



Episode 170: Bimbic Inspiration

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

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

(theme song by Glynna MacKenzie plays)

Emily: Okay, anyway.

Sally: I'm sorry, I just feel like I have nothing to say about these chapters.

Emily: Yeah, it's a little tough. I feel like we're also starting to say that more and more, but we're in book seven; we can't wind down yet.

Sally: Well --

Emily: We're about to be at our peak. But boy, is there nothing to say about Egg manipulating people.

Sally: Yeah, I just feel like we covered a lot of it last episode, and then as we get into the, like, Lan stuff, it's like, I don't know how many times we can say that the Warder bond is deeply abusive and manipulative.

Emily: Yeah. They talk about it a lot more in this chapter in terms of, like -- like, Egg gets into a little more detail about what happens to Warders after their Aes Sedai ... dies ... sorry, I don't know about subject-verb agreement there.

Sally: Aes -- Aes Sedai ... dead.

Emily: Um, if a Warder's Aes Sedai dies, as with Lan and Moiraine, apparently the, uh -- the mental response, which is triggered by the inherent nature of the magical bond, is that they just, like, simply cannot go on living. It's a little bit like being stilled, I think?

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: And I think what Robert Jordan is trying -- well, actually, I should stop saying that I think I know what Robert Jordan is trying to do. But I think when you compare what happens to Warders slash Aes Sedai after the other half of their bond dies to the idea of stiling, we're getting these, like, um, magical forms of mental illness. Like, an Aes Sedai is stilled, and everyone describes what happens afterward as just, like, a -- a really deep form of depression. And that is really, essentially, our only exploration of Depression™ within this series. There aren't any characters who we know of who just are depressed, who have that mental illness --

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Unless it is magically triggered upon them.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: We similarly don't know anyone who's just sort of going insane unless they are interacting with, um, *saidin*, the male half of the Power, and we don't really know anyone who, uh, reaches this level of suicidal ... grief?

Sally: I -- yeah.

Emily: Masculinity? I -- it's like toxic masculinity weaponized and turned back on oneself; I don't know how else to describe it. That isn't a natural process, but of course, when you have that, a very unnatural process, compared to the depression of losing your magic powers, which seems to us like something that would naturally happen regardless of whether magic was involved, you're just creating a whole, like, set of just pathologizing mental illness.

Sally: Yeah. Um.

Emily: I don't know if that was very clear, but.

Sally: No, it was very clear, and it was very smart. Um, and to just kind of take that and run with it in, like, a little bit of a different direction, maybe. Um -- I also am sorry I keep saying this -- but I talked about this a little bit in one of my Path of Daggers blogs, and I probably was a little bit more coherent there, 'cause I'm always a little -- little bit more coherent in writing -- not a lot. Um. But just the way that Wheel of Time continues to present almost these consequences for using magic and engaging in the magic system, we get, then, into a universe in which magic always has a price, it seems like.

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: We're being put forth the, you know, magic always has a price. Rand goes insane.

Emily: Which is a popular, by the way, just sort of, like, magic worldbuilding thing.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Do you remember the show -- the ABC show "Once Upon a Time"?

Sally: Yeah. "Magic always has a price, dearie."

Emily: Yeah, that man, whatever his name is -- Rumpelstilskin --

Sally: Rumpelstilskin.

Emily: His voice in my head saying that line in particular in his little Irish accent is, like, stuck on a loop whenever someone says "magic" and "cost" --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: In the same -- same sentence.

Sally: Yeah, it is a very -- it is an extremely common, um, worldbuilding tactic, and I hope I touched on that in my blog, otherwise that was a huge oversight on my part. And, like, the way in which I particularly was attempting to talk about it is the way that it's like, magic has a cost on the body in Wheel of Time. Magic has a cost, and it's specifically this, like -- creates this really weird disability rhetoric inside a series that already has really strange and damaging disability rhetoric, that it's like, you cannot try to do too much, or, like -- and also that, like, it just brings us back to the classical argument that disability is a punishment. Like, you are being punished for something. You are not worthy. You know, it's not that disability just exists without, um, any sort of value placed upon it because it does just exist, and there shouldn't be any value placed upon it, but in Wheel of Time, where, like, there's this constant, sort of, almost in every book, I think we get a slightly different iteration of, like, magic will in some form create these various mental illnesses. I don't know. I don't really know what I'm trying to get at here. I don't know if I ever really got at it in the blog either.

Emily: I think in Wheel of Time, disability is either a, uh, war-time tragedy enacted in -- you know --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Rand loses a hand or whatever because someone attacks him, or he ends up with this chronic pain in his side --

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Because, uh, of a violent act, or it is, um, because you are enacting this sort of Icarus mythology --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Of reaching too close to godlike power, and your body and mind simply can't sustain that level of --

Sally: Yeah, and I'm not, like, inherently against the idea of, like, divinity not fitting inside the human body, if we can, like, talk about the One Power in the Wheel of Time world in the terms of divinity. I still -- the religion is so weird to me. Like, I'm not, like, totally against that. Like, in terms of worldbuilding, I think it is, like, interesting if you have, like -- like, if the human body could do what God did, then what's the point of either the human body or God, you know?

Emily: You're so right, bestie.

Sally: (laugh) It's like, I'm not totally against that, but it is just, like, this repeated sort of, like, "Don't do too much, don't do too much, don't do too much."

Emily: Well, and it's --

Sally: But it's like, I was on Prometheus's side, actually.

