

SETH: Hello there Zyxx fans, it's Seth with our monthly release leading up to *The Young Old Derf Chronicles* this month, suggested by Kajj Celsius over on the *Mission to Zyxx* Discord, who said, quote, "I don't have a clever title, but like, I always love hearing people talk about their hobbies or passion projects."

[jaunty *Ocean's Eleven*-esque music begins underscoring Seth]

SETH: Well, Kajj Celsius, you do have a clever title because it's right in your pitch here. I hereby present the first, the final episode of *Passion to Zyxx*, in which not one, not three, but two past guests will detail their niche hobbies/passions to cast members.

[music picks up]

SETH: Not to say that we, the cast members ourselves, don't have our own such hobbies. I have a not-so-secret LEGO addiction spawned from finding a misprint Princess Leia LEGO hairpiece that was somehow worth \$450 and sent me down a deep and expensive hole into LEGO. Allie has been known to Geocache with the best of them, Jeremy was once deep into roller derby culture as a referee, and Moujan definitely does not participate in an underground dominoes league. As she would say, don't worry about it. Don't worry about it.

That list goes on, but today it's all about the past guests, two fan favorites, two cast favorites, and their obsessions. Later in the episode, Moujan will talk with Rachel Wenitsky, also known as Marf in the Zyxx world, about a not-so-common collecting habit that she has. But first, we're going to kick things off with Leslie Collins, aka the one and only Ms. Janelle Fitzmeyer, who spoke with our very own Jeremy Bent.

[music ends]

LESLIE: [as Janelle] Oh, hello. How are you?

JEREMY: [chuckling] I'm doing great now.

LESLIE: So nice to talk to you today.

JEREMY: A pleasure to talk to you as well. Leslie, you and I have known each other for a long, like we were on a musical improv team together many years ago.

LESLIE: [in normal voice] I know, like, really long time ago, like fifteen or more years.

JEREMY: Yeah, like I was thinking about it and I was like, I don't like any of these numbers. It was a while ago.

LESLIE: And I go back with Moujan as well because we were on a mod team at UCB together.

JEREMY: Oh, that's right!

LESLIE: So I think that's actually how I came into the fold is that y'all had a cancellation of somebody last minute.

JEREMY: We did.

LESLIE: And Moujan or you were like, hey, come and sit in. And I was like, I don't know what I'm doing, but sure.

JEREMY: Yeah, we were doing a live show in LA during season... while we were recording season two. And we had one recording session booked with Rekha Shankar. And then we had one with somebody else who I could name, but I won't.

LESLIE: It was probably like a famous person. And then you're like, well, we'll find somebody who'll be sloppy seconds. And I was like, I was happy to be sloppy seconds.

JEREMY: But he canceled literally day of. And I was like, hey, Leslie's in town. She's great! And we were like, okay, if she's available. And not only were you, you became like a beloved character in the Zyxx canon. Worked out great.

LESLIE: Y'all were really sweet. And I had so much fun. She was a fun character. And she... I was just playing my friend Julie, it was... I was just playing her mom. Her mom in my ear always sounds like that.

JEREMY: Well, it struck a chord because she is a character that people really seem to enjoy—

LESLIE: Yay!

JEREMY: —and we've brought her back to much acclaim from Zyxx fans. But Ms Janelle is not the focus today. Today, we are talking about one of your very real passions. And I know this because I've known you for a long time and you are *into* this.

LESLIE: Yes.

JEREMY: And I don't know that I've ever really talked to you about this. Today, we are talking about your passion, your love of the sport of sumo wrestling.

LESLIE: That's right. Sumo. Yeah.

JEREMY: Sumo. Now, I think I might be the best Zyxx cast member to interview you about this because I studied Japanese in college. I took a year of Japanese at Boston University.

LESLIE: [speaking Japanese excitedly] ああ、本当に！

JEREMY: I almost got a, like East Asian studies minor because I took modern Japanese history and I took... Culture of the Samurai was a class that my Japanese teacher taught.

LESLIE: Amazing!

JEREMY: I took Japanese Cinema in Translation. So I'm reasonably well familiar with Japanese culture. My Japanese is very bad as I have not practiced it in close to 25 years.

LESLIE: That's okay! I've also been brushing up because last year I went to Japan, but I was I had hopes of speaking more in Japanese, but I just clammed up whenever I was anywhere close to a wrestler, I acted like a... a freaked-out fan and did not use any of my skills.

JEREMY: But you did spend quite a bit of time in Japan, if I'm not mistaken.

LESLIE: Yes, I did. I spent about a year, but it was so many years ago. So I think I was twenty-three or twenty-four, twenty-five, somewhere in that range. So it was like twenty-five years ago. Now you can put math together and be like "she old." So I worked for Tokyo Disney. It was like my very first paying professional gig or one of them.

JEREMY: Exciting.

