was not... stellar. And I’ve heard a lot of other people say similar things, and of course it’s change. And she’s growing up, and she’s nervous.

But during orientation, there was so much of it that felt familiar. They were talking about the importance of community service hours, and getting involved with teams and clubs, and extracurriculars, and now there'll be pep rallies, and now there'll be dances. Although I will say, when she said school dances, Charlie literally, like... grabbed the bridge of her nose, like in consternation, and shook her head like, "Ugh. Ugh."

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: Like, "Dances..."

Taylor: What? Charlie?

Sydnee: Charlie did. I know. She looked like... [laughs] just an overwhelmed, I don't know, middle-aged mom. Just like, "Ugh, dances."

Taylor: I would assume she'd love a dance.

Sydnee: No, she was not— I don't know, it's the romance of it all. It's the crush — She's not into all that yet. We're not there.

Taylor: Mm. Alright.

Sydnee: Yeah, so no. Ugh. But then, they were like, "And we have some new rules this year." And this is really telling of the times. "No Starbucks at school." [chuckles]

Taylor: Wow.

Sydnee: "Do not bring Starbucks to middle school."

Taylor: No Starbs.

Sydnee: I guess— Well, and I think they were using Starbucks as the example, because most of the kids were bringing Starbucks. I think it was any sort of— I don't even wanna say coffee beverage, 'cause they don't get coffee. They get all those pink and orange and purple and blue things that—

Taylor: But if you brought your own pink thing in a— What are they, they use a Stanley cup? No, that's a trophy.

Sydney: It is a Stanley cup.

Taylor: Oh, it *is* a Stanley cup. Okay.

Sydney: Yeah, it is a Stanley. Yeah. No, you're right, we do not— Listen, we do not own Stanleys. My children don't need cups that will survive a nuclear meltdown, or whatever the heck the Stanley thing is. My kids don't need those; they have just water bottles.

Taylor: [chuckles]

Sydney: But what they're trying to do is get the kids to bring water. That was the point.

Taylor: Okay.

Sydney: But the main reason is that they had so many spills, [through laughter] I guess...

Taylor: Oh, god.

Sydney: Of all of these colorful Starbucks beverages last year that they've banned Starbucks from the school. [chuckles]

Taylor: I— You know, I can imagine. For as burdened as teachers already are by everything they have to deal with, can you just imagine this giant— I'm thinking of those— I don't know how big Starbucks cups get, but I'm thinking of those big, giant Dunkin' cups.

Sydney: Yeah, they get that big.

Taylor: You just imagine a child that is the size of that cup wielding one, and just every [laughs] half hour, you just hear a splash.

Sydnee: Just another kid.

Taylor: And it's— Oh, no. Oh, no. [chuckles]

Sydnee: Just dumping their whatever refresher, or tropical whatever— I don't even know.

Taylor: The floor is gonna be sticky for the rest of the week!

Sydnee: Well, that's— The counselor was doing the orientation, and she got super intense about it. She was like, "I am serious. If your child walks in the front door—" 'Cause the office is right there. There's one entrance to the school, and the office is right there. "If your child walks in carrying a Starbucks cup, they will be stopped, and we will dump it out right there." [laughs]

Taylor: [laughs] In front of them.

Sydnee: "We will make them watch while we dump out their Starbucks."

Taylor: Oh, my gosh. But if you snuck a Starbucks in in a Stanley, then it's okay.

Sydnee: Then I think you'd get away with it.

Taylor: Or is there gonna be checking? Or like, "It's only water, and we might do random inspections of water bottles."

Sydnee: I know they don't check, 'cause for a while, Cooper was squirting a Crystal Light pink lemonade— Or no, it wasn't pink lemonade. It was lemon iced tea situation into her water bottle, 'cause she likes that better than water. And then I made her go back to water. So I know they don't check, but... Yeah, which I'm all for.

Kids should drink water. Drink water, that's great! Let's all drink water. I don't— Those Starbucks things, they're expensive, and I also don't want my kids drinking caffeine, 'cause they're little kids. And a lot of 'em, you gotta be careful. There's secret caffeine in there, if you're not watching.

Taylor: Yeah. Well, and just the sheer amount of sugar that's in those.

Sydnee: Yeah. It's a lot of sugar. So no, that kind of blew my mind that that had to be a rule. And then they had a very serious conversation about Chromebooks. Which the thing about it is like, one, schools are still using Chromebooks.
[chuckles]

Taylor: Wait, like... What, a Chromebook?

Sydnee: The computer? The little computer thing?

Taylor: Like a... Not like a— Chrome is an operating system. It's not like a Mac, right?

Sydnee: No. No, I don't think so.

Taylor: I don't think I'm familiar with a Chromebook.

Sydnee: I don't know. It's like a little laptop.

Taylor: Oh. Is it just specifically for kids in schools?

Sydnee: I think they are very commonly used in schools. I don't think that everybody, but yes, a lot of schools use Chromebooks.