Emily: And I think it takes some of -- I think we lose some of the interesting flavor when the -- the disability that is, uh, portrayed or framed as this consequence for using magic, it's always, like, portrayed as, um, this sort of thing that everyone is trying desperately to avoid.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Rather than a sort of necessary and expected, like, price that they are willing to pay.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Like, there -- there -- we're sort of removing the agency element from it. Like, I think a world system where people are like, "Okay, this is going to really damage my body, but, uh, I'm aware of that, and I am willing to engage with that on any sort of level," is really different from a

world where it's like, "Men who use magic -- it's pretty hit-or-miss -- will probably go insane," and, like, so what we get is Rand just being horrifically terrified for the next, you know, entire series.

Sally: Yeah, no, that's such a good point. Like, there's a -- you know, it's the classic -- there's the other, like, really classic trope is like, you know, Odin giving up an eye.

Emily: Yeah. Mat giving up an eye. (laugh)

Sally: Mat giving up an eye -- yeah, Mat is an Odin figure; have we talked about that? -- Odin giving up his eye in order to have knowledge or, like, hanging himself from the World Tree in order to gain the knowledge of magic. You know, that's pretty common. And, um -- well, that -- that sort of vein of magic is, I think, pretty common. I can't think of any other example besides Odin right now, but you see it in, um, other texts where it's like, yeah, magic will pay a price, will take a toll on my body, even if it's just, like, the act of physically using some sort of major power, you know? But, yeah, here, it's the, just, like, you don't have a -- you don't have a choice. You can't opt out. The One Power is either something you're born able to use or not.

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: You can't be like, "Well, I will opt to learn magic," um, and the White Tower definitely doesn't give you a choice, and neither, really, does the Black Tower. It's either, like, you get fucking murdered or you become an Asha'man.

Emily: Yep.

Sally: The White Tower is like, "If we know you can channel, you belong to us now." Um, and I -- yeah, and to kind of circle back to a point you made earlier, it's really weird that it's, like, specifically mental illness that comes out of using the One Power. It's not like using it makes you go blind --

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: Or, um, causes you to, you know, you can't speak or whatever.

Emily: Right.

Sally: It's specifically mental illnesses, specifically forms of psychoses, depression, delusions --

Emily: Major PTSD.

Sally: Schizophrenia, yeah, PTSD. It's all of these various mental illnesses. Um. Which I don't really know what to make of. I find that really bizarre and interesting in a bad -- in, I think, a bad way.

Emily: (laugh)

Sally: I think I find it interesting in a bad way, not, like, well, that was an interesting and unique that Robert Jordan did.

Emily: No, I think what it just comes across as, like, since -- I just think since we're only seeing mental illness in terms of consequence, it just makes it seem like mental illness is, um ... I don't know, always something to be overcome, which is a sort of disability rhetoric that, um, someone else could probably speak to better than me, but it's like, sometimes mental illness, you just live with it, you know? And you adapt your life around it, and that's --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Totally fine. You don't have to, like, conquer it.

Sally: Yeah, you -- and I think in most -- I mean, speaking from my own experience, like, it's not something you can conquer. You know, it's not like you v. depression in the ring. You know?

Emily: You beat depression like you beat cancer.

Sally: Yeah. Like, that's just not really how it works. Um, and I also feel like it kind of comes back to the, like, your mental illness is your fault.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Like, if you just had more willpower, the One Power wouldn't make you go crazy. If you just had more willpower, you would not have OCD or PTSD or whatever. You know? Like, that's bad too. That's not correct. Lots of other -- like -- yeah.

Emily: Um. Like, um, we talked a little bit about not being able to opt out of it, and we have here, framed with Lan specifically, Egwene talks about how ninety-nine percent of the time, Warders volunteer to be Warders. Uh, supposedly. I mean, we have now seen two instances of men being forced into Warder-ships, or -- you know, Rand with Alanna and now Lan with Myrelle, um, so ... pfft. Sure seems like it's probably a systemic problem if two out of the hundred women we've met are willing to do it. But supposedly Warders are -- are -- are volunteers who know that this is a potential, uh, endpoint.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: And Egwene says something like, "I can't imagine the, like, courage that would take."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And so what we have there is this sort of glorifying of, uh, what I think arguably is itself a mental illness; you have to be -- we've talked about this before too -- you have to have some level of suicide ideation to willingly become a Warder.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: You have to at least be alright with the idea that your Aes Sedai dies, and then you are going -- unless your Aes Sedai is Moiraine and has done something akin to, Egwene herself says, gang rape -- unless she has done that ahead of time, you are going to die in battle --

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Just sort of pointlessly, uselessly, throwing your life away.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: In a way that you cannot control.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And it's like, okay, the guys who volunteer to be Warders are okay with that. And Egg is like, "Wow, they're all just such brave souls," and it's like, no, those are deeply traumatized men who have some serious issues.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And we're just gonna skim right over that.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: We're also going to skim over the equally batshit half of the Warder bond which is women who are willing to do this to men.

Sally: Uh-huh. Yeah! Like --

Emily: Women are like, "I'll sign up to have a Warder. If he dies ahead of time, I will be extremely weepy for one or two years. To be honest, though, if a normal guy that I was hanging out with every day of my life died, I'd be pretty weepy for a year or two also."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: I -- that just sounds like normal grief to me.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But they're like, "If I die, well, he dies too, and I'm just cool with that." Egg herself is like, "I don't know if I'll be able to let Gawyn go without doing that to him," and it's like, okay? Hello?

Sally: (sigh) I just -- not to, like, make this about the patriarchy -- (laugh)

Emily: But isn't it always? (laugh)

Sally: But it's just like, this -- I feel like the Aes Sedai and Warder bond is such a distillation of the way that Robert Jordan is, like, attempting to present matriarchy but is actually presenting a subverse -- like, a subversive patriarchy, you know? (laugh)

Emily: Robert Jordan is like that butterfly guy meme where he's like, "Is this matriarchy?"

