



Episode 186: Find That Rat
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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, 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 Glynn MacKenzie plays)

Emily: I mean, I'll say this about it: it came out of nowhere, and I can think of no way to transition from Ratatouille to Everybody Hates Rand. (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) I'm sorry.

Emily: That's okay.

Sally: I'm in a very weird headspace today. I don't think we need a transition.

Emily: Okay. This is Everybody –

Sally: Unless – let's see – (laugh)

Emily: (laugh) This is Everybody Hates Ratatouille, your friendly neighborhood Wheel of Time podcast. I'm Emily Juchau.

Sally: And I am Sally Goodger.

Emily: Do you think we'll get more people saying, "I actually love Ratatouille," than –

Sally: Yeah, probably.

Emily: People DMing us saying, "I actually love Rand"?

Sally: They'll be like, "Why would you say something, uh, critical about Ratatouille?" People who like Ratatouille, like, really like Ratatouille, like my friend Julie.

Emily: Yeah, I feel like that's sort of the – yeah.

Sally: Like, I feel like there's never people who are just like, "Yeah, I'd watch Ratatouille." People who –

Emily: Well, I certainly wouldn't just watch Ratatouille.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: I can't think of very many Pixar movies that I would just sit down and watch.

Sally: Yeah. I'm – yeah, what I'm trying to say is there's either just, like, people who are like, “No, I'm not watching Ratatouille. Why would I watch that?” or people who are like, “I fucking love Ratatouille.” There's no just, like, “Yeah, I'll have it on,” the way I'd have on the Goofy Movie while doing a puzzle.

Emily: That's true. We did watch a Goofy Movie while doing a puzzle this last weekend.

Sally: It's a good movie.

Emily: It is a good movie. (singing) “If we listen to each other's hearts –”

Sally: (simultaneously) “– Listen to each other's hearts –”

Emily: (speaking voice) Don't sue us, Powerline.

Sally: Powerline! I wish you were real.

Emily: I wish Powerline was real too.

Sally: Whoever made the Power – the two Powerline signs – (sigh, laugh) Whoever made the two Powerline songs –

Emily: It was a rat on top of a Disney executive's head. (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) Someone find that rat! The music was so good!

Emily: The musical rat who powered Powerline.

Sally: (wheeze)

Emily: Okay. Hey, you guys.

Sally: Hey.

Emily: So it's Winter's Heart, and – the – the really bad thing about Winter's Heart is that, um, it doesn't quite kick off, but it does, uh, get us right into the infamous Faile getting kidnapped plot. She actually got kidnapped at the end of Path of Daggers.

Sally: Yep.

Emily: I don't know if it was in the epilogue, but it was quite near the end.

Sally: Yeah, I think it's – it's – I don't believe it's in the epilogue, but I think it's, like, right there in the end.

Emily: Um. Yeah. While Perrin was with, uh, a lot of people, who we are reminded of in this opening chapter, um, he went to go see Masema. Which, as you may recall at – from the end of Crown of Swords, was his overall mission –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: When he came to this part of the country, which is, uh, Ghealdan and northern Altara. I think we're probably in Ghealdan right now, but as the – as this plotline progresses, we'll probably be in and out.

Sally: Yeah, I believe we're in Ghealdan 'cause also of minor import, perhaps, Alli – Alliandre?
–

Emily: Yeah, while they're in Ghealdan, they are approached by –

(distant cat screaming)

Emily: Oh, my God.

Sally: I hope the mic caught that.

Emily: Hey! Tybalt, stop biting Ed! Yeah, while they're in Ghealdan, Alliandre, who is the current queen of Ghealdan – we were introduced to her via Nynaeve, uh, back when Nynaeve and Elayne were in Ghealdan –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: And had their interfacing with Masema – um, but she's the queen after a series of rulers who came and went basically because of Masema –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Doing shit in Ghealdan. Um, so she's managed to hold power for, pfft, six months, a year?

Sally: Yeah, a very short amount of time.

Emily: Not – yeah, not quite sure at this point. But she's doing better than most of her predecessors. And she either approaches or is approached by Perrin while he and his giant contingent of people are in her land.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, and she has a meeting with him and Berelain, and eventually the result of these meetings is that she swears fealty to Perrin, basically 'cause he's ta'veren.

Sally: Yeah, it's ridiculous. It's like – whatever. Whatever. I just don't know why – why couldn't she have just been, like, their ally?

Emily: Yeah, it – it –

Sally: Does it have to be a fealty situation?

Emily: Well – I'm not quite sure why she doesn't, after swearing fealty, go back to whatever she was doing in Ghealdan – ruling the country?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But, like, she and a pretty large group of men, as we are reminded in this section, like, join up with Perrin's whole –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Group.

Sally: Yep.

Emily: So Alliandre was with Faile, um, when Faile was kidnapped, and Alliandre herself was kidnapped along with Bain, Chiad, um, and a couple of –

Sally: Morgase.

Emily: Yeah, Morgase, a.k.a. Maighdin –

Sally: Maighdin.

Emily: And, um, a couple of Faile's hangers-on.

Sally: Yep.

Emily: Uh, that was another thing that happened in Path of Daggers, was Perrin's group intersected with Maighdin's, uh, runaway group. Obviously, they are staying in disguise, although Perrin recognizes Basel Gill.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But their group has more or less been integrated into Perrin's, quote unquote, household. Um, also, we are reminded of that in this section. Basel Gill is sort of the head butler type guy –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, Maighdin – Morgase – was being Faile's, like, maid –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Lini's going around annoying everyone. Tallanvor's good at arms –

Sally: Is he, though?

