



Episode 192: The Rat Is King

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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 Glynna MacKenzie plays)

Emily: Um, this is Everybody Hates Rand, a – (snort) your friendly neighborhood Wheel of Time podcast. I'm Emily Juchau.

Sally: I'm Sally Godoger.

Emily: The first chapter is titled "Wonderful News," which mostly just reminds me of the Christmas movie "It's a Wonderful Life."

Sally: Mm.

Emily: But, um, there could be no lesser resemblance between those two works because here we are with Cadsuane's point of view, the worst possible character in the world. What even is the wonderful news? Oh, it's that everyone swore fealty to Rand –

Sally: The wonderful news is that Damer Flinn learns how to heal –

Emily: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Sally: Being stilled.

Emily: Separately –

Sally: He's a regular Nynaeve, yeah.

Emily: Yeah. Uh, independent from Nynaeve. Which is – I know that's, like, a thing, you know? Like, Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone or whatever at the same time as another guy, but –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: He just got to the patent office earlier or whatever. Like, I know it's a thing for independent –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Independent discoveries – discoveries to be made independent of each other but, like, at eerily the same time. That's, like, a – a phenomenon, a well-documented phenomenon. But it does feel, like, a little cheap to me in the context of a fantasy novel.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: It's just kind of frustrating 'cause it removes the potential for collaboration that I feel like could be really interesting. It's so frustrating because as we get further into this book, we meet more and more people who are like, "They're such great healers; they're even greater healers than Nynaeve."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: "This is the most – best healer of all the Aes Sedai in the entire world, Sumeko, whoever _"

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Da da da da da. And I'm like, what if they all got in a room together? Could they cure cancer?

Sally: I think so.

Emily: I mean, there's no cancer in Wheely Time universe; the one thing it has going for it. (laugh)

Sally: No, this is representative of a – what I find to be – I don't want to say a problem because Robert Jordan is making, I think, a very intentional choice to explore – this is – we'll give Robert Jordan half a compliment. I think with the Aes Sedai and Asha'man –

Emily: Half credit. (laugh)

Sally: He is doing some, like, interesting things to explore people's, um – people – how unwilling people are to give up power over themselves or another. To just sort of, like, submit to being part of a collective, I think.

Emily: Mm, yeah. Very individualist society here.

Sally: Yeah, I think –

Emily: Very American, as it were.

Sally: Yeah. Dun dun. So I think there's, like, a little – like, I will give him half – I will give him partial credit – maybe, like, 25 percent – for, like, exploring something that is very realistic. It is unfortunate, however, that that is the choice made with the Aes Sedai and the Asha'man because there is such interesting potential for collaboration and the way that they could work together and potentially discover or rediscover some really amazing magic, just by using both halves of the Power together or, more importantly, like, using their – all their magical brains in the same place.

Emily: Yeah, Robert Jordan really seems to buy into the idea of, like, the brilliance of individuals.

Sally: Yes.

Emily: Which I know I just – I'm basically just restating what I said thirty seconds ago, but it is becoming clearer to me now – of, like, the idea that just, given – given enough talented people, those talented people will all just, of their own volition and independently of one another, just hit on the same amazing concepts –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And innovations. And it's like, there's an element of truth to that. Individual people do incredible things every day independent of one another. But far more powerful is collaboration.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Which, I know I sound like a Commie there or whatever –

Sally: Comrade.

Emily: But I mean, I fucking am.

Sally: Yeah. It's just like – it's true, though. Like, it's so much better when there are multiple people around to solve a problem. And I know that, quote unquote, decreases your credit or, like, decreases the value of your own intelligence – that's incorrect –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: (laugh) You are not less intelligent or less important because you collaborate with other people. It just means that you are sharing resources, to put it in some Communist terms. But I also think this – and I don't want to call it a myth, because you are right; individual people are doing really incredible things every day – but this sort of, like, perhaps we can call it an archetype of the – the genius.

Emily: The inventor, yeah.

Sally: The inventor.

Emily: The Tony Stark, the Victor Frankenstein.

Sally: Yeah, really – those are two excellent examples, because both of those men come from incredible wealth, privilege –

Emily: Yes.

Sally: And have access to plenty of resources.

Emily: My point exactly. No one's making innovations in a vacuum.

Sally: Yes, exactly. It requires education, it requires investment, it requires time and the ability to have free time, which privileged white men tend to have more of since they neglect familial and community obligation.

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: So.

Emily: Yeah, and it's like – I mean, you're right that Robert Jordan deserves 25 percent credit there because nobody likes group work.

Sally: Yeah, of course not.

Emily: Fucking hate group projects.

Sally: So much easier to just be like, "I'll just fuckin' do it."

Emily: Yeah, but, like, it just sort of seems contrary to what sometimes seems to be the overall thesis of this series. Which, like, the series – especially once, um, we get those very Brandon Sanderson-esque scenes, uh, at the end – in the last three books, that take place in the Black Tower, which have to do with, like, one of the Asha'man and one of the Aes Sedai getting together, bonding each other, whatever, collaboration, collaboration.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: That's very interesting, and I – I say it's very Brandon Sanderson because it's very clear that he was the one who wrote it –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: I don't know if that idea came from him or Robert Jordan.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Uh, but with that sort of, like, presenting this, like, apex of what a man and a woman channeler can do together, it is like, okay, so it the thesis of this series supposed to be supporting of the idea of, like, community and –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Collaboration or is it anti that? 'Cause there's, you know, this – always cognitive dissonance here. It really feels like Robert Jordan was three separate people writing this. Maybe it was him and his ghost writer –

Sally: Yeah, his ghost writer.

Emily: And they couldn't agree on what was going on.

Sally: Well, no, it's especially interesting in this book because a little bit in Path of Daggers but mostly in this book we start to see the dynamics emerge between the Aes Sedai and the Asha'man they have bonded as their Warders.

Emily: Oh, and what a rancid dynamic it is.

