

Episode #1 – I Think There’s a Tapestry Involved?

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EMILY: [laughs] I can’t do this...HI

SALLY: hi!

EMILY: Welcome to our *Wheel of Time* podcast called Everybody Hates Rand. It’s a play off *Everybody Hates – Loves Raymond*

SALLY: And *Everybody Hates Chris*, I guess

EMILY: Oh yeah

SALLY: yeah

EMILY: I haven’t seen either of those shows so

SALLY: Me neither!

EMILY: It’s really good that we’re punning off those. Super knowledgeable there. Ummm we’re doing a podcast that probably no one’s gonna listen to, but if you’re here, congratulations

SALLY: And we love you

EMILY: Yeah and we’ll send you some quarters in the mail

SALLY: Mm-hmm

EMILY: Yep, so give me your mailing address

SALLY: Yeah and we’ll send you like three quarters

EMILY: Sally has a lot of quarters

SALLY: I do have a lot of quarters

EMILY: I have a lot of nickels. I could send you those, too

SALLY: We’ll send you three quarters and one nickel

EMILY: I've actually been trying to think of a way to get rid of all my nickels and dimes

SALLY: this is perfect! We'll nickel and dime you [tongue click]

EMILY: My mom gets mad at me every time I send change in the mail, which I do a surprising amount. I do

SALLY: Interesting

EMILY: I wouldn't make that promise. Empty

SALLY: Emily doesn't make empty promises

EMILY: That's true. Umm we're going to be talking about Robert Jordan's fourteen book epic fantasy series *The Wheel of Time*. Robert Jordan, uh, excuse me Brandon Sanderson did get involved at the end there, but for the most part we'll be crediting it as Robert Jordan's. We are both reading it right now. Sally is on book four in her first read. I am about to start book twelve in my reread, which is why we're talking about this. So I am your grizzled, world-weary *Wheel of Time* veteran, two days away from retirement [Sally laughs] Emily Juchau

SALLY: And I am your fresh-faced *Wheel of Time* rookie Sally Goodger

EMILY: Thanks for playing along with my police metaphor

SALLY: We are –

EMILY: You know how I love those detective procedurals

SALLY: We are – she does love – we are the buddy cop podcast nobody asked for [Sally laughs at her own joke]

EMILY: True. True. Absolutely nobody asked for. And let me take this moment to just say: if you're name is Becky Juchau stop listening immediately [Sally laughs very loudly]. MOM. Mom, I'm not joking. I don't want this to be how you find out that I use swear words a lot, and not just like the biblical swear words, some of the bad swear words. So just turn it off, Mom.

SALLY: Turn it off, Becky. Mrs. Juchau. For your own good

EMILY: If you're Sally's mom you can continuing listening. You're fine with that.

SALLY: She doesn't know how podcasts work, though so

EMILY: Okay [laughs] well, we'll help her

SALLY: We'll help her

EMILY: We're qualified to talk about this because we are both college graduates with English degrees. We're both lifelong readers and writers. Sally has done actual academic research into this topic.

SALLY: Yes!

EMILY: Talk about it [laughs]

SALLY: I, well, I've taken some classes on fantasy and fairy tale theory, as much as I don't know if fairy tale will play in. And I wrote my honors thesis last year on two young adult fantasy novels that interacted with the Holocaust in various ways. And it sounds weird because it is a little bit weird, but interesting. So maybe one day I will tell you all about my thesis work, but in that I did lots of fantasy theory and lots of fantasy history, so hopefully you might learn a thing or two

EMILY: I've read it. Ten out of ten would recommend. [Sally laughs]. I mean, not if you're already feeling a little sad, 'cause it is pretty sad BUT very well written.

SALLY: Thanks, bae

EMILY: Very well researched

SALLY: Thank you

EMILY: Umm, and that's going to be our podcast

SALLY: That's going to be our podcast. We're gonna share hot takes, some analysis –

EMILY: Lots of shit-talking

SALLY: Lots of shit talking

EMILY: Especially on Rand

SALLY: If you couldn't tell by the title, we don't like him very much

EMILY: Most of what we do here in our apartment is yell about how much we don't like him

SALLY: He's really just a big garbage boy

EMILY: Yep. Big garbage boy. That's him. Title of our podcast

SALLY: Title of our podcast. Everybody Hates Rand semicolon – ooh – a big garbage boy

[both laugh]

EMILY: So buckle in to the back of our...police car

SALLY: Yep. Nailed it

EMILY: And enjoy

SALLY: And enjoy

EMILY: Oh my god

[THEME MUSIC – “Tubthumping” by Chumbawamba]

SALLY: Whenever Perry and Ian are misbehaving, which is frequently, my mom will be like, “I can’t believe you think you can talk like that, when I literally pushed you out of my vagina”

[Emily laughs]

SALLY: And then, when they were teenagers, especially, they’d be like “Ew, mom! Gross!” because boys are fragile

EMILY: Boys are so fragile

SALLY: Let’s talk about the most fragile boys

EMILY: OH my god

SALLY: That’s what the kids call a segue

EMILY: That was a great segue. Let’s talk about the prologue, which is it’s own set of weirdness

SALLY: Yeah

EMILY: And then we can aim to get through, you know, the introduction to the Two Rivers and most of our main set of characters

SALLY: yeah!

EMILY: Actually, yeah, entirely our main set of characters. They are all introduced in that first –

SALLY *at the same time*: well done, Robert

EMILY: Fifty pages. What do you remember happening in the prologue? [laughs]

SALLY: Um, I remember, um, it's like – it's, what's his name, Lews Therin Kins...

EMILY: Lews Therin Telamon

SALLY: Lews Therin Telamon, the Kinslayer. Or the Kingslayer. No, that's Jaime Lannister.

EMILY: Good, good try

[both laugh]

SALLY: Jaime Lannister...no

EMILY, *laughing*: Our scene opens on Jaime Lannister, riding up the stairs of the keep on a horse, and all of us collectively had a sexual experience

SALLY: I – my best tweet was that –

EMILY: Yeah, you did have a really [laughing] good tweet

SALLY, *laughing*: Was that that was the best porn HBO has ever produced. That should be my pinned tweet. I should dig through the, the annals of my Twitter and find it.

