



Episode 196: Rand IS the Baba Yaga

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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: You guys, Sally's hair looks so cute. She got a haircut.

Sally: I got a haircut.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: For the first time in for – when I do this, I look like Robin Williams in "Flubber." When I have my glasses pushed up –

Emily: What? (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) Over my bangs. You never – he just has, like, very funny crazy hair in the trailer.

Emily: I vaguely remember, um –

Sally: Or in the poster. I don't know if he actually has it in the movie. I don't remember the movie.

Emily: Yeah, I don't – I don't think I ever saw the movie, but one of our VHSes had a trailer for "Flubber" –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: As one of the, you know, "Soon to own on – on video cassette."

Sally: "On video cassette."

Emily: Or whatever.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um.

Sally: I did indeed cut my hair quite short.

Emily: Yeah, it's very cute.

Sally: Thank you. That's so nice.

Emily: I just need everyone to, you know, refigure your image of Sally for the fanart.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Now she has bangs.

Sally: Now I have bangs. I've got the shag, as everyone is calling it, I guess.

Emily: The shag?

Sally: Yeah, that's what this type of hair style is technically called.

Emily: Oh.

Sally: A curly shag.

Emily: Huh. That's cute.

Sally: Yeah. If you do desire to draw fanart of us, an updated image, there's a picture of me on my Twitter. (laugh)

Emily: (laugh) 'Cause we're getting so many portraits these days.

Sally: Yep.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Because people just love to draw us.

Emily: Yeah. Welcome to Everybody Hates Rand, your friendly neighborhood Wheel of Time podcast. I'm Emily Juchau.

Sally: And I'm Sally Goodger.

Emily: Um, so we are switching over from the city of Ebou Dar to the city of Far Madding, which has probably only been barely mentioned up until this point. Um, no – no one – none of our main characters have been there or even really been in the vicinity. But it's a city situated between, um – let me check the map real quick, make sure I'm getting it right – between Illian, Tear, and Andor. It has, like, three gates, so one's the Andor or the Caemlyn Gate, one's the Tear Gate, one's the Illian Gate or whatever. Um, and a lot of what we get in these two chapters is just, like, stuff about Far Madding, which I think is kind of – I – I don't totally agree with Robert Jordan introducing a new setting and making such a big deal out of it this late in the series, because we never go back to Far Madding.

Sally: Yeah, we also do not spend a very large amount of time there.

Emily: Yeah, it's just gonna be these Rand and peripheral points of view in the second half of this book, which, you know, is half a dozen – eight – seven or eight chapters?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, so, like – mm.

Sally: I know, it's a weird choice, and it's also pretty frustrating, I think, 'cause Far Madding is quite interesting. Like, I think it adds, um, to some of the, like, thematic and, like, world building stuff going on. Like, Far Madding is an island city sort of situated in the middle of a lake, which makes it nearer Tar Valon, an island also in the middle of a body of water.

Emily: In fact – I was just going to mention this – we have made – many jokes have been made about the fact that the map of Tar Valon looks like a – a diagram of a – of a vagina and labia. The same can be said for Far Madding, although – and this is not to, um, body shame anyone, because of course, no one's vagina looks exactly like the Tar Valon map –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And probably no one's vagina looks like this either –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But there is a definite, like, crooked-ness –

Sally: Mm.

Emily: To this, um, particular, uh, how shall we say, yonic –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, map.

Sally: No, that's such a good point. Tar Valon is very, very neat –

Emily: Yes.

Sally: And tidy.

Emily: It's exactly like the diagram you'd see in a gynecologist's office.

Sally: Yeah. Or, yeah, Far Madding is – like, it's at a little bit of an angle. It's quite – not quite – not quite such, like, straight lines.

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: Which I – I – I mean, there's a lot – rich for discourse. (laugh)

Emily: I think it tells you everything you need to know about what Robert Jordan thinks of Far Madding.

Sally: Yes. Um, so Far Madding – and – it mirror – it, like, is a – if you can consider cities to be foils, it is a foil of Tar Valon in many ways. Um, they are both – keeping on my train of thought here for a second – they are both island cities in the middle of a body of water; Tar Valon is the

center of channeling, female channeling; in Far Madding, they have, um, ter'angreal that forbids – that prevents anyone, male or female, from channeling, so it's this sort of, like, dead zone.

Emily: Yeah, steddin effect.

Sally: Um, and, uh, they've also got – they're both, quote unquote, matriarchal societies. It is somehow even more intense in Far Madding than what you see in Tar Valon; it is taking very much a, uh – I don't know, I think it's, like, taking it very much to the extreme, like, men do not have basically any political or social rights in Far Madding, or financial rights.

Emily: Yeah, you would call this more militant matriarchy.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And just because it deserves being said once again, but we have posited – we have made the argument before that Robert Jordan's matriarchal societies cannot actually be matriarchies because they exist in a fully patriarchal society. The Wheel of Time generally is a patriarchal text –

Sally: Yes.

Emily: And a patriarchal world, so –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: These little one-offs of, quote unquote, matriarchy are still not exactly what a matriarchy would look like in a vacuum of patriarchy.

Sally: No, no, absolutely – absolutely not.

Emily: In fact, they reek of patriarchy coming from a man who, um, is positing what a – what a society would look like with women in position of power – in the positions of power.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And seemingly arguing against it. (laugh)

Sally: Yeah, being like, "Women are the – just the worst."

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: "These crooked vaginas out here. Just the worst."

Emily: (laugh) Great band name.