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: But the butterfly is labelled "patriarchy."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: It's like, he just simply can't tell the difference.

Sally: Yeah, 'cause it's supposed to be, like, men are just, like, willing to serve women, and it's like, what's actually happening is that societal pressure is telling these men they are nothing if they are not a literal weapon.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: And so therefore they are like, "Being a Warder is the best possible way to be a weapon." Like, that -- it's been glorified -- like, Warders are, like, the scariest, baddest bitches on the block, you know?

Emily: (laugh)

Sally: So they're like, "Yeah, I will be a Warder, even if that means dying horribly."

Emily: Sorry, I just pictured Lan, like, walking into a room with "Six-Inch Heels" by Beyonce playing. (laugh)

Sally: Yeah. (laugh)

Emily: That's my bad bitch anthem.

Sally: Yeah. So, yeah, it's -- it's exactly that, it's just, like -- and, like, I -- like, I feel like this is not going to, like, exactly get at the nuance I'm getting at here, but, like, women being like, "I love it when men die for me" or "I'm willing to have men die for me" is also, like, a deeply -- deeply patriarchal statement.

Emily: Oh, yeah, it's a manifestation of the patriarchy. Uh, if you at all start thinking about the patriarchy in terms of the way that it was propagated in the American South or, if you want to go a little bit further back, in terms of codes of chivalry in medieval Europe --

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Then that is all about men being willing to die for women.

Sally: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

Emily: Da da da da da, specifically women's virtue.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, and women who are buying into that are not being fun, feminist girlbosses; they're just buying into patriarchy. Like, I don't know how many times we can say, patriarchy does not always look like "A Handmaid's Tale."

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Patriarchy -- women can be bossy in patriarchy too, okay?

Sally: Yeah. It --

Emily: That doesn't stop -- it doesn't stop men from being the ultimate wielders of power.

Sally: Yeah. Yeah. So, like, I just wanna, like, go dunk my head in a toilet.

Emily: Yeah, it's a little tough to handle.

Sally: The Warder bond is really just so hard for me. And, like, I really struggled -- they -- after the trailer dropped, they did, like, a Q&A with Rosamund Pike and Rafe -- Judkins? -- I think his name is -- so Rosamund Pike, the actress playing Moiraine, and the showrunner, and they were like, "Rosamund Pike, what's your favorite part of the series?" and she said, "My Warder."

Emily: Ew.

Sally: And I was like, this does not give me a lot of faith in the way --

Emily: I mean --

Sally: The adaptation will present the Warder bond.

Emily: To be totally fair, the guy who they cast as Lan? Super hot. (laugh)

Sally: Okay, you know what? You got me there. Statement recanted. (laugh) He would maybe be my favorite part of the show too. He's a very sexy man.

Emily: He's very hot. But also, yeah, that would suck. That just sucks. Rosamund, Rosamund.

Sally: It's just like --

Emily: Exercise some critical thinking.

Sally: Yeah, I'm sure it was -- I'm sure she meant nothing by it.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: You know, this is no, like, dunk on Rosamund Pike.

Emily: (sigh) I hope Rosamund Pike hasn't even read the entire Wheel of Time series.

Sally: Yeah, I hope she opened it and was like, "This is not for me. I can do better."

Emily: "Pfft. Stick to the script, baby."

Sally: Yeah. Um. 'Cause it just was, like -- and just the way everyone reacted to it, they're like, "Oh, it's so cute. It's so cute that she and Lan feel this way about each other." You know?

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: I'm like, it's not! Moiraine was like, "I'm going to sell your body, soul, mind, psychological well-being to this total nutjob of a woman."

Emily: (sing-song) Ummm, yeah, Myrelle needs to fucking die.

Sally: So that she can eventually pass you off to Nynaeve like the well-trained dog that you are.

Emily: Oh my God, the, like, dialogue in which Egwene is like, "I see you're working him hard," which is, like, one of the, apparently, methods of getting men to get past their horrific battle rage slash grief, whatever.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But, like, the dialogue is all referring to Lan as though he is inhuman.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: As though he is animal, which is all -- a big enough red flag, I think, already, but, like, just in case it needs to be said flat-out, there is nothing romantic inherently or inherently, uh, good or pure about men dying or being maimed or otherwise harmed to protect women. Putting that on one gender, the preservation of one gender, at the feet of another is very sexist and very bizarre. If you are willing to, um, I don't know, be put in harm's way for another person because that's the world you live in, like, on an individual level, that's fine.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But on a systemic, gender-based level, that's absolutely not fine. (sigh) Okay, anyway.

Sally: The -- yeah, the conversation they have in which Egg is deeply complicit in the dehumanizing language --

Emily: And also is just saying, herself, some absolutely wack things.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Siuan's reacting to Myrelle as though she's done a war crime, which is, I mean, pretty rich, coming from Siuan, war criminal.

Sally: (laugh) Yeah.

Emily: But also, like, okay, fair enough, Egg herself tells us, as I've said already, that this is akin to gang rape. But then Egg is like, "Mm, well, I kinda get it. I don't -- I don't think Nynaeve would be able to, like, see Lan without just bonding him against his will. I don't think I'd be able to see Gawyn. That's just, like, an expression of romantic feeling." And it's like, if you think that putting that on another man is an acceptable outlet for your romantic feelings, then girl, you need therapy.

Sally: Yeah. So much of it.

Emily: Like -- and what that does, by the way, by -- pfft. By comparing the Warder bond to rape and then having Egg framed as a forced Warder bond apologist, Egg is, via Robert Jordan's writing, saying that rape can sometimes be an expression of romance if, in fact, the woman would eventually be fine with it. Would consent in retrospect.

