



Episode 194: What Does the Fox Man Say?

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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: But yeah, this is Everybody Hates Rand. I guess?

Sally: Allegedly.

Emily: Allegedly.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Your friendly – your friendly neighborhood Wheel of Time podcast? I don't know why I'm, like, saying it like a question. I'm Emily Juchau. I know that for sure.

Sally: (laugh) I'm Sally Goodger. I also know that for sure.

Emily: Um, we are in a slow spot, technically speaking, in Winter's Heart. After the gholam attacks, there aren't any physical attacks – well. Actual – there aren't any – mm. (stutters)

Sally: There are not any more street fights.

Emily: There are not any more lethal physical attacks against –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Or lethally intended physical attacks against Mat's person. Um, he is, of course, repeatedly being attacked by Tylin in a sexual sense, but, um, he is alive, and we can say that for him. There are some real ups and downs in these two chapters. On the – on the up – up hand – (laugh) On the up hand –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: It's very fun to have Mat introduce Noal to the rest of the – the surviving members –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Of the Band of the Red Hand. As Mat tells us, he came in with twelve or so guys, and they're down to three, plus Harnan, who's kind of the captain, and Vanin, who's sort of part of the Band of the Red Hand but more like a – a contractor.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: He's a former horse thief. We've talked about him before – who –

Sally: He's the best.

Emily: Yeah, I – I love Vanin. He's just a great little character.

Sally: Just – the idea of being a horse thief is really funny to me. Like –

Emily: I know, and Mat's just like, "He's just incredibly good at his job."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: "And just incredibly weird, and I love him."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And I'm like, it sounds like every single one of your boyfriends, Mat.

Sally: Yeah, I just – like, I know in a world where horses are extremely important for transportation, like, being a horse thief is a big deal. But –

Emily: Yeah, but is it, like – is it, like – (laugh) Is the modern equivalent being a grand theft auto expert?

Sally: Yeah. (laugh) Yeah. Like, is Vanin out here committing grand theft quad –?

Emily: Is Vanin like Paul Walker in Fast and the Furious?

Sally: Yeah. Fast and Furious. 2 Fast 2 Vanin.

Emily: Just stealing – (laugh)

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: I guess Vin Diesel. Paul Walker is the straight-laced guy, at least at first.

Sally: Yeah, he'd be Vin Diesel.

Emily: He'd be Vin Diesel. R.I.P. Paul Walker. (inaudible)

Sally: I know, now I want to – now I want to map the whole Band of the Red Hand onto the Fast and Furious cast, but that is a – a project for another time, I suppose.

Emily: I can't remember any of their names except Harnan, but I love the descriptions of the three surviving members of Band of the Red – the Band of the Red Hand, 'cause there's two guys who are just normal and then the third guy is just an absolute idiot.

Sally: (laugh) Yeah. Total dumbass.

Emily: And Mat's just like, "He – he's kinda clueless, but I love him."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So anyway, that's, like, a nice – a nice little section. It is nice to have Mat interacting with, um, people he is friendly with or even people who he just has nice working relationships with. Like, his and Juilin's interaction is kind of funny –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: As it is. At the very least, it is inoffensive. It's just him and Juilin kind of –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Kind of sniping at each other in a –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: In a fraternal way. And he and Setalle Anan are, of course, always very cute together. Um, I also like the montage format of the second chapter, um, and I enjoy getting updates on what everyone is doing.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Of course, the big downer in this chapter is that we are introduced to Tuon, um, and Tylin, of course, is back, and there is a – a lot of allusions to, uh, the sexual assault that Tylin is committing against Mat. (sigh) The title is called "Pink Ribbons," and the insinuation is that Mat will be tied up, uh, bondage-style, with, I guess, pink ribbons. Unfortunately, I have seen fan art of this –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: And I'm not quite sure why this is what everyone has decided to fixate on except that maybe it's the most specific sexual act that we get, um, from them. But, uh, Robert Jordan clearly is framing it to be slightly titillating –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um. And once you have – once you have sort of overcome the hurdle of thinking of this not as a – as a fun BDSM relationship – which: those are great, those are fun –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But this is not that. This is a sexual harasser and their victim.

Sally: Yes.

Emily: Once you sort of overcome that hurdle, then the pink ribbons thing stops being fun and interesting and starts just being, like, ah, that's disgusting and upsetting.

Sally: Yeah, it's, like, truly horrific.

Emily: And a tool of rape.

Sally: Yeah, I really don't know why that is something people have fixated on, but every time I see fan art of it, I just want to freak out.

Emily: I mean, yeah, I do – like, the Kill Bill sirens go off in my head.

Sally: Yeah, it – ugh. Ugh. There's nothing else to say besides just really gross.

Emily: Yeah, just – gag. Um, but moving chronologically, I guess: Uh, Mat and Noal get to the Tarasin Palace.

Sally: Yeah, our boy Noal.

Emily: Yeah, our boy Noal. Love him. Love him to death. Um, they are making for where, um, the Band of the Red Hand is quartered, just in this sort of, like, barracks outside of the palace or adjacent to the palace, um, and that takes them past or through the stableyard, which is also where the damane are being, quote unquote, exercised.

Sally: (simultaneously) Exercised.

Emily: Uh, much like when, uh, prisoners in a prison are let out into the yard for daily exercise. They're, like, being walked about between sul'dam. Mat gives us some, uh, sort of brutal descriptions of the brainwashing that is taking place. He specifically notes Teslyn, who we met in Crown of Swords as one of Elaida's two Aes Sedai who were stationed in Ebou Dar. So two of the only Aes Sedai who were in Ebou Dar who didn't get out with Elayne and Nynaeve's group. The other one was Joline. And Mat doesn't mention her, and we haven't seen her yet.