Sally: Yeah, "Crooked Vaginas" is a great band name, you guys can have that one for free.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Take that to the bank. Um, so anyway, that's the – that's some of the thematic stuff going on with Far Madding.

Emily: Yeah, Far Madding is also a pacifist, um, community –

Sally: Yes.

Emily: Which is, I think, one of the more interesting aspects about it.

Sally: Yes.

Emily: And I'm not quite sure what to make of it in terms of everything else that's going on with it.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: It seems like there are two very separate things going on here –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: The pacifism and the, like, anti-channeling matriarchy. Um, the deal is that you can't have a weapon in Far Madding –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Besides, like, the typical belt knife that everyone carries for basically, like, having a Swiss army knife.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, when you enter the city, uh, you – and if you own a sword, you are either required to surrender your sword –

Sally: Coat check it.

Emily: At the gates, yeah, and pick it up when you leave, or, um, have it –

Sally: Peace-bonded.

Emily: Peace-bonded, which, uh, we see happening. It's just, like, someone putting a bunch of wire around the, um, hilt and scabbard of the sword so that you can't draw it.

Sally: Yes, and unfortunately – unfortunately – I feel like we would be remiss if we did not comment on –

Emily: *Yes.*

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: The phallic nature of swords.

Sally: (laugh) The phallic nature of swords and the fact that they are here being rendered, um, impotent.

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: It is a form of metaphorical castration –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: As we enter this very, uh, yonic island.

Emily: Yeah, so maybe those two things are more connected than I'm giving it, uh, credit for; the idea that with women in charge, they would enforce a peace, um, you know, because women, we're all about – we're all about peace.

Sally: We're all about peace, baby.

Emily: Meanwhile, Egg is besieging Tar Valon, the other –

Sally: Meanwhile, Egg is like, "How do we make nukes?"

Emily: The other vagina city. (laugh) Stop.

Sally: Um, yeah.

Emily: Yeah, so obviously there are ways, apparently, of getting around the – what is it? Peace-guarding?

Sally: Peace-bonding.

Emily: Peace-bonding because Rand has an altercation here wherein a couple of guys have swords, so.

Sally: Yeah. Rand is just like, "I just very delicately clipped the wires so that it looks like it's still –"

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: But he just, like, totally has a sword. Which is, like, so annoying to me – sorry, bonk.

Emily: That's okay.

Sally: Just tear – rip your ear off. It's so annoying 'cause it – it would just be so much more interesting if it was like, they actually do not have weapons, and how are they going to deal with life? Because these are a group of men who are – I mean, they – all these men can channel. But they can't channel in Far Madding.

Emily: Yeah, the idea of Rand taking refuge – not taking refuge in Far Madding – he has deliberately left a trail –

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: (laugh) Like he's, you know, Agatha Christie, crafting –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: A murder mystery. He's deliberately left a trail to, um, lead his pursuers to the city of Far Madding. Um, his pursuers being the rogue Asha'man who attacked him at the end of Path of Daggers. (clears throat) Um, which includes four guys, I wanna say, plus Dashiva.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Who, uh, Rand just counts in their number, not knowing that Dashiva is actually one of the Forsaken and a little bit special therefore.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Um, but Rand has deliberately left this trail in the hopes of getting them all to the city and picking them off one by one, um, just sort of eliminating the problem. And apparently he has chosen this, uh, particular setting with the idea that it will, um, give him an advantage because although it will level the playing field in terms of, um, channeling and, you know, swords, maybe – even if everyone clips the wires and gets their swords out, you're still in trouble if you get your sword out in public –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, Rand has been –

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: What?

Sally: Sorry, you're in trouble if you get your sword out in public.

Emily: Yeah. Yeah.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Still, to this day. (laugh) Public indecency, ah!

Sally: (laugh) Anyway. Sorry I'm four years old.

Emily: No. Well. (laugh) Um, but Rand, un – this is so stupid. Rand has been training to kill with his bare hands.

Sally: (laugh) I know. Also, Rand has had – dyed his hair black, as, like, a disguise.

Emily: I know, he looks so ugly. He's just like, "That's it. That's the disguise."

Sally: And I can – I just had to picture that it is such a bad dye job –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: And he just looks like a fourteen-year-old middle school girl.

Emily: His hair is also shoulder-length, apparently –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: At this point –

Sally: Yeah. Full emo.

Emily: Yeah, he – he’s really – he’s really Hot Topic chic –

Sally: Yeah!

Emily: In the streets of Far Madding.

Sally: Yeah. Picture him in a – a – an Evanescence T-shirt.

Emily: Oh my God.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Yeah, we open with him stalking – what’s his name? Uh, Rochaid – Rochaid – we’ve, I think, joked about the French pronunciation of his name before –

Sally: Rochaid.

Emily: Rochaid. He is following Rochaid, and he – his entire point of view reeks of arrogance –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And egotism. He’s like, “This is too easy. Rochaid’s such an idiot,” only to find out that Rochaid is well-aware that he is being followed and has, like, deliberately cornered Rand where he can be attacked by another –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Of these rogue Asha’man. And Rand doesn’t really, like, react to that that we see. Um, you know, he’s not, like, beating himself up over the fact that it was so easy for these guys to corner him. As Min notes later, through the bond, she did not experience any type of emotion coming from Rand that one might expect in a fight for one’s life.

Sally: Yeah, which is extremely unhealthy, Rand, my guy.

