



Episode 124: Pocketfuls of Confetti

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Sally: Everybody Hates Rand is a Wheel of Time podcast that will contain spoilers for all 14 books. So if you're anti-spoiler, pause this, read all 14 books, and come back. We'll be here. Waiting.

Emily: Our title is a joke and is meant to be taken as such. In the context of this podcast, "everybody" refers to us and our cat. You are free to feel however you want about Rand, who is a fictional character. Don't DM us.

(theme song by Glynn MacKenzie plays)

Sally: I feel like we haven't recorded this podcast in, like, a full year.

Emily: (muffled) I dunno why I press record when I still have funfetti cupcake in my mouth. (laugh) I'm such a ding-dong.

Sally: Emily, it's sprinkles, as Jack told you.

Emily: Yeah, sprinkles, as my nephew would say. (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) It's fine.

Emily: I also feel like we haven't recorded this podcast in a long time. But that's the way it goes, baby, when -- when, um, you're gone for a week or whatever. So anyway. I'm pretty mad, 'cause my eye doctor -- who's not even my eye doctor -- it's just a doctor who looked at my eyes --

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: I mean, I guess that makes them an eye doctor, but it's not, like, MY eye doctor, you know? She was like, "OK, you need to come back on Monday or Tuesday."

Sally: What?!

Emily: And I'm like, "Why?" And she's like, "Well, I was hoping it would've healed by now, but it hasn't." And I'm like, that's 'cause it was two days ago when you saw me last. You thought it would be all healed by now?" She was like, "Yeah." And I was like, "Lady. I don't just have all the time in the world to be leaving my work and drive to the University of Utah to go to the eyeball triage center so you can look at my eyeball all day."

Sally: (laugh) It's very annoying. I'm sorry.

Emily: But I didn't say that, 'cause I was wearing my worst mask, and I couldn't -- it turns out if I wear that mask with glasses, then I can't talk or breathe without fogging up my glasses. (laugh)

Sally: Oh, it's the worst. I have some masks where it's like, no problem.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: And then I have other masks where it's like, no, bitch, shut up. (laugh)

Emily: That one's really tight, so --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: I've gotta get new ones. Anyway.

Sally: Friggin' eyeballs.

Emily: Yeah, they're really -- I was like, "You told me it was an ulcer on my eyeball, and you thought it would be healed in 36 hours?"

Sally: There's an ulcer on your eyeball?

Emily: A very small one.

Sally: Ugh.

Emily: It's from a bacterial infection.

Sally: That's so sad.

Emily: She said it was, quote, "the smallest she'd ever seen." (laugh) And I was like, thank you.

Sally: (laugh) She sounds like quite a fascinating woman.

Emily: She's really hilarious. (laugh)

Sally: Today I was leaving the Aviary, and I was like, OK, I really do have to go now, I want to go check on Emily, she had to go up to the Moran -- or, whatever, the eye -- the eyeball center. And Julie was like, "Why did she have to go to the eyeball center?" And I was like, "Emily has bad eyes." (laugh)

Emily: It's not my fault.

Sally: No, it's OK, and then I was trying to be like, "Emily had eyeball herpes in New York."

Emily: (laugh)

Sally: And Julie was like, "That's just pink eye," and I was like, "Shhhh."

Emily: It's not, though!

Sally: Yeah. And I was like, "Emily had to, like, wear an eyepatch and was, like, leaking from her eye and couldn't work for a really long time, so --"

Emily: I know what the difference between pink eye and --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Eyeball herpes is. They told me it was the rarest and most severe form of pink eye.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So technically it is pink eye, but --

Sally: Yeah, and I mean, that's what I said. I was like, "Yes, technically. But also, Emily might have gone blind." (laugh)

Emily: Yeah, I have permanent blurring in my vision.

Sally: She cute, though. (clicks tongue)

Emily: But I might go blind before 35.

Sally: Still cute.

Emily: At least in one eye.

Sally: Would you wear an eye patch?

Emily: Yeah, of course.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: What would be the point otherwise? What else would I do? Just go around with two eyes showing? (laugh) This is --

Sally: (laugh) Absurd.

Emily: This is the stupidest intro we've done in such a long time. (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) We have to get our podcast legs back.

Emily: I was eating a funfetti cupcake the entire time and just talking about eyeballs. I'm sorry if you're sensitive about eyeballs. I could tell you some really disgusting things about my eyeball exam, but I shan't.

Sally: OK.

Emily: Um. Not, like, disgusting, just, like -- they'll make your eyes water if you are sensitive about eyeball things.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: I'm pretty excited 'cause I didn't know what we were gonna talk about today, 'cause there's two kind of, um -- um, content-less chapters. (laugh)

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But then Sally came out with two printed pages --

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: And said, "These are my notes about the history of the circus," and I was like, great. I just Googled, "How do you know if you're in a cult?" in preparation for Masema, who isn't even in there, see? So I'm excited to learn about circuses.

Sally: OK.

Emily: I'm kind of sad, though, that I didn't watch the Greatest Showman, 'cause then I could whip out some of his songs here, but also I am glad I did not waste two hours of my life watching the Greatest Showman.

Sally: Yeah. Also, that's about P.T. Barnum, right?

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: And he's my nemesis.

Emily: Did you say memesis? (laugh)

Sally: He's my memesis -- he's my memememesis.

Emily: Mimesis.

Sally: He's my mimesis.

Emily: That's a thing I learned about and one time wrote an essay about, but I have completely forgotten what it means since then. (laugh) This is Everybody Hates Rand.

Sally: (laugh) Allegedly.

Emily: (laugh) Your friendly neighborhood Wheel of Time podcast. I'm Emily "Eyeball" Juchau.

Sally: (laugh) That makes me sad, 'cause none of my ailments start with an "s."

Emily: Sally ... do you have clinical depression? (laugh) Sally "Sadness --"

Sally: (laugh) Sure, we'll go with that one. This is -- so it's Emily "Eyeball" and Sally "Sadness." (laugh) Welcome to our ding-dong podcast.

