



Episode 225: Brett the Aelfinn
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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: We don't even have zebras to talk about today. What are we supposed to do?

SALLY: I know. I was re-reading my blogs for these chapters and I was like, "Oh, I feel like I had some interesting things to say," but then I sat down and was like, "I don't have the energy to say them again."

EMILY: [laughs]

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: [laughing] Sorta just –

SALLY: But I will try!

EMILY: No, that's a fair point.

SALLY: No. I will – I will try to talk about violence and the use of violence against the state [laughs], I guess. For lack of a better word. Whatever. This is Everybody Hates Rand.

EMILY: [slightly slurred] Your friendly neighborhood *Wheel of Time* podcast. I'm Emily Juchau.

SALLY: And I am Sally Goodger.

EMILY: It's so sad, too, because I was like, "Oh, this is fine," after I read the first chapter, you know?

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: Whatever. Could be worse. And then I got to the second chapter, and I was like [laughing], “God fucking dammit. Can’t have anything.”

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Can’t have anything for one week, Robert.

SALLY: [like the start of the Barenaked Ladies song “One Week”] It’s been!

EMILY: [singing] One week since you did war crimes.

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: [laughs] More like crimes against humanity.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Um. So. So.

SALLY: [sighs]

EMILY: Just some of our classic montage Mat chapters.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Wherein the circus leaves the town that they’ve been staying in the very next morning. Mat talks to Petra the strongman about it who’s basically like, “Yeah, basically as soon as we get someone trying to get into the circus without paying, you know, if it’s like anyone who has a modicum of power then we just peace out. Because we’re never going to have any power in those situations, because we are, like, not citizens of any given place and therefore we have fewer rights.”

SALLY: And you think Valan Luca’s gonna let someone see his circus without paying?

EMILY: Yeah. Are you kidding?

SALLY: Local con man, Valan Luca?

EMILY: Local con man, Valan Luca?

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: So Mat’s like, “Great. Love to be moving.” Then Valan Luca goes, like, two miles and is like, “Alright, guys. [laughing] We’re parking here.”

SALLY: We did it!

EMILY: “There are three houses around.” And, according to Mat, that’s how all progress is made. It’s very, very slow. The circus is often stopped. Um, one day Bael Domon and Egeanin, without notifying anyone, [laughing] go get married. Which I think is actually icon behavior.

SALLY: Yeah, it’s pretty funny.

EMILY: Just like, “Fuck these people. It’s not their business.”

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Totally tank Mat’s whole –

SALLY: Living arrangement.

EMILY: Living arr – A) living arrangement, B) like, the whole undercover story that –

SALLY: Oh, yeah.

EMILY: They just completely given up on that.

SALLY: Right.

EMILY: They’re clearly like, “Whatever. Mat’s not exactly following the plot anyway since he’s spending all his time with Tuon. So we might as well just do it.” And yeah, Mat’s like, “I’m not going to stay in a wagon with two newlyweds, so goodbye. [laughs] I’ll be living in a tent from now on.”

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Um, Mat tells us, because at one point – especially because at one point he’s talking to Tuon and the subject of the Dragon Reborn comes up. Mat’s been getting a lot of these little visions.

SALLY: Mm.

EMILY: You know, of Rand, specifically, when Rand comes up. Um, I imagine the same thing would happen with Perrin, but [laughing] he hasn’t thought about Perrin in quite a while. Which is also icon behavior.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: But the same thing is happening for Rand and Perrin, we're just with Mat for a while so we get more updates on it. He is deeply upset because the first time it happened to him, vividly Rand and Min were mid-coitus [laughs]. Or, like, making out naked or whatever.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: So Mat is like, [panicked] "Don't think about it, don't think about it."

SALLY: Don't think about it.

BOTH: Don't think about it.

EMILY: He's basically like, "Min and Rand are fucking like rabbits. It's not safe for my telepathy."

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: He's having a real –

SALLY: [laughs] Not safe for telepathy.

EMILY: [laughs]

SALLY: NSFT [laughs].

EMILY: What's that meme that's like, "Isn't there someone else [laughing] you forgot to ask for consent?" Only it's Mat.

SALLY: [laughing] Isn't there someone else you forgot? It's Mat Cauthon.

EMILY: It's Mat Cauthon, who may have to witness your sex acts. I don't really know what the purpose of them seeing each other serves. It would be, um, interesting – I – I think we've said this before, but this would be interesting if this at all served a logistical purpose, you know?

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: If they used it somehow to, like, meet up, communicate, do something else.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: If they, like, eventually figured out "I can hold up a sign."

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Or [laughs] have something slung around my neck, you know? So Rand gets the instant communication that I need to dispense to him.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: But, like, it's just sort of a uh, uh, random set piece addition.

SALLY: Yeah. I don't really get it, either. I have nothing to add. I don't know why I'm muttering like I do.

EMILY: Robert Jordan's doing a lot of things in these later books in an effort to, um, reinforce the idea that the Last Battle is impending.

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: And his, um, sort of strategy there is, I believe, to have weird things happening throughout the series, but the weird things are accumulating in quantity rather than scale.