Taylor: Alright. What was the drama around the Chromebooks?

Sydnee: The drama around the Chromebook— And I wonder, I wanted to ask— No, it's not an Apple thing. The drama around it, and I wanted to ask if this was evidence-based, if that's why they're moving in this direction, but also I think Charlie would have been mortified if I had asked questions at the end. Because the kids whose parents did ask questions were mortified, you could see it on their little faces that they were just like, "Mom, shut up." So I didn't want to do that.

But I guess what it's been before is that, as soon as you walk in, you go get your Chromebook out of your cubby or whatever. Well, I guess they have lockers now

– they’re in middle school – out of your locker. And you immediately open it up, sign in, and have it on your desk, ready to go. And they’re moving away from as much screen-based learning. They wanna do more practical learning, so they said, “We will have paper and pen more than we will have Chromebook this year.”

And I have heard some, I don’t know, some bits and pieces from the education world that maybe we need to be pushing back against screens for all learning. Like, not all learning should take place on a computer screen.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydney: So it was very interesting. So they were like, “Your Chromebooks will be locked away. When we tell you to go get them, you will get them. You’ll do the assignment we’re asking you to do, and then you will put them away immediately. And we will not have Chromebooks out the rest of the day. Don’t ask.” It was very interesting.

Taylor: I think that’s a good policy.

Sydney: Yeah. We’re pushing back.

Taylor: Yeah. I mean, haven’t there been a whole bunch of studies about the dangers of just screen time in general?

Sydney: Well, yes. But then the question was always, “Where does educational screen time fit into that?”

Like, is screen time just bad if you’re mindlessly scrolling YouTube shorts or TikTok or whatever? Yes. We have evidence that says doing that for long periods of time isn’t good for any of our brains. Adult brains, kid brains, no brains. You know, it’s not beneficial.

But if you’re using it for— I mean, they have to do all these learning programs on there, all these language programs and math programs and things. So is that healthy screen time? And now, I think that’s being called into question. Maybe we don’t learn best on screens.

Taylor: I could believe that. I mean, at least I would think— Everybody learns differently, but I've understood about myself that I feel like the more tactile my learning experience is, the more likely I'm going to learn it.

And that's why— The best way I can learn something, and often in my line of work, I'm having to learn new skills kind of on the fly. And it's like, "Do it for me once, and then I'll do it. If I can see you do it with your hands, and then I can do it with my hands, and then I'll be good."

But if you explain it to me, or if I have to look at an instruction picture that tells me how to do it, those are all removed from the physical process of doing it, and I'm not gonna be as good at it. And even with things that feel abstract like math, I feel like writing numbers down makes me understand it better than even just typing it out.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: For some reason, that tactile experience allows me to remember it better.

Sydnee: I've wondered about that – on a side note – in medicine. We used to write orders physically, write them down in a chart, and then hand them to somebody to go get the medicine, do the lab, get the x-ray, whatever the heck. And now, you just click boxes in a computer. And I wonder if that's not degrading our ability to remember what to do next, and— I don't know. I just find it interesting.

Or dosages of medicines. Now, I just click a dropdown menu, and I have all of them right there. Back in the day, I had to memorize 'em. I had to know, "This is the starting dose for this." And I could look it up if I wasn't sure, but I had to have a lot more knowledge on hand, because it wasn't in a dropdown menu.

Taylor: Well, that feels like it's even just— You know, there's a lot of that— The learning that they're doing at *that* age – like elementary school, middle school, I'd say all of it – is not really about the information. You're learning how to learn, you're learning how to know. And that, that you just described, it feels like having to generate words. Full concepts is a lot more of an important skill, and does a lot more for your brain than when the choices are there.

It's like a fill-in-the-blank test versus an A, B, C, or D. We know which one is easier, but we know which one requires more knowledge and probably pushes your brain harder.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: And that's ultimately, I'd imagine, the better exercise.

Sydnee: It was very interesting. I look forward to seeing Charlie's report back, 'cause I had worried about how much stuff we were doing, learning-wise, on the computer. But not really worried— I shouldn't say worried. My kids are doing fine. I think they're learning fine. I'm not stressed about it. *But* I also am a Luddite, and... [chuckles] I don't trust technology inherently. And I refuse to use it any time there's an option not to, so how's that? [laughs]

Taylor: I don't— I know that we're increasingly in the outliers there, in that mindset, but I'm the same way.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: And I have very, you know, high-minded ideas of why. I'm like, "No. This is bad." [laughs] We're supposed to have uncomfortable human interactions where we figure things out.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm.

Taylor: We don't need technology streamlining things between us. Because one, it doesn't make it more streamlined. And two, we're deleting an important part of ourselves when we do this. [chuckles]

Sydnee: Yeah. No, I agree. I mean, it's like the... I still read books, like physical books, because I enjoy the experience of reading a physical book. I also find that, as somebody whose brain is very busy, when I pick up a book, as the object I'm engaging with is just the object in front of me, it's not like I could flip to a different tab in the book and look at something else, and so I become completely immersed in the book in a way that if I'm listening to something, I'm not going

to.

