



Episode 217: Hey, Ear Guy?

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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: Um, this is Everybody Hates Rand, your friendly neighborhood *Wheel of Time* podcast. I'm Emily Juchau.

SALLY: And I'm Sally Goodger.

EMILY: And I'm super annoyed by these chapters, soooo I just don't wanna – I just don't wanna be here very long. In this space.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: In this Perrin shaped hole in the wall.

SALLY: Hole in the universe.

EMILY: Like a cartoon.

SALLY: Yeah, I just read *Grendel* by John Gardner. Would not recommend [laughs].

EMILY: [laughs]

SALLY: That is not an EHR approved text. Um, but there is, like, this scene where he talks to the dragon that Beowulf also kills eventually, you know?

EMILY: Sure, sure.

SALLY: And he like – it's described as him, like, falling out of space and time to sort of fall into the dragon's lair, basically. And that's how I – that's what I feel happened to me with Perrin. I just sort of fell out of space and time into this horrific place [laughs].

EMILY: This dingy murder whole.

SALLY: Yeah, which is really unfortunate because some, like, interesting – really interesting things are happening in this chapter and Perrin is just like, "Instead, I will torture people and collaborate, um, with the invading imperialist, fascist regime."

EMILY: Yeah, we're really at the, um –

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: I'd like to say it's the low point, but the thing with Perrin is that he just sort of keeps compounding his crimes.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: You know? It's hard to say – it's like when people say – [laughs] ironically, considering the Try Guys – how do you – you know, committing adultery isn't just one decision.

SALLY: Right. Totally.

EMILY: It's a series of decisions that you continue making, because at any point in the process you can back out.

SALLY: Yeah, of course.

EMILY: You'll still have done something wrong, but, you know, there are degrees of wrongness.

SALLY: Absolutely.

EMILY: And it's, like, Perrin makes this decision, multiple decisions, but then he continues to make the decisions.

SALLY: No, that is such a good point, Emily. About, like, often times in fantasy in particular, I feel like, it operates very much in the idea that good and evil and binaries, you know? This comes very much – like, fantasy comes very much out of the fairy tale tradition and the folk tale tradition, where, actually, maybe if you go back to the original fairy tales and folktales, good and evil and morality is a much more slippery thing, *but* in the way they've sort of been Disney-fied and, um, Brothers Grimm-ified, to a certain extent, like good and evil does become a little bit more binary. And fantasy comes out of that tradition, you know? You think – of course last week we talked about fantasy progenitor JRR Tolkien.

EMILY: Mm-hmm.

SALLY: And the way that he impacts the genre. Anyway, I'm on my rambling little soapbox today. I'll try to keep that contained, *but* we get in fantasy often this idea that good is very much one thing and evil is very much the other. And of course that is not true, and, like, it – fantasy fail this test within the own – within the text, you know? The text will fail its own test of being like, “These are our good guys and these are our bad guys,” and there's, like, no real in between. And, like, somehow – I keep talking about this, but somehow it's, like, no matter what our good guys do they never slip out of the camp of being good guys. And it's just, like, that is – that is not the case. That's not how things work. Like, Perrin in this instance is very much, like, like if you take the perspective of one of the people in the – in Perrin's camp, how do you not look at Perrin and be like, “This is a small dictator, who is absolutely not caring about what is happening, is sort of creating this microcosm of evil inside this camp.” And it's just, like, [sighs] so frustrating for it to be like, “Oh, it's fine that Perrin chops off a man's hand, takes food from a village that is obviously really struggling, and offers no assistance. Chooses to collaborate with the Seanchan. Chooses to sell slaves to the Seanchan.” Like, like you said. It's this compounding thing, and it's never, like, “Oh, time for Perrin to face a consequence or something.”

EMILY: Anyway, I don't think there's any way forward except into the crevasse.

SALLY: Yeah, sorry. Again, I will try to ramble not so much today.

EMILY: This is a three – a tri-chapter [laughs] experience. A three-dimensional wave of terror. Um, the first chapter in the Homeric tradition – and we get a lot of these with Perrin – is just this sort of catalog.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Of who is in Perrin's camp. It's quite annoying.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Because, I mean –

SALLY: [laughing] It really is like reading the Iliad.

EMILY: Yeah, you're just like –

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: Okay, great, I get it. [laughing] Berelain's still here. Arganda's still here. The fucking Aes Sedai are still here. But, we get them preparing to go to this town that they learned about in Perrin's last point of view, that would presumably have grain and other, uh, necessities to sell to them. Perrin is being accompanied by Berelain, a contingent of Mayeners, and an also contingent of Ghealdinin. Not, significantly, Arganda, you know, Alliandre's captian of the guard, because he's staying behind. Perrin says it's because Arganda doesn't want to get any farther from

Alliandre. Perrin, on his high horse, is like, “Yeah, I’m ready to die for Faile, but Arganda just seems like he’s ready to die.” And I’m like, “How do you think you look to people?”

SALLY: Yeah, bestie. Have, like, a modicum of self-awareness.

EMILY: Yeah, it’s, like, these are two men who are *not* handling the situation well *at all*. But they’re both, like, “Well, the other guy’s being terrible.” Anyway, uh, they’re also being accompanied by the Aes Sedai. Neald is waving – opening the gateways for them and they’ve also got some Two Rivers’ guys to, like, actually load the carts with anything they buy. Aram, significantly, is staying behind, because Aram has been, uh...

SALLY: Radicalized.