SALLY: Mm.

EMILY: As the series goes on.

SALLY: Mmm.

EMILY: So we're getting very few really major upsetting things, we're just having *more* people seeing ghosts, *more* strange *ta'veren* things happening. Mat is now hearing multiple sets of dice in his head.

SALLY: Right.

EMILY: Duh, duh, duh, duh, duh. And I'm not saying that's ineffective, uh, or the worst option, just that that's what he's doing and in some – in some instances, and I would say in this one, you should have gone for quality rather than quantity.

SALLY: Yeah, I – I agree that it is kind of an interesting approach to be like it's not necessarily, like, a bunch of earthquakes or whatever happening, it's just, like, evil significantly more present the closer we get. Like, that's interesting. I would argue that it doesn't *work* just because of the length of the series. Like, we're covering the same amount of time with characters over and over again that it starts to feel like – time just starts to feel very amorphous. There's a word for when you're out of time, right?

EMILY: Anachronistic?

SALLY: Yeah, maybe something like that. It just starts to feel like we're really dragging on. So, I feel like there would be a value to upping things in scale rather than quantity, because then I would feel like we're getting closer even though we're drawing it out over a significant page length.

EMILY: Yeah, I agree. I think the, like, central idea is a good one.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: There's some verisimilitude there to having things that happen that people can most write off and ignore.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: That's very true to, like, real world experience when crises are happening, you know?

SALLY: Yeah, absolutely.

EMILY: You just can't afford to think about things that are seeming like inconveniences even though they are symptoms of something greater, you know?

SALLY: Yes.

EMILY: Um, so I appreciate the sentiment, but, as you said, it's not working in a series this length.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Um, the major conversation, I would say, in the first of these two chapters is that Mat approaches Aludra with the solution to her riddle of several books ago. Um, she asked him what she would need with a bellfounder and Mat has finally figured out that a bellfounder would be used to create something that Aludra basically already seems to possess, what she calls a launching tube. Which is basically how you, you know, it's exactly like a cannon but it's used as a mechanism for shooting fireworks into the air. Slightly different than a cannon. Um, and Mat's like, "But I don't really get that, duh, duh, duh, duh, duh." And Aludra explains, like, I'm thinking if you have the tube at an angle and if you, like, load it with a certain type of thing, then it would be able to create explosions. Mat immediately sees the appeal of this and the power of this and, like, starts [laughs] asking logistical questions. Aludra's like, Oh, it's good that you have a brain in your head." And he's like, "How would you transport them? How heavy are they? Iron versus bronze." Et cetera, et cetera.

SALLY: Right.

EMILY: Again, it's a nice conversation between two, um, competent people, short lived though it is. Including that, Mat is like, "I can fund having these made in – en masse. If not me personally then I know someone who would very much like to have them." And she's like, "Oh really? Oh worm? Who's that?" And he's like, [muttered] "The Dragon Reborn." And she's like, "Okay?"

SALLY: "Oh worm?"

EMILY: “Oh worm? Oh worm?” I wish Mat had actually, like, advertised the – the dragons as they are called, as Aludra calls them. They are not cannons, they’re dragons and the things are dragon eggs, which sort of stretches the metaphor. The cannonballs, that is, are dragon eggs, because like –

SALLY: Dragons don’t spit their eggs at people [laughs].

EMILY: [laughing] Call it dragon fire or something.

SALLY: [laughing] Yeah, like.

EMILY: Or is that, like, the cannon is the dragon’s asshole? [laughs]

SALLY: [laughs loudly] It’s giving birth on the battlefield.

EMILY: [laughs] Gross.

SALLY: It’s the dragons cloaca.

EMILY: Yeah, do dragons have cloa – cloaci? Or?

SALLY: [laughing]

EMILY: Boy, isn’t that a question?

SALLY: Yeah. I [stutters] – I also think Robert Jordan could have just called them canons. It’s an instance where, like, making a fantasy word for something doesn’t really matter. We know they’re cannons.

EMILY: Yeah, and, I mean, he calls zebras “razors.”

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And I can – whatever, that’s fine, but, like, we’re gonna be talking about cannons for a lot of the next few books, so. Maybe just, maybe just do that. Um, so they sort of reach this agreement that whenever Mat leaves the circus, Aludra’s going to go with him in the pursuit of making more of these. She specifically wants to use them against the Seanchan and notably which –

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: They more or less will not be. So, sorry, Aludra.

SALLY: Which is, like, yeah very unfortunate. I think Aludra should get to use cannons against the Seanchan. They killed all of her people.

EMILY: Mm-hmm. She, as she says, is the last of the guild, the Illuminators Guild.

SALLY: Um...I just think she should have got to use the cannons. I know we are predominately a pacifist, anti-war podcast.

EMILY: [laughs] Restorative justice, et cetera.

SALLY: Restorative justice, et cetera, et cetera.

EMILY: A little revenge is nice in a narrative sense.