Emily: Which, yeah, if you can’t tell, is pretty unhealthy. So is the megalomaniac, you know –

Sally: Just being like, “I am going to kill these people with my bare hands in broad daylight in a city that would imprison and possibly execute me for committing violence in public, but I won’t get caught, because I’m the Dragon Reborn. I cannot channel, my number one superpower, in this city that I chose –” (laugh) It’s a lot, you guys.

Emily: This might be his most blatantly, like, off-the-rails, insane thing that he does.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And it is so frustrating because no one seems to call him on it.

Sally: Yeah, and he also doesn’t really, like, experience any consequences for it.



Emily: Yeah, he just is in this city, trying to kill the Asha'man. There's, like, a big fight. He gets put in a box again. Cadsuane rescues him.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Then they leave and go cleanse saidin.

Sally: Yeah. Literally. He's like, "Well, that was kind of – Far Madding was kind of a wild weekend at Bernie's."

Emily: He's like, "Well, that was bummer – that was a bummer." Yeah, and he really just, like – what happens in Far Madding stays in Far Madding.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Along with the bodies of all of the Asha'man he –

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Killed. (laugh)

Sally: Brutally murders in the streets.

Emily: Um. Yeah, I really don't get it, 'cause, like, besides Min's little, "Oh, you're not feeling anything? That seems like a problem," it's not like Nynaeve and Lan are like, you know – it's not like we're getting points of view from Nynaeve where she's like, "You know what, Lan? I really think Rand might be losing it."

Sally: Yeah, later in this book, when he's, like – finally goes to kill the two, like, remaining Asha'man or whatever, they basically enable him to do this. Nynaeve and Lan are just like –

Emily: Yeah, they're just like, "Oh, go – go along."

Sally: "Yeah, well, if you're going, we have to go with you." It ends poorly. Rand in a box.

Emily: Yeah, spoiler alert. Yeah, Rand in a box.

Sally: Cough, cough.

Emily: Cough, cough. But, like, yeah, it – it just is a little bit weird because Rand progressively, from this point forward – actually, Rand has already been – every time he interacts with people for the last five books, people have been like, "Ooh, is he going crazy?" or whatever.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And we, the readers, have been in Rand's head and have been kind of, like, well-aware that Rand is as sane as a person in his shoes can be.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: So it's always been a little bit ridiculous, you know?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: There have been these eerie moments, like Mat calling Lews Therin's name –

Sally: And Rand turning around.

Emily: And Rand responding to it.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But for the most part, we've been, like – Rand is still a rational, thinking and feeling protagonist, um, and everyone else is just sort of, you know, a touch paranoid because this is sort of what's going to happen, eventually. But here we're getting, for the first time, what objectively seems like insane behavior.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: And no one – nothing.

Sally: I know, I –

Emily: It seems like a real missed opportunity for Robert Jordan to be like, "Hey, you guys? That whole insanity thing? Not a joke."

Sally: Yeah, like – like, let's play with that a little bit more.

Emily: Especially because we are, like, on the verge of cleansing saidin, and you can really, like, put a lot of tension into that. Once they cleanse saidin, is his insanity, such as it is, going to go away? Or is he just going to be stuck on this precipice?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: I mean – and, I mean, the answer is the latter, but we just aren't really – Robert Jordan is spending so much fucking time talking about how Far Madding is a matriarchy and describing people's clothes and dresses –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And how different it is from other cities that he's not giving us the important details.

Sally: I know, I also feel like it's such a – like, Far Madding, for all of its ridiculousness, is, like, a really rich setting in, like, the terms of the Wheely Time world for Rand's behavior to be, like – like, I – I don't know, I almost want it to be, like, nobody's commenting on it because this is, like, such peak toxic masculinity behavior that it doesn't seem that out of place.

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: To be like, "Yes, I'm going to commit violence in broad daylight, obviously I am going to win, and I'm not going to have any feelings."

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: And – so it just, like – I almost want someone – I – I don't know, it just feels like there's a lot of potential for people to be like, "Oh, we're commenting on your behavior now because it's really strange," or being like, "Well, this is just how men behave."

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Like, there – there was a possibility to go, like, either of those two ways and have it be really interesting, but it just, like, goes – passes by without any other comment is like, why, Robert? Like, you had such a moment here.

Emily: Yeah, so – somehow, Robert Jordan has set up what could be a crucially interesting plot point –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And I forget that this happens all the time.

Sally: (laugh) Me too.

Emily: Completely forget Far Madding. Winter's Heart, I think, cleansing of saidin, Rand sleeps with Elayne, nothing in between. You know? Who –

Sally: Yeah. Mat escapes Ebou Dar.

Emily: Mat escapes Ebou Dar; like, Faile gets kidnapped. Who remembers this whole plot point in Far Madding? As wild as it is –

Sally: I know.

Emily: It should be one of the top moments in Winter's Heart.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But Robert Jordan just totally whiffed it.

Sally: Yeah, is like, "Doo – doo ba doo ba doo, doo ba doo, Rand kills a man with his bare hands." Wow. He's like the guy in the Matrix.

Emily: Neo?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Keanu?

Sally: When he learns kung for the first time.

Emily: Oh. I haven't seen the Matrix all the way through.

Sally: I don't get – like, I can appreciate the Matrix, but I feel like that's one of those things that I maybe – I missed the nostalgia factor of it.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Like, I just – I just don't fully get it. Maybe – maybe John Wick is a better Keanu reference in this instance.

Emily: John Wick could kill anyone with his – yeah, Rand is having a real John Wick moment here.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And it's like, your dog didn't even die, man.

