



Episode 213: Hate to Agree with Gareth Bryne

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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: Weeeelllll, let's hop right in. This is Everybody Hates Rand, your friendly neighborhood *Wheel of Time* podcast. I'm Emily Juchau.

SALLY: And I'm Sally Goodger.

EMILY: Despite all evidence to the contrary [laughs].

SALLY: By all publications to the contrary, naming me *Sarah*. Um, that is not my name.

EMILY: Here name is not Sarah. There are multiple duosyllabic –

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: Names that start with the *s* syllable. And hers is Sally, as it says [laughs].

SALLY: As it says.

EMILY: In print everywhere.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Except in these places.

SALLY: Except in a few key places [laughs], apparently.

EMILY: Airing of grievances over. Sorry, I wanted to jump in because it occurred to me that I don't think there were any Egg points of view in the last book?

SALLY: In *Winter's Heart*? Ummm.

EMILY: I don't think there are. Because I think the last time we – I think the last time in the series we saw her was in *Path of Daggers*, which means that we, as a podcast, have not discussed her point of view since *Crown of Swords*.

SALLY: Oh wow.

EMILY: Which is quite a chunk of time.

SALLY: Yeah, that is a chunk of time.

EMILY: Because I don't think anything happens between end of *Path of Daggers* when she gets war powers.

SALLY: Right.

EMILY: And now. When we cut to them in Tar Valon.

SALLY: Yeah, they just travel to Tar Valon, I think, and that's about it.

EMILY: Yeah, I think we, like, through Elayne's point of view last book, saw her talk to Egg or something a couple times.

SALLY: Yeah, she's like, "They're – we're moving. We're on the march."

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: So, yeah. That could be true. I think you're right.

EMILY: [clears throat] So, assuming that's true, then we've been neglecting Egg, because, um, a lot of – the bulk, I would say, of what happens in *Path of Daggers* has to do with the – the Aes Sedai arc. So, playing catch up here a little bit. Um, when we last saw Egg, on the podcast, uh,

she was still in Salidar, I believe, with all of the Salidar Aes Sedai. In *Path of Daggers* all that happens is that they march forward quite a ways on foot, while Gareth Bryne is accumulating soldiers on the march. Um, Talmanes and the Band of the Red Hand are following close behind as part of this scheme that, um, Egg and the others cooked up. Similar to the Borderlanders invading Andor to –

SALLY: Right.

EMILY: Give Elayne some support. The Band of the Red Hand is sticking close to Egg in order to inspire the Aes Sedai to get some forward momentum. Um, but in *Path of Daggers*, we see Egwene transition from being this puppet Aes Sedai – sorry, this puppet, uh, Amyrlin Seat, wherein sort of every Aes Sedai, it seems, believes that they personally are controlling her.

SALLY: [laughs] Yeah.

EMILY: Uh, from the various factions in the Hall of Tower, who are primarily led by these two women named Romanda and Lelaine, to this whole big faction of – uh, we must have seen Egg at some point – oh yeah. *Crown of Swords* they were already on the march.

SALLY: Yeah, *Crown of Swords* they were already on the march a little bit.

EMILY: Yeah, because we saw her deal with Myrelle and Lan coming back.

SALLY: Yes.

EMILY: Okay.

SALLY: Yep.

EMILY: Okay. I'm caught up.

SALLY: That's in *Crown of Swords*.

EMILY: That's in *Crown of Swords*. So, we've already seen Elayne – excuse me, boy. All the E names are really throwing me.

SALLY: I know, it's really tough.

EMILY: We've already seen Egwene start to transition out of this, start to accumulate power in the form of oaths of fealty? Which is very confusing.

SALLY: Yeah, bizarre.

EMILY: Uh, we've seen Moghedien escape and her not really do anything about that, because what can she do except maybe not have held one of the Forsaken captive to begin with? But [sing song] to each their own. Um, and we saw her, with Siuan's help, sort of starting to

maneuver some power for herself. Anyway, in the last book, the big thing that happened was that she met with some of the Andoran nobility. Not just her, a lot of the Aes Sedai. Specifically the Andoran nobility that Elayne and Dyelin are so worried about because they have not, uhhhhh.

SALLY: Declared a side.

EMILY: Yeah, declared. That's the, that's the word I'm looking for. They haven't declared for Elayne. They have declared for Dyelin, but...

SALLY: Unfortunately, that's not really an official option [laughs].

EMILY: Yeah, [laughs]. It's sort of like writing in on the ballot –

SALLY: It's like –

EMILY: It's sort of like writing in on the ballot – [laughs].

SALLY: Yeah [laughs]

EMILY: Writing in Mickey Mouse on the ballot.

SALLY: I would like Oprah to be president [laughs].

EMILY: [laughs] You know she'd do a good job at it [laughs].

SALLY: Yeah, but she's not on the ballot.

EMILY: She's not on the ballot. Um, these are people who were all sort of congregated on the Murandy—Andor border and officially Egwene and the Aes Sedai met with them, as well some Murandian lords and ladies to get permission – although of course the Aes Sedai would never call it that – to cross through their lands.

SALLY: Right.