'Cause now, I can look at 20 other things while I'm listening to something. Or if I'm reading on a computer or something where you could access other things, I would find that extremely distracting. 'Cause it's like, "Well, there's a Facebook tab. I'll just dip in. Well, there's a— What's happening over on TikTok? Well, you know, I have a question about that. I'll just google it." That would distract my brain.

Taylor: No, absolutely. Well, and I don't— I was really amazed when I'd been working heavily in just digital art, just with a tablet. And that's great, I love that, but I've been doing that for years. And then, I don't know, maybe two years ago, I switched back kind of as a response to AI. I started dabbling and then fully immersing myself in more physical medias, painting and drawing again. Like, on paper, on canvases.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: And I still, every now and then, will go back to do a digital piece when it makes sense, and it freaks me out how much better I am at my digital art because I spend the bulk of my time working in physical art.

Sydnee: Hmm.

Taylor: Like, it's shocking that all of my skills get better when I'm working in the physical space. They seem to stand still when I'm working in the digital space. Because, I mean, if you think about it, your brain's doing something different when every stroke you put down— It's not that it's definitive. You can erase it, you can paint over it. But there is a cost to it.

Whereas when I'm working in the digital space, I can just fart around forever, because I can erase anything, I can undo anything. And I think that, somehow, that cost makes me sharper and more aware. And then when I translate that back to the digital space, it's like, "Oh, now I'm more direct with my line work. Everything comes out a lot cleaner, and it seems to be a lot easier." But it scares me, all those years that I worked strictly digital. It's like, oh, that's just all lost progress. [chuckles]

Sydnee: No. No, 'cause it—

Taylor: Well, like, kind of. At least a little bit.

Sydnee: It's a tool, though. It's a different tool, you know.

Taylor: Well, it's a tool, but it's good to go back to working in— I mean, for me. That's just for me.

Sydnee: Yeah, sure. Tey, I don't have a transition here. We need to talk about *Interview with the Vampire*. I have to talk about this show.

Taylor: Yeah. We gotta talk about those gay vampires.

Sydnee: I know. I am obsessed with it. I know that you have not made it to *The Vampire Lestat* yet. I'm *obsessed* with *The Vampire Lestat*. I love this show. I haven't finished it. I watched all of *Interview with the Vampire*, which I know you've watched a season of. What did you think?

Taylor: Oh, it's— I'm so excited. As much as I love podcasting with you, I'm excited for when we're done. I can sit back down and watch more of it. [laughs] 'Cause we just decided to do this last week, and then I just binged it, the first season, over the course of, like, the last two days?

Sydnee: I read those books *many* years ago. I read *Interview with the Vampire*, I read *The Vampire Lestat*, I read *Queen of the Damned*. I read... Is *The Vampire Armand* a book? I think. I read multiple of these Anne Rice books. I don't remember them very well, [laughs] is what I'm realizing.

Because as I was watching them, I was like, "I don't think..." So much of the story of Louis hinges on him growing up in New Orleans and racial differences, right? There's a lot of that that plays into the story, and I don't think in the original book, Louis was Black.

Taylor: That's what I was— I wasn't sure, 'cause I never read the books. And I mean, obviously, we've all seen the Tom Cruise, Brad Pitt film.

Sydnee: Right. I don't feel like any of that was in the original book, 'cause I don't think that racial difference was there. I think they were white characters. I think.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Yeah. So it's very interesting.

Taylor: Well, and I mean, it's a brilliant decision.

Sydnee: Yes!

Taylor: Because I think that it creates a whole layer of storytelling that is really important. Like, I think it gives you a lot more understanding and empathy for his character.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: I think that sort of little, you know, collaboration between him and Claudia makes a lot more sense. And it's also just, I don't know, a good exploration of the power dynamics in, I guess— See, I've never read the books, so I don't know if the books are as explicit about, "This is a parallel for queer people." Because the show is, clearly. Right? Like, that's...

Sydnee: Oh, yeah.

Taylor: They're clearly drawing a line between being othered and seen as a monster. This is how people react to it.

Sydnee: I mean— And again, it's been *so long* since I've read the books. And Mom would know better, 'cause Mom read all the books I think multiple times. But my understanding is that from the first interactions people had with Anne Rice's vampire universe, it was clear that this is gay stuff. [laughs] Like...

Taylor: [wheeze-laughs]

Sydnee: You know what I mean? I don't— It has been beloved, I think, I believe, by the queer community for a long time. And so clearly, people saw something in

it. Now, I have to imagine that Anne Rice did that with some intention, or at least was aware and embraced it. Because otherwise, how did this show get made? [laughs] Otherwise, I feel like she'd be like, "No, that's not what I meant," right?

Taylor: Oh, well, I know that she's super— I mean, obviously she's super pro-LGBTQ.

Sydnee: Sure, sure.