EMILY: Yeah, [laughs] he’s – he’s sure getting worse. He’s getting more touchy, more violent, and ultimately, um, Perrin no longer trusts him to be by his side in delicate situations, similarly to Arganda. We know, with the benefit of hindsight, that this is because Aram is probably spending more time with Masema.

SALLY: Aram is basically like the werewolf chained to the radiator.

EMILY: [laughs]

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: That was [laughing] a good *Teen Wolf* pull.

SALLY: Perrin’s just like, “It’s for your own good.”

EMILY: Perrin himself doesn’t even want to leave, because he’s like, um, “The Maidens might come back with some captives that they’ve got from Malden, or whatever.” And it’s like, okay. Whatever. And he’s like [laughing], “I just wanna – I’m so excited to torture them for information.” Um, he doesn’t say that. Perrin isn’t thinking about what will happen he has prisoners to interrogate. As with most people he’s just like, “And then everything will be fixed!”

SALLY: They’ll tell me what I need to know and.

EMILY: Yeah, their agency is not a facet of this conversation at all.

SALLY: Yeah, Perrin is very much living in the eternal present. It’s just sort of like the next decision, the next decision. It’s pretty insufferable to read.

EMILY: Yeah, um, everyone’s pretty, like, decked out. They had to break into their safes, more or less, to get enough money. And Berelain’s like, “Yeah, we’re all wearing jewels because – so that they know we mean business. And that we can afford all of this.” Anyway, they Travel. Neald is, of course, the shining light of these chapters. He’s just such a funny little guy. With his waxed mustachios.

SALLY: I know. Perrin is so rude to him, which I think is very homophobic.

EMILY: I know. He's like, "He better not fuck up, Neald." And I'm like, "Leave – let him live."

SALLY: Yeah, can you –

EMILY: Not fuck up?

SALLY: Make teleportations? Yeah.

EMILY: Yeah maybe. He's like [in a dramatic, showman voice], "Very well, my – " You know? At least he has some showmanship.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Which is pretty hilarious when you think of Grady just being like –

SALLY: This bored farmer.

EMILY: Yeah [laughs].

SALLY: And Neald's like, "It's me!"

EMILY: It's me!

SALLY: Valan Luca 2.0 [laughs].

EMILY: [laughing] If Neald and Valan Luca met, it would be like a black hole in the universe.

SALLY: [laugh] Yeah, they can't – they can't occupy the same space.

EMILY: Yeah. It would be like two stars colliding.

SALLY: At the same time.

EMILY: Um, they Travel to this town. Perrin immediately is like, "Oh, no wonder Masema didn't loot this town. They actually have walls."

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: That's not exactly Masema's cup of tea. But as they advance, they see there are people on the wall, and Perrin's nose slash sixth sense starts giving him bad vibes. Especially because they walk up and the people on the wall are like, "How do we know you're alive?" And Seonid, [laughing] iconically, says. "If I have to prove I'm alive you'll regret it." [laughs]

SALLY: [laughs] I know, she's fun in these chapters.

EMILY: Yeah, she is pretty funny. Um, and they're like, "Uhhh okay, okay." And open the gates. Everyone goes in. Balwer, who's also there with a couple of Faile's, um, you know, little weirdos, immediately slithers away into the darkness to collect information. Uh, they talk to the guys on the wall, who Berelain's like, "Where's your lord and lady? That's who we're here to talk to." And this guy's like, "Uh, y'all want to talk to the grain merchants and they're all at this pub."

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: So they start heading there. So Harbor, um, is a town that Perrin describes as being very smelly, very dirty, and everyone being shifty.

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: Not in the criminal sense, but in the sort of shell-shocked traumatized sense.

SALLY: Right.

EMILY: Although I do think it is very interesting that Robert Jordan has, um, uhhh, c – categorized dirtiness and bad hygiene in this, um, off-putting sense.

SALLY: Yeah, I –

EMILY: It's a little bit, you know, like – you know, people who are dirty aren't bad people.

SALLY: Yeah, I was...like preparing for this episode and I was, like, desperately trying to figure out, like, why everybody is dirty. You know? Like, I – spoiler alert. We haven't gotten to the big reveal yet, but, you know, the dead are walking in So Harbor. And that's, like, yeah that's really upsetting but, like, why do we need to indicate such an upsetting setting – [laughs] and upsetting setting.

EMILY: [chuckles]

SALLY: With this type of, like, dirtiness and this type of, like, mass depression that is making people, like, unwilling to...

EMILY: Yeah, and we're never given a clear answer in the text, which I think is what makes it troubling.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: You know? It would be one thing if Robert Jordan was like, "And everyone was afraid to be in a shower by themselves, because [laughs] that's where the ghosts are."

SALLY: Yeah, or they –

EMILY: The shower ghosts.

SALLY: There's something with the water, too. Like, the food is contaminated.

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: Is the water also gro – you know?

EMILY: Yeah, something like that. But instead, what we're left to believe is that these people are, like you said, depressed. These people are terrified, and they are slipping away from humanity.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And dirtiness equals inhumanity, which is a real, um, fun bias.

SALLY: Yeah, sure.

EMILY: To be carrying into, uh, any world, fantasy or otherwise. That's my one quibble with the So Harbor sequence, otherwise I think it's a really interesting sequence and a really fun examination of the bubbles of evil effect.

SALLY: Yeah! I agree.

EMILY: Um, they go to this inn where the grain merchants are. They're also very shift. Everyone's acting super weird. Uh, as Berelain, like, conducts this negotiation, Perrin, getting more and more skeeved out is like, "Okay, we want to see your grain storehouses." And everyone's like [shuddering noises].