EMILY: This was a, like, cool snowy meeting out on the ice. The only notable thing was that Talmanes was there, like, lounging in a corner. Looking dangerous and sexy.

SALLY: Yeah, very sexily leaning on a pillar.

EMILY: Like, that's the standout moment to me.

SALLY: Mm. No, it's so true. Egg, like, looks across and there he is just –

EMILY: And everyone's like, "*Talmanes!*"

SALLY: Being so sexy and dangerous and French.

EMILY: This five-foot-tall man [laughs].

SALLY: [laughs] It is very powerful. And Egg is kind of like, “Hey, um, don’t go fight in Murandy.” And he’s like, “Hey, where’s Mat?”

EMILY: “Fuck yourself” [laughs].

SALLY: [laughs] It’s very –

EMILY: “I am gonna go fight in Murandy, fuck yourself very much.”

SALLY: Yeah, it’s a very powerful moment. She’s like, “Mm. I kind of thought I could tell him what to do.” He’s like, “Nope.”

EMILY: [laughs] Talmanes is like, “No. Exactly one *ta’veren* in this bitch gets to tell me what to do, and it’s not you.”

SALLY: It’s not you.

EMILY: Um, but, uh, then Egwene maneuvers the Hall of the Tower into declaring war on Elaida, which, due to some long ignored fine print in Tower law, means that she has war powers. Which basically means that the executive branch of the government has a lot more power.

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: Um, so that sort of has the ripple effect of showing everyone that she’s not necessarily some puppet. She’s a twenty-year-old with *power*. Or whatever. I don’t know how old she is.

SALLY: Yeah. Sure. Twenty. Why not?

EMILY: But this also means that she can move things forward at a much greater momentum, including, it seems, then traveling all the way to Tar Valon.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: So, smash cut to now. *Crossroads of Twilight*. Egwene is, um, standing, looking through a spyglass, with Gareth Bryne, looking at the river, um, through which boats bring both goods and soldiers into Tar Valon, which, uh, is an island city, of course. So. Um, and, uh, passage from the river into the, like, harbor of Tar Valon is controlled by means of a harbor chain, which stretches across the mouth of the harbor and can be lowered or lifted to prevent people from coming through. This harbor chain is a point of interest in *Crossroads of Twilight*, though not necessarily in a way that, um, makes itself clear until the end of the book.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: I remember when you were reading this book and were like, “They keep talking about the fucking harbor chains.”

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: And I was like, “Hoo!”

SALLY: Thanks for not spoiling it for me. I’m sorry I was so annoying about the harbor chains [laughs].

EMILY: [laughs] No, it was very funny.

SALLY: It’s just, like, I don’t get it!

EMILY: Well, I agree that Robert Jordan has a bad habit of keeping the weirder secrets from his readers in ways that aren’t necessarily satisfying. Uh, but since we do have a disclaimer about spoilers, we’ll just tell you. Egg’s big plan to actually put Tar Valon under siege, because as it stands, and as Gareth Bryne points out, they are not holding the city under siege. They can’t prevent boats from getting in and leaving.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Um, unless they want to start using the power to attack boats, which since they’re Aes Sedai they won’t do. [laughs] Because Egg is like, “If I blew up one of the boats and even one sol – one guy drowned, then that would be using the weapon as a power.” And I’m like, “As though [laughs] explosions aren’t weapons.” Like –

SALLY: Yeah, as though it has to lead in death to – to death for you to have broken that rule [laughs].

EMILY: It’s only a weapon if you kill someone.

SALLY: [laughs] If someone dies.

EMILY: Never mind if someone got maimed, or whatever.

SALLY: Yeah or just –

EMILY: Or lost their livelihood or whatever.

SALLY: Yeah, it’s so silly. She’s also, um – do we – we can stick with the harbor chains for a second and then I can make my point.

EMILY: Okay. Hold it. Yeah, the harbor chains are sort of Egg’s point of interest in that if she can, and some trusted helpers, can turn the harbor chains into *cuendillar* – heartstone, the thing that the seals on the Dark One’s prison are made out of – then that will make it, like, impossible

to move, lower, lift, whatever. It will just mean that the only way to get it off is by, like, literally removing the parts of the wall to which it is attached.

SALLY: Right.

EMILY: So that would prevent at least big boats with big shipments of food and grain from entering the city, and that would actually put Tar Valon under siege in the traditional sense.

SALLY: Yeah, and the big reveal in the second chapter is that Egg herself has learned how to make *cuendillar*.

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: That's one of her little...discoveries.

EMILY: Which she's like, "I don't mind people praising me for it, because I did discover it myself." And then [laughs] she tells us for like a paragraph about how actually Moghedien did give her the foundation for learning about it, but she doesn't credit Moghedien with it, because she *technically* pieced it together on her own.

SALLY: Yeah, and it's like...okay.

EMILY: [sighs]

SALLY: Intellectual theft right and left from these three.

EMILY: Yeah [laughs]. Um, anyway that's it on the harbor chains for now.