SALLY: Yeah, like, I was re-reading my blogs and I was talking about, like, what – what my personal journey has been around developing some nuanced thought around what resisting a violent regime actually looks like. And occasionally that has to look like meeting violence with violence. Sometimes that's, like – I had a really good metaphor that I'm probably not going to remember, but, like, there are many tools you can use in a revolution and, like, diplomacy is one of them and violence is also one of them. So.

EMILY: Mm-hmm.

SALLY: Anyway, read the blog, I guess.

EMILY: [laughs] No, I agree. That's a – a fair point. Um, so after they've made this agreement, Mat has dreams that look a lot like Egg's dreams of him, where he is reaching into the sky and pulling out, um, fireworks. Um [laughs] it's a very, like, creepy scene. It says in his dreams, "he wept for the death and destruction and somehow it seemed like the rattling of dice in his head sounded like laughter. Not his laughter. The Dark One's laughter."

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: So Mat is cognizant, um, on some level, semiconsciously if not consciously, that this is a real deal with the devil that he has made, and that's how it's being characterized.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Which is interesting, and we have talked about that in the past, and will continue to talk about it in the future, the, um, line between technology and magic.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And why Mat's willingness to engage with incredibly violent *technology* is a deal with the devil whereas...the Asha'man, a magical weapon of mass destruction, is characterized less so.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: You know, the series, unfortunately, logistically this makes sense, there isn't necessarily time for it, but the series doesn't end with, like, there being a big acknowledgement that the system of the Asha'man exactly needs to change. Obviously there's going to be major consequences for what Mazrim Taim is doing in the Black Tower and, you know, there's some indication that now the good guys in the Black Tower are going to maybe change things, but it's not like anyone's like, "Boy, this is fucked up!" The same way that it's fucked up about the cannons.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: I don't know. Just sort of an interesting thing there.

SALLY: It is an interesting thing. It's also interesting the way that, like, we're having basically back-to-back sequences of Perrin's quote unquote "deal with the devil" and Mat's quote unquote "deal with the devil," and the framing of those two is very interesting.

EMILY: Mm.

SALLY: Like, Mat seems very cognizant of – Mat's is also set up much more mythologically. Mat is given a riddle, which isn't really pertinent to anything, like Aludra can continue to make her cannons whether or not Mat knows what she needs a lofting tube for, you know? But he's given a riddle that he has to solve in order to get something. Like, it's very mythological and suddenly he's given access to *knowledge* and he has to make a *deal*. It's all very sort of mythologically loaded. And so it fits more in line with the sort of literary imagery we were talking about in the Perrin episode about, like, what it means to actually make a deal with the devil and Mat, again, is cognizant of that. Mat seems to understand the consequences and know that. Whereas Perrin's scene literally has a shaking of hands, which is so common in the deal with the devil imagery, but it's not set up as though he is doing anything *bad*. And it's interesting to think about the way that technology is playing into Mat's versus the way magic is playing into Perrin, is basically asking for access to the *sul'dam*.

EMILY: Mm-hmm.

SALLY: And the *damane* in order to attack the Shaido. So.

EMILY: Yeah, it's interesting. Because, um, we just watched a video recently that, uh, talked a little bit about the idea that, of course, one cannot, um – there is this sort of idea that is pervasive in some, um, circles of the internet that, um, what does she say? That representation is not, um –

SALLY: Oh! Um, what is the word? Like condoning it? Or something like that?

EMILY: B-basically, it's the idea that just because you represent something, say murder, in a book that doesn't mean that you are endorsing it.

SALLY: Yeah. I think endorsing was the word.

EMILY: Representation is not endorsement, perhaps, is the – is the phrase there. So you need to apply your critical thinking skills to, uh, a book and be able to see what the author is actually saying about that.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And that's where nuance sort of falls by the wayside. For a lot of people it's more comfortable to think, "I only want to engage with media that only portrays good things because to see a toxic relationship is somehow bad."

SALLY: Sure.

EMILY: "For me as a consumer as well as a sign of badness in the creator."

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: But there is such a thing as the author's framework, which shows us what the author's intentions are. And Robert Jordan, as you were saying, is framing these two things very differently.

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: So, clearly, he's meaning us to take away that one of these things is a moral gray area, whereas the other one is a moral gray area to the characters, but shouldn't be to us, in a strange way.

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: Anyway.

SALLY: Yeah, that is such a good point, and this is sort of tangentially related, but this book also – the *series*, and perhaps Robert Jordan, seem to have a real reluctance to admit that people themselves be weapons.

EMILY: Mm-hmm.

SALLY: Like, that's built into the framework of the, the magic system.

EMILY: The Asha'man.

SALLY: And the Asha'man, but yet there's – like Rand will acknowledge that he wants the Asha'man to be weapons, but there seems to be this, like, fundamental...misunderstanding – not misunderstanding, just a different understanding of what it means to, like, like we were talking about, wield magic versus wielding a sword or an axe or a cannon.

EMILY: Mm-hmm.

SALLY: It's very interesting.

EMILY: Yeah, totally.

SALLY: Anyway, that's just a random thought.

EMILY: Um, Mat continues courting Tuon. He's basically taking a bunch of meals with her. There's a little aside about how superstitious she and Selucia are. This is just meant to be a sort of cultural difference. Robert Jordan is doing his favorite thing which is to have point of view characters talk about how weird other characters are for something that they themselves do in a different framework.