SALLY: Oh no!

EMILY: One guy, like, puts his head on the table, as though [laughs] – like, buddy, you're just giving away the game there.

SALLY: Yeah. He didn't even try.

EMILY: I know like [groans]. [half-laughing] The guy who's in charge of, um, the Ghealdinin isn't Arganda, it's, like, his second-in-command and he's just carrying, like, a full [laugh] wine goblet this entire time. Which I just think is really funny of him. Just like, "Do be do be do."

SALLY: Wine mom.

EMILY: Being generally unpleasant. They go to the grain houses, open them up. Perrin gets into the grain and immediately finds, unsurprising to us, perhaps, because we've been in Egg's point

of view recently, this is super – everything’s gone bad. Everything’s rotting. In this case, for grain, it’s that there are weevils. So, [laughs] Perrin and Berelain are like, “Oh, great. So, you were just super trying to cheat us.” And Berelain’s like, “Yeah, for half the price, we’ll take it, but you’re going to – we’re going to have to sift it significantly.” It’s interesting, because Perrin, uh, and Rand and Mat, their groups generally don’t have to deal with the amount of food corruption that say the Aes Sedai and other groups of people who are not affiliated with the *ta’veren* do. Because, you know, they sort of create these bubbles of anti-Dark One’s effects.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Which just sort of left me curious. I was like, “Once they, like, get them into the camp, is there – are we going to find that everything’s good again.”

SALLY: Yeah it’s very –

EMILY: You know? More or less.

SALLY: Like, how does this immunity that they have work?

EMILY: Who knows? Um, but while they’re in the grain houses they hear that guy, not Argan – [laughs] not Arganda, the other guy, Wine Mom – yelling and they go out there and he’s like [strained voice], “Oh my god. I just saw someone, like, walk through a wall.” And everyone’s like, “Oh, yeah. You saw a ghost. There’s just dead people everywhere.” And, of course, the lord of the town fled, because he was seeing his dead wife, who, it is implied, he murdered.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: So, sort of along the dirtiness thing, So Harbor’s lord was a murderer, perhaps, these merchants are trying to cheat people.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And, uh, yeah, just generally not good behavior. So, it’s almost like So Harbor deserves this, which I think is an interesting stance to take, because, you know, it’s a bubble of evil. We should be saying – seeing that it’s not on any morality scale, it’s just happening to people.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: But they start sifting the grain. Um, Seonid is like, “One of us has to, like, stay here and see if we can do anything for these people.” And Perrin’s like, “No, fuck off.” And Seonid’s like, “Great. Thanks. Super duper. You’re the best. Fuck you.” [laughs]

SALLY: It also is just like – again, I know Perrin is dealing with so much stuff, but as soon as I was like – because in the lead up to it when they’re like, “How do we know you’re alive?” You’re like, oh, wouldn’t it be so funny if there were ghosts in *Wheel of Time*?

EMILY: Yeah [fake laughs].

SALLY: You're like, "Ha ha, Robert Jordan's gonna pull a fast one on me. There won't be ghosts." But then you get here and you're like [laughing], "Holy shit there are ghosts."

EMILY: THERE'S GHOSTS?!

SALLY: *Wheel of Time* suddenly just has ghosts. And we start to see more of this with Mat also seeing ghosts, you know? And you're like, "What the fuck? This is such a wild turn. This is so fascinating and interesting." And Perrin, who's, as our, like, viewpoint and main character, is supposed to be kind of, like, our window into the world, does not express any curiosity or interest in this at all.

EMILY: [laughing]

SALLY: And you're like, "What the fuck just happened?"

EMILY: He's just like, "Ugh well."

SALLY: And then we just, like, pick up and leave So Harbor. Never to return. And it's like, Robert, I would read an entire book series about this town. Like, this is super interesting. And he's like, "Look at this set piece I have crafted."

EMILY: Yeah, it's so –

SALLY: Goodbye! [laughs]

EMILY: Goodbye! We'll never go back.

SALLY: Yeah, it's so *weird*. It's so bizarre.

EMILY: Yeah, you're right. From, like, a series – because, like, from a series standpoint, there have been hints leading up to this. Like, in Elayne's point of view in this book, I think there was like a maid who screamed, because she thought she saw a dead person.

SALLY: Right.

EMILY: And that's been happening every once in a while to other people, but never to, like, our point of view characters.

SALLY: Right.

EMILY: Given, Perrin still hasn't seen a dead person. I think Mat is probably the first person to actually start interacting with ghosts.

SALLY: Right [laughs]. What a freak.

EMILY: But Perrin's being told to his face that this is, like, not just one person seeing ghosts, this is an entire town. And the evidence is before him, so, he's just kind of like, "Oh, well. On with my business. Pobody's nerfect."

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Leaves So Harbor. You're right. It's very odd.

SALLY: It's just, like, so frustrating to me. Like, why would you do this to me, Robert? It feels so egregious, and, like, I can't put my finger on it exactly, except for, like, the idea that dirty people are evil and people who have poor hygiene somehow deserve bad things to happen to them – like, something about this sequence feels, like, really upsetting. Like, again just in a way I can't quite put my finger on it, like, I feel like those two qualifiers do not totally make up for, like, how upset I am about Robert Jordan's treatment of So Harbor and, again, I don't know what it is. So, for him to just be like, "Look at this somehow offensive thing I have plopped in the middle of here, but it's also very interesting." Like, it could be less offensive if you let me just explore what's going on here. But Perrin just doesn't care.