Emily: And weapons – I guess? Lamgwin is, like, Perrin's body servant –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Which I find hysterical.

Sally: Yeah, Perrin references –

Emily: 'Cause he's a bouncer. (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) Perrin references having Lamgwin, like, trim his beard.

Emily: Yeah, like, what the hell?

Sally: And I'm like, what is happening?

Emily: What?

Sally: How does he know how to do this?

Emily: Um, and, uh, Balwer, our – the only one of these people I actually care about – is, uh, has become their secretary and has revealed he has a talent for information-gathering.

Sally: For spy-mastering.

Emily: So we're picking up right as Perrin is, like, walking out of this meeting with Masema.

Sally: Yeah, the important thing that comes out of the meeting with Masema is Perrin is like, "Rand is summoning you, so we're gonna open these big gateways using the Aes Sedai and the Asha'man, and we're going to Travel straight to Cairhien," and Masema is like, "No, it is blasphemous for anyone except Rand to touch the One Power," because religious zealots have absolutely no, like, logical consistencies.

Emily: Yeah. He's like, "Absolutely not. We can't do that."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And for whatever reason, the, um – despite literally everyone – literally everyone – telling Perrin, "Masema should just be killed –"

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: He's not serving any function. He's not doing the world any good. At this point, he is just someone who needs to be assassinated.

Sally: Yeah. He's doing, actually, very bad things.

Emily: Yes. Ghealdan is actively – and this entire area – are actively suffering because of his influence.

Sally: Yeah, they – he's – they walk – they walk through this town, and Perrin mentions, like, half the houses are just burned down –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Because Masema's followers just burn down your house if you don't agree to join him. (laugh) It's –

Emily: Yeah, it's – it's absolute chaos. And Perrin's like, "I gotta do this thing for Rand," and everyone's like, "You don't – I mean –"

Sally: "Kill him."

Emily: Yeah, “Kill him.” It’s –

Sally: “Exercise your discretion here.”

Emily: Like, the Aes Sedai are agreeing with the Wise Ones, which is wild, and they’re all just like, “Yeah, he’s gotta go.”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And Perrin’s just like, “Meh meh meh meh meh.” Stupid.

Sally: Which is stupid – it is really frustrating. And so is, like – Masema saying, “I will not use the One Power to travel,” could very well be part of his, like, religious inconsistencies in his beliefs, which you see in a lot of religions, I guess, but also, like, we are –

Emily: It sure feels like a delaying tactic.

Sally: Yeah, it feels – it feels very obviously like a delaying tactic to everyone except Perrin. Um, as we discover either in this chapter or in the next couple ones that Masema’s having, like, secret dealings with the Seanchan, and that’s, like, extremely bad news.

Emily: Yeah, and Perrin’s just like, “Weh.” Shrug emoji.

Sally: Yeah, like, the two groups of people I do not want joining up are the Seanchan and Masema and his religious zealots.

Emily: Yeah, if you are looking forward to a Perrin-centric plot where Perrin gets to be a smart boy, this ain’t it. In fact, Perrin makes bad decision after bad decision after bad decision. He is not helped in any way by the writing choices that Robert Jordan – like, Robert Jordan is writing him into being an idiot –

Sally: Yes.

Emily: As we will discuss a little bit later. But, like, ugh.

Sally: Yeah, Perrin is making just, like, a series of –

(distant cat screaming)

Emily: Oh my God.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Stop yelling! Settle in on your blanket.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: So annoyed by them.

Sally: Um, I lost what I was gonna say. Anyway, Perin walks out. Elyas is also with him. And they’re all – all of the Aes Sedai are like, “He’s fuckin’ dangerous. You should just kill him,” and Perrin’s like, “No.” So then they start walking through this devastated town.

Emily: Yeah, the result of this conversation was Masema said he wouldn't Travel, and so Perrin agreed, "We'll do this the long way."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: "We will take a road trip back to wherever Rand is." As a reminder, Rand is actively missing. (laugh)

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And can himself Travel. Rand could have solved this problem in about ten minutes.

Sally: Yeah, Rand should've just, like, beep beeped over there and been like –

Emily: Showed up. Knock, knock. "Hey, Masema, I heard you worship me. Either get in the bandwagon or get fucked."

Sally: Or –

Emily: "Chop, chop, literally."

Sally: Gun.

Emily: Yeah. But no.

Sally: Grady and Neald should use their gun on Masema.

Emily: That's what I'm saying!

Sally: (laugh) You think Jur Grady wouldn't have popped in there and been like, "I'm done with this."

Emily: Yeah, Grady and Neald are there, waiting, along with, um – Perrin didn't, like, take Faile 'cause he was all worried 'cause this city's so gross; he also didn't take Berelain or anyone of political importance 'cause he didn't want them to be in the same room as Masema, which – I don't really blame him for that.

Sally: Yeah. Masema's –

Emily: Haunting.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: He did bring, um, the Aes Sedai, and their Wise Ones, more or less, are acting as handlers for the Aes Sedai. As you may recall, a lot of the Aes Sedai have been – who, uh, were part of the kidnap Rand mission have just been turned over to the Wise Ones –

Sally: Yes.

Emily: As, quote unquote, apprentices. So we have Seonid and Masuri, who are Green and Brown Ajah, respectively. Um, and, uh, are pretty bland characters.

Sally: Yeah, they don't really have any personality traits.