Sally: Eugh.

Emily: Which is, um, an argument in rape apologist circles.

Sally: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

Emily: So Robert Jordan isn't coming up with anything groundbreaking here; he's just borrowing it from the worst possible source. He sounds like a fucking incel.

Sally: Yeah. "I mean, she loves me now."

Emily: "She loves me now; therefore it's okay that I raped her then."

Sally: Wow. I don't think consent really works retrospectively.

Emily: Um, it does not.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Obviously.

Sally: There's my hot take of the day.

Emily: (laugh) Welcome to EHR, where we only say groundbreaking things.

Sally: (laugh) Like, "Consent doesn't happen retroactively," and "The Wheel of Time is a patriarchal society."

Emily: Oh my God.

Sally: Wow. Wow.

Emily: Florals in spring? Groundbreaking.

Sally: Groundbreaking. Ugh.

Emily: Boy, this has just been, like, thirty minutes of Bummer Town. Sorry.

Sally: Cow-a-bummer. (laugh)

Emily: Cow-a-bummer, am I right?

Sally: Um, the good news, if we can just kind of leave that stinking cesspit -- with the last -- one last comment, where Egg is like, "I can fix this," and then is like, "Go protect Nynaeve, as is your duty, you man."

Emily: And Lan is like, "Fuck, yeah."

Sally: I'm like --

Emily: I'm like, shut up, bruh. (laugh)

Sally: Lan is like, "Get my horse immediately. I love protecting women. I love being suicidal in the -- the task of protecting women."

Emily: Yeah, and then Lan is just over it. Lan's just over Moiraine after that.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: It's like, okay, so Egg did fix him. The whole pathological suicide ideation? It's just gone.

Sally: It's gone. The grief? It's gone.

Emily: Because he's so in love with Nynaeve. Like, didn't it occur to him while he was at Myrle's? "Hmm. Nynaeve is out there somewhere."

Sally: "Hmm."

Emily: "The woman I love."

Sally: No, he's too busy being, um --

Emily: Oh, no, wait, no, because he's like, "I have to stay away from the woman I love until Egg orders me to not do it?" I don't -- I don't understand. I don't understand, Lan.

Sally: It makes no sense because Lan is just, like, sort of a hinged-together ugly Barbie doll of toxic masculinity. (laugh)

Emily: (laugh) I'm gonna go -- I'm gonna go dark here again --

Sally: 'Kay.

Emily: For a second. But in the many episodes of Criminal Minds --

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: I have watched -- in psychology, child psychology specifically, it is, uh, a common thing to look at children's dolls to sort of identify a child's self-expression --

Sally: Hmm.

Emily: And what they think about themselves. If they are abusive to their doll, then it is perhaps an indication that the child themselves is being abused.

Sally: Mm.

Emily: Which is horrible. But now let's think about Lan as an abused -- as Robert Jordan's abused Barbie doll.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And it's just like, oh, Robert Jordan, you poor, poor, poor --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Soul. I wish you had not taken this out on your readers.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Whatever you had going on. Which maybe was just being a man in the second half of the twentieth century.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Sure does suck, doesn't it?

Sally: Sure seems like it. Okay, we're gonna leave that festering --

Emily: (to the tune of "Funky Town") Won't you take me to Bummer Town?

Sally: (vocalizing) Um, we get mention of the world's greatest man, Talmanes.

Emily: (laugh) Oh, I was like, do we?

Sally: Where is she going with this?

Emily: Yeah, I was excited.

Sally: Um. We get mention of him. We do not get to see him, which I feel like is very cruel.

Emily: I know. My elusive little Frenchman. (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) Yeah. We don't --

Emily: We don't get to see him till the next book.

Sally: Yeah, where he's, like, leaning sluttily against a pillar.

Emily: Ahh! Stop!

Sally: And he's like --

Emily: Talmanes is out to seduce me personally.

Sally: I know.

Emily: I hate him.

Sally: Just such a tiny -- yeah, short king energy for sure.

Emily: Well --

Sally: He's like, "Egg, where's Mat?" And she's like, "I don't know -- who? Who's Mat?" (laugh)

Emily: "Who? I've never heard of that man in my life," and Talmanes is like, "Goodbye."

Sally: (laugh) Yeah.

Emily: "Get fucking wrecked." Okay, yeah, let's, uh, circle back to the beginning a little bit here. Egg wakes up with a headache. This is a common occurrence for Egg for the next four books because, as we find out and as is implied, uh, throughout these chapters and especially at the end of this chapter, these headaches are, uh, magical in nature.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Here's another example of magic enacting disability. Not through Egg's own work but because, um, Halima, a.k.a. Aran'gar, a.k.a. Balthamel, is using the male half of the Power,

which no other Aes Sedai would spot, of course, to be like, “Hmm, I will weave my little crown of thorns around your sad brain.”

Sally: Give you -- I’m gonna use the headache weave on you.

Emily: (laugh)

Sally: Bitch. (laugh)

Emily: “You must never use this weave.” (laugh) Imagine Moiraine being as weird about the headache weave as she is about balefire.

Sally: “Rand, you can never use it.”

Emily: (using an unidentifiable accent) “This is extremely forbidden.”

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: “I will -- I personally will use it many times. But you should never. It will give your enemies very bad headaches.”

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: (laugh) I don’t know what accent I’m doing.

Sally: It’s very good, though. Ahh. (laugh)

Emily: “And the sad thing is that we’re in fantasy land, so there’s no acetaminophen to help them.” (laugh)

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: “They just have to fucking suffer.”