EMILY: Yeah, it's just like we're stuck with a character who refuses to engage with any side quests.

SALLY: Right.

EMILY: And, like, no. Side quests are what make the story good.

SALLY: Yeah, they're what make things fun and interesting, and also, like, it's just very indicative of Perrin's point of view right now, where, like, the literal end of the world, or possible end of the world, is happening around Perrin and he refuses to acknowledge it.

EMILY: Yeah, like, we are not allowed, in Perrin's perspective, to have any fun, any deviations from what is, you know, right in front of him. Like you said, he's very much in the present.

SALLY: Yeah, he's just, like, very single minded. He's got a goal, he exists in the present, he's not doing any planning, he's not doing any reflection. It's just, like, there are ghosts in So Harbor –

EMILY: And on we go, you know? Like.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: I don't know. I'm – I'm curious how this would play on – for another character, because being in Perrin's head right now is a deeply unpleasant experience. And it's not just, like, his litany of people. I mean, Rand also has a litany of people.

SALLY: He he he.

EMILY: Who doesn't at this point? But, like, um, you know, Perrin's just no fun to be with at the moment. And So Harbor, I think, is also written very much to be an unpleasant experience. Like, it is off-putting. It is – none of the people we meet are kind or interesting or funny. They're all just mean and traumatized, duh, duh, duh, duh, duh. It's just kind of gross. Nobody feels comfortable around things that smell or are dirty.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: However much Robert Jordan is moralizing about it. So, it's just very much intended to be a [scared noise] experience.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: But, like, sort of Perrin himself is a sort of [scared noise] experience [laughs] at the moment. So, it's compounding.

SALLY: Yeah, and I think maybe a little bit of what is upsetting to me is this kind of theme in *Wheel of Time*, and theme in, like, any type of text that deals with war, because the Last *Battle* is framed as a *battle*, it's not like we are just having a – a – a climate apocalypse, you know, something that you can't fight. It's very much presented as, "We are going to fight the forces of evil and somebody is going to come out victorious." Like, that's how the apocalypse is presented to us, so of course a war is happening between the forces of good and evil, and, like, here you have a perfect example of just, like, everyday people caught in the middle. And Robert Jordan is just like, "Well, maybe [laughing] they should have been rich or something." I don't know!

EMILY: Yeah, the only people worth following are the ones who just incidentally got caught up in Mat or Rand or Perrin's circles.

SALLY: Yeah, and it's just like here's – these people are, like, legitimately suffering. If they're – if all the food is spoiled and Perrin and Berelain are buying basically the remainders of their stores, what is going to happen to these people, you know? It's just, like, this unanswered – this big unanswered question that just sits so poorly with me, and Perrin's just – like you said, Perrin's just [scared noise] so every decision he makes just kind of gives you the heebie jeebies.

EMILY: Yeah. Speaking of bad decisions, when they were walking to So Harbor, they saw, like, a Seanchan pterodactyl above them.

SALLY: [laughing] Pterodactyl.

EMILY: [laughing] That's what it is. And everyone was like, "Ah! Seanchan!" And Perrin's like, "Nothing to do with us." Which is, you know, sort of in a single sentence the whole problem with the – Perrin's attitude.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Um, and, in a more intentional writer I might think, “Oh, you know, Robert Jordan is showing us that, like, this is a bad thing that Perrin is saying, like – that Perrin is representing people generally who are like if it’s on the other side of the world, or far enough removed from me, then it’s not my problem.”

SALLY: Yeah, I think a really interesting thing with Perrin is that very infrequently do we get what’s happening in Perrin’s story from somebody else’s points of view.

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: Like, so frequently with, like, Rand, it’ll be like Cadsuane is narrating, or Min is narrating, or even Loial sometimes. And with Mat, you mainly get Tuon at this point, but up – before this, you know, Egg and Nynaeve, we were seeing him through other people’s points of view. Through Egg we get all these Aes Sedai. Nynaeve is also with Rand, so we see her through somebody’s – different points of view. Elayne. So, like we’re getting a more balanced perspective. But, like, with Perrin, we usually get Faile is kind of the only other one, but they’ve been separated. So, I think a lot of this is a problem of perspective. Like, we are in Perrin’s head.

EMILY: Mm-hmm.

SALLY: And has the narrative effect of being like this is a miserable place to be, so if that was the intention well done, but it’s also, like, there’s nobody providing any, like, balance for me to understand whether this was, like, *the point*. Like, if we were getting Grady and Neald being like –

EMILY: “YO, Perrin’s *fucking crazy*.” [laughs]

SALLY: [laughs] Yeah! Like, if we were just getting somebody to be like, “Here is an external perspective on events.” I’d be like, “Oh, perhaps I can think of this in a more intellectual way than just being like, “Dear god.”

EMILY: This sucks. Yeah, that’s a really good point. Um, they leave So Harbor – well, I don’t even know if they all leave So Harbor. I think some people stay.

SALLY: Yeah, they –

EMILY: To supervise the sifting of the grain.

SALLY: They have six warehouses to sift through and Perrin’s like, “Cannot – not my problem.”

EMILY: Yeah. And Berelain’s like, “Well, this is going to take days or whatever.” But Perrin’s just like, “Oh, well. Off we go.” He gets a report from one of Balwer’s people, who is, like, the least sneaky and the least subtle.