SALLY: Yeah, my – another thing that happens is that Egg is like – one she's like, "I'm not going to blow up boats, because what if someone dies?" And two she's like, "I refu – " [a plastic bottle is being opened and closed in the background] Gareth Bryne keeps being like, "We could win this super easy if you just let me and my soldiers teleport directly into Tar Valon. And we could take the city." He's like. "It wouldn't be, like, *super* easy, but it will be much easier if we do it now, than if we just keep letting them bring in soldiers and supplies and et cetera." And [laughs] Egg has this, like, monologue about how, like, upsetting it is that Gareth Bryne immediately saw teleportation and immediately decided to use it as a weapon of war. And it's like...she does have the caveat, she's like, "Well, he is a general, so of course this is how he thinks." And it's like, "Yeah!"

EMILY: What are you paying him for?

SALLY: Yeah! You paid him to do a good job and now you're upset that he wants to do a really good job?

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: And he's not asking – he's not asking you to do literally anything except open a gateway.

EMILY: Mm-hmm.

SALLY: And she's like, "I'm not comfortable with that blah, blah, blah, blah, blah." She has some reasoning about how she doesn't want Aes Sedai to end up fighting each other in the streets and I'm like, "I – how does that even apply?"

EMILY: I mean, my point there – I mean, let's, let's dissect this a little bit. First of all, I do think there are some ethical gray areas in Gareth Bryne's idea to use gateways to teleport in and take the city.

SALLY: Sure.

EMILY: In that the Aes Sedai have this big oath about using the Power as a weapon. At what point are you using the Power as a weapon? When you're aiding and abetting soldiers who are going to be killing people? Does that count?

SALLY: Good point, Emily.

EMILY: Um, but that's not Egg point. Egg's point is that there's a difference between the type of violence that Gareth Bryne is proposing, in that Aes Sedai could potentially be fighting each other in the streets, um soldiers will of course be fighting each other on Aes Sedai's behalves And the type of violence that she is proposing, which is putting a city under siege.

SALLY: Mmmm.

EMILY: In which people – not Aes Sedai – will then be faced with starvation. Um, so that's obviously a problem. And I hate to say that I side with Gareth Bryne on anything, but obviously I side with Gareth Bryne, because what he's proposing is the most efficient and probably, like, the least costly in terms of casualties, um, form of getting the job done.

SALLY: Totally.

EMILY: And certainly the least costly in terms of civilian life.

SALLY: Yeah!

EMILY: From a narrative standpoint, what Robert Jordan is trying to do is say that there has to be some sort of third option [a loud motorcycle passes in the background], because right now –

SALLY: Okay!

EMILY: Right now motorcycles are [making motorcycle noises]. Okay, man – manhood. Gasoline. Guns.

SALLY: I drink gasoline and bullets for breakfast.

EMILY: [laughs] Okay. Um, sorry. So, what Robert Jordan is trying to do from a narrative standpoint is say none of Egg's options are good.

SALLY: Right.

EMILY: Whatever she does in this is going to be something either that she is uncomfortable with or that does serious damage to Tar Valon and its citizens, or to Aes Sedai as a system, which is what Egg wants to avoid because she's the Amyrlin Seat and she's a good Amyrlin Seat, so she cares about the Aes Sedai as a whole [clears throat]. And typically when an author proposes that all the options are bad, what they're saying is, "Okay, at some point a third option will be found."

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: Which is – sorry to spoil it for you – more or less what happens. There will still end up being – there will still be some violence, etc. etc. but more or less there will be a more peaceful solution than what is being proposed here, due to what happens at the end of this book, which is Egg getting kidnapped.

SALLY: Snatch-ed.

EMILY: Snatched by the Aes Sedai in the White Tower and then she's able to sort of wage, I don't know, [laughs] psychological warfare on Elaida?

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Um, do work from the inside. And, um, I don't have a big problem with that, except that I'm irritated that all of Robert Jordan's female characters stumble their way into success. It was so nice in *Path of Daggers*, probably one of the only good things about *Path of Daggers*, watching Egg do something intentionally and succeed.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Even if it's something I don't necessarily agree with, like the executive branch of a government having war powers.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Um, it was nice because, like, Egg set out to do something. She did it. It had real, palpable consequences.

SALLY: Totally.

EMILY: And it's also similarly satisfying to watch Egg once she's in the White Tower, because what she does, and what she starts doing, has real consequences that are something she's working toward.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: So, what I'd like to propose is that Egg could do all of this intentionally.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: She could intentionally get herself kidnapped by the White Tower. She could set it up.

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: It wouldn't even be that difficult. She knows that it's Nicola, who's the one that ends up betraying her, spoiler alert, is a loudmouth who's willing to sell her information to anyone.

SALLY: For anything, yeah.

EMILY: Literally anyone. As long as they'll indulge her, like, weird ambitions.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Um, so, and like it's not ideal that she leaves the Salidar Aes Sedai to their own devices, but that's also something she could set up.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: She at least has people working with her. Siuan and Leanne or whatever. Soooo, I – that's my grievance against this big plot. It – it irritates me that this can't be something that Egg thinks of on her own.

SALLY: Totally. And I also like – I don't quite know how to say this, so stay with me. Play with me in this space for a minute, everyone.

EMILY: [mimicking Griffin McElroy] Play with me!

SALLY: Play with me! Um, it is not – caveat. Obviously, you know this is an anti-war podcast. We're not like, "Yes, do war. It's the best."

