



Episode 212: Birds or Death
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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)

Sally: Our, like, brand kit is very cute; like, I like the little housing graphics that they designed and –

Emily: Yeah, mm. Cute.

Sally: All the colors are really nice, but as usual, our mission statement is pretty hokey. But mission statements usually are.

Emily: I don't even know if we have a mission statement.

Sally: I think it's –

Emily: All I know is we have a big, bronze statue in the lobby of the founder with his ventriloquist puppet. I made Austin go and look at it on our first day. (laugh)

Sally: How is this the first time I'm hearing of this?

Emily: I don't think about it all that much.

Sally: I wouldn't either.

Emily: I try not to.

Sally: I'd be like, "Repress, repress, repress, repress."

Emily: I'm like – (gagging noise) It's so nasty and weird.

Sally: Um –

Emily: It's like how we had a giant bronze statue of a caveman –

Sally: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Emily: In the front hall of American Fork High School, and his knee was all shiny from everyone patting it, 'cause it kind of, like, stuck out.

Sally: Mm.

Emily: So everyone would just sort of pat him –

Sally: Hmm. That's wholesome.

Emily: On the way in, yeah.

Sally: Um, yeah, I think mission statements are – I don't know of many, like, for-profit entities that have mission statements. It's a pretty non-profit – I mean, I think you aren't, like, required –

Emily: Non-profit ...

Sally: To have a mission statement.

Emily: Esque.

Sally: Um. Yeah, so.

Emily: That makes sense.

Sally: They're just always like, "We are here to change the world." It's like –

Emily: And I'm like, okay, tall order.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: You can just be like, "I'm here to make some small but important changes –"

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: You know, "in some very specific people's lives."

Sally: Yes. And that's a good enough thing to do.

Emily: That's good enough, people.

Sally: We don't need to –

Emily: No, this is America.

Sally: Save all the birds.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Or build all the houses.

Emily: Or die. (laugh)

Sally: Save all the birds or die. You only have two options.

Emily: (gun noises, laugh)

Sally: Birds or death.

Emily: Birds or death!

Sally: Death!

Emily: Death! Um, I'd like to apologize for the following: someone's doing yard work, as usual –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: In the distance, so that might be getting picked up. Um, I sound a little funny, though less funny than I probably did the last couple days –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: 'Cause I have a cold, so that'll be nice. Um, but you know what? We're – we're in our twilight years. And I don't mean that because we're talking about Crossroads of Twilight.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: I just mean, like, we're winding down, you know? Our apex was – what do you think was our – our high point?

Sally: Our – for the podcast –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Or, like, in general?

Emily: (laugh) Gee, well –

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: I won't make you confess to your life's high point on the podcast.

Sally: Um.

Emily: I'm trying to, like ... was it maybe the end of Fires of Heaven? I felt pretty good then.

Sally: Yeah. Yeah, Fires of Heaven is a really fun one.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Um, every – like, I – I hate to think we peaked in book three, but –

Emily: Yeah, everything in –

Sally: The Stone of Tear sequence is so good.

Emily: Everything in book three is so – well, it's not us who peaked in book three. It's Robert Jordan who peaked in book three.

Sally: You're right, you're right. Um.

Emily: I've been trying to maintain the same level of contact – content, but Robert Jordan isn't letting me.

Sally: Yeah, so maybe book three or book five. Definitely not this book or Winter's Fart, that's for sure.

Emily: Yeah, these books suck. And I – it doesn't get better.

Sally: It sure doesn't.

Emily: Maybe we'll have, like, a – a ninth – an eleventh hour, um, comeback at the end of A Memory of Light, but so far I'm just thinking, like, this is the long haul before the sweet embrace of death. (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) Yeah.

Emily: Where every single chapter is bad!

Sally: Yeah, they're just, like, a little difficult to slog – just, like, a lot difficult to slog through.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Um –

Emily: You were like, "Don't even read that chapter," and I was like, "Bestie, I will not."

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: I sort of did. I skimmed it.

Sally: Oh, I forgot to look at my blogs for these chapters. Oh, well. I'm sure they didn't say anything of importance because –

Emily: Well – yeah, because, what is there to be said about this?

Sally: What's there to say?

Emily: This is Everybody Hates Rand. It's a friendly neighborhood Wheel of Time podcast. I'm Emily Juchau.

Sally: And I'm Sally Goodger.

Emily: And I just noticed that the paper chain is completely gone.

Sally: The paper chain is all gone.

Emily: Like, I saw you take it off on the Instagram –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But then I didn't connect that to a real-life location in my house.

Sally: Yeah. (laugh)

Emily: So.

Sally: Yeah, there's just the little –

Emily: How exciting.

Sally: Little holes I made with my little tacks.

Emily: Now what is there to live for?

Sally: Yeah, I mean, the paper chain – I – I mean this quite sincerely: the paper chain was a huge part of me being mentally able to finish Knife of Dreams.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Sometimes you just need a visualization, you know?