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: So much so that Neald, also the least subtle person in the world, is like, “Oh my god! [laughing] He’s so bad at this.”

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: Which is embarrassing for that guy.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Oh, all he says is that, “Balwer’s not going to be back soon, but go ahead without him.” And Perrin’s like, “Yeah, fuck. I’m leaving.” So, he leaves accompanied by Berelain, the Aes Sedai, most of the main people. They go back to the camp. Perrin comes up to the camp and he’s reported to by his main Two Rivers’ guy, who’s like, “Yeah, some prisoners were brought back. Uh, Masema’s here, and they’re over by the tent.” You know? And we’re like [groans], “What’s this gonna be?” Um, Perrin walks up. There’s, I believe, five Shaido prisoners. Uh, most of whom are just hogtied awaiting torture. Um, and one guy is in the process of being tortured by some creep who we saw in *Path of Daggers* literally collecting ears.

SALLY: Oh yeah!

EMILY: So Perrin’s like, “Oh, great.”

SALLY: [grossed out noises]

EMILY: Like, Perrin, just kill this guy [laughs].

SALLY: Just. Kill. Masema.

EMILY: [laughs] Not to be like, “Punitive justice!” Over – [sighs], but, like, I agree. With Masema – everyone? With Masema? And some of these guys? Just kill them, you know?

SALLY: Yeah, I mean, *Wheel of Time* is not giving us exactly, like, ferter – feter – [laughs] fertile –

EMILY: Fertile ground.

SALLY: *Fertile ground* for, like, anything but punitive justice.

EMILY: [laughs] Yeah.

SALLY: It’s not like there are therapists in *Wheel of Time* who could be like, “Could you unpack for me why you are collecting *human ears*?”

EMILY: Yeah, like, what led you to this?

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: Hey, hey, Ear Guy? Hey, Ear Guy? What's with the ears?

SALLY: What's with – what's with the ears? Perhaps we can draw out our feelings. This is not to –

EMILY: And he can be like –

SALLY: Mock therapy.

EMILY: [laughs] Yeah, I know.

SALLY: Therapy is very important and this is a legitimate point that there are actually no societal structures that would support anything but killing this guy.

EMILY: Yeah, this guy's never gonna be like, "Well, actually it turns out that [laughing] the ear collection goes back to my childhood trauma."

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: My mean dad, or something like that, you know?

SALLY: And now it's time for me to make amends and move forward, you know?

EMILY: No, he's just like, "Just gonna keep doing my ear collections."

SALLY: And Perrin again is just like [sighs].

EMILY: Well, there's nothing we can do to stop this man collecting ears [laughs].

SALLY: [laughs] There's simply nothing that I can do about any of this.

EMILY: [laughs]

SALLY: Except stop this torture only to start it up thirty seconds later.

EMILY: Yeah [laughs]. Ear Guy's gonna get the ears. Yeah, arrayed at this torture sequence are our three main – b – boys who are on the scale from evil to morally gray. Masema, who is clearly motivated by racism and, in fact, is citing, um, real world racist rhetoric, uh, that white people had toward Black people in America, as well as toward Native Americans. Which, as we recall, the Aiel are frequently coded that way. You know, Masema sounds like a 19th Century frontiersman, who's about to slaughter an entire village. Saying that they don't feel pain like we normally do.

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: He's just faking his pain, blah blah blah blah blah. Arganda's standing there saying, "Don't you fucking want to get your wife back? Clearly you don't want her that much if you're not willing to go through with this." And Aram is standing there like, "This is just what we have to do, Perrin. Like, if you can't handle it, then I'll do it. Don't get your hands dirty. I'm here to dirty them for you." So, it's interesting – it's an interesting reversal of the normal, um, triad, which is three women.

SALLY: Right.

EMILY: Instead, what we're getting here is three men, who are representing this very, like, you know, hear no evil, see no evil, something, something, something.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: They're all shoulder [laughs] devils.

SALLY: Yeah! No, that's such a good point, Emily. Usually you have this chorus of three women.

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: Offering different points of view, but it's three of the worst men you know offering the same point of view with varying degrees.

EMILY: Yeah, they're just literally offering three different, like, rationales or excuse methods to get Perrin past this.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Um, okay.

SALLY: Some crossroads demons for you.

EMILY: Yeah, yeah, yeah. What Perrin does here is irredeemable. Well, that depends on how you view redemptive justice. What Perrin does here is very bad.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: He cuts off a man's hand and tells him, "I'm going to keep cutting off your limbs and these other guys' limbs unless you can all provide the same story and answer my questions."

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: Um, this is...on some level a modern-day police tactic. You know, separating people in different rooms, making sure their stories match up. Threatening them. Blah, blah, bah, blah,

blah. The actual limb cutting off thing is much more medieval *we hope!* But as we all know, places like Guantanamo Bay exist.

SALLY: Yes.

EMILY: Um, so there is no shortage of real-world torture in the world. Unfortunately, the focus of this scene is the fact that it's very traumatic for *Perrin*.

SALLY: Yep.

EMILY: It's sort of presented in this way where he's almost, like, having flashbacks while these guys are just, like, saying all these horrendous things to him. It's almost, like you know, in a TV show all of these like – we'd see all these flashing callbacks. And we'd see like [laughs], you know, the like joke about, like, dead wife in a movie where it always pans back to her and she's, like, in lovely lighting, wearing a white dress.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Like laughing. And it's, like, you know that. We're seeing montages of Faile, but at their wedding or whatever.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: So this is all just, like, look at what Perrin's doing because he has no other choice and he's so upset and this is this climactic sequence for him. But Perrin goes through with it. Again, compounding evil. It's not something like he cuts off this dude's hand and then is like, "What the fuck?!" Which, I don't know if that would make it better, but, you know, it – he's there and he, like, carries through long enough to issue his threats and be like, "This is the tactic we are going to use." And then he takes off to have his little breakdown.