Emily: Um, but they're just there, and they are with the Wise Ones. So. Seonid, Masuri, uh, Elyas, the Wise Ones, Grady and Neald, Aram. I think that's the majority of the group –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: That is in this little town. They meet up on their way out with, uh, Balwer, who – Balwer's like, "I have some news," and Perrin, in his head, is like, "I bet it's about the fuckin' Whitecloaks."

Sally: Yeah, he's like, "Balwer really doesn't like the Whitecloaks."

Emily: Yeah, and instead of being like, "Hey, why do you hate the Whitecloaks?"

Sally: Yeah, he's just like, "Meh." I mean, does anyone really need a reason? (laugh)

Emily: I mean, yeah, that's true.

Sally: But, like, it feels – Perrin's like, "It feels very personal." (laugh)

Emily: It feels very Kill Bill-ish.

Sally: Yeah. He's like, "Eh, that's normal."

Emily: He's like, "Ah, something about they must have abused him in the past," and it's like, buddy.

Sally: Maybe – whatever.

Emily: Maybe ask.

Sally: Be like, "Do we need to worry about this, Balwer?"

Emily: Yeah. One of Perrin's bad decisions is not caring at all about some of the things that Balwer tells him. Balwer informs Perrin, um, that the Whitecloaks were recently in a battle backing the king of Ghealdan – excuse me, the king of Amacidia – against the Seanchan invaders. They lost, the king of Amadicia was overthrown, and, uh, is either dead or missing. Though Valda and his contingent of Whitecloaks managed to get away. And, as Balwer informs Perrin, are likely moving in their direction and could intersect with them at some point. Two big groups of people like that are likely to meet up. Uh, this is sort of a Damocles' sword hanging over their head that won't drop until the Gathering Storm, at which point the Whitecloaks are headed by, uh, Galad, but it's a little silly that Perrin disregards it.

Sally: The Whitecloaks who, um, have wanted to murder him in the past.

Emily: Yeah. Very specifically have a vendetta against Perrin.

Sally: Yeah. So he's like, "Mm, no big deal."

Emily: "No – I mean, no, I don't worry about it."

Sally: “I’m just so excited to go home and see my wife, who I love.”

Emily: “Wah, I love – I love Faile, la dee da dee da. I can’t wait for her to yell at me. Ba ba ba.”
Balwer also tells Perrin, yeah, that Masema has had secret dealings with the Seanchan, which is a big fucking deal. And Perrin’s like, “Eh, it’s not a big deal. The Seanchan are far away.”

Sally: It’s a huge deal!

Emily: Or Balwer, I think, might also tell, um – might – this might be when he tells Perrin that there was a battle between the Seanchan and sort of unknown forces in Illian.

Sally: Yes.

Emily: And Perrin’s like, “Oh, great. At least Rand knows about the Seanchan and is doing something about them.”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um –

Sally: Which also took place in Path of Daggers. A big –

Emily: A big battle.

Sally: A big battle.

Emily: A lot of – several battles, I would say.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Sort of an extended affair. Campaign.

Sally: Mm. Yeah.

Emily: Um, which mostly, I think we can agree, is sort of a stalemate since nothing comes of it. The borders remain intact between Illian and Altara.

Sally: Yeah, it’s a very frustrating – I remember reading it and being like, “That was very frustrating,” ‘cause it was an extremely extended battle sequence, and –

Emily: Yeah, clearly –

Sally: I guess we technically stopped the Seanchan from going further into Illian, but.

Emily: Yeah, they held the border.

Sally: It’s not like you – yeah, it’s not like you do anything to, like, prevent the Seanchan invading elsewhere. (laugh)

Emily: Yeah. We do get a mention here that, um, Perrin is seeing colors when he thinks of Rand. This, I think, started being hinted at in Path of Daggers but is going to be progressively more and

more of a, uh, noticeable issue that Perrin, Mat, and Rand, whenever they think of each other, throughout the next few books, actually can see each other and what they're doing.

Sally: I know, it's such an odd mechanic.

Emily: It is a very – like, really odd mechanic. I'm not sure why Robert Jordan chose to include it.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Except maybe as sort of a last-bid attempt to make it feel like his plots are all related, when in reality, he, at this point, has pretty much committed to the idea that he's writing three separate books.

Sally: Yeah, at least three separate books.

Emily: About these various plotlines.

Sally: Yeah, I don't – I don't really get it. It's really starting to come to a head in the beginning of Crossroads of Twilight. Um, maybe not as intensely as it does, but Perrin and Mat are now to the point where it's like, extremely inconvenient and kind of, like, interrupts –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Their thought process, as opposed to just being like, "Well, that's kind of weird." And I'm just like, to – to what end?

Emily: Yeah, I –

Sally: I just – I still – I haven't been able to pin down why a writer would choose to do this, except for what Emily just said.

Emily: And – and sometimes it's, like, used for comic relief or whatnot –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But, like, ultimately that's not a strong enough reason to include it. I think it would work if Perrin, Mat, and Rand coming together in a significant way at the end of the series was more of a thing –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: But as it is, that doesn't really happen. The three of them aren't ever in the same room together, so.

Sally: Yeah, is it ever used as a way for them to, like, communicate with one another? Like –

Emily: No, none of them ever take advantage of it, so.

Sally: Why invent things like magic FaceTime, basically –

Emily: Magic FaceTime.

Sally: And not have your characters use it? We can't use the teleporting, we can't use the magic FaceTime. We can't use any of it. We can use balefire, though. That one's okay. (laugh)

Emily: (laugh) It's just a real disappointment. 'Cause I want it to mean something.