Sally: Yeah, and, like –

Emily: You just got attacked. You always get attacked. I don't know what the big deal is. (laugh)

Sally: And John Wick wouldn't have had this level of megalomania. It's just grounded confidence.

Emily: Yeah. He's the Baba Yaga.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Rand is like, "Look at me. Look at me. I'm the Baba Yaga." And Rochaid is like, "What the fuck, man?"

Sally: Yeah, Rochaid is like –

Emily: "Are you good?"

Sally: "Are you okay?"

Emily: I mean, Rochaid isn't saying anything because his windpipe has been crushed, but –

Sally: Yeah, by Rand's bare hands.

Emily: Yeah, Jesus. Just the –

Sally: Give him the chop.

Emily: The karate chop. So Rand is stalking Rochaid and eventually corners him – he thinks – in this alley.

Sally: (laugh) Yeah, it's got a little bit of a comedic factor, almost Princess Diaries style –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Like, no, you picked the cup you thought had the poison –

Emily: Princess Bride.

Sally: Yeah, sorry. (laugh) That would be quite a different movie.

Emily: I was really waiting to see how that related to Princess Diaries. (laugh)

Sally: No, it would be quite a movie if Julie Andrews was like, “You picked the cup that you thought had the poison in it.”

Emily: Yeah. “There are two cups before you. One of them has deadly poison.”

Sally: Yeah. (laugh) No, there’s an alleyway before you –

Emily: And Anne Hathaway is like, “What you didn’t know is that I’ve developed an –”

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: “Immunity to iocane powder.”

Sally: Exactly. Quite a twist for the Princess Diaries. But yes, I mean the Princess Bride.

Emily: The Princes Briaries. Um –

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: So, uh, Rochaid’s like, “Wow, you idiot –”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: “I can’t believe you really thought that you –”

Sally: “You cornered me.”

Emily: “You cornered me,” and Rand just, like – (laugh)

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Karate chops him in the throat, before he can even get his sword all the way out.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And Rochaid goes down, like – (wheeze)

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Only for, uh, Kisman to come up behind Rand and try and attack him. Um, Rand dodges out of the way, and Kisman stabs Rochaid, so it’s a real comedy of errors.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Rand wasn’t actually the one who killed this guy; it was Kisman, his accomplice. Um, and before they can fight, Rand and Kisman, they hear the sound of guards coming, and Kisman is like, “If they catch us, we will both, you know, be going straight to ja-eel. Jail.”

Sally: Ja-eel. (laugh) The Aiel.

Emily: Just like the Aiel, yeah.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: And Rand is like, “Alright. Fair enough,” and they part ways. Two enemies. You know, just like John Wick.

Sally: To meet another day – yeah, exactly.

Emily: Just like John Wick, where, you know, at the – once you get to the hotel –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: The special hotel, you have to stop fighting.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Until John Wick three! Bum bum!

Sally: Bum bum.

Emily: Or John Wick two? Or is it –

Sally: I think it’s the end of John Wick two –

Emily: The end of John Wick two, yeah.

Sally: And then John Wick three is the, like – all the rules are fake now.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: We have to reestablish safe havens for assassins.

Emily: John Wick four is coming out soon, baby.

Sally: (gasp) John Wick four.

Emily: I know, I’m so excited.

Sally: That’d be a fun one to go see in the drive-in –

Emily: Ah.

Sally: With Devin and Janet.

Emily: I’ll see it in a real theater. If I saw Jujutsu Kaisen episode zero – (laugh)

Sally: You’re so right, bestie.

Emily: I’ll see Keanu. I’ll just have to wait a couple weeks for the crowds to thin.

Sally: Yeah, the two most important men in our life.

Emily: Keanu and –

Sally: Gojo. (laugh)

Emily: Stop. Not Gojo. (laugh) I’ll kill you. Yuuta, obviously.

Sally: Yeah, I'm sorry, I'm – I'm –

Emily: How dare you put Gojo's name in the same sentence as Keanu.

Sally: (laugh) Speaking of megalomaniacs.

Emily: Yeah, Gojo wishes he was Keanu. (laugh)

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: I hate that man.

Sally: Ah, what a bastard.

Emily: Okay, so Rand runs off, Kisman runs off. Kisman – we switch to his point of view as he, um, walks away and immediately gets poisoned. (laugh)

Sally: Yeah, gets stabbed with a poison dagger or some shit.

Emily: Yeah, he, like, feels a cut and then someone says, "He belongs to me," and then fades into the mist.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And Kisman basically keels over, dead, immediately. Um, we will find out at the end of this chapter that that was Luc slash Isam, who, again, we have not seen in many, many books –

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Since book four, I believe.

Sally: Another book four – four plot revitalizing in book nine.

Emily: Yeah. And he appear – appears here basically just to take credit for every unsolved murder that has happened in the series thus far, except for the random stabbing of that Aes Sedai woman that kicked off –

Sally: (laugh) Oh, yeah.

Emily: Events in Lord of Chaos. That was not Luc slash Isam; that was Padan Fain. Basically, at this point, if there's some, like, weird shit where someone gets stabbed or killed or assassinated or whatever, you can say to yourself, well, it's either Luc, Isam – or Isam – Luc and Isam – or Padan Fain, and really, there's no substantive difference between the two of them –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: They're both just sort of, like, these free agent evil characters running around who sometimes want to kill Rand and sometimes don't.

Sally: It's quite confusing.

Emily: It's pretty confusing and, like, pretty clearly, like, just sort of, like, Robert Jordan being like, "Sometimes I need a threat."