Emily: We could do, like, a paper chain that's like, um, for every point of view in that big-ass chapter in –

Sally: Oh, Memory of Light.

Emily: A Memory of Light.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: It'd be so long, but –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: That's how we'd get through that chapter.

Sally: Yeah. Maybe we'll do that. Paper chains are pretty fun, I think.

Emily: Yeah, paper chains are nice and fun. Um. So this is the last – oh, I wish it was the last Elayne chapter, period, but unfortunately, it's not, even in this book, I think. Can't remember. Maybe it is the last one in this book.

Sally: I can't remember what happens in the rest of Crossroads of Twilight.

Emily: It's the last chapter for a while with Elayne, and then we switch to a long chapter that's just the points of view of various bad guys who are doing bad things in Caemlyn. Which, like, we'll just say this: if you care at all about the subplot in Caemlyn, then I guess those, um, points of view are important for keeping track of what is going on behind the scenes, but if you do not care about what's going on in Caemlyn or have thus far been giving it your best shot but still can't keep track of what's going on, then they aren't going to help you, you know?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So just skip them. Do yourself a favor.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: They're so annoying. Anyway, we open with Elayne and her little triad of lady advisors, Aviendha, Birgitte, and Dyelin – I can't think of a – her, like, Weird Sisters, as it were. The Morrigan.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Well, I don't know. That's giving them too much credit. Um, receiving Reese Harfor and Halwin Norry as they make their reports about the goings-on in the palace. And they're pretty much the same as they have been for the last few times. Like, no shade on Reese Harfor and Halwin Norry –

Sally: No, never.

Emily: Who are doing the backbreaking labor of keeping a country actually moving while Elayne is distracted with her nonsense.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Like, here's a hot take: I don't think an Aes Sedai should ever be a queen because what is her priority? The White Tower or her country?

Sally: Yeah, it seems like a massive conflict of interest, if you ask me.

Emily: Yeah, and Elayne is, like, proving that.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Where half the time she's like, "I can't worry about running Andor because I have to worry about, like, making a bargain with the Sea Folk or – in a way –" I mean, I know the last one was, like, about the – Andor – but, like, she's constantly having to do things for the betterment of the Aes Sedai and Egg.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So anyway. That's my hot take.

Sally: I think it's an extremely hot take.

Emily: Um, but –

Sally: And a correct take.

Emily: Reese Harfor's like, "We found more spies," and everyone's like, "Oh my God, how dare you keep finding more spies," and she's like, "Do you want me to not look for spies?" (laugh)

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: It's like, obviously, just – it's not Reese Harfor's fault that there are so many spies.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Like, maybe there would be fewer spies if you paid them a better wage or something. I don't know.

Sally: Yeah, everyone's gotta have a side hustle these days.

Emily: Yeah. Jesus.

Sally: Everyone at the palace at Caemlyn is making \$7.25 an hour.

Emily: Yeah, they're quiet quitting by also –

Sally: (laugh, gagging noise)

Emily: Also talking to bad guys. Being like, "Oh, by the way –" Anyway, this guy was a spy for the Brown Ajah, and everyone's just like, "Okay," and Elayne's like, "Let's just find out more information and then we'll do something about it." And then Reese Harfor also is like, "Oh, and I also confronted one of our first spies we found and have, like, persuaded him to turn –"

Sally: Turncoat.

Emily: Double agent. Triple agent? I guess that would be triple agent. I can't keep track. But basically he's been reporting to Arymilla's squad outside of the city, and they're like, "We want you to go there to report but actually gather information for us," and once again, everyone's all mad at Reese Harfor for taking matters into her own hands and doing a normal, responsible, managerial thing to do.

Sally: Right.

Emily: And Elayne's like, "I can't, like, call her out because then she would just make my life miserable," and I'm like, she's patently making your life better.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: What would you have done differently?

Sally: Yeah, it's this –

Emily: Micromanage her? That's it?

Sally: Yeah, it's this very weird moment, like, kind of loaded with class warfare –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: About Elayne being like, "You have to let servants – you have to let servants do their role, otherwise they'll ruin your life," and it's like – your life. What am I saying? Your life.

Emily: Your life. (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) It's just so weird. She's like, "There would be, like, a hundred inconveniences that would ruin my day," and it's like, one, I don't actually think Reese Harfor is that petty. I think the woman can take criticism and –

Emily: If it's valid criticism.

Sally: If it's valid. Sure. I – and I also just think that she's, like, got better things to do than ruin your life, Elayne, like actually run Andor, but whatever.

Emily: Yeah, Elayne, you're perfectly capable of ruining your own life.

Sally: Yeah. And it's also just like, Elayne just being like, "We – I'm –" There's also, like – she's not saying anything, but she lets, like, Birgitte and Dyelin, like, take Reese Harfor to task about this –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: And it's like, you asked her to manage your spy problem, so she's managing your spy problem.

Emily: She's actually going above and beyond the call of duty.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: I'd be like, wow. Commendation.

Sally: I know. It's just a really weird moment where, like, Elayne always has to be right, is what's happening here with Robert Jordan writing her –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Elayne always has to be correct; nobody else can do a good job at politics.

