



Episode 184: Welcome to the Smack Dome

Release Date: January 10, 2021

Running Time: 52 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, stop 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. "Everybody," in this context, refers to us and our cats. You are free to feel however you want about Rand. He's a fictional character. Please don't DM us.

(theme song by Glynna MacKenzie plays)

Emily: Hey, so this is Everybody Hates Rand. It's, um, your friendly neighborhood Wheely Time podcast, back from our break, baby. I'm Emily Juchau.

Sally: And I'm Sally Goodger.

Emily: And here we are.

Sally: And here we are. We had a lovely holiday break.

Emily: That's true. Yeah, we did. I wish it was snowing, 'cause that would be apt.

Sally: I know, I was thinking I need to take pictures for our Instagram, and I'm like, thank God that it's winter, so that I can, like –

Emily: Yeah, just, like, throw it out in the snow.

Sally: Keep the aesthetic – yeet!

Emily: (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) Yeah, that's a good point, I'll have to, like, mostly have my sad, gloved hands in all the photos, but I'm like, look, it's winter. And here's Winter's Heart. Um.

Emily: I was talking to you about this earlier –

Sally: Yes.

Emily: But the faces on the cover of Winter's Heart are truly some of Darrell K. Sweet's –

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Finest – and by "finest" I mean worst –

Sally: Worst –

Emily: Work.

Sally: They're really horrific.

Emily: They don't – you're right. Perrin does look like a Teen Wolf character.

Sally: Yeah, like, the sideburns, the point – like, vaguely pointy ears.

Emily: Yeah. The, like – it's just the eyes.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: The eyes feel like they're watching me.

Sally: Who is this supposed to be?

Emily: I don't know. It looks like Moiraine.

Sally: I know, I was gonna say, the Aes Sedai –

Emily: There's a lady with a staff and a big – and a little, you know, gem –

Sally: In her – on her head, yeah.

Emily: And I have no idea who it's meant to be because, um, Perrin – the only Aes Sedai Perrin is with are, like, Seonid and Masuri, right?

Sally: Yeah, there's Seonid and Masuri –

Emily: Oh, and Annoura.

Sally: And Annoura. Maybe – is it supposed to be Berelain? Does Berelain have a staff? (laugh)

Emily: Is it supposed to be Berelain? That's a great question. I assume this is Elyas, but also –

Sally: Is he on a horse?

Emily: Is he on a horse?

Sally: (laugh) What's happening? The perspective there is –

Emily: He looks like he's kneeling on a horse.

Sally: Yeah. I'm assuming this is Gaul.

Emily: Yeah, of course it's Gaul. Gaul's Perrin's left-hand man, I guess.

Sally: RIP to Gaul. He really hasn't done anything to deserve that.

Emily: It must be Elyas.

Sally: It must – like, it has to be. The drawing is just so strange.

Emily: There's only one old man in Perrin's company.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Unless it's meant to be Grady, but Grady's a hottie.

Sally: Grady also is, like, not that old, he's –

Emily: Yeah, he's in his twenties, I assume.

Sally: Yeah, he's just, like, prematurely wrinkled is what they always say about him.

Emily: Ha! He's just so tired. (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) Yeah, I just read a scene in Crossroads of Twilight where Perrin is like, "He looks kind of like a middle-aged man, but he's only, like, a handful of years older than us."

Emily: Oh my God.

Sally: I know. So –

Emily: Do you know what that means? You go to the White Tower and you stop aging; you go to the Black Tower and you age prematurely. (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) You are so rapidly – you see Mazrim Taim and it adds ten years to your life.

Emily: As it should. Fuckin' –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: The source of all evil.

Sally: Yeah, but you're right, it can't be Grady, 'cause Grady is sexy. So.

Emily: I just, like – who – who dis? You know?

Sally: Yeah, who is this woman?

Emily: Did no one tell Darrell K. Sweet that Moiraine was dead?

Sally: (laugh) He's like, "It's been a minute since she's been on the cover, let's throw her on –"

Emily: He's like, "Oh, yeah, she's one of the mains, I should throw her up there."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: "She's with Perrin, right?" and everyone was like, "Oh my God. Don't tell him. This'll be a good joke."

Sally: "Nobody tell him. He's so fragile."

Emily: "This will be such a blast."

Sally: I also hate the design of the red eagle here.

Emily: Yeah, red on blue?

Sally: First of all, it doesn't even really look like an eagle.

Emily: Oh, yeah, that looks like a – I don't know enough about birds to know what that looks like.

Sally: Honestly – I mean, it – I guess it vaguely looks like an eagle, but if you look at it from afar, it honestly looks like a hummingbird, which I think is pretty funny.

Emily: Oh, yeah.

Sally: The red hummingbird of Manetheren. (laugh)

Emily: Yeah, the mighty hummingbird. Stab! Stab! Stab you with its –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Sucker thing.

Sally: But yeah, the red on blue thing is really heinous to the eyeballs.

Emily: Um, I was gonna do alternate titles, but then I was like, I'm not gonna be able to think of it as anything other than Winter's Fart.

Sally: Yeah. (laugh) There's –

Emily: Like, I already came up with – I already coined the best –

Sally: Yeah, the funniest title.

Emily: Alternate title for Winter's Heart, so –

Sally: Winter's Fart.

Emily: In the little, um, epigraph – is that what they're called? Why do I always get that mixed up?

Sally: I think it's an epigraph. An epitaph is what goes on your gravestone, right?

Emily: Ah, yes. That's what I always get it mixed up with.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: I always say epigraph, thinking, "Is this the thing that goes on your grave –?" No, it's epitaph.

Sally: Epitaph. I mean, it's very confusing. Epigraph, epitaph.

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: Prologue, foreword.

Emily: So according to the epigraph, winter's heart is actually, um, death.

Sally: What?

Emily: So this book is titled –

Sally: Death!

Emily: DEATH!

Sally: Death!

Emily: His – it's from the Karatheon – the Kara – the Cycle.

Sally: "Karatheon" sounds fine.

Emily: Um, "The seals that hold back night shall weaken." That means the seals on the Dark One's prison, and I hate to break it to you all, but pretty much all of them have already weakened, so that's not news –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And I don't know if any of them are, like, important plot points in this one. Um, "The seals that hold back night shall weaken, and in the heart of winter shall winter's heart be born."