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: You know, uh, Mat is superstitious about crows and ravens and duh, duh, duh, duh, duh and so doesn't understand the system of omens that the Seanchan follow. Um, this is, I think, Robert Jordan's idea of being multi-cultural, but doesn't always pull it off very well. Um, as they're talking one night, Tuon brings up the Dragon Reborn.

SALLY: [laughs softly]

EMILY: Mat kind of sidesteps it. He's like, "What's that have to do with it?" She's like, "Well, the Dragon Reborn has to kneel before the Crystal Throne and it's urgent if he's one that sounded the Horn of Valere." And he's like [strained], "The Horn of Valere?" [laughs] And she's like, "Well, obviously it was sounded. I've had all these weird reports out of Falme." And Mat's just like [siren noises].

SALLY: Yeah, don't worry about that.

EMILY: Mat's like, "Okay. Great. Good to know." Um, a few days later he, or at some point, he gives her the [accented to sound posh] *zebra*. [laughs] The zebra, as the little –

SALLY: The zorse.

EMILY: The zorse [laughs].

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: As his gift and they go riding with Selucia, of course in tow. Um, at one point they're, like, on the road, they pass some Tinkers, who are heading in the direction of Ebou Dar right as they're passing, and Mat's kind of distracted, you know, waving, greeting them. Tuon takes off to test the speed of the horse, I guess, but Mat go – runs after, and Selucia does, too. Mat finally catches to – catches up to her and is like, "Dear god. You could have killed yourself and that horse, what the fuck? Please don't ever do that again." Or I think he tells her, "You won't ever do that again." And then she asks, "What is this place?" Because they're in, like, surrounded by

some ruins. And Mat, I mean this is the one area in which I'm mildly sympathetic to Tuon. Boy, does Mat have some strange reactions and behaviors to things.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Like she asks, to Mat, she asks Mat, "What do you know about the Dragon Reborn?" And he, like, spits [laughs].

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: [laughing] And she's just like, "Okay." And she's like, "What is this place?" And Mat fully, like, dissociates, because he's remembering being in this place.

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: As someone who was dying. He remembers dying.

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: And Tuon's like, "Are you fucking ill? What's happening?"

SALLY: "What are you doing?"

EMILY: "You look like you're going to puke." And he's like [groaning], "I'm fine." And she's like, "Please...what?"

SALLY: Yeah, what's your beef, little dude?

EMILY: Um, hmmm! What's your beef, little dude, truly. So Mat – Mat's kind of having an existential crisis because it has occurred to him for the first time how weird it is that he can remember *dying*?

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: You know? That sort of indicates that however these memories got put in his head by the ashan – uh, what are they called? Uhhh, the Aelfinn and the Eelfinn, these memories were accessible to the Aelfinn and the Eelfinn up until the moment of dying.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And he's trying to figure out how that is. And it's not something that's really answered by the text, and I would say it's not something that needs to be answered by the text.

SALLY: Sure.

EMILY: It's one of those rare things that is, uh, better, I would say, when it's a little more amorphous, when there aren't set boundaries and rules to it. Sort of – the Aelfinn and the Eelfinn are such an *odd* part of this series.

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: But so relevant to Mat's entire plot.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: That having them be just sort of shrouded in mystery and confusion is really working.

SALLY: I agree. It also makes it – like it leaves the element of horror, because we have the uncertainty about how they are doing this, that Mat's like, "Are they in my head right now? Is it some type of, like, are they just, like, hanging out watching through my eyes on a big creepy television screen somewhere in the Tower of Ghenjei? Or, like, what type of weird magic do they do to, like, pull these out of my body?" Like, it's – it eaves this element of, like, discomfort and makes them, like you said, feel very otherworldly because we just don't know how they operate.

EMILY: Yeah, it – it works extremely well, especially this timing.

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: Because we're about to, in the next few chapters, get into the quest, the call to adventure as it would be framed in the Hero's Journey, wherein Thom shares Moiraine's letter –

[a cat meows loudly in the background]

SALLY: [laughing softly]

EMILY: – with Mat, which basically says, like, that she's trapped in the Tower of Ghenjei, kept prisoner by the Aelfinn and Eelfinn, and that she needs to be rescued by Thom and Mat.

SALLY: Mm-hmm. And one other.

EMILY: And one other. And Mat sort of has to face down a return to that place. And the Tower of Ghenjei sequence works so well because it is very much a mythological labyrinth with the Eelfinn and the Aelfinn as the Minotaur, or monster, at the center.

SALLY: Right.

EMILY: And that only works if we are still afraid of them.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And Mat is still afraid of them.

SALLY: Yeah!

EMILY: And Robert Jordan does a great job of that.

SALLY: Yes. Sensational analysis, Emily.

EMILY: Keeping us – keeping us freaked out by whatever they could do, what their powers are. God only knows.

