



Episode 147: “The Swiss Army Knife of Buttholes”

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Running Time: 45 minutes

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

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

(theme song by Glynna MacKenzie plays)

Emily: Ah, fuck.

Sally: Hmm?

Emily: I should've hit two, since I want the exact same thing.

Sally: Oh, I do that all the time. I did that when we were ordering Village Baker yesterday --

Emily: (laugh)

Sally: And then I had to go through the menu again and find the same sandwich.

Emily: Have you guys heard how Sally and I always order the exact same meal?

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: We've been doing this -- I can't emphasize this enough -- this is not a -- like, a proximity thing, that we have aligned to each other's tastes. We have been doing this since day one.

Sally: Yeah, like, the first time Emily and I, like -- like, we knew -- like, we'd been hanging out around each other, but when we, like -- like, we went out to lunch one time, and it was the first time we'd, like, hung out --

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: And we got the same meal. (laugh)

Emily: Classic.

Sally: Yeah. And it's continued these past five and a half years.

Emily: (sigh)

Sally: It's always very funny -- well, it was always very funny, in the before times, when we'd be, like, sitting in an actual restaurant --

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Then it was like, 'kay, who's gonna go first, and who's gonna be like, "I'll have the exact same thing." (laugh)

Emily: (laugh)

Sally: God bless.

Emily: Oh, OK. OK, I am ordering the food ...

Sally: OK, I'm gonna put some lotion on my --

Emily: Oh, sounds nice.

Sally: Reptilian hands.

Emily: We don't have anything to talk about in this, um -- (laugh) With these chapters, really, so.

Sally: We can talk about how scientists have, like, rendered in upsetting detail a dinosaur's butthole.

Emily: What?!

Sally: (laugh) I'll show you the article that Julie sent.

Emily: Oh my fucking God. Boy, Cubby's is expensive. ASAP. Ah, perfect, 45 to 55 minutes. I mean, I am hungee, but that's how long it will take us to record this podcast.

Sally: Podcast -- podcast. "Scientists have described a dinosaur's butthole in exquisite detail."

Emily: EXQUISITE.

Sally: (laugh) Science alert dot com.

Emily: I need chapstick. (distant) Ahhh!

Sally: (laugh) This article is so funny.

Emily: I mean, it's the "exquisite" that gets me.

Sally: Yeah. Um. "When a dog-sized --" I don't know how to pronounce this -- pistachiosaurus?

Emily: Pistachiosaurus?!

Sally: That's what it -- (laugh) that's what it -- that's not what that is, but it's what it looks like.

Emily: I like it, though.

Sally: "Was living out its days on Earth, it was probably concerned with mating, eating, and not being killed by other dinosaurs. It would never even have crossed its mind that 120 million or so years later, scientists would be peering intensely up its clacker." (laugh)

Emily: What? I have a lot of thoughts running through my head.

Sally: "However, that's --"

Emily: Clacker. Is this --

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: What slang is that? What country uses that slang?

Sally: (laugh) I dunno. Michelle Starr from Science Alert dot com does, apparently.

Emily: Science Alert dot com.

Sally: "However, that's precisely what they have done, yielding the most description -- detailed description yet of a non-avian dinosaur's cloaca, the catch-all hole used for peeing, pooping, mating, and laying eggs. This Swiss Army knife of buttholes --"

Emily: No!

Sally: (laugh) "Is common throughout the animal kingdom today. All birds, amphibians, reptiles, and even a few mammals possess a cloaca. But we know little about the cloacae of dinosaurs."

(laugh) This article goes on and on, but I won't, um, need -- I don't need to finish it for you.

Emily: So we're not just looking up its buttohole; we are also looking up, um, its reproductive --

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Organ, and its -- what's the -- what's the -- urinary -- urethral organ?

Sally: Mm-hmm. Urethral ... Yeah, it's the waste, the sex, the laying eggs. Yeah, cloacas are fascinating.

Emily: Yeah. Birds are really interesting. Um, I know that's not, like, hot news coming from this podcast.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: (laugh) But dinosaurs. Dinosaur buttoholes. Not what I anticipated that we would be chatting about at the beginning of this podcast.

Sally: You're welcome.

Emily: Thank you, yeah.

Sally: "The Swiss Army knife of buttoholes."

Emily: Oh, man. If that has to be the title of this episode --

Sally: (cackle)

Emily: I am gonna be so unhappy. (laugh)

Sally: Probably should've sat closer to the mic while I was reading that; I'm sorry.

Emily: Oh, that's OK.

Sally: Yes --

Emily: Who cares about audio quality?

Sally: Not this podcast. (laugh)

Emily: Not -- not us. (laugh) This is our brand, and we all have to live with it. I think that's our new motto.

Sally: Yeah. Sarah McClintock has, like, desperately tried to get EHR to, like, improve our Audacity -- (laugh)

Emily: Yeah, no, multiple people have tried to tell me how to edit audio, and I have been like, "Thank you, but I don't actually want to learn how to edit audio." (laugh)

Sally: Yeah. Sarah's just so cute. She always sends these, like, "This guide was really helpful for all the podcasting I do," and I'm like, "You're so great," and then we just continue on with our --

Emily: Yeah, I need to --

Sally: Buffoonery.