Emily: And just, like, all these noble, higher-class – our main characters, for lack of a better word –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Are like, "I can delegate tasks, but only menial labor."

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: "If it's something that I think could be important in some plot-relevant way later, then I have to be in charge."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: It's annoying.

Sally: And it's just like, yeah, let your employees do their fucking job.

Emily: Anyway, Halwin Norry's big news is that, um, Arymilla and the other bad guys who are besieging Caemlyn have taken out a bunch of loans via banks, and it is predicted that they will try and use this money to bribe some of the mercenary soldier units that are currently guarding Caemlyn into either betraying Caemlyn or just switching sides.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Either of which would be bad. And Birgitte and Dyelin are like, "See, Elayne? Told you we shouldn't have hired mercenaries," and Elayne's like, "Well ... (inaudible mumbling)." And it's like, okay, I don't know what the point of that was. Like, they have this dumb little war council, just the four of them –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: They're like, "We have to have it in secret behind wards," and I'm like, no offense, but none of you is qualified to be running a war council.

Sally: It's also just, like, this exact problem could have been prevented if you just accepted the trained army that Rand was offering you to defend Caemlyn.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Like, once again – once again, we come up against a perfectly avoidable problem.

Emily: Yeah, this whole – this whole thing is so avoidable.

Sally: Mercenaries did not have to be involved at all, in fact.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: But what do I know?

Emily: You guys don't even, like, need to be under siege, really. This problem would be so easy to take care of.

Sally: Mm-hmm. You're so right, though. The – the four of them having this, like, war council, making these decisions, is, like, maybe Birgitte is qualified –

Emily: Yeah, well –

Sally: You know?

Emily: I would say Birgitte is qualified. Um, Birgitte is definitely qualified to offer advice, and, like, she does, to a certain extent, know what she's talking about, because she's lived through a lot of, like, military, um, events and combat, but, like, she also has been saying non-stop over – all the time that she doesn't want to be doing this.

Sally: You're right. You're right. You got me.

Emily: And that she doesn't feel comfortable doing it. So, like, I wouldn't want to put my army in the hands of someone who's like, "No, I – I absolutely should not be doing this."

Sally: Right.

Emily: You know? I do think she's, like, downrating herself a little bit, but she – she – the woman's lived for thousands of years; she probably knows what her strong points are.

Sally: Yeah, it's just also a very weird situation in Caemlyn because it's not like there's a – it's not like there really is a person in charge of the military.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: It's like, sometimes Birgitte; it's sometimes this guy named Charlz.

Emily: Oh, yeah, Charlz.

Sally: Who I think we're going to meet at some point, if we – I don't think we've met him yet.

Emily: Guybon.

Sally: Yeah, Guybon. Sometimes he's in charge; sometimes Elayne is in charge. And it's like –

Emily: Who's – what's the structure here?

Sally: No – no wonder you're having such a big problem with this siege. Like, there's nobody who is – there's no one head capable –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Of just, like, making decisions.

Emily: Yeah. If Gawyn were here, would he be in charge? I don't know.

Sally: I think so. I think Gawyn would be in charge, and it's like –

Emily: But are they just, like –

Sally: Not ideal, but at least there'd be one person. (laugh)

Emily: They're like, "We just don't have him, so we're just going to fall apart completely."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: How annoying.

Sally: It's very bizarre that, like, Elayne can't even make the decision to be like, "You are in charge of the military, person," this person, whoever it is.

Emily: We don't – we just don't know. We don't know. Out of the millions of details that Robert Jordan has chosen to dispense about the Caemlyn subplot, he has not given us this piece of information. Um, they also discuss how the Borderlanders are moving very slowly in their quest to, as Elayne told them, move into Andor and freak out everyone in Andor enough to give Elayne the throne, which I maintain is a stupid plan.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: They're like, "Shouldn't Borderlanders be able to move more in the winter?" and they're like, "It looks like they're wintering down." Like, they are stopping for the winter. And I'm like, shouldn't you have, like, had this conversation when you met with the Borderlanders? Be like, "Okay, how fast are you going to move? What is your projected rate?" And then, if it was like, "Oh, you're not going to move fast enough for us, here, we'll set you up with five teleporters." Or whatever.

Sally: Right.

Emily: It's just so nonsensical. I guess they really don't want to teach the Borderlanders how to teleport because then, I don't know, they might actually find Rand. (laugh) Which is still not your problem.

Sally: It's – it really is such a weird plot.

Emily: Um, also, some of the other heads of houses, like, the ones that want Dyelin to be queen, are, like, moving into Andor, and no one knows where they're going to go, so that's a cause of stress for Elayne, I emphasize, not for me. I don't give a shit what happens to these people.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, and then one of the Wise Ones comes in with Sumeko, who's one of the insufferable members of the Kin, who's, like, good at Healing.

Sally: Mm-hmm

Emily: And they're there to do Elayne's midwife stuff.

Sally: Midwifery.