Sally: Yet.

Emily: Although of course she will come back. Uh, but Teslyn – uh, Mat feels for her, I think is fair to say.

Sally: Yeah, absolutely.

Emily: Um, but much like the occupation in general, is pretty pragmatic about the situation, knows that it would be suicide, really, to try and help any of the damane at this point.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And he – he notes, I – I don't know how relevant this is, but he just notes, that, like – it will be relevant later for when Mat starts interacting with Teslyn again – but Teslyn has not been, quote unquote, broken; her brainwashing has not been completed.

Sally: Yes.

Emily: Um, she is still clearly – she's not actively fighting back, but she is passively, internally –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Resisting what is happening to her.

Sally: Yes.

Emily: And Mat – Mat sees that clearly, and so – like, they make eye contact, and she just, like, glares at him.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And he's just like, okay. Keep fighting the good fight, I guess.

Sally: He's like, 10-4, buddy.

Emily: 10-4, good buddy.

Sally: I – I'm – Same.

Emily: Same.

Sally: Wow – kin.

Emily: Wow. (laugh)

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Um, but they go to where the barracks are; they have to, like, pass some guys who, uh, stop and talk to Mat. This is the first guy who tells Mat, "Oh, you should get cleaned up before you see Tylin 'cause she'll be upset otherwise." It passes Mat off because he is a contrarian in – in this. And, I mean, you know, it's a form of resistance –

Sally: Yeah, absolutely.

Emily: Being dirty when everyone is telling you that your captor will be upset to see you dirty. But yeah, this is just also sort of, like, generally how Mat is with authority.

Sally: Yeah, and – yes, true. Correct. Yeah, and I – it's one of, I think, the more charming, roguish aspects of him, that he's like, "I don't – I'm not going to, like, make myself presentable just because you have certain expectations of what people look like." And I'm like, hell yeah.

Emily: Yeah, one is reminded – or, at least, I am reminded – of Mat in the White Tower in book three, just sort of his general reactions to authority figures –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Around the White Tower. Um. And his sort of slippery nature around all of them. Mat is very – one of the things that most upsets him about his relationship with Tylin is that everyone in the Tarasin Palace knows about it. Which is, of course, an extended form of the humiliation that he is undergoing. Um, he's being held up as a figure of public ridicule –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: As well as being privately humiliated.

Sally: Ah, that's such a good way to put it, Emily. The public – the humiliation factor of their relationship is something I don't think I've ever fully, like, put into words until you just said that. Like, a lot of Tylin's – the power that she's exercising over him depends on humiliating him.

Emily: Yeah. And it's – it – we've mentioned this before, but, like, because of Tylin's place in the power structure, she is able to use all of the servants and all of the staff of the Tarasin Palace as sort of, like, extra limbs.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Um, so her power extends throughout this entire building. Like, the entire architecture of it is designed to trap Mat in that way. So that, of course, is – makes everything more difficult and more humiliating for him; Mat talks a lot less, um, and I don't think we get it as blatantly, but there would also be a humiliation factor of everyone he knows and is friends with being aware of this –

Sally: Yes.

Emily: Relationship. Um, and we saw that a little bit with, like, him and Elayne and Nynaeve. He seems a little less concerned about it when it comes to, like, Thom and Juilin –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Or maybe he just, like, hasn't internalized it, but that would certainly be upsetting, that a bunch of people you know are aware of what's happening to you and either don't see a problem with it or aren't doing anything to help you.

Sally: Yeah, I think one of the worst parts about this arc is that there is no one who is willing to believe Mat or help Mat in regards to this situation. Like, none of the servants are like, "This is extremely fucked up; I don't want to participate in this. Like, I know this is my employer, but I'm going to find some way to, like, I don't know, feed this man when he's being starved out by the kitchens," or, like, Thom is never like, "Time to play the fatherly figure here and be like, 'Are you okay?'" Like, nobody reaches that hand out to Mat.

Emily: Yeah, and it – and it's a form of gaslighting –

Sally: Mm.

Emily: That is being extended toward Mat to sort of, like, normalize this relationship –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Uh, and just sort of in his friends' non-reaction and in Beslan thinking it's totally normal and all of the Ebou Dari people seeming to think it's totally normal. Um, but it's also a form of gaslighting that Robert Jordan is doing to us.

Sally: Yes.

Emily: Normalizing this. Um –

Sally: Preach.

Emily: And, yeah, you're right; no one ever really – we – we get, I think, what is the first person saying straight-out to Mat, "What Tylin is doing is wrong," with Setalle Anan.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: And she, uh, brackets that by saying, “Oh, well, it – it’s a tradition to have this sort of, like, um, sugar daddy relationship, you know, with young people and older people in positions of power. That’s a tradition in Ebou Dar or, you know, something that a lot of people do, but it is not correct and not part of tradition that she is keeping you there against your will.” But again, Robert Jordan brackets that with some, um, humor in having, like, Setalle Anan, like, make Mat twirl to show –

Sally: Mm.

Emily: His dumb little outfit that Tylin is forcing him to wear, which – um, it’s hard to think about – I have a hard time with Mat’s little outfits here, because we are told that they are very flamboyant and, um, on a certain level, they are, like, meant to be, like, slutty outfits.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Like, showing his butt and stuff like that. But since we’re doing, like, medieval – not medieval – you know, seventeenth century, eighteenth century –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Wear – you know, it’s not like Mat’s wearing a crop top and short shorts.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So it’s a little bit harder for me to conceptualize how, like, humiliating these clothing – this clothing would be.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Because to me, I’m just like, oh, it’s just what he normally wears, just cut differently.

