



Episode 193: Mat's Rhythmic Gymnastics Routine

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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: What?

Sally: I'm sick of the snow in real life –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: And I'm sick of winter's heart in Winter's Heart. I've had enough of this book.

Emily: That was inception. You Winter's Inception-ed –

Sally: I Winterceptioned it.

Emily: Win – Winterception's Heart. (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) This is gonna be a fun episode.

Emily: The most stupid possible – you're right, this is gonna be a great episode. What am I saying? Hey. Hey. This is Everybody Hates Rand, your friendly neighborhood Wheely Time podcast. I'm Emily Juchau.

Sally: I am Sally Goodger.

Emily: And the good news, guys, is that we're with Mat, my beloved. He's so pleasant.

Sally: Pleasant in this book.

Emily: He is pleasant in this book.

Sally: Crossroads of Twilight Mat is –

Emily: On thin ice.

Sally: Thin ice. And he –

Emily: Once Brandon Sanderson gets ahold of him? Forget about it.

Sally: Just drops right through the ice.

Emily: Yeah, just – goodbye. Goodbye, my – my youngster. (laugh) I don't know what I'm saying.

Sally: Goodbye. Goodbye, my youngster.

Emily: Goodbye, my youngster.

Sally: Um, but we are back with Mat, and after –

Emily: After a book-long absence. A book and a half-long absence – we are halfway through Winter's Fart –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And I guess we should really only say half a book's absence because, as – famously, you may recall –

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: (laugh) We have not covered Path of Daggers. But I know it's there, so I still feel it, you know?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: His absence.

Sally: Yes.

Emily: Um.

Sally: After a book and a half, it is very nice to be back in Mat's head.

Emily: Yes.

Sally: He's a very refreshing narrator, as we've talked about.

Emily: He is just so spazzy.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: I love – I mean, you'll be reading him, and you'll be like, God, it's annoying how much Brandon Sander – ah, not Brandon Sanderson; excuse me – how much Robert Jordan is like, “Wow, Mat gets distracted, like – distracted by women all the time and whether they're pretty and what their boobs look like or whatever,” but then you'll be reading, and you'll be like, Mat also gets distracted by horses and shiny things, so.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: (laugh)

Sally: So those are his three magpie obsessions.

Emily: Yeah. He – he – it's really, just, he –

Sally: It's boobs –

Emily: He might have ADHD.

Sally: It's boobs, horses, shiny things. (laugh) And – I mean? I can relate.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Boobs, horses, shiny things? I –

Emily: I too – (laugh)

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: It's like, you know, when you're driving along any road, a country road –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And anytime you see horses, you're, like, obligated to say, "Look, horses."

Sally: Yeah, of course.

Emily: I – it's like if you're obligated – you – when you see nice boobs, you have to be like, "Look."

Sally: "Look."

Emily: "Look at those."

Sally: "Look at them."

Emily: Look at – look at thoooose.

Sally: Look at thoooose.

Emily: What are those? Um, and I pretty much point out shiny things, too, whenever I see them, so.

Sally: I mean, I love shiny things.

Emily: Yeah, Mat is just pretty relatable, actually.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um –

Sally: You actually should not, while you're on the street –

Emily: Yeah, don't ever – ever do that, actually.

Sally: Point at a woman and be like, "Look at those boobs." (laugh)

Emily: (laugh) Maybe if she's, like, a very close friend, and it's an inside joke.

Sally: Yeah. (laugh) Yeah. Um, yeah – please –

Emily: (laugh) But do not actually –

Sally: I just – I just want you to know we are not condoning that behavior.

Emily: Yeah, no, don't catcall. Mat does things in the privacy of his own head, which is –

Sally: Which is totally fine.

Emily: Yeah, go – go ahead, little guy.

Sally: If you see some lovely breasts, you can be like, "Those are lovely," in the safety of your own head.

Emily: Yeah, that's – that's your space. And God's space. Did you know, for my entire childhood, I was afraid God could read my mind?

Sally: Me too! (laugh)

Emily: (cackle)

Sally: I have a very vivid memory of playing in – with Barbies in the Barbie, like, house – doll house my mom got me –

Emily: Oh, yeah?

Sally: With the neighbor girl, and I had this, like – I was, like, six? – I had this, like, existential crisis, being like, "I'm playing God to these Barbies," right? And I was like, "Oh my God, Alicia, do you think God can read our mind?" and she's like, "No, you freak," and I'm like, "No, I'm convinced that he can." (laugh)

Emily: Yours is so much more profound than mine. I just was like, I can't masturbate because –

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: God will know – (laugh) that I'm thinking sexy thoughts. So.

Sally: Well, the Church probably told you that.

Emily: (sniff) I don't remember if the Church said that Jesus can read my mind, but it certainly didn't say he couldn't read my mind, so. (laugh)

Sally: Left it up to interpretation.

Emily: Yeah, left it up to interpretation. There's also some troubling things about, just, like – the dead can visit us at any time.

Sally: That's horrifying.

Emily: You know? So, like, your dead grandma could be there. Another reason not to masturbate. (laugh)

Sally: Yeah, that's a real mood killer. We open with Mat in Aludra's firework wagon.

Emily: Yeah, where – we have returned to Valan Luca's circus.