Sally: Yes. Extremely rancid. Like someone just, like, please pray for Narishma, who is just just being, like, chronically abused. They all are.

Emily: Pray for Eben, who's being –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So infantilized.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Damer Flinn, who I think is being treated like an aged grandpa –

Sally: Yeah, when he's literally out here curing women of being stilled.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Like, he's a genius, obviously. It's extremely rancid, and it very much has to do with them being like, "We are going to hold power over these men." They're so insistent upon it. Cadsuane is really insistent upon it. And yet the very important climax of this book – we are now mid-series plus – is Rand and Nynaeve working together to cure – to cleanse the taint on saidin.

Emily: Yes.

Sally: It requires a male and a female channeler working in complete harmony, complete tandem; there are times when Nynaeve holds more of the Power; there are times when Rand holds more of the Power; it's like an ebb and a flow.

Emily: And they are also surrounded by these groups of male and female channelers –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Who are all linked together to, like, have more powerful bonds or whatever.

Sally: Yeah. So again, it's like, what's the point, Robert? What's the –

Emily: What's the truth? (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) What are you saying?

Emily: What is the truth?!

Sally: Robert, I'm getting a lot of conflicting opinions here.

Emily: I said "ghost writer" earlier, and that was a perfect time to make a Robert joke, and I just missed it entirely.

Sally: (laugh) Let's go back and just, like, slap-cut it.

Emily: Just – just flew right by me. By – like a piece of Robert Jordan's soul. Yeah, it's just, like, very obvious that the Asha'man are being treated as, not sub-human but very specific categories of human that involve very powerful power dynamics.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Eben, as we are opening on this scene, uh, with Cadsuane, um, talking to a couple of the Sea Folk, and she is sort of – has this backdrop of Aes Sedai plus Eben – Eben is literally, like,

serving tea. Someone enters the room and he, like, jumps up and, uh, runs to give them tea. Narishma's carrying messages.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Um, Damer Flinn is – well, I guess we don't see him, but I don't think –

Sally: He's mentioned, yeah.

Emily: He's been treated very well either. And this is a real leap because the last time we saw these three men was at the end of, um, Path of Daggers, when they were still just part of Rand's coterie and were totally just, like, independent forces. And they weren't always on their best behavior; they were also relying a lot on the classic Asha'man intimidation – not just that I'm a male channeler, but that I'm a male, period.

Sally: Yes.

Emily: Which is also no fun to read about. But it is sort of – stretches the limits of belief that these three guys would just be like, "Okay, I'll be bonded as Warders."

Sally: Yeah, it –

Emily: And – were they all – did they all consent to that?

Sally: Yeah, it really begs the question, doesn't it? How consensual was this arrangement?

Emily: Were they strong-armed into it by, like, Cadsuane saying, "Well, this is the only way you're going to have protection," because Rand more or less, like, left a crime scene here, evidence of male channeling, and then just left his three male channelers –

Sally: Mm-hmm. Just fucked off.

Emily: To face the music, you know? Which –

Sally: Yeah, he is –

Emily: Rand is definitely partially to blame here for not taking care of his people at all. But, like, it sure did leave a big opportunity for Cadsuane and the other Aes Sedai to be like, "Well, unless you're connected to us –"

Sally: Yeah, we can't protect you.

Emily: Yeah. So –

Sally: Or we won't protect you. Like, we'll go after you ourselves if you don't submit to being bonded – it's – it really is impossible for me to believe that it was consensual.

Emily: Yeah, it would've been so much more interesting if you had had, like, any sort of pushback against the Asha'man and the Aes Sedai just stepped in to protect them because these are all channelers.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: You know?

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: But again, that would be leaning into community over power struggles between individuals and especially the sexes, so.

Sally: Yes.

Emily: Robert Jordan didn't know what he was writing about. Speaking of power dynamics embodied, we have Cadsuane here, who is just, like, a walking, "I'm the biggest bitch in the room."

Sally: It – yeah.

Emily: As evidenced by the way she treats the Sea Folk, very dismissively. At one point, she, like, has her attention elsewhere, and the main Sea Folk lady, Harine – who is trying to get her sister back?

Sally: Her sister, who Cadsuane is holding hostage.

Emily: She's like, "Could I just have my sister back?"

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: You need to – you have literally no jurisdiction to hold my sister."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Which, I guess, Cadsuane's like, "Well, I'm an Aes Sedai, and I'm a bigger bully than you, so that's my jurisdiction." Uh – jurisDICKtion.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: My bigger dick.

Sally: Get 'er.

Emily: Get 'er. Get 'er. Um. But at one point, Cadsuane seems to be tuning out, and Harine, very reasonably, I think, taps her on the face –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Like, "Pay attention to me; you're having a conversation with me." And Cadsuane reacts as though she has slapped her.

Sally: Yeah. And, like, I don't know, I would freak out if anyone ever touched my face –

Emily: Yeah, I – I mean, I wouldn't enjoy it, but, like –

Sally: But, like, it is reasonable to touch someone to get their attention and, like – yeah, Cadsuane acts as though she's been assaulted when this woman is just – and, like, Cadsuane is

being a bitch, so actually, her touching her on the face is a completely, totally acceptable thing. I rescind my comment.

Emily: (laugh) Well, and I also just think, like, there's a cultural difference. I think the Sea Folk – we have seen them in the past touching faces a lot more?

Sally: I think you're so right. Yeah. Comment completely rescinded. Harine is doing fine.

Emily: Um, yeah. Harine's just like, "Cadsuane."

Sally: "Give me my fucking sister back. Pay – also, don't dismiss me like I'm a child."

Emily: And Cadsuane's like, "Oh, well, actually, I heard everything you said," and it's like, that's not the point; the point is that you're acting –

Sally: Yeah, it's not whether you were, like – it's about – (laugh) let's go back to, you know, elementary school – active listening.

Emily: Yeah, it's about your behavior.