EMILY: That should be

SALLY: Okay, so from the prologue that we open on Lews Therin, our boy, from the past. And it's the scene where he, I mean, he's going crazy. I think. And there's like some dude. And he is, he's like killed his family – that's why they call him Kinslayer, I imagine

EMILY: Uh-huh

SALLY: That's about it

EMILY, *laughing*: no keep going

SALLY: [laughs] um, and Lews, Lews my boy, is whacked out, and someone is there, like, talking to him. It might be one of the baddies...It might not be! [laughs]

EMILY: This is hilarious

SALLY: [still laughing]

EMILY: How does the scene end, Sally? Do you have any memory of this?

SALLY : Ummmmmm the scene ends...I think there's a tapestry involved. I'm not foolin'

EMILY: What?

SALLY, *laughing*: Okay maybe there's not a tapestry involved

EMILY: I mean maybe there is a tapestry involved. When is a tapestry not involved when it comes to *Wheel of Time*?

SALLY: True. True. True. True. Something – doesn't Lews Therin die? Doesn't he get killed by the baddie? I don't remember

EMILY: I just glanced at the Wikipedia article for this particular section, and that refreshed my memory. The scene opens with Lews Therin wandering around his rich people mansion fucking yelling for his wife. And, we, through our more lucid audience eyes, realize that everyone is dead in the house, has been murdered brutally. And then our, I guess we can call him our main baddie because, you know, the Dark One is more of a theological bad guy. Ishamael is sort of our more of a physical villain. Yeah, Ishamael – call me Isahmael, plus I'd like to add a vowel for three hundred, Alex – shows up

[Sally laughs (more of a cackle really)]

EMILY: Oh, I just combined a lot of game shows in that one

SALLY: That was really well done

EMILY: Ishamael shows up and is like, "Hey, my dude, I'm here to wreck your fucking day." And Lews Therin is like, "Who are you, my guy? I'm just over here chasing butterflies. Being a crazy guy." And he's like, "Here's the thing, you are, you are basically Jesus, this world's Jesus, and I am the guy they nicknamed Betrayer of Hope –" Which, frankly? Badass

SALLY: Yeah. That's a pretty slick one

EMILY: Yeah, And he decides, "Okay, I'm not getting any of the satisfaction out of this that I would like. I don't want you to die, basically, without realizing how far you've fallen." So he briefly heals Lews Therin of his madness. So Lews Therin comes to lucidity and realizes he has killed his entire family. He doesn't remember why, I think. He doesn't remember why and Ishamael says, "Oh what happened is that you just had a big fight with us and you sealed away the dark one [claps] so claps for you for getting

that one done, but, however, big mistake: All the men got fucked by that.” All the men who can channel *saidin*, which is the male portion of this world’s magic system, are now going to go insane, and already that has begun basically outside their window the world is getting torn apart.

SALLY: Okay

EMILY: So then Lews Therin remembers what he’s done in its entirety and he just starts screaming, and, like, teleports away to the middle of the plain, and basically he just channels so much that it creates this big ass mountain, which, you know, a thousand years later or whatever is where our hero, unfortunately, Rand, will be born.

SALLY: Now that you talk about this I remember [laughs]

EMILY: Do you remember?

SALLY: Maybe

EMILY: Most of what I remember is reading it as like an eleven year old. You know, the first time I read the series, you open up to this prologue and what a wild ride it is. [laughs] You’re like okay, “There’s some Hercules stuff going on here.” Hercules, you know, killed his wife in a fit of madness inflicted by the goddess Hera. We have our – you don’t know – at first you’re like “oh, is this guy our hero?” Nope, he’s not our hero. His name is literally “Lose”. He lost.

SALLY: He do

EMILY: Fucking big time. We’re also – and like, he’s not even a sympathetic character to begin with. I think – I’m interested in what Robert Jordan thinks he’s doing in this scene. If he’s making Lews Therin sympathetic, or if he’s intentionally not trying to make Lews Therin a sympathetic character, because, you know, he’s wandering around yelling “My Ilyena.” His Wife. And you’re like, bitch, any minute now this dumbass is gonna ask his wife to make a sandwich for him, like, he’s not a great. He’s not interesting at all. He’s incredibly boring.

SALLY: Fitting because he’s reincarnation Rand al’Thor is the most boring

EMILY: Also boring. And you’d – this scene would have been a lot more memorable if his counterpart, Ishmael, would have been more interesting. But Ishmael is also incredibly boring. I’d argue, with the exception of Lanfear, he is the most boring of the Forsaken

SALLY: Yes

EMILY: He’s very much your textbook Darth Vader father figure, even though he’s not anyone’s father. He’s just sort of your emo boy

SALLY: Like Kylo Ren

EMILY: wants to watch the world burn. yeah he is a very – God, Adam Driver would play Ishmael really well

SALLY: Oooh, he would play Ishmael really well

EMILY: Yeah, given – there's also the fact that Ishmael seems to come to this place not to gloat, but to destroy Lews Therin. He's like, "I want you to realize that I'm better than you now, and then I'm gonna kick your ass," But he doesn't do that because Lews Therin teleports away, and Ishmael is like, "Okay well, guess that's that." [laughs]

SALLY: Shucks!

EMILY: So we're introduced to this world's, you know, epic battle, epic cosmic battle between good and evil by saying, "Here's our hero, he sucks. He didn't save the world, exactly. And here's his villain, who also sucks, 'cause he couldn't succeed in killing the hero." Ishmael, all it would have taken was for you to walk in there and balefire the hell out of Lews Therin. Did you do that? No, you wanted to gloat like every boring villain ever.

SALLY: Yeah. Because you are a prideful boy. Yeah, that's really interesting to think about. I remember when I first started reading *Wheel of Time*, which was almost one year ago

EMILY: Awwww

SALLY: Yeah isn't that tender

EMILY: S tender

SALLY: You, like, sold it to me, or, like [chuckles] sold it to me. Yeah. Kind of. Pitched me *Wheel of Time* –

EMILY: I physically sold you the *Wheel of Time* copy

SALLY: I physically bought a book from Emily

EMILY: I sold it to you – did I tell you the prologue was really good or something?