Taylor: She's talked about her own identity as sort of... question mark in all directions. And I mean, her son is openly gay. I can't imagine that, if in some reality it wasn't fully intentional, she's not loving it. [laughs]

Sydnee: Yeah, that's what I'm saying. Whether or not, as she wrote those words, she thought, "This is kind of like gay people," I don't know. [laughs] But like—

Taylor: I think it *has* to be, right? 'Cause I mean, they're lovers in the book.

Sydnee: Yes. So it is. But it's not just— You asked me that, "Is it just that there are gay vampires, or is it a gay show?" It's a *gay show*.

Taylor: Yes. Well, yeah.

Sydnee: Like, it's bigger. [laughs]

Taylor: It's engaging clearly with a parallel to being gay, but it's also with lots of stuff that it's clearly for a gay audience. There are lots of lines that I'm like, "God, that's— That line is somebody's entire personality, isn't it?" [chuckles]

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: "You are a library of confusion."

Sydnee: [laughs] I—

Taylor: I gotta say that— I was gonna say, I gotta say that any time that my

girlfriend confuses me, but she never does, so I don't know. But that's good— A great line. [laughs]

Sydnee: Well, and Louis and Lestat are just so— I love— They're both bad in some ways, and they're both funny in some ways, and I love them both. Even when they're at their worst, I can't help it.

Taylor: Well, there's a real raw dynamic to— I would say to *their* relationship, but it's not ideal. It's very ugly in some ways, and it's very beautiful in others, and that feels realistic. And even when Claudia comes into the mix, it's like, you know, she's not treated purely as a victim. She's not treated purely as the killer that she is.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: There's a lot of nuance there to her character, and there's a lot of humor! I mean, the part where she's been on a murder spree, and she's hidden people [laughs] around her room, and she's running around, grabbing thumbs from jewelry boxes and stuff. It was very funny!

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: That scene endeared me to her character, in a way. It could have been treated as a more dramatic thing, but it was such a silly— The way they shot it, I don't know.

Sydnee: The sense of humor— And this permeates the show, and I would say is even more present in *The Vampire Lestat*. The sense of humor they have about everything is, I think, the most interesting part of the show for me. Because it could just be dark, serious, drama, romance, whatever.

But it's not, and I feel like because it is so funny, because the dialogue is so clever, because the characters are witty and engaging and not just nice to look at, I feel like it's a nice answer to gay tragedy. Because while tragic stuff is happening – I'm not saying it's not, clearly – there's so much lightness and joy and levity in the way that they interact with things. It's like saying, "We're not *miserable*. Yes, some bad stuff has happened, but we're having fun." [chuckles]

Taylor: Yeah! Well, I think you would probably agree with this, on sort of a personal note, that there's a lot of dysfunction here, but when things are at their most dysfunctional, that's where the humor matters the most.

Sydney: Yes.

Taylor: That's where somebody says something that like, "I'm so mad at you, but that was funny." Like... [laughs] I think that, again, that tends to the realism. This is, you know, when you grow up with dysfunction, you probably grow up funny. And then you learn how to navigate other dysfunctional people with a little bit of humor. And it's not a laugh-out-loud show, but there is that, where there's a different way you could've shot this scene that is so serious.

I mean, it's like when after Louis and Lestat have their big fight, where they learn that Lestat can fly. And then he drops Louis. [laughs] And then he's just coming back around with little gifts. It was a little silly! It's not like he's hiding somewhere, like, "Oh, I've been shunned." It's like, "Would you like a car? [laughs] I have it in blue!"

Sydney: "Sorry about that!" [laughs]

Taylor: "Here's a book!"

Sydney: It is. Well, and that's true. I think it's what saves Lestat's character from being a monster, and why eventually, you'll get to, there is a whole season about him. Is because, I mean, he's written that way, but also, the actor is very good at continuing to be kind of charming and endearing, and earnest in a way that is very startling and disarming. I don't know. I have to imagine it's a perfect marriage of character and actor that is creating that.

Taylor: Absolutely. Well, it's like I— I don't know, that character would be so easy to hate if there were subtle shifts in a million directions. And I will say, just so you don't worry about it, I do know the plotline through the second season.

Sydney: Oh, okay.

Taylor: Yeah. And I know the big reveals at the end, that we're kind of dealing

with an unreliable narrator situation through a lot of it.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: Which adds to that! I think it's obvious that you want to be more sympathetic with Louis, but the idea that we're not really getting— And it's not fully his fault, but we're not really getting the full story. So we're seeing, especially in season one, a more monstrous presentation of Lestat than is what is true.

Sydnee: Yes. Yeah, we are definitely— Yes. I'm glad you already know that, yeah. There is— And it's interesting, because there are a lot of reasons for why Louis' memory is not accurate.

Taylor: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: But part of it is, I think, just representative of the fact that, one, he's lived a really long time. [laughs] And two, our memories are always created by our feelings about the memories. And what we thought of the people then, and how we see them now. And so our memories are never completely true.