Sally: Yeah, it's –

Emily: I think it could be really cool.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But alas. Um, Perrin and his crew get back to the camp to find the whole thing in, uh, chaos, disarray. Battle lines seem to have been drawn between Alliandre's Ghealdanin forces and, uh, the Mayeners, with the Two Rivers guys sort of in a circle in the middle around the Aiel.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And Perrin is like, "Hello, what the fuck? What's going on?" Um, he rides up, goes to the Mayener contingent, for, uh – first, and is like, "Uh, hello? What's going on?" And Berelain is like, "Hi. Faile – I – we were attacked when we were out hunting, me and your wife and a few other people. And I'm the only one who's made it back." So. Perrin immediately stops being capable of rational thought. (laugh) For about the next, mm, twenty pages.

Sally: Yeah, which I think is okay. Like, when you are faced with bad news, to be like, "I can – I am – I'm in shock."

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: It just – like, I feel like I remember – and I read through my blog, my, like, response to this when I first read it, being like, "Ah, I actually feel really on-board with Perrin right now; I feel like he's being very sympathetic in this moment." The problem is that he never seems to come out of this space.

Emily: Yeah, that's true.

Sally: Except – like, he comes to being able to, like, make decisions, but they're not good decisions. Like, Perrin, through the next couple books, will say things like, "I don't really care what Masema and his followers are doing to the towns that we pass. The only thing that matters is rescuing Faile." Which is incorrect.

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: Just on, like, a – objective statement.

Emily: A moral, rational – (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) He just never seems to sort of rise out of the, like, really deep shock, and it just becomes, like, inexcusable at some point. Like, being stressed about your wife being kidnapped is totally valid, but at some point, you have to accept that, like, other things are happening, and you have to continue to function. Like, it's not an excuse to not lead your people or not make good choices for the people you are responsible for.

Emily: Yeah, I agree. Mat – uh, Mat, excuse me – Perrin’s gut trauma response is, um, totally fine, and I think I, reading it, was just, like, resigned to it –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Because I was like, ugh. Here we go.

Sally: Here we go, yeah. It’s just the start of a really long –

Emily: If this was something that Perrin came out of eventually, uh, hopefully within this book –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Early in this book, um, then I think we would be more accepting of it. I think we would also be more accepting of it if this was an opportunity for side characters in Perrin’s retinue to step up –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, and to behave with, uh – by taking more leadership from Perrin and ultimately being kinder in that way. And it’s very frustrating because we don’t just see Perrin failing to, uh, be a good leader after this tremendous thing has happened to him, but we also see Berelain failing to be a good leader. Uh, we don’t see anything particularly inspiring from the Aes Sedai and the Wise Ones. Um, from any of the, like, main army guys, you know?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: People aren’t stepping up in any significant way.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: They aren’t saying, “Okay, Perrin is clearly in shock, so we need to start making decisions.” That would be a – a really interesting and radically strange thing to do in a fantasy series, but because this is a radically strange fantasy series, or that is how it’s meant to be, that could have worked. But that would require some creative thought, which Robert Jordan, along with Perrin, struggles with.

Sally: Yeah. I also – this is a little bit of a side-step, but, um, just something I was thinking about – is it’s – the next chapter we get, which we’ll talk about next week, is from Faile’s point of view. Um, if I’m remembering correctly.

Emily: Yes, it is.

Sally: Um, and I – it’s very interesting – and I don’t want to, like, just break this down to, like, to gender, but I’m talking more specifically about, like, the socialization of gender. So, like, when something really terrible happens to Perrin, he can kind of just, like, fall apart.

Emily: Shut down.

Sally: Shut down. And, um – though in the long term, we don’t see anyone like Berelain stepping up and being like, “I’m making decisions where the camp is going,” we do see, around Perrin in

this moment, people being like, “Kay, we’ll send out scouting parties, we’ve done this, we’ve done that. We’re taking care of that for you.” Admittedly more traumatic is being kidnapped than having someone you love being kidnapped, not to, like, play trauma Olympics, but, like, Faile is in much more danger. Like, much more physical danger, and she is not allowed to shut down. She does not have the – like, it’s not safe for her. She has to be completely, like, hyper-vigilant.

Emily: Yeah, and Faile – unlike Perrin – her immediate response is not just her own survival but taking care of her people, who –

Sally: Yes.

Emily: Got kidnapped with her.

Sally: Yeah. So Perrin, as the male in this situation, is able to just, like, completely shut down; people are taking care of him; he does not have to take any responsibility for his actual responsibilities –

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: He does not have – or – take responsibility for his responsibilities, what the fuck am I saying? – he does not have to attend to his responsibilities, whereas, like, Faile does not get the opportunity to do so. She has to immediately step up and take care of not only herself but other people. And I feel like that is a very true distillation of what happens in our world when horrible things happen. Women are expected to take care of it, whereas men get to just not deal with anything.

Emily: Well, and it’s a trope propagated in all sorts of stories. It’s like Taken with Liam Neeson –

Sally: Mm.

Emily: Something bad happens to a woman you care about, and suddenly it’s all about – every other important thing in your life comes second.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Which, of course, is what we all feel –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: When something bad happens to someone we love, but it is not reality.

Sally: No.

Emily: So, um, yeah, I agree, I don’t know – I don’t know how to talk about that, but I think it’s something worth thinking about as we get further into this arc.