Sally: Yeah, it’s just pants and a coat.

Emily: You know, so I – brightly colored, I’m sure, but – as he tells us – but maybe Sarah McClintock can offer us some insight –

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Into what constitutes slutty wear for –

Sally: Wheely world.

Emily: For men in this era. Anyway. Mat and Noal are trying to get into the Band of the Red Hand’s – the barracks – when some, uh, Seanchan, like, ride up to do something, um, and Mat immediately is like – gets Noal away, um, and Noal clearly isn’t familiar with the Seanchan, per se. Like, he has been living in this occupation, but Mat has to tell him about, like, the concept of Listeners.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And things like that. And Noal has a really interesting reaction here where Mat says that he seems annoyed with himself, that he doesn't, like – he didn't, like, understand that or know that. Um, and it's just, like, a facet of Noal's character that I find interesting. As we later find out, much later in the series, Noal is Jain Farstrider, who is this, uh, renowned adventurer type –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Guy, sort of an Indiana Jones, retired.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, who's written, like, books and everything about his exploits. So it's interesting to see this aspect, like, of a character who did a lot of stuff in their, uh, youth, so to speak, who is aging.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: I think – just think Noal sort of reflects – Thom is a little bit OP, if that makes sense –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Like, he's an old man, but he's extremely spry; he doesn't have any, like, mental problems that normally come with aging; he doesn't seem to be aging at all.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But Noal's – Noal is very much an old man who, like, has some disabilities; he walks with a stoop and a limp, I think –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Um, and due to Compulsion and various things that have happened to him or due to old age, he isn't quite as with it as he was in his youth.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And that frustrates him –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: 'Cause he's aware of it. I don't know, I just find it interesting.

Sally: Yeah, it is really interesting, and I just wish that it was a little bit more clear how much of this was just Noal as a person aging –

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: And dealing with that and how much of it was the Compulsion slash brainwashing thing that went on that's kind of, like, underwriting this plot in a way that's never fully articulated.

Emily: Yeah. So frustrating.



Sally: ‘Cause it’s like, that – like, either way, we want to, you know, cut it, it’s really interesting to deal with a person who’s like, “My memory and my ability to make connections is not what I want it to be –”

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: “For whatever reason,” and I just kind of, like, wish I – Not that I – you need to have a reason, but I wish I just knew where to direct my attention about it.

Emily: Yeah, it would be great if we were given any sort of understanding about this at all besides Mat’s occasional observations –

Sally: Yeah. Yeah.

Emily: When he obviously doesn’t have the full story. Anyway, Mat comes in and introduces Noal to the rest of the gang, um, and they’re all just like, “Oh, cool. Hi, Noal.”

Sally: “Hey, old man. What’s up?”

Emily: Especially once Noal very adaptly tells – very adeptly; excuse me – tells the story of the gholam attack.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And Mat’s just like, “Oh, he is a born storyteller.”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: I’m like, of course he is. He’s a bestseller.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: New York Times bestseller. (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) He has a Pulitzer, Mat.

Emily: He’s a Cairhienin bestseller, Jain Farstrider over here. Tells the story of the gholam attack, and Mat’s like, “Okay, so clearly the gholam is back, so I have been thinking that you guys should leave the city.” One of Mat’s more heroic things is that of course even though he sort of wants support, he wants to get his guys out of the city because although he is aware that the gholam is focused on him, the gholam will also kill anyone who gets in the way.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: And in a very sweet show of support, every member of the Band of the Red Hand is like, “Of course we’re not leaving.” And someone is like, “Talmanes would kick our asses if we came back without you.” (laugh)

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Which is –

Sally: Very sweet and romantic.

Emily: So good. Um. But they're like, "Yeah, Mat, we're not leaving." And Mat's like, "Okay, well, thanks, guys." Um. He then goes to, you know, go to bed, whatever –

Sally: Yeah, snooze town – (scoffs) I wish it was snooze time –

Emily: I know.

Sally: Instead, the two worst women you know – (accidentally hits the microphone) Oh, sorry.

Emily: (laugh) That's fine. On his way, uh, up to the rooms he shares with Tylin, sort of, I guess, near the upper portion of the palace; the palace is sort of constructed, uh, class level, um – you know, upper class is going to be higher in the palace –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Lower class, lower. Uh, Mat runs into Juilin, who he does not expect to see at this place – or, excuse me; he does not expect to see, um, in this particular part of the palace, and he's like, "What the fuck is going on?" He's like, "Hey, Juilin; just so you know, the gholam is back," and Juilin's like, "Ah, dang, that sucks."

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: And Mat's like, "Is – are – are you having, like, a little affair?" (laugh)

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: And Juilin's like, "Shut up, Mat. You look stupid." And Mat's like, "Ahhh!"

Sally: Mat's like, "I know I look stupid."

Emily: "I know. Come on."

Sally: "You don't have to tell me."

Emily: "You rat bastard." And it's just like, okay, goodbye, Juilin.

Sally: Yeah. I mean, goodbye, Juilin is –

Emily: This is – we've – only being alluded to at this point, but Juilin has discovered, uh, Amathera, the former – (laugh) This is such a ridiculous –

Sally: I know.