LESLIE: It was very exciting. Right out of college, I studied musical theater. So I went over there to sing and dance, and I was hired just basically to be an American in this... this Big Band show where we sang Big Band music from yesteryear and we tap danced at the same time. And the Japanese do everything with honor and perfection and excellence. So, you know, you normally go to a theme park here and all the music's canned. You know, it's like they push play and like you're dancing and... there we had a seventeen-piece—

JEREMY: They wouldn't dare.

LESLIE: They wouldn't dare. They would not. They did not. They put a seventeen-piece orchestra with us on stage—

JEREMY: Wow.

LESLIE: —and we tap danced and we would do this in the middle of typhoons that would come through, it was like partially outdoors, which was kind of dangerous.

JEREMY: Yeah! [laughter]

LESLIE: But anyway, I did that. And when I was there, we had basically a minder, an American Kid minder, meaning like the guy that lived in the American village and he was Japanese. His name was, like, Hide-San. That's what we called him. And he was—he would teach Japanese classes to us. This was like before the Internet, I swear.

JEREMY: Yeah, yeah.

LESLIE: So it's like he had to do it old school. And I remember looking at a book and being like, "I don't know how to pronounce this reading a book. How am I going to learn?" So Hide-San was responsible for keeping us in line—late at night—because we were a bunch of Americans and we were living in like a nice Japanese neighborhood with other actual Japanese families. And of course, a bunch of a-hole-like kids from the States who have never been wild and free are all over in Japan, all horny, all trying to get drunk, all trying to, like, do all the things you're not supposed to do. And he... that was not me, by the way. I was not one of those kids.

JEREMY: Uh huh.

LESLIE: No, for real.

JEREMY: No, I believe it.

LESLIE: I was like, sweet, young, virginal, innocent, like everything. I was like, I'm just here to be a Disney thing. And so Hide-San would take us under his wing. And he would also, for those of us that were interested, take us to certain places around town and translate and kind of get us into Japanese culture, show us the customs.

So anyway, he took a few of us to see a sumo tournament. And sumo at that time, this was like '98, '99, was huge because there was kind of like a resurgence because there were two American guys who were at the top of the ranks over there called Yokozuna. They were from Hawaii and like American Samoa.

JEREMY: Sure, sure.

LESLIE: And their names were Akebono and Musashimaru. And they were Yokozunas. So that is... in the sport, that's like the best of the best.

JEREMY: Oh... That's like being like a chess grandmaster.

LESLIE: Yes. And you make the most money, you're never supposed to lose, and at that time, there were also two brothers who happened to be Yokozuna. So there were four Yokozuna. And right now there's... there's actually two, but like ones... they're both very new.

JEREMY: Right.

LESLIE: You usually only have one or two at any given time, sometimes none, because it's a very hard rank to achieve. So at that point, there were four Yokozuna. Two of them were American and two were brothers, the Wakanohana and Takanohana.

JEREMY: Amazing.

LESLIE: And I say their names because in sumo, they have what's called *shikona*, which is a ring name. So it's not their name they're born with, but it's their fighting ring name.

JEREMY: It's sort of like American professional wrestling.

LESLIE: Yeah. It's like "The Terminator!" or "Crazy Wind!" or "Running Horse!" or whatever. So it's kind of fun when you learn, like, what they're... like, Fuji, you hear a lot, that could be mountain... or Kaze is wind. So they all... they have, like, the translations like Strong Wind. So I got into the sport then and when I saw it in person and what's amazing about it, what I loved is it's very easy to follow. It's the first guy who hits the dirt or the first guy out of this like four and a half meter circle.

JEREMY: Yeah.

LESLIE: There are no weight classes. So the big guys can go up against the little guys. And you would think that the big guy is always going to crush the little guy, but he doesn't. Oftentimes the little guy sweeps his legs out from under him. So it was easy for me without understanding, you know, Japanese, like who won and who lost. And there's so much tradition. Japan has like, like at any given time, there's a bunch of religions that they practice there.

JEREMY: Yeah.

LESLIE: But a lot of sumo is steeped in Shinto religion, like ritual.

JEREMY: Yeah.

LESLIE: So their hairstyles, their loincloth they wear, which is called the mawashi, the kesho-mawashi, which is the big apron they wear when they do the ring entering ceremony. All of this in the rituals that they do before and after the bouts have like a connection to Japanese history and culture, religion. And I was like, I got to know more.

JEREMY: Yeah. It's like, their religion is very ceremonial, but like just their culture in general is extremely big on ceremony and sort of following traditions.

LESLIE: Customs...

JEREMY: And like, the Japanese tea ceremony is like famously a very long and involved thing, and it's very beautiful, but it has all these steps and they take like two to three hours if I'm remembering correctly?

LESLIE: Yeah.