Emily: I need you guys to know this: I know it is a deeply annoying personality trait of mine that I do not want to be told how to do things unless I specifically ask. And I know it is a problem that I should probably work on in therapy. (laugh) But it's just where I'm at.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: I don't like it. Sarah did, though, give me a guide on how to knit that I have been faithfully following, so.

Sally: So it's not all things.

Emily: I dunno why --

Sally: But she asked for that, so. Right? Didn't you ask Sarah for advice?

Emily: Um. No, I didn't ask her specifically. I think I just kind of asked Twitter in general, but she does know how to knit. She's very good at it.

Sally: That's true. She's been knitting a lot of fun stuff.

Emily: She's incredible at textiles of all types, so.

Sally: Ooh. Textiles of all types.

Emily: Yeah. That's a -- that's a free, um, little slogan for you there, Sarah, if you want it. (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) Some other things that have happened. Um.

Emily: Did you see that, like, cooking game that Aaron and Devin and I were playing the other day?

Sally: Yes.

Emily: That was -- I've been thinking about it for so long. Aaron was incredible at that game.

Sally: Aaron's a powerful man.

Emily: Yeah, he is, in all the, like, normal adult things. And also electricity, 'cause he grew up in a haunted house. (pause) Let me rephrase that. He did not grow up in a house that was haunted by ghosts. (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) That we know of.

Emily: He grew up in a house that marketed itself as a haunted house, and people came to enjoy the haunted house experience. This was a family business for Aaron and his family. It is one of -- not even the weirdest thing I have unearthed about him. (laugh) I love him. Anyway. There's this game, where you just, like, are all line chefs, and you all have to complete tasks in order to get orders out and whatever. And I'm the only one of us who has actually worked in food service, and I was terrible at this game.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Like, simply could not conceptualize what was going on, what I had to do, any of it. Devin was just, like, hand-feeding me instructions, and I was like, great. This is fine. Love it. (laugh)

Sally: I mean, from what I saw, it looked very chaotic, and, like, I could -- I don't think I could play it. I think it would give me a heart attack.

Emily: It was giving me a little bit of anxiety, but, like, mostly in a funny way, because I could just watch Aaron doing his thing.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Like, he just got in the zone. It was incredible. (laugh)

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Anyway, that was a small poem about my friend Aaron --

Sally: He's --

Emily: Who I just think is really neat. (laugh)

Sally: He is very lovely.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: He'll always respond to my dumb Lord of the Rings Tweets. (laugh)

Emily: (laugh)

Sally: Because he's so nice and good.

Emily: When we made D&D characters -- um, like, most of us made -- not, like, joke names, but, like, did not put much effort into our names. Aaron, like, did, like, an Elvish translation from Lord of the Rings.

Sally: He's so powerful.

Emily: And, like, I knew Aaron before that. But that was when I really entered his fan club, I think.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: I just appreciated the commitment --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: To the bit.

Sally: Yeah. I mean, I named my first D&D character by opening the baby names book that I have and just pointing at the page, so.

Emily: I mean, yeah. You come up with your D&D character name however you come up with it. I personally was in the McDonald's drive-thru ...

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: And then Devin was like, "What's your D&D character name?" and I was like "... Mack? Like a Big Mac?"

Sally: (laugh) It's -- I think it fits him.

Emily: It does. He's an idiot. OK.

Sally: This is Everybody Hates Rand, your friendly neighborhood Wheel of Time podcast. I'm Sally Goodger.

Emily: I'm Emily Juchau.

Sally: There, now we have an intro.

Emily: We do, yeah. Um. Should we just not acknowledge what happened last week? Not speak of it at all?

Sally: (laugh) I dunno.

Emily: You might have heard all about it already and be like, "Move on, idiots."

Sally: Yeah. Well, if you haven't, here, in 15 seconds or less: We recorded a really funny episode last week, and then Audacity ate it, and then rather than re-record, we decided not to. So. There was no episode last week.

Emily: That was fewer than ten seconds.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: And again, this is our brand.

Sally: We just have to live with it, baby.

Emily: Yeah, there's just, like, no turning away from this. Um.

Sally: Some people are professionals.

Emily: Pffft.

Sally: We're not.

Emily: We're not. (laugh) If anyone even thinks of getting me the McElroy podcast book, I will stomp you to death with my hooves.

Sally: (laugh) My hooves.

Emily: My hooves.

Sally: I feel like -- I think I've said this before --

Emily: (laugh, bad Scottish accent) "I'll be shooting for me own hand!"

Sally: (laugh) "I'll be shooting for me own podcast."

Emily: (laugh) Stupid.

Sally: Listen, I don't need the brothers McElroy to tell me anything. We're obviously --

Emily: Yeah, like I'm sure it will be a very funny book, and I do love to support them financially, but if anyone gives it to me, I should clarify, as a subtle hint that maybe I should up my podcasting game -- (laugh)

Sally: Yeah. Nah, B.

Emily: Then I will be furious.

Sally: No.

Emily: This is a ding-dong podcast, and we're proud of it.