Sally: (snort)

Emily: "Amdi –" Stupid, Robert. "Amid the wailing of lamentations and the gnashing of teeth, for winter's heart shall ride a black horse, and the name of it is death." So it's saying, in the – in mid – in the bleak midwinter, winter's heart, a.k.a. death, will be born and will ride a black horse. Which vibes with, um – Robert Jordan loves the descriptor "winter's heart."

Sally: Oh –

Emily: He uses it all the fucking time; it's actually my favorite title – I don't mean that literally, I mean this ironically: it's my favorite title, if only because it is actually used throughout the series –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Unlike, say, Crossroads of Twilight –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Like, where'd that come from?

Sally: I don't know.

Emily: Who knows? Path of Daggers? The only thing we get there, really, is from the epigraph.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Winter's heart, um, is Robert Jordan's favorite descriptions for Lan's eyes –

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: (laugh)

Sally: “As blue as winter’s heart.”

Emily: Yeah, any sort of thing that he finds deadly or upsetting.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So it makes sense that he’s like, “It’s death. Winter’s Heart is death.” And that also vibes with, um, Tilda Swinton’s best role, as the White Witch in the Chronicles of Narnia, which I watched recently on Christmas Eve.

Sally: Oh, yeah? That’s very Christmas-y. Um, I feel like – I mean, I – I’m sure I always read the epigraphs because they’re there, but I feel like I never digest them. Like, I guess I don’t know how much they add to the –

Emily: I don’t feel –

Sally: Reading experience.

Emily: They’re kind of, um, you know, paratext.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: I feel like epigraphs are something writers use to be, um – to add a sort of *je ne sais quoi* to their work, and I think in some ways, it really works if you are pulling from other texts.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: I think a favorite thing in fantasy is to pull from within the realm of your text –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And therefore to sort of add, like, worldbuilding or something.

Sally: Mm. Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

Emily: And it can really work. Brandon Sanderson uses it really well in the *Mistborn* –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, books. That’s really fun.

Sally: Yes.

Emily: But I feel like Robert Jordan is just sort of trying – he’s just, like, throwing random thematic – not even thematic – he’ll just be like, “Okay, here’s the little phrase of the prophecies or whatever that I got the title from, which of course I made up for the title –”

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: And it's just, like, a – it feels a little masturbatory.

Sally: Yeah, I feel like in its best iteration – and Mistborn is a really good example, whenever they have, like – they're pulling it directly from the text that then becomes a crucial plot point of the book –

Emily: Yeah, when it's giving you information –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: That's good.

Sally: That's super neat. Like, in its best way, it, yeah, provides information so it serves, like, an – like, a literal function and also it is adding to the depth of the world, which it does in Mistborn, like it create – it makes it more immersive.

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: Versus in Wheel of Time, I never feel, like, more immersed because there's a – a clip of the Prophecies of the Dragon at the beginning. It always feels a little bit, like, disorienting to me.

Emily: Yeah, I'm already pretty dang immersed, for one thing. These books are –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Thousands of pages long, so how much more immersed can I get? You know? I'm drowning here, Robert.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But also, yeah, it feels like the intention is for him to be like, "This story is the stuff of legend, of prophecy. These are things – important things coming to pass." And that is thematically already something that the series has told us and continues to tell us –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Without the epigraphs. So, yeah, it's just not adding anything relevant.

Sally: Especially 'cause Rand as a character is so focused on his own prophecy. Like, I never forget that there's a prophecy we're dealing with, you know?

Emily: Yeah. And I guess, like, the epigraphs would be important if the prophecies and Rand's interests about the prophecies were tied together a little bit better, but –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: I don't feel like they are.

Sally: No.

Emily: Um – (clears throat) "Let the Dragon ride again on the winds of time."

Sally: No. Don't let him.

Emily: Stop it! Okay, so we read half the prologue. Originally we were gonna read the full prologue, but then I came to get the book, and Sally was like, "It's 87 pages long," and I choked on my own tongue.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: (laugh) Because I was like, what the fuck – who the fuck does this?

Sally: Robert Jordan does.

Emily: Yeah, he's a menace to society.

Sally: The Crossroads of Twilight prologue is fully a hundred pages long.

Emily: Oh my God. These are – we're going – these are the latter books, so we're going to be starting – we should, like, make a chart of the top sins of these later books.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And one of them is excruciatingly long prologues that do not need to be prologues.

Sally: Yes.

Emily: These could just be chapters.

Sally: Yeah, we could just start at chapter one.

Emily: Chapter one, baby. Here we are, back in the White Tower, with the – torture, of course.

Sally: The – the torture girls.

Emily: With the torture girls, everyone's least favorite girl group. You've got the Spice Girls, you've got the Torture Girls –

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: (laugh) Whatever, you know?

Sally: Yeah, they really are quite ...

Emily: They're frustrating. Both of these points of view – um. I mean, some prologues, you get so – we get this, like, scattershot of points of view, you know?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: There's, like, eleven –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: In eighty pages, and that, at least, is like, okay, fine.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: That sort of makes sense, the prologue structure. But this one is only four points of view, so four mostly long points of view.

Sally: Yeah, so they could just easily have been the first four chapters.

Emily: Yeah, let me actually find four chapters. One, two, three, four. The first four chapters go from page 87 to 154. Unless I am mistaken –

Sally: I think that's shorter, right?

Emily: That's shorter, yeah. A hundred fifty-four minus eighty-seven ... sixty-seven.

Sally: So it's twenty pages shorter than the prologue.

Emily: Come on. Come on!

Sally: I just – I feel like someone at Tor Books was literally holding a gun to Robert Jordan's head and was like, "There has to be a prologue." (laugh)

Emily: And Robert was like, "I can't – I can't do it anymore. I can't do it." (laugh)

Sally: Like, "No, it's a fantasy book, there has to be a prologue."

Emily: "It's a fantasy book! There has to be an epigraph, a map, and a prologue. Otherwise it doesn't count!"

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And he was like – (crying noises)

Sally: (crying noises) "Please free me."

Emily: "Please free me from this prison. Please break the seals on my prison." Okay. The prologue is called "Snow."

Sally: Do you get it?

Emily: Yeah, I think – I'm sensing –

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: It's like in Fires of Heaven; there were a lot of fire-themed chapter names. I bet there will be a lot of wintery –

Sally: Ahhhh!

Emily: Wintery themed title names.

Sally: Snow. Snow.

Emily: Snow. Ice. (long pause)

Sally: Winter's Fart.

Emily: I stopped being able to think of winter-themed things that weren't also Christmas.

Sally: Snow. Ice.