JEREMY: And so it's no surprise that like, yeah, sumo, which is, you know, one of a few sort of sports national to Japan is like, is very similar where there's a lot of ritual. If you're there for the first time, you're like, "why are they doing this?" And then after you

go for a couple of times, you're like, "well, they can't start until they do this. This is extremely important."

LESLIE: Right. Right. Exactly. So there's so much to discover in it. And so, yeah, I had been a fan then. And then, you know, like I said, the internet and streaming and all that wasn't around, so I couldn't watch again.

JEREMY: Yeah. So when you got back to the States, you had to sort of give it up a little bit.

LESLIE: Yeah. For many years, like fourteen years till I found the NHK World News Network, which is like Japanese PBS, which is great. If you ever want to go to sleep, you can find any documentary that—or Japanese television show. There's some crazy stuff on there because the Japanese do have incredibly crazy and delightful TV shows.

JEREMY: Their game shows are—

LESLIE: Game shows are, like, unbelievable, but they also have very calming shows about ice making or like persimmons in Kyoto. You know, it's just like you could fall asleep and turn it on and it's just very calming. So I found the NHK World News Network. You can get it on your Roku or Apple TV. And then they have Grand Sumo Highlights. So...

JEREMY: Ah!

LESLIE: Yeah! And they have English commentating, which was huge for me because I kind of understood, but I didn't understand all of it. I didn't understand the sport, how it was breaking down. I didn't know the guys' names as much. And so then I got really back into it and I could watch... there's six tournaments a year. There's actually one going on right now and they're fifteen days long. So every day for fifteen days, you can get a thirty minute highlight reel and with English commentary. So I started to watch that, and then I learned a lot more about the sport.

And then as I was doing that, I lived at home because it was the pandemic. And my sister came through the living room and she was like, "why are you always watching these guys?" [laughter] And I was like, "this TV is the only one that has the Roku on it so I gotta watch it in the living room." And my sister got into it as well! She started to get real curious. And at the time there was a wrestler who was the greatest—he was actually from Mongolia originally, one of the greatest wrestlers of all time, the most winning wrestler of all time, the Muhammad Ali of sumo, but he's Mongolian. So he doesn't get the full respect because he's not Japanese. But his name was Hakaho.

JEREMY: Which is another aspect of Japanese culture...

LESLIE: Yes. They are homogenous and he was not one of them, but no matter what the case was, he won like sixty-five tournaments over his career.

JEREMY: Dang!

LESLIE: Nobody could beat this guy. I can go on a whole other tangent about Mongolian Boke wrestling.

JEREMY: We might have to save that for a future segment.

LESLIE: [laughter] Anyway, so she kind of fell in love with him. And it's easy to fall in love with these guys. They're big, they're strong, they're muscular. They don't all look like butterballs, you know. A lot of them are like... massive traps. So then she got into it. And then we decided, out of the boredom and the time that we had, to start a podcast. And then we've been doing a podcast every week for the last, I think, five years. We have 267, I don't even know, episodes.

JEREMY: You're way ahead of Zyxx.

LESLIE: I mean, I'm amazed I do it every week, but here I am. Every week I break down some aspect of the sport or I break down like what's this wrestler all about? What's his style? All that kind of stuff. So I have become, oddly, I wouldn't say I'm a complete expert, but I would say, yeah, I might be an expert. I'm, like, working my way to be an expert in this sport.

JEREMY: This is similar to like, I don't consider myself a Eurovision expert. I think my co-host Dimitry might qualify as a true Eurovision expert. But as an American, I know more than probably 99% of Americans about Eurovision.

LESLIE: Yeah, I did see your Eurovision pictures and I was like, I need to go. That looks amazing.

JEREMY: Oh yeah. And the same way, it's like for probably 99.9% of Americans, you know way more about sumo. So yeah, like you become an expert.

LESLIE: Yeah, it's crazy.

JEREMY: Had your sister been to Japan before she started watching sumo with you?

LESLIE: No, my sister's funny in this way. When she gets into something, she's like, oh, I'm getting into that. So when she watched a bunch of Lord of the Rings movies, she got so into Peter Jackson. She was like, I think I'm going to go to New Zealand to get my master's in documentary filmmaking. And she did, right?

JEREMY: Wow!

LESLIE: She's just like, you know what? I'm really interested in reiki. And then she gets herself certified in reiki. You know, like she just has this ability to go get into something and excel at it. She's just a brainiac. So we complement each other well, because I had lived there. I hadn't been back since until this last year. We both went this last year. And we have a following online, so like, it was really fun for us to continue kind of bringing like that kind of experience from us, Japan, seeing the tournament and to our listeners. So she went with me then.

But we make a nice combo because we both edit, we both have different perspectives on it. But she really likes to get into the nitty gritty of the actual techniques and what's called *kimarite*. That's the way somebody could bring down an opponent. There's like, I don't know, eighty-two. I don't know. There's like a bunch of different ways you could make somebody fall down to the ground or out of the circle.