Taylor: Yeah. Well, we're—

Sydnee: So I think it's an interesting exploration of that just very human concept.

Taylor: Absolutely. I mean, that's the whole— The centerpiece being an interview. It's like when we tell our stories, we're always telling *a* story. Even if it's ours. We're deciding on an angle of things, and moving forward with it. And you can tell that story different ways, and that would lead to a different truth.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: It's like, your past is just a story you tell. You decide how you tell it.

Sydnee: I do think it was a wise creative decision to make Claudia older. 'Cause you know, in the book, I believe she's, like, six, or something?

Taylor: Yeah. Well, and even in the movie, what was it, 1990-something?

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: With Kirsten Dunst. That was very obviously, like, a young, young child.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: Because we had two different actresses for Claudia in this, right? They change actresses.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: And they both— They still obviously look like children, but they at least look like teenagers.

Sydnee: I think they're supposed to be like 14.

Taylor: Yeah. 14 is when she dies.

Sydnee: Which I think that was a smart decision, 'cause all the stuff— I mean, reading it, I remember reading that part with Claudia in the book with her talking about, "My mind is aging, my brain is aging, I am— Inside, now I'm 30, but I look like a six-year-old." And the way that was damaging, and kind of drives her mad. That made a lot of sense to me. It's one thing to read that. It is another thing to see that.

And I don't know, I remember Kirsten Dunst's character being incredibly disturbing to me, back when I watched the movie. But I was younger. But I remember thinking that, like this uncontrolled evil child thing that— Monster that, you know, looks like a porcelain doll and then will eat you. [laughs] Is incredibly disturbing.

And they've made the character— I mean, she's still a really good vampire. She definitely enjoys being a vampire. But she's not— I can love her. I can have more affection for this character than— like, the Kirsten Dunst character was very scary

to me, I remember.

Taylor: Yeah. No, I agree. I mean, there's a lot more— They also give her a lot more intelligence. Her ability to outsmart, that she's the mastermind that can outsmart Lestat I think is important. The desire she has for a more adult life, it makes sense, based on her storyline.

But that's not something that I would necessarily want— They didn't delve into that storyline in the old movie, and I think that was for the best. 'Cause this actress is at least old enough that you can understand— I remember being 14 and thinking about dates, and partners, and you know, kissing people. That's okay. That seems okay, at that age.

Sydney: Right. No, and I have to imagine too, with Tom Cruise playing Lestat the first time around, that that character was not nearly as likable as [laughs] this Lestat is.

Taylor: Yeah. Well, there's no way you could have watched— I thought that— Now, it's funny. After seeing this, and then going back and thinking about the original movie, like, "How did they make it so *not* gay? How, based on the subject matter, did you not—" I don't know. 'Cause they seemed to do a lot of excising of all of that in the old movie.

Sydney: Yes.

Taylor: Like, it's gotta be there, the plot points, [through clenched teeth] but we can't make it gay.

Sydney: Well, it was the '90s. We didn't have gay people then, Taylor.

Taylor: I guess so, but...

Sydney: [laughs]

Taylor: But yeah, I don't— You're very sympathetic to Louis, 'cause Lestat just kind of feels like purely a predator. And I think because inevitably, when you have two men living together, raising a daughter together, there's gonna be this

bit of like— I remember, even in my young teenage brain, seeing it for the first time, “Are they gay?” But instead, it seemed to amount to, “Oh, well Lestat probably is, and he’s the predator in this situation. He’s the evil one.”

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: Which reinforces something very bad [laughs] to society.

Sydnee: Right. No, I—

Taylor: He trapped this upstanding young man in an evil gay relationship. [laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs] No, I definitely think— And I think it’s interesting, because by making that decision that Louis is not white, I think you have Lestat— He’s still a predator in some ways, right?

Like, I love Lestat because I think he’s hilarious and chaotic. But I recognize, he is still a predator. But it’s not because he’s gay and Louis’ straight, certainly. I do think that his whiteness comes into play. And you know, that contrast. The way that he can have privilege over Louis constantly, just by virtue of being a very Aryan-looking guy. I think that comes into play a lot more. And that’s a smart decision, so that it’s not like he’s gay. It’s no, he’s just a white guy. [laughs]

Taylor: Well, and they even specify that Louis *is* gay. Lestat is... He says, what, non-discriminating?

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: He’s bi, pan, I don’t know.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: But that’s part of what Louis is struggling with, is he’s a gay man. And that’s— So you kind of get that double-edged sword, of that gives him another way where Lestat has power in society over him, but Lestat is also giving him power to defend himself, both as a Black man and as a gay man.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: So it's a weird give-and-take.

Sydnee: Mm-hmm. But it's so much more interesting, and it allows— I think that, you know, especially when we look at portrayals of queer people in media, that nuance, the idea that these people contain multitudes, they have lots of dimensions, and some of them are really funny, and some of them are pleasant, and some of them are not so pleasant to see, that is all that people are seeking with representation, right?