SALLY: Yeah. Leaving, basically, the instructions to continue.

EMILY: Yes.

SALLY: More or less. And yeah, I'm so fascinated by what you were saying and you're just so smart. This idea of, like, there are – basically Perrin is coming up against, like, threshold against threshold, cliff against cliff, at which any point you can turn around, and he's just refusing to do so. Like, there are so many – like, he could have just been like, "No."

EMILY: Mm-hmm.

SALLY: We're not going to do this. Could have not have cut off anybody's hand, could not have issued threats, could not be like, "Continue in my absence, because...of x, y, and z." You know? Sorry, I'm just repeating what you're saying, because I'm so fascinated by this framework that you're presenting. It's so smart and such, like, a good look at what Perrin is doing.

EMILY: I'm also interested by the fact that, like, torture is never not the primary option.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: We're sort of given this, like, framework of Perrin does this really bad thing and what's worse is that Perrin himself does it. He doesn't delegate it. You know, that's the absolute worst end of this spectrum.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: On the better end of this spectrum, Perrin lets the Maidens torture these guys. Because they assure Perrin they will do it correctly and probably faster than everyone else.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Because they're Aiel and they know the Aiel operate in torture scenarios. Duh, duh, duh, duh, duh. But it's never, like...Perrin's like, "Let's capture prisoners, question them, treat them well, and then, you know, they're our prisoners now. We'll see if perhaps that becomes some sort of advantage later on. Or perhaps by treating them well, they will change their minds. Or perhaps we will be able to deprogram them."

SALLY: Yeah, also, it's just, like – [laughs] I find it hard to believe that you're master – your spymaster Balwer is untrained in sort of interrogation.

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: And manipulation, you know?

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: How do you think he gets information out of everybody he knows?

EMILY: Yeah, this is just sort of presented, like a lot of what we're seeing with Perrin, and we've alluded to this before, as an insurmountable problem.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: There's only one way forward and it is [laughs] the worst possible way.

SALLY: Yeah. Yeah – this is such a good segue into, of course, the end of these chapters where Tallanvor returns. Apparently, he's been gone this whole time [laughs].

EMILY: Yeah, who fucking knew? It's not like I missed him.

SALLY: Yeah, I was like, "He hasn't just been here? Where is he coming back from?"

EMILY: [laughs] He's – speaking of the worst men you know.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: It's so sad – you were saying there's no one – we don't ever go to anyone's point of view in Perrin's. And I was sitting there trying desperately to think whose point of view I would want to go in, who's not as grotesque an experience as Perrin.

SALLY: Yeah, like truly –

EMILY: And it's just Grady and Neald.

SALLY: Yeah, Grady and Neald are the only options, and apparently Robert Jordan just, like, refused to give the Asha'man points of view for some reason. Which is something I – until Brandon Sanderson was like, “We will have Androl.”

EMILY: Yeah, he gave Eben, right before Eben was fridged [laughs].

SALLY: Oh, poor Eben. Fridgd for the cause. Um, we'll – we should maybe come back to Perrin's sort of meltdown in the forest for a second, but jumping in terms of themes. But Tallanvor comes back and he's like, “Yo, there's a bunch of Seanchan with a bunch of these *damane* who could potentially – they're also hunting the Shaido for...kind of confusing reasons.”

EMILY: Reasons unknown.

SALLY: “And maybe we can partner up with them.” And I think Balwer is there, who's like [laughing], “No. Don't do it! Don't do it! This is a horrible idea.” And Perrin's just like, “Ah, tell me about the Seanchan.” You know, his sort of famous ending – famous last words.

EMILY: Yeah, seriously. Well, the enemy of my enemy. Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.

SALLY: Yeah, and like Emily said, we've alluded to this so much. That Perrin is presented with – like, Faile's capture and the sort of, like, massive hoard of the Shaido – maybe Balwer isn't telling him not to do it. I don't quite remember.

EMILY: I'm wondering, because my reading was that he was like, “Yeah, yeah, yeah, Tallanvor. Go on.”

SALLY: I don't remember.

EMILY: But I'm looking at it, and Balwer gives us zero indication of where he falls on this.

SALLY: Oh, interesting. Interesting how we both had –

EMILY: Which is sort of classic for Balwer.

SALLY: Yeah, interesting how we both sort of projected onto him.

EMILY: [laughs] What we wanted from Balwer.

SALLY: Yeah, what would be the most interesting thing for him to do? No, that's interesting. I apologize for my misread. But, as we've alluded to so many times, so this might be a little bit repetitive, Perrin – Robert Jordan, master of this universe, was like, "this is an insurmountable problem. There is no way for Perrin to get Faile back except for collaborating with the Seanchan." And therefore, what the narrative is telling us is that we should ultimately be grateful that forces like this exist, because they are so powerful that they can solve any problem. It's very, like, military propaganda, like, isn't it so good that the United States has such an insanely jacked military –

EMILY: [laughs]

SALLY: In order to solve problems around the world. And it's like, obviously, historically, we know the United States military has never solved any problems.

EMILY: Just causing them.