Sally: They have to get creepy, full-body massages from Halima.

Emily: Yeah, Halima slinks in and is like, “Let me give you a temple massage?”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And Egg’s like, “That sounds nice.” And then Halima gives her a temple message, and voila, the headache goes away. (sigh)

Sally: Yeah. Egg is so smart but so stupid.

Emily: Yeah, bless. Egg’s stupid side real come -- really coming out.

Sally: Yeah, real bimbo energy here.

Emily: (laugh)

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Halima's proximity --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Turns other people into bimbos.

Sally: Yeah. She's got -- it's like a -- like a bard in Wheel of Time. She can roll a --

Emily: Bardic inspiration?

Sally: Yeah, a bimbo inspiration die.

Emily: Bimbo inspiration. Bimbic inspiration.

Sally: (laugh) Bimbic inspiration. "I would like to give her bimbic inspiration."

Emily: (laugh) Stupid. Okay. Egg wakes up, has a headache, regales us about how bad her other maid is, who is also a spy from Romanda slash Lelaine, and is just like, "I hate her. She's such a bitch. I know she's poor and if I, you know, fired her, then she would be back to being poor and probably starving, but that doesn't stop me from hating her," and it's like, okay. I don't know why you need to tell us this, but okay.

Sally: Yeah, for, like, three pages.

Emily: For so long. Egg goes to her study -- you know, her tent that acts as her study -- and walks in on Theodrin and Faolain, who we referenced last time as the two, uh, Accepted who, along with Nynaeve and Elayne, were raised by Egwene to Aes Sedai. Of course, they are not fully Aes Sedai because they haven't held the Oath Rod, which is the, um, standard to which all other Aes Sedai are held.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: And they talk about this when they're reporting to Egg, that they questioned some people and didn't -- nobody saw any men around Moghedien's tent, but Halima was spotted. Ain't that funny?

Sally: (laugh) Ain't that a kick in the head?

Emily: Ain't that just -- a coinkidink.

Sally: (laugh) Coinkidink.

Emily: Um, but they're like -- Faolain's like, "I wish that I were holding the Oath Rod so I -- you would know that right now I'm being completely honest when I say that I hate you." (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) I know. The power she holds.

Emily: "I don't like you, but I am going to do what you say because it is in my best interests."
And Egg's like, "Yeah, I mean, I don't -- I don't need you to hold the Oath Rod; that's just pretty good logic right there."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: "And also, as we all know, the Oath Rod means jack shit."

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: "Aes Sedai lie to each other all the fucking time. You just have to be more conniving about it."

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: "So why don't we all just trust each other?" Which is, distilled, a really interesting idea, Egg. Of course, it is then immediately eradicated by the fact that a whole slew of women swear fealty to you, using an unbreakable vow, that, as we know, pretty much you're going to hell if you break it.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So I guess trust doesn't actually mean anything.

Sally: No.

Emily: We all -- we need to reenact the entire code of chivalry.

Sally: Trust is for babies.

Emily: Trust is the color of death.

Sally: Ooh. Okay.

Emily: Okay, what were we talking about? Anti-oaths of fealty, that's us, here at EHR.

Sally: Yeah, I just, I mean, I feel like -- not to be, like, idealistic, but I just feel like oaths of any sort ruin all forms of human relationship. Like, I feel like you need to commit to the fact that people might be shitty to you.

Emily: Well, it's interesting --

Sally: Like, that sucks, but.

Emily: It's interesting that this comes right after the end of Dumai's Wells, when Rand has a bunch of women swear fealty to him -- "Kneel, Aes Sedai, or you will be knelt."

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: And that's essentially what Egg is doing here -- the whole Mazrim Taim, "Kneel, Aes Sedai, or you will be knelt" -- she's just doing it in a more roundabout way.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And what's that -- what that's doing is framing for us, um, a form of leadership in which oaths of fealty are necessary because the people you are leading inherently cannot be trusted.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: But you, yourself, the leader, are infallible.

Sally: Yep.

Emily: Which is a pretty, um ... mm, fascist way of thinking.

Sally: Mm. Mm-hmm.

Emily: Um, and it is interrogated, to be fair, through Rand, a little bit. Uh, Rand's form of leadership -- this particular form of leadership -- is eventually reconstructed to be, uh, seen as a bad thing. Y'know?

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: And Rand is -- is forced to, uh, eventually take messenger -- uh, take measures to actually earn his constituents' trust, for lack of a better word.

Sally: Mm. Wow. Groundbreaking, yet again.

Emily: But when we have Egg, this is instead just seen as an incredibly smart move on her part.

Sally: Yeah, it's just, like, the Aes Sedai really are so dumb.

Emily: Yeah, I just think Robert Jordan built the Aes Sedai and was like, "I fucking hate them. Everything they ever do will be dumb and evil," and it's like, why'd you even do them, then? You know?

Sally: Yeah, no, I -- I'm sorry that I keep referencing my blogs, but it, like, is the only other time of the week that I think this much about Wheel of Time. But I just wrote a -- a blog about, like, how much I, like, hate the Seanchan; I hate Robert Jordan's presentation of the Seanchan, where

they, too, also somehow seem infallible, at least where I'm at. I don't really care about what happens in the future. That's where I'm at right now in my feelings with the Seanchan. But yet somehow, he's like, "The White Tower is nothing but fallible." Like, we can't present, like, a complicated institution without it then feeding into, like, the deep, deep sexism of these books.

Emily: Yeah, the problem with the White Tower is that it's all ladies.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And -- (laugh)

Sally: And as we all know, ladies are dumb.

Emily: Ladies just -- they have their periods all over the place.