Sally: That's correct. I -- I -- yeah. This is --

Emily: (laugh) OK.

Sally: Our ding-dong podcast.

Emily: This is our ding-dong podcast. Yeah, it really is, um -- it's tragic on a number of levels that we lost the, um -- episode a hundred and forty ... six?

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Is that it?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um. It had lots of good jokes, but also, like, there was pretty good content in there.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Because we -- this was, like -- we talked about three chapters --

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Which is a lot. Um, and now here we are with two chapters, one of which was very short -- like six pages, it felt like.

Sally: Yeah, which is -- for Robert Jordan just, like, a breath.

Emily: Yeah, like, the height of restraint for Robert Jordan.

Sally: Seriously.

Emily: I can't imagine where he summoned the willpower to stop himself after six -- only six pages of describing Sammael and Graendal plotting?

Sally: Oh my God. I mean, thank God it was only six pages because --

Emily: I know, like --

Sally: I would've burned the book. (laugh)

Emily: Yeah. Let me clarify that I did not want any more of it. (laugh) And it is paired up with a Mat chapter, so it's like, oh. This is a pleasant reading experience for once. Not the Graendal-Sammael bit, but the fact that the Graendal-Sammael bit is short --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Plus Mat.

Sally: Yeah. And even Mat's chapter is, like, not overly long. You know? Like, it was an actually digestible chapter, as opposed to some that feel like they just go on --

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: For, like, fifty pages.

Emily: What was your peak emotion reading these two chapters?

Sally: My peak emotion was ... I mean, it was mostly sadness, 'cause I feel like the Tinker massacre is deeply upsetting.

Emily: Oh, yeah, you're right. Mine was bamboozlement. I felt like I didn't know what was going on the entire time.

Sally: I mean, yeah. I -- I feel like that of the time when I read Wheel of Time --

Emily: Oh.

Sally: So I don't even acknowledge it. (laugh)

Emily: Well, this was particularly confusing 'cause it felt like it started off a lot of plot points that didn't actually go anywhere.

Sally: That's fair, yeah.

Emily: Like, Mat comes across -- Mat and his army, I guess -- come across the site of a massacre of Tinkers, and some theories as to who might have done it are thrown around, but none of them are, uh, you know, settled on.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And it doesn't seem like there's ever a definitive answer given.

Sally: Yeah, that's a good point.

Emily: And then Mat is himself attacked by a group of rogue Aiel, and he later finds, like, a gateway was made, but we never know which of the Forsaken -- or maybe Mazrim Taim --

Sally: Yeah. (laugh)

Emily: Sent a bunch of Aiel, and where did the Aiel come from?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And then, like, there's this whole bit with Sammael and Graendal, and, you know, it's the usual convoluted plotting, plotting, plotting, that I always feel like I'm supposed -- is supposed to go somewhere that it doesn't actually go.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Does that make sense?

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: So. Yeah, I was just sort of befuddled by the whole thing.

Sally: That's fair.

Emily: I also was very sad, though. The Tinkers ...

Sally: Yeah, I just -- I'm on -- so, RIP to everyone who's been reading my Path of Daggers blogs. I'm sorry. But I'm -- been on, like, a -- I mean, I've only -- the only three have been published, but I just wrote the twelfth one, and for, like, all twelve of those blogs, I have been like, I hate all the war stuff going on; I hate all of the politics around war and warfare. So the Tinkers, as our, like, pacifist, joy-filled people, hold a very special place in my heart.

Emily: I know, they're very -- they're very lovely.

Sally: Is what I was trying to say. Um. And so, to just, like, come back to this, where it's just, like, everyone -- and even, like, Mat, to his -- like, Mat, normally, I am fine with, but even he has the very, like, prevailing attitude of men in -- I almost just said Westeros. (laugh)

Emily: I mean, what's the difference, people?

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Less incest. That's all we can say.

Sally: (laugh) Um. Even he is kind of like, "Tinkers won't even raise a hand if you're, like, literally hacking them to death," and you can kind of hear a little bit of condescension in that, right?

Emily: Yeah, contempt.

Sally: Yeah. And so that just is frustrating, and I just wish they got more. They deserved more.

Emily: Well, and this plot point bothers me, I guess, particularly because, um -- it feels like, when you introduce, you know, your pacifist race of people, if -- pacifist race of people? -- pacifist group of people --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um. Like, that, then -- any sort of violence against them ought to be a major indicator of some sort of plot moving forward.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Like, um -- I'm trying to think of an example. Um, I know it's, like -- this is kind of weird 'cause it's a kids' show, but in Avatar: the Last Airbender, like, the atrocity of the genocide against the, um, Air Nomads, is sort of, like, tripled because they are, like, a group without an army.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: As Aang points out in one of the later seasons, I think -- that the Air Nomads didn't have a standing army --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So they were essentially defenseless against any sort of armed attack.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And so -- I don't know, the, like -- it becomes a bigger deal, and I just feel like it is, uh, rendered sort of as this, like -- um, what's a good way to say this? I feel like fantasy authors often, like, massacre pacifist groups of people, um, for the pathos of it all. But then, if you are not following through on that pathos by allowing their deaths to be in any way explored or made sense of or, uh, brought justice to --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Then what's the point?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: It just feels like you're killing off people for sport, essentially.