Sally: It's the return of the king. (laugh)

Emily: (laugh) Return of the king.

Sally: Valan Luca is back, baby.

Emily: Only, he's been domesticated, like a sitcom husband –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: By a nagging wife.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: You know, Valan Luca was never interested in getting married, but I guess a woman finally nagged him into it.

Sally: Yeah, and Mat takes every opportunity while in Valan Luca's circus to remind us how wretched Valan Luca's wife is. This'll be –

Emily: Oh, yeah.

Sally: Like, a running –

Emily: Is that 'cause she's such a shrew or whatever?

Sally: Yeah, she's just so mean.

Emily: And it's like, well, I kind of would be too, if I was married to Valan Luca.

Sally: Valan Luca. Yeah, he's a nightmare. (laugh)

Emily: Um, Mat is in Aludra's tent. It takes – it always takes me a little while – and luckily Mat reminds us of the fact – but I was like, how do they know each other? They know each other? Like, it's just so weird, you know?

Sally: Yeah, it's a weird connection.

Emily: But Mat and Aludra met very briefly along with Thom in, um, book three, the best book, when Aludra walked into a barn –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: That Mat and Thom were sleeping in and was chased by some other Illuminators who were out to kill her because they blamed her for the explosion that happened in Illian that was actually Rand's fault. Yes, this is a real plot. (laugh)

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Um, and Mat and Thom rescued her. So she gave them some fireworks, and Mat used those fireworks to blow a hole in the Stone of Tear.

Sally: Yeah, so it really just comes full circle. Not really. Illian and Tear are different.

Emily: Yeah. But Mat tells us that he has been, um, uh, working on Aludra for the last few days, and we're not quite sure what that means yet, except he does sort of give us these little hints about how he is, like, "Aludra, I imagine that you can make explosives – like, I've seen you use night flowers –" which are what they call, um, fireworks – "and they come out of this tube, and you say they can go up to three hundred yards, but I imagine if you put them on their side, they'd be able to go a lot further than that." And da da da da da, he's like, "I think, you know, you – you wouldn't be able to take back Ebou Dar except with Asha'man or maybe with Aludra's night flowers." So it's very clear that he has some destructive weapon in mind. Um, and Aludra, clearly, has also had this thought. Um. She's, like, working with a mortar and pestle –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: At something while they're talking, and, um ...

Sally: Yeah, and Aludra is, um – I think some relevant background to this is that Mat tells Aludra that basically – well, to his knowledge – all of the other Illuminators have been killed by the Seanchan.

Emily: Killed or are – killed or are not out and about, like Aludra is.

Sally: Yeah, so there's been a sort of ethnic cleansing of them –

Emily: Yes.

Sally: Perhaps not as intentional as that, but Mat is like, "You are basically the only Illuminator that I know of anymore." So there's some, like – and we know that historically the Illuminators' Guild has always been very close-chested, and I think the fact that there are no other Illuminators to be seen – maybe they are out there but in hiding – would make – makes Aludra kind of, like, the only Illuminator left, so of course she's going to continue to guard those secrets. This makes – this makes sense to me. But she's very hesitant to give Mat the secrets to her fireworks, and so she gives him a riddle – (laugh) – which is very, like, classically, in – it's very funny, but it's also, I think, pretty in line with Mat's archetypes and mythology to, like, have to solve a riddle in order to get something that you need.

Emily: Yes, it's very tropey.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Riddles are something that, like – you speak in riddles to dragons; riddles bring to mind, like, Rumpelstiltskin or something; they are usually, like, one half of a bargain between a trickster figure, which is Mat, and some kind of, like, uh, you know, princess –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Which kind of reminds one of Aludra, who does not have the ability to spin straw into gold but can make literal explosions out of black powder, which is arguably much more interesting.

Sally: Yeah, and I definitely think there's, like, a princess-y aspect – like a lost princess-y aspect to her, being, like, separated from her people. So it very much plays in line, um, with all of these tropes, definitely. Um –

Emily: Yeah, I find Aludra to be one of the more interesting characters in this series.

Sally: I agree. Hundred percent.

Emily: She's one of those characters who I'm like, I could really, like – at this point, I don't need any more points of view –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But if Robert Jordan had been a little more economic with his points of view, then I would have appreciated one from Aludra, because you're right; she's in a very unique position as the last – as far as we know – surviving Illuminator.

Sally: Yeah. The last Illuminator.

Emily: Excuse me. And her, like – the fact that she's part of a circus and now she's hanging out with Mat – it's just a very interesting –

Sally: Yeah, and she's got –

Emily: Set-up that she's got.

Sally: Living in the circus under, like, an occupation? It's – yeah, it's all very – very interesting. I wish Mat and Aludra did not have little make-out sessions in the wagon, the way they do in a couple of chapters –

Emily: Yeah, a sexual relationship.

Sally: Um. Yeah, that's a better way to say it; obviously it's probably not just kissing, though it would be fine if it was.

Emily: Yeah, maybe it is. Who knows?

Sally: Um, I – that – I don't know. It kind of cheapens their relationship to me. Um.