Sally: (laugh) Their wombs --

Emily: Can't fuckin' keep a thing straight. Whatever.

Sally: Wombs are always wandering.

Emily: So Egg gets these oaths of fealty, although arguably that is far less important than Theodrin and Faolain simply saying, "We're on your side."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: "Trust us."

Sally: Yeah, I mean, at least, to Egg's credit at the beginning of this chapter, Theodrin and Faolain give the oaths without her really asking for them.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: And then she's like, "Wow."

Emily: "Mm. Neat idea."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: "Thanks, ladies."

Sally: "Thanks for this one, ladies."

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: And then begins to demand them from people.

Emily: Egg, then, is going to go looking for Siuan, who barges in right in time to, uh, be like, "Sorry, I've just been being harassed by yet another person who wants to torture me to get my --" what are called "eyes and ears" in the Wheely Time world, but, you know, it's basically just spies.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Siuan has a spy system from her time as Amyrlin, and by all rights, that should have been passed to Egg.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But no one seems to really remember that Egg exists --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And are like, "We just want Siuan's spy system." So blah blah blah blah blah. Um, they are sort of, like, leaving to go for a walkabout -- oh. Egg then sees Myrelle passing and is thinking, "Hmm, now's a fun time to exercise the newfound power I have over the Salidar six women, thanks to Sheriam telling me about the dumb thing they did." Although, as we've already said, not really a dumb thing.

Sally: Wasn't a dumb thing at all.

Emily: Just bad, I guess, that they did it without Parliament's permission. Um. But Egg is like, "Hey, Myrelle, come here, I want to talk to you," and Myrelle's like, "Ehhh," and Egg's like, "Shut up. Come here," right as Gareth Bryne is walking up and is like, "I need you to see something right now," and Egg's like, "Ugh, 'kay, well, then, let's go on our ride, all of us together, just a fun little pleasure cruise out at night." Just kidding; it's daytime. Um, so they're waiting around for her horse or something when, uh, Romanda and Lelaine and some hangers-on come up and start arguing at Egg, not for any contribution that she can offer, about how, uh, Delana -- who is most well-known to us for being Black Ajah and for being Halima's, quote unquote, employer, actually puppet -- um, Delana keeps introducing legislation in the Hall of the Tower to criminalize Elaida as Black Ajah. And everyone's like, "We need to just stop talking about the Black Ajah. Because we need to go back to our normal system, which is pretending that they don't exist, otherwise everyone's gonna freak out." And Egg's like -- (makes frustrated noise) "Okay, whatever?" But they're just arguing over her, and she does have a pretty comedic moment where finally Siuan arrives with her horse, and Egg's like, "Okay, well, when you figure out what you want me to say, let me know."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And they're just like, "Wha--?" as she sails off into the sunset. (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) Yeah.

Emily: Like, "Goodbye!" Um, on their ride, nothing eventful happens. They pass through the soldier camp. Egg's like, "Boy, we have a big army. Gareth Bryne, how do you plan to take Tar Valon?" and he is like, "Well, it will really matter that we, uh, can hold the harbor gates," or something. I've already forgotten.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: He's like, "Here's how siege works," and Egg's like, "Wow. I'd forgotten that people inside the city I'm besieging will starve and that that is, in fact, what siege means." (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) She's like --

Emily: "Some -- somehow I just sort of signed onto this."

Sally: "We were -- we're just gonna catapult food over that says 'For citizens only.'"

Emily: "Citizens only. No Aes Sedai or soldiers."

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: "Honor system, please." As we all know, that works for the Aes Sedai.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Whatever.

Sally: Stupid.

Emily: She's like, "Gareth Bryne, what did you want me to --" Oh, they spot some of Talmanes's soldiers, and Myrelle's like, "Filthy Dragonsworn," and Gareth Bryne's like, "Ah, I saw Talmanes the other day. He seemed concerned about you, Egg," and Egg's like, "Please don't bring that up in front of Myrelle." (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) Ahhh!

Emily: "No one can know that Talmanes and I have a prior connection --"

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: "Through Mat Cauthon. It's vital no one knows that he's part of my little spiderweb."

Sally: Yeah. I mean, I get it. But if I had ever met Talmanes, I'd be like, "Do you want to hear about that time I met Talmanes?" (laugh)

Emily: I know, I'd be like, "Oh my God, he's so cute." (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) And everyone would be like, "You're an annoying asshole."

Emily: Anyway, but Egg's like, "Wow, Gareth Bryne is making connections. This is dangerous. He's so smart." And it's like, it would take an idiot to not be like, "Hey, Talmanes, why the fuck are you following us?"

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And for Talmanes, in turn, to not be like, "Well, here's the -- here's the entire reason, flat-out, Gareth Bryne, so you don't turn around and attack me."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Dur dur dur.

Sally: Yeah. Talmanes is like, "I actually don't want to get into a fight, so I will explain to you what's going on."

Emily: (sigh)

Sally: And Egg is like, "NO!"

Emily: "Men, communicating?"

Sally: "As we all know, men can't think."

Emily: "It's fucking dastardly."

Sally: Dastardly. (laugh)

Emily: Just twirling their mustaches. Anyway. She's like, "What'd you want me to see, Gareth Bryne?" What Gareth Bryne wanted her to see was some people?

Sally: Oh, I know. I'm like, we -- they literally -- I was trying to keep count; they rode, like, upwards of ten miles to see this.

Emily: And I don't think they actually needed her to see them?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: I don't know -- or what --

Sally: It's just, like, some fucking merchants.