Emily: Imagine saying this sentence. The former panarch of Tarabon who was taken as a slave by the Seanchan, and Juilin has found her, and now they're having an affair, I guess.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Apparently they had chemistry in the original book, but I don't think we ever saw them interact.

Sally: Yeah, I was like, did they even meet?

Emily: The only thing we heard about it was that Juilin said, “She’s pretty,” and everyone was like, “Okay.”

Sally: I say lots of people are pretty, and yet I –

Emily: Yeah, but I –

Sally: Do not end up having –

Emily: But I guess Juilin is like –

Sally: Illicit affairs with them.

Emily: “I will fuck the former panarch of Tarabon.” Whatever, Robert Jordan, and your compulsive need to pair people off –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Shakespeare-style.

Sally: You do not have full humanity unless you have a romantic partner.

Emily: (sigh) I mean, Juilin is hardly a character to begin with, so. And neither is Amathera, so I guess they’re perfect for each other. Just the two flattest characters.

Sally: I know. Amathera is done really dirty, I think.

Emily: I know. God bless her.

Sally: Um, I mean, first of all, being taken captive and forced to be basically the equivalent of a serving girl, which is, in Seanchan society, also deeply humiliating because you basically serve naked.

Emily: (simultaneously) Naked, yeah.

Sally: Um, it’s a very sexualized and dehumanizing thing, um, which is especially hard for – I mean, I think it would be hard for anybody, but I think it’s – the idea is supposed to be it’s especially hard and humiliating for Amathera because she came from such a position of power. And then this was deeply traumatizing to her, so she’s a very anxious, skittish person now, and Mat – where I’m at in – well, I just finished Crossroads of Twilight – Mat and other people comment on, like, how frustrating it is that she won’t just, like, get it together. And it’s like –

Emily: Nobody –

Sally: Are you kidding me? Like –

Emily: Yeah. Nobody handles trauma the same way.

Sally: The same way.

Emily: Give this woman some grace.

Sally: Give this woman some grace, and also, like, you had no idea –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Like, you've never had to do it. You don't know what you would respond to – Tybalt, could – I'm talking. (laugh)

Emily: Tybalt – no. Tybalt, this – Tybalt's part of the conversation.

Tybalt: (meows)

Emily: You dummy. Goodbye.

Sally: Like, you have no idea how you would respond if you were expected to serve someone like this. Like, it's –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: So gross. So I just feel very bad for Amathera, and then she has to get paired off with Juilin, who is –

Emily: Bland.

Sally: Subpar at best.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: So RIP to her character.

Emily: Oh, Amathera. Hardly did we know thee.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Juilin – not Juilin; excuse me – Mat, getting more and more pissed off because more and more people are telling him – at one point, someone's like, "Oh, you've got some mud there; you better clean it off," and he's like, "What mud?! Fuck off."

Sally: (laugh) Yeah.

Emily: Um, he walks into Tylin's room, and this is a comedic moment. He, like, walks in, flings his hat across the other –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Across the room and is basically, like, about to say, "You'll never believe the day I've had –" (laugh)

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Starts saying something when he realizes that Tylin is actively, like, having tea with Suroth, who is, uh, in Mat's view, the main Seanchan person, the leader of the Seanchan Forerunners, and then this veiled individual, who Mat mistakes initially for a little girl.

Sally: Which is –

Emily: Which is not good.

Sally: Could we just –

Emily: By the way. Just by the way.

Sally: Robert Jordan's insistence that Tuon looks like a child is so deeply fucked up.

Emily: Yeah, very – very weird. Um. I don't know what layers are going on there, but none of them are good. Anyway, Mat sort of takes in this situation and is like, "Hello? What the?"

Sally: (laugh) "H-hello?"

Emily: "Hewwo? What the fuck?" Um, and – I can't remember the order of this situation, so I'll just try to hit the, uh, important points. Um, Anath is there, which means Semirhage, one of the Forsaken, is there –

Sally: In the room.

Emily: And presumably recognizes Mat. Does absolutely nothing about it.

Sally: Classic.

Emily: This is why Semirhage is my favorite –

Sally: She's like, "Ah, whatever."

Emily: Argument. Semirhage is just like, "Eh. Can't be bothered."

Sally: "What's he gonna do?" Look at him, covered in mud."

Emily: "What's he gonna do?" And then he completely ruins all her plans, I believe, so –

Sally: Nice.

Emily: Good for him.

Sally: You had the chance, Semirhage.

Emily: And you just didn't. Mat is intro – not really introduced to Tuon, but he learns who Tuon is by her name, uh, Tuon, and not as the Daughter of the Nine Moons. This is because Tuon has entered the city under a veil, which, in Seanchan culture, basically means that she is, uh, doing this sort of extended form of penance where she has not assumed her full position. Um, and her penance is for beating one of the damane, uh, unjust – unjustifiably, she recognizes, because the damane was, like, a fortune teller and told her a fortune that she didn't like.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Later we'll find out, I think, past where you are, so Knife of Dreams spoiler alert, I guess: we'll later find out that this little prophecy that was given to Tuon was sort of the, uh, reverse equivalent of "You'll marry the Daughter of the Nine Moons"; you know, she was basically told, she'll marry a man who – uh, the fox who makes the ravens fly –

Sally: Mm.

Emily: Which explains Tuon's interest in Mat's ring –

Sally: Mm.