And so she likes, kind of the technical body aspect of things like why, why this guy pulls this way with his right arm and all the gravitation. [rattling] Sorry, that's my dog who insists on coming in.

JEREMY: That's okay!

LESLIE: I wouldn't say I bring the personality. She has personality too. But like, I have different interests. Like every sumo wrestler sings. Did you know that they all do... did you know that they all do karaoke?

JEREMY: Everyone?

LESLIE: Every single one of them.

JEREMY: That's amazing.

LESLIE: And imagine that.

JEREMY: I had no idea about that. Yeah.

LESLIE: So what happens, like, the Japanese love karaoke, right?

JEREMY: They love it.

LESLIE: It's like part of their culture. So every time they go to an event, like these guys are asked to just hold a microphone and be like, we're going to turn on the karaoke machine and we need you to sing. And there is a strong tradition of sumo singing within this ancient sport. They live monastically, like in what's called a stable. And when they're younger, they don't have rights. Basically they have to go higher up in the ranks to be able to have more privileges. So they hang around the stable and then they play video games. They sleep there, they eat there, they do everything together, but they have to go to sumo school and they have to learn about all their traditions and all those

sumo songs. So not all of them are great singers, but surprisingly, many of them are. Imagine going to see like, I don't know, Travis Kelsey and everywhere he goes, they hand him a microphone and then they're like, okay, go ahead and sing me a Frank Sinatra song.

JEREMY: Yeah. He does a bunch of jazz standards and you're like, huh! Okay.

LESLIE: It's really fun. And they have like, so there's... sumo always has events, like fan events. They have a belly touching event where the guys go, there's all these fans that are there. They all sing songs, they play games or they do all these, like, things that totally please fans. And then at the end of the two hours of the, you know, asking questions, them singing songs, and games, the crowd is allowed to go through one by one and touch the belly of a sumo wrestler.

JEREMY: That's so funny.

LESLIE: So half of the stuff we talk about is not always the technicality of like sumo and during the tournaments it is, it's all the sport, but between the tournaments, it's like they do all kinds of silly events and there's always news. There's always scandal. There's always stuff like that. So there's plenty of stuff to talk about. And we have our fans write poetry songs because we have a Valentine's day episode.

JEREMY: Aww!

LESLIE: So it's like, there's a lot of people who are really into the sport and they follow us and they—they love the fluff.

JEREMY: Have you ever talked about... cause I, this is one thing I know about sumo having read the book *Freakonomics*, where they talk about high-ranked sumo throwing matches to each other so that they don't lose standing?

LESLIE: Oh yeah, match fixing. Well, that happened for many, many years. They say it doesn't happen now, but I have a hard time believing that. So the guys have to hold a rank of it's called, I won't get too technical. It's called kachi-koshi. It means that within fifteen days, they have more wins than losses.

JEREMY: Right. Okay. You have to have a positive win/loss.

LESLIE: Right. And if they don't, they have what's called a maki-koshi. So if you get a kachi-koshi, that means you go up in rank, like maybe one or two levels, but that means you have, like, a better chance of making more money. You have a better way to... getting all the way up to the top of the rankings where you're, you're the big baller. Right? So, um, this is what would happen is somebody who is a high ranking guy, uh, he might have a buddy cause they all know each other very well—

JEREMY: Of course, they all went to sumo school.

LESLIE: Right. They all know each other well. In the old days they would be like, "Hey man, you already have your kachi-koshi and I'm at seven and seven. If you kind of lose this one today—"

JEREMY: Yeah, you're at ten and four, so like...

LESLIE: "—I'll throw you some cash and then I will have my kachi-koshi and I'll keep my rank" because you don't want to lose rank because then you lose money. But the thing is there was a huge scandal that's come up a number of times about match fixing. There was a Yokozuna of yesteryear who got kicked out because of that.

JEREMY: Oh wow.

LESLIE: Oh yeah. There's been a lot of scandal, but the crazy thing is, is that they say it doesn't happen. And you really do watch it sometimes. We're like, okay, it makes sense that that match might've been fixed, but they have been watched so much by the Japanese public who does not like any of that funny business. Guys have died in this sport due to harassment. Like it has been brutal in the past and the Japanese public's like, "no, no, no. Maybe in the past y'all were cool with that. Not anymore."

JEREMY: Yeah.

LESLIE: So they really are much better about it, but does it probably happen? Yeah, there's... sometimes I watch and I'm like, "eh, that guy didn't look like he was trying as hard as I know he could." But then there's always something with injuries too that you're never aware of.

JEREMY: Yeah. I was going to say, I was like, I can't imagine that sport is kind to the body.

LESLIE: No. I mean, they eat a lot because they have to. They have what's called shanko nabe. Every time they practice in the morning for three hours, they go, they get cleaned up, they have this massive meal, and then they take a nap. And that's how they put on the weight. And by the way, the weight is not always the case for every wrestler. Some guys are like, yeah, morbidly obese. And it takes a toll on their body. Years later, they die younger than most people. But some other guys, they don't eat quite as much, but they still have to be big.