Sally: Yeah. And, like, this -- I feel -- you're right, I feel like this chapter is setting up something because you have Mat and his, like, 10,000-strong army or whatever --

Emily: And that's the other thing! I still don't fuckin' know what's going on with the convoluted plot in Illian!

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: I still don't fucking know. I'm confused all the time.

Sally: Yeah. (laugh)

Emily: OK, sorry.

Sally: No one knows what's going on.

Emily: Ahhh!

Sally: But yeah, Mat has this huge -- like, this huge army --

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: Marching 45 miles a day, which is insane for a group of people to do on foot or on horseback, um, and there's sort of this, like, dialogue about warfare, and Mat's constantly like, "Why would anybody want to be a soldier? It is so dangerous and there's just sort of this, like, nonsense violence," and then when Mat later gets attacked by the Aiel, he's basically like, "See ya." (laugh)

Emily: Yeah. (laugh) "Goodbye!"

Sally: Um. And, uh -- and then -- I can't remember which one -- but one of -- one of his little homies is like, "We need to get the Aes Sedai across the river to heal people," and Mat's like, "Yes, of course, I would never ask my soldiers to die if I could save them."

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: So, like, it's got this idea of, like, warfare and how kind of, like -- I don't know, I always get the feeling that Mat is, like, recognizing that warfare is senseless, you know? But he's also, like, the war boy. So you've got that set up against this sort of, like, really senseless and meaningless violence against the Tinkers. Like, what type of meaning can you make out of the massacre of people who are literally just living their lives?

Emily: Yeah, perpetrated by who? We see -- we have no idea.

Sally: Yeah, we have no idea. So I feel like there's -- there could be a really interesting sort of, like, coming together of ideologies where, like, warfare meets pacifism and what's happening and how is that changing the way Mat and his soldiers are thinking about things, and that just doesn't -- like, nothing comes of that.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: You know?

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Like, they're still just marching along. Mat's still gonna be our big war boy -- it's not like he's rejecting his destiny or anything.

Emily: Yeah. Mat has, like, the most potential, I think, to engage in violence in an interesting way.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: And all of the boys, on some level, are supposed to have plots that engage with violence, but we've, you know, sort of talked enough about how Perrin's wears really thin because it's so, um, immediate and personal for him, and there's really just not that much to explore, you know?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: You sort of just have to come to terms with the fact that you are a person who is going to be in violent scenarios and your call is to defend yourself. You're not a pacifist. OK. Time to come to terms with that and move on.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: With Rand, you know, he is also sort of in this weird position where he is, um, having to make big, violent decisions for whole nations at a time, and he just doesn't really have a whole lot of choice in the matter. I know he has more choice than the text usually gives him, but he's sort of stuck in this -- pardon the expression -- box that fantasy puts him in.

Sally: Yeah. Well, it's like Robert Jordan made -- like, Robert Jordan wrote Rand that way.

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: Like, if he wanted to interrogate the violence that leaders do upon their nations by making these decisions, he could've done more of that, but Rand is just like, "Yeah, I'm the leader of these countries. These are the decisions the genre needs me to make."

Emily: Yeah. Whereas you have Mat, who, from pretty much the moment he is introduced, is no -- is not interested at all in being a violent person.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Or in, um, participating in violence. He has some, you know, interest in adventure and things that are exciting --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And he's a little bit of a thrill-seeker. But he doesn't enjoy being in harm's way or putting other people in harm's way.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And yeah, the fact that he is just, like, stuffed into the mind of this incredible general, that he's handed this skill set that he doesn't necessarily want -- it would be so much more interesting if he, I don't know, tried to hide it.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Like, if he at all became conscious of the fact that Rand will use this and was, like, sort of on the run from that.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: I dunno. You could do a lot of things with Mat.

Sally: Yeah. Especially because Mat is our, um, you know, our folk hero, everyday character --

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Who's supposed to -- though this thread for him sort of unravels in the latter half of the series -- he's supposed to be, like, the voice of the people on the ground. Like, Mat is supposed to be our character who's got, you know, the most roots, so to speak, even though that usually relates to, like, family. Like, Mat is supposed to be our most grounded character as opposed to being, like, lofty and noble. So, like, it feels like there should be -- and you see hints of that coming out when he's talking about, you know, he's fine having horse thieves --

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: Being his scouts and stuff -- I know that's, like an -- in part, a tactical decision, but Mat's like, "I don't give a shit if you stole. Fuck the rich." (laugh) You know?

Emily: Yeah. "I'll pay you extra money --"

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: "To keep doing good at what you --"

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: "To keep being good at what you're good at."

Sally: Yeah. So, like, you see hints of that, but I just feel like this moment where he sees just, like, everyday people -- these Tinkers, women and children -- massacred could have been a turning point for some of the choices he's making, and he's just, like -- but then again, Robert Jordan makes the decision to sort of snatch him out of this everyday man thing and just, like, thrust him into nobility.

Emily: Yeah, Mat, more than any other character, feels like he is only ever where the plot needs him to be.