SALLY: Like, I – this is so random. I agree. It's – for the story the best thing we can do is keep the Eelfinn and Aelfinn really creepy, but we have a point of view from everybody else. Wouldn't it be funny if there was [laughing] just a random Eelfinn character –

EMILY: [laughs]

SALLY: [laughing] That we kept checking in with.

EMILY: It's just in wingdings [laughs].

SALLY: Yeah! [laughs] And they're always like, "Why are we checking in with this guy?" And he's like, "Here's my little monster life."

EMILY: "Here's my little doop be doop be doo. Watching Mat Cauthon. The big screen of Mat Cauthon."

SALLY: On my little, like, drone camera.

EMILY: Yeah, Jesus Christ.

SALLY: I mean, we check in with every other villain.

EMILY: [laughs]

SALLY: It's a little absurd that we don't have an Eelfinn/Aelfinn touchstone. What would we name them?

EMILY: You're right. There should be a character. Along with Larry the Trolloc.

SALLY: [gasps]

EMILY: There's, um, god I have to think of a funny name. [pause] Brett.

[both laugh]

EMILY: [laughing] Brett the Aelfinn.

SALLY: Brett the Aelfinn. Larry the Trolloc.

EMILY: They have the love story for the ages.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: [laughing] Finally found the love interest for Larry the Trolloc.

SALLY: Larry! [laughing] You've been holding on for so long, searching for love like Carrie Bradshaw before you.

EMILY: [laughs] Stop.

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: Don't tell me that Brett the Aelfinn is Mr. Big in this scenario.

SALLY: [laughs] Always in a little suit.

EMILY: Yeah. Occasionally charming, but most insufferable.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Um. Wow. Well, that was a certain – certainly an expansion on the mythos [laughs].

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: Um, Mat and Tuon head back. They run back into the Tinkers, who, understandably, saw two women on horses apparently running away from a man on a horse and are like, "Hewwo?"

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And Mat's just like, "Whatever. Let the ladies talk to the ladies and get it sorted." So he's just talking to this guy about, like, "Oh, I've seen a lot of Tinkers headed to Ebou Dar. What's the deal?" And this guy's like, "Well, we've heard that we won't be discriminated against, basically, under the Seanchan government." And Mat's like, "Yeah, okay, fair point, but also, fair warning, things aren't great under them, either. There are – " um, what does he say? "Their safety comes at a price and some of their laws are harsh." And they're just like, "Yeah, whatever. Not a big deal." Um, and that might be worth a longer discussion at a later time. I don't know if there will be a better time in the future, since I don't really know if it comes up again. The Tinkers, as we've discussed, are something that Robert Jordan introduced in the early stage of this series and then sort of clearly wasn't interested in anymore.

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: Once he'd done the big reveal with the Aiel.

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: Um, but the, the Tinkers, I would say, are one of the only, like, universally discriminated against populations on this continent.

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: And having them react to, um, an invading force of fascism by being like, "This will be better for us," is a little disingenuous on Robert Jordan's part, because I don't think it's historically accurate.

SALLY: Mm.

EMILY: That anyone has ever run into the arms of –

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: The invading, uh, force on the promise that it might be better than the status quo. Um, generally, if something enters at the top of the food chain and starts consuming the things underneath it, you, at the very bottom, aren't going to be...

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Safer. But it's just sort of Robert Jordan's continuing project of being like, "Fascist governments are completely legitimate and have some benefits."

SALLY: That's exactly what I was going to say. As you point out, the Tuatha'an are the universally discriminated against group, which, obviously they have a very real world parallel in the Romani people. Um, but also, if they're operating as our only universally discriminated against group, they could also very easily be a sort of metaphorical stand in for Jewish people, any number of the groups that were targeted in the Holocaust, the disabled, gay people, people of color. You know, they could have that real world stand in for a lot of different groups, and the sort of idea that they would be better off under the thumb of an authoritarian, fascist empire plays exactly into the rhetoric of historical authoritarian, fascist empires which is that they are improving the overall life of the world by managing populations in whatever way they manage them. So, it is just a continue – continuous – um, so it is just *continuing* this story's underpinning of, like, you said the validity and legitimacy of, um, invasion and occupation and empire. So. It's really fucked up.

EMILY: Mm-hmm.

SALLY: Is what it actually is. To be like, my real world parallel to someone – a group that was targeted throughout human history, um, is gonna just run into the arms – like you think that it's – it's also just continues the infantilization of the Tuatha'an by being like – this group would have a very strong history of understanding that they are not welcome in places and for them to sort of have this bright eyed, naïve approach to being like, "It will be fine" is not accurate to the way that these groups go about their life.

EMILY: Yeah. It's extremely naïve.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Um.

SALLY: So.

EMILY: Oh, whoa ho ho. Goody goody. Uh, like the next day, Egeanin tells Mat, "Oh, good job on the whole zebra gift."

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: "Because, you know, as a – according to Seanchan protocol that just means that you're acknowledging that she's above your station, because it's a rare gift and it pertains to one of her interests." She's like [laughs], "Among the Blood, when you are courting someone higher than you, a traditional gift is something exotic or rare. Best of all is if you can connect the gift to one of the recipient's pleasures." As though that's not just, like, a normal part of gift giving.