Emily: We should start a radio show. Yep. And this is Tybalt.

Sally: What's your -- Tybalt also has --

Emily: Tybalt "Tear Ducts."

Sally: Yeah, there we go. Perfect.

Emily: OK.

Sally: OK.

Emily: OK.

Sally: Um, do we just wanna do, like, a quick plot synopsis and then I can talk about the circus or vice-versa or ...

Emily: We can talk about --

Sally: Both? I can --

Emily: The plot synopsis, and you just jump in whenever you feel like it's time to talk about the circus. I guess. Right?

Sally: Sure. (laugh)

Emily: (laugh)

Sally: OK.

Emily: The scene -- the scene -- the chapters start --

Sally: Ohhh kay. (laugh)

Emily: (laugh) Ugh. The chapters start with, um, Nynaeve in the wagon, getting all dressed -- well, she's just, like, standing there petting her own hair.

Sally: Yeah, and she's like, "Oh, my hair is dyed, you know, cherry red or whatever."

Emily: Yeah, they change -- they dyed her hair red. And she's wearing the red dress that she was so resistant to putting on, um, before. And we find out that it's because -- essentially because she's trying to make Birgitte happy. 'Cause Birgitte comes into the wagon, also wearing her own red dress --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And is, like -- first of all, it describes her as having her braid coming over her shoulder and "nestled between her breasts," which I don't know why Robert Jordan thinks that hair behaves that way. Like, hair doesn't fall -- like, you have to really tug it -- to get it there.

Sally: Yeah, I mean, but if you have, like, a long enough braid -- like, it's -- like, it has to be purposeful. Like, she had to have, like, done that.

Emily: Yeah, to be, like -- the cleavage.

Sally: That's what I thought was happening was that Birgitte specifically was like, "It's between my titties."

Emily: Oh. Yeah, I like that better than my reading, which is that Robert Jordan doesn't know how long hair works. 'Cause it just seems like he's always describing as things "nestled between women's breasts," whether it's hair or necklaces or whatever.

Sally: Yeah, but it'd have to be, like, a pretty -- like, a long braid in order for it to even, like, come to breast-length. 'Cause your hair gets shorter when you braid it.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: So -- whatever.

Emily: Like, how long is Birgitte's hair? Is it down to her butt?

Sally: Whatever -- it's whatever. (laugh)

Emily: Wow.

Sally: Tybalt, why are you on the washing machine?

Tybalt: (meows)

Emily: Time to get down, sir.

Sally: Go. Hey -- hey, Egghead. Get down here. here. (laugh)

Emily: (laugh)

Sally: Thank you.

Emily: So angry. Um --

Sally: He's mad 'cause I put him in his hot dog costume last night. (laugh)

Emily: (laugh) So funny. Ugh. Birgitte is talking to Nynaeve, and it's, um -- we talked about this the last time we recorded an episode -- but Birgitte gets in Nynaeve's face about how Nynaeve is being such, like, a pushover to Birgitte sppecific -- sppecifically. (laugh)

Sally: Birgitte, sppecifically.

Emily: Um, to Birgitte specifically because she feels so guilty about what happened to Birgitte. And Birgitte is like, "You're being a total, like, dick about this," essentially. Like, "You need to stop 'cause it's not just disrespectful to yourself; it's also disrespectful to me. And also, like, hilariously, you're trying to do everything you can to please me, but what would please me most is if you would knock it off." (laugh) So.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: "Please act like yourself," she says. "I don't -- if this was who you were -- like, if this was just your natural personality, then whatever. We'd be fine because that's who you are. But you're just putting on this little weird show, and that's, you know, not great. So."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: "Stop it or I'll drive you away," essentially. And Nynaeve's like, "I can't."

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: (laugh)

Sally: I mean, that's literally -- she's like, "Too hard."

Emily: She's like, "No, I just feel so guilty about what happened." And Birgitte's like, "Stop it." Like --

Sally: Yeah. Just stop.

Emily: Just don't, maybe.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And Birgitte's like -- I mean, Nynaeve's like, "But I was such a coward." And Birgittes' like, "No, what you are is a moron." (laugh)

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Because it's not cowardice to feel fear. Like, I do not know why that -- that's such, like, a man thing to think in terms of modern heteropatriarchy.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: The type of stuff that gets put on men. But yeah, fear is normal especially if you're being -- about to be tortured to death by one of the fucking Forsaken. Why would you not be afraid?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: You'd be insane if you weren't afraid. And Nynaeve's like -- (fake sobbing noises) And won't get over it until the end of the book.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: At least that part of it. She gets over Birgitte pretty quickly, I think.

Sally: Yeah. And it's just, like, a very, like -- I can't really remember what we talked about last time because we recorded so long ago -- but it's very, like -- it's a very upsetting thing when people feel guilty about something and they have to externalize it in a way that pushes it onto their, quote unquote, victims rather than just, like, dealing with guilt internally. Um, because by pushing your guilt onto your, quote unquote, victims, you're just giving them -- you're just victimizing them in another way.

Emily: Yeah, like, it's not only bad for all the reasons that Birgitte is listing. Um, it's also bad because it's essentially emotional manipulation.

Sally: Mm-hmm.



Emily: And whether or not Nynaeve is aware of that or not -- obviously she reads as not being aware of it -- then it's still what it is, and maybe you should actually exercise good social practices by listening to people. 'Cause Birgitte is such, like, a clear communicator --

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Which is what makes it all so upsetting and, like, nonsensical.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Because Birgitte's like, "Here's what I need from you. Here's how I feel about this. Can we please move forward?" And Nynaveve's just like, "No."

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Like, throws herself in front of the wagon. (laugh)

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Fuckin' Scarlett O'Hara fainting away in her red dress.

Sally: Yes.