Emily: Snow.

Sally: Frost.

Emily: Ice. Frost.

Sally: Icicle.

Emily: Icicle. Um.

Sally: Storm. The storm gathering.

Emily: Glacier.

Sally: Glacier? Polar bear.

Emily: (sing-song) Let it go ...

Sally: Let it go ... Elsa from Frozen.

Emily: Do you want to build – one of them is just titled “Do You Want to Build a Snowman?”

Sally: (sing-song) Do you want to build a snowman?

Emily: And it's Gaul talking to Perrin.

Sally: Oh my gosh. Gaul should get to build –

Emily: I would love if Gaul got to build a snow – okay, we've been delaying for far too long.

Sally: If we ever graffiti a copy of Wheel of – of Winter's Heart, I'm gonna print out so many Frozen screencaps. They're gonna be all over the place.

Emily: I think you should, yeah. I think that makes a lot of sense.

Sally: Actually, I'm gonna cover the – I'm gonna cover all the text with just pictures of Elsa.

Emily: Yeah, just cover the front.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: “Winter's Heart” – and it'll just be Elsa. Just put Elsa's face right over –

Sally: Yeah, Elsa and Anna and the fuckin' reindeer –

Emily: Fake Moiraine's. Yeah, and that little evil snowman guy.

Sally: Olaf. (laugh)

Emily: (laugh) I forgot his name.

Sally: “That little evil snowman guy,” who’s, like, supposed to be the comic relief character. “Evil snowman.” (laugh)

Emily: (laugh) I’m gonna cry. I don’t know how I forgot his name.

Sally: It’s – well –

Emily: He’s so annoying.

Sally: He’s extremely annoying.

Emily: Okay. Ugh.

Sally: Okay, welcome to Winter’s Fart. It’s snowing.

Emily: Welcome to Winter’s Fart, it’s snowing in – outside the White Tower, but that doesn’t matter ‘cause we’re in the fucking basement, a.k.a. our, um, makeshift torture room.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: We’re catching up with, um, the torture girls, which originated as Seaine – and, boy, Seaine and Saerin –

Sally: Oh my God, it –

Emily: Two very similar names with all the same vowels in the middle.

Sally: It makes me so insane.

Emily: I know. Seaine and Pevara. It started – recap. It started with Elaida going to Seaine and asking her to track down, um, dirt on Alviarian, but she asked in such a non-specific way that Seaine was like, “She’s clearly asking me to hunt down the Black Ajah –” (laugh)

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And then went to Pevara and was like, “We have to go all, you know, detective on this.” So they started their investigation, um, and have uncovered, as we find out later, they’ve uncovered a sort of conspiracy where the Salidar Aes Sedai sent back some people –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: To sort of act as spies and agents, rumor-spreading agents –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Within the White Tower. So they uncovered that and were in the process of uncovering that when, uh, they were confronted by three more Aes Sedai: Saerin, Yukiri, and Doesine.

Sally: Okay. I couldn’t remember Doesine’s name.

Emily: Yeah, Doesine. There's – they're not really – of course, they're all given, you know, bullet point personality lists –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: You know – you know what I'm saying?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But, uh, they're pretty much interchangeable. The only one I find to be relevant is Pevara and only because, uh, Brandon Sanderson made her relevant at the end of the series.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Um, but really, it's just five, you know, pick 'em and choose 'em Aes Sedai.

Sally: Yep.

Emily: Doing their best, which, of course, means doing war crimes. Uh, as this chapter opens, they are in the process of torturing a woman named Talene who was sort of in their group, but they're like, "Oh, she's Black Ajah," 'cause she wouldn't reswear the Oaths.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: They have obtained an Oath Rod. And – make no mistake – just because, um, Talene is experiencing her torture psychologically rather than physically does not make it less torture.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: They have this special torture chair, which apparently is regularly used to punish criminals.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And it's like, uh, okay, that's a pretty dark facet of Tar Valon that we have not yet been exposed to. Um –

Sally: Yeah. They're like, "There's no crime in Tar Valon," the way it's like, "There's no war in Ba Sing Se." (laugh)

Emily: Yeah, "There's no crime in Tar Valon," yeah, because all the criminals are terrified of your torture chair. God.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: All the normal people are probably terrified of your torture chair.

Sally: Yeah, it's –

Emily: Jesus Christ.

Sally: It's freaky. You sit on it, and they paint little psychological horror movies for you in your own brain.

Emily: Yeah. At first, we're told – Seaine's like, “The torture chair's nice because it allows you to experience the, quote unquote, consequences of your crimes,” and in my head, reading that, having forgotten the function of the torture chair, ‘cause obviously it's not called the torture chair, um, I was like, oh, that's kinda, like, nice, like, if a murderer, you know, had to confront the family members psychologically –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Of the person he killed or something – or had to face –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: The consequences of their actions in any sort of restorative way –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: That makes a lot of sense. That's cool. But it's Robert Jordan, so actually it's just whatever hallucination he wants to subject, uh, people to.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Which, in this case, is startlingly similar to, uh, that one time in Lord of Chaos when all the Aes Sedai were trying to learn how to use Tel'aran'rhiod –

Sally: Tel'aran'rhiod.

Emily: And, like, got sucked into a nightmare.

Sally: Yeah, that's a good point.

Emily: It's always women being dragged – tormented and dragged towards a Trolloc's cookpot and/or about to be raped by a Myrddraal. And it's like, I don't know, not very creative – (laugh)

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: For one thing. You're just reusing –

Sally: Yeah, it's just, like, slasher film nonsense.

Emily: Yeah, you're just reusing the same scenario, Robert Jordan? I just don't understand. I mean, I do understand: Robert Jordan loves torturing women. But I don't really understand the function of this dumb chair.

Sally: Well, especially ‘cause they're, like, I don't know – they say this is the third time they're torturing this woman in this way.

Emily: Yeah, to break her.

Sally: To break her. And it's like, I don't know, I don't want to, like, get into the mechanics of how they are torturing her, but yeah, it doesn't feel like if you are torturing someone who is Black Ajah – I don't know. Maybe they're thinking, "Black Ajah, Shadowspawn."

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: "This is the consequence of your actions." I don't know, man.

Emily: I just don't – um. It's pretty clear what side of the Guantanamo Bay debate Robert Jordan would've fell into.

Sally: Sure is.

Emily: Uh, torture's fine as long as you're doing it to evil people, and that's sort of the thesis of his – of all his books.