JEREMY: Yeah.

LESLIE: There's so much muscle underneath that. So they have to kind of eat like that and, and work out like that.

JEREMY: Well, I don't know, like... any sort of implication of not trying your hardest would, would naturally turn off a Japanese audience. But like, I do think it makes sumo more interesting to know that there's this, like, behind the scenes sort of like... mm...

LESLIE: Oh yeah. I mean, and it's no, it's no secret. The sumo association in the past—the Yakuza, which is the Japanese mafia, can be everywhere. And in this old sport, um, yeah, it, they used to sometimes be in bed with gambling and, and Yakuza activities.

JEREMY: I'm assuming people bet on sumo matches.

LESLIE: Yes. And the wrestlers, you know, they're under the thumb of their coach, which is called an *oyakata*. So there's all these different stables, kind of whatever environment each stable is. How would you know what's right or what's wrong? If you came into the sport at fifteen, like how would you know a world without harassment or what they call power harassment, which is basically hazing? How would you know a world where match fixing is wrong? If everyone around you is doing it and your Oikata looks the other way, or is part of it.

JEREMY: And plus, guys you've looked up to, or who taught you growing up are like, "ah, yeah, you know sometimes you throw a match, you know, sometimes it's fine."

LESLIE: "It's fine!"

JEREMY: "It's no big deal."

LESLIE: And your... your coach was an old wrestler. So that's the way it works. He just comes from the older generation where things were tougher and more, you know, more loosey goosey when it comes to that. So these young kids don't always know, you know, but I'd say overall today, you, you don't, you don't see it as much. The punishment is extremely strict for any, any, any stepping away...

JEREMY: That's also very Japanese... Yes.

LESLIE: I mean, if there's any sort of lying, if there's any sort of breaking of the rules, especially during COVID, like you get canceled from the sport.

JEREMY: Yeah. Few Japanese celebrities of any stripe bounce back from scandal in Japan.

LESLIE: Right. They don't, they don't. They're just like, bye. Yeah. It's a pretty tough system.

JEREMY: Yeah. They don't... not a lot of PR teams in Japan willing to do rehab assignments.

LESLIE: Well, what's crazy is that they have this Japanese sumo association, which is like 800 or so former wrestlers that has their own publicity arm. So the publicity arm is essentially run by a bunch of wrestlers who don't have any training in publicity—

JEREMY: That's so fun, though!

LESLIE: —it's just such a mess, but like a delightful mess because it's done by these old coots that are, that have no idea how to do it.

JEREMY: So if I want to get into sumo, I can get NHK World News on my streaming device...

LESLIE: Oh yeah, and you can also just go to YouTube and just look for grand sumo highlights. And you might see the word basho, which is their word for a tournament, but you can translate that into Japanese, the kanji, and then also Google that and find that.

JEREMY: Or it might be easier if I just check out *Sumo Kaboom*.

LESLIE: That's right! You know, we're, we have a lot of fun stuff that we do to get people kind of involved. So we run a basho, like a tournament bingo contest.

JEREMY: Oh, that's fun!

LESLIE: So your card is all the wrestlers. And then if they get a winning record, that's the kachi-koshi or a maki-koshi. But if you get, yeah, if you get a bingo, then we give away prizes and yeah, it's a jar of my homemade jam, but also we have like, we give away merch, like gift cards for merch.

JEREMY: Sure, but I've had Leslie Collins homemade jam before and it's really good. This is crazy.

LESLIE: This is crazy, I've shipped my jam across, like I've sent it to Norway. We have, we have people all over the world who play this. I've shipped jam to all over this world. And I think there's not that many English speaking, you know, sumo podcasts. We're one of three. So we have a lot of listeners and they're all over the world and they're just sumo fans.

So we have our bingo contest, which is a really great way to learn who the wrestlers are, kind of figure out what their names are and how they match up on a card. And then win prizes, free to play! We also have raffles. We're giving away like some signed merch from one guy, we have this amazing connection to one guy who is from the Ukraine, actually. He's from Ukraine and he came to Japan, I think, right amidst all of the insanity and he's done amazingly well. And he's beaten all of the Yokozuna. This tournament, he may very well win the whole thing, which is unheard of because it's only his second or third tournament in the top division. So his name is Ionishiki and we're giving away, we got three or four signed items from him personally. So we are silly. We talk about the sport. We just talk about, like, fun wrestler stuff and the history of Japan and a lot of the culture.

JEREMY: It sounds very fun. It sounds like if you were interested in getting into sumo, this is a great way to do it. Like, I certainly didn't know that they sang. That is my new favorite sumo fact.

LESLIE: Oh yeah. They'll, they'll dance for you too. I mean—

JEREMY: God bless.