Sally: Let's engage with people as though we are paying attention to what they are saying and that what they're saying matters.

Emily: Yeah. But Cadsuane's like, "No. It doesn't. You don't matter. I hate you."

Sally: She also go – then, like, jumps through all these hoops, like, "You have to fucking leave, and I'll give you your sister back, but it will take, like, three days," like, "I won't do it on your schedule." It's so annoying.

Emily: Yeah, and then she has one of the Aes Sedai escort them out and is like, "And spank them if they're bad."

Sally: That was Bobert.

Emily: That was Bobert, yeah. He really took the wheel on that one. (laugh)

Sally: Yeah, he took the wheel, yeah. Bobert, take the wheel.

Emily: What, no, Bobert, no, don't take the wheel –

Sally: (singing) Bobert, take the whee-ee-eel –

Emily: He can't be trusted. He doesn't have a license –

Sally: (singing) Take it from my hands –

Emily: To operate a motor vehicle. (laugh)

Sally: (singing) I can't do this – (laugh)

Emily: (laugh) Stop.

Sally: (normal voice) Don't sue me, Carrie Underwood.

Emily: (laugh) The idea of Carrie Underwood, A, hearing of this podcast –

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: And B, being – being, um, litigious about it –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Is pretty hilarious.

Sally: Tybalt, what do you see? A bug? Um, yeah, so Cadsuane is just, like, on her full racist bullshit.

Emily: Yeah, Cadsuane – there is nothing at all – and I mean, this is a dead horse we’re beating – there is nothing at all that is likable or interesting about Cadsuane.

Sally: Not at all.

Emily: Every line that comes out – either out of her mouth directly or in her inner monologue is just like, “I’m a bitch. I’m a bitch. I’m a bitch.”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And it’s like, was that the point of her? Was Robert Jordan like, “I’m just going to create a character who is Mega-Bitch over here, because I like to portray women that way”? Or was he like, “Only a Mega-Bitch could convince Rand to not be – to be less of a psycho”? You know, like –

Sally: Yeah, it really is quite a mystery because as – I don’t – maybe I’m treading thin ice here; I don’t want to give George R.R. Martin too much credit for writing good women – but sometimes Cadsuane calls to mind for me Cersei Lannister –

Emily: Mm. Yeah.

Sally In, just, like, the way she kind of behaves with people. But there are parts about Cersei that are, like, interesting enough to be like, I can kind of enjoy seeing this character on screen, at least for the things she is going to do, if not necessarily for her motivations.

Emily: Well, and there are parts of Cersei that are, um, like, sympathetic to us.

Sally: Yeah, that’s a good term, yeah.

Emily: And, like, you know, she’s not – she can act totally deranged to other people, but in her own inner monologue – and we get this, um, better in the books, I guess, but also, I, uh – her actress in the show, whose name escapes me –

Sally: Ah. Lena Headey.

Emily: Yeah, who won Emmys for her portrayal – very well-deserved, um, Emmys –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, insofar as the Emmys and the Oscars, you know, are accurate portrayals at all. But through her inner monologue is how we get those, like, sympathetic moments. And Cadsuane is, in her inner monologue, acting exactly as deranged as she does to every other character.

Sally: Yeah, that's – that's a good way to put it. There's no – like, with Cersei, there's a – not that – ugh. Again, I feel like I'm getting all tangled up. But there is a difference between, like, her outer persona and her inner persona. You get to see some of the, like – her motivations, which are really interesting, at times.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: With Cadsuane, there is no difference between her outer persona and her inner persona. She is just a raging asshole, no matter what she is doing. Her motivations are completely, "I am going to have power over people for no other reason than I want it." Cersei is often seeking power because she has been disenfranchised as a woman in a world who is not valued – in a world that does not value women. Who – who would've thought I'd brought George R.R. Martin into this? (laugh) Anyway, there's just, like, nothing redeeming about Cadsuane, literally at all.

Emily: Right. And just to, like, cross the gender boundary, too, Jaime Lannister is, I think, the same –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Way. Jaime starts out as a mega asshole because we're never seeing him from his point of view.

Sally: Yes.

Emily: And I'm – I'm better acquainted with the show than I am with the books; it's been too long since I read the books – but, um, like, everyone, famously remembers that very good – (laugh) I always think of it as a hot tub. I know it's not.

Sally: (laugh) Bath tub?

Emily: It's, like, a bath scene with him and Brienne –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Where he monologues about – he has this really good monologue about the choices he's made –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: That have given him this reputation, you know?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And he suddenly – we're like, oh.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: He's actually a very sympathetic and interesting character.

Sally: Yes.

Emily: Who has had – who has had to make some really tough calls.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And that's like, oh. Suddenly interesting. We never get that moment with Cadsuane.

Sally: You're so right, bestie.

Emily: Never. She's just constantly, like, pushing children out of windows. "The things I do for love."

Sally: Yeah, she never –

Emily: Slapping Rand in the face. (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) She never gets past the pushing children out of windows.

Emily: Yeah. If – if the stages of character development are – (laugh)

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Pushing children out of windows. Losing a limb. (laugh)

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Hot tub confession scene.

Sally: Hot tub confession scene. But yeah, Cadsuane never gets past the pushing children out of windows thing. And it's like –

Emily: Real arrested development there.

Sally: Yeah, it just doesn't make sense to me. Like, this is a character – like, she's very one-dimensional. And that one dimension is being a dick. And it's just, like, I don't see the point of this character. And I especially don't see the – the value in having her be a point of view character.

Emily: Mm.

Sally: If you need her to be, like, a piece on the chessboard for Rand to have something to, like, move around –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Maybe that would make more sense to me, but her points of view are just, like, rancid.

Emily: Yeah, and it brings to mind the idea, like – and this is, I think, part of the reason why we are both so anti these villain perspectives that we get all the time – if you're going to create a character who is one-dimensional –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: And whose one dimension is, “I’m evil,” or “I’m a rapist,” or “I just am a unilateral dick to everyone I meet –”

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Then we don’t need to be inside their heads.