Emily: Like, come on. It's annoying. But Birgitte is like, "Fine," and goes back to making her own arrows. She has, like, a hilarious line about Valan Luca's bow --

Sally: (laugh) Yeah.

Emily: She's like, "It was, like, carved from a tree by a drunk man in the dead -- by a drunk idiot in the dead of night." (laugh) Um.

Sally: It's very funny.

Emily: Yeah. Good for Birgitte, knowing her crafts -- her craftsmanship? I guess?

Sally: Sure.

Emily: But Nynaeve is like, "OK, I gotta get out of here." So she leaves the wagon. Birgitte's like, "I'm gonna start kicking your ass if you don't shape up," and Birgitte's -- Nynaeve's like, "Ugh." She's like, "You make me so angry, but I can't be angry. 'Cause I'm the victim here." (laugh)

Sally: Barf.

Emily: Ugh. Um, and leaves. They're apparently parked, which is, like, weird, 'cause Nynaeve talked in the chapter about moving within the wagon while her hair was being dyed to their, like,

spot, uh, across the bridge, I guess outside of Samara where all of the circuses are being set up. But now they've come to a stop, so the circuses are in full swing --

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Around them. And Nynaeve goes, essentially to see Elayne's performance, although she of course has to describe everything about the circus and the other performers as she's getting there. We don't really know what her end goal is until she's there. It's like an open area -- it's like an open air space, right?

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: For some reason, I always picture it in a circus tent.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: I dunno why.

Sally: I mean, it's 'cause our -- that's our image of the circus, you know?

Emily: Yeah. And so it's, like, frustrating to have those two things --

Sally: Yeah, 'cause you can, like, see the elephants standing up and doing things.

Emily: Yeah, that's the exact image that I was like, "Oh, yeah, there is no tent."

Sally: Yeah, there can't be a tent.

Emily: But --

Sally: I mean -- yeah. Yeah, there can't be. Weird.

Emily: Do you want to talk about circuses now?

Sally: Sure! Let's talk about circuses.

Emily: Bread and circuses.

Sally: Yeah, exactly. So that's a great segue, 'cause the concept of a circus, um, dates back to ancient Rome, where they had the -- the policy "bread and circuses," where if people are fed and entertained, they will not uprising against the government or whatever.

Emily: Yeah, that was what the first few Caesars -- (laugh)

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Who were like, "Aw, dunk, maybe, yeah, we shouldn't have done away with the fucking republic."

Sally: Yeah. (laugh)

Emily: "And all the people hate us." (laugh)

Sally: Yeah. (laugh) Um, uh, so circuses are a form of public entertainment that have a long history, but, um, in Rome, the circus -- that word refers to a building, not a company of performers, and at the circus was where they did, like, horse and chariot races, equestrian shows, staged battles, gladiator combat, um, and displays of and fights with trained animals.

Emily: Doesn't circus share -- it shares the root word with, like, "circuit."

Sally: Mm.

Emily: So I think it is, like, referring to the actual, like, track --

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Around which people would race. But I could be wrong about that. That's just what I want to say.

Sally: Oh, no, that sounds very smart.

Emily: (laugh)

Sally: Um, what Wikipedia said was that "in the book *De Spectaculis*, the early Christian writer Tertullian --" (laugh)

Emily: (laugh) *De Spectaculis*."

Sally: "Claimed that the first circus games were staged by the goddess [Circe](#)." which could -- which was what I was guessing were part of the word --

Emily: Oh, cool.

Sally: Would come from, is Circe and -- or Circe and circus, depending on how --

Emily: Cool.

Sally: Uh, people pronounce it. Um, and then, so after the fall of Rome -- spoiler alert if you didn't know, Rome falls -- (laugh) -- um, uh, the circus buildings fell out of use, and instead animal trainers, performers, all those people, would, um, travel throughout Europe to perform at local fairs. Um, and the traveling -- traveling group of players is a concept that runs throughout Europe for a few centuries, um, and will probably -- and probably impacted the way that circuses traveled in later centuries. Um, so -- but historians generally track the beginning of circus history to the Englishman Philip Astley, who was a cavalry officer. Um, and he set up the first modern amphitheater for the display of horse-riding tricks in Lambeth, London, on April 4, 1768. Um, so

Astley was the first person to, um, bring horse-riding tricks as well as a few acrobats and clowns together to perform a show. Um, and Astley also rode in a circle to do his tricks rather than a straight line, uh, which set him apart from his competitors, apparently. Um, 'cause most people would be, like, in a straight line to do tricks.

Emily: Sure.

Sally: Um, but also, Astley performed these tricks, um -- these stunts, I guess -- in a 42-foot diameter ring, which has been the standard size used by circuses ever since.

Emily: Oh, that's interesting.

Sally: Yeah, isn't that cool?

Emily: Forty-two. I wonder if it was just totally arbitrary for him.

Sally: Yeah, it was probably just, like, the space they had. (laugh)

Emily: He's just like, "And this is how big it is."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And every circus after that was like, "It has to be 42 feet in honor of our lord and savior -- what's his name? Astley."

Sally: Philip Astley. (laugh)

Emily: Ass-ley. (laugh)

Sally: Philip Ass-ley. Um, so circuses continue and eventually make their way over to America, where they encounter the unfortunate figure of P.T. Barnum.

Emily: The unstoppable force of circus meets the immovable wall of P.T. Barnum's -- (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) I hate --

Emily: Racism.

Sally: Yeah. Um, and P.T. Barnum combined this idea of, like, a performing circus with the freak show.

Emily: Mm.