SALLY: [laughs] Is perhaps exacerbating problems all across the globe. Um, so we're just, like, set up with this – this idea that there's only one way to go and it's the right decision and with – and it's the same with the torture sequence. Like, Perrin has – like it's – it's – I referred to them as crossroads demons as kind of a joke, but Perrin is just sort of, like...it doesn't make sense actually to call it a crossroads, because there is no other way for him to go.

EMILY: Yeah, there's just like a single road and these three guys are like the hitchhiking ghosts in the Haunted Mansion, you know?

SALLY: Who are like, "We have to go this way." And therefore, the narrative also ultimately holds up that this is the right thing to do. And, like, m – maybe I'm being a little bit extreme there, but it's, like, if the author is not giving us any decisions, like, that's taking a stance, you know?

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: That's how I –

EMILY: There are no alternatives then.

SALLY: That's how I think, anyway. Like, I think Robert Jordan is offering up that there are no alternatives in these scenarios, that violence is justified when you are facing such insurmountable odds. And it's just, like, that is a really icky place to be.

EMILY: Mm-hmm. Um, one more thing.

SALLY: Yeah!

EMILY: Before we get to Perrin and Elyas' –

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: Anticlimactic talk, I would say. Perrin, what he threatens the Aiel with is not just the removal of their limbs, but that he will leave them in a town to beg.

SALLY: Right.

EMILY: That – as though to say, being disabled is the worst possible punishment. Being helpless.

SALLY: Yes.

EMILY: So, just some light ableism from Robert Jordan.

SALLY: Yeah. Thank you for bringing that up.

EMILY: Um, Perrin storms off into the woods and throws his axe at a tree. Elyas appears and is like, “Well, I told you to throw that away if you start liking it, so did you like it?” And Perrin’s like, “No, like, that was terrible.” Um, I always think of this scene as, like, way longer than it is.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And way more emotionally impactful, but [laughs] it’s really not. They exchange like three sentences. Perrin is like, “It’s more that I, like, could see the possibility of one day enjoying it, because I don’t like how I react to violence.”

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: I feel so, like, you know, turned on not in a sexual sense, but in a adrenaline is pumping through me sense. Violence is a drug. It’s adrenaline.

SALLY: Yeah, totally.

EMILY: And Elyas just says like, “Well, you know, everyone reacts really differently to combat situations and to violence. Some people go, like, really cold and some people go hot.”

SALLY: [softly] Yeah.

EMILY: “You know, what you’re describing sounds like a, sorry, pretty typical response.” And Perrin’s like, “Well, no one’s ever suffered like I have.” And then Neald shows up to be like, “Balwer’s back.”

SALLY: Yeah, like, Perrin has this very bad case of, like, not understanding – I got this phrase of the podcast *Queery*, which is very good. It's from Cameron Esposito's interview with one of Teagan and Sara, I can't remember which one it was.

EMILY: [laughs]

SALLY: I apologize to twins everyone [laughs] for this mishap. And I don't – I think she quotes it from someone else, but the idea is that you are not terminally unique, you know?

EMILY: Mm-hmm.

SALLY: And, like, Perrin is very much having a teenager response to this, where it's like, "No, I *am* unique. Nobody in the world is like me at all. I'm the only one who's suffered. I'm the only one who's experience this." And what Elyas is offering is ultimately the comfort of the fact that you are not terminally unique. Like, there are other people who have dealt with this, myself included, and perhaps we can, like, work through this in some ways that might be productive. Like, helping you process this with other people or maybe under – talking to other people about it and getting their perspective. And Perrin is just like, "Absolutley not."

EMILY: Yeah, Elyas is not trying to be like, "Oh, well. You're not special. Get over yourself." What he's trying to be – although that is true, Perrin.

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: What Elyas is trying to be like is, "Listen, adrenaline's a hell of a drug and, you know, ninety-eight percent of the guys who have this experience that you've described don't end up as serial killers."

SALLY: Yeah!

EMILY: You know, like, you don't need to worry so much about it. Um, but, again, Perrin is sort of interrupted before this conversation can reach any sort of conclusion or climax.

SALLY: Right.

EMILY: So, we're left on this sort of like, um, you know, coitus interruptus in terms of this conversation. Um, which is frustrating because, of course, what we want is for Perrin to just fucking make a decision.

SALLY: Yeah!

EMILY: And that's the problem because all of Perrin's decision in this section are bad, but they all feel like they aren't final.

SALLY: Yes.

EMILY: I don't know how to describe that, except we, the readers, are very obviously like, "Perrin's making bad decisions," but we all know that Perrin is, like, one of the three main characters, so he's not going to be making bad decisions forever. This is just a low point, and he will soon have a redemptive arc at some point. So, they don't feel final to us.

SALLY: Yeah. I would argue, and I know I have a really major bias here, so I'll admit that. I will say they don't feel final until Perrin agrees to meet with the Seanchan. For me that is kind of – and maybe even at that point he could still back out, you know? So, maybe it's when they seal the deal and spit in their hands or whatever, maybe that's kind of the final moment for me, but it's just, like, it is – I agree. It is really frustrating, I feel like, like, with the ghosts, we've been building up to this conversation with Perrin and Elyas since literally Book One. We are now on, what, Book Ten? Why do I always forget? Oh, it's because we skipped *Path of Daggers*.