Sally: No.

Emily: And, in fact, they’re generally much more interesting outside of their heads.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Because now we’re getting to see how other people react to them and maneuver around them.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And that is all – always going to be a much more compelling and sympathetic plot.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: (sigh) So yeah, Cadsuane didn’t need – need a point of view. But the plot of this is that she’s a jerk to the Sea Folk. Um, she is a jerk to all of the Aes Sedai.

Sally: I might have talked about this on the podcast. I’ve talked about it extensively in my Crossroads of Twilight blogs and a little bit at the end of this book, I think, Winter’s Heart. It gets to the point where Robert’s female characters are behaving so badly – no, we have talked about it on this podcast – behaving so badly, making the worst decisions, that he’s just, like, drawing us into his sexism with us –

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: And that’s how I feel with Cadsuane.

Emily: I know, I’m like, “Do I hate women?” (laugh)

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: After reading Cadsuane.

Sally: I’m like, “I just – it just – she’s just not very likable, you know? I think she could be more palatable.”

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: “She could be less of a bitch.”

Sally: Yeah, “It would just – if she could just, like, work on her delivery, that would be really nice.”

Emily: (laugh)

Sally: And so it’s just like, I – then I just feel gross after reading her points of view.

Emily: “I feel gross” is sort of the – the thesis of these two chapters.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Boy, do I feel nasty.

Sally: Okay, sorry, getting through the plot.

Emily: The plot is these three major pieces of news. The first is that now all of the Aes Sedai have sworn fealty to Rand.

Sally: Yep.

Emily: These are the Aes Sedai who, uh, were part of Elaida’s contingent to kidnap Rand. Of those who were not killed or captured or stilled, um, they have slowly been swearing fealty. The first five who did are in this room, um, and Cadsuane gives us a little debrief on them because really they’re the only five who will be at all relevant. But, you know, they all have given motivations and whatnot. And this would be a little weirder if we didn’t know, thanks to the prologue in Path of Daggers, that Verin has been putting all of these people under rudimentary Compulsion.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: She does not know what she’s doing. She’s like the equivalent of a guy in the 19th century wandering around America, a medicine man, who – a dentist, one might say, back when the dentist job was to do every sort of medicine, including lobotomies.

Sally: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Emily: She has no fucking clue what she’s doing, but she’s just like, “I’ll just put them all under Compulsion to serve Rand.” And that’s going on. Nobody else knows about it. Cadsuane’s like, “What the fuck is happening?”

Sally: She’s like, “I really don’t understand. They’re all giving me reasons, but they don’t make sense,” and Verin’s in the corner, like –

Emily: I mean, it – it doesn’t make sense. Compels me, though.

Sally: Compel – (laugh) Compels me, though!

Emily: Wink!

Sally: Ha ha!

Emily: Wink.

Sally: And it seriously is like, Verin, what are you doing?

Emily: Yeah, girl.

Sally: This is – the lobotomy tent is really out of left field. (laugh)

Emily: Yeah, it's a real shock. Where you're just like, "She's doing whaaaat?"

Sally: "She's doing – Verin?"

Emily: Verin, you've been so –

Sally: Could you stop –

Emily: Reliably stable up until this point, and now you're like, "Maybe I too am crazy."

Sally: Verin is out of her cage.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: And –

Emily: No. No.

Sally: (simultaneously) No. Go back in your cage.

Emily: Go back in her cage.

Sally: Stop putting Compulsion on women.

Emily: Um, that's piece one of news. Piece two is that Damer Flinn has managed to heal one of the women who was stilled; um, and she immediately swore fealty.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And he wants to heal the other two people, but, uh, for some reason, the Aes Sedai are like, "We have to give him permission to do that." And it's like, he should be able to heal whoever he fucking wants.

Sally: If I was Damer Flinn, I'd be like, "I'm under the Hippocratic Oath to heal these women, so."

Emily: Yeah, this is our indication – our major indication that Damer Flinn is also being treated in a subservient role in his bond to the Aes Sedai. Like, clearly he is not being treated like an equal if he has to get permission to heal people.

Sally: Yeah. To heal them of what is basically a terminal disease.

Emily: Yeah. Like, the Wise Ones are like, "Oh, we've just been trying to keep them alive because –"

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: For the – they're all suicidal –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: After this. That's piece two of news. Piece three, delivered by Narishma, is that Alanna has fainted very suddenly. And I believe the reason for this is that Rand came so hard that Alanna – (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) Please go to prison.

Emily: I don't – I legitimately don't know what the reason is. Is it because of the bond?

Sally: I thought it was because he got bonded again.

Emily: Oh ho ho.

Sally: Yeah, and that it's not typical for one – like, one woman can hold two bonds, but –

Emily: Oh. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Sally: Like, it's not typical for her to hold a bond and for Elayne to hold a bond over the same person.

Emily: Yeah, which, Elayne, in the last chapter, reassured us that the only reason that wasn't done was because of custom, but Alanna's fainting fit, uh, seems to indicate that there's maybe another reason.

Sally: Maybe there's, like, physical repercussions?

Emily: But, I mean, if that is the reason that Alanna fainted, then good for her. Girl, stay unconscious, 'cause you're gonna wake up and be like, "What's he doing? Oh, THAT'S what he's doing – who's he doing?"

Sally: Super bad news. Not only has the man you bonded non-consensually been bonded mostly non-consensually by three other women, but you now have to live through him and Elayne having just, like, rabbit-like sex, apparently, over the course of one day.

Emily: Yeah, and – and him and Min, I guess.

Sally: And him and Min, yeah.

Emily: Just this, like, absolute – rabbit sex. (laugh) I mean, they are breeding.

Sally: They are – and he's –

Emily: Not to be disgusting –

Sally: Breeding multiples.