Sally: Yes.

Emily: Like, Robert Jordan does not give him a clear delineation of what to do in a specific order. It feels like he just plucks him out --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Of the map and sticks him wherever he needs him to be.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And I'm like, what? (laugh)

Sally: Yeah. And it's, like -- it's kind of interesting because Mat himself very much feels like that, you know?

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: So there's, like, a little bit of that, but it's also, like -- it's just bad writing, you know? (laugh) Like, even if you, like, build it into your character, like, it's still -- you control where that character goes and, like, you could have made a more steady march forward for him, even if it feels a little chaotic.

Emily: Yeah. I just, like -- the point in this book -- which we haven't got to yet, but we're, uh, fast-approaching -- when Rand is just like, "Forget your whole convoluted plan, Mat," that has never actually been explained to us clearly.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: "I'm just going to put you in this totally other different place to do this totally other different task, which for some reason no one else in my sphere can do."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Like, that is one of the most batshit wild -- not just character decisions but writing decisions in the entire series.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And it is not treated as such.

Sally: Yeah. It's treated as completely logical for Rand to take his military genius and have him do such a, you know, inane task as take one person from one place to another.



Emily: Yeah, when you have a character like Rand, who is bordering on insanity, you could actually make sense of this batshit thing.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But it -- you'd have to make a bigger deal out of it.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Like, Mat had -- would have to be like, "OK, I can no longer trust Rand to make rational decisions."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Like, people have to react to it as though it is batshit.

Sally: Yeah. As opposed to --

Emily: And nobody does.

Sally: Everyone just being like, "Sure."

Emily: "Yeah, whatever, Rand's gonna Rand."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: I just feel like at this point in the series, we have, like, suddenly come over this hill and entered, like -- like, Marvel comics territory in the way that when you're reading a Marvel comic, it does not feel grounded at all.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: The stakes are so whack because someone -- you know, aliens or supervillains are attacking all the time. People don't ever die and stay dead.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: There are no stakes.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Everything is just, like -- nothing matters. And I feel like that's where we're at.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And we're only six books into the series, and you're still trying to make us, like, feel things with groundedness, if I can, like -- I don't know how to say that. I'm not being very articulate tonight. (sigh) But, like, if you're going to suddenly blow us into epic fantasy

proportions, then you can't still be having these, like, beats of humanity and groundedness and unsolved massacres.

Sally: Yeah. And it's like ... I can't think of the -- there -- I feel like there was a specific term for it, so I'm probably, uh, forgetting something, but -- not to draw the Lord of the Rings parallel -- but there's, like, um -- at the end of the Lord of the Rings, at the end of the Return of the King, there are, like, these two marriages that sort of anchor the ending that, like, kind of wrap things up. So Aragorn and Arwen get married, and that's a very much, like, noble marriage that has its, like, direction pointing towards divinity, basically, in -- in the sort of literary, mythological sense, where they're getting married, and this marriage is going to, like, restore the land and bring in a new age and bring in a new era of peace, and then on the other side of the continent, basically -- actually, I can't picture the map -- but on the other side of the social scale, you have Sam get married to Rosie Cotton, which is a very, like, in-the-earth, two hobbits are getting married; it happens all the time. But it kind of wraps up that storyline, where it's like, we're continuing on with our things; we're bringing peace back to the Shire; we're bringing peace back to Middle Earth, but in this, like, very, lofty way, in this very on-the-ground way. And that's very successful because throughout Lord of the Rings, J.R.R. Tolkien makes, like, a point of being like, "The hobbits are our grounded characters," and we see this over and over again. Like, the focus is on these little bits of humanity. And so, like, it's possible to do that, to have fantasy be happening on an epic scale and then be happening on the very, like, domestic scale, but, like you were saying, it -- there's just, like, no anchor for that. I feel like we're, like, up in this realm of epic fantasy, and Robert Jordan has these moments that just, like, drop us down, and then we're just sort of expected to, like, rocket right back up. Like, there's nothing that keeps it on the level of the personal, you know?

Emily: Yeah. And I guess I felt like until this point, that had been Mat.

Sally: Yeah. Yeah.

Emily: Mat is the one kind of keeping us -- like, I -- I know we're huge Mat stans; I get it, like, and it's probably annoying, but, like, Mat is the single character who feels grounded in reality.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Who feels like -- like, stakes are, um -- the stakes are what they are.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Like, at the end of book three, the girls get kidnapped, and Mat is very intent on rescuing them, um, and making sure they are no longer kidnapped. And the girls, by the time they are kidnapped and get out and sort of move on, they have just been, like -- they have processed it as just, like, "Oh, this is part of what we needed to do in our quest."

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: You know? “We have accepted that occasionally you get beat up by the Black Ajah and thrown into a dungeon and whatever. You have to have a convoluted escape plan through Tel’aran’rhiod.” And Mat’s the only sane character going, “Why are you -- what are you even doing here?”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Like, why are you guys doing this?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: What’s happening? And also, fuck the quest if you’re going to be thrown into a dungeon.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Like, why are we the ones responsible for this?