EMILY: Yeah [opening and closing a plastic bottle].

SALLY: But Robert Jordan is doing – it's, it's frustrating that we seem to have this with almost every single one of the female characters, except perhaps Tuon. Like they get in situations of power and then they are, like, unwilling to use it? Particularly in regards to, like, military power. Like, Elayne, uh, has like weird things about using an army and, like, attacking people. She's just

got a lot of weird holdups there. Egg obviously has a lot of weird holdups about like doing war. And it's like I understand that, but it's very frustrating for Robert Jordan in these situations where they are, like, leaders of countries or quasi-countries and not willing to act as a military head in the way they are supposed to. And it just, like, it's just really frustrating that it keeps happening and, um, I feel like especially in the second half of the book, Robert Jordan is, like, making me hate the female characters and it feels like I'm just being a huge misogynist.

EMILY: [laughs]

SALLY: But, like, why isn't Egg doing things intentionally, you know? Like why isn't she stepping up to the plate in this regard? If she was, like you were saying, doing some sort of espionage, that would be fine, but it's like make a tough decision. I'm sorry that both decisions are really shitty, but you're in charge now. You have to make a tough decision. Are you going to one, starve a bunch of civilians to death or two, deal with a little bit of warfare in the middle of your city?

EMILY: Yeah, and interestingly, I think, Elayne and Egwene have extremely similar situations here.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Where both of their reasoning behind avoiding military action is that they don't want to have this group that they're trying to unite – Aes Sedai in Egwene's case, Andorans in Elayne's case – they don't want them fighting each other.

SALLY: Right.

EMILY: But in both those cases, the cost of soldiers not fighting each other is civilian life.

SALLY: Yeah!

EMILY: And I don't know what Robert Jordan was thinking, what his overall thesis about war was. I am – obviously he was okay with writing about it and depicting it, but I do think there is, on some level, um, an element to his writing of the idea that war is horrible.

SALLY: Of course, yeah.

EMILY: And awful and traumatic and it should be avoided at all costs.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Um, and so – but the fact that he's giving these plots about trying to avoid war to his female characters specifically has an element of one, making the women especially seem incredibly naïve.

SALLY: Right.

EMILY: And also, like, putting them on sort of a weird pedestal.

SALLY: Right. Like –

EMILY: Of like they're not going to get their hands dirty. They're women.

SALLY: Totally, and it also puts the onus of avoiding warfare entirely on women, when like Rand is literally controlling multiple countries and could just stop war with the wave of his hand, you know?

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: So it's, like, frustrating that they have to do all this peace labor about it. And it is – I think the nai – naivete is what is frustrating to me. Like he's setting Elayne and Egg up as these leaders, but of course they are, like, young women who are unwilling to engage in something. And it's like, I'm not saying they have to. I am – it is interesting that they are trying to find different solutions, but it is, like, why isn't Rand also trying to find different solutions? Why is Perrin literally selling slaves to the Seanchan because he cannot find a solution that does not involve killing all the Shaido, you know? Like, why do they have to be the ones that do it? It's just really upsetting to me.

EMILY: Yeah, like, while Elayne and Egg are losing sleep soldiers dying on their behalf, Rand – literally his reasoning in *Path of Dagger* for attacking the Seanchan in the way they did, in a massively costly engagement, was that he brought on his side people he wanted to get rid of.

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: He was like, "These are all the guys that I don't like. So, it isn't a big deal if they just get killed."

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And Perrin is doing some, like, human war crimes shit over in this weird region. And Mat is inventing cannons!

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: [laughs] None of them have any qualms, it seems, about getting their military shit done.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: In fact, it would be – it would behoove Robert Jordan to take some of the qualms from Egwene and Elayne and spread them out a little bit.

SALLY: Yeah!

EMILY: So that our men characters seem less like violent sociopaths.

SALLY: Totally! And that our women characters are – they don't just have to exist, like you said, in this idyllic, peaceful, womanly headspace, like, they're – I want all of our characters to exist in reality, which is that peace is, of course, the option that you should be working for and you should be really legitimately upset that people are dying, but, like, you do live in the real world. So, like, are you going to starve all your civilians to death or are you going to let soldiers who signed up for the army...fight?

EMILY: Yeah, like Egwene's whole thing – okay, yeah, maybe her espionage thing as a solution would be cool, though with many, many risks and variables that would make it hard to control. Much more interesting would be to see a narrative in which she says, "Okay, Gareth Bryne, do your job." And then actually has to struggle with what that means.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Like, how do you bring the White Tower back together after that? Do you do some like sort of propaganda machine to make sure the citizenry of Tar Valon doesn't turn against you? Like –

SALLY: Yeah!

EMILY: Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. There's interesting things to be talked about there. It's just – we're stuck in this weird woman space [laughs].

SALLY: Woman space. Um, one other thing I want to say. Um, which is kind of related. But like you said, Robert Jordan is definitely willing to write about warfare and how it's bad, but I feel like a lot of people who write about how warfare is bad, especially if they themselves had experience in war like Robert Jordan did, seem to really center how warfare is bad for soldiers. Like, how traumatic it is to fight in a war, which obviously is extremely true and nobody should have to do it, but there is not near – there's not the same attention given to how warfare is, um, traumatic and deadly to civilians and economies and all sorts of things.