Emily: (gagging noise)

Sally: It's just lots of little babies, everywhere he goes.

Emily: Yeah, she is, a, we hope, unwilling voyeur –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Because I would rather she wasn't a – an interested voyeur –

Sally: Yeah, I –

Emily: That would somehow be worse.

Sally: I – it – like, I really do think she fainted because of the bonding, but it would be so funny if she was like, "I am just so uncomfortable by this situation –"

Emily: "I'm just so overwhelmed."

Sally: "That I just fainted to get away from it." (laugh)

Emily: Pffft. But I guess she can channel, so she can shut it out, unlike Min and Birgitte, who have to get drunk.

Sally: Stupid.

Emily: Which is a stupid plot. Um –

Sally: Maybe just don't – (sigh)

Emily: Yeah, whatever. So everyone is going to go, uh, try and deal with that. The one good scene from this little point of view is that Cadsuane is stopped by Dobraine, who is officially sort of steward in Cairhien, and is like, "Um, it's a real shame, Cadsuane, but Caraline Damodred and Darlin Sisnera, who you literally kidnapped –"

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: "And were holding prisoner have escaped."

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: And she's like, "How dare you do that." and he's like – (whisper) "I did, though." (laugh)

Sally: She's like, "Did you think that was wise?" and he was like, "Time will tell."

Emily: Time will tell. And she's like – (sputters) And I'm like, Dobraine.

Sally: Absolute Chad.

Emily: You're looking pretty hot right now.

Sally: Yeah. No, I think she actually is like, "Do you think that was wise?" and I think he says something like, "I do."

Emily: I do. I do, actually."

Sally: "Whatever his response is, it's very iconic, because he's like, "You cannot keep these people – you can't – you have to stop holding hostages, actually."

Emily: Yeah, and he's also like, "And by the way, Darlin is the official Steward of Tear. That – Rand has made him that."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: "So you literally cannot keep him out of Tear, you dumb fuck."

Sally: Without creating a war. Darlin is slowly becoming my favorite character.

Emily: Dobraine, you mean?

Sally: No, Darlin.

Emily: Oh.

Sally: Literally. I also like Dobraine a lot too.

Emily: They're both very good.

Sally: Darlin is just, like, my himbo king, out here –

Emily: Oh, yeah, 'cause you actually get to interact with him now.

Sally: Yeah. (laugh) Stumbling into power. I mean, he's doing a great job, from all accounts, but, um –

Emily: Yeah, Darlin – between Darlin, Dobraine, and Talmanes – I've got, like – oh, not to mention Ituralde –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And, um, what's his name? Bashere.

Sally: Bashere.

Emily: (pause) Don't say gang bang, don't say gang bang. (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) Gross. Or is it?

Emily: Or is it? That's the question.

Sally: It's really stressful in the beginning of Crossroads of Twilight when Dobraine has an assassination scare.

Emily: (gasp) Oh, yeah, I forgot about that.

Sally: And you're like, no! Who's gonna rule France?

Emily: No, not my man. My man – who will rule France?

Sally: Elayne can't do it.

Emily: England? France will hate that. Shakespeare wrote a bunch of plays about it. I know.

Sally: Yeah. Anyway, Dobraine is doing the Lord's work –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: By freeing – (laugh) Darlin and Caraline from Cadsuane's crutches – clutches.

Emily: Uh, but then we switch over to points of view to Damodred. Damodred? Demandred.

Sally: Demandred.

Emily: Speaking of rancid characters. Demandred's pretty funny, actually. He's just like, "Blah, blah, blah, I'm so mean."

Sally: Demandred is just, like, full of so much envy and spite.

Emily: I know. And I'm like, I mean, it's better than being stuck with Graendal.

Sally: Yeah, who's – what's motivating her?

Emily: My one main point against Demandred is that he refers to Cyndane as something – "bosomy." Little something –

Sally: Yeah, that was rough, I was like –

Emily: And I was like – (gagging noise)

Sally: Sir. Sir.

Emily: Go to prison.

Sally: Sir.

Emily: Go to jail, do not pass Go.

Sally: Do not pass Go, Demandred. Do not collect two hundred dollars.

Emily: Uh, but Demandred is at a meeting with, uh, the surviving Forsaken, minus Semirhage, who he says, uh, where she is, it's hard to get away, and, uh, Mesaana, who he says is being shy, which I'm like, okay, that's a stupid reason to not go to a meeting where all the other Forsaken are. Like – (inaudible)

Sally: When has Mesaana ever been shy?

Emily: Yeah, she's just in the White Tower, and we're – I don't – whatever. So it's Demandred, Graendal, Aran'gar, and Osan'gar. Uh, Aran'gar, we know, is masquerading as Halima in Egg's camp, and she makes reference to how her "charge," meaning the person she's meant to suppress, look after, is under her thumb. Uh, and we are, you know, aware of Egg's headaches and how she relies on Halima to make them go away. So, creepy. Osan'gar was, until recently, and I guess still is, kind of, masquerading as Dashiva, one of Rand's top Asha'man, who – (stutters) who betrayed him at the end of the last book, and everyone's like, "Wow, O – wow, Osan'gar, you really fucked that one up, didn't you?" and he's like, "Don't be mean to me." And they're all like, "We do what we want."

Sally: “We will be mean to you. You’re annoying, and you suck.”

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: So.

Emily: Uh, Graendal, we still don’t know where she is based, and of course we don’t know anything about where Demandred is based. Um –

Sally: I mean, we do, Robert Jordan just chickened out.

Emily: Yeah, Robert Jordan.

Sally: He’s based in the White Tower. (laugh)

Emily: Yeah, he is very obvious – ‘cause they’re like –

Sally: Black Tower, excuse me.

Emily: “Oh, yeah, it was – It was your job, Demandred, and Osan’gar, to take care of Rand.”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And he’s like, “yeah, we’ve been watching him.” And I’m like, oh, how have you been watching him, Demandred?