Emily: Midwifery. They're do to – they're there to do a prenatal check-up.

Sally: Right.

Emily: Um, which seems like a really odd time to do that, in the middle of the work day, basically in Elayne's office, but who am I to cast aspersions? (laugh) Working women, I guess.

Sally: (laugh) Yeah.

Emily: Girls do get it done.

Sally: (scoff)

Emily: Um, but they basically are just, like, doing a fancy form of channeling to check on – it's like an ultrasound, basically.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Magic ultrasound and far, far in advance of when a normal ultrasound would –

Sally: Yeah, Elayne's been pregnant for, like, a week and a half or whatever.

Emily: Yeah. Um – yeah, it’s still only been, like, three weeks. It’s so stupid. Like, um, what’s her name? The Wise One is like, “Oh, you have two babies,” and luckily – if the Wise One had been like, “You have two babies, and they’re a boy and a girl,” I would’ve been like, there is no way –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: That these babies – that these fetuses are far enough in their development to have gender characteristics.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Like, what the fuck.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Anyway. I – I don’t even – I don’t know how gestation works for twins, but I am even – it’s even stretching my disbelief that they can tell that there’s twins, you know?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But the Wise One is like, “Okay, so you won’t have morning sickness –” She calls it birthing sickness, because this is a fantasy text, so we have to change everything slightly. She’s like, “You won’t be nauseous and whatnot, but you’ll have a hard time channeling, and, like, it’ll get harder and harder as you get into your pregnancy, but basically the second you pop those suckers out – (popping noise) – channeling’s back on.”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: “And you’ll have major mood swings and be super mad, and the dad of your babies better stay out of your way,” and Sumeko’s like, “Yeah, I heard she already bit his head off earlier today,” about Elayne calling out what’s his – Hatchet Face –

Sally: Hatchet Face.

Emily: For doing a bad thing in his job.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Which is just like, someone should kill Sumeko –

Sally: She’s an asshole.

Emily: Is all I’m saying. Yeah. She’s such a bitch. Um, but anyway, this whole, like, chain of, like, special channeling lady pregnancy symptoms really seem manufactured on Robert Jordan’s part to –

Sally: Totally.

Emily: Once again make Elayne as, like, weirdly vulnerable as possible while still allowing her to think that she’s invincible.

Sally: Totally.

Emily: It's like, you'll sometimes have problems channeling, but sometimes it'll be fine, and I'm like, wow, well, I can't wait to see what situations Robert Jordan will manufacture where Elayne should be able to channel, but just at that moment, her hormones are out of whack or whatever, so she can't channel. Like, stupid.

Sally: Yeah, I also take a lot of issue with the idea that, like, channeling – excuse me – channeling is only a problem, um, while you are actively carrying the children.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Like, I would – I would buy it more – I think it's a ridiculously manufactured plot in general that women either lose or gain magic while they are pregnant in, like, um, large quantities. You know, either become way more powerful when you're pregnant or you totally lose power when you're pregnant. I think that's a weird, um, trope that we see. But I would buy it if it was more, like, something about your hormones is affecting your channeling, so, like, it will perhaps last through while you are breastfeeding or whatever –

Emily: Mm. Yeah.

Sally: You know, not just, like, the idea that while you are actively pregnant –

Emily: But then Robert Jordan would have to actively understand hormonal cycles.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Including the fact that women's – including the fact that literally all people's channeling abilities would then fluctuate based on hormones –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Not just ladies'.

Sally: Totally.

Emily: Dudes' hormones fluctuate also. Like –

Sally: Yeah. That would be really interesting.

Emily: It would be interesting. Too bad Robert Jordan didn't know shit. (laugh)

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: He just was like, “Um, I just wanna, you know, like, make everything more dangerous and hard for Elayne so I can continue threatening her with rape.”

Sally: You're so right, though. Because, like – I mean, you're so right about Robert Jordan being like, “Let's make Elayne vulnerable for, mm, no reason, really –”

Emily: Mm-hmmn.

Sally: Um, but also, like – I also further don't buy it because then why don't – why doesn't your menstrual cycle affect your –

Emily: Yeah, exactly.

Sally: Your channeling? That – but that would require Robert Jordan to talk about periods in the text.

Emily: Which he has done once.

Sally: Which would be grody! Ew! (laugh)

Emily: I know. He's only done it once to be like, "This is what – how BFFs Elayne and Birgitte are. Their cycles match."

Sally: "Their cycles match. But I'm not going to talk about any of that stuff. You know."

Emily: I also think it's so annoying that he specified that, like, "You'll have major mood swings." 'Cause, like, first of all, mood swings are also linked to hormones –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So that's just sort of an intrinsic part of pregnancy anyway.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But also, it really feels like Robert Jordan being like, "Now I can write Elayne even crazier than she already is."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: "And make it funny because she's pregnant."

Sally: Yeah, I also – it's just – I mean – I keep saying "I also think," but it's, like, this – I just feel like pregnant women get it real hard in the media anyway. Everyone loves to be like, "They're just so bitchy and volatile and they're just so tired all the dang time," and it's like, yeah, they're – their body is going through something, like, absolutely bananas.