EMILY: Mm-hmm.

SALLY: So, like, this focus of avoiding warfare – or, the men being like [deepens voice], "We just have to deal with the trauma that we're getting from this." Um, I lost my point. Anyway, it's just. Yeah. It just all seems to be about the soldiers not wanting to like – not wanting the actual warring bodies to fight and avoiding what that does to them and what that does to political institutions, like, Elayne – like what Egwene is choosing is basically like the sanctity of the White Tower as an institution over the lives of the people she actually supposed to protect. The Aes Sedai are technically part of the government with her.

EMILY: Mm-hmm.

SALLY: Which she doesn't always seem to think. She very much holds herself above them, which in some instances she is, but much like the President of the United States, she is not supposed to be the whole body of the government.

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: But she has set herself up that way by getting war powers and she very much thinks of herself that way, or she probably would not have struggled so hard to get them. So.

EMILY: Woof.

SALLY: That's Egg. You're so smart.

EMILY: No, you're so smart.

SALLY: It's just a frustrating little plot.

EMILY: [laughs] Yeah, there's a lot going on in those – in these chapters, I guess.

SALLY: Her just being like, "Mmm. Don't use teleporting." And it's like, [laughing] why was it invented if no one's going to use it for anything? I don't want it to be used for warfare, but, like –

EMILY: Yeah, not to be the, like, shoulder devil here, but you have a very – one hopes – small window in which to use teleportation willy nilly before hope – hopefully, I emphasize, God only hopes, that some sort of, like, Geneva conventions will be placed around it, you know?

SALLY: Yeah. Yeah!

EMILY: But until then, go crazy.

SALLY: Yeah and like she – she's so intense about being like, "You cannot open gateways where literally anybody can see them." They have, like, very secret traveling grounds.

EMILY: Mm-hmm.

SALLY: So, it's like, why hold the secret so tightly if all you're using it for is to send people off on little research missions?

EMILY: Ugh.

SALLY: And again I'm not – I don't want you to do war crimes and use weapons of war, but it is just, like, an incomprehensible plot to me that teleportation was invented and is not used to make fighting easier, to make traveling easier, to move supplies, to go ask Rand for help. [laughs] Like.

EMILY: To get rid of communication, transportation, all sorts of plot problems. Like, how is it that we're in the second half of this series, teleportation is now a thing, but everything has become slower and worse?

SALLY: Yeah!

EMILY: You know?

SALLY: Like you can basically just use it as a cell phone? Teleport over to Rand, be like, "Hey, Dragon Reborn, what do you think about this?"

EMILY: [sighs]

SALLY: But they're like, "Mmm."

EMILY: [clears throat] No.

SALLY: "Let's just use it to send the Brown Ajah to various libraries."

EMILY: Or whatever the fuck is going on.

SALLY: So.

EMILY: Anyway, in terms of actual plot, Elayne and Gareth Bryne have that conversation. It is a miracle that Gareth Bryne [laughs] does not quit on the spot.

SALLY: I know.

EMILY: Because if I were him, I would be like, "Why?"

SALLY: "Why am I here, then?"

EMILY: Yeah, he's like the epitome of someone who has been hired to do a job and then has bad managers being like, "But don't do it in the best way. Just do it in the way I say." He's like, "Great, I'm just going to watch people that I've trained die, because of your decisions."

SALLY: Because –

EMILY: And Elayne's – excuse me. UGH! Egwene's not even explaining her reasoning to him. I mean, she explains her whole bit about the sanctity of the White Tower, but she's not like, "What I'm hoping to accomplish here, with the harbor chains, is something that will actually save your soldiers lives." You know?

SALLY: Right.

EMILY: Duh, duh, duh, duh, duh. Here's what I actually need from you. Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. So, um, they head back around. Egwene meets up with the people who she's riding with, which happens to be the six women who have been so important in Salidar. Um, as she's meeting up with them, Delana [laughs].

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: Whomst I hate [laughs].

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Comes riding up and Egwene's like, "Yeah, Delana's confusing because, like, she's in the Hall of the Tower and her secretary is my, like, weird sex masseuse lady. Um, [laughs] and happens to be one of the Forsaken who's giving me my migraines, but don't worry I'm not worried about that. Um, and Delana just does all these very confusing things in the government, and no one can make any sense of it." And Delana comes up and tells Egwene, "Listen, so, what I'm hearing is that some people in the Hall are talking about opening up negotiations with Elaida. Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah." And she's like, "Now, what we don't want is for that to get around." And it's, like, clearly she has all these ulterior motives and she's double speaking, triple speaking, in all these layers and Egwene's just like, "I have – what's going on here?"

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: So drags Delana back to the other six and is like, "Tell them what you told me." And Delana's like [dramatic voice], "Negotiations." And they're all like, "Outrageous! We would never negotiate with Elaida because the terms would be so unreasonable."

SALLY: Right.

EMILY: And Beonin, who's the Gray Ajah, is like, "Well, what if we, you know, tried?"

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: "Never say never, am I right?" And then Egg is like, "Sure. Go ahead. Start negotiations." And everyone's like [dramatic gasping], Wilhelm Scream in the background [laughs].