SALLY: Yeah. I thought about something you really like that might be difficult to acquire for yourself, so I'm going to prove my affection to you by spending time or effort [laughing] into finding something for you.

EMILY: [laughs] That's only, that's *only* in the Seanchan nobility.

SALLY: [laughing]

EMILY: For everyone else, Christmas is just –

SALLY: I got you socks.

EMILY: Yeah. Got you socks, year after year after year. The drudgery.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Of socks.

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: It's only – gift giving is only fun in Seanchan. Yet another benefit of empire! [laughs]

SALLY: The Drudgery of Socks sounds like a Charles Dickens story [laughs].

EMILY: [laughs] You're right.

SALLY: About some poor orphan who has to mend socks for her living.

EMILY: Or someone named Socks.

SALLY: [laughs] Socks is one of the Artful Dodger's little minions.

EMILY: Oh my god. Mat updates us on the situation with the Aes Sedai post this confrontation they had in the last couple of chapters. Uh, Bethamin, who's the one who channeled accidentally, is now being taught by the three Aes Sedai – or, I think Joline and Edesina. Teslyn doesn't seem to be participating because, as she said, she does not care to train the Sean – the *sul'dam*. She doesn't care if they live or die. And Seta, the other *sul'dam*, is reacting by, like, cover her eyes whenever there's channeling around her, which seems to indicate that she can see the weaves, but she's in a state of denial. We've seen things like this before with other *sul'dam* that have been captured or are prisoners of war. Um, and as everyone says, it's a modicum of progress, it's just slow going and sure seems to look like torture [laughs].

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: So, uh, a sort of Robert Jordan classic. Um, the Aes Sedai, Joline at least, has found a way around Mat's medallion and is just throwing rocks at him and shit. And this goes on until Joline has a huge beatdown fight with Teslyn in their wagon, which Mat just, like, hears the yelling as everyone else just scurries out. You know, Edesina comes out with, like, hair curlers in, basically.

SALLY: [laughs] Yeah.

EMILY: And is like [vocalizing]. And Mat's like, "What the fuck is going on?" And they're just like [mumbles].

SALLY: Teslyn's whooping her ass in there.

EMILY: Yeah, and Mat never has to deal with that again, so it's very charming to think of Teslyn being like, "Could you..."

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: "Behave. To the man who saved our lives." [laughs]

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: “I’m begging you.” [laughs]

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: “Be normal.”

SALLY: It’s also just, like, continue to theme of last week’s conversation. Like, Joline is within her right to be like, “I want revenge on the person who humiliated me.”

EMILY: Mm-hmm.

SALLY: “By spanking me in this way.” But it’s just, like, one, don’t throw rocks at Mat, but two, it just continues this pattern of her being the most immature, I’m going to literally, like, throw spitballs at you while we ride around.

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: Like, it just continues, which plays into what happens to her later in this chapter, I think. So.

EMILY: Yeah. Joline is just a big stupid dummy.

SALLY: Yeah, big bratty bitch, who deserves anything coming her way.

EMILY: Because she’s too stupid to listen to anyone. Um, a lot of this chapter is framed in this conversation that Mat is having with Setalle Anan, uh, wherein, like, he seems to be in his inner monologue. You know? We’re sort of getting these events, but he also seems to be talking about them to Setalle Anan. It’s one of those chapters.

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: And he’s like, says something about being worried that they’ll just take the, the medallion from them. And Setalle Anan is basically like, “Well, that would be stealing so she would have to do a penance, but I wouldn’t exclude that from that...” that she might still do it, basically.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And, uh, she sort of lectures him about how he’s doing the wrong stuff with Aes Sedai. Blah, blah, blah, blah. The conversation kind of turns to Tuon and she’s like, “Oh, well you’re still just – you’re still kind of being a womanizer and dancing from woman to woman.” Mat says, “There’s no dancing away from this one. Not for me.” And Setalle Anan says, “Oh, like that, is it? You’ve chosen a fine one to break your heart.” Which is a very sweet line, sort of speaks to a sort of intimacy between the two of them, which I appreciate. I appreciate any time there’s a male-woman relationship in this series that isn’t tainted horribly.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: By Robert Jordan's weirdness. I don't like that it seems to foreshadow something that doesn't happen.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Um, there's a sort of melodrama whenever heartbreaking comes up, you know? So it sort of demands some form of payoff.

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: I guess? So...I almost would appreciate it if Tuon just went Dark Side and then Mat's heart was broken and he had to move on from that. It would be a more interesting character arc, I think, if Mat married someone and it didn't turn out great and fine.

SALLY: It's especially, um, upsetting because it's, like, setting the stage perfectly – so, to just, like, jump ahead for just a second, but I promise it's relevant. This is the chapter in which the Aes Sedai come to confront Tuon, having learned, I think from Valan Luca, that she is a High Lady.

EMILY: Mm.

SALLY: Because Valan Luca can't keep his –

EMILY: Fucking mouth shut, yeah.