Sally: Yeah. Just, like, plot clean-up.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Lazy plot clean-up.

Emily: Lazy plot clean-up, and, like – yeah, it seems like after book three, he was like, "Well, I can't just throw Trollocs or Gray Men at Rand and his allies whenever I need an exciting moment of conflict, so I guess I have to throw in Luc or Padan Fain," and we're like, that doesn't make any more sense than Trollocs randomly appearing.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: In fact, it makes less sense, because the Trollocs, we are led to believe, are not really rational creatures.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Luc slash Isam – there's something in there. There's a brain. So he should have motives that make sense on some level.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But he doesn't. He just likes killing. He does explicitly refer to Rand, though, as his nephew here, which is, I guess, the first time that's happened. Um, but yeah, he's basically like, "Um, yeah, a bunch of the Forsaken –" Oh, no, wait, that was Kisman.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Kisman was like, "So here's what happened. We're trying to kill Rand. The M'Hael, a.k.a. Mazrim Taim, was like, 'Yeah, for sure kill him,'" which – I don't know if that's our first blatant indication that Mazrim Taim is evil, but, like, if you missed it up until this point, then there's no hope for you, I hate to tell you.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Um, "'Kill him,' Demandred had commanded later," which I guess is Robert Jordan finally committing to the fact that Mazrim – uh, Mazrim Taim and Demandred are –

Sally: Separate people.

Emily: Not the same people. Unless this was a red herring and – (laugh) Demandred and –

Sally: They are the same person.

Emily: Yeah, they just both separately were like, "Hey, you're such an idiot, I have to tell you twice."

Sally: Make sure you know.



Emily: “In separate guises.”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And then later, Moridin, also, was like, “Yeah, you can kill him, but above all, bring everything in his possession to me,” which – I think Moridin is after the Choedan Kal. So –

Sally: (snort)

Emily: Lots of – lots of Forsaken going on here. Luc slash Isam is answering to we don’t know who. It is a – a man who is in disguise, doing something with the Power so that Luc can’t, like, see him directly or something. And it’s like, at this point, we’re down to Mazrim Taim, Demandred, and Moridin, I believe, uh, and I guess Dashiva –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: In terms of male Forsaken, and Dashiva’s about to bite it, so.

Sally: Heh heh. Heh heh heh.

Emily: And at this point, there’s really no – the difference between those three are negligible –

Sally: Yep.

Emily: Because, as we know, Demandred and Mazrim Taim are the same person –

Sally: Correct.

Emily: And Moridin and Demandred are on the same side, doing essentially the same things.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Sooo. It doesn’t really matter. Nothing that Luc is doing really matters.

Sally: Which seems like another missed opportunity on Robert Jordan’s part because Luc/Isam is such an aberration in this world, like – aberration, excuse me –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Like, what a fascinating and weird thing that went on. Why does it just, like, float around in the background instead of being like, here’s a weird thing that happened that’s going to be a central plot point of some sort.

Emily: Yeah, you might as well have not told us who killed Kisman; it would have made about as much difference.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um. I am a little bit frustrated that Kisman got killed by, um, Luc slash Isam because – I don’t know, as much as I think what Rand’s doing here is stupid and, like you said, toxic masculinity, he’s still the protagonist, and I kind of want him to succeed at his goals.

Sally: I know. It's –

Emily: So, like, in a Kill Bill way, there's a satisfaction in him, like – the idea of him, like, hunting down these guys who betrayed him.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Even though it was pretty fucking obvious that they were never on his side. You know, it's stupid, but it would've been nice if he actually succeeded in killing –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Any of these guys, but in fact I don't think he does. He is not the one, really, who kills Rochaid. That was an accident – friendly fire –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: He's not the one who kills Kisman; I don't even know if he knows that Kisman is dead.

Sally: I don't think so.

Emily: The other two, um, Gedwyn and Torval – Torval and Gedwyn – I think they survive this.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: I don't think – I think – I think they're still around, and obviously Dashiva, so.

Sally: I know, and it's like, if Rand doesn't kill any of them, it –

Emily: Then what's the point?

Sally: Then why does Far Madding happen at all?

Emily: Exactly.

Sally: Like, it's really – the more we talk about it, the more I'm like, this whole city and this whole sequence of events is so unanchored from everything else that happens.

Emily: It feels like page filler –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Which, in a series as long as Wheel of Time, that could have been cut down so much, feels so ridiculous.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Why did we need page filler?

Sally: Yeah, of all the things. Yeah, Rand could have just gone directly from –

Emily: Like –

Sally: The beginning of this book – or sleeping with Elayne or whatever – to going to cleansing saidin.

Emily: Yeah, we could've used these pages to go back to Perrin and progressed that plot a little further.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So that we weren't languishing with Perrin's plot for the next two books.

Sally: Ugh. Languishing is correct.

Emily: (sigh) Boy, you guys. It's really frustrating.

Sally: It is just really – it is really weird.

Emily: Anyway, Rand, after this altercation, goes back to the inn where he's staying with the others, which means Min, Nynaeve and Lan, and – I don't know if we referenced this – when Nynaeve disappeared from the palace in Caemlyn, basically just leaving a note, 'cause, I don't know, she was like, "I'm on a secret mission," but also she is conflict avoidant, weirdly enough –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: But, um, she brought Alivia with her, for some reason. I can't remember the context.

Sally: I don't know if it's ever explained, really.

Emily: I think maybe Alivia just insisted on going along.