SALLY: No [laughs] No.

EMILY: Dear god

SALLY: No. Emily would never tell me, anti-prologue, that I would like the prologue

EMILY: Yeah I know you hate prologues

SALLY: You were like the first book in the series is very, like, very prototypical fantasy novel in like the epic fantasy tradition. Like you can map it really well with what happens in *Fellowship of the Ring* and pretty much kind of – I don't know I haven't done an intense study of the *Game of Thrones* books in this way, but probably on to that and whatever epic fantasy you want to choose. But you said once it sort of gets through that in the first book, and it hits all those highlights, it sort of spreads into this totally different thing that pulls a lot on Eastern mythology and does a lot to, like, does really interesting things with the notion of the hero's journey and with prophecy and with fantasy on a massive epic scale. So, it's interesting to consider –

EMILY, *laughing*: That all sounds very like me by the way. Super eloquent. Something I would say. Go on

SALLY, *laughing*: It was what you said! So, thinking about the first introduction to this, where we don't have the typical conflict between good and evil, I think that's really interesting. Because the macro conflict of *The Wheel of Time* is very basic in that it's literally the light versus the dark.

EMILY: Yeah, sure

SALLY: But Robert Jordan does really interesting things to, like, trouble that once he gets past [whispers] everything that happens in the first book

EMILY: [laughs]

SALLY: Bless him. So, it's – because I read the prologue and I was like “What in the ever living fuck just happened?” Next page

EMILY: It's a very confusing prologue without context. It's a very interesting prologue when go back to it in re-reads. I re-read all these books before the fourteenth one came out and, you know, the prologue is just...I don't want to say rich with foreshadowing, but it is rich with foreshadowing.

SALLY: It very much is

EMILY: And Lews Therin, although he's not a very likeable character is a very interesting character, especially once he starts manifesting as, literally, the voice in Rand's head. That's such an interesting concept, which troubles a lot of notions about heroism and maintaining your sanity in the face of heroism, which is an essentially mentally and emotionally draining task

SALLY: Oh absolutely

EMILY: As we've learned from *Fellowship of the Ring*. Frodo. And as Robert Jordan personally experienced, you know, being in a war?

SALLY: Vietnam, right?

EMILY: He was in Vietnam, I think, yeah. Which posttraumatic stress disorder is *the worst*

SALLY: Yeah, but it comes out really interesting in book three [whispers] the best book

EMILY: Yeah, book three, arguably –

SALLY: It's so good

EMILY: Definitely from Sally's standpoint having read only four books, book three is by far the best

SALLY, *speaking at the same time*: having read only three books, book three is definitely the best one

EMILY: I don't know. I can make a strong case for book seven. My favorite.

SALLY: True. Heard good things about book seven... So yeah, very important prologue, considering again the macro plot happening in *The Wheel of Time* series, but [laughs] immediately after that we are led to a bunch of sheep boys [Emily laughs] like, two or three thousand years later. So it's a little bit jarring

EMILY: It's very jarring! Because, yeah, you go from this very, like, cosmic energy, Darth Vader facing Luke on the little skybridge right when he's about to cut off Luke's hand, you know?

SALLY: Yeah, literally

EMILY: Just that sort of like epic space opera feel. Suddenly –

SALLY: Space opera is a good word. I'm sorry. Continue

EMILY: Thanks. I think I read it in a review today about *The Last Jedi* so don't give me too much credit for that

SALLY: I'm always gonna give you credit. You're brilliant. You're beautiful

EMILY, *in an affected voice*: Stop it.

[Both laugh]

EMILY: Yeah it's pretty jarring going from Lews Therin's point of view to Rand's point of view, which one could argue is the same point of view

SALLY: Yes, which is fascinating

EMILY: Which is fascinating, but Rand is [laughs]

SALLY: I wish you could see the face I'm making right now, dear readers

EMILY: Dear listener [Sally laughs] on this audio medium, Sally's gazing into the middle distance, with her fingers together like she's going to do the chef kiss, you know? [makes the chef kiss noise]

SALLY: But I'm not

EMILY: But she's not. It's like she wants to crush the life out of him

SALLY: It's like I'm going to put poison into my mouth, thinking of Rand

EMILY: It's like...It's like she's giving us a physical representation of the size of Rand's dick

SALLY: OOOOOOOOOOOHHHH

EMILY: YOOO

SALLY: Oh, she just dabbed

[both laughed]

EMILY: [sighs] Ah Rand. Rand. Rand. Rand

SALLY, *softly*: the Maytag Man

EMILY, *laughing*: Fuck you [Sally laughs] Let's start by saying Rand has the best dad of all fantasy

SALLY, *enthusiastically*: Oh my god. Literally. Literally. I hate dads. That's just something we should get out there, guys. I am never going to be interested in anybody's dad, fictional or otherwise

EMILY: True

SALLY: Maybe Emily's dad. He's a good lad. And Elise's dad. Elise is our roommate. I love Elise's dad [laughs]

EMILY: Meat Thermometer Chris, that's what they call my dad at work

SALLY: Oh, boy. Her dad does sell meat thermometers

EMILY: Yeah, tragically

SALLY: Umm, tragically or heroically? Speaking of heroism

EMILY: Stop

SALLY: Chris Juchau

EMILY: It's tragic because we all have a meat thermometer on our keychain

SALLY: It's amazing. I've seen Emily whip it out in her chicken that she makes

EMILY, *at the same time*: which you've seen me whip out [laughs]. Yeah, but it is truly great because he's helping barbeque obsessed people across the nation perfect the art of smoking their meats

SALLY: Which is like? The hero we need, but not the hero we deserve

EMILY: Surely, but back to Tam al'Thor

SALLY: Back to Tam al'Thor, literally the cutest dad of all time

EMILY: He does – he's got great parenting technique. The first that happens in the Two Rivers is they're walking down a windy road – the eponymous *wind* in the winds of time

SALLY: Yes, wind

EMILY: And Rand looks back and sees a cloaked figure, which is a staple in your epic fantasy, is your creepy, dark cloaked figure standing menacingly some fifty feet away