Sally: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, I agree -- up to this point, it has been Mat. And then we’re -- we’re already losing that here, and then I feel like, once we get to Ebou Dar, we kind of lose it --

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Completely. Is -- I mean, I haven’t gotten there yet, but at the point when Mat is roped into the Seanchan nobility and forced to lead armies or whatever. Um. So yeah, it’s just -- it’s just very frustrating, and I feel like it contributes to a lot of plot points that just kind of float off in space. And I also think it’s -- this is a personal thing for me -- but I think it lends to my frustrations with the Wheel of Time, where we have very much, like, top-down look on the world and how these large decisions and these large instances of violence are affecting people’s lives.

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: Um, which I think is kind of common in epic fantasy anyway, because it is so grounded and rooted in, like, having characters in the nobility and people in the place to make decisions, so you have that, like, top-down look, as opposed to having just, like, one character who’s like, “I am just a person, and this is how this is affecting my life.”

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: And we just, like, don’t really get that because all of our characters are roped up in the quest. And I feel like even inside the quest, there should be ways that this is affecting their lives, but we just don’t -- I don’t know. I’m also not making very much sense tonight.

Emily: I just -- (sigh) I -- I think we’re all pretty tired of warfare in fantasy, but I do also get it, as someone who’s, like, trying to plot a fantasy book right now. I get that it is incredibly hard to,

like, dance around warfare while still having what feels like stakes, because in our real world, war is happening all the time.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And it feels like an omnipresent threat to us. The -- like, the omnipresent threat, I guess.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And so trying to write around that is really, um, hard if you don't want to engage with it in the way that it has been engaged tiredly over and over again.

Sally: Yeah. And I -- I know I'm, like, very adamantly, like, "No more warfare." Um, and -- but I definitely think there are texts that -- like, there are ways to write about war in -- that aren't just, like, quite as grating as *Wheel of Time* is on me. Like, I don't want to, like, keep talking about how *Finnikin of the Rock* is such a good book, but -- I actually just wrote a *Path of Daggers* blog on this -- but *Finnikin of the Rock* kind of rather than this top-down approach, takes, like, a bottom-up approach, where all of our characters are very much impacted by the suffering that this war has created and so, like, all of our characters are moving towards ending the war and the suffering, not just winning the war --

Emily: Mm-hmm. Yeah. Or starting the war.

Sally: (laugh) Or starting the war.

Emily: In *Rand's* case.

Sally: And so, like, that is very interesting. It's, like, their situation -- they've been put in a war situation by forces outside of their control; their country was invaded.

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: And so people were -- it's -- it's a very good book. So then they're moving forward like, "How can we end the suffering of ourselves and our people and bring justice to our people?" rather than *Rand* just being like, "I need to conquer all of the world."

Emily: Yeah. So I'm, like -- that's what I want when *Mat* comes across a massacre of *Tinkers*. Rather than him being like, "Well, bury the dead, and we're moving on tomorrow --"

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: "Off toward wars unknown." You know?

Sally: Yeah, like, where's that *Mat Cauthon* who does have, like, a -- a -- up to this point, a very strong moral compass, despite what he says? Like, where's the *Mat* who's like, "Let's find out who did this." Like --

Emily: Yeah, where's detective Mat Cauthon?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: With his little gray cells. (laugh)

Sally: Yeah. Poirot Cauthon.

Emily: (laugh)

Sally: Um.

Emily: God, I would kill to have a, like, procedural of Mat as a detective. (laugh)

Sally: Mat and Talmanes. Sherlock and Watson. (laugh)

Emily: There's a lot of, like, good Mat/Talmanes/Nalesean/Daerid --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Content here. As usual. The book, oddly, starts -- not the book -- the chapter starts with Nalesean being like, "Mat, have you ever wanted to be a Warder?" and Mat being like "Fuck no."

Sally: (laugh) Yeah.

Emily: "What the fuck are you talking about?"

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Which, I think, um -- we complained in a recent episode about how you -- we don't really understand the types of men who become Warders.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Because we don't really see any normal Warder types. All we get is Lan --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Who's a fuckin' edgelord. (laugh)

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But here we have three men who have, like, romanticized the concept of becoming Warders in the same way that, I think, Egwene has romanticized the concept of being an Aes Sedai --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Early in the series especially. So, um. That's just, like, an interesting little nod. And I think it is sort of similar to Mat's prevailing question through this chapter of why would anyone choose to be a soldier.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Mat is also the type of person who thinks, "Why would anyone choose to be a Warder?"

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But he is literally surrounded by people whose value system glorifies this type of violence.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And so, yeah, of course for these guys, like, the peak of masculinity and honor and violence is being a Warder.

Sally: Yeah. I feel like there's also very much that, like -- we talk about how Lan basically has a suicide wish --

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: And I feel like that is coming out in a smaller way here, where men are like, "It would be, like, the pinnacle of, like, chivalrous masculinity to, like, live your life for an Aes Sedai and die for her and, like, be her super-warrior."

Emily: Yeah, like, it is an unspoken law that suicide ideation is required if you're going to be a soldier on some level.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, and I guess it is just, like -- on the Warder-Aes Sedai scale, that is, um, tenfold.