Sally: Um, and so the freak show is -- kind of runs a parallel track to the development of these circuses. Um, but the history of freak shows are mostly based in Europe, especially England and America, because -- especially at the beginning, freak shows relied a lot on colonialism, where the native and indigenous people of -- peoples of colonized lands would be captured or

manipulated in various ways by these colonizers and explorers to come back to England or Europe with them, um, for display. Um, probably the most famous example of this is Sarah Baartman, a.k.a. “the Hottentot Venus.” Um, Sarah Baartman was a South African Khoikhoi woman, who, because of her large buttocks -- uh, which is just a trait that appears naturally among the genetics of the Khoikhoi woman -- Khoikhoi women, um, and people in general, I think -- uh, Sarah Baartman was exhibited as a freak show attraction in the late 1700s and early 1800s under the name “Hottentot Venus,” specifically in England and France.

Emily: I remember learning a lot about her in our London, um, study abroad.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And I’m sad I don’t remember much of that, because it sort of all blended together with the various, um, studies we were doing into freak shows and stuff like that.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But, um -- yeah, didn’t we, like, see various, like, art, um, based upon her?

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Or something like that.

Sally: Yeah, and so, like, it’s -- a lot of racist caricatures of Black women in particularly with their, like -- in particular, with, like, exaggerated boobs and butt, come from, like, images of Sarah Baartman. Um, “Hottentot” is now considered, um, an offensive term, um, but was what the Khoikhoi were called back then.

Emily: Mm. Gotcha.

Sally: Um, so -- like, if you guys remember the Paper magazine cover of Kim Kardashian popping a champagne bottle into a glass that was on her butt, she’s actually mimicking, like, a -- an image of Sarah Baartman, who was doing that at some point, so.

Emily: Really?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: I didn’t know that.

Sally: If I remember -- I remember Paisley talking about that in our class. You might have been asleep. (laugh)

Emily: I slept a lot, OK? It’s just --

Sally: (laugh) That’s OK, you were very tired.

Emily: (laugh) This just 'cause it gives us the opportunity to talk about it and because we're in the middle of an anti-racist movement in the United States right now -- that image of Black women with exaggerated buttocks and breasts fed into the notion, um, that white, quote unquote, scientists perpetuated throughout the history of the seventeenth -- well, from the seventeenth to almost the twentieth -- the early twentieth century, a) that Black people were inherently different from white people, when now we know that race is, essentially, a non-existent biological factor -

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: And that it played into the idea that, um, Black women and Black men have exaggerated sexual appetites --

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Which has been totally used within, um, the transatlantic slave trade, all the way up until now in white colonist spaces to, um, suppress and oppress Black people and to put offensive stereotypes on them.

Sally: Yes.

Emily: So just to, like, put that out there, some history that you can learn today.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: The end.

Sally: The end. Um, so more broadly than just, um, like, captured native peoples, um, the freak show relied on the exhibition -- exhibition of, quote unquote, biological rarities, which people called -- and still probably call -- freaks of nature, which is where freak show gets its name. Um, so these would be people with physical abnormalities, diseases, or conditions, like John Merrick, called "The Elephant Man," or, um, Charles Sherwood Stratton, um, is another pretty famous one who went by the performer name "General Tom Thumb," um, and Stratton stopped growing after the first six months of his life.

Emily: Whoa.

Sally: Yeah, so he was, like, 25 inches tall. Like, very little. Um, so extremely small and performed, uh, for P.T. Barnum for many years at P.T. Barnum's American Museum, which was basically -- which was, um, like, part of his circus, I think, but it was a stationary museum, um, in New York City, I believe, that was kind of his, like, main freak show place. A lot of stuff with, like, famous performers that you'll see connected to P.T. Barnum performed out of the American Museum.

Emily: We also studied "The Elephant Man" in London.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Did you hear that conversation I was having with my parents --

Sally: Yes, I did.

Emily: Oh my God. My brother -- (laugh) My dad showed us the clip from the really old Elephant Man movie, where, like -- it's a very sad and upsetting scene, where John Merrick is, like, trying to just get through a train station or something, and I think he's, like, wearing a mask, but it gets, like, ripped off, and all these people, like, crowd around him, and it's really upsetting. And he says in his, like, British accent, "I am a human. I am not an animal."

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: And my little brother, who was, like, seven when our dad showed us that scene, would just say that all the time. (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) Adam.

Emily: Sort of 'cause he just, like, latched onto it the way that kids do.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: And I was just on the phone with both my parents and Adam the other day, and my dad said that, and he was like, "What's that from?" and I was like, "It's from the Elephant Man movie," and he was like, "What's it from?" and I was like, "It's from the Elephant Man movie!" And he was like, "Yeah, but someone else used to, like, quote it all the time," and I was like, "Adam used to quote it all the time, 'cause you showed it to us." It took me, like, saying it, like, six times --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: For it to reach him. (laugh)

Sally: It was pretty wild.

Emily: It was pretty upsetting. That's --

Sally: Classic Chris Juchau. (laugh)

Emily: Yeah, it was just selective deafness -- (laugh) To what I --

Sally: Astral projection.

Emily: To what I was saying. I was like, "Please stop gaslighting us all about our child --" He's like, "That didn't happen." And I'm like, "It happened." (laugh)

Sally: It happened. We all remember it.

Emily: Four against one. (laugh)

Sally: Chris. Ugh.

Emily: Jesus. Anyway, that's a fun little aside.

Sally: (laugh) Um, so, uh ... relied on people with physical abnormalities -- abnormalities, and even after the, quote unquote, Age of Colonialism -- even though colonialism is still happening - - um, these shows, uh, still relied on people of color and more often -- and these people were often exhibited as unknown races, kind of playing off of this idea of the exotic other. Um, and P.T. Barnum and other circus people -- this is kind of a common thing -- would make up stories like these unknown races about these people.

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: So it's like, this person is, like, the first of his race, um, to be seen by the human eye. Or there's some guy who had a bunch of tattoos on him, and, like, the story -- his performer story was that he was kidnapped by a group of indigenous people and they gave him a choice to either be cut into small pieces or to have his entire body tattooed, so he elected to have his entire body tattooed and would tell these, like, stories about how long the process was and how gruesome the tattooing was and -- yeah.