SALLY: Yes, part of the intrusion

EMILY: Part – what? Is that part of the hero's journey? Tell me more

SALLY: No, no, no. So, um, dear listeners of this audio medium, last fall I took *the best class of all time*? Which was a Lord of the Rings class taught by my favorite professor of all time, who will go unnamed [both laugh] to add to the mystery

EMILY: We don't want to sully his reputation

SALLY: Yeah we don't want to sully his reputation by associating him with this trash. But we studied four categories – I pulled them up on my old canvas – four categories of fantasy as defined by Farah Mendlesohn in *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, which is –

EMILY: Damn! Dropping sources. Look at you

SALLY: Is a very good book. I read some of it [laughs] for my thesis, definitely not all of it. But the four categories of fantasy are the Portal Wuest Fantasy, the Immersive Fantasy, the Intrusion Fantasy, and the Liminal Fantasy. And, fantasy, is a very, like, difficult term to define, obviously

EMILY: Yeah, yeah

SALLY: As soon as you start to pin it down it sort of wriggles away. So it has been called a “slippery set” by various fantasy critics such as – I think it's John Attebery, who said that? I don't know, my dudes. This is not my thesis, but you –

EMILY: I feel like you did cite that, did use that quote in your thesis

SALLY: I did. I did use that quote in my thesis

EMILY: Dang

SALLY: So it's sad that I don't remember his name

EMILY: No [laughs]

SALLY: BUT because fantasy is like a slippery set, quote unquote, it is very difficult to offer a functioning definition so it is often more defined by its examples and its genre markers, than any sort of, like, definition. Which I feel is true of, like, any type of genre fiction. Like I think it is much easier to offer examples than it is to offer definition. But –

EMILY: Can we go back though and say slippery in terms of like the way *Wheel of Time* functions in that it starts out a certain way and the immediately branches out? Is that one of the ways you mean?

SALLY: Um, that is a good question. I don't know how it would be applied to any particular novel. I'm gonna look – let's see. I think the quote is here. Oh it is. I'm going to literally read you this. It's from *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, which is very good. I also [coughs] have the plague so apologies for this me

EMILY: You've been sounding great so far

SALLY: Oh my god thank you

EMILY, *laughing*: you're welcome

SALLY: Okay. *“Much word literature has been described, at one point or another, as fantasy. “Fantasy” – certainly when conceived of” – nope – “ when conceived as being in contrast to Realism – is a most extraordinarily porous term, and has been used to mop of vast deposits of story which this culture or that – and this era or that – deems unrealistic. In the late 20th century, however the term FANTASTIC has more and more frequently been substituted for “fantasy” when modes are being discussed. As a term of definition, “fantasy,” though a term which continues to lack the specificity of SCIENCE FICTION, does designate a structure. Fantasy is not a form – like HORROR – named solely after the affect it is intended to produce [...]*

And then there is a dot dot dot because we are skipping some sections, and that’s how you do things in the world of literature

EMILY, *whispers*: Education

SALLY: Yeah. You’re welcome. *“But fantasy’s specific location in the spectrum of the fantastic is a matter of constant critical speculation. There is no rigorous critical consensus over the precise definition and “reach” and interrelation of any of the terms referred to above. As Brian ATTEBERY has indicated through his description of fantasy as “fuzzy set,” – excuse me it’s a fuzzy set not a slippery set*

EMILY: Still good

SALLY: *“it may be that fantasy is inherently best described and defined through prescriptive example [...] A fantasy text is a self-coherently narrative. When set in this world, it tells a story which is impossible in the world as we perceive it [...]; when sent in an otherworld, that otherworld will be impossible, though stories set there may be possible in its terms.*

That is from the fantasy scholar John Clute in the *Encyclopedia of Fantasy*.¹ SO looking at it in that way, of course you have – like they said horror is intended to produce an affect on the reader. You’re supposed to feel horrified, and science fiction is a little bit more specific, because when you discuss science fiction – fantasy we talk about what is possible versus what is impossible, but science fiction, the sort of inherent assumption of that is that we’re looking at something that isn’t possible now but –

EMILY: Could be

SALLY: Yes, exactly. Could be possible in the future. And fantasy doesn’t have either of those specific –

EMILY: It’s more like science-fiction could be in our world. Fantasy would be if the rules were changed

¹ This isn’t word for word with the audio, but has been altered to quote the text exactly because Sally changes a few words when she read it

SALLY: Yeah. Yeah exactly

EMILY: Okay

SALLY: At least I think so. I'm not a fantasy scholar, guys, but I'm doing my best

EMILY: You are pretty close to one. You did study it extensively

SALLY: So because fantasy, when you have a fuzzy set – which I believe is a mathematical term. I could ask my mathematics major, Veronica, but it's a mathematic term that, like, a set of numbers, the closer you look at them the more they, like, alter, I believe. So when you try to pin them down the set of numbers will do weird things. I don't know how math works. And so, Farah Mendlesohn set out and was like, you know, so much scholarship has been dedicated to trying to define fantasy. You have terms like "the fantastic," "unrealistic" and whatever, whatever. And she did not find those particularly productive, so she set out to define a rhetorics of fantasy that discusses the affect on the reader and what happens in these particular categories, which you can then use to discuss fantasy without getting caught up in the inevitable genre whirlwind of trying to define it. So her four categories are the Portal Quest Fantasy – which is a specialty of Emily's, don't let her tell you differently – Immersive Fantasy, Intrusion Fantasy, and the Liminal Fantasy. And to – and I will talk about these a lot just because that is where my fantasy background. I also am, um, guys my background is as a *Lord of the Rings* person [Emily laughs] that was my introduction to fantasy

EMILY, *in an affected voice*: My background is that I love *Lord of the Rings*

SALLY: My background is that I fucking love *Lord of the Rings* by J.R.R Tolkien. My boy.

EMILY: Portal Quest is the traditional *Alice in Wonderland*, *Wizard of Oz*. Protagonist from our world gets whisked away into a fantasy world.