Sally: Yep.

Emily: And we've pretty much already covered that ground. Obviously, torture's not okay no matter who you're doing it to. (sing-song) Dur dur dur.

Sally: Wow.

Emily: I know.

Sally: That was really groundbreaking, Emily.

Emily: Groundbreaking. Give me the Nobel Peace Prize.

Sally: I know. I can't believe you fixed everything.

Emily: Thank you. Time's Person of the Year. Emily. Juchau. For saying torture's bad.

Sally: Emily. Said, "Torture's bad."

Emily: It seems really fucking obvious, you guys. But fantasy writers are like, "No –"

Sally: It's okay when the good guys do torture.

Emily: "It's okay. It's a moral quandary." (laugh)

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Shut up, Batman. Shut up!

Sally: Yeah, it's – it gets –

Emily: You guys are not the – well, maybe you guys are the heroes that Tar Valon deserves.

Sally: I mean, if you have something called – what is it called? Like, the Chair of Punishments or some –

Emily: I don't know. Sure.

Sally: Basically the torture – if you have something called the Torture Chair –

Emily: It's just a Squatty Potty. (laugh)

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Stupid.

Sally: This is my ter'angreal. It looks like a Squatty Potty.

Emily: Yeah, can you imagine? Being just stuck in that little position?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: It would be rough.

Sally: Anyway. She – Talene? Whatever her name is – finally is like –

Emily: Yeah, Talene finally confesses. She releases all her existing oaths on the Oath Rod and then is, like – takes the new oaths and immediately is like, “Yeah, I'm Black Ajah, and I'm pretty sure Elaida's Black Ajah too.”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And everyone's like, “Well –” Basically like, “That would be really bad, but we don't know that.”

Sally: Yeah, it's pretty funny, 'cause Talene is like, “Elaia has to be Black Ajah because the Black Ajah knows everything that she's doing,”

Emily: And it's like, there are multiple ways –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: For example, the Black Ajah could be her top secretary.

Sally: Yeah, like, literally, it never crosses anyone's mind: “Maybe Alviarin, who's with her all the time.”

Emily: Oh, maybe Alviarin, who's, like, controlling her every move?

Sally: Yeah, maybe the person who literally spends, like, 24 hours a day with her? I don't know, just a thought.

Emily: What's important to remember is that these women represent – A, they're all Sitters –

Sally: Yes.

Emily: Which means that they all either directly or indirectly condoned Elaida being raised –

Sally: Yes.

Emily: As the Amyrlin Seat –

Sally: Yes.

Emily: So this is a pretty, like, narrow subset of women confronting the, um – the, uh, consequences of their actions or inactions, as the case may be.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And to them, it's, like, mind-boggling to think that Elaida might be Black Ajah. To those of us who are reading the series, even if we didn't get Elaida points of view, you know, we would probably be like, you know, what's coming out of the White Tower stinks of Darkfriend incompetence.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So it's not, like, a big leap of logic to be like, "Elaida's gotta be Black Ajah."

Sally: No.

Emily: Um, but these are women who do not want that to be the case.

Sally: Yeah, so they've got a – a healthy sense of denial, really.

Emily: Yeah, they're all more or less in denial. They are – they have a, uh, self-interest in Elaida not being Black Ajah, um, and while this subplot, this particular little section is a sort of distillation of things Robert Jordan really likes to do with his female characters – humiliate them, torture them, make them look incompetent –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: A.k.a., all of these women just stumbling into –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Hunting the Black Ajah; none of them are doing it on purpose –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: More or less. Um, things like Seaine throws up as soon as she realizes the Black Ajah might be coming after her.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: You know, women are cowardly, women are weak, da da da da da.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: None of that is great. All that said, this is one of the more interesting subplots that we get from the series because for seemingly the first time, we have people outside of our direct group of protagonists who are trying to deal with a problem.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Like, you know, complicated but good guys –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: In that way, good people who are trying to deal with the seemingly unstoppable force of evil in the world.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And are really having to confront that. Like, they're looking down the barrel of, oh, Black Ajah actually are in the White Tower, something that we've been in denial about for literally hundreds if not thousands of years.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So, um, I don't know, I just find it kind of fun and interesting. I don't find this section interesting, but I find the premise ...

Sally: Yeah, especially 'cause they, in their own sort of bumbling way, also make progress towards this goal. Like, they're discovering women who are Black Ajah; they're getting confirmation that the Black Ajah exists. They're starting to put things together, you know?

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Versus when, like, Elayne – Siuan set the girls out hunting the Black Ajah –

Emily: Ugh.

Sally: It feels like nothing ever happened with that.

Emily: Yeah, and in a way, it's sort of validating, 'cause it's like, you know what, Siuan could've figured out a way to –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Actually uncover Black Ajah in the White Tower –

Sally: All the –

Emily: Without sending out these girls.

Sally: Yeah, all you had to do was ask Seaine, apparently.

Emily: Yeah, all you have to do is get a little creative with the Oath Rod, apparently.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Which is also, you know, um, um – not to, like, divert too far into the future series, but it's pretty well-known that there will be a purge – that's the term – of the Black Ajah, thanks to Verin and thanks to Egwene. And it's a little annoying, 'cause as usual, Egwene does everything much faster than everyone else and much more competently. Like, she just traps a Black Ajah lady in a lie, and that's how she confirms –

Sally: Mm.

Emily: That she's Black Ajah, which is sort of like, oh, if you can just do that –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: What's with the torture chair, you know?

Sally: What is with the torture chair, ladies?

Emily: Um. So that's annoying. But also, like, the Oath Rod does come back into that. They're just like, oh, Egwene recognizes that this as a methodology is pretty efficient.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: As long as people are retaking the Oaths in front of witnesses, you're good –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: You know, you're Gucci. Minimum of actual pain involved.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So that's that section. Do you want –?

Sally: So that is that section. No, we've covered it.

Emily: Moving on to Elayne.

Sally: Actually, no, we're done.

Emily: (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) Episode over.

Emily: We are – speaking of staring down the barrel of things – we're looking, uh, at the unfortunate – far worse, I think, than the Faile rescuing Perrin – I mean, excuse me, Perrin rescuing Faile arc – is Elayne's succession to the throne arc. Literally the most boring – so boring, these chapters.

Sally: They –

Emily: Not just this chapter, generally, but every time we go to Elayne, it's like, God.

Sally: Yeah. Maybe I should've made a paper chain for that.