Emily: Don't you think that's a no-brainer, though?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Between being tattooed and cut into little pieces? (laugh)

Sally: Yeah, I mean, of course. But it was just supposed to, like, add, like, sensationalism with these fantastical stories, um, for people as part of showmanship, which, um, I think we see a little bit of that legacy with Valan Luca here, kind of. Though he is not portraying racism, he's basically like, "Juilin, stop being so drunk." (laugh)

Emily: Oh, yeah.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: It's interesting -- I just think we talk a lot, um -- well, not us two, specifically, talk a lot -- but it's, like, a common thing where we talk about public executions in, like, the quote unquote, olden times. People are like, "How could people do that?"

Sally: Mm-hmm.



Emily: But it's just like, the displays and the sensationalism around the visibility of, like, gruesomeness --

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: And spectacle, in that way, have always been a thing and continue to be a thing. It's just now we're seeing it portrayed on Game of Thrones --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Rather than in real life.

Sally: Exactly.

Emily: You know, and for a while, in the nineteenth century, in the eighteenth century, it was, quote unquote, putting freaks on display.

Sally: Yes. Um, so we had these, quote unquote, unknown races, physical abnormalities, and they also often exhibited people with, um, intersex variations. And I couldn't really find anything on this, so this is me just speculating, but I imagine that is kind of where the prevalence of the bearded lady figure comes from, as kind of, like, an -- trope or almost archetype of the circus performer.

Emily: Right. Did you read all of the Series of Unfortunate Events books?

Sally: I never read a single Series of Unfortunate Events books.

Emily: I mean, good.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: I mean, I don't particularly -- lots of people have really fond memories of those books, and I just sort of feel a -- a vast blankness towards them.

Sally: Yeah. (laugh)

Emily: (laugh) I -- I don't remember liking them or disliking them. But I'm remembering there was this sort of, like, troupe of, um, villains --

Sally: Uh-huh.

Emily: Who followed Count Olaf, or whatever --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And they all sort of variously fell into these, quote unquote, like, freak show archetypes.

Sally: Mm.

Emily: I remember very specifically there was a character whose gender was non-specific and was never, I believe, given to us.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: And so you had these, like, weird, odd representations of people who we don't usually see represented, but because they were still in the category of villains, it is, like, anti-progressive.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So, just putting out there. (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) Looking at you, Lemony Snicket.

Emily: Lemony Snicket. I don't really know what was happening there.

Sally: Um, so a lot of these identity categories that were put on display as freaks are still, um, very common marginalized identity categories in today's world. Uh, not -- quote, unquote, non-white races -- but as Emily said, race is a social construct. Um --

Emily: And also, white people are, like, the minimum.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: There's so few white people compared to every other race.

Sally: Yeah, and, like, race is a social construct, like many things, but it has very real, um, impacts on people's lives, so I should maybe not say that so flippantly. Um, so people of color, um, queer people, and disabled people.

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: Um, so, uh, this combination freak show-circus sort of model, uh, ran from the nineteenth century into the twentieth century. Um, and they only began to stop and slow down as attitudes around disability began to change so that rather than being an object of gruesome fear and therefore curiosity, um, they became objects of sympathy. So, still not great attitudes towards, um, disability then or even now in this country, but, um, laws began to be passed outlawing freak shows and the exhibition of "any deformed human being or human monstrosity except as used for scientific purposes." That comes from a law passed in Michigan in 1931. Um, so this is kind of where we begin to see, like, the medical model of disability, um, arise. Um --

Emily: Yeah, I think it's interesting that that was at the same time that you're seeing a huge rise in the eugenics movement --

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Both in America and in Nazi Germany.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: And the experimentation on and forced sterilization of disabled and, quote unquote, othered bodies.

Sally: Yes, if you, um, did not know, the, uh, mass murder and genocide collectively known as the Holocaust actually began with the murder of disabled people in Nazi Germany as, like, state-sanctioned murder of people in, um, mental hospitals. Um, where they were just like, "These people don't have -- " Allegedly, they're like, "These people don't have anything to provide our country, so we're just fine killing them."

Emily: Yeah, it's just so -- it's interesting how the attitude seems to shift to "If we can't look at them --"

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Or "If we can't create entertainment from their bodies, then we will eliminate the bodies."

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Which is such a horrifying and disturbing notion.

Sally: Yeah, it's this very frightening shift where it's like -- yeah, the -- ugh. The eugenics movements in the, like, 1930s are deeply upsetting. Um, and so you get, kind of looking backwards into these freak shows, you get kind of two arguments coming up from people. Where it's like, people like P.T. Barnum were, like, taking advantage of these people and abusing them and profiting off of their misfortune. Um, and most of these people, especially at, like, the American Museum, were working, like, twelve- and fourteen-hour days. Um, and just, like, really long hours being exhibited to people. And then on the other side, you have this argument that, um, the freak show provided an opportunity for employment and, like, self, um -- I don't know what the word I'm looking for is. But the opportunity for employment and, like, being able to provide for themselves.

Emily: And, like, community, I guess.

Sally: Yeah. And community that, um, many -- or, actually, disabled people wouldn't have had at all otherwise.

Emily: Right. That would be the Hugh Jackman --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Lens of looking at --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Freak shows.

Sally: "We're providing, uh, space for the people." Um, and so -- I mean, I don't know the history well enough to provide my own opinion on the matter. I think it's just interesting that you get these kind of two things, and then you get them converging in the 1930s with, like, eugenics and the arrival -- the, like, emerging medical model of disability where, like, if there is something, quote unquote, wrong with the body, it needs to be fixed.

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: So, just interesting. Um, so circuses continued, of course. And this is random, but I just thought it was interesting -- that "in 1919, Vladimir Lenin expressed a wish for the circus to become the people's art form, with facilities and status on par with opera and ballet." So the USSR nationalized Russian circuses and opened training facilities, like the Moscow Circus School, which trained performers using methods developed from the Soviet gymnastics program. (laugh)

Emily: (laugh) OK.