Emily: In this scene, which is engraved with a fox and ravens. Um, da da da da da. So there's – there's a sort of, um, dramatic, uh, recognition and disguise thing going on here, where Mat and Tuon – Mat is meeting his fated wife but does not yet realize it, and Tuon is meeting her fated husband and on some level realizes it but is gonna spend the next few months resisting that. And that's the sort of thing that, you know, we see in Shakespeare or, more or less in, like, operas and these old-fashioned fairy tales. There are these big scenes of recognition and revelation, you know, when –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: People who were in disguise are revealed – reveal themselves. Um, da da da da da. So that's archetypically what's going on with Robert Jordan here. So Tuon isn't really treated as the Daughter of the Nine Moons or referred to that way, um, and Mat doesn't understand at all what her position is; nor does Tylin. Tylin's like, "Yeah, I don't really know who she is, except she – Suroth sort of reacts to her like she's in charge." And everyone is confused by Anath, who, I guess, even by Seanchan standards, is acting like a bitch for a Truthspeaker or whatever. So everyone's just like, "Um, what the hell is this woman doing?"

Sally: (laugh) What the hell is Semirhage doing?

Emily: (laugh) What the hell is Semirhage doing? Um, when Mat enters the room, Tuon is like, "Oh my God, this man's been accosted," because he looks like he's been beat up and flung through the mud, which he has.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: She's like, "I thought the streets were supposed to be safe, Suroth," and Suroth is like, "Ahh," panics because she's getting called out on bad city management or something, which makes Tylin panic, and Mat is like, "Eugh," so he's like, "Oh, I'm – I'm fine, really; I just fell." Which is the classic – (laugh)

Sally: Yeah, "I just fell down a flight of stairs."

Emily: I just – yeah, the classic excuse for visible bruises and, sadly, is what a lot of abuse victims say, which –

Sally: Yeah. "I just fell."

Emily: Is fitting because Mat is himself being abused and on some level disguising that fact.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: But Mat's like, "Yeah, it's no – it's really no big deal, like, don't worry about it," and he's obviously talking to Tuon the way he would talk to anyone, which is not the way you would talk to a high-ranking Seanchan, so everyone's like, "Hello – exsqueeze me." Tuon herself approaches him, sees his ring, like I said, um, and is basically just like, "Who – what the fuck are you?" She's like, "Tylin, I'll pay you for him," and Tylin's like – (sputters) and Mat is like – (groans) Tylin's like, "He's actually not for sale, 'cause he is a free man," and Tuon's like, "Oh, dang," and goes about her business. And Mat's like, "I don't even fully understand the bullet I just dodged, but I do understand that, Matrix-like, I did just dodge a bullet."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So first impressions of wifey: she did try to – try to buy me, like unto a slave.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um –

Sally: It also says she inspects him, basically like a horse.

Emily: Like a horse.

Sally: Which is disgusting, um, and calls to mind, uh, the type of inspections they used to do of slaves on the auction block where they would, like, inspect them like animals.

Emily: Yeah, during the, uh, times of chattel slavery.

Sally: Yes, sorry. Thank you for clarifying. So, um, Tuon's just digging – Robert Jordan is digging Tuon an incredibly big hole that she will, I think, never get out of, in my perspective, at this point.

Emily: Yeah, you described her as a slaver last week, and I think that, um, is probably the best shorthand for Tuon's general behavior –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And sort of the way she interacts with people who are of a lower rank than her and also towards, like, Mat and damane generally. Um, it – yeah, it's very creepy. It is, I think, what – you remember when all the – when the guys who wrote Game of Thrones were like, "Oh, actually, we want to write an alternate history where the Confederates won the Civil War? And there will be a – like, a torrid love affair between an enslaved woman and her enslaver," da da da da da.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Obviously Mat himself is not specifically, um, enslaved under Tuon, nor is he enslaved generally, although he is in a very rough, uh, captivity-related situation, so it's not quite that. But it does call to mind that, because that – those are some of the, uh, vibes that Tuon is bringing to

the table. And, uhhh ... so it's not fun or romantic or cute at all. It is extremely mythological and archetypal. Robert Jordan has done a lot, um, with that. He – just to, like, get this out of the way – we've talked about Mat as, like, a trickster figure; um, Mat also has god of wealth type things going on, where he is – like, gold is attracted to him; it's almost like he's, um, King Midas. Um, Tuon, on the other hand, um, her name – her full name is For – Fortuona, which reminds one of “fortune” –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, Mat describes her constantly as having a face and an expression like a judge or like an executioner. Um, and she also is extremely wealthy. Mat, seeing her for the first time, um, is not at all attracted to her – which I think is, uh, sort of interesting in terms of who Mat is as a person –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And as a, quote unquote, womanizer –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: To not be attracted to her initially –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: That's probably one of the only things that I find at all interesting about their relationship: that he becomes attracted to her intellectually before physically.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But he is just like, “Oh my God, she is dripping in jewels and gems,” and Mat is just like –

Sally: “Give to ME.”

Emily: You know, that little magpie part of his brain.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So, uh, Tuon is sort of in this position as, like, Hades in a little way – in a way. Or Pluto, who is the Roman equivalent of Hades but is more – has more connotations as, like, a god of wealth.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: The jewels under the earth. And of course, um, Hades is in charge of the dead and the judging of the dead, da da da da da. So we have here a situation where, um, Mat will eventually kidnap Tuon, which is like Hades kidnapping Persephone, but, you know, reversed. Persephone kidnapping Hades, I guess, except that Mat also has Hades connotations, so.

Sally: Hades kidnapping Hades.



