



Episode 214: Chess with LeBron James  
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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: Have you heard – (laugh) Suckingham Phallus?

Sally: What?

Emily: Instead of Buckingham Palace.

Sally: Oh. Suckingham Phallus. (laugh)

Emily: Every time I see it, I crack up. Anyway, the queen's dead. Heh heh.

Sally: Ha ha ha.

Emily: Ha ha. Oh, to be in an Irish pub right now.

Sally: I know. Emily texted me – (laugh) After we were, like, well, exchanging some Tweets or whatever, and she was just like, "I'm so happy for the Irish." I was like, yeah, that's the right sentiment. It's what they deserve.

Emily: Yeah, if you're Irish, congratulations.

Sally: Tybalt. (claps)

Emily: If you're, uh, in the UK, then I hope you riot when they try and spend a million dollars on her funeral. Don't let them use your money that way.

Sally: Yeah, a million dollars feels low.

Emily: Tax – a billion dollars.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Or whatever for a lady who did nothing.

Sally: Who really didn't do anything except enable atrocities and theft. You – could you be normal for, like, five seconds?

Emily: If you're like, "Wow, a surprising amount of anti-monarchial vitriol coming from hit podcast Everybody Hates Rand, only a minute and a half in," then where have you been –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: The last two hundred episodes, because I would not be happier unless it was the queen of Andor herself, Elayne –

Sally: (laugh) Yeah.

Emily: Who had died, and I do think there are parallels between –

Sally: Hmm. Mm-hmm.

Emily: Elayne and the royal house of Andor and the royal house of England. Tybalt, my God.

Sally: It's time – it's time to be a normal boy. It's time to be a normal boy.

Emily: He can't.

Sally: He just did, like, a full barrel roll in my arms to escape my clutches.

Emily: Do we need to open the window for you?

Sally: Do you just want to see the motorcycles go by? Um, anyway, the queen is dead.

Emily: Yeah, that's the big news in the world.

Sally: Halle-loo.

Emily: When you're listening to this, it will have been several days, so sorry that you're no longer living in the blissful afternoon hours of September eighth.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, or whenever you heard the news, 'cause time zones. Um, but that's where we were when it happened.

Sally: Yeah, Twitter's been pretty funny today, so.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: I hope you enjoyed it.

Emily: But, no, we're here to talk about Cross – Crossroads of – of Twilight. (sigh) Every day, it gets more exhausting. Goodbye, Tybalt. Go attack Ed or whatever. This is hit podcast Everybody Hates Rand – (laugh) your friendly – oh. Neighborhood – your friendly neighborhood hit Wheel of Time podcast. I did that wrong. I'm not gonna fix it, though.

Sally: That's fine. We'll – we'll – we're massaging the slogan.

Emily: Yeah, we're working on it.

Sally: Um. Did you say your name?

Emily: No. (laugh) I'm Emily. Juchau.

Sally: (laugh) And I'm Sally Goodger. It's been a day, you guys.

Emily: It's sure been a day. I don't know how long this will be, 'cause, boy, was it some not very exciting chapters. We're just still with Egg, and, you guys, Egg chapters are kind of boring sometimes. Especially when they're, like, about the politics of the Hall of the Tower –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Which, um, aren't done particularly well, I would say.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: It's difficult to express why that is except for, you know, the usual layer of Robert Jordan's misogyny. It's clear as he's writing about an all-female government body that he doesn't believe that government bodies should be made up of only women.

Sally: Right.

Emily: You know, that sort of disdain leaks through.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Um, and there are many political fantasies that are done very well, but this is not one of them. Also, because it's, like, one of eighteen different subplots going on right now, just in this character's point of view, so –

Sally: Right.

Emily: Political, um, I think, fantasies tend to work best when we are fully immersed in them.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Not just sort of flitting back and forth between them, because of course it's impossible to keep track of, mm, more than, I would say, three or four of the players in the Hall of the Tower. All I've got is Romanda, Lelaine, Delana –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And, um, Sheriam, I guess.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: That's it. None of the others mean anything to me.

Sally: Yeah, that's such a good point, Emily. Um, I always say that I don't care for political fantasy – I like that; that's a nice little term. Um, I always say that I don't care for it. And I – I usually don't. Like, I usually don't like being steeped in politics to that extent. But I think of, like – we've referenced this book before – “The Goblin Emperor” by Katherine Addison, which is a deeply – like, it's – it is very high fantasy™, and also very, like, political fantasy™.

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: And it's one of my favorite books in the world. It's so lovely and so interesting, and I care very deeply about everything that's happening. And, one, I think part of that is just the writing; it's such a lovely book. But you make a really good point about being in, like, one court in particular and the ability to actually understand all of the plots that are happening because, though there might be multiple plots happening at court, they're all, of course, connected; we're living in the same spiderweb. What Wheel of Time is asking us to do, and Game of Thrones does a similar thing – it asks us to exist simultaneously in, like, eighteen different spiderwebbing plots, and there's just no way the human brain – at least – some people are much smarter than me. There's no way my human brain can keep track of all of that.