SALLY: Yeah [laughs].

EMILY: And Egg's like, "But these are my terms. Elaida has to be exiled." Which is basically a way of saying that "You can open negotiations, but absolutely nothing will come of them."

SALLY: Right.

EMILY: Which I think the text does a bad job of explaining to us. Beonin faints, because it's not a scene with a bunch of Aes Sedai unless someone fainting or throwing up, literally.

SALLY: Yeah, we also can't – we, as readers, are not smart enough to parse when Ed – Egg has made a savvy political decision, so Robert Jordan has to let us know by someone fainting.

EMILY: I know. [laughs] This never happens in male dominated political spaces.

SALLY: Otherwise, I would have truly no idea that Egg was intelligent and making moves [laughs].

EMILY: I'm also just – I just don't get it, because I don't what's – Robert Jordan hasn't explained well enough to me what Egg is going for here.

SALLY: Right.

EMILY: Ugh! Whatever. Delana leaves and they all talk and are like, "Okay, what was she actually after." And one of them very astutely is like, "She's clearing trying to cause, like, mayhem and chaos between all of the Ajahs, if not in – in – inside the Ajahs themselves, you know? Like, who knows what's going on here?" And someone else is like, "Well, no. Any number of other things could be going on here." And it's like no one's willing to take the – everyone sort of agrees with the initial assumption that the only thing that can be gained here is chaos. You'd have to be an idiot to handle things the way that she did unless that was your end goal.

SALLY: Right.

EMILY: And we, the readers, know that Delana is Black Ajah, that she is under the thumb of Halima, aka Aran'gar, aka Balthamel reborn. And we know that she's in some sort of extremely odd psychosexual relationship with Halima, because that's Robert Jordan's whole kink.

SALLY: Thing, yeah.

EMILY: Um, and basically that she's probably being tortured at every opportunity. So, we know that she's making decisions that will serve only the bad guys.

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: What's confusing is why, in this group of women, no one says, "So, [laughs] who does this benefit?"

SALLY: Right.

EMILY: Absolutely no one, therefore perhaps we should suspect Delana of being evil in some way.

SALLY: Yeah, even –

EMILY: I know none of us likes to talk about it, and I know some of us are also Black Ajah. Looking at you, Sheriam. But perhaps that's a possibility.

SALLY: Yeah! Or even just being like, "Maybe she's a spy for Elaida."

EMILY: Yeah!

SALLY: It doesn't – you don't immediately have to jump to –

EMILY: Black Ajah.

SALLY: Blach Ajah. You could be like, "What – why does she have these motives to make our system fall apart, you know? We have multiple enemies."

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: Perhaps we should consider that she works for one of them.

EMILY: But no one is even like, "Let's keep eyes on her, or let's somehow deal with the problem in some other way. Let's arrange an accident [laughs], as Siaun would say." I know they would never actually propose killing another Aes Sedai, but it would be so funny if they did.

SALLY: It would be super funny. I think they should let Siuan Sanche do some killing.

EMILY: I know. Siuan Sanche is like, "Let's just kill some people who clearly aren't helping the plot in any way and are clearly deterring the plot."

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And everyone's like [laughs], "No, Siuan!" And I'm like maybe –

SALLY: Maybe.

EMILY: Let her go crazy.

SALLY: If Siuan is going to be this insufferable person who does not believe in the sanctity of human life, maybe utilize that [laughs].

EMILY: Siuan is over here operating in *Game of Thrones* land.

SALLY: [laughs] Yeah!

EMILY: While everyone over here is still in *Chronicles of Narnia*, like.

SALLY: Right.

EMILY: [laughs] I'm not saying it's a good thing.

SALLY: No.

EMILY: But maybe let her do her thing if that's what it's gonna be.

SALLY: Right. Like, Egg does have a hilarious line when everyone is like – later everyone is like, “Nicola is truly the worst. We hate this seventeen-year-old girl more than we've hated anyone in our whole lives.”

EMILY: “And nothing good can come of her.” And Egg is like, “Maybe I should have let Siuan kill her. What am I thinking?” And I'm like, “You're thinking the right thing. [laughs] Maybe you should have let Siuan kill her.”

SALLY: [laughs] You should have let Siuan kill her. She's literally going to betray you.

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: And [laughing] everyone hates her, and –

EMILY: Nothing. Nothing good.

SALLY: I'm not saying you should just kill someone because you hate them, but...

EMILY: But I am saying that this is fantasy fiction and characters should maybe sometimes kill people!

SALLY: Yeah, like, Robert Jordan really wants to walk this fine line of our good guys are *good* –

EMILY: Except he's only doing that with the female characters.

SALLY: He's only doing that with the female characters. Totally. But also, like, our good guys are good, except sometimes, you know?

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: Except when Egg wants to starve the people of Tar Valon. Except when Perrin wants to sell as many people as he wants to to the Seanchan, because it's so important that he gets his wife. And I know people gonna argue with me and say these are intended to be, like, moral gray areas to make complex characters, but our characters are never presented as gray area characters. They are *always* framed within the narrative as being good and just, and that means sometimes they have to make bad decisions and hard decisions, but they never, ever, *ever* get any consequences from the narrative of being, like, morally gray.