Sally: Yeah. Or, like –

Emily: Or maybe Nynaeve wanted to keep an eye on her or something? There is a sort of, like, competitive-ness between Nynaeve and Alivia; Nynaeve is outfitted in all of these, like, angreal, sa'angreal jewelry things –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Like, she's got a cool bracelet that's connected to rings –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Set-up thing, which Rand notices and is just like, "Wow, Nynaeve's getting real materialistic these days," and it's like, okay, you don't have room to talk, first of all.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But also, yeah, they're clearly angreal, you know?

Sally: Yeah, uh, Cadsuane will talk about it later, but they call them, like, wells or something like that. They are specific types of ter'angreal that let you, like, store the One Power in them in order to draw upon it later. So, like, this allows them to channel a little bit while in Far Madding.

Emily: Yeah, Cadsuane and Nynaeve are the only two –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Who can do that.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, but yeah, he comes back and is like, “Well, I just killed one” – he didn’t – and Rand had a run-in with another one, which means there might be more of them in the city than I originally thought, so we’ve gotta, you know, pack up and move inns. And everyone’s like, “Great,” and goes to do that. I don’t really think anything substantive happens. It’s just the usual, you know –

Sally: Blah blah blah, isn’t it so funny when women are in charge and are mean to men?

Emily: Yeah, and Rand being like, “Nynaeve’s insane,” and no one being like, “Rand, you’re insane.”

Sally: “You’re insane –” Did you have anything else you wanted to add about Nynaeve and Alivia being competitive with each other?

Emily: No, I think I just –

Sally: I don’t know if I cut your thought off.

Emily: I think I just – that was it. Nynaeve is clearly wary of Alivia.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So’s Min. I don’t think Min has had – or has she? I don’t think Min has had the viewing yet that Alivia is going to, quote, “help Rand die –”

Sally: Mm.

Emily: But she does have that viewing later, and then she hates Alivia’s guts. I – as interesting a character as I find Alivia, I also think she is not serving much of a function either here or elsewhere in the series, especially for someone who is attached to such an important prophecy as –

Sally: Well –

Emily: Being involved in Rand’s death at all.

Sally: Yeah, and Alivia is also, up to this point, really, the, like, one Seanchan character we see that is so deeply anti the Seanchan empire – this is the same character, right? Alivia?

Emily: Yeah –

Sally: Who was a damane?

Emily: Alivia was a damane for many, many years; she’s very old.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, and she has been successfully deprogrammed – or, successfully, as we who have read the entire series know because Alivia never betrays anyone. But some characters, like Nynaeve, are still wary.

Sally: Yeah, and it's like, that is, to me, a person who is very anti the Seanchan having any points of view at all, Alivia is the Seanchan character that would be of most value and interest to give more depth and points of view to.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: As someone who's like, "What am I going to do to take down this horrific imperialist force?" But instead, she's just another woman for our main female characters to hate. So.

Emily: Yeah, it seems more, really, like she's just added to Rand's coterie the way that he is adding representatives from every major culture –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Into his coterie. He usually has some Aiel around. He usually – at this point, he's going to start having some Sea Folk people around –

Sally: Mm. Mm-hmm.

Emily: At random. Um, now he's got a random Seanchan woman, and it's just like, to just emphasize his world conqueror-ness. And the idea that he has to work with all of these cultures in order to get anything done, which is, as we have said many times, um, a gross point when it comes to the Seanchan.

Sally: Yeah. Yeah.

Emily: But speaking of the Sea Folk, we switch points of view over to, uh, Shalon – that's how I'm going to say her name – who is a Windfinder with the Sea Folk. Um, there's a big Sea Folk – just to, like, recap – there's a big Sea Folk ship in Cairhien that's just been anchored in the river. Um, in the last book, some of the Aes Sedai succeeded in creating a bargain with the Sea Folk, which they started out on pretty good terms because Rand was there, doing ta'veren stuff, but then he left randomly, leaving the Aes Sedai alone, and so now there's a more equitable bargain, I would argue. Um. But, like, one part of the bargain that concerns Harine, who is the main lady, as well as Shalon's younger sister, um, is that she should be allowed to, like, be near Rand, part of his coterie as well. Or, I guess in her point of view, he'd be part of her coterie.

Sally: Yeah. She's collecting the Dragon Reborn, not the other way around.

Emily: Um, so she's, like, constantly making these demands to see Rand. And for some god-forsaken reason, Cadsuane has gone along with this – Cadsuane has never, in our experience, you know, allowed people to do what they want or been like, "I'm going to compromise or do whatever –" You know, I don't know why she's allowing the Sea Folk to go with her here. It makes zero sense. But she does, for some reason.

Sally: I know. Another part of Far Madding that's really weird and frustrating is, like, in a series that is kind of so insistent on showing us all the steps between point A and point B – like, we get so much talking about traveling and so much traveling and so much discussion of destinations, even when it's, like, shrouded in mystery, like the fake-out with Illian at the end of, um, Crown of Swords. There's, like, absolutely no connection between the last time we saw Cadsuane, at the beginning of this book, and then her coming to Far Madding. There's, like, no connective tissue there.

Emily: I think – yeah, I agree that there is not enough blatant connective tissue –

Sally: I mean, like, I know she's going after Rand; da da da da da.

Emily: Right.

Sally: But it's not, like, as explicit as it normally is.

Emily: Yeah. Normally we would get, like, a whole planning stage.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Here, we are in Shalon's point of view, so we're not even in a character's point of view who can have, like, a little sentence like, "And eventually Cadsuane realized that Alanna can pinpoint on a map where Rand is –"

Sally: Yep.