LESLIE: It's just so much fun.

JEREMY: So much fun. I'm, I'm going to go, I'm going to start watching some sumo and I'm going to start listening to some *Sumo Kaboom*. Uh, Leslie, thank you so much.

[music starts]

LESLIE: My pleasure. It's been so, it's always good to chat with you. It's good to see your face too, but it's really nice to just chat with you and just, and hang out. It's always a good time.

JEREMY: It's really nice to see you as well. Yeah. Well, I don't know who else will be in this episode, but I'm sure they're going to start talking... now!

SETH: So right you are, Jeremy. This is when I'm talking. Um, hello. It's Seth again. What a wonderful discussion with Leslie Collins. Please do check out *Sumo Kaboom* on the podcast app of your choice, and if you would like to revisit the *Mission to Zyxx* episodes with Ms. Janelle Fitzmeyer, Rodd bless her, her first appearance was in episode 213: *Attack Some of the Clones*, and then she returned in Season 5, episode 515, *Gary's Home Companion*. The Eurovision podcast that Jeremy mentioned obliquely that he co-hosts is called *Eurovangelists*. Okay. Next, another beloved guest, Rachel Wenitsky, who of course plays the Space wielder and hoarder Marf, in conversation with Moujan Zolfaghari.

MOUJAN: Rachel Wenitsky. It's so wonderful to have you on this, of course, 1000th episode of *Passion to Zyxx*. I think that's what we're calling it...

RACHEL: Wow... what an honor.

MOUJAN: Marf, huge part of the Zyxx canon. And similarly to Marf in a way, you are a person who collects things and has a collection of their own. What is your passion, you would say?

RACHEL: Well, I have a lot of passions. I have a lot of hoarding tendencies. I collect a few things, the biggest of which is, ah, vintage salt and pepper shakers.

MOUJAN: Okay. I've seen these.

RACHEL: Yeah.

MOUJAN: And you have more than like two, I would say.

RACHEL: More than two, I think less than a hundred, but...

MOUJAN: Okay!

RACHEL: There's certainly a lot in my house. They're, they're in three different locations. So it's a little bit of, like, a jump scare when people come over and they're like, "Oh!" They see like one part of the collection. They're like, "Oh my God, like, that's so cool. Your salt and pepper shakers."

And they like, turn around and there's more of them. And then they're like, "huh." And then I go and look over there and they look at the third location and they're like "okay..." and then by that point they're sort of like "how interesting..."

MOUJAN: Yeah, and then these aren't just like your run-of-the-mill salt pepper shakers they're more how would you describe them? Like, what makes them unique, besides having so many of them?

RACHEL: Um... well, they're... they're like little guys.

MOUJAN: [laughter]

RACHEL: I would describe one of my greatest passions in general to be like, little guys, like...

MOUJAN: Okay.

RACHEL: When you are somewhere and there are... they're like [cutesy voice] little guys that you could, like, take and put in your house and there's like any sort of... [normal voice] Like, I don't know how else to describe it, like just [cutesy voice] little guys. [normal voice] And, uh, salt and pepper shakers are, like, the ultimate little guys to collect because they come in every form imaginable. Like, there are ones that are like apples but like the salt is a whole apple with a slice missing and the pepper is like the slice, or... or like, there's one that I didn't get once that I've thought about literally every day since that was, like, a naked woman laying on her back and her big round boobs were each a salt. Like, one was salt, one was pepper and you could, like, remove them. I have one that's, like, two fried eggs. The yolks are the salt and pepper.

MOUJAN: Wow.

RACHEL: And then there's ones that are just like... dogs! Cats!

MOUJAN: Yeah.

RACHEL: They're endless and they're all so cute.

MOUJAN: What's your most prized salt and pepper shaker?

RACHEL: Oh my god... well, I have one that's like this poodle sitting on a chair?

MOUJAN: Okay.

RACHEL: But she's, like, kind of a diva, very 80s, and the poodle is one of the shakers and then the other shaker is the chair. Which is, I think, funny to me because that's just so random!

MOUJAN: Can the poodle sit on the chair?

RACHEL: The poodle is sitting on the chair which is actually, like, really precarious, and I worry about having a delicate collection in a place prone to earthquakes?

MOUJAN: Yes.

RACHEL: And I will say, I keep thinking, I need to, like, stick them down with museum wax and then I don't. But the poodle is actually the only one in my collection that did once fall off the shelf and break, and I had to Gorilla Glue it back together. You can't tell that it was broken but I think that's what makes it so unique. Also, it's just a very precarious object.

MOUJAN: During, you know, the fires which we both experienced... The fires—

RACHEL: [fake shock] We're going there?

MOUJAN: We're going! We're going to a dark place, we're just shifting focus to a dark place, uh, because you... we left the city for a little bit, some of us, uh, did you consider taking any of these? Did you take any of them?