Emily: Yeah, I think some people like feeling challenged, in a way, to understand –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But I find it a little bit exhausting.

Sally: Yeah, and I also think, um – I – from my experience, when I read these types of political fantasies and I can't keep track of everything, I feel like people's response is then to tell me that I am not smart enough to engage with the series, and I feel like to a certain extent, the genre likes making – this particular genre, of political fantasy, likes making people feel stupid.

Emily: Yeah, it's a sort of, like, intrinsic level of gatekeeping.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Like, I am not allowing you to engage with this on the level that I, the author, am writing into it unless you are, like, doing homework.

Sally: Right.

Emily: And, like, studying your notes every night. Or unless you just have the sort of brain that functions that way automatically, which I think is a pretty low percentage of the population.

Sally: Right.

Emily: Most people, I would imagine, most people who are, like, reading the Wheel of Time series as the books came out, probably weren't conducting full rereads of the series every time a book came out because otherwise you'd be doing nothing but reading Wheel of Time.

Sally: (laugh) Yeah.

Emily: So, like, that sort of expectation is, yeah, like, sort of condescending in a way and also just, like, unrealistic. Like, you guys, you need to write to where your audience is, and if you refuse to do that, then you can't be mad when your audience is like, "I don't know what's going on."

Sally: Yeah, I don't know who killed Asmodean, what are you talking about, Robert Jordan? It's not actually obvious.

Emily: Yeah, 'cause it's not in the text, Robert Jordan.

Sally: (laugh) Yeah.

Emily: And there's no normal-sized hints in the text. Just say, "I forgot to write it."

Sally: Yeah, and I feel like this leads to two interconnected but kind of, like, opposite ends of the spectrum experience where the – where these authors, sort of coming from this place on high that they are smarter than their readers and their readers need to exercise a certain level of intellect or study in order to engage with the text. It's either, A, the "I killed samodean" scenario, where you're like, I have literally no idea what the fuck you're talking about because you're just like, "Oh, it's so obvious; everyone will know," and it's like, I have no idea what you were talking about, or B, on the other end of it, you're like, "My audience is so stupid I'm going to spoon – spood – spoon-feed them a bunch of information that they don't actually need. Like, I don't actually need to know the names of so many Aes Sedai in the Hall of the Tower. I don't actually need to know all of these subplots in order to understand the general arc of the siege of Tar Valon. You know?

Emily: Yeah, Robert Jordan had a really tough time, like, figuring out the level of information to give, which I think is sort of the hallmark of the Wheel of Time –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Series. Dude did not understand that we don't need to know what every woman is wearing; that's sort of, like, the comparison that everyone goes to, but furthermore, like, when you peel back the layers, literally, of the dresses: I don't need to know distinguishing features of every woman.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: I don't need to know every woman's name. I don't need to know this many people's, like, characters –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Because this many characters are not necessary.

Sally: Yes.

Emily: So, like, I think I'm operating on a normal baseline, is what I'm saying, that I only know Romanda, Lelaine –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And, like, two other Sitters by name, and the fact that he's just, like, throwing us in there with everyone talking about, like, well, so-and-so has this vendetta, and so-and-so wants this and this, and maybe there's a – some sort of weird conspiracy where some of the Sitters are younger, and that's happening in both Halls of the Tower, and that's significant somehow, and I'm just like, is it, though?

Sally: No.

Emily: Because you can't just keep saying, "Here's the facts: they are significant," and keep saying that until someone reaches the conclusion –

Sally: Right.

Emily: That, apparently, you want us to reach.

Sally: Right.

Emily: That's no way to do a mystery.

Sally: Right. Like, I think – you're right, you are operating at the normal baseline of being, like, four main players, four or five main players, depending on how much you want to count, like, Egg and Siuan and Lelaine as their own –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Or – Leane – as their own faction or, like, individual players. That's actually, like, a completely normal amount of characters. Like, epic fantasy has really conditioned us that there needs to be hundreds of players on the board, when really, like, a strong narrative can be made with a handful. With two, really, if you want to get down to it, but, like, if we have Romanda's faction and maybe we know a few of her underlings, Lelaine's faction, we know a few of her underlings, and then Egg, I'd be like, yeah, I've got it. I understand these currents of power, more or less.

Emily: Yeah, Robert Jordan and George R.R. Martin are going to this school of, like, "I must make fantasy as photorealistic as possible –"

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: When it comes to comparing it to history. Because history is full of inconvenient characters and people who mostly don't really matter but come up in weird ways –

Sally: Right.

Emily: Da da da da da. But, like, the difference between history and fantasy is that fantasy you can build –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: To make it for someone's consumption.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: You don't have to consume history in that way. If you do consume history, then you're a historian or a student and you have diagrams with you.