Emily: Yeah, when will Elayne finally take the throne of Andor? But even then, it doesn't stop, because then it's like, we still have to catch – catch up with Elayne doing queen shit, and it's like, I don't care.

Sally: Yeah. Also, like, I feel like Elayne is doing a really bad job of everything. Like, we catch up with her, and she's just like, "I have sent my allies, the Saldaeans and the Aiel, out of the city,

because I can't have foreigners keeping the peace in my city. Instead, I will hire other foreigners who are living in the city already." (laugh)

Emily: She's like, "I can't use the foreigners that Rand gathered."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: "I have to gather my own foreigners to make it look like I'm in charge." And it's like, bitch?

Sally: Yeah. Like, RIP to Dyelin in this scene.

Emily: I know.

Sally: Who's, like, trying so hard –

Emily: Homegirl's making such good points.

Sally: Yeah. But yeah, we open and Elayne's like, "I wanna hire mercenaries, basically, to keep peace in the city."

Emily: And Birgitte and Dyelin are both like, "Terrible idea."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And she's like, "Get fucked."

Sally: "I'm doing it anyway."

Emily: "I'm the queen." And then she's like, "Also, by the way, I want to raise a huge army."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: "I want to expand the Guard." And Dyelin's like, "That's basically inviting attack."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And Elayne's like, "Attack is going to happen regardless of whether I'm prepared or not, so I might as well be prepared," which is a fair point, but then it's like, yeah, of course, we, the readers know that Elayne will eventually be attacked by the people she names, but it's like, who started it, you know?

Sally: Yeah, but also, like, if you need an army, again, I cannot – like, I'm really struggling with this in Crossroads of Twilight too, because we open in Crossroads of Twilight and Davram Bashere is, like, three miles outside of Andor.

Emily: Oh, yeah.

Sally: Just, like, watching this shitshow happen.

Emily: Just like, whoop ba doo ba doo.

Sally: And it's like, you had a perfectly competent army, allies of you and your allies.

Emily: Yeah, I don't know why it would've – I mean, it would've been hard, but I don't know why you couldn't have, like, imagined a scenario where you come to Davram Bashere, the Saldaean army on your own terms –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And are like, here are the – we are actually going to start, like, a diplomatic relationship, and that starts with you lending me –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: An army of a force that the people in Andor, at this point, are already accustomed to.

Sally: Yeah. Like, it's very – like, the – Elayne's almost, like, neurosis to separate herself from Rand's governing is just creating more problems for her.

Emily: Yeah, there's just, like, this total lack of creative problem-solving here.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Robert Jordan keeps having her be like, "There's no other way. There's no other way for me to do this," and I'm like, there are other ways.

Sally: There are about a thousand other ways for you – to have done this.

Emily: You just want Elayne to do XYZ because that's what you need for the plot.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And you're really transparent about it, Robert.

Sally: Yeah. It's just very – like, I get it. You don't ever want to, like – I mean, if we were living in a sort of feudal, monarchy-based state, you don't ever want to take power because someone else gave it to you or whatever. I don't know.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: But you could also accept that – like, she literally says to Taim in this scene, "I will have to basically swear fealty to Rand at some point, because Rand's conquering every other country anyway."

Emily: Yeah, Rand's becoming the – the Constantine of this –

Sally: So why not, like, lean into that and just use the tools he left you?

Emily: I know. It's very annoying. It's like Robert Jordan is like, "I need to make a feminist icon, but she has to be as stupid as possible about being feminist because feminism is ultimately stupid."

Sally: Yeah. We've got a real girlboss here.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Ladies, is it feminist to not use the army your boyfriend left you and instead raise your own army of incompetent men –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: That you can barely pay?

Emily: She's like, "We'll just have to drain the coffers," and I'm like, what?! (laugh) What about Davram Bashere?

Sally: What about the perfectly healthy army that's literally leaving the city right now.

Emily: So stupid.

Sally: Just call them back. (laugh)

Emily: You don't have to pay if you, like, set up a trade agreement, you know?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: God.

Sally: Also, Davram Bashere is literally one of the, like, five best generals in living history.

Emily: Yeah, also, not to mention, homeboy fucking loves fighting.

Sally: Yeah. He's like, "You want me to fight? Hell, yeah."

Emily: He's fresh off of a very unsatisfying campaign in Illian against the Seanchan. He's like, "Give me one I can win easily."

Sally: Yeah. "I need a W."

Emily: She's like, "Okay, here are these losers."

Sally: And he's like, "They're done."

Emily: "Rebels," and he's like, "Done, baby."

Sally: Six days flat –

Emily: Yep.

Sally: You're queen of Andor. It's just really frustrating.

Emily: Oh, hewwo?

Sally: And, see, they agree.

Emily: Yeah. Ugh.

Sally: It's just very frustrating. Elayne is just being, like, as incompetent as possible. And another really frustrating part of this is we're in a little room and it's Dyelin and Birgitte, so

Dyelin functioning as kind of, like, Elayne's main advisor at this point, and Birgitte has been named the Captain-General of the Queen's Guards.

Emily: Which she hates.

Sally: Which she's like, "Fuck this."

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: And Birgitte and Dyelin for, like, unfathomable reasons, hate each other.

Emily: Why?

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: It's impossible to say. It's just more of Robert Jordan being like, "Women don't like each other. They're not allowed to."

Sally: Yeah, they're not allowed to be friends or even just, like, amicable colleagues.

Emily: Unless they're Elayne and Aviendha. Those are the only two who are allowed to like each other.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And then it has to be, like, the most intense liking each other of all time, you know?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Ugh. Yeah, God, speaking of annoyances.

Sally: Yeah. So for, like, no reason, Birgitte and Dyelin are like, "We hate each other," blah da da da da –

Emily: And it's like, umm? But do you?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Or does the man puppeteering your little strings just really want you to? As they're – speaking of annoying women –

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: As they're sitting, arguing with each other, uh, two of the Sea Folk come in. Uh, Renaile –

Sally: Yeah, Renaile and –

Emily: Renaile, who's the top Windfinder, so she sort of represents the big-ass faction of Windfinders that came to, uh, Caemlyn with Elayne and everyone else, 'cause for some reason, that was the solution to their problems.

Sally: Yeah, let's bring them with us.