Sally: Yeah, I just, like – that – your – that is totally fine; it was just, like, a thought that popped into my head. Um. That I’ve seen happen to people I love when something bad happens and also very much has happened in my family when bad things happen. It’s, like, the women

who have to step up. It's always, you know, for – to take a really dramatic example, you never see, like, the men of the family feeding people at a funeral.

Emily: Sure.

Sally: It's always the, like, female relatives who have come together to put food on the table after someone has died.

Emily: Right.

Sally: So Perrin just gets to sort of, like, really –

Emily: Wallow.

Sally: Marinate in his man pain. (laugh) And he is joined in that by my favorite character, Tallanvor. (laugh) Um, and what they do is they stand on top of a hill.

Emily: Staring. (laugh)

Sally: Into the forest. (laugh)

Emily: Waiting for some sign to come – so fucking stupid. Yeah, Perrin, um – there is a lot of man pain –

Sally: Yep.

Emily: Going around.

Sally: Yep.

Emily: Perrin is like, "What happened? What the fuck?" He is just like, "We gotta go get Faile. We gotta go get Faile." And everyone's like, "There is – there are crises happening right now, in front of you –"

Sally: Yeah. Yes.

Emily: "Including this potential violence. Masema's on his way, supposedly."

Sally: And he's also been secretly meeting with the Seanchan.

Emily: Yeah. Ahh!

Sally: Like, big shit is happening.

Emily: Um, but we find out that the reason this has come to a head is because obviously Berelain was – and – came back with word that the Aiel had attacked them –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: And the, uh – Alliandre's forces, very racistly – (laugh) um, were like, "Well, there are Aiel right there. We can just –"

Sally: "We'll just kill these ones."

Emily: “We’ll just ask them where the fuck –”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: “Everyone they know is,” I guess.

Sally: (laugh) Everyone they know – like twenty million people.

Emily: You have tracking chips in all of the one hundred million Shaiddo Aiel, right?

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: The ones that keep –

Sally: Just sort of popping out of the snow. They’re like Pick Men. You just pick ‘em up.

Emily: Yeah. Whoo!

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Um, and obviously the Two Rivers were – guys were like, “Wh-what? No. You can’t just torture Wise Ones and Aiel and whatnot.”

Sally: “You can’t do this.”

Emily: As a reminder, the forces of Aiel with Perrin are entirely Wise Ones and Maidens. Gaul is literally the only male Aiel with them.

Sally: What an absolute king. (laugh)

Emily: Yeah. God, I love him. (laugh)

Sally: He’s just like, “It’s me! The token man.”

Emily: “It’s me, Gaul.”

Sally: “It’s me, Gaul. Hello!”

Emily: Um. So, like, here’s an opportunity for Perrin to exercise some leadership muscles. This army guy in charge of Alliandre’s forces comes up and is like, “We’ve gotta put the Aiel to the question,” and instead of Perrin being like, “That would be pointless because I –”

Sally: “There are different groups of Aiel.”

Emily: “There are different groups of Aiel. Clearly we know where all of these ones are, so they had nothing to do with it. How do you –” Like, using reason at all with this man.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Perrin’s just like, “Get fucking lost. You’re not my problem.” Which won’t improve the situation. Even though Berelain is like, “You handled that perfectly.”

Sally: Um –

Emily: And I'm like, in what fucking world, Berelain?

Sally: Yeah, in what way can you just be like, "Go away"?

Emily: Berelain immediately starts flirting with Perrin. Perrin is like, "I don't have patience for this."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And she's like, "It's not a game, Perrin. You should be flattered by all my sexual assaults."

Sally: (laugh) I don't know why I'm laughing.

Emily: Yep. (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) It's not funny.

Emily: "You're not flattered that I'm call – that I'm catcalling you? I'm saying you're pretty."

Sally: "I'm saying – I'm trying to fuck you right after your wife got kidnapped."

Emily: "I'd fuck you. Aren't you flattered?"

Sally: And Perrin's like –

Emily: "No, girl."

Sally: (laugh) "Could we end this conversation, please?"

Emily: Ahh! Um, he leaves them and goes to talk to the Two Rivers guys, who sort of explain their side of the story and are like, "We immediately sent out two of our best trackers –"

Sally: Yep.

Emily: "To go in that direction." And Perrin's like, "Okay, great." He sees the Aiel – oh, he also sends off Elyas immediately. He reaches out to the wolves, who are basically like, "We can't tell the difference between humans." (laugh)

Sally: Like, "You want me to find one human? No way, dawg."

Emily: "Nah. Good luck, though."

Sally: Yeah. (laugh)

Emily: (laugh) Love them. Love the wolves.

Sally: "Not my problem, but best of luck."

Emily: "Best of luck, bestie. Good – Godspeed to you."

Sally: "Godspeed-d-d-d."

Emily: And Perrin's like, "Wow, super helpful, my telepathic link with wolves."

Sally: It's like – they're not your slaves.

Emily: Yeah. What –

Sally: They have agency.

Emily: What do you want them to do? Uh, so those people are sent out; Gaul and the Maidens are all assembled to go and find them. Perrin is like, "You guys have probably the best chance of tracking Aiel, so good luck." And Gaul's just like, "Thanks, bro," and they part ways. Perrin notes that – the Aiel are very kind to Perrin in their –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Uh, response to him. It's very sweet. Um, Perrin is not really kind to them in return. Like saying to Gaul, "Oh. Good luck getting Bain and Chiad." You know, no thought –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: No thoughts, head empty.

Sally: Yeah. "Good luck getting the women that YOU care about back."