Taylor: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: Complicated nuanced portrayals of characters that are multifaceted. Not there's the good gay, and there's the bad gay. [laughs]

Taylor: Well, and I mean, how we— Monsters, as sort of symbols of culture, have been utilized in different ways. There's not just one way to read a vampire. I know most of the time, we go, "Oh. It's one of the classic monsters that's always a parallel for people that are othered in society. That's what this story is saying."

With vampires, I feel like it's been employed just as often to do that as it is— I mean, I think in a real-world sense, they're always what? Incredibly rich, incredibly beautiful, and they suck the life from regular people.

That really can be viewed as more of a representation of the one percent, of the ruling class. That is who they are. They live off our blood. They get to live longer, more lavish lives than we ever will, and they're predatory upon *us*, the everyman. And I think that if you go back to that— If you've just got two beautiful rich white men traversing about the world, feeding off of the underprivileged, it's hard to root for that with a modern lens on things.

Sydnee: Yeah. Well, and I think especially by making one of your main characters Black and living in a time where it was even more difficult than it still is, I think what you're calling attention to is that thing in all of us where, while vampires are representing something evil – like you said, they're living off the blood of others, and they're taking, and they're ruling, and whatever – if you

could be one, though, would you?

I mean, I think that's the question that that asks of yourself. But if, to get out of your situation of oppression, whatever it may be, if you could *become* that monster, wouldn't you? I mean, that's the question it's asking everybody. And that's hard! Like, ask yourself, "Would I? If I could, would I?"

Taylor: Well, and is it just you'd be able to defend yourself against the monstrous parts of society that exist and are approved of, and happen out in the light that you know?

Sydnee: Yeah. And does it start that way? Or, like with Louis, does it become much more? Because he *does* amass fortunes, right? He does become the one percent.

Taylor: Yeah. Yeah. I mean, however it was originally written, *this* take on it seems to be the one that's willing to engage— And it doesn't feel like it's a throwaway for dramatic purposes. It's a very purposeful way of investigating, I think, just that. The vampire concept, all angles of it, you know?

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: I mean, in that, it almost makes me think of like... One thing that I think is present in the queer community and in the Black community is this— I'm thinking of like, Black dandyism. Dressing really well, dressing better than the people that oppress you, as sort of a, "I can't control what you do to me, but I look better than you. I am more put together than you will ever be."

And I think that there's a history of that in the queer community too, of adorning ourselves. Dressing ourselves up. Making ourselves— We can't do anything about the status we hold in society, but we can take care of and honor ourselves in a way that makes *you* angry. [laughs] It's a defiance by self care, which is really beautiful. And I think that runs parallel to that. That decadence of the vampire, is it that they're above all of us, or is it that they're putting on airs because they exist in a place that's lower in society? I don't know.

Sydnee: 'Cause we think they're monsters.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: Yeah. I had not— It surprises me that it went on for as long as it did, and I wasn't even aware that it was happening.

Taylor: [laughs] Yeah. I got a lot of clips on my TikTok, and I'm like, "Oh, I should watch this." And then, you know.

Sydnee: Although I think it's on, what, AMC?

Taylor: Yes.

Sydnee: So that could be why. [laughs] I mean, I understand they have *The Walking Dead*, but I don't know that— I mean, *Mad Men* and *Breaking Bad* are both over. So maybe people are just not paying as much attention?

Taylor: Yeah. Something that I accidentally subscribe to, that's an add-on to Prime or something, I can watch it. But I definitely do not have an AMC+ subscription. [laughs]

Sydnee: Yeah. That's, I think, part of why more people aren't talking about it. It's on AMC. And you can watch it on regular AMC when it comes out every week or whatever, but I don't know. Yeah. [chuckles] I was surprised I hadn't seen it. I was really shocked that Mom hadn't watched it. And then I thought, "Well, maybe it's bad."

And so we started watching it, actually because we were in New Orleans. Justin and I were like, "Well, we're in New Orleans. We'll watch this show that's set in New Orleans about vampires; this'll be fun."

Taylor: Oh, that's—

Sydnee: We thought it'd be kind of pulpy and trashy. But it was great.

Taylor: I didn't realize. I thought that perhaps your New Orleans trip was inspired *by* [laughs] your watching the show.

Sydnee: No, we were there in our hotel room late, like, “What should we watch? Oh, this’ll be kind of fun.” And I thought it was gonna be pulpy. I thought it was gonna be— Which it is a little. Like *True Blood*? I was looking for a little *True Blood* kind of vibe. And it definitely has that element to it, but I think it’s a *little* more sophisticated than *True Blood*.

Taylor: Mm-hmm.

Sydnee: I would argue.

Taylor: I agree. Well, I think it is— It’s engaging in a lot of cultural awareness, and just a deeper understanding and sympathy for all of the main characters, you know?