Emily: Um, and Zaida, who is, uh – she has a counterpart in Cairhien who we’ve met already – Harine, I believe, is her name –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: But, like, these two Sea Folk ships just went up the river in the hopes of cornering Rand.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And the one in Cairhien did, and so he’s set up a bargain via the Aes Sedai there; the one in Caemlyn never did, so this is her –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Still trying to get in to talk to Rand –

Sally: Yeah, it’s –

Emily: They are, presumably, rivals, Harine and Zaida.

Sally: Mm.

Emily: And I think that’s sort of hinted at.

Sally: Because, again, why would women like each other?

Emily: Yeah, well, they both want to be the supreme lady – Mistress of the Ships – after, uh, Nesta?

Sally: Nesta.

Emily: Who is missing, presumed dead, after the Seanchan attack in Ebou Dar.

Sally: RIP.

Emily: Um, yeah, RIP to that lady that one time Mat threatened, iconically. Um, but they come in and are like, “We want you to fulfill your bargain to give us Aes Sedai teachers. All we’ve got is Merilille,” who’s, like, cowering in a corner –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Because Black women are terrifying. Oh, and they have mannish voices, by the way.

Sally: Yeah, they have mannish voices.

Emily: Ugh. Robert Jordan, just say, “I’m racist,” and go.

Sally: Yeah. They just have such an overwhelming presence. They’re so colorful, and they – their perfume is really strong, and – it’s all bad.

Emily: It’s all pretty bad. Um, but these Sea Folk women represent just this sort of endless problem that has no solution because, I don’t – I – I seriously cannot fathom why this subplot continues to be a thing and why it is extended as long as it is –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Just the Sea Folk hanging out, being like, “We want Aes Sedai teachers,” and the Aes Sedai being like, “We don’t want to teach you, but we’re all stuck in this Bargain,” and everyone being like, “There’s simply no way for us to resolve this,” and it’s like, there would be a way for us to resolve this, again, if anyone utilized creative problem-solving, but this is Caemlyn and we don’t believe in that. It’s against the law.

Sally: It’s against the law to think, actually.

Emily: Welcome to Caemlyn, city of problems and no solutions.

Sally: It’s kind of like New York.

Emily: Yeah, you’re right. The Big Apple.

Sally: The Big Apple.

Emily: The Big Snapple.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: (laugh) So as they’re arguing about that, uh, who should enter but Mazrim Taim –

Sally: Ugh. It just keeps getting worse.

Emily: I know. Just – first, Elayne’s, like, Mistress of the House comes in and is like, “Umm, following behind me directly –” and Mazrim Taim comes in and is like, “I’m here.” Behind him are two of his evil-looking guys. He’s always, you know, got some henchmen –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Around him at this point.

Sally: Always.

Emily: Um, and that sort of triggers an elaborate charade in which Elayne and everyone else in the room try not to look like they’re threatened, but of course, they are –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Because it’s Mazrim Taim and two extremely evil-looking guys. And it’s like, this would read very much different – this would read very differently, you know, if it were just, like, some normal Asha’man –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: We would be like, damn, these women are fantasy racist against men who can channel.
(laugh)

Sally: (laugh) Yeah.

Emily: You know, but it's Mazrim Taim and two guys who look super evil –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And so we've just, like, crossed this line from, hey, people shouldn't be so mean to guys who can channel just 'cause they can channel. You know, that's bad, that's prejudice –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And now we're like, maybe everyone should be mean to men who can channel because half of them – there's no way of knowing except by the evil look in their eye –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Who's been corrupted by Demandred – (clears throat) Excuse me, Mazrim Taim. (sigh)

Sally: I know, it's become this, like – I'm – think – I'm sure there's a better term for this, but it's just become this, like, self-fulfilling prophecy –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Where Mazrim Taim is like, “Well, my guys are evil, that's correct.” (laugh)

Emily: “Hey, actually, you were right. You were right to be prejudiced. My guys are evil.”

Sally: “My guys are super duper evil, all of them. And they are all also just, like, really arrogant and insufferable in addition to being super evil.”

Emily: “Yeah, every time I open my giant mouth you're gonna hate me more, somehow, than you already did.”

Sally: And it's like, I really thought I'd sort of plunged the depths of my hatred, but.

Emily: Yeah, like, he walks in, immediately snubs Elayne by, like, not –

Sally: Yeah, he calls her, like, Miss Elayne –

Emily: Mistress Elayne or something like that.

Sally: Mistress Elayne.

Emily: And it's like, bitch, even if you don't want to acknowledge her as the queen, she's still, like, a –

Sally: High – you can call her “Lady.”

Emily: Lady Elayne. Whatever. It doesn't, like, matter, but.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: He's rude immediately and is like, “Um, here's me and my Asha'man, and we can do what we want,” and Elayne's like, “You're actually in a country and you have to obey the country's laws, so, like, I have to send people to, like, fucking inspect you.”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And Mazrim Taim's like, "Okay, well, I can't guarantee their safety." And she's like, "Great."

Sally: 'Cause the training is so dangerous, men are dying every day at the Black Tower.

Emily: Yeah, we've never heard of OSHA over at the Black Tower. Call us Amazon; we do not value our workers.

Sally: It's true.

Emily: Um, and Elayne's like, "Well, that seems like a problem for another day," and reader, it will be. But before they can really get much farther than that, one of the Wise Ones who is in residence in the palace – super interesting how you kicked out all the Aiel, like, soldiers but not the Wise Ones –

Sally: Yeah, but these ones can stay –

Emily: They can stay.

Sally: Because they're useful to me.

Emily: Yeah, whatever.

Sally: The rest of the Aiel could've also been useful to you.

Emily: Where's the difference?

Sally: You are stupid.

Emily: But one of the Aiel comes in and is like, "You've been summoned." And Elayne's, like, prepared for this; we aren't, but. Um, she's like, "Oh, I have to go, like, right now." This ceremony, because it's a Robert Jordan-written ceremony, uh, requires ritual nudity.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: No further comment. Um, so Elayne has to disrobe in front of everyone, and there's a very, um, what's that – what – "She's not alone" moment, you know, from Marvel? – a bunch of ladies – look at us –

Sally: Oh, yeah.

Emily: Girlbosses.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: They're all like, "We'll protect Elayne from the super gross men."

Sally: Yeah, they all, like, line up in front of her. Even, like, the Sea Folk and Merilille form a wall –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: While she strips and puts on this wool cloak.

Emily: And it's like, boy, this didn't have to happen.

Sally: Yeah, the whole scene is designed to be humiliating to Elayne for absolutely no reason at all except Robert Jordan, again, loves to humiliate and debase his female characters.