Emily: Yeah, it's always nice when Mat has relationships with – not Mat specifically – it is always nice to have platonic male and female relationships –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But Mat specifically, you know, has, like, a, um, a history with them somewhat with Birgitte and, as he, um – and, you know, with various Aes Sedai, people like that. Mat tends to have stronger platonic relationships with women than some of the other guys do.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But yeah, Valan Luca's circus is camped outside of Ebou Dar. It's the middle of winter in the Seanchan – in the middle of the Seanchan, um, occupation. And I find this to be a really interesting set-up. I do not at all enjoy the Seanchan, you know, conceptually –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Or as characters, but I find Mat's perspective as it is interacting with other characters' perspectives on, like, this occupation –

Sally: Yes.

Emily: And what that means for them and what they can do about it –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: To be really interesting. Mat is, as is, um, in line with his character, very pragmatic about the whole thing –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And a little bit fatalistic about it. He's got this military mindset of, like, well, you guys, through no real fault of your own – I mean, just, Ebou Dar wasn't equipped to turn aside this invasion – but now they're here, and you can't get rid of them, because that's how occupations work, really. It's going to take more manpower –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Than you guys have.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And he's also like, if you do anything to, um, rebel against the Seanchan, then you are just going to get killed. They are now the military and law enforcement authorities within the city.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Like, you don't have any power. Notably, when they are returning to the city from Valan Luca's, um, circus, there are, like, people's heads – I don't know if they're on spikes or something – but, like –

Sally: Yeah.



Emily: Gross stuff outside of the walls as, like, here are criminals. And Mat notes that there are Seanchan heads among them, so they are not just persecuting – not – persecuting isn't the right word. They are not just condemning, uh, the invading – they are not just condemning the, uh, native inhabitants of the place they are invading. Um. That is obviously not an excuse; it's just something Mat notes. But amongst those, uh, heads are – are the, uh, former Mistress of the Ships from the Sea Folk and the – her Master of the Swords, which I guess, those were just kind of like, the two people who were in charge.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: And their supposed crime was rebellion –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Or fighting back against the Seanchan. And speaking of ethnic cleansings, there has been some, like, real damage done to the Sea Folk. We don't really get that in these chapters specifically, but we'll get it a little bit more as Mat starts interacting with, like – he'll start going into the quarters where the damane are kept –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: And seeing a lot of Sea Folk women there. Stuff like that.

Sally: Yeah, I agree with you completely. Mat is, um – I also don't enjoy the Seanchan occupation. Um, but when it – how do I want to say this? It is very – it is an interesting set-up when seen through Mat's point of view. I don't think I would enjoy this if it was through another character's point of view. Um, Mat, as we've talked about at length, is our most fluid and adaptable character, so of course, like Emily said, he's approaching this with a pragmatism about what you can do and what you can't do, and I think it offers a very interesting counter-narrative to the typical narrative we see when – especially in, like, fantasy or high adventure novels – when you are faced with an invading regime and an occupation, of course the – most often, our main character is slid into the, like, resistance leader slash freedom fighter role.

Emily: Yeah, which is where Beslan and Thom, as we'll talk a little bit more about, are currently.

Sally: Yes. Um, and I just think Mat's relationship to it, again, is an interesting counter-narrative because I think it is more authentic. Obviously resistance to invading forces and regimes – authoritarian regimes, fascist regimes – are incredibly crucial, and many horrors that have happened in our world would not have stopped without the efforts of those everyday people on the ground, resisting. But it's also, I think, too simplistic to say that that is something that is available to everyone under an occupation. There is a lot more threat to various people depending on what identity you are occupying. For instance, it's a lot more dangerous for the Sea Folk to rebel because they're just going to take all the women who can channel and then enslave them, and – not saying this – there's a right choice – but if the Sea Folk had, like, maybe laid a little bit lower, those women might have flown under the radar, perhaps. So there's different levels of harm presented based on what role you occupy in society, especially under an occupation, so, again, too simplistic to say that you shouldn't resist, obviously, but too simplistic to say that it's just, like, everyone can – can and should be a freedom fighter despite the – the

price you would pay and the price your loved ones would pay. Um. So yeah, Mat just offers such an interesting, like, counter-perspective to what I think Rand or Perrin or Egg or even Nynaeve and Elayne would be doing in the same situation.

Emily: Yeah. I think Mat's, um, stance on this wouldn't work unless we didn't, A, know that pretty much literally every other character would take a, um, high moral approach to this situation –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: In wanting to be a part of a resistance, and, B, I don't think it would work unless Mat was, um, in contrast to characters who are actively planning a resistance.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Um, we have sort of – Beslan and Thom keep, like, talking and having these, like, hushed conversations. Um, Beslan, obviously, being the prince of this country, feels that he has a responsibility –

Sally: Yes.

Emily: To fight back against the invaders – which, like, good for Beslan.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, and Thom, as a person with vast experience in, uh, overthrowing political regimes –

Sally: Killed two kings.

Emily: “Killed Two Kings” Merrill –

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Is probably pretty well-equipped to handle it.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Plus, you know, he can't resist meddling in politics.

Sally: Yes.

Emily: And Mat, accurately, you know – the – the paragraph where he realizes what they're talking about is very good because clearly they haven't really considered that he would be on to them, and he's just like, “Could you guys not? You're gonna end up getting murdered.”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And they're like, “Whatever do you mean, Mat?” (laugh)

Sally: “What could you be talking about?”