Sally: Oh, word?

Emily: If you’re in Shara? Spoiler alert.

Sally: Oh – oh, worm? You mean the Black Tower outside of Caemlyn, where Demandred lives?

Emily: You’re right. Robert Jordan was such a huge wimp. Come on. It’s clearly Mazrim Taim.

Sally: It’s clearly Mazrim – stupid. Anyway, who should show up but the worst man in the world. (laugh) Moridin.

Emily: (laugh) Who should show up but Moridin, carrying a rat?

Sally: Yeah. (laugh) Oh, you’re right, that is such a – he’s just got a rat on his shoulder.

Emily: That might be my shining light in this. The rat.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: It’s very sad that the rat immediately gets killed, but the fact that he’s just, like – has a rat on his shoulder –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And everyone’s like, “Moridin, what the fuck is wrong with you?” and I’m like, is Moridin my favorite character?

Sally: (laugh) No, Demandred has such a funny line where he's like, "He's carrying a rat on his shoulder for some reason, or maybe no reason at all."

Emily: "'Cause he's a – he's a total weirdo."

Sally: Yeah. (laugh) Just got a rat. I forgot about the rat.

Emily: I'm like, ah, I love that rat. Um, although Moridin then uses it in some rant as a metaphor for how easy it is for things to go wrong. I don't remember. Uh –

Sally: Something about, yeah, the smallest things being important. Blah blah blah.

Emily: Trotting – trotting on his heels is Cyndane, who we were introduced to in the last book –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: I believe, so –

Sally: Yep.

Emily: We would've skipped that, podcast timeline-wise. Uh, Cyndane is, as described by Demandred, a small, bosomy woman. She's hot. She's a – she's a very hot woman. She looks very different than Lanfear, who was tall and had dark hair. Cyndane is small and fair, but I guess they have the same fuckin' triple D cups. And Cyndane's like, "I'm actually actively being sexually assaulted in front of everyone, but I'm doing it in a sexy way." Which – yeah.

Sally: So it's fine then.

Emily: It's fine. It's fine.

Sally: Go to prison, Robert Jordan.

Emily: Yeah, Cyndane is, uh, one of – if Robert Jordan has, you know, his serial killer board, but it's a torture porn board –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Of various women that he's currently torturing, Cyndane is one of them, along with Moghedien. They are both, uh, under a mind trap, which is a method by which they are enslaved –

Sally: Yep.

Emily: Uh, with Moridin as their captor. Um, Demandred tells us that he originally thought Cyndane was Lanfear in a new body –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Uh, but Mesaana or someone told him that it's the – they have different levels of power, and so therefore she cannot be Lanfear. We will, of course, later find out that Cyndane is Lanfear; she just got some of the power sucked out of her by the Eelfinn and Aelfinn, who have vampiric qualities. Um.

Sally: Who else could this sexy woman be besides Lanfear?

Emily: Yeah, it would be weird to just introduce a new sexy woman at this stage in the game.

Sally: Yeah, Robert Jordan's running out of sexy women quotas.

Emily: Yeah. He's just – too many – too many on the board. But, yeah, I referenced her being sexual assault – sexually assaulted; just that, like, Moridin is caressing her, touching her face, tilting her chin up, in ways that she is clearly uncomfortable with.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um. Uh, but Moridin comes in with the news that Rand's big plan is to cleanse saidin. (laugh) Graendal's like, "What?!" Drops her wine.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: "How dare you?!"

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And Demandred's like, "Okay, drama queen."

Sally: He's like, "That was obvious, even to me."

Emily: "That was clearly a fake – a fake-out."

Sally: "Yeah, you – you knew."

Emily: "Bad acting. Bad acting."

Sally: "Boo."

Emily: "Two out of five stars."

Sally: "Zero percent on Rotten Tomatoes."

Emily: "Two for the commitment to the bit."

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: But everyone, like, freaks out, 'cause, uh, the way Moridin phrases it, he says he is going to use a woman, and they are going to use the Choedan Kal to do this. And it's not explicitly clear to us why the women first freak out, meaning Graendal.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Um, I think it will later become obvious that what they're worried about is that Rand will not have a buffer between saidin and saidar and touching the taint, so then saidar will just get tainted too.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So that's what they're worried about. Uh, but then Moridin is like, "You should be worried even if he succeeds because if there's no taint on saidin, then how will the Dark One know that the men are still loyal to him?"

Sally: Yeah, 'cause they rely on him to be able to channel without going insane.

Emily: Yeah, so.

Sally: Everyone is also super freaked out about Rand deciding to use the Choedan Kal because these are extremely dangerous and almost destroyed the world once.

Emily: Yeah. Big, nuclear-type weapons.

Sally: Yeah, so they are like – (stutters)

Emily: (stutters) And Moridin's like, "Well, the good news is that once he uses those, everyone in the globe will know that he is channeling and where, so we'll just all go to there and kill him." (pause) And that's how the series ends. They succeed, and – (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) They succeed, and the Dark One wins, and it's not as bad as you'd think.

Emily: Yeah, the end. Yeah. Um –

Sally: They put the rat in charge. (laugh)

Emily: (laugh) The rat is king.

Sally: The rat is King Rat. The Dark Lord.

Emily: Dun dun. Uh –

Sally: The Dark One. The Dark Lord? Gross.

Emily: No, there's a bunch of dark lords and kings and ones and whatever. Okay, we then switch points of view in the next chapter to Tuon. Um, plot-wise, just getting this out of the way, Tuon is on a ship headed for Ebou Dar. We are introduced to the main members of her household. This includes Selucia, who, uh, was her bodyguard throughout her entire childhood and who chose to remain as her bodyguard when she became an adult at the age of sixteen. Selucia, uh, masquerades as her maid and, I mean, fills that function as well, but she is also Tuon's bodyguard. Uh, we're introduced to the Deathwatch Guards, whatever they're called, which are basically, like, Tuon's bodyguards. Which –

Sally: Yeah, there's like a billion of them.