Sally: Yeah. Yeah. So. But also -- (laugh) I don't know, I guess I didn't pick up on this, really, the first time I read this, but when the Aiel are coming to attack Mat, he is in, like, his underwear, counting stars, like a drama farm boy.

Emily: Mat is peak little boy --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: In this section.

Sally: Yeah. (laugh)

Emily: And of course he is because Olver --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Is reintroduced as, like, a foil.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But, like, this chapter starts out with Nalesean being like, “Hey, have you ever wanted to be a Warder?” and Mat’s juggling and thinking about the cool shit he keeps in his pockets.

Sally: Yeah. He’s like, “Look at my sick fuckin’ rocks.”

Emily: He’s like, “I fuckin’ love rocks.”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: “I love cool, colored rocks.”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And I’m like -- (laugh)

Sally: I -- yeah.

Emily: He has this little collection, which, of course Olver also has a little collection, who’s like, “Look at my sweet-ass --”

Sally: “Look at MY cool rocks.”

Emily: “Look at my sick-ass rocks.”

Sally: Yeah, and Mat’s like, “Ah, those are some dank rocks.”

Emily: Mat’s like, “You’re hired. This is a stronger resume than Talmanes ever gave me.”  
(laugh)

Sally: (laugh) Um, so Mat’s, like, laying -- yeah, which is literally something he did when he was a kid, would, like, count constellations.

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: So that’s why he isn’t in his tent when he tries to get assassinated, so, you know, ta’veren.

Emily: Look.

Sally: But Talmanes comes up, drunk, and is like, “Mat, I brought you brandy because it was so sad that all those people were dead.” And Mat’s like, “I have to do something or they’re going to kill Talmanes.” (laugh) And I guess I just, like, didn’t get that the first time, that he was like, “I can’t let them kill Talmanes.”

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: So he just, like, starts running down the hill, screaming.

Emily: It's this, like, comedy of errors --

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: That 's also intensely sad because --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Talmanes is walking up, drunk, intensely PTSD about the whole thing --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And is like -- (slurring) "Hey, Mat, I know you're not -- I know you're not sleeping 'cause you saw some dead people, and boy, isn't that fucked up?"

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: "So why don't we get a little drunk 'cause we're men and we don't know how to handle feelings?"

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And Mat's like, "Oh my God. Talmanes is going to literally get himself chopped into pieces." (laugh)

Sally: Yeah. (laugh) Yeah. And it's just like, OK. So Mat, in his smallclothes, and his staff -- of course he brought his staff out to lay in the grass with it --

Emily: What a little lunatic.

Sally: Is just, like, running down the hill, calling all his soldiers, while Talmanes is still like, "What the fuck is happening?"

Emily: Yeah, it's amazing that Talmanes still lives.

Sally: Yeah. (laugh)

Emily: I mean, he gets, like -- he has to have a tourniquet, so --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: He got stabbed pretty bad in the leg, I guess. But -- blegh.



Sally: Yeah. So, anyway. (laugh) It's very chaotic, and a little homoerotic, as a lot of Mat's chapters are.

Emily: You're right, yeah.

Sally: Um. And -- yeah, then Mat gets sliced and diced, so he has to get sewn up by --

Emily: Nerim.

Sally: Talmanes' manservant.

Emily: Nerim.

Sally: Who is not very good at doing stitches.

Emily: Who is not very good at stitching, and Mat's trying to, like, be all stoic, because Olver's there.

Sally: Because Olver is there.

Emily: And then he's like, "AHH! Fuck!"

Sally: Yeah. (laugh)

Emily: "Could you not?" (laugh)

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um. Boy, yeah, there actually is, you know, plenty to say about this chapter, it being a Mat chapter. Um, but you know, they're on the road; they've made good time. It's been eleven days. Mat says they're about halfway to the end point in Illian --

Sally: Wherever that is.

Emily: Somewhere in Illian, I guess. Um, we're introduced to Mat's little band of former horse thieves turned scout -- scouts.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Uh, primarily Chel Vanin -- which is how I'm going to pronounce that -- um, who's the only one who's ever really named.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, and who is -- for some reason, ends up in Mat's little, uh, fellowship of the Band. Who takes him to see this, uh, Tinker massacre. There's no indication of who did it. Mat rejects

several theories, such as the Aiel who are across the river, also, I guess, making their way into Illian.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Um, and, you know, normal brigands. Mat says, if they were, like, just looking for horse - horses -- if they were just horse thieves, then they would not need to kill the Tinkers. You could just take the horses. Tinkers wouldn't stop you.

Sally: Yeah, they wouldn't do anything.