Sally: And it just is, like, so random. But I think that's also where, like -- most media that portrays a circus has at least, like, one or two Russian characters, so I wonder if, like, that's where --

Emily: Huh. That's funny.

Sally: That comes from as well.

Emily: The Russian circus. (laugh)

Sally: Yeah. (laugh) So -- just random. Um, so P.T. Barnum's Ringling Brothers ran for 146 years, which I did not know, and it only ended in 2017.

Emily: Yeah, I remember that.

Sally: Yeah. Crazy.

Emily: That was, like, right when the Greatest Showman came out, too.

Sally: And everyone was like, "P.T. Barnum!"

Emily: Like, "Oh my God! It's Hugh Jackman!" And I was like, shut up.

Sally: (laugh) Shut -- yeah, shut up. Um, so circuses still happen today, but, um, most common -- the ones you see the most of -- are contemporary circus or nouveau cirque, which is more of a performing arts movement that utilizes traditional circus skills but are more focused on aesthetics and storytelling, like Cirque du Soleil.

Emily: Mm.

Sally: Um, and they often take place in theaters rather than, like, outdoor arenas. So you'd see Cirque du Soleil in Las Vegas --

Emily: Right.

Sally: Not, like, the county fair grounds. Maybe you'd see Cirque du Soleil at the county fair grounds. I don't know. Um, and so animal acts rarely appear in contemporary circus, unlike traditional circus, where they often played, um, huge roles. And so I think kind of the two big ethical things that people juggle with circus is, like, the freak show and human rights aspect and then the animal rights aspect of it.

Emily: Well, which I think are directly tied to each other.

Sally: Yes.

Emily: When you, um, create an atmosphere wherein animals are, like -- where you're creating, like -- animals can be not just looked at but also abused, then you're also creating a space wherein we can other humans and put them in the same category as animals.

Sally: Yeah, I think it's not necessarily by accident that "the Elephant Man" was called "the Elephant Man," because that --

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Is turning him into an animal.

Emily: Yeah, of course.

Sally: Um. So, like Emily's saying, there's lots of controversy surrounding animals in circuses, and I think most of it is correct.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Um, with allegations of animal abuse in order to get animals to perform. And, in fact, "in 2008, a university in the Netherlands did an investigation into the welfare -- welfare of circus animals and discovered that 71 percent of observed animals had medical problems and that the elephants in the circus spent an average of 10 hours a day showing abnormal behaviors that would not occur for elephants in the wild." Um, and the animal welfare -- welfare -- I don't know why that word is so hard for me -- animal welfare training I've had to do, um, working in a

zoological institution, emphasizes constantly the importance of caretakers providing environments for animals to exhibit species-specific natural-occurring behaviors. So it's very alarming and scary that the elephants were spending such massive parts of their day doing behaviors that would not occur in the wild. And often they're, like, stress behaviors like swinging their trunk back and forth or pacing.

Emily: Oh, gosh.

Sally: Um, so scary. Um, so there's also -- like, it's -- we see this in the Fires of Heaven with, like, an animal attack with the elephant, like, plowing through.

Emily: Mm.

Sally: And a lot of people will be like, "Circus animals are dangerous because sometimes they attack people," and it's like, they're attacking people, if they do, because they're in distress.

Emily: Right.

Sally: So. Um, so these days, um, there are nation-wide bans on using some if not all animals in circuses in 35 different countries in the world, and nine more, including the U.S., have various local restrictions on bans -- or bans -- local restrictions or bans on animals in entertainment. Uh, Bolivia has banned all use of animals in circuses, calling circuses "an act of cruelty." And Greece has also banned any use at all of animals in circuses. Um, so pretty unusual to see animals in the circus today. Pretty unusual to see anything resembling a traditional circus today.

Emily: I have a memory, as a child, of going to a circus, like, in a tent. With --

Sally: Mm-hmm. I have that memory too.

Emily: With my family. Yeah, now I'm like, did it really happen?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Or do -- was I -- am I projecting from various things I've seen on TV?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But I'm pretty sure we did, and I think there were some animals.

Sally: Yeah, I think you'll see a lot of, like, horses --

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: And dogs. And I went to a circus -- I think it probably was in 2017; it might have been -- even been a Ringling Brothers circus -- I went with a friend who's writing about a circus. Um,

and there were big cats, which are one of the, like, major calls for animal cruelty, 'cause, like, they're forced to jump through, like, rings of fire, and of course animals are afraid of fire.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: And stuff like that. So I think you'll -- if you do see anything -- and it was, like, that weird horse show that was at South Towne Mall for forever. Do you remember that?

Emily: I don't -- yeah, it was so weird.

Sally: It was, like, Utah's big obsession for, like, six months. Um. So I don't know -- again, I haven't done a ton of research. This is mostly just some Wikipedia skimming. So I don't know a ton about circuses, enough to say that circus training can be done without vast animal cruelty or if circuses are just across the board bad. Um, but I've seen a lot of bird training as part of my job? Um, both -- both, like, for the bird show and just part of enrichment to keep species in captivity, uh, mentally stimulated, they'll do training behaviors with animal -- with various animals. So it'll just be, like, um, training them to hop on the scale when they need to be weighed, or training them to do this, or we have a few birds that are, like, trained to pick up, um, plastic bottles on grounds and recycle them in blue recycle containers. So, like, just neat little things. So, um, no one at the Aviary has ever hurt one of the birds trying to train it, so. I think it can happen.

Emily: (laugh) I think it's really interesting that, of course, you have this version of the circus in Robert Jordan's fantasy world --

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Which is at its most sanitized --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, regarding, you know, humans and the display of humans because rather than having people who are on display for their differences, we have people who are putting their skills on display.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: We have Thom eating fire and juggling, which, of course, is very impressive. Elayne and, um, Juilin are performing as acrobats without actually channeling to support them --

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Which is incredibly impressive, and I don't really believe they'd be able to do it in, what, the three weeks they've been with the circus?