SALLY: Yes

EMILY: So, certain set of circumstances there. It's an interesting way to write point of view because you get to navigate the fantasy world through our eyes, basically

SALLY: Yeah, which is something that is called the Least Knowledgeable Character

EMILY: Right

SALLY: And so it's very interesting to have the Least Knowledgeable Character talking about what's happening because they get to sort of describe everything to you as you kind of are experiencing for the first time. So the tone or the affect that it's supposed to have on you is a sense of wonder, and then later, as you become more accustomed to it, it

becomes, it sort of slips into the next category of fantasy which is the Immersive Fantasy, which is more along the lines of like *Game of Thrones* where it's just sort of like – it exists as its own cohesive world. And so it's not possible by our standards that ice zombies whatever and there's like a seven hundred foot wall, but that's totally –

EMILY: Dragons whatever

SALLY: – plausible and possible in the world of Westeros. And then you have the Intrusion Fantasy, which is what I mentioned with the – I want to call it a Black Rider, but that is not correct because that is *Lord of the Rings*.

EMILY: Does he ever ride a horse?

SALLY: He should. If he doesn't –

EMILY: I think Myrddraal ride horses eventually because there's some sad descriptions of them dying

SALLY: So the intrusion fantasy is where you have – you operate in the mundane world, which for Rand and his compatriots is the world of the Two Rivers

EMILY: Right

SALLY: And then something from – there is a violation into that mundane world by something of the fantastic, which, for the case in the Two Rivers, is this Myrddraal, who comes. We don't know it's a Myrddraal yet at this point

EMILY: Same thing in *Lord of the Rings*. Hobbiton, basically. The intrusion would be the ring.

SALLY: The ring, yeah. And –

EMILY: And really Gandalf finding out about the ring

SALLY: And literally an actual intrusion of the Black Riders

EMILY: And the Black Riders

SALLY: And our final category of fantasy, which is a little bit different, is the Liminal Fantasy, where you have an overlap between the mundane world and the fantasy world, where you're not entirely sure if what's happening is something that's real or if the character is crazy, or – if you've ever read Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw*. It's a big one for liminal fantasy, or what Tzvetan Todorov, in his classic study *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* –

EMILY: Oh my god [Sally laughs]. You're just out here dropping the whole bibliography. It's incredible

SALLY: – discusses as the uncertainty of what you're experiencing is real or not, which I would alter that – argue that Rand is also sort of experiencing in that moment because he's like "It's really windy, but this guy's cloak isn't moving. What's happening to me? Have I, I don't know, got dehydrated?" He's a farmer. I'm sure that's a concern of his

EMILY: Yeah and that's pretty interesting that Rand does briefly think "Uh, am I going crazy?" In a book where he ultimately does go crazy.

SALLY: Yeah, goes totally insane

EMILY: Yeah

SALLY: And what's interesting about these four categories of fantasy is that they start to overlap

EMILY: Anyway, yeah you're right. In that first ten pages we have pretty much the latter three that you described. And Portal Quest –

SALLY: Happens within a hundred pages, because they're literally leaving the Two Rivers and going on – because "portal" is a very, again another kind of fuzzy term in fantasy. It can be a literal portal like Alice falls down the rabbit hole. Or it can be a little more symbolic like the scene in *Lord of the Rings* when Sam is like "This is the farthest I've ever been from the Shire." When he crosses that point he goes through a portal

EMILY: There are also literal portals in *The Wheel of Time* series, and we see them used in the prologue

SALLY: Which is *fascinating*

EMILY: So, interesting stuff, Robert Jordan

SALLY: I know. Robert Jordan really was a master

EMILY: RIP

SALLY: Rest. In. Peace, RJ. Whose real name is...not that

EMILY: Oliver

SALLY: Oliver? God. He's so cute

EMILY: I knooow. Oliver Rigney Jr.

SALLY: Oliver Rigney Jr.

EMILY, *singing to the tune of “My name is Alexander Hamilton”*: My name is Oliver Rigney Jr.

SALLY: Ooookaaaay and that is your very limited crash course in the types of fantasy terms that I will be using. If you’re interested, would recommend – I think you can Google the *Rhetorics of Fantasy* and there might be a good Wikipedia page. The actual book is very dense. Not to suggest that you guys can’t do it. But I don’t know why in your free time you would want to read dense literary theory when you can just listen to me [laughs]

EMILY, *laughing*: She just made a peace sign with her fingers

SALLY, *still laughing*: you’re welcome

EMILY: Oh my god. Returning to world’s greatest dad: Tam al’Thor, who no doubt has a mug, hand crafted by Rand, age three, that says *World’s Greatest Dad*

SALLY: And all the other dads in the Two Rivers had to smash their *World’s Greatest Dad* mugs because –

EMILY: They knew. They knew

SALLY: They knew that Tam al’Thor is the best dad of all time

EMILY: Tam reacts super supportively when Rand is like [in a timid voice] “I think I just saw a scary dude back there”

SALLY: [laughs, and in the same voice] Dad! Dad!

EMILY: “Dad! Dad! Do we know any people with long black cloaks?” And Tam’s like, “We live in the wilderness, son. Be more specific.”

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: No, Tam really does what a good parent does, which is say, “Okay. Look around.” Validly reacts to Rand’s alarm, but we’re not going to act threatened. But as soon as they get to the village he goes and tells someone. He goes and tells the mayor, I think. He’s like, “Hey my son saw something creepy.” And that’s when the mayor is like “Yeah, some other idiots [laughs] saw the same thing.” And while that’s happening we’re introduced to our secondary protagonist. And we should see that Rand and Tam are farmers. They’re going to the central village in the Two Rivers, which is like a farming community, and the village is called Emond’s Field. They’re there basically to deliver some goods for the Fantasy Christmas party that’s happening the next day

SALLY: What is it [pronounces them in two different ways] Beltine or Belteen?

EMILY: Yeah [repeating the same pronunciations] Beltine or Belteen, something like that.

SALLY: Fantasy Christmas!

EMILY: Which is exciting for Rand because obviously he doesn't get out much

SALLY: Because he lives on a farm

EMILY: He lives on a farm and he's an idiot. And this an opportunity for him to meet his friends, who are of course just the other boys who are close to him in age. [Laughs] and our first introduction to Mat Cauthon is him, like, fucking rolling around the back of the cart like a summersaulting ninja and being like "I just stole a fucking badger and I'm about to go let it loose on some people, do you want to join?"