Sally: Yeah, and also, like, I think it is really – I mean, you're much more of a historian than I, so you can correct me, but, like, it's also very, um, idealistic to say that history is not in and of itself a narrative with certain key players highlighted for various reasons.

Emily: Sure.

Sally: You know? So, like – and you’re – you’re – you’re right; if you are giving, like, an actual historical account of the War of the Roses, to pull – as an example, since we’re talking about Game of Thrones – yeah, you are gonna mention minor players because they did contribute to the web.

Emily: But, like, you can pull a Shakespeare and combine minor roles, do things like that.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And Shakespeare, don’t get me wrong, his War of the Roses plays are still very confusing unless you are operating on a baseline contextual level of the War of the Roses –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But, like, he made it into a narrative. So it’s possible.

Sally: Yeah. It’s just – yeah, and I don’t want to always come back to this, like, level of male intellectual elitism, but I do feel like that’s what a lot of this comes from. Like, gatekeeping is, I think, not an inherently masculine trait, but I think it comes from a lot of masculine ideas – I shouldn’t say the word “masculine” because that is kind of a nonsense thing – but I feel like men are more likely to gatekeep; it’s men who are much more likely to tell me that I am stupid for not following the plot of Game of Thrones; not a single woman has ever said that to me, but multiple men have said that to me. And it’s just like, why are you writing in this way? History doesn’t – you’re right. It doesn’t need to be photorealistic. I dunno. It’s just – it’s just frustrating to be in this space that feels like – it just reminds me very obviously that I’m writing – I’m reading something written by a man.

Emily: Yeah, well, and I think it’s, like, fair to say that we are seeing hallmarks of the, quote unquote, late nineties/early 2000s nerd culture –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: That became so pervasive and that shared so many of these traits, like gatekeeping –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Like misogyny, everything else. Like, those – they didn’t come out of a vacuum –

Sally: No, you’re right.

Emily: They – the eponymous nerds of nerd culture.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: They came from somewhere. And they were nurtured by people like Robert Jordan and George R.R. Martin, intentionally or not.

Sally: Yeah, you’re so right. Like, the idea of lore – and this is – we can – we keep saying George R.R. Martin and Robert Jordan, as if JRRT himself is not, perhaps –

Emily: Yeah, sure, the – (inaudible)

Sally: Ultimately – (laugh) Ultimately responsible for this.

Emily: JRRT, you threw in Tom Bombadil knowing full well I would have no idea what the fuck you were talking about.

Sally: (laugh) Yeah. Like, what were you doing? Like, um, coming out of the Tolkienian tradition, and though – as though – I mean, Tolkien is not the beginning of this, but keeping with this sort of arc of big fantasy authors, like, the idea of lore, in and of itself, just allows you to gatekeep. And, like, it allows people who feel like they don't have a lot of other cultural cache to be like, "Oh, I can lord this above you," you know?

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: In a way that is extremely insufferable. So books like, um, the Lord of the Rings, Wheel of Time, Game of Thrones, um, all of those type of things, yeah, they just lend themselves to being this really toxic –

Emily: Gate-kept.

Sally: Nerd culture, gatekeeping thing. Um, I don't – just as, like, a counter-example to this: um, uh, the Priory of the Orange Tree by Samantha Shannon – I didn't care for this book for a lot of reasons that are mostly, like, personal taste, um, but it is in – kind of in the similar genre of, like, very big epic fantasy that plays a lot on, like, court drama. But it does it with relatively few players, so to speak. Um –

Emily: Yeah, I read that book when the pandemic started? So –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Two and a half years ago or so. And, like, Sally was reading it and I was like, "I don't remember anything about that book," but that's not precisely true. I don't remember, like, names of places –

Sally: Right.

Emily: Or names of people, but I do remember, generally, like, okay, there was a player who was, like, the queen character; there was her bodyguard who was also doing this stuff with the mystical Priory –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: There was the dragon rider over on the other continent –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: There was that dude and his, like, boyfriend-not-boyfriend –

Sally: Yeah.



Emily: Who got killed immediately – spoiler alert –

Sally: RIP.

Emily: RIP to that guy.

Sally: Yeah, I don't remember his name, but RIP.

Emily: There was dragon – you know, like –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: I did remember things, and, like, I also felt like that was a book that did pretty well in being like, there is a history and a lore here, and it's a dense –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Mythology, but you're never going to be left feeling stupid for not understanding it.

Sally: Yeah, totally. No, I totally agree. It's a book that also lends, like, um – goes out of its way to teach you the mythology. It does it in a lot of trope-y ways, but it's not necessarily –

Emily: Sure, yeah.

Sally: Bad. You know? Like, the tropes exist – like, the trope of telling a story to someone in the oral tradition is not a bad one. Like, that's how we dispense information as humans. But you're so right. Like, it's three very – like, it's three distinct plots that are easy to remember, and at each of those places, there's a lot of people because they're populated places, but you never have to remember, really, more than, like, five names and five players. Um. And it's able to exist in this tradition of epic fantasy with very deep mythology and these very complicated plots, without being like, “You're actually a dumb piece of shit if you don't remember the Duke of X's cousin's son's nephew's husband.” And it's like, well, at least there's a queer character in there, I guess. (laugh)

Emily: (laugh) And at least someone's gay.