Sally: Yeah, Elayne is, like, cartwheeling on a tightrope? No.

Emily: Yeah, like, as Nynaeve pointed out, I'd be able to believe it of Juilin, who spends much much of his -- spent much of his upbringing and, like, time --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Going around on scary high places.

Sally: Yeah, rooftops and stuff.

Emily: But Elayne's just, like, doing cartwheels and backflips and shit.

Sally: I don't believe it.

Emily: And it's like --

Sally: I don't buy it for a second.

Emily: Girl. What?

Sally: What a Mary Sue. (laugh)

Emily: (laugh) Yeah, and you have, like, what's his name, Petra the strong man, who's basically just, like, weight-lifting --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Like, cartwheeling with a dumbbell --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And whatever. But then, of course, you also have, like, the side that people who -- human rights activists, of course, might, like, skim over this and be like, "Alright, it's fine." But if you're at all attuned to the idea of, like, animal rights and the idea that animal rights are inherently connected with human rights, and they sort of feed each other, then of course, this circus isn't as utopic -- utopic as it might appear.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Because you -- as we've said, have animals that are way, way outside of their natural habitats --

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Like the elephants.

Sally: Mm-hmm.



Emily: And other ones, who are just, like, doing tricks and things, and we're not really seeing much into their, like, training procedures because Nynaeve and Elayne don't care about that stuff. But we can imagine that those aren't necessarily the healthiest.

Sally: Yeah, especially with, um, elephants. Elephants are a complicated species for humans to live in close proximity to -- with anyway just because they are so big. Like, there is just, like, per elephant, the amount of territory they need to be considered, like, healthy space, is just, like, massive. Is just, like, huge. So, like, there's, like, this rating that comes out in, like, the zoological community, and it's like, the ten worst facilities for elephants or whatever. Everyone constantly is like, "Why do you produce this list when, like, elephants just are held to hold in captivity like this, and we need to kind of, like, transition from having them away from zoos," but elephants are such, like, charismatic megafauna that people go to zoos and they want to see elephants.

Emily: Right.

Sally: So it's just, like, very complicated thing, but a lot of people are just like, "It's -- we just can't really have elephants on exhibit. We just can't do it healthily for them." And you see, like, this happening here where they're in these, like, small places. But also, like, in circuses, because elephants are so big, like, they can -- it's very hard for a small human to, like, exercise control over them. So, like, one of the cruelest instruments in circus history is this thing called a bull hook, which is just, like, um, a rod with, like, a curved kind of knife on the end of it, and they would just, like, hit the elephants behind the ears with it to make the elephants do -- like, on -- behind the ears and, I think, on the legs -- to make the elephants do what they wanted them to. So it's just like, they're hard species for humans to live with and do things with. Like, they're very gentle, generally speaking, but they're also big. When was the last time you saw an elephant? They're fucking huge.

Emily: Well, and I think it's also an interesting version of sanitization here that Robert Jordan has, like, put these -- this nuclear family of elephants here.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: There's a mom and a dad and a baby elephant.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: So he's like, "It's the most wholesome version of animal cruelty that can possibly exist."

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: "Don't worry about it." Because to portray anything else, he just doesn't have the time or space or interest for it, and he's trying to portray the circus as a refuge for our human characters.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: And it's just like, circuses are way more complicated than that.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And to, like, kind of wash over the really disturbing and distressing parts of their historical, like, place is, you know, to whitewash them, in a way.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um.

Sally: Yeah. But it's one of -- it's one of many things that Robert Jordan is like, "I'm just gonna put this very complicated topic into the middle of my vast fantasy series with, like, a bajillion words and not dedicate any time to it and just kind of let it function however it functions."

Emily: Yeah, because circuses have become this thing that's just like, oh, it's a genre --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: That we can, like, pick and choose from. Along with other things, like, I dunno, what are other famous genres? Like pirates --

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: And, um ... now I can't remember literally any other genre that's ever existed. (laugh)

Sally: Well, it's like, you've got pirates, the circus, you've got the, like, medieval court. You've got --

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Um.

Emily: Interactions with desert folk. (laugh) That's sort of like a genre -- Dune.

Sally: Dune. We've got Dune. (laugh)

Emily: You've got the Dune genre, and it's all just like, these are all intensely complicated --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, genres of their own right, but when you're like, I'm just gonna, like, throw them all in combination and just use them as, like, my set pieces --

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: My backdrops, then of course you're going to do them a disservice of, like, not examining them closely.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: There's so much more to piracy than dudes stealing shit.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Pirates had gay marriage and democracy! Why aren't we talking about that?

Sally: Pirates really were ahead of the game.

Emily: (laugh) Pirates were, like, doing it.

Sally: Pirates were like, "Here are our staples: Fuck the monarchy." (laugh)

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: "Fuck capitalism."

Emily: I mean, pirates were doing murder a whole lot, but they were also --

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Like, the real comrades of the era.

Sally: Which is, like, why it's a complicated thing. It's like, yes, they were doing all these socially progressive things, but then they were, like, keelhauling. (laugh)

Emily: Yeah. Keelhauling. Don't -- ugh.

Sally: Don't Google it. (laugh)

Emily: Don't fucking Google it, and don't watch the episode of Black Sails about keelhauling. I'm scarred for life. Whatever. (sigh) So that's the sort of thesis of this episode. Of course, then we switch over to Nynaeve meeting Uno at the circus, but that's a fairly brief conversation --

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: In which Nynaeve is like, "Uno?" and Uno's like, "Who the fuck are you?"

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: And she's like, "Nynaeve? I was with Rand?" and he's like, "Oh." And immediately tries to, like, drag her somewhere where they can talk.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And so you have this sort of comedic scene where Uno is sort of monologuing to Nynaeve and swearing every other word and for, like --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Pulling -- towing her along when she's like, "What -- the fuck? What's happening?" (laugh)

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: "I don't even know you, and now you're taking me somewhere."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: "Don't go to a second location."