Emily: He does note that Gaul – the Maidens are like, "Oh, Gaul's in love with Chiad, so he should –"

Sally: He should be in charge.

Emily: "He should be in charge," which is kind of cute.

Sally: Yeah. They're like, he –

Emily: A sort of – a sort of, um, a sort of response to man pain that I guess I am on-board with.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Because here's Gaul, doing something productive with the help of the women –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, but ultimately, he's not wallowing.

Sally: Yeah –

Emily: And they are not allowing him to wallow.

Sally: Yeah, they're like, "You are gonna be in charge, then."

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: "If you're this upset about it, you're gonna make the decisions, and you have to make good decisions, or we're not gonna get her back."

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: It's – you're – I agree.

Emily: The pressure increases in some ways.

Sally: Yeah, but in, like, a – a good way.

Emily: In a productive way.

Sally: In a productive – yeah, being like, “Okay, I gotta, like, get my shit into gear. I gotta focus. I can't just be, like –” Yeah. Which is, like, not – everyone responds differently, so I do want to, like, hold space for the fact that you can't just force everybody in a crisis situation to do something because a lot of people just won't.

Emily: Yeah, some people automatically hyperfocus –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: On productivity after a trauma. Some people do what Perrin is doing and just fall apart, and ultimately there should be space for both of them, but ultimately, in this series, what we're seeing is that Perrin's way –

Sally: Yeah, we're faced –

Emily: Is – oh, go ahead.

Sally: No, we're faced again with what we talked about last week in terms of, like, anything is fine in the individual.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Like, every form of human expression, sexuality, um, shock, trauma responses, they're all – like, I don't want to, like, overuse the word “valid” because I know that is, like, the internet's hot slang term, but of course, all those things happen, and they're totally fine. It's when we're hit up again and again with Perrin and Rand and these types of men who are really celebrated for being like, “I simply cannot function through my own pain.”

Emily: Yeah, “I'm expecting women to pick up the slack.”

Sally: Yes. Yeah. “I'm expecting the women around me to carry me instead.” And it's like, that is – then we're just basically setting that up not as, like, a response but as, like, what is expected and what we should accommodate for.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: When that's not how – and, yeah. Anyway.

Emily: Um, Grady and Neald approach Perrin and are like, “We can teleport. We can go start looking, you know? We can cover more distance.”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And for some – in my head, I’m like, “Oh, this is great,” you know? He does have two people who can teleport. Theoretically he has one person who could stay with him and another person who can go out and teleport and a guy who can be teleporting the Aiel and whatever –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Over vast swathes of – you can solve this problem right here, you know? You have people who can teleport. It’s insane.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But Perrin is just like, “No. Just stay here.” I, like – I don’t know – I just don’t know how to function – (laugh) I don’t know –

Sally: Yeah, because there’s – like, I think another element of this is, like, um, Perrin is, yes, in a state of shock and crisis. Robert Jordan is not. And Robert Jordan is ultimately in control of the narrative. So Robert Jordan can be like, “I can make a choice that makes sense to move my plot forward,” and instead, Robert Jordan is allowing – Robert Jordan is actively choosing to not do that, which I think is part of my frustration.

Emily: Yeah. That’s what – I – that’s what I mentioned earlier. Perrin isn’t making good choices, but Robert Jordan isn’t allowing Perrin to make any good choices.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Like this. Perrin – Grady and Neald are representative of a multitude of different paths –

Sally: Yes.

Emily: That Perrin and this plot could take.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: But Robert Jordan, via Perrin, just shuts it down.

Sally: Yep.

Emily: Perrin – you could still be true to Perrin’s response, which is to be shut down, while still allowing this path to open up. Grady and Neald – they could decide, “Perrin’s not in his right mind; we’re gonna do this anyway.”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: They could team up with various people –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: To go out and do this. There are, like – there are ultimately different ways this could go.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: But Robert Jordan isn't allowing it to go in different ways, which is part of what makes this plotline so frustrating, because ultimately we will always have this moment – these multiple moments where it could've just not happened.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But Robert Jordan wanted it to happen, so it happened, and that's very obvious to us as readers.

Sally: I know, 'cause it's like – the way I'm – like, if this were me, I'd be like, okay, Berelain was out with them. Berelain, take us to where you were hunting.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: We're gonna send people out in all four directions from this spot, using our teleporters to cover large swathes of ground. At some point, we will catch their trail.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: And you've gotta do it now. I've – I've seen crime procedurals. It's the first twenty-four hours, baby.

Emily: Yeah, baby.

Sally: Forty-eight hours, whatever it is.

Emily: And, like, they're saying, you know, okay, we have heard reports of this huge Aiel force in such and such a place, da da da da da.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And the sort of logical argument that Perrin is making here – I think it's Perrin making it – is that if we just send people out, we could eventually just run into this giant force of Aiel that we can't deal with. And it's like, okay, but you're gonna have to deal with them eventually.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: This isn't ever going to stop being a problem. And by sort of saying, "Step back and wait," you're closing off options for yourself.

Sally: Yeah, and I'm – nobody is saying, send Grady and Neald alone to bring back these twelve women or whatever.

Emily: Yeah, you just have –

Sally: It's called scouting. (laugh)

Emily: My God. I know. (laugh) Like, just find where they are.

Sally: Once you find them – (laugh)

Emily: Yeah, Jesus.

Sally: Then you can use the teleport men to come back and make a plan.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: It's, like – wow. Call me Sun Tzu. (laugh)

Emily: Grady and Neald are specifically given to Perrin by Rand to be his teleporting boys. And –

Sally: They're just Uber drivers.