Emily: And he's like, “You're gonna get me murdered too.” Like –

Sally: Yeah, and that's what's most important.

Emily: And that's what's most important. Um, but yeah, I – if – if, like, everyone was just totally indifferent to this –

Sally: Yes.

Emily: Then that would be totally wild and, uh, historically out of character, I think.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And Mat himself isn't even indifferent.

Sally: Yes.

Emily: Um, Mat isn't like, "Oh, just let this happen"; he's just like, "Realistically, there is nothing that can be done," and notably, when Mat does have the means and the, uh, necessity to start fighting back against the Seanchan in the next few books, he does. He mounts quite a guerilla –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, counterattack against the Seanchan in Altara.

Sally: Yeah, and especially – Mat is not just sitting passively; he's trying – actively trying to figure out how to make cannons so that he – they can fight back against the Seanchan who have just ridiculously – ridiculous amounts of firepower because they're willing to weaponize women who can channel –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: In a very cruel way. So, yeah, Mat is also not sitting by passively; he's just sort of biding his time, which is a very classic Mat thing.

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: Knows when to make his move. Um, yeah, it's just very interesting, and it's – I was thinking – like, this just happens to be convenient timing – an interesting book to pair with these chapters would be, um, "Phoenix Extravagant" by Yoon Ha Lee, which I'm currently reading.

Emily: Mm.

Sally: I'm – and, full disclosure, I'm almost finished – I'm not – I haven't finished it yet; I have, like, fifty pages left. Um, but this is a book that deals with, um – the main character lives in a country that has been invaded, conquered, and occupied by an invading force from a different country, so it is looking at issues of collab – like, collaborating. So collaborators with the occupation, of resistance, of what it means to navigate those difficult decisions in order to survive, and how are you protecting your culture and your people? Um, also deals with weapons of mass destruction, the way that cannons could be classified in this world. They are the most destructive thing besides channeling that, I believe, we see. Um, so just a lot of similar themes dealt with in, um – a more intentional way. I don't think Robert Jordan – Robert Jordan is

making, of course, intentional decisions, but that's, like, the full focus of the book, so of course it is just, like, more intentional because that's what we're dealing with, not this inside of a whole apocalypse narrative.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: So I just wanted to offer that up if you find these themes interesting.

Emily: Cool. Cool. I need to read that.

Sally: It's been very good so far.

Emily: Um, yeah, this whole occupation is backdrop for Mat's current, like, A-plot –

Sally: Yep.

Emily: Which is the fact that he is still in Ebou Dar, um, under Tylin's control. And obviously there's a comparative metaphor there. Mat is under Tylin's control and, uh, this entire country is under Seanchan control.

Sally: Yes.

Emily: Um, and, it – it – it's a pretty, um, I think, accurate metaphor in some ways, at least the way Robert Jordan has written it. I'm not going to use this to comment on occupations, period –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But Robert Jordan's sort of, um, lenient stance toward, uh, occupations by efficient empires and how people are just willing to sort of, like, submit and see the good in them –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Is really reminiscent of how Mat has these really mixed feelings –

Sally: Mm.

Emily: Toward Tylin.

Sally: Mm.

Emily: Mat obviously does not appreciate not having any power in the relationship, but he, um, uh, does appreciate some things about the relationship. He enjoys having sex. He thinks Tylin is, um – he has mixed feelings about Tylin herself. You know, I'm – and I'm saying that entirely from Robert Jordan's –

Sally: Yes. Yes.

Emily: Perspective.

Sally: Sorry, it's just hard for me to get in Robert Jordan's head 'cause I hate that woman so much.

Emily: Yeah. Why – we wouldn't necessarily classify this as "having sex"; we would classify it as rape –

Sally: Yes.

Emily: But the way Robert Jordan has written it is that there are – their relationship is a gray area rather than a black and white –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Uh, good or bad. So, um, sort of an interesting thing there. And that ties back into how, um, Mat's reigning narrative here is that he wants to get out of Ebou Dar and away from Tylin.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: And, um, he is, uh, facing some rather insurmountable challenges in that quest.

Sally: Yes.

Emily: For one thing, up until this point, he has not been mobile at all.

Sally: Yes.

Emily: One thing we're dealing with here is Mat recuperating from injuries that he sustained at the end of Crown of Swords. We're told that he broke a leg, um, and that, uh – and some ribs –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: As well as the sort of superficial – using medical speech – uh, damage that the rest of his body took.

Sally: Yeah, like soft tissue damage.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: 'Cause a building fell on him!

Emily: Yeah. And we're pretty used, in Wheel of Time and in a lot of fantasy texts, I think, to having injuries magically healed.

Sally: Yes.

Emily: Um, so it is also interesting to have Mat be dealing with an injury that was not magically healed.

Sally: Yeah, I think about this, and I actually get so upset that he doesn't have a point of view in Path of Daggers because it feels like the purpose of that to – was to be like, Mat was on bedrest, so what could he possibly have said?

Emily: Or done? Yeah.