Emily: Yeah, which she gets because she is the daughter of the Empress. And we're introduced to – what's her name? Anath?

Sally: Oh, yeah, I can't remember. Her name is – it's something like that.

Emily: She's Tuon's Truthseeker. Um, and just to, like – you know – oh, maybe you're not here yet. Do you know she's Semirhage?

Sally: (laugh) No. But that's fine.

Emily: (laugh) Sorry. She's Semirhage.

Sally: It's super funny that they're like, "She can't get away, 'cause she's with the Seanchan."

Emily: She's with the Seanchan. She has to take care of her 17-year-old charge or whatever.

Sally: It's also not surprising, because this woman is very obviously evil.

Emily: And very obviously sadistic.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, she's Tuon's Truth ... speaker or something?

Sally: Seeker, yeah. Seeker?

Emily: I don't remember. Um, but she fill – fulfills this position which the Seanchan have for royals, you know, people – blooded people, I guess I would say. Uh, which is, "This person can say whatever the fuck they want to you, and there will be no consequences." The idea being that, um, everyone else might be intimidated to flatter you or not deliver the correct – you know, the true news to you, but here's one person you can rely on to tell you when you're getting above yourself –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Or doing dumb shit.

Sally: And, like, it is kind of interesting, 'cause it plays a little bit off the concept of a court jester.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: And jester – there's something called, like, jester privilege or the privilege of the jester –

Emily: Yeah, you can't execute the jester for telling you – for saying absolutely wild shit to you.

Sally: Yeah, even if –

Emily: For making jokes about the size of your dick, for doing whatever would be counted as treason for anyone else.

Sally: Yeah, and, um, Shakespeare in particular would play on this, where, like the jester is the only one in the play who's actually saying intelligent things and making intelligent criticisms of – of the nobility and the silly things that they are doing.

Emily: Yeah, like the fool in King Lear.

Sally: Yeah, the fool. Um, was the one who's being like, "This is – the king is being ridiculous."

Emily: Insane, yeah.

Sally: Um, and so it's – it's the fool character that you can look at in Shakespeare's plays to sort of, like, get a sense of, perhaps, the moral high ground. (laugh)

Emily: (laugh) Yeah.

Sally: You might want to call it. Um, so it's playing off that a little bit, which it – like, I always find jesters to be very interesting or fools to be very interesting. Unfortunately, that is tainted by Semirhage's extreme sadism.

Emily: Yeah, Anath is clearly abusing the privilege.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And it's like – I mean, it – it is well-portrayed – this, um, idea because we might be able to write it off as just, like, oh, this is a Seanchan culture thing that we haven't been introduced to yet, but because we're in Tuon's point of view, Tuon tells us that Anath makes her uncomfortable –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: That she clearly says a lot of verbally abusive things, and Tuon is just sort of handling it –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Because that's what you do. So that kind of clues us into the idea that this is not the average situation –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: With these people. Um. Tuon. Tuon is one of our first main Seanchan points of view. I think the last one we had, really, was probably Egeanin.

Sally: Mm. Mm-hmm.

Emily: Uh, who we only really got snippets from. So we're getting a lot of, like, Seanchan culture, jargon, things like that, from Tuon. We are getting, uh, the importance of and reliance on omens. Um, the really cutthroat nature of the Seanchan court; the idea that Tuon is not at all connected in the normal, loving way with any of her family members; they are all rivals –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: For the position, and although she seems favored now, she knows that is not a secure position.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Um, she is in her late teens or early twenties; I'm sorry I can't remember. Um, she has a whole – she has one of those classic, like, protagonist looks into the mirror and details their appearance.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Uh, so Tuon tells us that she is dark-skinned; she wears her head shaved, as one of her standing does. And that she is extremely small and does not have much, uh, bosom to speak of, so she's very boyish looking, according to her.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: And I think we'll probably get into that later; we don't have time now. But, uh, just sort of a – just sort of – there's an eyeroll there.

Sally: Just sort of, like, put a pin in that; we'll come back to it.

Emily: Just – just put a pin in that.

Sally: Because it is, uh, fucking ridiculous.

Emily: Yeah. Um. Tuon is one of those characters who is portrayed sympathetically. Things like this, showing that she is insecure –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: In certain ways, um, and that she's not a perfect person, nor does she consider herself a perfect person –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Uh, are meant to be – to portray her in a more sympathetic light. All of that is hard to get to, though, when we are treated to really disgusting sequences of Tuon interacting with the damane. Uh, she is herself trained as a sul'dam in some way –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Which, you know, we know that means she can channel if she wants to learn, but that's not really relevant yet. Um, and that she really enjoys training damane, which means she enjoys breaking women like animals.

Sally: Yep.

Emily: Which is not a fun character trait for anyone to have.

Sally: Nope.

Emily: Um, and she treats all of the damane as subhuman; more or less as prized pets. And boy, we've seen a lot of that outside of the Seanchan point of views, but inside the Seanchan points of view, it's even worse somehow.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, it's just wildly upsetting and gross and nauseating and, like, Robert Jordan – (sigh)

Sally: I know – I know I harp on this soapbox all the time, and I know many of you disagree with me, so you're tired of hearing me say this, but we gain absolutely nothing in terms of nuance, in terms of plot development, in terms of character development, by getting a point of view from

the perpetrator of enslaving human beings. Tuon is a slaver. She, uh, works in the process of procuring human weapons and enslaving them.

Emily: Yeah, she gives us a great anecdote about purchasing a damane who we find out was an Aes Sedai –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And how Tuon finally succeeded in making her this perfect damane. So yeah.

Sally: Yeah, in breaking her spirit.