EMILY: Yeah. There's absolutely no problem with writing a story in which your characters are like, "Hey, I'm going to be making some morally ambiguous decisions because that is what the narrative is forcing me to do."

SALLY: Totally.

EMILY: Okay, yeah. That's fine, but you're the one in control of the narration, Robert. You get to choose how it treats them after they make these decisions. Not saying that everyone needs to be *punished* for making bad decisions, but, then again, that is what you have set us up to do. Everyone who is a bad guy does get punished.

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: So, why are our people who are making some good, some bad decisions not, you know, facing consequences.

SALLY: Yeah. It is, like, truly boggling that Perrin gets put on trial by the Whitecloaks for killing two guys in Book One and not, um, collaborating with the invading fascist empire.

EMILY: Yeah, the consequences are never related to the crimes.

SALLY: Yeah, and, like, the – I think – I mean, I haven't gotten to this plot, so I might just be kind of like talking out my ass here, but, like, putting Perrin on trial for, like, killing two people in Book One is ultimately still framing him as a bad guy, because he's – I mean as a good guy, because he's willing to, like, face justice for this thing that he did that he wasn't totally in control of, but, like, he understands the reasoning. So, it's like what the fuck is happening?

EMILY: Even just if characters had a modicum of self-awareness.

SALLY: Yeah, if Egg was like, "I know what siege means."

EMILY: Mm-hmm.

SALLY: And that is – it's shitty, but it's a consequence I'm willing to pay.

EMILY: Or just like, "I am probably going to lose sleep about having Delana murdered, you know?"

SALLY: Yeah!

EMILY: "But I really do genuinely think that's the best decision at this time."

SALLY: Yeah! And it's like okay.

EMILY: Okay.

SALLY: Great.

EMILY: That's what you're doing with power.

SALLY: But it's just so frustrating that our bad guys get to commit war crimes, Rand. And Perrin. And Mat [laughing], and everybody. But it's still – like some of our Darkfriends are much better people than our main characters –

EMILY: [laughs]

SALLY: – are, actually.

EMILY: Yeah, shocking.

SALLY: Anyway, we can finish up with the plot. I've really run my mouth today.

EMILY: No, you're fine. Anyway, um, they all discuss this, come to no real conclusions. Egg is like, "I mean, yeah, you can actually open negotiations with Elaida and that will maybe serve us as a delaying tactic." So she puts Beonin in charge of that, which is a mistake. Um, that will come back to haunt everyone, but we will see that in the future. Meanwhile everyone goes their separate ways once they get back to the camp. Egwene sort of takes the opportunity to wander on her own and ends up at this tent where people are making *cuendillar*, both as an economic thing, like, they can sell it. It's extremely valuable.

SALLY: Right.

EMILY: But Elayne has – excuse [sighs], Egg has this ulterior motive of being like, "I need to discover who is powerful enough to make *cuendillar* quickly, so I can find some assistance in this harbor chain scheme that I've concocted."

SALLY: [whispering] Not that she'll take it.

EMILY: And so far, she tells us that her best candidates are Leanne and, uh, this random Aes Sedai named Kairen.

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: Literally Karen, who isn't enthused about making *cuendillar* on the side. Like, if you are able to do it then you are required to put in an hour at the tent to help keep the camp running from an economic standpoint, which I think is funny. And Kairen hates it. And Ed – Egg's like, "If I told her what it was for, then maybe she'd be more enthused, but like, [deeper voice] I just need to keep all my secrets."

SALLY: [deep voice] "I just can't trust anybody."

EMILY: Yeah, [unclear muttering].

SALLY: You have to trust some people.

EMILY: We're also told that Bode Cauthon, Mat's younger sister, who has entered the Tower as a Novice is also up there in the candidates, but Egg is not considering her because she is a Novice, uh, but that will come back in the plot. Um, that – that's sort of the only thing that plot-wise happens. Updates we get in terms of the camp at Salidar are that the Novices have been sort of reorganized under the watchful eye of a woman named Sharina?

SALLY: I think so, yeah.

EMILY: Sharina, who's an elderly woman, which – who would never have been able to join the White Tower under the previous prescriptions, but they have opened the books. That's another thing that happened in *Path of Daggers*, so they have seen a massive influx of Novices and, since none of the can take the test to become Accepted, it's just, like, this extremely bottom-heavy power structure.

SALLY: Yeah, there's like just nine hundred of them.

EMILY: Yeah. Almost a thousand, which is as many as there are Aes Sedai.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Which is for the future, you know, a good thing.

SALLY: Yeah, totally.

EMILY: But it's a huge logistical problem in this moment. And this woman named Sharina had the bright idea like, "Hey maybe we wouldn't have novices who are running away, burning out, getting super depressed and upset, if we didn't, like, enforce isolation on them [laughs] at every opportunity."

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: If, instead of this, like, weird Catholic boarding school structure, we allowed them to structure themselves into units called families, where everyone is sort of looking out for each other. So, there's this weird power struggle going on between Sharina, who clearly has it all figured out, because she's an older woman with experience and wisdom, one can assume, and the actual Mistress of Novices, who is also a woman with age and experience, but doesn't look like one.