Sally: Or done to contribute to the narrative, and it's like, that is such an ableist decision, Robert, because – just because you are on bedrest does not make you an active – does not mean you are not an active contributor in the world around you. Um, it also – like, Mat could still be commenting on what's happening with the Seanchan, which is really vital information. So, like, regardless of whether or not – whatever. It's just such a weird decision to me. But it also could just really be so interesting and – because Mat notes that Tylin started assaulting him before he was off bedrest –

Emily: Yes.

Sally: Like, she was taking full advantage of the fact that he was not mobile to get rid of all of his clothes and replace it with clothes that she wants him to wear, to continue to assault him, and to just exercise absolute, complete control over him, which is something that many disabled people, um, are unfortunately faced with when they have to have a caregiver. Like, that's a situation that is rife with abuse. Anyway. It's just, like – it makes me so frustrated because, yes, Mat does not have access to magical healing the way people do when they're just literally being, like, almost decapitated and other situations. So, sorry. Continue.

Emily: No, that's – I just think, um, where we're at now, I find it interesting to deal with a point of view character who is still dealing with major, um, body challenges.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Mat comments constantly on how walking is a struggle. You know, he'll be, like, sitting for a long time, and he's already thinking, "Ugh, it's gonna be such a pain to get up and start walking, to get the kinks out," and then – once he says, "We walked enough to get the ache out of my leg and then put it back," you know?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Stuff like that. So he is, um – he's mobile now, but he is dealing with chronic pain, I think we'd say.

Sally: Yeah, which is very fascinating, very interesting. Um.

Emily: Yeah, and I don't know – in *Crossroads of Twilight*, is he still dealing with it?

Sally: Um, I think he comments on it a bit at the beginning. Um, but it sort of starts to – his commentary on it starts to fade out and is replaced with his obsession with Tuon. So.

Emily: Oh. Unfortunate.

Sally: (gagging noise)

Emily: Um, it's just – I – I guess it's just notable because it's so rare in this series.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And I – as a big advocate of the verisimilitude of injuries – (laugh)

Sally: Of course.

Emily: Um, really appreciate it, as I appreciate it whenever it appears in other fantasy texts where magical healing is an option but for whatever reason we need to deal with the actual timeline of an actual body.

Sally: Yeah, it's – in a way, it's just very refreshing. Because, like, it's so easy for magical healing to drift into disease and disability just don't exist in this universe –

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: Which is very uncomfortable. Like, I am a sick and disabled person, so this is something that I notice a lot. So, uh, not going to apologize for commenting on it, but that's probably why I do so. Um, but it also just, like, feels icky to just be like, "Nobody is ever going to be sick."

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Except for Mat.

Emily: So Mat is dealing with that as a major, um, hurdle to overcome –

Sally: Ugh, I know.

Emily: In his escape. Yeah, like, among that, he says he doesn't think he can sit in a saddle for –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Uh, long periods of time. Plus, of course, there's the fact that Tylin, uh, won't let him go anywhere. Uh, he has commented on, like, he tries – he at some point tried to just get on a ship to get out of the city, and Tylin just had him, like, dragged back to the palace.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: And, uh, there's also sort of, um – this hasn't been explicitly stated, but it is implicit – that Mat has a lot of people here in Ebou Dar with him –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Who he also has to get out.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Presumably Mat himself, as a very slippery, lucky character, might be able to maneuver a situation where he himself could get out, but he has a ton of people that he feels responsible for. And that number is only going to increase. And what's interesting about that, mostly, in this storyline, is that although that number of people he's responsible for increases, the number of people that he can rely on also increases.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: His collaboration with, like, Egeanin and Bayle Domon, for example, is pretty interesting, because they become, like, partners, in a sense –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: In this escape. So there's a little bit of that, like, community over individualism there.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um. (clears throat) But Valan Luca's circus is, right now, their main plan to get out of the city. And Thom is like, "Yeah, he'll take us on at exorbitant rates, but, um, he's not planning on leaving till spring." And Mat's like, "Dang it." Although probably Mat could do with more time to prepare.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Although one understands his very urgent desire to get out of the city.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So, plot-wise, this is just – Mat, Thom, and Beslan are out visiting the circus; they have Olver with them; there is the usual commentary about Olver; not really worth talking about here.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Um, but they leave the circus and, uh, go back to the city, which is, like – has a big line of people waiting to enter into it, so we get a lot of occupation commentary, um, about that. References made multiple times to, uh, the Seanchan-enforced lottery for horses –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Which is, um – I don't know why – I – I mean, I guess this is just our first major point of view that's been in, uh – in Seanchan-occupied territory, which is why this is the first we're hearing of it, but then again, Mat is also a horse girl, so –

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: He would be very interested in it. Um, and he notes that, like, their horses are safe, or at least, his horse is safe because, I don't know, Tylin got exemption for him or something.

Sally: Yeah, it is just, like, an interesting – it's one of those, like, realism details I do find really interesting. Like, the Seanchan could not – I mean, it's kind of funny, 'cause they bring other livestock – but they couldn't bring enough horses for their army –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Over on their dumb little ships.

Emily: So, yeah, we just gotta confiscate –

Sally: (laugh) So we just have to –

Emily: One-fifth of the horses.

Sally: Yeah, we have to do a horse tax.

Emily: And Mat's like, they pay for them, but there goes your horse.