Emily: It's like he's trying to get her away or something and then Egg's finally like, "Myrelle can hear it," and Bryne -- Gareth Bryne is like, "Okay, well, these people are spreading rumors that the Dragon Reborn has gone to the White Tower to swear fealty," and Egg's like, "Ah ha, that's hilarious. Don't worry about it. I know that's not true 'cause the Wise Ones -- who are lying to me -- told me it's not true. And I and a bunch of other Aes Sedai will flat-out tell your

men that it is not true to prevent mass desertion,” and Gareth Bryne’s like, “Alright.” And for some reason, that weak-sauce argument is enough for him to be like, “You have my sword, Mother.”

Sally: “And my axe.”

Emily: And for -- and for her to be like, “Wow.” I don’t get it. I know Egg and Gareth Bryne are supposed to, like, importantly have a relationship of mutual respect, but I don’t really know why this is the trigger for it.

Sally: Yeah, when he’s like, “The army is yours. You will direct the army at Tar Valon.”

Emily: I would think that that would come a little bit later, you know?

Sally: Yeah, after she’s like, “I have manipulated war powers from the Hall of the Tower.”

Emily: Yeah, and after he has, like, seen her do things more successfully. She’s still kind of in her floundering stage right now.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Anyway. Then she -- the three women turn around and are like, “Doo do do do doo.” Siuan takes the lead and is directing them, uh, towards where Myrelle’s horrifying farm full of Warders who are there against their will is. Um, she doesn’t actually know exactly where it is; she’s just heard about it, apparently this morning. Or something? Egg’s like, “What are you doing?” and Siuan’s like --

Sally: Yeah, I don’t know.

Emily: I don’t know.

Sally: It does -- I just -- it struck me now, just for the first time, that Myrelle has three other Warders --

Emily: Yes.

Sally: That we cannot guarantee that they are consensually part of this bond.

Emily: We know for a fact -- Egg has told us -- that two of them had prior Aes Sedai.

Sally: Oh, that’s right! Oh my God.

Emily: And Myrelle saved them.

Sally: *Saved* them.

Emily: Quote unquote, saved them. Myrelle, we can assume, did not, like, have their bonds passed to them, like happened with Lan, but she did presumably use all the methods that she has used on Lan, which include sexual assault, on them. So yeah, Myrelle's a rapist.

Sally: I am going to pass away.

Emily: Anyway, they get to this farm. Myrelle's getting more and more nervous, justifiably. Uh, they get there and find her Warders, uh, the other Aes Sedai, named Nisao -- she is one of the Six, I believe? Actually, I don't think she is. Maybe she is. I don't remember. She's another Aes Sedai --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Who's there.

Sally: Yet another one.

Emily: And -- doo doo doo -- Nicola and Arenia are also there, and as Egg quickly finds out, they have ferreted out what's going on here and are blackmailing Myrelle. And Egg's like, "What the fuck is up -- blackmailers?" and Siuan's like, "Well, we better have them murdered."

Sally: (laugh) Which is pretty funny, I think.

Emily: I know, is also pretty funny, and to be fair, would have taken care of the problem. (laugh)

Sally: Yeah, like, I'm not like, pro-murder, but I just think the whole Nicola -- Nicola and Arenia plot is, like --

Emily: Chekhov's gun, hoping this will go somewhere eventually. It doesn't.

Sally: Yeah, it's --

Emily: Actually, it does.

Sally: It's just stupid. And also, like, what is up with these girls that they were like, "We unsuccessfully blackmailed the Amyrlin Seat, and it was really scary. So instead we will blackmail these ladies. We'll try it again." Like, if at first you don't succeed --

Emily: I mean, presumably they -- presumably they blackmailed these ladies first and were like, "Oh, that was easy."

Sally: Oh, you're -- you're right.

Emily: "Time to approach the Amyrlin Seat." And Egg was like, "Dun, dun, dun."

Sally: I guess, timeline-wise, you're right. Makes more sense.

Emily: Either way, though, stupidity abounds.

Sally: They're like, "Time to level up our blackmailing. We'll go straight to the top."

Emily: "The pope. We're gonna blackmail the pope."

Sally: And the pope is like, "I have a gun." (laugh)

Emily: "Bang, bang, motherfuckers." Anyway.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Uh, Myrelle's like, "Okay, but wait until you see this," and trots out Lan, who starts doing, like, sword exercises or whatever. Then we get into all the troubling rhetoric that we have discussed already at length. Uh, eventually this is resolved, quote unquote, when Egg is like, "Lan, you wanna go hang out with Nynaeve?" and he's like, "Yes, please." So she, uh, Travels him via Skimming to, uh, again, six or seven days outside of Ebou Dar. Not sure why it has to be that far outside of Ebou Dar, but --

Sally: I know.

Emily: There you go. They have what is probably their only time alone as Lan and Egg, you know, two characters who have been here since the beginning of the series but have never had time alone. This could be a sort of interesting thing, but instead Egg is just sort of bossy toward Lan.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Like, "Here's what you've gotta do," and he's like, "I'm forty years older than you. I know all that."

Sally: She's like, "Um, Nynaeve is a little bit headstrong," and he's like, "Wow, this explains so much."

Emily: He's like, "Oh my God, really? She's a fucking Aries? Who could have known?"

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: "It's not like I fucking looked up our horoscope charts --"

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: "To see if we're compatible. My name is Lan, and I'm a hopeless romantic."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Whatever.