SALLY: His mouth shut. So, they're like, "Oh, we should try some diplomacy or whatever." And of course the Aes Sedai are being very bossy about it. Blah, blah, blah, blah. But Tuon apparently just has some fucking –

EMILY: *A'dam*

SALLY: *A'dam*.

EMILY: Just, like, squirreled away. Where'd she get them? No one knows.

SALLY: And Selucia put them on the Aes Sedai and Tuon is wearing both of the bracelets.

EMILY: Mm-hmm.

SALLY: And this is extremely upsetting for, um, an infinite number of reasons. And this is – we're, like, set up [laughs], with this line in particular – "You've chosen a fine one to break your heart" – for Mat to have a reaction to this that is negative. For Mat to be like, "Oh, perhaps it is hitting me for the first time in my sort of, like, romantic haze, that this is a bad person."

EMILY: Instead, you'll never believe what happens. Mat gets horny [laughing] about it.

SALLY: Yeah, Mat's like, "Wow, she's so sexy."

EMILY: Insta boner.

SALLY: Yeah. It is, like, so repulsive. He's like, "She's like a – like a leopard. Like a dangerous predator."

EMILY: Which, like, stop characterizing Black women as wild animals.

SALLY: Jungle cats.

EMILY: Gross.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: [sighs] But also, yeah dude! [cat purring in the background] Like, you're suddenly villain sexual? Like, what's going on there?

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Because that's never been your thing in the past.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Exactly. So Robert Jordan – I mean, it's just more character assassination. But, yeah, this is totally a moment where Mat could be like, "Jesus Christ, I'm in over my head."

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And, I don't know. I mean, we continue to maintain there's an infinite number of ways that this could have gone differently, this whole storyline. You could have changed Tuon's character, you could have left character the same and had Mat's reaction to it be completely different.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Robert Jordan has opted for a love story, um, in this sort of Hades and Persephone narrative. Um, but to make Hades and Persephone into a modern day love story requires a certain amount of naivete.

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: And that's what he's bringing to the table here.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: It's not a really thoughtful, fair interpretation to all parties. [cat purring in the background] Which, uh, I guess no one could ever accuse Robert Jordan of being thoughtful, but.

SALLY: [sighs] Certainly not in this scene. Like, it is frustrating to just be like, "Okay, Mat. You've – you've apparently been in – " Like, there could be an argument to be made that, like, Mat has been in denial. When you have feelings for someone, you know, you've got your, your rose-colored goggles on the world. He knows that she's a part of the Seanchan empire, he knows that she trains *damane*, but maybe he doesn't fully know what that means. And then he watches her put a collar on two people that he has risked his *whole* ass to save, and that doesn't like – no lightbulb moment?

EMILY: Yeah, it's troubling –

SALLY: Like, what is happening?

EMILY: It's troubling because everyone else has a normal reaction.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: A – a standard human reaction. Edesina tries to physically run out of the –

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Out of the, um...wagon. Teslyn immediately breaks down and starts crying. She's one of the ones who has a collar on. Um, Noal almost pulls a knife.

SALLY: [laughs] Yeah.

EMILY: On Tuon.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Which, I at least would have been fascinated to see what happened then. Uh, but Mat has to, like, sort of wink him down. Um, and Joline doesn't really react at all, because of course she doesn't have the know-how, but then we watch Tes – Tuon immediately begin engaging in, like, the training of her.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Which is incredibly disgusting to watch. And Mat is just, like, trying to calmly talk Tuon away from this and one could argue that that is him having a sort of delayed reaction.

SALLY: Sure.

EMILY: Sort of being like at a certain point I must be able to talk her out of it and then maybe she's redeemable.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Um, but Tuon can't really be talked out of it. Mat has to sort of get up and release the collars, like, through the mechanism. And clearly Tuon tries to stop him via channeling but is not able to because of his medallion. And Mat's like, "You can't do this." And Tuon's like, "Well, they're annoying me." And Mat's like, "Well clearly they're not going to annoy you again." And it's just, like, Tuon wins this interaction in a way.

SALLY: Yeah. Yep. Yeah. Mm-hmm.

EMILY: In that she drives the Aes Sedai away completely. And it's, like, yes they are incredibly annoying. Joline was incredibly rude to her, to everyone. That's Joline.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: But, like, at what cost? And why – and...[groans]. The chapter ends with Mat having confiscated the *a'dam* and literally burying them and it's just, like, oh at least finally someone's having a normal thing with the *a'dam*.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Just get them the fuck out of here. But, like, dude, you're still thinking like, "Sure do love Tuon."

SALLY: Yeah, and you're so right. Mat – Mat's initial – I mean...Mat's reaction to deescalate the situation is obviously the correct one. Like, he is doing – he is choosing the right action. Being like I have to do whatever it takes to deescalate the situation and get these women out of here.

EMILY: Mm-hmm.

SALLY: Obviously he's making all the right choices. As much as I would have paid all of the money in my savings account to watch Noal stab Tuon. That would be –

EMILY: Oh my god.

SALLY: The most satisfying thing I've ever read. [laughs] Of course he makes the right choice by being like, "No more weapons."

EMILY: It just ends there [laughs].