Emily: Yeah. Interesting.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: That is, sort of surface level, what's going on, mythologically, archetypically. Robert Jordan has clearly put a lot of thought into that. All of that would work and be really interesting and fun, I would say, if Tuon wasn't who she is, which is an enslaver.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Um, and that is just sort of the insurmountable, uh, hurdle that we will be facing for the next ... six books?

Sally: Yeah. Insurmountable indeed.

Emily: Yeah, you really just can't get over it. Um.

Sally: Yeah, she is an enslaver, she is a dictator, she's got fascist and authoritarian leanings. She's also just kind of an asshole. (laugh)

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: On top of –

Emily: She's just not nice.

Sally: I mean, like, all of – all of that, like, very rude behavior of hers can be dialed in to the fact that she's got authoritarian tendencies and believes that she is better than people, and it's just like, God, this is so gross to just, like, throw Mat into this situation. Um, but it – it's really – it is frustrating that this is a thing, but it is a thing. Like, there have – there was recently, like, a big controversy 'cause someone was publishing yet another Nazi romance –

Emily: Hmm.

Sally: Where someone on the side of, like, America or the good guys falls in love with a Nazi officer, or, like, I think there have been even worse ones where, like, a Jewish woman in a camp falls in love with a Nazi officer, and it's just like, what is this fascination?

Emily: Yeah, that's a real romance trope –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: In romance – the romance genre specifically, but you also see it in literally any type of book that has romance in it.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Uh, what comes to mind is, like, um, that book you read for your thesis –

Sally: Mm.

Emily: Wolf by Wolf –

Sally: Yes.

Emily: Which is about a – a – an alternate history wherein, uh, the Germans won World War II –

Sally: Correct, yes.

Emily: And involves a – a Jewish protagonist girl who sort of has a romantic relationship with a former Nazi.

Sally: She – yep, and in the second book, they get together officially. She officially –

Emily: Cool.

Sally: He, like, repents his Nazi ways.

Emily: Yeah, and it's, you know, you've got this sort of, like, oh, I will save or redeem the former bad guy through our love. This also happens – more of you are probably familiar with this book – uh, Six of Crows –

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

Emily: The relationship between Matthias and Nina, oppressor, oppressed, et cetera, et cetera.

Sally: Yeah, it's very – it's – I – I find it really disgust – I find it a really disgusting trope.

Emily: Yeah, it's, like, an immediate turn-off for me.

Sally: Yeah, for me, I'm like, blegh. But if I try and, like, remove myself and, like, look at the analysis, I think it exists because it is a really obvious way to play with power dynamics –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Which is what the romance genre is about in many ways, particularly, like, how do you upend power dynamics; I think we're often seeing that or, like, not – or – yeah. I just think power dynamics – in my admittedly limited interaction with the romance genre, you see that happening, where it's like, just – that kind of is playing its part. But I think in western society – I'm not as familiar with literature of other cultures – but I think in relationships, that is a big deal for people anyway. Like, people are always thinking about power dynamics and how to get power over the other person.

Emily: Everything is about sex, except sex, which is about power.

Sally: (simultaneously) Which is about power.

Emily: Thank you, Janelle.

Sally: Thank you, Janelle. Um, so I think that's where it's coming – I think that's in part where it's coming from. I also think there's a savior complex, which also plays a big part in romance. It'll often be, like, saving this guy and, like, humanizing him. And that's, like, sexy or whatever. And I think, like, if you make him as bad a person as possible, a Nazi or a slaver or a fantasy

Nazi in Six of Crows, that just, like, makes it so much more powerful, but it's really a horrifying thing if you think about it. It's like, the prize of your redemption is a woman's body.

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: It's like, eugh.

Emily: And, like, those are all the tropes we're working with here, and we're giving a double layer of how disturbing this is because Robert Jordan is not trying to use Mat to redeem Tuon; Robert Jordan doesn't see a problem with Tuon the way we do.

Sally: No.

Emily: Mat and Tuon's relationship is less about Mat redeeming Tuon or vice-versa than them meeting in the middle.

Sally: Yep.

Emily: And arguably a lot further on Tuon's side of the middle than on Mat's side.

Sally: Yeah, Mat has to get folded into the Seanchan nobility.

Emily: Yeah, which is very troubling.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, and we'll talk about that a lot more. I think we'll also talk a lot more about my complicated relationship with Tuon and how it has changed over the years, um, but we don't really have time for that right now –

Sally: Yeah, sorry, I have been running my mouth –

Emily: No, you haven't.

Sally: About power dynamics. So.

Emily: I think it's really interesting. Um, but that's their first meeting.

Sally: Yes.

Emily: Mat embarrasses Tylin, I guess, in front of these very important Seanchan ladies, so, uh, Tylin is like, "As punishment, here's our – our BDSM relationship. I'll tie you up and do sexy things to you, da da da da da." And it's like, gross. Gross gross gross.

Sally: It's also not BDSM .... (inaudible)

Emily: It's also not BDSM. I'll fuckin' – (growls)

Sally: Yeah. Maybe, like, read a fuckin' book, Robert Jordan, I don't know.

Emily: I know. God.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Stop conflating BDSM with rape. Different things. Totally different things. Speaking of power dynamics in sex. One is consensual. One is not.

Sally: One is consensual, and, in fact, BDSM is probably one of the most consensual forms of sex you can have –

Emily: Literally. So consensual.

Sally: Because you have to have so many conversations around what each person is comfortable with.

Emily: So many layers –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Of consent. Yeah, if you're doing it right.

Sally: If you're –

Emily: Which, I hope you are.

Sally: Yes.

Emily: I don't know who I'm speaking to.