SALLY: Therefore we can't trust her.

EMILY: Therefore we can't trust her, and also, I don't know, one of them is stuck in the way thing were and one of them has creative problem solving ideas. It's very uninteresting. It doesn't really matter.

SALLY: Yeah, it's just like this weird, like, little subplot where Robert Jordan is like playing with this tension of, like, the wisdom of age and the, like, wis – I don't know. You said exactly. Creative problem solving versus, like, letting people who have different life experiences at different ages come into the White Tower and how that is a good thing, versus Aes Sedai being like, "You can only come in if you are under eighteen and then we're going to [laughs] indoctrinate you."

EMILY: Seriously. Into our structure.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Um, that's sort of the main thing going on, otherwise we're just, like, there, um, no that's it. I think we have covered every point of interest. Um, we'll be with El – Egg for a few more chapters, so we'll get more of her goings on, including, uh, more interactions with Suan and sort of what her day-to-day life is looking like. Um, oh, supplies are running thing because they're all getting rotten and gross thanks to the Dark One's taint [retching noise]. Um, and I don't know. We'll get more about the ominous Halima, headache dispenser and remover, which is exactly as stupid a subplot as you can imagine.

SALLY: Yeah, I don't understand the point of it.

EMILY: It's very annoying.

SALLY: And Egg, when she gets captured, is like, "Wow, my headaches have gone away. That's so interesting."

EMILY: Oh my god! I know. Egg is astounding for being this medical marvel, who's like, "I'm getting these awful headaches, and not seeking any sort of treatment beyond the tender [laughs] love of Halima. Which, like, could be explained, and others of Egg's decisions, could be explained if Halima is putting her under compulsion, but that is not something that is ever answered or pointed at directly, so we're left to believe, well maybe Egg's just an idiot. Which is frustrating, of course.

SALLY: Which is exhausting. It's like, you can't tell me she's one of the smartest characters in the series and also tell me that she's this incapable of solving little problems. Like, maybe I should talk to one of the Yellow Ajah about Healing or medicine or teas or anything that could help with this.

EMILY: Yeah, maybe I should call up my friend Nynaeve. Or even just, like, I don't know. I don't know, it's just frustrating, because her current treatment plan is something that clearly isn't working.

SALLY: Yeah, like, she's still getting headaches. And, like, we can talk about this later. Obviously, we're kind of running up against time here, but if you have an actual chronic condition, sometimes things just don't work, you know?

EMILY: Yeah, sometimes you just need relief rather than a cure.

SALLY: Yeah, like some – truly, like, if – especially if you get migraines. Um, this is – I – to the best of my knowledge, there are very few things and very few medicines that actually help people with migraine disorder. And it's, like, okay, but let's see Egg maybe trying a few things out before she lands on the fact that, "Hey, these massages that I get are the only thing that provide some relief." Versus being like, "These are truly horrific to deal with –" It's also just a little unbelievable. Like, if you were dealing with symptoms that were so debilitating, of course you're gonna try different things to be like I want them to go away. I don't want to just get massaged by this kind of creepy woman every night.

EMILY: And of course you'd be like freaked out. Like, what's going on with me? Is this a terminal condition?

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Do I have a brain tumor? Maybe brain tumors don't exist in *Wheel of Time* world, but if you're a young person who's never dealt with a chronic illness up until this point, you'd probably be like, "Huh? Wonder what's going on here?"

SALLY: Yeah. I should go to the doctor.

EMILY: And not just going to take it into stride.

SALLY: It's just a very weird plot that is more of Robert Jordan's bad disability representation.

EMILY: Yeah. Anyway, um, that's those two chapters.

SALLY: Yee.

EMILY: We'll be back with Egg next week as well. Um, thanks to Glynna MacKenzie for our theme song. Thanks to our patrons on Patreon and our followers on social media. Um.

SALLY: You guys are the best!

EMILY: Yeah. Do you have a sign off?

SALLY: Um, we have a listener submitted sign off, but it's on my phone, so I'll do that next week, I promise. I'm not forgetting you. Um, I don't have any, like, bad funny sign offs, so here's a good sign off. My niece Liz, who is six, is taekwondo.

EMILY: [whispers] Ah, fuck yeah.

SALLY: And she did a test yesterday to see if she could upgrade the color of her belt.

EMILY: Woo!

SALLY: And she passed!

EMILY: WOO!

SALLY: So, she's now a yellow stripe on her taekwondo belt.

EMILY: [sighs]

SALLY: So, good job, Liz.

EMILY: Hell yeah.

SALLY: My brother sent me the funniest video of her breaking, like, a – it's obviously a very thin piece of plywood.

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: That all these six-year-olds are breaking with their little taekwondo punches, but she hit the shit out [laughing] that thing.

EMILY: Yeah, I always known Liz would be able to kick our asses one day, but it's a little terrifying that she will actually have –

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: Like, the education behind it. Not just sheer power.

SALLY: Not just sheer power and will. She's being trained in a martial art.

EMILY: Well, good job, Liz.

SALLY: Yeah, good job, Liz!

EMILY: Have a good week, everyone!

SALLY: Goodbye!

EMILY: Goodbye!