Sally: It's -- no, it's very annoying. She's also --

Emily: And he's like -- he's like, "Good job, Egg, you're doing pretty good, but be careful," and she's like, "Oh, thanks," and then they part ways, never to speak again, presumably. (laugh) I don't think they do. Um, then she goes back in time to watch Myrelle and Nisao taking out their anger on Siuan. Of course, there's a lot of politics about power, who has more power, whatever; as soon as Egg is gone, Siuan loses hers. Egg marches up and is like, "Well, that was fuckin' dumb." And these ladies are like, "Eh, yeah, we know," and Egg's like, "Seems to me the only way to resolve this is for you to swear fealty to me." (laugh) And they're like, "Well, ethically, that's not great, and I'm not gonna like you for it, but I don't really see a way out of it, because apparently I'll be burned at the stake if anyone finds out that we consented to this thing, which the Amyrlin Seat herself shows no intention of punishing us for."

Sally: Yeah, no, Egg is, like, talking about what will happen to them, and she's like, "They'll take away your Warders and see how you like it, but I won't do that; I'm merciful," because she doesn't care.

Emily: Yeah. Girl.

Sally: She's just manipulating --

Emily: It doesn't serve her ends.

Sally: She does not give a shit about those sad little men over there who are like, "Maybe the Amyrlin will free us too. She'll adopt us out of the Puppy Pound too."

Emily: (laugh) So sad.

Sally: (laugh) And then she's like, "No, fuck you."

Emily: These men are just, like, "Please, I need a forever home, away from this monster."

Sally: Yeah. (laugh) "Please."

Emily: Nope. Egg is like, "Don't give a fuck as long as I get my oaths of fealty."

Sally: She's like, "I'm Cruella deVille, and I will skin you --"

Emily: (snort) Jesus.

Sally: "For a Warder-spotted coat." Sorry, was that a little too much?

Emily: No, I thought it was really funny. Good metaphor.

Sally: Thanks.

Emily: So anyway, Egg is like, "You have to obey me, and you also have to obey Siuan as though she were me," and they're like, "Sounds fake, but okay." And that's that. And then Egg

and Siuan leave, and Siuan's like, "Job well done, Egg." Egg's like, "Thank you. All in a day's work, you know?" Um, they get back to the camp; Siuan leaves; Egg, uh, back in her tent, sees, like, some letters that, uh, the Hall of the Tower met while she was absent to go over Delana's dumb proclamation. We didn't hear any resolution on it, but presumably, Elaida was not declared Black Ajah. Presumably Delana was shot down like she always is.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So I don't know why it was a big fucking deal.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But Egg is like, "Alright, great." Then Halima sways in and is like, "Hello. Let me take away your headache." And Egg, the entire time, is like, "Halima is so sexy, but she can't help it, so I shouldn't judge her based on that."

Sally: It's like, you're right.

Emily: Which is, like, such a novel fucking idea.

Sally: (laugh) Yeah.

Emily: "I shouldn't judge people based on the way that they look." Yeah. I mean, there's a very telling moment where Egg is like, "Halima looks as though a man dreamt her," which --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Is meant to be foreshadowing to the idea that an extremely horny man, Balthamel, is inhabiting Halima's body --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Or whatever, whatever. So there's supposed to be some, like, double commentary there, but it's pretty fucking stupid to have Egg be like, "Just 'cause Halima looks sexy and kind of acts sexy doesn't mean that she inherently is having a lot of sex." And also, if we were gonna take that one step further, past your puritanical politics, Robert Jordan, Halima can have as much sex as she wants.

Sally: Yeah, no matter how she looks.

Emily: I mean, personally, I don't think Halima should be having as much sex as she wants 'cause she's literally evil --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But any other person who looked like Halima -- (laugh) can have as much sex as they want.

Sally: Yeah. I mean, like, Halima specifically should be executed. (laugh)

Emily: Halima specifically should, like, be locked in a cave somewhere. (laugh)

Sally: Yeah, and just, like, throw away the key. But if Halima were not Halima and just looked like Halima, that person could do whatever they wanted.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: They have full agency. (laugh)

Emily: Great.

Sally: Do you think --

Emily: Have as much sex as you want.

Sally: The headache weave is making Egg stupid? (laugh)

Emily: (laugh) Sure wish that that were the case. Halima's like, "This girl's too smart for me. I just have to make her --" It's the Lowering Your IQ weave.

Sally: (laugh) Ugh.

Emily: Ten Points Stupider weave. 'Kay.

Sally: Moiraine's like, "You can use that one whenever you want. Not the headache weave, though."

Emily: Well, the good news is this is the last we'll see of Egg for a while. (laugh)

Sally: Thank God.

Emily: Not to dunk on Egg, but this has been a pretty grim set of chapters.

Sally: Yeah, I'm --

Emily: Hopefully it'll be looking up in the next couple books. But that's where we leave Egwene, getting her headache weave lifted by the headache weaver herself, Halima.

Sally: (laugh) Oh, how the turntables.

Emily: Oh, how the turntables.

Sally: Stupid.

Emily: Next week, we will float on over to Ebou Dar to, uh, get with the interesting part of this fucking plot in this book. That's it, bruh. Sorry for the expedition to Bummer Town, but you know, gotta have some, uhhhhh, literary conversations every now and then. What's up?

Sally: Yeah, otherwise why do you listen?

Emily: (laugh) I mean, I don't know. Uh, thank you for listening, though.

Sally: Yeah. (laugh)

Emily: Whyever you're doing it. Whyever? Is that even a word? For whatever reason you're doing it.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Thanks to Glynn MacKenzie for our theme song and to our Patreon -- patron -- I always do that --

Sally: It's so hard not to.

Emily: To our patrons on Patreon. Check out Sally's aforementioned, uh, former Path of Daggers, now Winter's Heart blog on there.

Sally: Is that one of our cats?

Emily: I believe that's Ed.

Sally: What the fuck does he want? Eddie, come here.

(very distant cat meowing)

Emily: Bye, everyone.

Sally: Bye!