Sally: Yeah, but he's like – yeah. If – especially if you're someone who relies on it, like, that is a very real consequence for you. And it's going to just continue to be a plot point as they, spoiler, escape with the circus. They constantly are like, "We're super worried that the Seanchan are gonna come inspect our, like, horse tickets or whatever."

Emily: Yeah. Because Valan Luca, um, still has all their horses, which is one of Mat's reasons for wanting to leave with the circus –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Because they have that, like, mobility.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Um – and now I can't remember why he still has all their horses; he just, like, put on a show or something, and they really liked it?

Sally: Yeah, Valan Luca – I noted this in my blog, anyway – says that he's got, like, a little bit of favor because he sheltered one of the Seanchan, like, elephant trainer women –

Emily: Oh, right, right, right.

Sally: After the invasion at Falme.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Um –

Emily: And we met her through Elayne and Nynaeve's point of view.

Sally: Yeah, so she was still at the circus and has, I don't know, maybe joined back up with the Seanchan or something. So he's got, like, a little – I don't know if that is specifically why his horses are exempt or if he, like, bribed somebody, but he does note that as well.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: That Valan Luca is in, like, very good favor with the Seanchan.

Emily: Yeah, which is an – also, an interesting thing to talk about –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Under occupation and stuff like that –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Because then Valan Luca is one of those people who is – I mean, he's being paid for it, so he's not – he doesn't really have the moral high ground here –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But he is aiding and abetting an escape – major escape attempt.

Sally: Yeah, for, like – not – I don't want to give Valan Luca too much credit, because –

Emily: Yeah, exactly.

Sally: 'Cause he's not, again, a moral character, but he is using his relative privilege to assist people who very much need to get out of the city.

Emily: Yeah, it – and it's like, we'll interact with other characters like that, including Setalle Anan, coming up –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Who is sheltering Aes Sedai –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Stuff like that.

Sally: Yeah. And so, yeah, it is an interesting, um ...

Emily: I just find this group of people, as annoying as many of them are individually, just a really interesting bunch.

Sally: Yeah, it is, like, an interesting little – well, actually, quite large – fellowship –

Emily: Oh, yeah. Huge.

Sally: That we put together by the end of Winter's Heart. It's, like, sixty people. (laugh) Plus the circus. So.

Emily: Yeah. Um, so they return to the city and find the city incredibly crowded because, uh, the Seanchan Return has – finally here. So, uh, up until this point, it's just been the Forerunners, or the military invasion.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Now we are – now, uh, it's the colonists.

Sally: Yep.

Emily: Um, so there are, like – Mat notes a lady with, like, a wagon full of plants.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: You know? Stuff like that. So Mat's return to the city obviously coincides with, like, Tuon's arrival, uh, by sea. And, of course, we'll deal with that in a minute. Uh, but once they're in the city and realizing that this is happening, uh, Beslan and Thom are, you know, still talking about their little rebellion; this is when Mat is like, "Please, for the love of God, do not get all of us killed."

Sally: Yeah, Mat also notes that you shouldn't talk about these things in public because there's secret police.

Emily: Yeah, guys. And Beslan's just like –

Sally: You fucking idiots.

Emily: “Doo ba doo ba doo.”

Sally: Beslan is a full-ass idiot throughout this entire plot.

Emily: Beslan's a huge himbo, yeah.

Sally: (laugh) Fucking moron. God bless him.

Emily: He's like, “La dee da dee da.” Uh, but Mat's like, “Please take Olver and go back,” and Thom's like, “Please don't go get – try and look at the ships again,” and Mat's like, “I'm not gonna.”

Sally: “I'm not gonna look at the ships.”

Emily: “God.”

Sally: “Leave me alone.”

Emily: Uh, but so Thom and Beslan and Olver separate from Mat, who, uh, says that he's going to go, like, look for money, uh, by dicing, and we kind of have one of our infamous, like, uh, Mat, um, montage sequences, where we're not given a lot of details of what he's doing –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But presumably just dicing, hanging out, and wandering around the city –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Sort of noting how things are.

Sally: Yeah, being a real low-life.

Emily: I don't know why, we get so many montages from Mat. We're about to get one in the next, uh, couple of chapters; I can't remember, but.

Sally: Yeah, and there's just, like, Mat – they're so fascinating to me 'cause Mat enters this such, like, liminal hazy headspace –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: And I'm like, what is up with this, like, dissociative state that you go into when you're gambling? I dunno. It's fascinating.

Emily: I don't know.

Sally: Fascinating little weirdo.

Emily: But, like, when Mat regains consciousness, more or less, he's also getting – his leg is hurting more and more –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And his hip. Um, and he's finally like, "Ugh, I guess I have to return to the palace," so he starts making his way there through, like, gross alleys because the streets are all still so crowded. Um, and Mat had a throwaway line here that I just wanted to comment on. Which was that he – he referenced that, um, he's hungry so he needs to return to the palace, and he has, like, a little fantasy about all the foods that he's going to, um – he might be served over at the Tarasin Palace. And it just made me think of how Mat is a trickster figure and – I just read a book about this; this isn't my own thought, so don't think I'm – I'm breaking any ground here. But, um, trickster figures in mythology are often motivated by appetites –

Sally: Mm.

Emily: Especially hunger.

Sally: Mm.