Sally: (laugh) All of our listeners in the BDSM community.

Emily: I – I know all of you are, somehow, tangentially related to it.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Anyway. The next chapter, um, is a – as I have alluded to – montage style, where we just get Mat over the next week or two.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: He says it as “the next few days after the gholam attack.” Um, hitting the major points: Beslan and Thom continue to conspire to do some sort of revolution against the Seanchan.

Sally: (sing-song) One day more –

Emily: (sing-song, falsetto) One day more till revolution –

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: (normal voice) Mat is – don't sue me, Les Mis.

Sally: Ahh!

Emily: Mat is –

Sally: (laugh) Victor Hugo is going to rise from the grave.

Emily: “How dare you.” Who wrote the music for Les Mis?

Sally: I dunno. You keep talking, I’ll find out.

Emily: Yeah, look it up. It better not be, like, Andrew Lloyd Webber.

Sally: He will sue you. (laugh)

Emily: Yeah, he would sue me. Very litigious, as everyone knows, Andrew Lloyd Webber.

Sally: I don’t know anything about Andrew Lloyd Webber.

Emily: Me either. Um, Mat is continually more and more annoyed by Tuon – excuse me; Thom and Beslan’s behavior but is like, “Whatever, I can’t do anything about it.” He is also concerned and annoyed by Juilin’s continuing love affair with what Mat assumes to be a Seanchan noblewoman or someone otherwise, like, within the Seanchan hierarchy, who, Juilin, as a, um, person outside the Seanchan hierarchy and particularly a low-born person, a peasant, should not be, uh, mixing with. Juilin, at some point, like, gets caught where he shouldn’t be and is whipped publicly, which is gross.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, and Mat sort of has this, like, resigned attitude about it, where he’s just like, I – Mat – Juilin’s a – a man – like, Juilin’s a person, an adult; I cannot physically stop him from doing something that is bad for him.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So you just kind of gotta let your friends make potentially lethal mistakes, I guess. Um, Mat eventually goes to Setalle Anan’s inn, which is just, like, across from the Tarasin Palace, because he remembers, oh, there was a place in the inn where, like, my money chest was kept while I was a patron there. Did you find out who wrote Les Mis?

Sally: Yeah, some – I don’t know. It was some French guy: Claude-Michel Schönberg.

Emily: Huh.

Sally: And then they’ve got some French guys who did the original French lyrics and then Herbert Kretzmer did the English lyrics.

Emily: Lame.

Sally: I don’t know who any of these people are.

Emily: I just wanted to make fun of Andrew Lloyd Webber.

Sally: (laugh) Well, there’s always Cats. You can always make fun of him for that.

Emily: And boy, isn’t it mockable. Um, so Mat goes to the inn, which now is full of Seanchan patrons –

Sally: Yep.

Emily: It being a very nice inn. Um, he runs into Setalle Anan and besides the whole Setalle Anan making him twirl to show his ass or whatever is going on there, they have what – what is, um, I think most delightful about Mat and Setalle Anan, which is that they are very much peers.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: It's a little bit like Birgitte.

Sally: Yes.

Emily: Mat clearly understands Setalle Anan is a woman and is not just, like, one of the guys, but, I don't know, they just treat each other with more respect than we usually get between men and women in Wheely Time. Um, so Setalle Anan agrees to harbor Mat's fugitive money and clothes –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Because, as she says, it is ethically wrong, what Tylin is doing to Mat.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, in fact, like – Mat's like, "What can I pay you?" and she's like, "Just twirl," which is obviously gross on some level, but on – when you think of it as, like, she is not charging him –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Actual money; she's just sort of, like, teasing him.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, so Mat starts squirreling away money, um, and he finds his old clothes, though they're somewhat moth-eaten. His two serving guys, Nerim and Lopin – one of whom was formerly Nalesean – RIP – uh, Nalesean's manservant – they're now both Mat's ... menservant?

Sally: Menservants?

Emily: Men – manservants? Menservants? They're both now servants to Mat. And Mat is like, "Challenge: You guys are going to start taking, like, pieces of my clothing and pocket – pocketfuls of money over to the Wandering Woman," which is the name of this inn, and they're like, "Challenge accepted; we love that."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: They literally, like, race each other.

Sally: Yeah, they're very cute. (laugh) I like Nerim and Lopin.

Emily: (laugh) Speedrun enemies to lovers.

Sally: Yeah! Oh my gosh, I wish.

Emily: Like –

Sally: If Robert Jordan wasn't a coward.

Emily: Yeah, Tylin comes in and is like, "Mat, I just saw Nerim and Lopin literally sprinting down the hall," and Mat's like, "Don't worry about it." (laugh)

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Um, so that's sort of, like, step one of Mat's escape plan, is just get his own source of money and clothing that is not monitored by Tylin.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um. Meanwhile Tuon is acting very weird. Uh, he, like, sees her around; he still doesn't fully understand her position, what she is exactly. Uh, but she and Tylin have a friendship that is developing, um, and so Mat runs into her occasionally, although he starts to think it is more than occasionally, that she is maybe seeking him out. Which kind of creeps him out but he's not too worried about yet.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Uh, but, like, he walks into his own rooms at one point, and she is looking at his spear, his ashandarei, and it's like, okay, that's totally psychotic behavior.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Like, you can't just go into people's rooms.

Sally: Yeah. Tuon, you freak.

Emily: But she's like, "Oh, is this yours? I'll pay you for it. What did you – what did you pay?" and he's like, "You can't pay what I paid, unless you're –"

Sally: "Willing to die."