Emily: Yeah, and to make her, like, prove that Aviendha's the most important thing in her life. Whatever, whatever. And it's like, okay, this is all fantasy, Robert Jordan; you – it was not necessary for you to have that be the method of humiliation.

Sally: Yes.

Emily: Nudity, you know.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: In front of men.

Sally: Especially Mazrim Taim.

Emily: Ugh. Gross. But Elayne goes off to have this, um, Aiel ceremony – ceremony – that seems too light of a word for it. It does actually involve the One Power, so –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: There's some magical stuff going on. Um, in which she and Aviendha will be bonded as first sisters, which in the Aiel parlance, basically means that they are adopting each other as family.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, obviously, this scene is riddled with its own problems. Um. (sigh) Uhh. I don't even know where to start.

Sally: I know. Um. Let's see.

Emily: Oh, here, name your least favorite misogynistic moment in this, um, you know, series of pages. Mine was when – uh, Amys also has to strip 'cause she's being their ritual mom –

Sally: Mm.

Emily: And giving birth to them, and Elayne is like, "Don't worry, she has a flat tummy, and her breasts are perky as fuck."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: We don't believe in aging.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Robert Jordan doesn't believe women should age.

Sally: Yeah, also – also, their boobs should not at all be affected by breast feeding.

Emily: Yeah. She's like, "I've had kids and, um, you know, breast-fed," and Elayne's like, "Well, she doesn't look it," because that would make her less sexy.

Sally: Yeah. And she –

Emily: For your consumption.

Sally: Needs to be sexy, yeah, for you, in order to –

Emily: Meet your standards of male consumption. Um. (sigh) Yeah, woof.

Sally: Um, just jumping back real quick. (laugh) Um, earlier – a little earlier, when it's, like, just Birgitte, Elayne, and Dyelin, Elayne is talking about the Warder bond with Birgitte –

Emily: Oh, yeah.

Sally: And the way that they, like, bleed into each other –

Emily: And it makes them more emotional!

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: You'll never believe –

Sally: It makes them more emotional, and also, Elayne says something about her "courses," which I find the funniest euphemism for a period –

Emily: I know, it means their periods have synced, and readers, that is our one and only reference to women menstruating –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: People menstruating, excuse me, in the Wheel of Time.

Sally: And Elayne also is like, "Our courses have synced up because of the Warder bond." (laugh) Which is so funny, because if you know anything, um, at all about women – women who – or people who menstruate – who live together in the same space often get synced up on the same cycle. It's, like, a phenomenon.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: It has nothing – (laugh) It's just so funny to me that Robert Jordan was like, "I'm gonna make –"

Emily: Stupid.

Sally: "Use of this magic," and it's like, oh, okay.

Emily: “And I want you to know that it’s super girly, so that’s why I’m gonna bring periods into it.”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: It’s like, God. Fuck you. (laugh)

Sally: Yeah, get – shut up.

Emily: Get fucked.

Sally: Um. Okay, anyway, back to this completely bonkers ceremony.

Emily: Let me just – let me give it one small defense. Um, we – we like to joke that, like, Elayne and Aviendha are lesbians. And it is true that they have one of the deepest and most, um, rich for shipping, shall we say –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Uh, bonds between two women who are not related within the series. Um, and I don’t want to discourage anyone from shipping them –

Sally: No.

Emily: That’s totally fine, and, in fact, I hope if the show includes both of them that they end up –

Sally: I hope they get to kiss.

Emily: Yeah, I hope they get to smooch. But this ceremony and, um, this sort of importance of them being – adopting a bond of sisterhood. It would be a little, like, culturally insensitive, I think, to just, like, write it off.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: You know, in many cultures, especially outside of Western cultures, these adopted familial bonds are super important and a really, like, rich part of the family and the community structure. So for Elayne and Aviendha, especially Elayne, an outsider –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: To be, like, doing this and to be so committed to it is really good and, like, interesting.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um. And, yeah, sisterhood is really great and powerful, and it is important for women to enjoy and value each other and love each other outside of the realm of sexual, um, desire as well as sexual desire. So that’s my one thing about that. That said –

Sally: That’s a good point.

Emily: This ritual does include, um – the girls have to confront each other about their jealousy of Rand. They have to hit each other for some reason?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: There's a lot of, like, violence that's really weird. (laugh)

Sally: Yeah. They have to, like, hit each other as hard as they can.

Emily: Um.

Sally: Um.

Emily: Do you have anything in your notes –

Sally: Yeah, one thing I just wanted to note – the – the form of the ceremony is they have to say, like, what's the best thing about your sister, what's the worst thing about your sister, what are you most jealous of, then smack each other really hard. (laugh)

Emily: Then: smack.

Sally: Um, and the qualities that Elayne and Aviendha note in each other are traditionally masculine qualities or –

Emily: Mm. Yeah.

Sally: Negatively coded feminine qualities. So, like, Elayne says that Aviendha is super confident.

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: And Aviendha says Elayne is super brave. And then Elayne says Aviendha is super violent, and then Aviendha says Elayne knows she's really beautiful, so she uses that to manipulate men.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: And it's just like, not necessarily a criticism, but it was – it did really stick out to me the first time I read Winter's Heart that it's like – they're never like, Elayne is really kind or nurturing, or Aviendha is really, you know – I don't know, loyal or whatever. It's all just, like –

Emily: Yeah. And, like, in fairness, Elayne is not kind or nurturing –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: She's a total – total jerk. (laugh)

Sally: Fair enough. (laugh)

Emily: But yeah, it is relevant, I think, that –

Sally: Yeah, I think it's –

Emily: The – the qualities of value that they most value in each other are courage and –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: You know, power, in a way.

Sally: And, yeah, power and, like – yeah. It's, like, yes, I agree with you that I think it's really important, especially in a series where women can't ever seem to just get along to have a – a friendship between two women being portrayed as so important to both of them. So I guess I just am a little dissatisfied that there's not, like, as much – and, I mean, masculine and feminine is a – a false binary, you know, but there's – it exists very much in Wheel of Time, so we don't get to be like, I love this person because she is feminine –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: And also powerful. It has to be like, she's a manipulative bitch, but I love her. (laugh)

Emily: But I love her, 'cause she's so brave.