Sally: At least someone's gay.

Emily: At least there are a relatively normal amount of characters of color. Like –

Sally: Yeah. Like, come on.

Emily: You know? Fantasy's doing better, I think, is what we're – what we're all saying.

Sally: Yeah, I think it's doing better. And I think, um.

Emily: But fantasy is burdened – fantasy as a genre is more or less carrying the dead albatross that is –

Sally: Yes.

Emily: These generations of –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Gatekeeping and misogyny.

Sally: And just, like, the literal heaviness of the page count of the genre itself, I think, is something fantasy is trying to break away from.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: I think people realizing that books can actually just be 350 pages long –

Emily: (laugh) A normal – a normal length.

Sally: Was actually just, like, a revelation –

Emily: “What?”

Sally: For fantasy writers in the 2010s. (laugh) I think they were like, “Oh, wait, actually, if my book is only, like, 400-ish pages –”

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: “That still might be a little too long.” Okay, that’s my little, like, tirade about how –

Emily: Yeah, that’s our – our soap box.

Sally: Male fantasy authors make me feel dumb.

Emily: Here’s what’s going on. Egg goes back to her tent to find Siuan and Halima arguing. Halima is, like, literally lounging on her side on, like, a pile of pillows, and Egg’s like, “Sorry, I need to actually do some work,” and Halima’s like, “Ugh, how dare you,” and storms off after making eye contact with Egg and then – and Egg immediately getting a headache. So, again, we have the unfortunate reality that Halima is very obviously, like, evil –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And doing something to Egg’s brain and Egg – and no one else, seemingly, is realizing it.

Sally: Yeah, everyone’s too busy being like, “Halima is such a whore.”

Emily: Yeah, actually, my big takeaway from it these days was that maybe – perhaps Robert Jordan’s overall thesis is that, like, feminism allows evil women to sneak in.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: (sarcastically) Or, worse, trans women. Like, because, legitimately –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Egg is like, “I let Halima be here because I like her, because I like that she is outspoken –”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: “I like that she is not appropriate, necessarily –”

Sally: Right.

Emily: “And I even like, to a certain extent, that she’s, like, this slutty, like, gives-no-shits –”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: “Person that everyone else finds so offensive.”

Sally: Right.

Emily: And it’s like, whether Egwene liking that persona or not is real because there’s always the question of how much Compulsion she is under –

Sally: Right.

Emily: Um, it is still telling us that, like, Egwene is doing this feminist thing of accepting women –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: However they are, however they behave, however sexually loose they may be.

Sally: Right.

Emily: But by doing that, she’s letting a snake into her bosom. You know?

Sally: Yeah, if she’d up – if she would only uphold the morals of a good, chaste woman –

Emily: A good – if only Egg would behave like a good Christian woman –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Who massages her KKK husband’s feet every night and fucking licks cops’ boots, then –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Everything would be fine, and she wouldn’t get headaches. Sorry.

Sally: No, I mean, listen. Robert Jordan’s really telling on himself in these chapters, so.

Emily: (laugh) Yeah, it’s so annoying.

Sally: We’re just making it clear to you.

Emily: Anyway, so Egg’s like, “Oh my God, I have a headache,” and Siuan’s like, “Blah blah blah blah blah.” Siuan’s just doing her usual thing of ranting and raving and not making any sense about anything. Um, but basically Siuan’s like – they’re doing this report that doesn’t really matter; Siuan, again, brings up the idea that there are Sitters who are too young in both Halls of the Tower, and she thinks that this means something, and Egg is like, “Great, well, find out what it means.”

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: And maybe she will one day. But not –

Sally: Not yet.

Emily: Not in my recollection. And their meeting is interrupted eventually by, um, some of the Aes Sedai – some of the, like, members of Egwene's little coterie –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Of six coming up and being like, "Oh, those ladies who we sent to scout the giant beacon of power a few days ago have come back," so they've called for the Hall of the Tower to sit, which, I don't even think we referenced in the last episode that several Aes Sedai, on a volunteer basis, it seemed, were sent to investigate the beacon and that everyone sort of suspected it was the Forsaken –

Sally: Right.

Emily: So they were all too freaked out to really go for it.

Sally: Yeah, imagine being one of the people who did volunteer.

Emily: It'd be very interesting.

Sally: Like, who's the adrenaline –

Emily: Junkie.

Sally: The adrenaline-focused Aes Sedai who was like, "I will go confront the big hole in the ground."

Emily: The big hole in – well, as we find out from the women who give their report, most of these women were either volunteered or chosen because they have this ability to read resonances of the Power.

Sally: Oh, that's right. That's right. I remember now.