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: Like, there is a person growing inside of their body.

Emily: It's terrifying.

Sally: It's terrifying. It's exhausting. It does really bizarre things to your body and your hormones, including affect your moods, and that can be really frustrating for the people around you, but, like, whenever anybody has a mood swing, it's frustrating for the people around them, even if you just have a bad day and you, like, snap at somebody. That's frustrating and unfair, you know. It's not just pregnant women who do this. Just because it might happen a little bit more frequently isn't a reason to, like, mock them.

Emily: No, I mean, in Robert Jordan's mind, women are just –

Sally: You're right.

Emily: Open – it's open season on women.

Sally: Open season on women.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Ha ha, women are so ridiculous.

Emily: The LEAST dangerous game. Heh heh heh.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: They're women. THEY don't know how to hunt.

Sally: All the women go to a Sephora and hunt each other. It's not an abandoned island. Everyone's in the Sephora. (laugh)

Emily: The least dangerous game is a man hunting women on an island, but that's just, like, literally how men operate, so. (laugh)

Sally: It's not a game. It's real life. (laugh)

Emily: In real life, yeah. Just a man cruising in his fucking –

Sally: In his fucking Ford F-150 –

Emily: In his fucking Tesla.

Sally: In his Tesla. (laugh) He's cruising.

Emily: Oh, God.

Sally: The least dangerous game. Oh my goodness.

Emily: Any fucking way. (laugh) Um, then the midwives leave because one of the guards run in with the big news that, um, one of the Sea Folk apprentices is missing, and so is Merilille. And they're like, "Oh my God. We have to find Merilille and the Sea Folk apprentice," so the meeting is broken up, and I meant to go on Wikipedia and be like, "Is this relevant at all?" but I don't think it is.

Sally: Um, yeah, I don't think so. I do think Merilille and the apprentice left together, because this is the same apprentice, I believe, that, like, accosted Nynaeve about –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Wanting to go to the white Tower.

Emily: And was just like, "Get me out of here."

Sally: Um, and I think Merilille is also pretty desperate for an escape at the moment, so.

Emily: Yeah, 'cause she's in a very abusive situation.

Sally: But I don't know that – I don't know if it comes back to be anything. It hasn't to the best of my recollection in Knife of Dreams.

Emily: They haven't reappeared in Knife of Dreams? Yeah, I think it's literally just like, Robert Jordan needed a reason for that scene to end. Like, it's not like Merilille and this random Windfinder gal are going to come back in A Memory of Light and be like, "We have, on our travels, gained some important intel."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: They just, like, literally walk off the map.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: So simply no reason for this. And honestly, I don't blame them.

Sally: I would also want to leave Caemlyn.

Emily: Yeah, I would also be like –

Sally: Very badly.

Emily: "Oh, I can teleport? Goodbye."

Sally: Yeah. See ya.

Emily: Uh, that's when we switch over to Elenia. I don't know how to –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: I'll probably say her name six different ways in the next ten minutes. Um, Elenia is in Arymilla's camp. Here's the bare bones of the plot we get: Elenia and Naeon are the two Houses that everyone expected would actually make, like, attempts for the throne. It's very weird that instead they are supporting Arymilla.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: It becomes very obvious that Arymilla is coercing them to help her.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Like, they've – Elenia's husband is not in the camp, but she's, like, been forced to write to him and be like, "Don't try and rescue me," and da da da da da. Um, everything about this camp is gross and disgusting. Um, Arymilla has a creepy – there's, like, some creepy lord who's running around who is elderly and both seems to be struggling with, um, senility but is also just, like, a total creep about harassing and assaulting women. Those two things can coexist. I don't know if it's really worth dissecting how Robert Jordan goes into it because this – he's such, like, a non-character. He's literally just, like, a – a cardboard cutout of sexual assault as a threat that Robert Jordan is thrusting at these women.

Sally: Yeah, I think – I do think it's worth saying just a couple of things.

Emily: Go for it.

Sally: And, um, mm – and you're totally right that this character is obviously dealing with some form of dementia. Um, is what I would kind of classify it as.

Emily: Yeah, sorry, I don't know if –

Sally: No, it's okay. I – I think, um – I think dementia is, like, the best blanket term –

Emily: Sure.

Sally: That we can use. I could be wrong, so correct me if I am, if anybody knows. But he's dealing with some form of dementia, so he doesn't have great memory recollection. Um, he gets confused very easily. He thinks or has been told that Elenia is his betrothed. Um, so he has either sort of, like, concocted this, which is a very real thing that happens; both my maternal grandparents had dementia, and they would concoct these sort of really bizarre, out-of-left-field stories. My grandmother, for a while, was convinced that she and one of my cousins were going on a riverboat in Manhattan, and she was very stressed that she was missing the plane. You know?

Emily: Yeah, gosh, I would be.