EMILY: [laughing]

SALLY: And I have no idea how to count. Um, so it's, like, why would you interrupt this conversation? Just to leave Perrin in this limbo of he can make – and, you know what, you're so right. I do have this bias feeling like Perrin is irredeemable because he worked with the Seanchan, but I do still feel like narratively, throughout that, we are kind of led to believe that this is not a final decision. That once Perrin gets Faile back, he will snap back to reality and he will be like, "Oh my god. What have I done?" You know, I've not gotten to that point with him yet, so I cannot speak to that. But you're so right that it never feels final. So, Robert Jordan is just letting – is just like continuing to play in this space, which is really uncomfortable, because it allows a lot of really bad things to happen.

EMILY: Yeah, we just feel really suspended in this moment. And it's uncomfortable to be suspended for, what? Four whole books? On a question that can be resolved pretty easily.

SALLY: Yeah, and, like, I'm – I'm trying to remove my, like, very obvious anti-Perrin, anti-the Seanchan bias here, to be like, "It is kind of interesting, I guess, to explore moral quandaries in the face of war or whatever. Like, how do we navigate an ultimately violent world?" But I just, like – it just doesn't work for me. I just don't feel like I'm getting any value out of this limbo, out of this suspension.

EMILY: Well, I'll say, with the advantage of hindsight, that there is no advantage toward it, because I don't believe Perrin's interactions with the Seanchan specifically are ever treated like the bad thing that they are.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: So, I'm in – I'm in agreement with you, but, uh, narratively I don't think Robert Jordan understands what the fuck is going on. Which is, you know, pretty par for the course.

SALLY: It is also just, like, not to beat dead horses to death over and over and over again, but it is another instance where the length of this series is a detriment. Like, it – you are dragging out –

I know we've said this before, but it is, like, notorious among *Wheel of Time* to be like, "The rescuing Faile sequence is absurdly long." But it is absurdly long, and, like none of this – maybe it would work if it was condensed a little bit. Like, Perrin agonizing over violence for...a hundred pages, not ten books.

EMILY: Yeah, it almost makes me think that this later series, up to a certain point, should have just been splitting characters.

SALLY: Oh yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

EMILY: Like, an entire book on Perrin, an entire book on Mat.

SALLY: Yeah, take *The Two Towers* approach.

EMILY: Yeah, because Jesus Christ. We can't like – the problem is that it's so extended. If we were seeing all of Perrin's points of view all at once, we'd still have this slog, but, you know, it would be a single book.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: So, that's my big bright idea, Robert.

SALLY: No, I think that's really smart. I think the joke there is [laughing] who would read an entire book from Perrin's point of view?

EMILY: Jesus Christ. Seriously.

SALLY: But, like, it could be really interesting. At that point, perhaps you would see the sort of intellectual, narrative project playing out here in a way that would feel satisfying rather than being like, "We have been doing this for so fucking long and it feels like all of our other characters are making some type of forward progress and Perrin is here just...slogging along in the snow. Same type of shit over and over and over and over." It makes me feel...bananas. [sighs] Here we're ending with Tallanvor coming out of the fucking forest.

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: Like some sort of bog monster.

EMILY: [laughs]

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: He's got a beard now.

SALLY: [laughing] Yeah. No idea –

EMILY: That's how we always know a man's been on an emotional journey. He grows a beard. Men always cut their hair shoulder-length.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And men –

SALLY: Grow a beard.

EMILY: Like [growling noises].

SALLY: I truly have no idea where this clown has been.

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: If he's just been wandering around the forest looking for Morgase by himself. I have no fucking idea.

EMILY: He's just been do bee do bee do-ing.

SALLY: But we end with him. What a fucking low note.

EMILY: [laughs]

SALLY: Sorry these chapters were such a bummer, but.

EMILY: Yeah, but [laughs] that's it for Perrin in *Crossroads of Twilight*. But, uh, thanks everyone for listening. Thanks to Glynna MacKenzie for our theme song. Thanks to our Patrons on Patreon and our followers on social media.

SALLY: Yeah. Thank you so much! I also – I want to give an extra special shoutout to our Patrons. I know we've been kind of slow on responding to comments. That's on me. It just has been a really rough and busy time, so thank you for commenting. We do see them and we love them. And I will respond to you with as much affection as you deserve soon. So, thank you for engaging with our content. We're really glad that you enjoy it, and we're really, really grateful for your support and will attempt to return in kind. More quickly.

EMILY: Um, do you have a sign off?

SALLY: [softly] Let's see.

EMILY: Well, I opened the door today to let in my mother and she had a giant Amazon box, which was confusing, because she was dropping by to drop off something for me.

SALLY: Right.

EMILY: And I was like, “W – what’s this?” And she was like, “Oh, it was on your doorstep.” So, we go upstairs. I open it, and it is a, like, set of knives.

SALLY: [laughing]

EMILY: Just, like, kitchen [laughing] knives. And I was like, “Hello?” And Sally was like, “*Oh!*”

SALLY: Oh!

EMILY: [laughing] There’s an explanation. And then I dig in the box and there’s a note from my sister that says, “This isn’t a threat.” [laughs]

SALLY: [laughs] Or is it?

EMILY: Or is it? It was just a birthday present, but it was pretty funny, feeling like we were being threatened in the most roundabout and expensive way possible.

SALLY: Somehow we’re giving *you* a weapon, and that’s the threat.

EMILY: That’s threat.

SALLY: As if I’m giving you knives to bring to my gun fight [laughs].

EMILY: That does sound like my sister [laughs].

SALLY: Real power move.

EMILY: Thanks everyone!

SALLY: Bye!

EMILY: Bye!