RACHEL: That is such a good question, because I live in Pasadena, very close to the fires and when we left I was, like, running around our house being like "what do I want?" And I'm someone who owns, like, so much stuff. Like, I am such a collector, I have like a million... and I also have, like, I have like a bunch of vintage phones that I've collected...

MOUJAN: Oh!

RACHEL: And like... oh, I just, like, so much shit, Moujan, it's everywhere! And I was like, "oh, like, everything matters and also like nothing matters."

MOUJAN: Right, right.

RACHEL: And I did think about my salt and pepper shaker collection and I was like [laughter] "oh, I'd be devastated to lose this, but also like who the fuck cares."

MOUJAN: That's a good mentality.

RACHEL: Yeah, yeah. I did take a painting, I took a watercolor that somebody made of our dog Bagel, and I took my dad's guitar that I inherited, but that was it. I didn't take— Oh, and I took my journals, I was like "I'm gonna need to remember what I did in 2024." Um, and that was it. And my salt and pepper shakers, I left to fucking ROT.

MOUJAN: Or you were leaving them in a way for others to discover in the future.

RACHEL: Well, you know what's actually really beautiful is that apparently a lot of people found ceramics in the rubble.

MOUJAN: Yeah.

RACHEL: And I don't know... I don't know how much of these... how many of these salt and pepper shakers are made of, like, good materials, but friends found like... family heirloom Seder plates in the ashes, like... things like that—because it lasted. So, like, there is something interesting about, I don't know, like... I bought a ceramic recently from a woman who had lost her house and... and had some of her, like, art that... that she recovered from her studio and was selling it, and it was, like, cracked. And she was like "it's my collaboration with disaster" and I was like "that's so fucking cool." And it's, like, amazing, and I don't know. I was, like, "oh, that's cool, to think that my, like, little... like," ceramics collection could outlast something like that" [laughter] so in that way hoarding is beautiful.

MOUJAN: It's beautiful. Hold on, I have some important questions about salt shakers.

RACHEL: Okay, yeah.

MOUJAN: This is a salt shaker flash round.

RACHEL: Okay,

MOUJAN: We're gonna just, like, plow through these questions.

RACHEL: Okay.

MOUJAN: Okay. Where do you generally find these salt and pepper shakers?

RACHEL: Flea markets, antique malls, estate sales. I made a rule for myself that I'm not allowed to buy them online.

MOUJAN: Okay, yeah.

RACHEL: If I open that up to myself like, I would just, like, never stop because you can buy unlimited salt shakers online. I, like, love going to flea markets and antique stores but I find them to be really overwhelming and it sort of became, like, "okay, this is like a small thing that usually isn't too expensive that can be sort of my goal."

MOUJAN: Yeah.

RACHEL: The other way that I often get them is that friends now will, like, either get them for me. Like I have one friend Amy who, like, will be like "I'm so sorry, but I, like, saw a bunch that you needed and I got you twelve sets..."

MOUJAN: I kind of, like, want you to... if you can, like, list just from memory right now all the different variations of salt and pepper shakers you have. Like, we know about the dog, we know about the egg one...

RACHEL: Okay, I have a... set of squirrels with tennis rackets.

MOUJAN: Oh! Yeah, you *need* those.

RACHEL: I have one that's like a fruit bowl and it has like a bunch of fruit in it and it's plastic, and then the, like, banana and the... and the peach are like the salt and pepper shakers? I think that's really cool... I have one that's a... oyster shell that's open, and the pearls are the salt and pepper shakers?

MOUJAN: Uh-huh...

RACHEL: I have an umbrella stand where the umbrellas are salt and pepper shakers..

MOUJAN: Fantastic.

RACHEL: There's one... oh, I have a piano and a piano bench. I have one that is the... the set that my grandmother had, of like, her everyday dishes. I found the, like, salt and pepper shakers that would have gone with that set.

MOUJAN: Aww.

RACHEL: Yeah, and so I got those. There's some like, really weird ones like asparagus with faces, and you're like "what went into this decision, this design decision?" I have a dog and cat one, that are actually the only ones I ever ordered online because I saw them at a flea market and I didn't get them and I, like, couldn't stop [laughter] thinking about them.

MOUJAN: Yeah. Fantastic.

RACHEL: Yeah, there's a... there's a lot. I have a lot.

MOUJAN: Is there anything, you think, that the general average person may not know about salt and pepper shakers?

RACHEL: Um, yeah, a lot of them will still have salt and pepper in them and I will get them home and then, like, it'll spill everywhere? And you're... there's something so nasty about, like, "oh, like, is this thirty year old pepper?" I don't know! Other than that, really just that a salt and pepper shaker can look like anything.

MOUJAN: That's true, that's true!

RACHEL: Oh, another favorite, um... are ones that my friend Reed found for me that are feet? Like, it's just like two stick up feet with, like, I think they have like red nail polish, and I just find them to be so beautiful.