Sally: Yeah. So I just found that kind of – I guess pretty typical. The ceremony's very girlboss in its way. I know I throw that word around a lot –

Emily: No, it's –

Sally: Particularly regarding Elayne, but –

Emily: "Girlboss" is a, uh, shorthand for a certain type of feminism that was particularly prevalent in, like, the nineties –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And early aughts, and obviously it's still around, but Robert Jordan was clearly sort of making that his baseline for –

Sally: Yeah. It's kind of –

Emily: His female characters.

Sally: Speaking of the Spice Girls, it's very, just, uh, Girl Power.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: You know?

Emily: Girl power.

Sally: And that's – that's the beginning and end of the sentiment. There's no – absolutely no nuance at all.

Emily: Right.

Sally: Anyway, they – I think one of the more interesting parts of this ceremony is that then the One Power is used to kind of get Elayne and Aviendha to experience –

Emily: Yeah, to – to –

Sally: Being in the womb.

Emily: Stimulate. Simulate?

Sally: Simulate.

Emily: Yeah. (laugh) I always get those two mixed up. To simulate, uh, birth.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: As twins, also –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Which is interesting.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Yeah, it is, like, a super interesting –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Way to, like, use the Power.

Sally: Yeah, it's really neat. But –

Emily: Very ...

Sally: They – they wake up after this stimulated – this – damn it. (laugh) This –

Emily: Sorry, now I've got it in your head.

Sally: Simulated birth and they're both laying gently on Amys's breasts.

Emily: It would've been so funny if they were fully sucking on her titties – (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) Like wee little babes.

Emily: And Amys is just like, "Doo da dah da dah."

Sally: "Da da da da da."

Emily: "Part of the job."

Sally: Uh, but then they're like, "You are first sisters," and Elayne and Aviendha are crying 'cause they're so happy and –

Emily: Yeah, that's sweet.

Sally: They love each other so much.

Emily: Yay.

Sally: So it's a complicated little ceremony going on there.

Emily: Yeah, there's a lot – lot to unpack.

Sally: And I really don't know why all the women have to be naked.

Emily: Ugh.

Sally: It really doesn't – like, I – it really doesn't make any sense why any of them have to be naked. Um, or why they have to hit each other. Like, the hit – the – the smackos are supposed to be symbolic for, like, every time you fight, you'll want to hit each other – I've never wanted to hit any of my friends, even when we fight.

Emily: No.

Sally: (laugh) So –

Emily: To – to physically do violence –

Sally: Yeah, to, like –

Emily: Against, someone? I feel like Robert Jordan really underestimates what a – uh, how much of a boundary you would be crossing to physically hit someone, especially between women. Like –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Not to be – but buying into Robert Jordan's gender binary, which he definitely enforces throughout this series, like, women are codified to be much more reserved –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And much less aggressive, and so to overcome all of that societal stuff to smack another woman –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Would be pretty transgressive.

Sally: Yeah, especially if you're just having, like, a fight between friends over something probably really stupid.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Like, it's not like you're being attacked or anything.

Emily: Yeah. God.

Sally: You're just like, "I'm so angry I'm gonna smack the shit out of you."

Emily: Hello. Welcome to the Smack Dome. (laugh)

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: It's this birthing room.

Sally: This birthing dome. Birthing room.

Emily: (inaudible)

Sally: Mad Max: Smack Dome.

Emily: Welcome to the Smack – (laugh) Okay. Uh, lots to unpack, but we don't have any more time to unpack it. So we're gonna cover the rest of the prologue next week, um, and from there, if you want to check out our reading schedule, that is on our website, as usual.

Sally: Yes.

Emily: Uh, whenever we start a new season, it's good to remind you, if you want to check it out, everybodyhatesrand dot –

Sally: Com.

Emily: Dot com. Thanks for listening, thank you to Glynna MacKenzie for our theme song. Glynna MacKenzie has been with us for so long now –

Sally: Oh my gosh, I know.

Emily: I can hardly fathom a time when we didn't have her lovely theme song. Thank you, Glynna.

Sally: Back when we were committing copyright infringement. (laugh)

Emily: Shh. Don't. Don't speak of it. The dark days.

Sally: Thanks for being the third host of this podcast, Glynna MacKenzie –

Emily: That's true, yeah.

Sally: We love you.

Emily: Um, thank you to our followers on social media. Thanks to our patrons on Patreon. Speaking of which, big announcement – um, not a big announcement. It's not that big. Don't freak out – we are planning a revamp of our Patreon, um, in – our guesstimate is about six months.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: We don't know exactly because we want to take the time to do it right.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Uh, we have just passed the halfway mark of this podcast, which means we still have a significant number of books to go and a significant number of years doing this podcast, if we stay on our regularly, um – our regular schedule. So we want to redo the Patreon, uh, in our own interest because we are laboring to produce this podcast and to produce the extra content that goes on our Patreon. Uh, we are hoping to change it to reflect that a little bit better. Um, we don't know too much about what those changes will constitute, but as we know, you will know.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: You will be in the loop. Um, never fear that. Uh, the one major thing that will affect everyone, starting now, is that we are closing the ten dollar tier. Um, that does not mean you cannot continue to donate at the ten dollar level; Patreon allows you to do that.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Uh, but functionally, what that means is that we are no longer going to be doing the graffitied books. Um, that does not mean forever, necessarily –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: We might come back around to that, but we have a huge backlog of books to do; they each take us a lot of time; you guys have heard this from us in the past. And so we want to take the next six months to get as caught up as we can.

Sally: Yeah, exactly. Um – it - yeah. We just want to get them in the hands of people who have been paying for them. Um, so if you've pledged at ten dollars pre-2022, a book is coming to you –

Emily: Yep.

Sally: Um, and we'll be in contact with you about that. Um, if you want – again, if you want to pledge at the 10 dollar level afterwards, we'll kind – we'll keep that slot open on Patreon, and just please know, moving forward, that that will not, uh, guarantee you a graffitied book.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: So it's up to you whether or not you want to contribute at that level for, um, at this point in time, no extra reward.

Emily: Mm-hmm. Is that everything? Everything we talked about?

Sally: Yeah, I think that was everything.

Emily: Okay.

Sally: Um.

Emily: And that's that.

Sally: And that is that.

Emily: That's that on that.

Sally: That's that on that.

Emily: Thanks, homies.

Sally: Thanks, homies.

Emily: Enjoy, uh, the heart of winter.

Sally: Well, it surely is the heart of winter outside. It's, like, pitch fucking black outside –

Emily: Yeah, God.

Sally: And it's six o'clock.

Emily: (laugh) Thanks for listening, everyone.

Sally: Bye!

Emily: Have a good week. Bye!