Emily: "And we can go to there." You know?

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: We don't even get that, so we're just kind of left to, uh, make those intuitive leaps ourselves. Which, generally, is fine if you are not coddling your reader, uh, but Robert Jordan has a habit of coddling his readers.

Sally: Yeah, and it just makes it feel like – (laugh) It feels like a wild swing to the other end of the pendulum, where I'm not given enough information for once.

Emily: Oh, yeah, Robert Jordan is either not giving us enough information or giving us way too much information.

Sally: Yeah, and it's like, you can settle in the middle here. Like, I – I personally am an idiot, but the reader, generally, as a concept, can put this together and know what's going on; you don't have to spoon-feed us information. But you do need to, like, set the table for us. (laugh)

Emily: Yeah. "Here it is: the plot."

Sally: Yeah. So – but we are in Shalon's point of view. Shalon, for reference, is the Sea Folk woman that Rand tied up at the end of Crown of Swords.

Emily: Yeah, at the end of Path of Daggers –

Sally: Sorry, Path of Daggers.

Emily: When the rogue Asha'man were attacking, he walked into a room and found Shalon and Ailil, who's a Cairhienin woman, um, in the same room – not, like, in flagrante or anything, but in this book, I guess, Cadsuane or someone, we've been told, that Shalon and Ailil are having an affair. And we referenced earlier that Cadsuane would be blackmailing both of them into compliance with this affair, which is, of course, very annoying, because it's just queer women getting punished for being queer. Um, so Shalon has that hanging over her head –

Sally: Yeah. RIP.

Emily: Um, and – which is basically why she's going along with anything, although of course Harine is in charge, so she sort of has to do what Harine says. Um, and nothing, like, major happens in Shalon's point of view. They Travel outside of the city; they go into the city, which is where we sort of get our explicit, um, explanation of the ter'angreal and the stedding effect; um, and they enter the city, which is where we get the explanation of the peace-bonding and the pacifism of the city; and then that's it. That's where we leave that point of view. Um, so the bulk of Shalon's point of view in this is just sort of running down the roster of who is here, the million and a half Aes Sedai who are following in either Cadsuane's wake or Rand's. And Shalon, as an outsider, sort of interpreting those various groups and not understanding, um, and – I don't know, the thing that struck me most was that this is what feels like our first Sea Folk point of view –

Sally: Mm.

Emily: Um, and it is reminiscent, to me, of some Aiel points of view that we've had previously. We've noted that in the very – the relatively few points of view that we get from the Aiel – usually Aviendha – Robert Jordan has a habit of, um, making them seem stupid.

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

Emily: You know, he is trying to show us cultural differences. If we're – if we're giving him the benefit of the doubt here, he is just trying to show us that cultures are different, but then what he is doing is making Aviendha and, here, Shalon, seem like an idiot.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: You know? Like, they're always afraid of horses, and they can't ride – which, like, of course, yeah, Shalon probably can't ride, but you don't need to, like, be reminding us of it every minute.

Sally: Yeah, it's also like, I –

Emily: She doesn't know what the word "clearing" is.

Sally: I'm also so annoyed with Robert Jordan's, like, obsession with the fact that the Aiel and the Sea Folk can't ride horses. Like, yes, being an experienced rider is one thing, but just, like, getting on a horse and riding it is not an extremely difficult thing.

Emily: Yeah, I could do it when I was seven, so.

Sally: Yeah, like, it's not – like, 'kay, maybe they're not gonna be the best riders in the world; they're not gonna be able to chase someone down on horseback. But they're gonna be able to, like, sit in a saddle.

Emily: It feels like one of his ways by which he humiliates women –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Because there are no men characters who have, uh, trouble riding.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, if the men –

Sally: True.

Emily: You know, we never see Gaul on a horse, I don't believe. He just runs alongside, or Loial carries him bridal style. (laugh) But, like, um, a lot of our most insufferable female characters, including a lot of the Sea Folk and, like, Siuan, have trouble riding.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: So it's just sort of Robert Jordan being like, "Oh, here's a way to, quote, humanize them," which, in Robert Jordan speak, means humiliate them.

Sally: I don't know why I'm, like, so deep in this type of discourse today, but I also think there could be something to be said with the fact that Shalon is a canonically queer woman, Aviendha and Siuan are deeply queer-coded women –

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: And the fact that they have trouble riding –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Is certainly something, isn't it?

Emily: Um,, yeah, it sure feels that way. We're – we also get an allusion here, by the way, to, um, apparently Cadsuane in her last scene was like, "Spank the – spank Harine if she misbehaves," to one of the Aes Sedai –

Sally: Oh, yeah.

Emily: And apparently that Aes Sedai – Sarene – went through on that threat if, um, Harine's behavior is at all indicative, which is just yet another example of Robert Jordan being like, "Ha ha, isn't it funny when women get spanked? Especially when they're doing it to each other, oh my God."

Sally: It's so titillating.

Emily: It's so – so sexy, especially because Sarene is canonically one of our most beautiful characters. Who doesn't know she's beautiful.



Sally: (scoff)

Emily: And also, you know – I don't know, I sort of think Sarene would be an interesting character, um, to do a reading of her being on the spectrum.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Um, but I don't believe that's what Robert Jordan's intent was.

Sally: No. No, no, no, no, no. I don't think so either.