Emily: Um, we get a lot of Native American, um, trickster mythology with, like, Coyote and Rabbit, are hungry characters –

Sally: Mm.

Emily: And are doing things, um, with hunger –

Sally: Mm.

Emily: And, you know, a lot of the types of trickster animals, like foxes, which Mat uses, are, like, hunger-motivated.

Sally: Hmm. Interesting.

Emily: So – I don't know. That's just something I'm going to be keeping an eye on –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: As we are with Mat the next little while; not necessarily always his physical hunger, but, like, his sort of desire for things.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Which – we referenced kind of jokingly about how he's constantly getting distracted by women, horses, and shiny things. But Mat is a very, like, greed-motivated character.

Sally: Yes.

Emily: Which I think is a – is really interesting in showing how a greed-related character can also have, uh, moral standing.

Sally: Yeah, it's an interesting intersection. Usually, like, greed is associated with being very very evil. But Mat –

Emily: Mm-hmm. One of the seven deadly sins, as it were.

Sally: Yeah, in fact. Mat is extremely greedy, loves money, loves things, objects. Um, but he is also, I think, one of our most moral, kind, and empathetic characters in his very bizarre way.

Emily: Yes.

Sally: Um, so it is just a fascinating intersection of traits there.

Emily: Well, and it's also, like, an intersection of trickster traits. A lot of tricksters are motivated by hunger but then also through their hunger motivations end up giving to the world.

Sally: Yes.

Emily: Tricksters are often related to, like, creation myths, especially Native American tricksters.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: They'll end up, like, giving the world – Prometheus was, in fact – is classified as a trickster.

Sally: Yep.

Emily: Figure.

Sally: Stealing fire.

Emily: Yeah, thievery. Tricking Zeus and the other gods into taking the worst portion of meat.

Sally: Get fucked.

Emily: Whatever, whatever.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, so, like, tricksters give things to the world or to humanity, and I think Mat solidly occupies that position as well for giving people things.

Sally: Yes.

Emily: Whether that's freedom in the people that he is about to get out of Ebou Dar or cannons – that's sort of his Prometheus –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Moment, although, you know, fire and destructive, uh, fire power –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Are not exactly the same thing. Um. But yeah, just something to keep an eye on. Anyway, as Mat is going through one of these alleys – (laugh) um, he trips, and, uh, the gholam, like, is immediately right next to him.

Sally: Yeah, he's, like, "Get fucked, loser."

Emily: And would have – would have, like, been right in front of him with Mat unable to react, if Mat hadn't tripped.

Sally: Classic.

Emily: So, yeah, classic ta'veren moment. But the gholam himself trips 'cause this is, uh, in D&D terms, rough terrain.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: With all the mud and whatnot. Um, which gives Mat enough time – he, like, yeets his walking stick at him and then gets his foxhead medallion out, the only thing that scares the gholam.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And is doing his little twirly, um, rhythmic gymnastics routine with it.

Sally: Good for him.

Emily: Yeah, good for him.

Sally: I hope he – I hope he gets all tens.

Emily: While he gets up. Um, and – so he and the gholam are having this, like, extremely bizarre stand-off –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: With, like, the gholam trying to reach past the medallion, um, meanwhile, and Mat's just, like, frantically twirling his little heart out. (laugh)

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: When there's a voice that's like, "Come on, guys! He went into the alley," or da da da da da.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And the gholam backs off, 'cause he's like – and he says to Mat, like, "My orders are not to – are to not attract attention, which is the only reason I'm not going to kill you right now."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And Mat's like, "Oh, yeah? Back the fuck off."

Sally: He's like, "Oh, yeah?" Aggressively twirls the medallion at him.

Emily: Yeah, and runs after the gholam, just so he can watch the gholam literally, like –

Sally: Squish – like, squish-like –

Emily: Octopus-like –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Squish into a small crevice –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And disappear. And Mat's like – (gagging noise, laugh) And, um, he's, like, staring after that when Noal just, like, pipes up right next to him, "What the?"

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: "What the?"

Sally: Noal's like, "What the fuck was that?"

Emily: And Mat's like, "Oh. Oh, hello."

Sally: And it's just the – the ugliest old man you've ever seen.

Emily: Yeah, and Mat notes that he looks familiar. And if you have recently read *A Crown of Swords* and made a special note of it while reading, Mat and Noal did have a very brief interaction in that book.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Um, it's kind of weird that Mat never figures out why Noal looks familiar –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But there it is.

Sally: What do you do?

Emily: Um, and he's like, "Oh, where are your friends?" and Noal was like, "Oh, no, I – I don't have – I was just yelling."

Sally: "I don't have friends." (laugh)

Emily: "I don't have friends. Are you kidding?" So Noal was there, playing his own trick –

Sally: Yes.

Emily: Noal is himself a trickster –

Sally: Yes.

Emily: Figure, um, as we will learn. He's in disguise throughout, which is another hallmark of, um, trickster figures, and one of Mat's, for some reason, main character traits in the last three books, once Brandon Sanderson gets ahold of him, is that he loves disguises. I don't know why that –

Sally: Mat?

Emily: Yeah. I don't know why Brandon Sanderson brought that to the game, but it is, uh, archetypically correct.

Sally: Yeah, okay.