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: That’s the thing that it really lives on, is they’re all— Especially Armand. You wanna hate him, and I think I kinda do, but also, that’s a fully-realized character who you have to also have some sort of respect and reverence for, just...

Sydnee: He’s fascinating too, as it goes on.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: His whole arc is really— I mean, Lestat is my favorite. I love Lestat. I already bought merch. [chuckles]

Taylor: [laughs] What merch did you buy!?

Sydnee: We— Justin got a tank top with his face on it that just says, “The Vampire Lestat.”

Taylor: [laughs] That’s great. That’s all you need.

Sydnee: I got some sort of pink little half-t-shirt. What does it say on it?

Taylor: Oh, wait. Oh, I thought you were saying Justin got that for you.

Sydnee: No.

Taylor: *Justin* has a tank top with [through laughter] Lestat's face on it.

Sydnee: Yes.

Taylor: For him.

Sydnee: He does, for him.

Taylor: Amazing. Excellent.

Sydnee: I got a little pink half-shirt that says something. It's like their band merch.

Taylor: Oh! Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Sydnee: It doesn't ruin much to know that—

Taylor: You're not spoiling— I already knew the setup.

Sydnee: Yeah.

Taylor: You know me. I spoil things for myself.

Sydnee: He has a band.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: He's— Yeah. He's leading a band. And so he's this glam rock guy that is — It's great. It's great. Justin and I had this conversation already. I was like, "Man. I wanna be the vampire Lestat for Halloween." But I don't know— There's nobody Justin can be.

Taylor: Hmm.

Sydnee: Except maybe the interviewer.

Taylor: Oh, that would be great!

Sydnee: So that—

Taylor: Danny Molloy?

Sydnee: Yeah. The Anthony Bourdain lookalike.

Taylor: Yeah, yeah. He's cool. He's got a pretty signature look going on.

Sydnee: Yeah. I told him, we just get your hair gray, and you can be Daniel Molloy.

Taylor: Just walk around with a recorder, a notebook? [laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs] So I don't know. We'll see. I've gotta finish the series, too. That's the other thing.

Taylor: Yeah.

Sydnee: And then there's some witches stuff that's in the same universe. The witches of something?

Taylor: Is it— 'Cause I have not watched any of *The Vampire Lestat*. Is that brought in, into *The Vampire Lestat*, the witches?

Sydnee: So here's what I— I did not watch it, but I think there are moments where there are references being made, maybe, to it. And I'm not— You know what I mean? But it's not— You don't *have* to watch it to watch *The Vampire Lestat*. Is this it? Is it *Mayfair Witches*? Yes.

Taylor: Yes. That is in the universe. Oh, wait, that was a show that already

happened, right?

Sydnee: Yes. So that show, I think timeline takes place after *Interview with the Vampire*, and maybe before *The Vampire Lestat*? Or I think there are references in *The Vampire Lestat* to, maybe, things that happened on that show, and I don't understand them. Do you know what I'm saying? And I could be wrong. I could be overthinking it.

Taylor: I will—

Sydnee: But it's in the same universe, and I did not watch it.

Taylor: Do we know if any of the witches are gay?

Sydnee: Do you want me to google that? "Are any..."

Taylor: No, you don't have to google. it. Well, you can google it, 'cause I feel like — I saw some clips of Kathryn Hahn in like, I guess she's doing Mother Gothel in the live-action reboot of *Rapunzel*? And just seeing her on my screen again, I'm like, "God, I wish— I miss the time in my life where there was a lesbian witch on my TV every week." That was the happiest I'd been in a while, when I got to see her as Agatha for a period of time.

Sydnee: Yes. I know, right?

Taylor: And it feels like the same joy. Seeing Agatha, evil lesbian witch, seeing Lestat, evil gay vampire, this gives me the same joy. And I miss one. I will take the other. I would like to have both.

Sydnee: So in Anne Rice's source novels, the legendary and exceptionally powerful family patriarch Julien Mayfair is queer.

Taylor: Great. But patriarch, so that's—

Sydnee: So that's— Yeah, he's a gay guy. But in the AMC television adaptation, they expanded the queer cast, but I don't know who. But there's more.

Taylor: Okay. Alright.

Sydnee: Yes. So I think there are more gay characters, maybe, on the show than there— Oh, here's an article. See, this was written for you, Taylor. It's from LGBTQ Nation, and the question is, "How queer is Anne Rice's *Mayfair Witches*?"

Taylor: [laughs] It's just about— Specifically, I want a gay witch. A gay lady witch. That's what I want.

Sydnee: Uh—

Taylor: Why is it so hard to find? I mean, not in Bushwick. I could throw a stone and hit a gay lady witch in Bushwick. But in the entertainment world. But I wouldn't throw a stone, 'cause that would be a hate crime.

Sydnee: I don't know— So Julien is the queerest member of the family.
[chuckles]

Taylor: [laughs]

Sydnee: Uh...

Taylor: Wow. That's a designation.