Sally: I would be too. Um, and just – but, like – and they lived in Louisiana, so, like, it – they were just these stories, you know? So, like, that's not outside of the realm of possibility. It is also not outside the realm of possibility for people to be aggressive when they have dementia. Also not outside the realm of possibility for them to be sexually aggressive –

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: Or to sexually harass people when they have dementia. Another thing that happens with dementia is that your sort of, like, social, um ...

Emily: Barriers?

Sally: Barriers, your sort of –

Emily: Inhibitions.

Sally: Yeah, your social inhibitions – you just are, like, a little bit looser with that. But it – I think it's really dangerous, actually, what Robert Jordan is presenting here, which is that, like, because this is one of the only elderly characters that we get, and certainly one of the only elderly characters that we get that's dealing with dementia, which is actually fairly common among – more common than you'd think, I think, among the elderly. Like, it's just the – it's the danger of the single story.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: You know? And it's just this idea that, um, people with dementia are to be feared; that they will ultimately have violent tendencies; that they are ultimately a danger to young women in

particular. And, again, none of these things are outside the realm of possibility; like, these things do happen. But I think it's really cruel to sort of smash these two characteristics together. And I'm not saying that Robert Jordan has never, um – Robert Jordan does this frequently, sort of smash characteristics together without any real thought, particularly to, like, how it's presenting a disability. Um, but I just think it's really cruel and really unkind when, like, people with dementia do deserve, um – they are also still people, you know? They are not being reduced to a single – we should not reduce them to a single thing. They are still people who have many facets to them and deserve rights and respect, and it's kind of really common to just portray people with dementia in the media as these, like, villainous things to be afraid of or to pity. So. I don't know if any of that is useful or valuable, but I think it's just a really unkind portrayal of what's happening, and, um, not very three-dimensional, but that's kind of disability throughout the Wheel of Time. So.

Emily: Yeah. And, like, what you said about there being very few elderly people in this text is interesting to me because what Robert Jordan has actively done with most of his elderly characters is negate any traits that might be more associated –

Sally: Mm.

Emily: With elderly bodies.

Sally: Mm.

Emily: Um, all of the Aes Sedai, who are hundreds of years old, look and behave like much younger women.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Thom is, like, eighty but is walking around like a spry 36-year-old.

Sally: Right. Totally.

Emily: Noal is also old, but his memory problems are linked more to tampering that has been done with his mind –

Sally: Right.

Emily: So we lose any opportunities there to make any meaningful connections to dementia or any other sort of disability that elderly people face.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And, like, Lini is still doing fucking hard labor –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Wherever she is. And being a total dick about it, but –

Sally: Right.

Emily: That's just Lini. Um, so, yeah, I don't know, Robert Jordan is just kind of – is like, "I like to pretend that inconvenient bodies don't exist –"

Sally: Yep.

Emily: "Until I can use them in a way that will threaten women somehow."

Sally: Yeah, that was a perfect thesis statement for the Wheel of Time, Emily. Um, you're so right. And it's just, like – 'cause that's exactly what this is. Like, it isn't – it would not be enough for this to be a, um, rapey dude running around Arymilla's camp. He has to be both old and struggling with dementia. These two things are supposed to make him further upsetting to the reader.

Emily: And comedic.

Sally: And comedic. You're so right. It's this very thin line of upsetting and comedic.

Emily: Yeah, like, what Robert Jordan has going on here is we have two characters, back to back, in – sorry, I can't even remember this guy's – Nasin, I want to say?

Sally: Yeah, Nasin.

Emily: Nasin – rhymes with Jason –

Sally: Blegh.

Emily: And Hatchetface. We get those two, back to back, and Hatchetface is a very creepy, very unfun –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Rapey character who is not particularly presented in a comedic light, I would say, except –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: When we are outside of his point of view.

Sally: Totally.

Emily: Um, Nasin is one hundred percent portrayed as comedic, even though we're in Elenia's point of view, and she does not view him as a figure of comedy. She views him as a, like, genuine threat to her person.

Sally: Right.

Emily: Um, but we, the readers, are supposed to be laughing at how Elenia, who's a bad guy, is in this bad situation.

Sally: Right.

Emily: And we're also supposed to be laughing because Elenia is herself such a dick; she says all these awful things about, um, you know, people who are in a lower class than her. Um, she casually threatens Naeon with, like, Arymilla's torturer –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Although Naeon also, um, threatens her back with Nasin. You know?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: They're just backbiting constantly. And just, like – she calls Arymilla stupid a thousand different ways, when it's like, if Arymilla was that stupid, would you be in this situation?

Sally: Right.

Emily: You know?

Sally: Right.

Emily: And I get all that, because what Robert Jordan loves to do with his female villain characters is be like, "Look how dumb they are; look how mockable they are; blah blah blah." But what I got while reading Elenia was, like, this is just Elayne.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: They're complete narrative foils to one another.

Sally: Right.

Emily: Their names even look alike.

Sally: Yep.

Emily: Elenia sounds like Elayne exactly with, like, one veneer of social inhibitions taken off.

Sally: Right.