Emily: And we're not really told what that means except, you know, based on context. None of our main characters, as far as I know, really have that ability.

Sally: Right.

Emily: Uh, but it seems like – that they are able to sort of see the weaves that were there.

Sally: Right.

Emily: Um, and, of course, those weaves were more or less meaningless to them because the weave to cleanse saidin wasn't something that ever existed before.

Sally: Right.

Emily: Um, but Egwene is, like, listening to all these, like – everyone’s just sort of talking about before she goes to the Hall because she has to have Sheriam, her Keeper, announce her, and Siuan runs off to fetch Sheriam, so while they’re waiting for Sheriam, everyone’s just kind of arguing about, like, oh, well, what could be going on? Like, not just with the hole in the ground but also, like, these proposed negotiations with Elaida? What could those people be up to, the ones who are talking about that? What’s this chick named Moira up to because apparently she’s up to something?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: I don’t really remember that being brought up, but okay. And finally after Sheriam not showing up for ten minutes, Egg’s just like, “Let’s just go over there; maybe she’s gonna meet us there.” So they go over as the Hall of the Tower is meeting. We get a lot of lady descriptions. Eventually Sheriam shows up, breathless and mildly hysterical, which, these days, is sort of Sheriam’s baseline.

Sally: I know, it’s ...

Emily: And the Hall of the Tower convenes. It’s an open session, which means that every Aes Sedai can, uh, watch if not participate.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: And they get this report out of the way immediately and all that happens is the six women who went are like, “Okay, well, we went and what we found is a big hole in the ground, approximately, like, three miles wide and a mile and a half deep.”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: A mile and a half deep is incredibly deep.

Sally: It’s so deep. It’s such a big hole.

Emily: I don’t think we’re – yeah, I don’t think we’re really talking about that. That’s, like, the Grand Canyon.

Sally: Yeah. Fucking Kennecott Copper Mine, just in the middle of Shadar Logoth.

Emily: Yeah, and they’re like, “And this happened – this is the location that Shadar Logoth was.”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: “And we don’t know what happened there or what’s going on, da da da da da.” And that’s all their report is, basically. “We went, tons of saidin was used, more saidin than saidar but also a huge amount of saidar, and Shadar Logoth is gone and now there’s just this hole.” So this is – this is annoying because as a person who enjoys sort of, like, mystery novels and –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And detective-type work, I feel like they should have been able to do more if this ability to read the resonances is significant. For example, if they'd gone to the origin point, where Rand and Nynaeve were sitting, and fanned out from there, then they would have very quickly found evidence of people fighting one another –

Sally: Right.

Emily: Both with saidin and saidar.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Uh, with more recognizable weaves.

Sally: Yeah, and there should also be, like, some dead bodies, unless people cleaned up everything.

Emily: Uh, yeah, I don't know. I think – I think the only dead body that would have been left would have been, um, Dashiva's.

Sally: Oh, that's right.

Emily: And he got, like, super blown up, so maybe not a lot of him left.

Sally: You're – you right, you right.

Emily: Um, but there should be, like, scorch marks, you know?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Blood, maybe.

Sally: Blood.

Emily: So they – they should have been able to do more. But it suits Robert Jordan that they're left in this state of confusion, and it suits the members of the Hall of the Tower who want to use this big event that no one knows what it was, what happened, but for some reason – and I don't know if this – this – this is weird to me. They have all assumed it was the Forsaken.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: And there has been no debate that we have seen that maybe it wasn't the Forsaken.

Sally: Right.

Emily: Despite the fact that, like, Rand is also sort of a very obvious "maybe."

Sally: Yeah, it's very frustrating to me that Rand is, like, apparently never on the table.

Emily: Yeah, like – especially because he's been missing.

Sally: Right.

Emily: And also, even if he's not communicating with Egg, Elayne and Aviendha know where he is, always, and Egg is in communication with them, so.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: There should be, like – the Aes Sedai should not be totally in the dark about this.

Sally: Yeah, I think it is in this chapter following, 'cause I was just skimming my blogs really quick, that Aviendha – they, like, talk in Tel'aran'rhiol or whatever and Aviendha, like, deliberately chooses not to tell Egg that it's Rand for some reason, if I'm remembering correctly, and it's like, why?

Emily: Why?

Sally: Just tell her.

Emily: Like, the – the lack of communication in the later books of the Wheel of Time is something that readers often point out as being very frustrating –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Alongside the really delayed plot points of, for example, the siege of Tar Valon, Perrin rescuing Faile, et cetera, et cetera. And they're right; the lack of communication is really annoying because Robert Jordan does not give us any clear reasons why it's happening.

Sally: Right.

Emily: It's not like he can even say, like, this is happening along a gender binary, where men are not communicating with women.

Sally: Right.

Emily: This is, in this case, just women not communicating with women.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And God knows Rand isn't communicating with anyone else –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Perrin, Mat, anyone.

Sally: Mm.