SALLY: Yeah

EMILY: So what does that tell you about Mat?

SALLY: So, Mat is insane and I would die for him and marry him

EMILY: Yeah. Simultaneously

SALLY: Simultaneously

EMILY: Which fits because his actual wife has a very God of Death persona

SALLY: Yo, y'all I love me some gods of death

EMILY: She's great, but

SALLY: Staying in the Two Rivers

EMILY: Yeah staying in the Two Rivers, we won't skip forward to Tuon yet. Mat is pretty much the most interesting character in the Two Rivers

SALLY: Correct

EMILY: Even though he, too, is filling out a lot of fantasy stereotypes. He's simultaneously Merry and Pippin, which is interesting because, at least in the movies, I can't remember how well they function in the books, but together Merry and Pippin kind of create this innocent trickster versus this slightly more street-smart trickster

SALLY: Yes, I would agree

EMILY: Pippin being the younger, innocent and Merry being the, the...

SALLY: Wizenod old...cutpurse

EMILY: The world weary artful dodger of the two

SALLY: [laughs] artful dodger

EMILY: Yeah, Merry. And Mat's kind of both of those. He has moments of being innocent and a total idiot like later in the book when he just picks up whatever shiny thing he sees and it curses him, which is the exact same thing that happens to Pippin with the...

SALLY: Palantir...[a different pronunciation] Palantir. I don't know

EMILY: But he also has – he also tends to be the most suspicious of everyone in the trio. The trio being the three main boys, and yeah. Uh, that tapered off. Sorry

SALLY: No. No. No. No. I think you just kind of hit on Mat's high points. Trickster. Suspicious AF.

EMILY: So suspicious

SALLY: Suspicious AF. And insane, as in I just stole *a badger*. How do you even do that?

EMILY: He's like, "My dude. My badger guy fucking caught a badger, and now I've got a badger." And like, what is this network that Mat Cauthon operates in where he's the overlord of –

SALLY: A badger guy

EMILY: Canonically if anything happens in Emond's...what's it called? Emond's Field, everyone is like, "Where the fuck is Mat?"

SALLY: Everyone's like "where's Mat?"

EMILY: So much so that Mat has several times been pinned for things he didn't do

SALLY: And he's like, "Excuse me!" And they're like, "Mat we know you did it."

EMILY, *speaking as Mat*: Excuse me I have better taste

SALLY: Yeah he's like, "I would never pull something that blasé."

EMILY: And we're like, "but you have."

SALLY: You have

EMILY: And you will. And he's like "True"

SALLY, *as Mat*: Don't judge me. Not all of our tricks can be winners, you guys.

EMILY, *as Mat*: I, too, had a growth period

SALLY, *as Mat*: Yeah, I had to –

EMILY, *as Mat*: A blue period

SALLY: A blue period – oh my god

EMILY: [laughs]

SALLY: I had a blue period, um, you know. Yeah, I don't know enough about art to continue that funny metaphor

EMILY: I'm sorry

SALLY: It was funny, though, and I ruined Emily's good joke. So we'll edit that out

EMILY: I had half of it there and it didn't go anywhere because I don't know actually know anything about art, either. So

SALLY: I just finished interning at a museum [laughs] and I don't know shit about art. So

EMILY: You didn't do too much on the actual art side, to be fair

SALLY, *whispers*: No I didn't

EMILY: *But*

SALLY: Neither did Mat Cauthon

EMILY: Yeah, Mat's probably the least artistic character

SALLY: Oh my god imagine Perrin, like, water-coloring

EMILY: Perrin makes total sense to me as a water-colorer

SALLY: Yeah, he'd just be like "I just need some Perrin Time, you know?"

EMILY: Perrin is like – Perrin we're introduced to last of the trio and he is *also* a fantasy stereotype as in he's the blacksmith's apprentice, the gentle giant, the very sweet, innocent boy. Who's really kind of bland when we first meet him

SALLY: He's incredibly bland

EMILY: He's incredibly bland. He doesn't start, you know, standing out as a character until he gets his wolf-man arc

SALLY: MMMMH *WOLF MAN*

EMILY: A werewolf in the Two Rivers

SALLY: A werewolf – exactly. An American werewolf in Two Rivers. A Two Rivers werewolf in Two Rivers [both laugh]. And that movie would be exactly as boring as it sounds [laughs] because it is!

EMILY, *yelling*: That movie is already boring, Stephen!

SALLY: Oh god

EMILY: What was his name?

SALLY: Stephen Graham Jones

EMILY, *with a lot of feeling*: Stephen Graham Jones. I hate him

SALLY: We'll get there when we, uh, talk about Perrin being a werewolf

EMILY: Talk about Perrin. UGH

SALLY: Emily and I have an unfortunate schema due to a lack of – due to an unfortunate scheduling decision [Emily laughs] on our part during our undergraduate career. I'll admit: I dragged her into it.

EMILY: I was ready and willing to go to a werewolf class

SALLY: Yeah and then it turned out to be [in a higher pitch] traaaaaasssh

EMILY: It had some good moments, though

SALLY: None of them class-related [laughs softly]

EMILY: We did watch an episode of supernatural

SALLY, *excitedly*: that was – okay that was hilarious. That was so good. I forgot about that

EMILY: Anyway, we also meet essentially the rest of our main cast here in the Two Rivers. I think, in order, even before we meet Perrin, we meet Nynaeve and Egwene, who I know the pronunciation guide says her name is Egg-wane, but it confuses me too much so I call her Edge-ween

SALLY: I also call her Edge-ween

EMILY: I just like it better

SALLY: Egg-wane

EMILY: Egg-wane. I'm just like, egg?

SALLY: I can't call her Egg-wane

EMILY: Especially because the pronunciation guide also says that Gawyn's name is pronounced Gwyn? [not sure how to phonetically get that since I can't even pronounce it see immediately below]

SALLY: Gwy...what?