Emily: You know, Elayne doesn't refer to "dirty peasants," but she does refer to "peasants" –

Sally: Right.

Emily: In a way that makes it clear that she disparages them and feels patronizing toward them.

Sally: Totally.

Emily: The same way Elenia does. So –

Sally: Totally.

Emily: Just wanted to say that. Um, but anyway, I don't know what – I just feel like Robert Jordan is deliberately putting – bracketing these sort of villainous points of view and deliberately putting a variety of, um, sexual ... criminals ... (laugh)

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: I don't know what the phrase is. Men who sexually assault women. And he's putting it around Caemlyn to make Elayne herself and the various female characters – because, remember, Elayne's war council is four women –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Which is unthinkable.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So he has to put this, like, threat surrounding them of men who will rape them.

Sally: Right.

Emily: I don't know, man. It's just pretty gross.

Sally: It is extremely gross. Um, and you're so right about, um – just, like, one further thought about, like, Nasin being, like, an old man and that supposed to be being funny, it's kind of this trope of, like, creepy old man at the nursing home who's always, like, played for laughs when he, like, slaps the nurse on the ass.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: But it's also the way in that, like, especially in, like, comedy movies and, like, raunchy comedy movies, like, fat people's sexuality is played off as a joke and, like, old people's sexuality is played off as a joke because, like, these are undesirable bodies, so isn't it funny that they have sexual impulses?

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Um, there's, like, a lot of other layers to that because Nasin is, um, sexually assaulting and sexually harassing women; he's not engaging in consensual sexual activities, but there's still that – so it's still part of this, like, undesirable body being played off as a joke because, like, why would he have any – ugh. Anyway. Um, but yeah, it's totally – and it's really frustrating that, like, truly – 'cause – truly at the center of this, if we think of Caemlyn as a circle, as we talked about – we always think of cities as a circle – at the center of this is this, like, young, beautiful, white –

Emily: Nubile.

Sally: Nubile, blondish woman being threatened with rape, whereas, like – rich, also, let's throw that in there. Whereas, like, all around her are these women with varying degrees of, like, lesser agency, whether that is, um, Elenia herself – actually it is the maids in this camp that are sort of, like, thrown in front of the noblewomen to protect them from Nasin. Arymilla literally makes one of her maids go with Nasin, and who knows what happens next. When we jump over to Hatchetface, like, Falion, who we talked about, or who we know, um –

Emily: One of the Black Ajah ladies.

Sally One of the Black Ajah ladies that is being punished for failure by being raped constantly –

Emily: Periodically, yeah.

Sally: Um –

Emily: Not just by Hatchetface. There's another guy –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: In the mix.

Sally: There's another guy in the mix that they've just, like, thrown at her, and, um, I don't remember, but to the best of my knowledge, Falion is not noble herself.

Emily: (noncommittal noise)

Sally: Um, definitely, in this situation, she is positioned as a servant, so, like, all of these women around Elayne who are of lower class are being, um, actually harmed and threatened, but yet, like, the threat is positioned at Elayne.

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: The way the narrative is structured. So it's really frustrating and gross.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Robert. Which is a common thing, I think. You know, the sexual – the sexual purity of certain types of women is protected at the expense of other women.

Emily: Yeah, it reminds me just of how, like, um, in real life – in real, um, crimes, uh, people don't pay attention to –

Sally: Mm.

Emily: Sexual violence unless it is perpetrated on a specific type of person and body.

Sally: Right.

Emily: Um. And there are many, many, many layers of victims that perpetrators can go through before they hit on the one that suddenly everyone will care about.

Sally: Yeah. Be up in arms about. Totally.

Emily: Um. Slightly off-center of this circle is the arson subplot – (laugh) that could've been great.

Sally: Could've been excellent.

Emily: I know.

Sally: We could've just had a rogue arsonist in Caemlyn.

Emily: They're like, "What's going – with all these arsons?" and then in the next point of view, Hatchetface is like, "Well, I just keep doing these arsons, and they keep getting foiled, and I don't even know why I'm doing the arsons."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And I'm like, aw. Boring.

Sally: I know, I didn't want it to be Hatchetface. I wanted it to be some, like, cool –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Criminal, Robin Hood figure.

Emily: Yeah. Except they are trying to burn down the storehouses –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Which is, like, bad for people but also, as everyone points out, they're just getting more food shipments from outside the city via Traveling, so –

Sally: Yeah, so it's, like, not actually that big of a deal. (laugh)

Emily: Not – there's not really a point. Yeah, Hatchetface is like, "Why are you making me set fires?" and she's like, "Don't ask stupid questions," and he's like, "Okay."

Sally: It wasn't a stupid question. It's probably the only question of value he's asked so far.

Emily: Yeah, just genuine – just genuinely a question I had. Um, but yeah, as always, bad guys continue to be boring and un-fun to read about, and Robert Jordan continues to be absolutely foul. (sigh) Do you have anything else to add about these?