Emily: So it's not, like, even serving Robert Jordan's project, really. It's just sort of his conceit in order to keep the plot secret –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: From characters, which is very annoying to readers because at a certain point, you stretch our suspension of disbelief to the breaking point. We no longer believe that these characters are that stupid, because you've been spending eight books telling us that they're smart, actually.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So anyway. Everyone's like, "This was definitely the Forsaken, and the Forsaken were definitely using some sort of, like, nuke or whatever – the A-bomb – the fucking A-bomb on Shadar Logoth," and Romanda's like, "Well, who gives a shit? It's Shadar Logoth." (laugh)

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Like, "Good riddance."

Sally: Which is a pretty funny response, I think.

Emily: I know. And also, no one's like, "So the Forsaken got rid of Shadar Logoth – like, the evillest city?"

Sally: Yeah, like, why?

Emily: Why? Are they trying to clean up the world –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Before they take over? What's the point? You know?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But this comes down to – a few women are, like – have manufactured this to be like, "Okay, well, if the Forsaken have this much power and can do this level of damage, then we need to up our game in being able to fight them because, like, look at us: we have all these contingency plans, if we're ever attacked, that involve linking up with each other, but we are not as strong as whatever happened here." And it's like, yeah, no one is as strong as what happened there, because they were using the two biggest –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Sa'angreal, ter'angreal of all time.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And you were also using two of the most powerful channelers of all time.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Like, these are not, like, fair –

Sally: Yeah. It's not – (laugh)

Emily: Logical leaps.

Sally: Yeah, it's like me being like, "Damn, I'm not as good of a basketball player as LeBron James."

Emily: Yeah, no, I don't expect you to be. Like – (laugh)



Sally: It's like, I – so I should do something about it. It's like, no, I don't need to do anything about it.

Emily: Yeah, we're not gonna start going to summer camp now.

Sally: Yeah. Like, we do not exist on the same scale.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: And that's fine. Like, it doesn't – it – they mean – the comparisons mean nothing.

Emily: If I'm ever called upon to, like, be in a competition with LeBron James, I'm going to try and ensure that it's not basketball.

Sally: Yeah. (laugh)

Emily: Like, maybe it will be something we're equally good at, like chess. I don't know. Maybe he's really good at chess.

Sally: Yeah, maybe. Who –

Emily: I'm not.

Sally: I'm not either, so he could probably beat me at – anyone could probably beat me at chess.

Emily: Yeah, he could probably – baking? (laugh)

Sally: Baking. (laugh) It's the Great British Break-Off, starring LeBron James and Emily Juchau.

Emily: I'd watch that.

Sally: Me too.

Emily: I bet he's delightful. Um –

Sally: Um.

Emily: Stupid.

Sally: So – but it – it's just like, that's how ridiculous this feels. And even if they are comparing – even if they're not, like, knowing that it's Rand and Nynaeve and – featuring the Choedan Kal – even comparing –

Emily: (laugh) It's like a fucking –

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Rap album.

Sally: Yeah. Um. Featuring the Choedan Kal. Um, feat, f-e-a-t, period.

Emily: Yeah, exactly.

Sally: Um, even, like, trying to compare yourself to the Forsaken seems a little bit like comparing yourself to a professional athlete.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: It's just like, they're thirteen of the most powerful channelers in history, given special powers and training by the Devil himself. Like, it is also not fair to compare yourself to them. I understand that you need to find a way to fight them, but to just be like –

Emily: “Wow, so this is finally evidence that we're outclassed.”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And it's like, that's been known from the get-go.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: In fact.

Sally: Yeah. Like, it just, like, I – I do understand them being like, “We need to find a way to deal with this,” but it's just like, it took this for you to perhaps consider, “Hmm.”

Emily: Hmm.

Sally: “Perhaps we are not able to fight the Forsaken?” (laugh) It's actually not as hard as you'd think, so.

Emily: Oh, yeah. They're actually all super bad –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: At everything.

Sally: Which is the other thing that's really funny. Like, if they were in communication with Rand “have killed half of the Forsaken” al'Thor, he'd be like, “It's not that hard. You don't need to worry about it.”

Emily: Yeah, like, legitimately, just –

Sally: Just don't worry about it.

Emily: Just show up. Nynaeve would be like, “Oh, yeah, I beat Moghedien's ass like three times.”

Sally: Yeah. She's like, it's actually not that big of a deal.

Emily: It's not that hard. They have weaknesses. They're all idiots.

Sally: They're all –

Emily: That's the big weakness.

Sally: They are all foolish.

Emily: Anyway, so the proposed plan is that maybe the Aes Sedai should consider getting into linked circles with the Asha'man. This causes immediate uproar in, as you referred to last week, you know, when we're in Robert Jordan's women governmental bodies' space, women all have to react by fainting, screaming, throwing up, because women are so emotive –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: They just can't hold it in. Or their ovaries will explode, killing them instantly.