EMILY: Gwayn or something like that

SALLY: No, Robert

EMILY: Yeah. SOOOOO that's –

SALLY: I also don't care to call [annoyed emphasis] *Gwain* by his correct

EMILY, *mumbling*: Yeah no he's the worst. Speaking of horrible men. Anyway [claps] we meet Nynaeve and Egwene pretty much immediately. I think because Nynaeve is running up to the men of the village, who are all talking about the Black Rider, the Myddraal, and she comes up to yell at them basically for slaking off. Which is an iconic Nynaeve move. And Egwene is in tow because Egwene's basically her apprentice. And immediately Rand is like, "That's my girl."

SALLY, *singing as Rand*: I love her

EMILY: And Egwene bats her eyelashes at him which is –

SALLY: Because she's beautiful

EMILY: A – she’s beautiful, but B – that’s a very misleading moment in our characterization of Egwene. Egwene is the most badass character in this entire series

SALLY: Egwene is literally like, “Men? Hmmm no time.”

EMILY, *at the same time*: Don’t know her

[both laugh]

SALLY: Who is she? [laughs again, but then gets real serious] because Egwene is obviously a huge lesbian. Not canonically, but she is obviously a huge lesbian

EMILY: Not canonically, but yeah she would – god, imagine being Egwene’s girlfriend. I do, daily

SALLY: I do. I would – I don’t deserve her, but

EMILY: I know but –

SALLY: Who does?

EMILY: We’d be way better than Gawyn [sighs]

SALLY: I can’t talk about Gawyn. We’re going to have an entire episode where Emily can just yell about him

EMILY: Probably multiple episodes. We might as well be honest

SALLY: “Reasons Why We Hate Gawyn.” That’ll be the arc

EMILY: One...

SALLY: One: hate him. [Laughs]. Now that we got that out of the way. In case you were wondering...um, and Nynaeve is what’s called the village Wisdom

EMILY: Right. There is an interesting – we don’t immediately see the repercussions of the events of the prologue on this world until, you know, the world starts unfolding and we see these events referred to historically as the Breaking of the World. We start hearing of Lews Therin as the Kinslayer. I think in this chapter alone it’s referenced that someone scrawls a Dragon’s Fang on someone’s door. In this superstitious village, as a reference to this guy who broke the world, is basically like referring to someone as a witch in the time of the Salem Witch Trials. Which is all really interesting because, obviously Robert Jordan does a lot of really interesting and sometimes problematic things with gender

SALLY: True

EMILY: But one of the most fascinating things he does is reverse the effect of the Christian Fall if that makes sense. In our world, where Christianity has the most effect on Western cultures, as it were, it's understood that Eve, the first woman that God created, bit into the fruit, the forbidden fruit, and thus caused the Fall of Men. And therefore she's been cursed to have to bear children and basically just to be the weaker sex, because she fucked up. Which, you know, you could pin a lot of historically women's oppression to that. In *Wheel of Time*, it does the reverse. In *Wheel of Time*, it's the men that fucked up. Which is refreshing

SALLY, *with a lot of feeling*: Which is so *good*! So fucking good.

EMILY: It's so interesting because we get to see the power dynamics of men and women in daily lives like in a rural village. And rural places are where these things tend to be in the most full force, you know? Rural places in America are where, frankly, women are most at risk. And similarly, actually not similarly. Men are treated pretty well, obviously, in *Wheel of Time*, but we do get to see that the real authority figure, that Rand thinks of as an authority figure, is Nynaeve. Even though she's a very young woman, and even though she's also surrounded by very powerful men. And there's also the idea of the Aes Sedai, who are kind of like this world's, um, priest. I don't know. Is there a good metaphor?

SALLY: Uh, yeah I don't know because their role they play is so specific.

EMILY: Yeah, and I do think there's a connection to Catholicism and the hierarchy of the church their just because they're related to the Power which is such a religious thing. Or an anti-religious thing as you see it in *Wheel of Time*. But...yeah. They're also all just so specific

SALLY: Yeah. I think – I don't think there is a good metaphor for the Aes Sedai. Priest is close, I think

EMILY: Yeah. And we see such a variety of ways that people react to them. For instance, Rand, Mat and Perrin are all super in awe of her. And sort of immediately just fall in love with her. They're like she's so beautiful. She's so otherworldly. She's so worldly, because she's from Tar Valon. She's from – she's very educated. She's seen the world. She's very powerful. We know that. I think there's certainly an element of fear to that, but it's not like they react poorly to her. They're very polite. We get to see other times in *Wheel of Time* when Aes Sedai are treated very badly because –

SALLY: People are very suspicious. Call them those “Tar Valon witches.” That's a running refrain

EMILY: Yeah, yeah. Which, *true*. They are all witches, but like in a good way

SALLY: But like in a cool way. Like, you wanna be an Aes Sedai. Obviously

EMILY, *mumbling*: I wanna be an Aes Sedai

SALLY, *mumbling*: I do. [Louder] So yeah, but then there is that level of awe because she comes to the village. She's another form of intrusion into this village. Much like Gandalf. She's Lady Gandalf. Literally

EMILY: Yep. Lady Gandalf

SALLY: Lady Gandalf. But interestingly she has a companion of her own, which Gandalf usually does not travel with a companion. But she has Lan? God I almost forgot his name

EMILY: [laughs] I forgot – to be fair, Lan doesn't say much.

SALLY: He's pretty boring, generally.