Emily: So whatever. Um, and Mat and Noal are just like, "Oh, hey. Hey." And Mat's like, "What's happening? What are – what are you doing here?"

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And Noal's like – he's like, "Oh, are you new to the city?" and Noal's like, "No, I've been here for, um, a while, but I got kicked out of my place because of all of the influx of Seanchan, so I was basically going to sleep in an alley tonight," and Mat's like, "Oh, well, I think I can do you one better," and will offer and in the next chapter we'll see him bring Noal to the Tarasin Palace to integrate him into the fellowship, which is just –

Sally: Mat has –

Emily: Great.

Sally: Picked up this old man off the street and is like –

Emily: Yeah, this is literally – the next few chapters are just Mat picking up various people –

Sally: Yep.

Emily: Putting them in his pockets and carrying along –

Sally: Yep.

Emily: On his escape attempt.

Sally: Noal is definitely my favorite one that he picks up, I think.

Emily: Noal is great, yeah. I love him.

Sally: I love Noal. His, like, twice-broken nose and – I love him.

Emily: Yeah, just an ugly man.

Sally: Just an ugly old man who's just always, like – Mat's always like, "He just seems like he knows more than he's saying."

Emily: (laugh) And Noal's like, "I do."

Sally: (laugh) "Something seems shifty about this old man."

Emily: Um. And he is.

Sally: But Noal's like, "Takes one to know one, you shifty little bitch."

Emily: (laugh) But the, uh, framing narrative of these last couple of char – uh, chapters is that, uh, the dice are rolling in Mat's head –



Sally: Yes.

Emily: And he is very concerned about what will happen when they stop. The last time we were with Mat and the dice stopped, a building fell on his head –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So his paranoia is understandable.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And he's like, "They didn't even stop when the gholam attacked me, so what fresh hell could be in store for me now?"

Sally: (laugh) And it is a fresh hell.

Emily: Yeah. Uh, but the gholam coming back, by the way, is just, like – uh, the gholam's still in the city.

Sally: Yes, the gholam is still in the city. It will play a crucial part in the climax of this book, though I don't know if we find that out until –

Emily: No.

Sally: The next book. Or after.

Emily: The gholam is sort of the serial killer in the shadows –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Waiting. Which, uh, at the beginning of Path of Daggers, everyone was really worried and stressed about. And, I guess I should say, at the end of Crown of Swords, too. And it's sort of interesting that Mat apparently hasn't been worried at all.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, although I guess, maybe, it – it was driven out of his mind by the building falling on top of his head. Plus he no longer is as worried about protecting Elayne and Nynaeve.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: They're obviously out of danger.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: As far as the gholam is concerned. But since the gholam has this kind of vendetta against Mat, it is interesting that he doesn't just, you know, come after Mat more forcefully, I guess –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: For the next few weeks, months, however long this montage is going to take?

Sally: Yeah, it's – for some reason, like, it can't get into the Tarasin Palace –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: (whisper) Except it does.

Emily: Except it does. Dude, you can squeeze through cracks in the wall, I think you can. He's like, "I just don't want to attract notice." And I'm like –

Sally: It's like, "Boo."

Emily: Boo.

Sally: Shut up, Moridin –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Or whoever gave you that dumb order.

Emily: Yeah, I can't remember. Sammael? Moridin? It can't be Sammael; Sammael's dead.

Sally: Ha ha ha ha ha.

Emily: Moridin, perhaps?

Sally: Oh, Sammael.

Emily: Uh, but anyway, that's our: boo ba doo boo, Mat updates.

Sally: Mat updates.

Emily: He's doing about as well as can be expected, which is to say pretty bad, but.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: He's still alive.

Sally: Mat is going through it.

Emily: Our little survivalist boy. And we're gonna be with him for the next several chapters –

Sally: Yep.

Emily: So.

Sally: It's Mat time, baby.

Emily: Mat time, baby, which unfortunately is also Tylin and Tuon time, as we've already referenced, but, uh, we will deal with that as it happens. Okay. Well, um, thanks to Glynna MacKenzie for our theme song. Thanks to our patrons on Patreon and our followers on social media.

Sally: Yeah, thank you guys. We love you a lot.

Emily: (laugh) Do – do you have anything to add?

Sally: Uh, no. I think I have said enough.

Emily: Okay. Do you have a sign-off?

Sally: Yes. Tonight, my mom is getting up at three a.m. –

Emily: What?

Sally: To watch – (laugh)

Emily: What? Oh, no.

Sally: To watch –

Emily: Oh, no.

Sally: BTS perform in Seoul, Korea. (laugh)

Emily: (laugh)

Sally: Uh, they are doing a performance and she bought, uh, live-streaming tickets. And the performance is obviously at, like, seven a.m., Seoul time, which is, like, three a.m. or two a.m. So she's like, "I don't know if I will, but I think I will." (laugh) So wish my mom luck.

Emily: Your mom's obsession with BTS is one of the highlights of my life.

Sally: I know, it's so funny. I also really like BTS, but my mom brings it to, like, a whole new level, and it's just, like, really funny how much she loves them. So everyone be thinking about my mom, up at three a.m., watching BTS by herself. (laugh)

Emily: God bless. (laugh) Have a good week, everyone.

Sally: Bye.

Emily: Bye.