Sally: Yeah. I actually threw up this morning when I found out the queen of England was dead.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: That's how I expressed – (laugh)

Emily: I just started screaming, crying. God. Um, no – (laugh) She – tellingly, it is Sheriam who begins having this extreme emotional breakdown –

Sally: Right.

Emily: And Sheriam's been kind of, like, borderline mental breakdown for a little while.

Sally: Yeah. What's happening, friend?

Emily: Uh, but now she's, like, legit having a breakdown in front of everyone. Delana, also tellingly, also looks upset about this.

Sally: Right.

Emily: So, Sheriam and Delana – Delana – because we've both seen them, at this point, um, interacting with the Forsaken, we know that they're both Black Ajah, so clearly this is something that the Forsaken themselves will not be pleased by.

Sally: Right.

Emily: Um, whether this is because in general the Forsaken and the Dark One realize that it's best to keep the various, you know, circles of channeling people separate because they're less powerful that way –

Sally: Right.

Emily: Or because, ooh, God forbid we send more women to Mazrim Taim's school for damaged war criminals.

Sally: Yeah. (laugh)

Emily: You know, not-Demandred's home base. I mean, come on.

Sally: Yeah, not – definitely not where Demandred is.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: That's how it's labeled on the map.

Emily: It's Mazrim Taim, parentheses, NOT Demandred's, school for wayward war criminals.  
(laugh)

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Anyway, after some tense argument and explanations, the Hall of the Tower arrives at a consensus that they will move forward with this plan and will approach, at some point, the Asha'man. Um, similar to this, we know that over in the proper White Tower, Elaida has sent some ladies on a, uh, SWAT, Seal Team Six mission that immediately got fucked over. Um, and pretty soon Pevara and, um, we'll – we'll be getting this in the next few chapters, I believe –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: The beginnings of this. Uh, the White Tower, Elaida's White Tower, is going to do something equivalent to this. So there's going to be a lot more mingling of Asha'man and Aes Sedai. But those are the big plot points, such as they are.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, not – not terribly significant yet because they don't really have any payoff in this book or the next few books, really.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: If you can, you know, say that they have any payoff at all; really, I just find the whole Aes Sedai/Asha'man interactions more confusing and frustrating than they are productive.

Sally: Well, yeah, especially at this point in the series. We're ten books in and we're still try – Robert Jordan is still trying to get traction out of the whole, like, "Every man who can channel is evil," and that's how the Aes Sedai react – "Every man who can channel is dangerous and evil," and, like, they are dangerous because Mazrim Taim and Rand al'Thor are using them as weapons –

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: But they're not, like, inherently dangerous or inherently evil, and it's just, like, ridiculous that Robert Jordan is still trying to get traction from this, even within the Aes Sedai points of view. Like, much like the lack of communication in the series, this, like, intrinsic world-building of, like, "male channelers bad" just doesn't work anymore because we have too many different points of view in which we are seeing the opposite or we are getting the piece of information so we, the reader, know it, and it's just kind of exhausting at this point to, like, exist outside what the characters know. Like, we're – I just feel like we're too far in the series for this.

Emily: No, yeah, like, this has been – this whole idea has been thoroughly disproven to the readers –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So it's more frustrating that the characters can't keep up. That's another reason why lack of communication is frustrating. It's a little like, I don't know, if you were reading a – a book about, like, science from the point of view of someone who was like, "Vaccines aren't real –"

Sally: Right.

Emily: You know, you'd be like, uhhh, what? Like –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Why am I paying attention to you, even? Like –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: If you can't keep track of the basics, then why am I supposed to believe you can keep track of more nuanced things?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So, dunno, besties. It's pretty annoying. Amongst the news that Egg receives in these two chapters are, um: Arad Doman is in shambles. Merana of the Gray Ajah has been sighted outside of the palaces of Tear, so score one for Merana –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And also put one in the column for various Aes Sedai from both camps being spotted either doing things for Rand or, like, within company tied to Rand.

Sally: Mm. Mm.

Emily: So outside of the situation, Egg and her camp are becoming aware that, like, okay, whatever happened to the Aes Sedai we sent to Rand and that the White Tower sent to Rand, clearly they're all working for him now. And we don't know why – Compulsion, maybe? – but that's –

Sally: Yeah, there's this –

Emily: Happening.

Sally: It feels a little ridiculous to me for Egg to be like, "I think my friend, my best friend from childhood, is brainwashing people," and it's like, it happens, sure. We've all been there. (laugh)

Emily: It happened. Lobotomy tent.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Verin did that. (laugh)

Sally: But it wasn't Rand. It wasn't Rand. And so it's just, like, this exhausting sort of pointing the finger at Rand for things that Verin did but not knowing what Rand – not actually considering that maybe Rand did the big explosion. It's just, like –

Emily: It's also frustrating that Rand wasn't immediately – I mean, this is giving Rand too much credit, perhaps, but some of the Aes Sedai should've been like, "Okay, Rand, you want to establish a relationship with the Aes Sedai, the larger group of Aes Sedai, that's not going to involve whatever you don't want, which is you bending down to them; you need to allow us to communicate with them and be like, 'Here's what's going on, here's what's happening; we chose this –'"

Sally: Right.