Emily: Yeah. (clears throat) But they decide to camp for the night, and Mat is kind of just, like, laying out under the stars, moping a little bit, you know, as he does, and feeling a little restless. The Aiel attack -- just a dozen Aiel, I guess. Mat and Talmanes both get injured; some other guys get killed or injured. Um, and then while Mat is investigating around his tent and finds out a gateway was made to bring the Aiel here, um, he finds Olver. And then somehow over the course of their miniature job interview, while Mat is also being sewn up, he is like, "Sure, you can stick around and run messages." Which is just, like -- as usual, Mat is not -- Mat's train of thought is not given to us very clearly.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Um, there, so we don't have Mat thinking like, "OK, well, here's a child who I can't really responsibly bring into my military, but he's sort of already here, and it's clear that he's not going to be -- I can't foist him on someone else --" You know, duh duh duh duh duh.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: He just is like, "Alright, you're hired." Which, for Mat complaining about how little he wants to be in the army, surrounded by violence, it's so -- it's an interesting move that he is like, "Sure, I'll bring a child into this."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Especially a child with whom he strongly identifies.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So. I don't know.

Sally: Yeah. It's not a great choice.

Emily: It's definitely not a great choice. Olver doesn't need to be a character. Um. We've said that before, but, you know, it's kind of interesting. A -- a -- an interesting look, I think, into Mat's psyche.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: I think Mat can't see any way out for himself and is also unable to conceptualize a way out for Olver.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Anyway, then we switch over to Graendal, who comes to meet Sammael, and they just la da da da da da da.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Sammael says that Rand accepted his truce --

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Which is patently untrue.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And for some reason, Graendal, psychologist extraordinaire, does not pick up on that lie.

Sally: I know. She's like, "That seems wrong," and he's like, "No, it's right," and she's like, "OK, you must be telling the truth."

Emily: She's like, "Alright, well. You're only a supervillain, so I guess I can trust you." (laugh)

Sally: I know.

Emily: And he uses this idea, that Rand has teamed up with Sammael and now they're just going to go after all the other Forsaken -- including Graendal if she doesn't start, you know --

Sally: Shaping up.

Emily: Giving up names -- um, to try and pry information out of her as to where other Forsaken are. And all Graendal says she knows is that Mesaana is in the White Tower, which is pretty old news.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, and then she leaves in a huff, and Sammael's like, "Ba ha ha ha ha, manipulating people."

Sally: He's like, "LMAO, I can't believe she believed that."

Emily: He's like, "What the fuck? Oh my God, she's slipping."

Sally: "I can't believe that worked."

Emily: "I can't believe that worked." (laugh) "You think this is a joke?" "Eh, kind of."

Sally: (laugh) "Eh, kind of."

Emily: (laugh)

Sally: Ugh, that animatic is so funny.

Emily: God, I fucking love that animatic. (laugh)

Sally: "You know, traffic." Geese.

Emily: Geese. (laugh)

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: No one on Earth knows what we're talking about.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: And I refuse to explain.

Sally: I mean, how would we? (laugh)

Emily: Um, so that's that, basically. Anything else to say about it?

Sally: I don't have anything else to say. I had surprisingly more to say than I thought I did.

Emily: I know, yeah, I -- I should remember that when Mat is around, we'll always come up with more things to say, but. Um. Yeah, an interesting, uh, but ultimately not fruitful, I think, investigation into war and violence.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Especially because Robert Jordan is just like, "I'm just gonna leave you hanging with the mystery." You know?

Sally: Of who killed these lovely people.

Emily: Of who killed these totally normal, minding-their-own business people.

Sally: I know.

Emily: Maybe it will be hinted later? I did mean to, like, Google it and find out if it's ever told to us, but I assume one of you can just tell us.

Sally: (laugh) Please do our work for us. This isn't a professional podcast.

Emily: Um, this -- (laugh) Yeah, this is not a professional podcast. I don't know if we've made that clear enough in the last 44 minutes of bad audio. I did actually adjust, literally, our volume mid-recording, so. (laugh) That's where we're at. Um, thanks for listening. Thank you to Glynna MacKenzie for our theme song. Thank you to all of you for sticking with us despite, uh, last week's shenanigans.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: If you missed it last week or didn't see it on our Instagram, we are now an affiliate of bookshop dot org. You can find out all the details about that on Instagram, uh, but basically, if you need to buy a book or want to buy a book, you should check out our link that is in our Instagram linktree.

Sally: Mm-hmm. And our Twitter linktree. It's the same linktree, but it's also on Twitter.

Emily: Um, and if the book isn't there, you can DM us and we will add it for you, unless, of course, it is an offensive book or written by an offensive author who -- to whom we do not wish to give a platform.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Um, but that way, you will be able to buy your book through an independent bookstore while also giving money to independent bookstores and directing ten percent of that to us, and we are going to direct that toward mutual aid organizations.

Sally: Yeah. So hopefully a way for, um, the EHR community to pool our resources for good, since I know we're all already buying books anyway.

Emily: Yep.

Sally: So.

Emily: We're excited.

Sally: Very excited. In fact, I need to go post some recommendations, for it is Wednesday.

Emily: Ha ha.

Sally: Wed-ed-nes-day.

Emily: Do you have a sign-off?

Sally: (laugh) I mean, I feel like I should have saved the dinosaur buttthole conversation --

Emily: I mean --

Sally: For now.

Emily: But what an opening, you know?

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: And I mean that in more ways than one. (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) Ahhh! Um, do I have a sign-off? Not one that's funny,

Emily: (laugh) OK, the dinosaur butthole joke it is to end with.

Sally: (laugh) OK, bye!

Emily: Goodbye, everyone.