Sally: No, I just wanted to touch base on what you said, I think it was last episode, about, just, the sort of, like, real spike in sexual violence in the second half of this series –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Particularly around Caemlyn. It's just, like, really bizarre and –

Emily: I know, I really just think he was like, "I can get away with anything I want now."

Sally: Yeah. It's just really bizarre and uncomfortable and –

Emily: Or, like, maybe the zeitgeist changed enough, you know, that he was like, "Oh, actually, this Game of Thrones type violence is what people want."

Sally: It's not.

Emily: And, I mean – I say it's not, but look at how many people tuned in –

Sally: You know what –

Emily: To the new Game of Thrones –

Sally: Oh my Christ.

Emily: Spin-off despite Game of Thrones being what it is. Anyway, we're headed over next to a quite long section with, um, Egg. I guess it's not really longer than the Elayne section, but some long chapters, and then we'll be in the White Tower a little bit –

Sally: Mm.

Emily: And then we'll finally switch over to Rand. But, um, thank God; I think the day of the beacon has finally ended. This – we've got through the –

Sally: (laugh) How far are we into the book? Like, five hundred pages?

Emily: We're literally, like, halfway through the book. We are literally 468 pages. It's the day that's finally over. The day that God forgot.

Sally: Sick.

Emily: So –

Sally: Sick title for something.

Emily: (laugh) Sicker than it deserves. Okay, everyone. Hope you're having a nice week.

Sally: Me too.

Emily: When's this coming out?

Sally: August 29th.

Emily: August twenty-something?

Sally: I think?

Emily: Yeah, August 29th. So, hey, if you're listening to this and you're a patron on Patreon, just remember that our tiers are going to be changing in a way that will go into effect on the first of September. There aren't any minor – major changes, but if you're an existing patron, you should've already received messages about this. If you're listening to this and thinking about joining Patreon, uh, I dunno, just do it on the first of September. Then you won't have to think about this –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Announcement –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And it'll all be there, all set up for you.

Sally: It'll all be there.

Emily: Um, thanks to Glynna MacKenzie for our theme song. Thanks to our patrons, and thanks to our followers on social media.

Sally: You guys rock.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: You're the best.

Emily: Do you have anything else to add?

Sally: ... No.

Emily: Nur.

Sally: Nur.

Emily: Do you have a sign-off?

Sally: I do. Um, today, I, like, posted on my Instagram story this thing from, like, a legal defense fund that's like, "Don't talk to cops," and it was –

Emily: Uh-huh.

Sally: Specifically regarding, like, a bunch of abortion trigger bans have gone into effect today in a bunch of states in the United States and it was like, "As a reminder, like, you don't have to talk to cops, and if you do, have a lawyer present with you," like, a lot of people are being detained or prosecuted because they're, like, giving information that they didn't need to give. You know? And this guy that I kind of almost dated in college, who I have no – like, I do not follow him on Instagram, I have not talked to him in six years – responded to my story and was like, "The cops are detaining people for providing abortions? Like, is this happening in-state or, like, out of state?" and I was like, what are you talking about? And so, like, trying to give him, like, the benefit of the doubt, I'm like, one – either this is, A) a trap, and he wants to tell me that I'm going to hell for believing in abortion, or B) like, this is a person who's genuinely curious, and, like, maybe I can –

Emily: Uh-huh.

Sally: Do a good thing and educate him. And I'm like, yeah, this is happening, and it, like, depends on abortion laws, and he's like, "I just don't understand. Like, what – what information are the cops not getting if you don't talk to them? Like, what information do they not already have?" And I'm like, what type of world do you live in –

Emily: Oh –

Sally: That you do not understand that you shouldn't just confess to the cops? (laugh) It was legitimately – he was like, "I – this is the first I'm hearing of this. Like, by not talking to the cops, how are you preventing someone from being detained?" And I, like – I went – I had to, like, basically mansplain why you shouldn't talk to the cops to this person.

Emily: You should've – you should've sent him the clip – have you seen the clip? It's from that show that Brennan Lee Mulligan is on. It's, like, College Humor. But it's like a game show style thing, and they give up – they give out, like, prompts, and then give out points. It's basically like they make up the game every time. But they're like – the prompt is "Defendant stupidly interrupting his lawyer's closing remarks."

Sally: Right.

Emily: And so Brennan's, like, playing the lawyer and goes off on this monologue that's like, "There is no actual evidence linking my defendant to the scene of the murder –" Like, this impassioned defense, and then suddenly the defendant goes, "Yeah, I did it."

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: (laugh)

Sally: Oh my God, I should have.

Emily: That's just what it is.

Sally: And, like –

Emily: Don't talk to cops. (laugh)

Sally: Yeah, and after I sent him that, he was like, "Oh, that makes sense. Like, it's just a way to protect yourself," and I was like, ah, you got there in the end, buddy. (laugh)

Emily: Wow. Jesus Christ. Okay, everyone.

Sally: (laugh) "No, I did it."

Emily: "Oh, yeah, I did it." I'll show it to you.

Sally: (laugh) Bye, guys.

Emily: Bye.