EMILY: Or arguably do much

SALLY: He's just there

EMILY: Yeah he just sort of lurks. He is, like, a positive male role model for Rand, but I don't know how much – a lot of Rand's emo attitudes about death and duty come from Lan. So I don't know if I can blame Lan for that [Sally laughs]. Generally I like Lan, but maybe I need to think more critically of him. I just – he's also pretty bland

SALLY: He's incredibly bland. I have no opinion of him, because he doesn't do anything interesting to me at all

EMILY: Yeah, He's Moiraine's bodyguard. He's our way of introducing the Warder-Aes Sedai system to us. You know, the witches all basically get bodyguards, which is interesting because it's taking the women in charge power dynamic and exploring how they would handle it when women are technically still weaker than men. How they would navigate the world. And they choose to do that with a basically subservient male companion

SALLY: Especially Moiraine who is tiny

EMILY: Yeah Moiraine is tiny. And certainly – I don't think we're ever in a situation? No, I'm sure we are. Especially when we get into Elayne's point of view. But with Moiraine in particular, I never feel like Moiraine is threatened. It's very interesting. I never feel like she's in a situation that she can't control

SALLY: Which is also so refreshing

EMILY: Yeah Moiraine is definitely tiny and in charge. I was going to say large and in charge, but

SALLY: She's not large. She's very small

EMILY: She's a smol

SALLY: No, but the Warder system is fascinating because Robert Jordan could have so easily, when reversing the gender roles in mythology, could have don't such a, like, I don't know, really cut and dry way of being like there's no threat to women. Like they are, like, I don't know how I'm describing – I don't exactly know what I'm getting after, but like –

EMILY: No yeah. It would almost be, like, too unbelievable

SALLY: Which is tragic because people will believe the impossible before they'll believe the implausible. That is another anecdote picked up from my thesis work. But just the notion that it feels like – it would be very jarring, in like a good and interesting way, to approach a society where women did not feel some threat from men. Because there are definitely some creepy men throughout *Wheel of Time*, and threats to the women. So the fact that Robert Jordan is like, while we have this gender dynamic, just because men are in charge in our world doesn't mean that there aren't threats to men. And the women are handling that, especially the Aes Sedai, in really interesting and fascinating ways

EMILY: Yeah and I don't know if we can give Robert Jordan credit for this, but I do think it was smart of him not to take the challenge of having women live in a totally safe environment. I think that's something that should be reserved for a female writer

SALLY: Absolutely

EMILY: Because she'd cover it so well. That's the type of thing [laughs] that's the type of fantasy world women in particular like to fantasize about. So, yeah, it's interesting that Robert Jordan didn't just reverse it. He did what I always think is wisest with fantasy, which is to take an existing system, twist it, and explore the consequences

SALLY: Yeah, and it just makes for much more interesting reading, as well. Like Robert Jordan – like I don't want to read a very thin veneer of an allegory of how bad women are treated in our society by showing us how bad men are treated

EMILY: No that's not it at all

SALLY: And Robert Jordan does it – basically this is just me complimenting Robert Jordan doing interesting things, so moving on

EMILY: And men – sorry I can't move on. I'm not ready to move on – I'm just really interested in the fact that men aren't exactly oppressed in the *Wheel of Time* system. They just have to suffer different suspicious. And you do interact with a few cultures, because *Wheel of Time* has a really rich diversity of cultures, where women really are matriarchal.

There's at least one place where men are expected to be extremely subservient to women. To the point that Rand's later mentor, who you haven't met yet, but her name's Cadsuane, she – I don't want to say replaces Moiraine because Moiraine is irreplaceable as we all know – but Cadsuane sort of takes over, and her interactions with Rand tend to be very strange and very, like, she does expect to be obeyed in a – she expects to be listened to and respected and treated as a superior rather than an equal.

SALLY: Which is a fascinating – I mean, given where I am – it's a fascinating, like, um foiling I guess would be the correct, or somewhat, literary term for Moiraine [emphasis on *moi* like in French] or Moiraine, whatever

EMILY: Sorry I call her Moiraine [like moy-rain]

SALLY: Oh, that's okay. Emily can't do the *moi*-raine thing

EMILY, *whispers*: I can't

SALLY: But the major – pretty much – it feels like every major plot problem where I am, books one through four, is that our main boys won't listen to Moiraine. They feel like, oh this Aes Sedai is meddling in my life. Blah blah blah. And she's so patient, and doing her best, to manhandle these three idiot, nineteen, twenty year olds who are like “I am going to do whatever” – which is probably more of an attitude on teens than on boys, because Egwene and Nynaeve are, luckily, allowed to do the same type of shenanigans. They don't have to be these well-behaved women all the time

EMILY: No they do their own running off and rebelling

SALLY: Disobeying, and poor Moiraine has to be like, “You fucking dipshits”

EMILY: Although it is interesting, still talking about gender dynamics, the genuine fear that, Mat especially, but also Perrin and Rand feel when it comes to disobeying Moiraine and rebelling against her. As opposed to Egwene and Nynaeve, who know there are going to be consequences, but they can logically assess the consequences without really any fear

SALLY: Yeah there is a deep anxiety that permeates

EMILY: Surrounding Aes Sedai

SALLY: Male points of view that is not – which is, like, when I first started reading it I was like this is so annoying because it's just another form of men disliking powerful women, but when you stop – and there's still certain parts of that. Maybe that's just me putting my world lens onto. But I also wonder how comfortable I, as a young woman, would be if there was this priest or some government official or something, having such a large role in my life. There definitely would be that level of anxiety, so it's just a really interesting exploration of power dynamics and gender dynamics and how that all interacts

EMILY: Which is the world we step into in *The Wheel of Time* in the first few chapters

SALLY: Yeah, kiddos

EMILY: We've been talking too long

SALLY: We've been talking too long. We'll pick this up with Fantasy Christmas

EMILY: [gasps excitedly] Which is ironic because Christmas is coming up for us, too. I don't know when we'll record this. Probably not during our break

SALLY: Probably not during our break, no

EMILY: No, I'm gonna need a few weeks to figure out what we're doing with this

SALLY: Yeah I don't know what we're doing. But that was fun!

EMILY: Yeah we need a sign off thing

SALLY: Um...uh...I want to make a "Jesus Take the Wheel" pun so badly right now

EMILY: Oh my god. What?

SALLY: Because it's like *The Wheel of Time*. We're passing off the wheel

EMILY: Ooohhh my god. Jesus take the Wheel of Time

SALLY: Jesus take the Wheel of Time. Is that – that's calling our listeners, our non-existent listeners Jesus.

EMILY: Whaaaaat [laughs]

SALLY: Listeners, take the wheel [attempting to sing Carrie Underwood's "Jesus Take the Wheel"] it was a long cold night – that's not how that song goes

EMILY: I'm ending this

SALLY: She's ending it. NOOOOOO

EMILY: I'm ending this

[both laughing as it ends]