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: Uh. So what could we possibly get out of this that we do not already know? The process – everything about the – the process, the institution of the sul'dam and the damane is deeply fucked up. I already know this. The Seanchan are very bad. I already know this. What are –

Emily: What I'm getting from this is that Robert Jordan wants to think – us to think of the Seanchan sympathetically, and I have no interest in doing that.

Sally: I have no interest in doing that either, because it is this deeply subversive thread throughout the Wheel of Time that actually, empire is good.

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: And –

Emily: Maybe we should actually let them have a seat at the table.

Sally: Yeah, maybe we should let imperialist slavers have a seat at the table. And I just, like, fundamentally disagree with that.

Emily: Yeah, spoken like a true coward, Robert Jordan.

Sally: Yeah. So there is no reason – there's just no reason to give Tuon a point of view, at least at this stage. I argue that Tuon is not necessarily a necessary character –

Emily: At all, yeah.

Sally: At all.

Emily: Yeah, at the end of this, we find out she's the Daughter of the Nine Moons, so.

Sally: That's Mat's wife.

Emily: That's Mat's wife. And boy, do I hate her.

Sally: And boy, do I dislike her.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Um, it is also – there is a lot more nuance than we can cover in the last few minutes we have of this or perhaps that we, as two white women, should be covering at all, but Tuon, as being one of our only main characters who is Black, is troubling.

Emily: Combined with the fact that she is a slaver, it's – you know, we're barreling straight past the category of "insensitive" and right into outright racism.

Sally: Yeah. It's just – and, like – there's – like, what are you doing, Robert? (laugh) What are you doing? What are you doing? So, like, the portrayal we get of Black women are the Sea Folk and Tuon, basically, and that is it. So we get basically women who are just aggressive and mean and enslave other people. That seems – I – I don't know, I'm not an expert – that seems pretty one-dimensional and racist to me. So that's what I have to say about Tuon.

Emily: Yeah, put a pin in that one too, because unfortunately, she's not going away. And this whole issue isn't going away.

Sally: This whole issue is not going to vanish, as much as I wish it would.

Emily: So sorry this wasn't a very fun episode. I don't even know who to list as my least favorite character because I hate all of them. The rat, obviously, is my favorite character. (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) I'm gonna – I'm gonna give it to Dobraine, this one. He's my favorite character.

Emily: Oh, you're right; Dobraine.

Sally: I love it when people stick up to Cadsuane, since apparently only Dobraine is willing to do it.

Emily: Yeah, he was actually the MVP; he was my only – he was the reason I got up this morning, you know?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Dobraine.

Sally: Dobraine and the rat.

Emily: And ranked for worst favorite – worst favorite? – worst characters: Cadsuane, all of the Forsaken, Tuon, Anath, all of them.

Sally: Yeah. Alanna.

Emily: Alanna. They're all bad.

Sally: All of the Aes Sedai. Even Verin. We gotta throw her in there because of the lobotomy tent.

Emily: (sigh)

Sally: Sorry, Verin, but you made that choice.

Emily: Lobotomy tent. Yeah, girl. Stupid.

Sally: Um.

Emily: (laugh) The good news is we're with Mat next chapter, so at least –

Sally: At least we're with Mat. Unfortunately –

Emily: At least we're with Mat. Unfortunately, it will involve, still, him interacting with Tylin and Tuon and a lot of really gnarly stuff going on there. But you know what? At least it's Mat.

Sally: At least it's Mat. We may be in Seanchan-occupied Ebou Dar, but at least we are with Mat Cauthon.

Emily: So that's what's on the docket. I guess we're, um – I guess we're done. I'm done. I'm done talking about it. You know?

Sally: Put a fork in me.

Emily: Put a fork in us. Hey, thanks for listening. Thanks to Glynna MacKenzie for our theme song, to our patrons on Patreon, and our supporters on – our supporters? Sorry, I got lost in the sauce of staring at Tybalt's eyes. They're so big right now.

Sally: (laugh) They're enormous.

Emily: Um, our followers, excuse me, on social media. Um, do you have anything to add?

Sally: Uh, nope, it – well, yes; I always say no and then add something. (laugh) Classic. Um, if you have the spare funds, we would really love for you to check out our bookshop dot org affiliate page, where you can buy books, and ten percent of those funds come back to us, which we then donate to an organization supporting, um, uh, direct aid, mutual aid, uh, general assistance for, uh, Black and Indigenous trans people, or trans people generally; this month I – or next pay period, I would love to send it to an organization helping trans youth in Texas since they are repeatedly attacked by their legislature. Um, so if you want to pool your funds with the rest of the people buying books in the EHR community, now would be a super awesome time to do it.

Emily: You can also, on our Twitter, find a link to a – is it an Indiegogo or a Kickstarter?

Sally: Uh, it is an Indiegogo, which is like a Kickstarter.

Emily: Uh, yeah, it's a crowdfunding organization for, um – you can probably say this better than me – but, uh, a magazine that will be publishing, uh, short stories, primarily, from, um –

Sally: They are – it is primarily from, um – I think it is exclusively authors who are immigrants or are experiencing some type of diaspora. Um, so people who are dealing with sort of, like, migration and transition. Um.

Emily: Yeah, so if you would like to, um, shoot some money to some people who, uh, have less privilege and funding than more well-established authors, um, then that is a good choice for you.

Sally: Yep. I will – in fact, this is a good reminder – I will pin that Tweet at the top of our profile for a couple of weeks –

Emily: Yep.

Sally: Until they get their funding, since we would really, uh, love for you guys to support them.

Emily: Uhhh, thanks for listening. Do you have a sign-off?

Sally: Thanks for listening. Just administrative sadness. I had to send an email –

Emily: Noo!

Sally: To one of our funding –

Emily: You could have ended there. (laugh)

Sally: I had to send an email. Actually, you know what, maybe we'll just call it. (laugh)

Emily: I had to send an email.

Sally: I had to send some emails and God, it sucked.

Emily: Ugh. Goodbye, everyone.

Sally: Bye.