Emily: Yeah, they're literally just Uber drivers. And Perrin – glorified taxi drivers. And Perrin brutally uses them later in this plot for teleportation purposes but also brutally underutilizes them. Grady and Neald are just kind of, like, two randos. You have multiple opportunities to use them.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: What if you just, like – like, later, we're gonna end up in this siege situation, where all of the captives are stuck in this city.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: You – (laugh) You can dress Grady and Neald up as gai'shain, send them in –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Find the ladies, teleport out of there.

Sally: I know.

Emily: Like, it's insane how many possibilities there are, and just none of them are even brought up.

Sally: Yeah. It's just like, why would we use our magic boys or the Aes Sedai?

Emily: Yeah, who aren't strong enough to channel – I mean, to teleport, I guess.

Sally: But they can still do channeling stuff.

Emily: So many things.

Sally: It's just – yes. It is this double frustration of being presented with a very common situation of this man wallowing in his pain not making decisions, but also behind him, the lurking figure of Robert Jordan, not letting this plot move forward. It is a plot that he seems to be purposely dragging out for books and books on end to no real purpose.

Emily: Yeah, which – I mean, everyone, I think, as soon as a new book came out, was like, "Whoa, here's hoping that they wrap up the Faile –"

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: “Kidnapping plotline,” and then Robert Jordan didn’t, and then it’s like, what are you gonna do? Just wait for the next one, you know.

Sally: Yeah. I mean, look at the paper chain I have on my wall about when Faile will be rescued.

Emily: (sigh) If she doesn’t get rescued –

Sally: It’s so long.

Emily: She gets rescued in Knife of Dreams, right?

Sally: Yeah. I have a full book to get through.

Emily: Jesus.

Sally: And then it’s, like, many, many chapters into Knife of Dreams before she gets rescued.

Emily: Yeah, it’s, like, a climactic sequence –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: In Knife of Dreams.

Sally: It’s not, like, at the beginning of Knife of Dreams, we solve this problem. No. We have to suffer through many attempted assaults on Faile’s person.

Emily: Oh, God. Let’s take a step back. What is Robert Jordan trying to accomplish with this particular plotline? Um, Robert Jordan wants Perrin to have a confrontation with the Shaido Aiel and more or less eliminate them as a threat.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: He also, throughout this plotline, wants Perrin to come in contact with the Seanchan and have a more or less positive interaction with them. This is all stuff in the future, so sorry to jump ahead –

Sally: No, I don’t mind.

Emily: Readers and – I mean, listeners and Sally, but –

Sally: I don’t care.

Emily: He wants to prove that, uh, actually, people can work with the Seanchan from a tactical standpoint, because that is his overall thesis, is that we must put up with fascists in order to defeat the cosmic force of evil.

Sally: We must put up with fascists to defeat the Aiel. (laugh)

Emily: Yeah, the Aiel, the outsiders – the –

Sally: Yeah, the Aiel are not the representatives of the cosmic force of evil, I’m sorry if I crossed the streams there – I just –

Emily: I mean, in some ways, they are because they were dispensed by Sammael. They're representatives of chaos.

Sally: Oh, there we go. There we go. We're back to the Lord of Chaos himself.

Emily: But they are also representatives of this, um, quote unquote, savagery –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: That, uh, is very rooted in racism and which is intersecting nicely with Robert Jordan's whole chaos theory. There's a sort of Manifest Destiny at work here.

Sally: Yeah, and just holding vaguely onto that thread, I just want to jump back a little bit to the beginning of the first chapter – not the prologue – the first chapter of *Winter's Heart*, where we're doing Robert Jordan's, like, we're riding the winds of time, and we check in with various places, and there are comments about how, um, in Tanchico, things have been so much better since the Seanchan took over.

Emily: Yeah, actually, no one really cares. It was pretty chaotic for a minute there, but things settled down and just went the same way, and now no one's starving, so it's cool.

Sally: Yeah, it's just like, the Seanchan are just, like, organize – they've organized everything a lot better. And it's just, like, this disgusting thesis that Robert Jordan hits on all the time, is that, like, well, at least this sort of fascist force is very, um, bureaucratic and effective.

Emily: And, like, to be clear, we're not saying that that's a thing that never happened in the history of the world –

Sally: No, of course not.

Emily: When other forces – this was something that happened, like, for example, with the Mongols. I just read a book about them. When Genghis Khan's forces invaded in various parts of Asia, often what they left behind was better systems.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: These are still violent, invasive forces. Like, what about the people who died in the invasion, you know? (laugh)

Sally: What about the people who died? And, yeah, there's something – in terms of, like, logistics and the manpower to organize things, yes, the bigger empire is going to have more manpower to make that happen. That's not a surprising thing, logistically. But it's weird to me that Robert Jordan – and I feel like other historians and writers – have, like, really focused on this detail that, like, the larger the imperial force, actually the more effective the world becomes when they conquer them. And it's like, that – it just doesn't sit right, you know?

Emily: Well, it's a very macro perspective on world history –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Which, um, is a perspective that has the luxury of hindsight and does not require us to sit with the people who were killed.

Sally: Yeah, or the women – the –

Emily: And brutalized.

Sally: Yeah, and brutalized. And tortured and enslaved in the – like, sticking with the fictional world of Wheel of Time, what about all of the Aes Sedai women who can channel? Who have been literally collared like dogs?