MOUJAN: Rachel, when is it... when will it be enough? Or, do you think this is just, like... this is just the start?

RACHEL: Um, I feel in my current home, I don't have room for that many more.

MOUJAN: Okay.

RACHEL: And I've become really picky about them, and so now when I... when I see them, I'll be like, I become really discerning and I'm like "okay, well, do I need this?"

MOUJAN: Uh-huh.

RACHEL: Sometimes I just have, like, goals, like I found a... one, I found an owl salt or pepper shaker somewhere that didn't have a pair. A match pair?

MOUJAN: Oh.

RACHEL: And it made me really sad, because I was like "oh, no one's gonna get this because it's... doesn't have a match," and like, I just... if it has a face I'm like, that's a living being.

MOUJAN: Yeah, I get it.

RACHEL: And I felt so sad for it so, like, now I feel like I completed the main video game and now I'm sort of, like, going back and, like, collecting all the coins where I'm like, oh, like, if I find the pair for that, if I see the boobs again, like, I'm gonna get that.

MOUJAN: Oh, of course. The boobs will be guiding you for the rest... that's gonna be your...

RACHEL: I know, and I've... I've actually found those online and...

MOUJAN: No... it needs to come to you.

RACHEL: I think it needs to come... it needs to come to me, and so that's sort of the thing. Uh, and I think they will.

MOUJAN: Yeah. So right now you would say your number is between two and a hundred. [laughter]

RACHEL: Yeah, I should count. I really don't know, like, I'm gonna count when this is over.

MOUJAN: And then do you... and this is like the big question, I should have asked this number one, but do you actually use any of them?

RACHEL: Absolutely not, no.

MOUJAN: No, right?

RACHEL: No, and I don't even use regular salt. Like, I use, like, sea salt and a pepper grinder.

MOUJAN: Yeah. Sure.

RACHEL: Also I do genuinely think it would be gross.

MOUJAN: Yes. I think I just love the idea that you have, is this true, like, uh, do you have like orphans? Like salts without their peppers, peppers without their salts?

RACHEL: I have a few, just the owl and the... and I have a baguette that's missing a pair and again, like, I feel like they'll find me, like, I think the pairs will... I think the pairs will come to me.

MOUJAN: But also, this is a call for action, if anyone out there has the other side of these...

RACHEL: I know, if you see... if you have a little owl that has holes in the top you might have a pepper shaker.

MOUJAN: You might... you might have the second half, you might have the link that brings these two together.

RACHEL: That would be so beautiful! I really hope I find it someday but also I think I've given the singular owl a good life.

MOUJAN: I... because I'm a history nerd I always like looking up *The First*. Did you know about the first salt and pepper shaker?

RACHEL: No, tell me.

MOUJAN: Let's do a quiz!

RACHEL: Whoop whoop whoop quiz time!

MOUJAN: This is a standard thing we do in *Mission to*—no, what is it called... *Passion to Zyxx*. Right, I should know that, it's called *Passion to Zyxx*, that's a name that we were doing. Alright: in what year did a newspaper state "a pepper box for salt is the latest Yankee invention!" Was it 1937, 1872, or 1601?

RACHEL: [laughter] Okay, was it 1872?

MOUJAN: It was 1872! It was! *The Albany Register* on May 10th, 1872 declared the pepper device the hottest new thing!

RACHEL: Wow, oh, that's amazing! Who knew!

[music starts]

MOUJAN: Well, Rachel, thank you so much for telling and teaching and guiding us and inspiring us in the world of your passion: salt and pepper shakers. And I hope that every... every one of your salts finds its pepper! And vice versa.

RACHEL: And thank you so much! And I will go count them right now.

MOUJAN: Okay. If it's more than a hundred...

RACHEL: I'll lie. If it's more than a hundred I'm gonna lie about it.

SETH: Well, there you have it folks. Are there any less additive words than "there you have it folks," by the way? Like, yeah, we already knew we had it. Anyways, to hear the *Mission to Zyxx* episodes featuring Rachel as Marf, look for episode 306: *The Fresh Connection*, an absolute classic. And also, episode 512: *A Noob Hope*, which was actually a two-hander also featuring Justin Tyler as Old Derf, and episode L10: *Just the Tubes of Us*. L stands for live, that was a live episode we released in a past Maximum Fun Drive. Speaking of which, and speaking of Derf, please join us in making *The Young Old Derf Chronicles*! If you are not yet a supporter, please sign up at maximumfun.org/join and you will not only make *The Young Old Derf Chronicles* possible later this year, but you will unlock lots and lots of bonus content to tide you over until it debuts. And you will be able to join our festive Discord! Thanks again to Leslie Collins and Rachel Wenitsky, we will be back next month with another episode of... not *Passion to Zyxx*, something else suggested by our beloved supporters. Maybe you! Okay, till soon!