Emily: "'On some level and we're actually making progress.' Like, da da da da da." That's the only way things are going to get done.

Sally: Totally. So it is very silly.

Emily: Just people being stupid.

Sally: Just, like –

Emily: Just a bunch of dummies.

Sally: Unbelievable communication. Someone needs to establish an international news network ASAP in –

Emily: Someone needs to get the fucking Pony Express –

Sally: Wheely World.

Emily: Going.

Sally: Yeah, that can be Olver's first job. Boy loves horses so much.

Emily: Oh my God. He does love horses. He's lightweight or whatever.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But that's that, you guys. Um, anything else to add?

Sally: No. I, as always, have said plenty.

Emily: Okay, well. Thanks to everyone for listening. Thanks to Glynna MacKenzie for our theme song. Thanks to our patrons on Patreon and our followers on social media. Do you have a sign-off?

Sally: Yeah, we actually have a listener-submitted sign-off.

Emily: Ooh.

Sally: Okay. This was submitted to us by Xander.

Emily: Hi, Xander.

Sally: Um. (laugh) And Xander said, um, “I have a listener-submitted sign-off for you (that actually features EHR! Or I guess Letters to Hozier specifically).”

Emily: Ooh.

Sally: That’s our side podcast, in case you don’t know. We work very hard on it, so maybe listen to it. Um, Xander said, “So today I was at my desk at work, and generally when I’m sitting at my desk I’ll listen to music or podcasts or whatever. Full disclosure, I normally avoid listening to Everybody Hates Rand at work because it will make me laugh too much.” That’s very kind. So, “Today I started listening to your Letters to Hozier side project.” Um, uh, “So anyways I was listening to the In A Week letter to Hozier,” um, “Emily is talking about the Two Maidens from Pompeii and how it was recently discovered that the two maidens were both men and Emily said, ‘Instead of the Two Maidens, are they now the Two Bros?’ I thought this line was pretty funny, but probably would have just chuckled to myself and moved on. However, immediately after Emily introduces the idea of the Two Bros, the letter switches to Sally’s narration where Sally states, ‘The stomach acid of vultures is incredibly corrosive.’” (laugh) This is, like, the most distilled distinction of our two personalities that you –

Emily: (laugh) I did that on purpose, for the record.

Sally: That you could have picked out. (laugh) Um, it was really good editing on your part. Um. (laugh) So, “For some reason, the humor of Emily’s line and the abrupt transition to Sally’s bird facts –” That should be my, uh, new gig: Sally’s Bird Facts. Um, “Really tickled me and caused me to laugh rather loudly at my desk for a few seconds. My coworkers looked over and asked what I was listening to that was so funny. They weren’t annoyed ...” um, “I think they were just wondering because I’m normally pretty reserved and professional at work. However, I wasn’t sure how to respond to my coworkers’ question because it was really the contrast between Emily and Sally’s subject matters that made me laugh and I didn’t want to try to explain I was listening to something about both corpses from Pompeii and vulture stomach acid. And explaining the Two Maidens as Two Bros also seemed like too much, so in a momentary panic I said I was listening to a podcast about vulture digestion.” Which is, like, a great – (laugh)

Emily: (laugh)

Sally: A great cover. And I would listen to that podcast.

Emily: And you were laughing. (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) Yeah. And you were like, “Ha ha ha.” Uh, so that’s the thing here. “Unfortunately my coworkers were all curious about what aspects of vulture digestion were so amusing. Unsure of what to say, I simply repeated Sally’s line of ‘the stomach acid of vultures is incredibly corrosive.’ On its own, this line is definitely not that funny and all my coworkers were looking pretty weird, probably wondering if I was okay. I wound up just saying the hosts of this hypothetical vulture digestion podcast were really funny, and I had laughed because of how the fact was presented. I think they could tell I was trying to cover up what I was listening to but none of them pressed me.” (laugh) “Fortunately none of my coworkers asked for the name of this vulture podcast because I don’t know what I would have told them.”

Emily: (laugh) Vulture Vulture.

Sally: Vulture Vulture? (laugh) Vulture Culture.

Emily: Vulture Culture! That's a good one.

Sally: I know, I think –

Emily: You just came up with that off the dome.

Sally: Yeah. Welcome to Sally's side podcast –

Emily: Vulture Culture.

Sally: Vulture Culture.

Emily: Well, just so you know, Xander, I splice the letters together, and I did think that would be the funniest place to put that.

Sally: I'm sorry I'm so weird.

Emily: No, it was very good.

Sally: I just think vultures are neat.

Emily: (cough) Thanks for listening, everyone!

Sally: Bye!

Emily: Bye.