Emily: "Unless you're –" Yeah. "Do you – should I kill you?" (laugh) She's like –

Sally: It would be so funny if he said that. (laugh)

Emily: "Oh, do you want to die?" Pulls out a knife. Immediately, a bunch of Deathwatch Guards tackle him from all sides.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Um. (laugh) Like – like the Secret Service.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Uh, but she's just like, "Okay, weird," and leaves. So there's just, like, some sort of weird behavior going on with Tuon throughout.

Sally: Yeah, it makes a lot more sense in the context of her also getting a prophecy that is about Mat. The fact that that is not revealed to us until –

Emily: Knife of Dreams.

Sally: Knife of Dreams – ‘cause it is, like – seems like fully psychotic behavior – I should not say that. I’m trying to be better about the word “psychotic.” It seems very confusing behavior when Mat’s like, “I’m kidnapping you,” and she’s like, pretty much, “Sounds chill.”

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Like – girl?

Emily: And, like, it contextualizes somewhat – it does not make it right or excuse it in any way – it contextualizes the fact that her initial reaction upon seeing him and these suspicions being, um, evoked, um, that she immediately offers to buy him. Clearly she’s just like, “Is this the guy?”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: “Of whomst the prophecies have spoken?”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And an easy way to sort of put him aside or put him in my power so I can deal with him in my own time –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Would be to sell him within – to buy him, excuse me –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Within the Seanchan worldview. Um, especially because, you know, the alternative is just that, like, Tuon sees Mat and is like, “Oh, he’s hot.”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: “I want him to be my naked servant.”

Sally: Yeah, it – (laugh)

Emily: And Mat’s just like, “What’s happening?”

Sally: Yeah, it does –

Emily: “I’m covered in mud.”

Sally: He’s like, “This is what turns you on? You want me to be naked and covered in mud?”

Emily: And me, Emily Juchau, I’m like, I do love a grimy man – (laugh)

Sally: Yeah. Maybe. (laugh)

Emily: But, like – maybe?



Sally: No, it does – it does take a little bit of the sting off of it when you realize that she’s kind of got some other wheels turning. But as it stands right now, she’s just like, “I want to buy him and make him my naked servant” for who knows what reason?

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Sexual harassment reasons, it seems like, at this point. So ...

Emily: Yeah, it’s a little confusing why Robert Jordan chose to leave that as a reveal.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Rather than just, in Tuon’s point of view that we got right before this –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Contextualizing what the prophecy was that she –

Sally: She could be like, “The prophecy is really confusing,” ‘cause that’s when we get the reveal that she’s the Daughter of the Nine Moons.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: So it would make perfect sense for her to be like, “I also got this weird prophecy about some fox man.”

Emily: Yeah. This little –

Sally: Who’s the fox man?

Emily: Who’s the fox man? What does the fox man say?

Sally: What does the fox man – (vocalizing “What Does the Fox Say?”)

Emily: And the fox man says, “It’s nothing; I just fell down the stairs. Don’t worry about it.”

Sally: (laugh) Ugh, I’m so worried about this man.

Emily: I know. God bless Mat.

Sally: Matthew.

Emily: Oh, Matrim.

Sally: Matrim.

Emily: My beloved.

Sally: Matrim-thew.

Emily: Uh, did I miss anything? I probably did, but –

Sally: I don’t – I think we covered the – the big points.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: I think so.

Emily: We'll get one more chapter from Mat's point of view specifically, and then we'll get another couple of points of view, uh, from people who will be relevant to Mat's escape, but his escape will really start coming together in the next few chapters.

Sally: We really start collecting people –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Just sort of like a big – a big magnet.

Emily: Yeah. Noal is step one, but, uh, there are many more steps to come. Um, so those are those two chapters. Fun in some ways, very troubling in other ways.

Sally: That's what –

Emily: But that is sort of where we're gonna be on that balancing scale with Mat –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: For the next – ever.

Sally: I feel like that's how – yeah, we ever since we entered Ebou – Ebou Dar, I feel like that's how it's been, so.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Kind of hard to cut the cake one way or the other.

Emily: Yeah. Poor Mat. Um, that's it from me. Do you have anything to add?

Sally: I do not.

Emily: Okay.

Sally: I – as always, I think I have said enough. I think there's been plenty out of this hot bag of air.

Emily: Stop.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Um, thanks for listening. Thank you to Glynn MacKenzie for our theme song, to our patrons on Patreon, and our followers on social media. Um.

Sally: Uh, we just did a rendition – a rendition? Whatever – of our other podcast on Patreon, We Don't Watch Outlander, watching cinematic classic The Mummy, 1999 –

Emily: Yeah, starring Brendan Fraser and Rachel Weisz. Sarah, my sister, saw a bumper sticker out in the wild one time or saw it on the internet or something that just said, "I'd rather be

watching The Mummy, starring Brendan Fraser and Rachel Weisz,” and was like, “I have to find it for you.”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: I’m like, yeah –

Sally: Put it on your –

Emily: That is the single bumper sticker I would allow on my car. I’m not a bumper sticker person, but.

Sally: Um, yeah, so if you’ve been thinking about joining our Patreon –

Emily: There it is.

Sally: There – there’s the carrot.

Emily: It’s – yeah. So good.

Sally: In front of your little donkey cart.

Emily: Um. That’s it.

Sally: That’s all, folks.

Emily: Okay. Sorry, guys, for the weird energy.

Sally: ‘Kay. Byeccc.

Emily: Have a good week. Byeccc.