Emily: Yeah, it is a – a majority perspective, not a minority-favoring perspective.

Sally: Yeah, and it's just kind of like, what is – what – for what is the value of a human soul? (laugh)

Emily: For what is the value of a human soul?

Sally: Like, what is the cost? Like, what is the human cost of running an effective society? Like, being – societies should be messy. That means they're, like – multiple people have a say in how it runs rather than one person being like, "This is how it's done, and that's it, and if you stray out of line, you're going to get killed."

Emily: And it's just like, the Seanchan already reek of the, uh, American South and the system of slavery that existed there. Um, and that sort of argument is in line with an argument that slavery apologists would use –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Which is that, like, America wouldn't be the country it is today – which, I wish America wasn't the country it is today –

Sally: Yeah, you're – (laugh)

Emily: So that's not as great an argument as you'd think – but America wouldn't be, like, an economic powerhouse if it hadn't been built on the backs of enslaved people. And it's like, that does not, in any way, excuse – like, just because we're saying, "Things would be differently – if they'd happened differently –" Yes. I agree.

Sally: Yeah, and –

Emily: That's not a smart thing to say.

Sally: Yeah, also, just, like, again, I know, like, a lot of these people are, like, not morally sound people, but, like, do you hear what you're saying? Like, it is more important for you for our country to be a, quote unquote, economic powerhouse, whatever that even means – (laugh)

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Than to be – in order to, like, sacrifice the millions and millions of people who died and were brutalized under slavery in the American South? Or in America in general, it wasn't just the South, that's just where the bulk of it happened. Like –

Emily: You just can't make excuses about the past by relying on the future as an argument.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Like, that's not fair to anyone. So anyway. (laugh)

Sally: So. (laugh) Brought that up.

Emily: Along that thesis, what's happening now with Perrin we can try and excuse in that it is leading up to something that Robert Jordan clearly wants to happen, but that does not stop it from being poorly written now.

Sally: No, not at all.

Emily: You might feel, later on, okay, Perrin's confrontation – ultimate confrontation – is worth it in some way. But that doesn't make up for the swathes of horror that is happening right now, most – best crystallized by Perrin and Tallanvor standing alone on a hill, just sort of staring, and unless I'm mistaken, when we pick up with Perrin's point of view later, literally just sitting there until they become borderline hypothermic.

Sally: Yep. Yep, yep. That's correct. And someone has to be like, "You have to come inside." I think it's Berelain.

Emily: Berelain, like, drags Perrin, unconscious, into her tent and then uses that for nefarious reasons. It's just –

Sally: It's – ooh, what a rancid couple of chapters. (laugh)

Emily: Yeah, and unfortunately, this is just how it's gonna be every time we're with Perrin and Faile for the next little while.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: As much as Faile is remarkable for, like, stepping up in a crisis, obviously what happens to her is even less fun to read about –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Than what is happening with Perrin.

Sally: Like, Faile is being a more interesting character 'cause she's making decisions and really trying her best to get her people out of there, but she's just being, like, tortured. She's working in a labor camp.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Being tortured, almost raped.

Emily: Repeatedly.

Sally: Repeatedly. And it's like, these things actually don't have to happen, Robert. You could have made different choices. Like, Faile didn't need to get kidnapped in order for Perrin to have confrontations with all of these people. Masema is right there as a plot device to just hinge all of this around.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Because he's unstable. He's an unstable person, doing unstable things. I don't know if "unstable" is the best word, but.

Emily: Ultimately, what we have here at the beginning of Winter's Heart is what happens at the start of all good books. You know, some – there – there's a crisis, and a lot of things could happen because of that crisis, and a lot of those things could be interesting. But one of those things could be super fucking boring –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: And Robert Jordan chose that one to write about. So that's the reality we just have to deal with.

Sally: It's Robert Jordan's world, baby. We're just living in it.

Emily: We're just – we're just reporting on it, live.

Sally: (laugh) Live, this is the Wheel of Time update.

Emily: Coming at you from Smog Lake City.

Sally: Ugh, you guys, the air has been, blegh, so bad. It's a little better today, but.

Emily: Anyway, we've gotta go, uh, separate Cain and Abel –

Sally: (laugh) Tybalt's Abel instinct – Cain instinct is kicking in.

Emily: Yeah, the cats are insane, so.

Sally: I guess – yeah.

Emily: Thanks for – (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) "We have to separate Cain and Abel." I have to go do physical therapy, so I can just lock one of them in the room with me.

Emily: Ugh, sorry. Then we can watch the new Sex and City.

Sally: (gasp) I'm so excited.

Emily: Uh, but thanks for listening. Thank you to Glynna MacKenzie for our theme song. Thanks to our patrons on Patreon and our followers on social media. Got –

Sally: That's – you nailed it, bestie.

Emily: That's it, baby.

Sally: That's it.

Emily: Got a sign-off?

Sally: I don't have a sign-off, I don't think.

Emily: I'm gonna kill our cats.

Sally: That's our sign-off.

Emily: (laugh) I'm not really, don't worry.

Sally: We're not gonna hurt the cats.

Emily: No one is going to do violence against animals in this household.

Sally: But, I am going to go do some kind of disciplinary action.

Emily: The spirit of murder is in my heart right now.

Sally: What – like, what is up with them, you guys?

Emily: And I can't use it on Masema, so.

Sally: I wish I could. What a little freak.

Emily: God, give Grady and Neald a gun.

Sally: Give Grady and Neald a gun!

Emily: Goodbye, everyone.

Sally: Goodbye.