Emily: I think if you brought your best reading intentions to this, you could be like, "Oh, here's someone who has Asperger's or is on the spectrum." Um. Not because she's hyper-rational or anything like that; that's just sort of the way she behaves around other people. Sorry; I'm not trying to make stereotypes.

Sally: No, but I – I think – I think you're making valid points.

Emily: Um, but Robert Jordan, I seriously doubt, had that in mind. He just sort of wanted to make Sarene look awkward and incapable of social interaction or understanding social currents.

Sally: Yeah, no, I don't know if I'm gonna totally make this bridge, but I think with a lot of the White Ajah, which I believe Sarene is part of –

Emily: Yes, the – the logical – people.

Sally: There is that, like, hyper-rationalization that Robert Jordan is playing into, which happens to be equated with stereotypes of people who have autism. Um, and so I think Robert Jordan is perhaps unintentionally but still playing into those stereotypes when he's presenting characters like this; you get a lot of really destructive stereotypes around that.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: I don't know. I'm not – I don't know if I'm quite getting at my point here, but it feels like something that is a destructive representation without –

Emily: Even being representation, yeah.

Sally: Yeah, yeah. Exactly.

Emily: But yeah, those are – those are the main points. Shalon doesn't like not being able to channel. She's like, "It's fine," at first, and then by the end she's having a meltdown, so. Um. I don't know, women are unstable and emotional, what do you want? She's probably on her period.

Sally: Ugh.

Emily: (laugh)

Sally: Some of the Asha'man are also with us.

Emily: Some of the Asha'man are also with us because they have been bonded as Warders, so. Doo ba doo. Damer Flinn, Narishma, and Eben.

Sally: Narishma, my beloved.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Damer Flinn, my beloved.

Emily: Eben, who – who I don't really feel anything about.

Sally: Yeah, I'm like, "Hi."

Emily: He's just sort of there. Spoiler alert, he dies at the end of this book, so – (laugh)

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Doesn't do much.

Sally: So. We're just losing Asha'man one after one after one.

Emily: Um, but that's, I guess, it from Far Madding for now. Far Madding, by the way, is a reference to the title of the Thomas Hardy novel, "Far from the Madding Crowd," which itself comes from a poem, called "Elegy in a Church Courtyard" or something. It's a very long poem; I remember seeing it in a – an English, uh, textbook when I was in high school and still really into Wheel of Time and being like, "That looks familiar."

Sally: "Far from the what now?"

Emily: "Far from the what?" Um. And I don't – I don't have any further comment on that except that Robert Jordan was pulling from literature. I don't know, thematically, what either of those works really –

Sally: Yeah, I don't know – I don't know if I've ever read any Thomas Hardy.

Emily: I wouldn't.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Seems pretty boring.

Sally: I mean, he wrote "Tess of the d'Urbervilles," right?

Emily: D'Urbervilles, yeah.

Sally: And that's, like, Anastasia Steele's favorite book in Fifty Shades of Gray, so I, like, cannot bring myself – (laugh) to read it.

Emily: Oh, boy, yeah, don't – don't trust it.

Sally: Um, but that is interesting. I did not – I had no idea. I thought Far Madding was just, like, a fun name. So.

Emily: Yeah, and again, I don't really know thematically if it means anything, um, or, if it does, what it means, but it's there. If you know, I guess, you're welcome to tell us. That's it, though. Do you have anything to add?

Sally: No. (yawn) Excuse me.

Emily: Okey dokey.

Sally: No, I've said enough.

Emily: Um, then we'll leave there. Um, thanks to Glynna MacKenzie for our theme song. Thank you to our patrons on Patreon and our followers on social media. Um, we're gonna be taking an off week next week just because Sally's out of town, so we won't have a chance to record –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, but we'll be back two weeks from today, if you're listening to this on the Monday that it's released; uh, back with more Far Madding content. (sing-song) Doo da doo.

Sally: Straight from Winter's Fart.

Emily: Straight from Winter's Fart. I guess my sign-off is that a fly did indeed get into our house today, 'cause a maintenance guy had to come and paint something. Um, and for fully, like, an hour and a half, it was driving Tybalt absolutely bananas, which happens every time he spots an insect –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But, um, it was – (laugh) really killing me. He, like, eventually had it cornered –

Sally: Oh, no.

Emily: In one of the windows, and kept swatting it, and I kept thinking that he had actually successfully, like, grabbed it –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: In his little paw, and I'd, like, get up 'cause I was afraid he was gonna eat it. And eventually, I just put the poor fly out of its misery 'cause I felt like he was being tormented by this –

Sally: Tormented.

Emily: Giant creature. I didn't have a fly swatter, so I had to use an Agatha Christie novel.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Now I have a fly swatter. I went out and bought – (laugh)

Sally: Emily was like, "Never again, Agatha."

Emily: Yeah. Poor Agatha. Um, that's it. Not very exciting –

Sally: Well, it's, like –

Emily: But summer is starting, I guess.

Sally: Tybalt's history with insects – first the cricket that he mysteriously brought –

Emily: Oh my God, yeah.

Sally: Upstairs. The fly that he was tormenting.

Emily: He really is a terror to –

Sally: Yeah, to the whole insect population.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: They're – they're gonna tell tales of him.

Emily: (laugh) Of the monster. The beast.

Sally: The monster. The beast of Gevaudan. That's Tybalt.

Emily: The beast of Gevaudan – okay, everyone.

Sally: Goodbye.

Emily: Teen Wolf movie comes out –

Sally: Oh, I forgot about the Teen Wolf movie!

Emily: Goodbye!

Sally: Ahhh!