SALLY: Yeah he's just like [stabbing sound] knife directly to the heart. Problem solved.

EMILY: [laughing]

SALLY: [laughing] The Seanchan Empire is in shambles.

EMILY: Crumbles [laughs]

SALLY: [laughing] Yeah! That would be so good! What the fuck? Um, of course he makes the right choice of being like, “No more weapons. Like, we’re gonna deescalate.”

EMILY: Yeah, everyone walks away from this situation physically intact, if not emotionally.

SALLY: Yeah. So, like, he’s making the right choices and he’s acting as though, you know, he believes slavery to be bad. But his internal monologue is literally like, “Wow, she’s so graceful and so powerful.” There’s no – there’s no change. So, it’s like what are you doing, Mat? What are you doing? What are you doing?

EMILY: What’s HAPPENING HERE?

SALLY: I feel like I’m saying the same things over and over again, but this scene makes me feel like I am on a different plane of reality.

EMILY: I know. It’s so frustrating to watch what is this sort of, like, classic distillation of Mat in the whole Tower of Ghenjei plotline, what is coming down the pipeline with that, duh, duh, duh, duh, duh. And then this sort of, like, rampant character assassination.

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: That’s also happening with the courting of Tuon and it’s just so – it’s just so frustrating. Robert Jordan’s adherence to monogamy as the end all, be all of, like, a character arc. *Any* given character arc must end in a marriage between a man and a woman and that is the project of *The Wheel of Time*.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: It’s like, but then you’re losing everything that could be interesting or engaging at all.

SALLY: Yeah. Another note I had in my blog of, like, my first reaction on reading these chapters was like, Mat’s arc through marriage very much reflects Mat’s initial, um, perspective on marriage. When Mat is single and, uh, unattached, his plot is *very* interesting and dynamic and intriguing and rich and full of life and adventure. And as soon as he gets attached to his, um, monogamous partner his plotline sucks ass. He has apparently no agency. He’s not interesting. It is, like, for me Mat is the [laughs] ball and chain in this marriage. Like, I hate reading about him now that he’s sort of got his spouse. And that was exactly how Mat thought about marriage and that’s exactly what’s happening to him, so what does that tell you about Robert Jordan’s perspective on marriage.

EMILY: I know. Robert Jordan named Mat Matrim.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Three letters short of *matrimony*. Clearly marriage was in the cards from – for Mat from the get-go.

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: And yet, couldn't pull it off. You could have made that some sort of tragic irony going in there, but here we are. I don't know.

SALLY: Here you are, burying your future wife's, um, crime – weapons against humanity in the muddy rainstorm, thinking about how hot she was when she almost tortured people in front of you.

EMILY: At least we have Brett the Aelfinn.

SALLY: Brett the Aelfinn is watching through Mat's eyes like what I do when I watch *Sex and the City* like, "Can you believe this shit? Can you believe what these people are doing?"

EMILY: [laughs] Okay, everyone. Those are those two chapters.

SALLY: [sighs]

EMILY: The next two are also with Mat. There will at least be some ghosts and an exciting action sequence and, as we said at the beginning of this episode, or midway through, whenever, we'll start in on that Tower of Ghenjei plotline.

SALLY: It is so fun.

EMILY: Finally.

SALLY: When Noal's just like, "Hey, me too."

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: Sounds lit.

EMILY: I'll go.

SALLY: And they're like, "Why would *you* go?"

EMILY: He's like, "I dunno."

SALLY: “You don’t know Moiraine. Or *us* really.” [laughs]

EMILY: [laughs] He’s like, “I dunno.”

SALLY: Noal’s like –

EMILY: “Sounds like a fun time.”

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Blah, blah, blah. Um, that’s what’s on the docket. Thanks for listening.

SALLY: Yes.

EMILY: Thanks to Glynna Mackenzie for our theme song. Thanks to our Patrons on Patreon and our followers on social media.

SALLY: Yeah. We like you guys so much.

EMILY: Yeah, do you have anything to add.

SALLY: [sighs] Oh no. I’ve said enough. Once again.

EMILY: Alright. Do you have a sign off?

SALLY: Oh, I’m trying to think of one. The sign off is that our cats are the worst. To leave you with, uh, uh, a charming image I guess. Ed had to have –

EMILY: [laughing]

SALLY: His tummy shaved [laughs] for some procedures he had to do at the vet. So he’s walking around with a naked little pink belly.

EMILY: It’s so fuzzy, you guys.

SALLY: It’s so fuzzy and cute.

EMILY: And he hates having it touched.

SALLY: And he won’t let us touch it.

EMILY: It makes him so angry.

SALLY: It’s really –

EMILY: [intensely] But it’s so *cute*.

SALLY: A punishment from on high that we can't touch his fuzzy little belly.

EMILY: [sighs]

SALLY: He's doing okay. He's back to himself which is...

EMILY: Bad.

SALLY: [laughs] Bad. He had a few lethargic days and now he's ready again. To scratch every carpet in our house.

EMILY: [sighs] Alright, guys.

SALLY: Okay, bye. Have a good week!

EMILY: Bye!