Sydnee: I don't know if... "Like the novels, *Mayfair Witches* is exponentially less queer than *Interview with the Vampires*. But the show's creators have promised LGBTQ+ inclusion in the series."

So I don't know. Um... "They created a role for the show, Josephine Mayfair, who is played by a trans actress, Jen Richards."

Taylor: Oh, that's cool.

Sydnee: Yes. But I don't know— Is the character trans? I don't know. But anyway, it sounds like there is queer content, but not as gay. It's not as gay. That's the answer to your question. Not as gay as *Interview with the Vampire*.

Taylor: Not as gay. That's— Alright. I don't know.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: 'Cause see, I like— *Interview with the Vampire* is pretty gay, but it could be gayer.

Sydnee: It could be gayer.

Taylor: It could be gayer!

Sydnee: *The Vampire Lestat* is so gay.

Taylor: That's good. Alright.

Sydnee: [chuckles] Not even the character! It's not even about Lestat. I'm not commenting on *his* sexuality at this point. 'Cause like we said, it's "not straight" is kind of all he tells you. But it's just a very queer show. It's great.

Taylor: I need to meditate, 'cause I'm realizing as we're having this discussion, that I'm like, "I think everything I enjoy needs to be a little gay." And it's not about that there are homosexual relationships happening in the piece. There is an outlook that is inherently— And I don't know what I'm trying to say, but I'm like, that's what I know when I like something, like, "Ahh, it's a little gay. Then I'm gonna like it!"

Sydnee: I think it's why I like this specific series so much, is that I know he doesn't say he's bisexual, and he may be pansexual or maybe something else. But I feel chaotic bisexual energy coming from him constantly in this series. He's doing things in *The Vampire Lestat* that I'm like, I understand this. [laughs] I understand this, this petulant, petty behavior. Why are you doing this? I get it. [chuckles]

Taylor: I mean— And that's the thing, like, it's so funny that you can't be appalled. Like when he kills the tenor?

Sydnee: Yes.

Teylor: And they even film it with sympathy for the tenor, like there is the dialogue going on beneath it where Louis is talking to Daniel about how this man had a family. And yet it's just so funny that he marks all those notes in blood, and is like, "No. No. No. I have to kill you." [laughs]

Sydnee: [laughs] It— Yes.

Teylor: Like, what a fussy queen! [laughs]

Sydnee: He is. Alright, well, maybe we can talk more about it later on, after we've finished it all.

Teylor: Yeah. And then I would happily come—

Sydnee: Or we could check out—

Teylor: Huh?

Sydnee: We could check out the witches, and see if it's more queer than we were promised. I don't know.

Teylor: We could do a part two, where we can talk about the full *Vampire Lestat*, and make a decision whether the witches are gay *enough*.

Sydnee: Okay. Alright. But not—

Teylor: I just think, if you're— Go ahead.

Sydnee: Oh, go ahead. What were you gonna say?

Teylor: Oh, I was gonna say, I just think if you're gonna write about witches *or* vampires, you have to at least— Even if you're just wanting to have the most watches as possible, you have to say, "Well, we gotta make it gay." Right?

Sydnee: Gotta make it a *little* gay.

Taylor: There's just nothing more disturbing than when witches and vampires are played too straight. We've all seen the baseball scene in *Twilight*.

Sydnee: [laughs]

Taylor: Most uncomfortable, disturbing sequence. [laughs]

Sydnee: Yes, that's nothing. But we're not gonna do that next, Tey. What are we gonna do next?

Taylor: Next, I want an excuse to spend too much money renting *The Backrooms* streaming. And there's also a lot of really positive buzz around it, so I would like to watch *The Backrooms*.

Sydnee: Finally! Me too. I've been very excited to watch this, once it came out streaming.

Taylor: Excellent.

Sydnee: So we'll watch *The Backrooms*, and talk about that next.

Taylor: Alright.

Sydnee: Alright. And in the meantime, if you haven't watched *Interview with the Vampire*, you should. It's very good. And *The Vampire Lestat*. And I guess, sure, the *Witches* too. I don't know how gay it is. No promises. But it exists.

Taylor: Alright.

Sydnee: You should also go to MaximumFun.org 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: We need to make, like, a grand chart of all the media, from not gay enough to too— Is there too gay? Is there a place where—

Taylor: No, I don't think that—

Sydnee: Is there a sweet spot, or is it just not-gay to gay?

Taylor: I think if it's pandering to gay, that's where you come around, and you create—

Sydnee: Too-gay.

Taylor: Well, but it's not— But too-gay media can't be made by gay people. I don't think that's possible. I think that's made by people that are like, "Let's get the gays to like this." And then we all hate it, and—

Sydnee: Ah, okay.

Taylor: I don't know! Again, I think I've opened a question. What is inherently gay media that doesn't necessarily revolve around gay relationships?

Sydnee: I don't know. We're gonna figure it out.

Taylor: [through laughter] By the end of this podcast, we'll have a dissertation!

Sydnee: We'll figure it out.

[chord]

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