Sally: "You're not getting -- taking me to any secondary location!"

Emily: "You're not taking me to any secondary location!" (laugh)

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Um, but finally she's like, "What -- what's happening?" and he's like -- he's like, "You can't, like -- people here are crazy about, you know, Rand, essentially. And if they find out that you're at all related to him, then that could be really dangerous for you." And of course they have the whole -- uh, they have the beginning of the, um, swearing every other sentence. (laugh)

Sally: Yeah, so Uno's, like, counting his sentences while he talks.

Emily: I know. She's like, "Oh my God." It's one of the genuinely funny scenes --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: That Robert Jordan actually meant to be funny.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So, like, it can be done.

Sally: I mean, taking that, if Nynaeve was going to have to end up with a man older than her, Uno would have been a very funny match for her. (laugh)

Emily: So funny. (laugh) And he's great!

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: He's hilarious. But he's, like -- I don't think at the end he says he's going to take her to Masema, does he?

Sally: Well, he's like -- he's like, "Maybe we should -- like, you should maybe see what's going on, but also, it's after night, and it's, like, really scary for women," and Nynaeve's like, "Why do men always think they have to protect women?"

Emily: She's like, "Let's go."

Sally: And he's like, "You could be snatched." (laugh)

Emily: "You could be snatched. It's just me." Yeah, and as we are going to learn in the next chapters, this really is a very unsafe city.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Partly because Masema is in power --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: In this city. That's what we'll talk about next time, I think, as we get into meeting Masema, in terms of, like, what is a cult? (laugh)

Sally: There we go. (laugh)

Emily: Is Masema leading a cult? (whisper) Yes.

Sally: Yes.

Emily: Super -- super much.

Sally: Yes. (laugh)

Emily: And, like, what the heck is going on?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Are the Whitecloaks a cult? (whisper) Yes.

Sally: Yes.

Emily: And so we have two --

Sally: Is the military a cult?

Emily: (whisper) Yes.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: It really, really is.

Sally: No, the military is so frightening.

Emily: Are you in a cult? Probably.

Sally: Are we all in a cult?

Emily: Most religions are cults. They just have a franchise.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: I think Taliesin Jaffe said that in the most recent episode of Critical Role. (laugh) Don't -- don't credit that to me. Um, so that's what you learned about the circuses.

Sally: Kind of a very quick and dirty cover of the circus.

Emily: No, that was great, I think.

Sally: Thanks.

Emily: I learned a lot. And you learned a lot, I hope. And now we know all about the circuses.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: And I'm back to being -- (laugh) so sleepy.

Sally: (laugh) Emily's being a little wacky.

Emily: I have to go put my eyedrop -- okay. Thank you for listening.

Sally: Yes.

Emily: Thank you to Glynna MacKenzie for our theme song. Thank you for, um, bearing with me when Sally was out of town. Do you have a sign-off?

Sally: I do. This one was hinted at at the off -- aforementioned Windwaker livestream, but my family vacation, we had to pull over at a gas station in Shoshone, Idaho, to do my brother and sister-in-law's gender reveal for their baby. Um, because they were, like, worried -- they wanted my mom and I to look at the results they got from the -- 'cause they did one of the blood tests to get it done earlier than, like, an ultrasound would have. Um, so they wanted us to look at the blood tests, and then we would pick the color of this, like, huge confetti cannon thing. And then they would pull it. And they were like, "We won't have service up at the lake, so we want to do it now." And we were like, "OK." So my mom, being very sweet, was like, "Sally, you've made me think a lot about it," and I was like, "Have I?" (laugh) She was like, "I -- we need to put down a blanket so we can just clean it up really easy and none of the birds get hurt by the confetti," and I was like, "Oh, Mom, that is so sweet." So she and I, not expecting to do this at a gas station in Shoshone, Idaho, were, like, digging frantically through the car for the confetti cannon thing and blankets. So we finally just pull out some beach towels, we find the confetti cannon, we go over, and I, like, hand one to both my brother and my sister-in-law, 'cause there

was two, and so I was like, “You probably both want to know, right?” And, like, I’m getting prepared to film it, and my almost-two-year-old nephew just takes off running down an alleyway. (laugh) And Shanna -- my sister-in-law -- was like, “It’s fine,” and the rest of us were like, “I know you’re very excited, but it is not fine.” So I, like, throw the phone at my mom to film it, and I’m, like, sprinting down this little, like, farm alleyway to get my nephew, and I throw him over my shoulder, and I’m like, “We need to go back.” They’ve already popped the confetti cannon. Surprise! They’re having a boy. But the confetti is gigantic --

Emily: Ugh.

Sally: And there is also so much of it. Like, we probably covered, like, a 20-square-foot of grass in this gas station lawn in confetti. So, like, the little towel that my mom put out didn’t even, like, catch any of it ‘cause it was, like, up in the trees and in the bushes, and so, like, all of us are, like, down in the gravel picking up pieces of confetti, ‘cause they were just like, “Maybe we should just leave it,” and I was like, “We cannot leave this much blue confetti. We’d be monsters.” So, like, my nephew’s still running down the alleyway. We’re all taking turns chasing after him. (laugh) And I just have, like, pocketfuls of confetti ‘cause I’m trying to pick it up as fast as I can. And I have to pee so bad.

Emily: (laugh)

Sally: They would not let me go to the bathroom. (laugh) ‘Cause they were like, “It’ll just take a minute,” and I was like, “I’m gonna pee my pants all over this blue confetti.” Anyway, it was a fascinating experience. Um.

Emily: Bread and circuses. (laugh)

Sally: Wouldn’t necessarily recommend it. (laugh)

Emily: Thanks for listening. (laugh)

Sally: Yeah. (laugh)

Emily: Don’t do war crimes.

Sally: Don’t -- don’t do war crimes.

Emily: Goodbye!