



Episode 226: Snakez in the House
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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: Speaking of consequences, um, I don't know what are consequences here. The consequences of going to a dive bar.

Sally: Oh, Lord.

Emily: I don't even know if "dive bar" is the correct corollary, you know?

Sally: I truly – this is Everybody Hates Rand.

Emily: Yeah, your friendly neighborhood Wheel of Time podcast. I'm Emily Juchau.

Sally: I'm Sally Goodger, and this purring in the background is Ed.

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: In case you can hear him. I don't really know if there is, like, a real-world corollary. Like, the idea that Tuon wants to go to, like, the worst type of bar, like, what – are you taking her to, like, a biker bar? Like, I legitimately don't understand. Like, the – I feel like there's something here about inns and taverns that don't quite correlate to –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: The modern day.

Emily: It's, like, meant to be a play on the trope of, like, you know, princess –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Leaving the tower.

Sally: Totally.

Emily: Tuon wants to gain some, um, real-world experience, and she has decided that the best way to do that is to, like, go directly to the bottom of the cultural barrel –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And go to what is called a “hell.”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, which is, just according to Mat, a place where likely knife fights are going to break out at any given moment –

Sally: Sure.

Emily: And everyone’s stealing from each other, and –

Sally: Sure.

Emily: Da da da da da. Just terrible – everyone’s poor, everyone’s impoverished and wants more money, so they’re playing each other; everyone’s drunk. (sigh) And Mat’s like, “I cannot possibly take a wealthy woman there because she’d be robbed immediately –”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: “And I would be responsible for protecting her –”

Sally: Right.

Emily: “So then I would be getting into constant fights.”

Sally: Right.

Emily: Um, very, very understandable qualms.

Sally: Sure.

Emily: And, yeah, I can’t really think of a real-world equivalent. We have, um, you know, what is called “bad neighborhoods” in America –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But generally that’s a racialized term –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: It doesn’t necessarily actually equate to any sort of moral or legal quality –

Sally: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Emily: Of a neighborhood.

Sally: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Emily: It just means that you’re more likely to find people of color there.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, at least based on my experience living in New York, where every neighborhood in Brooklyn that isn't invaded by white people is a, quote, bad neighborhood.

Sally: Bad neighborhood, yeah. Uh, no, I was gonna say the same thing. Like, it's – yeah. You said it. It's a very racialized – even Tuon being like, "I want to go to a bad place," feels – obviously, there's a lot of class playing into it here.

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: That's probably, like, the more important thing in Wheel of Time terms, but the idea of going to a bar in a bad neighborhood is just like, "Take me to," quote unquote, "the wrong side of the tracks."

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: It just means, yeah, you're gonna find people of color there who are probably just trying to, like, hang.

Emily: Yeah, just doing their thing.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: And they're like, "Okay."

Sally: "Why are you here? You don't belong here."

Emily: Um, yeah, there are, like, biker bars; people wouldn't be – the bikers might not be thrilled to –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Have you in there, but they're not – just generally speaking, people are likely to leave each other alone, you know?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Perhaps that's my innocence speaking, but I feel like there's many more, you know, bar fights depicted in media than actually happen.

Sally: Yeah, I mean, I'm not a frequent bar-goer, so –

Emily: Yeah. Same.

Sally: I can't say, but my experiences being dragged to bars in college and after is that mostly people are just doing their own thing.

Emily: Yeah. Just getting –

Sally: Unless they're trying to fuck –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Which is a different sort of scenario than robbing you blind. (laugh)

Emily: Who knows.

Sally: But like Emily said, this is very classic, um, princess-type behavior. We see the same type of shit with Elayne, who focuses instead on, like, going to places where poor people actually live, instead on just appropriating the language of the working classes. Um, that's how we see it manifest in Elayne. But it's the same type of thing.

Emily: Yeah, and, like, occasionally Elayne will, like, I think especially, um, in this latter Andor part of the, um, series, she, like, goes out not – sometimes in disguise or whatever, whatever –

Sally: Mm. Mm. That's right, yeah.

Emily: I think that happens a couple of times, but, like, what Tuon is technically going for here is that she doesn't just want to go to this place, but she wants to go to this place as not herself.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: You know, she is not known as the Seanchan Empress or the Daughter of the Nine Moons at this random dive bar. Um, and even if that identity was known, most people wouldn't know what that meant or how to behave, quote unquote, properly in her presence.

Sally: Sure.

Emily: So, like, regardless, she's just not going to be treated like royalty.

Sally: Right.

Emily: Um, which, you know, that's just sort of the classic princess schtick, is "very sheltered woman wants to experience the big old world outside of the castle." Um, and that's generally used as, like, a coming-of-age type thing.

Sally: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Emily: It's also generally used to indicate that the princess in question is spunky –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Or a feminist icon of some kind.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, you know, she has agency; she wants to be with the people – she wants to be where the people are. (laugh)

Sally: Yeah, exactly.

Emily: So this is sort of another tally in the column of Robert Jordan trying to – trying his damndest to make Tuon in some way likable or relatable.

Sally: Sure.

Emily: With – without sort of examining her whole deal.

Sally: Yeah, ‘cause, like, from – like, giving Elayne, like, the barest credit, at least when she’s doing this stuff there does seem to be a sort of, like, genuine curiosity there. Or, like – like, a form of, like, joy or pleasure that people other than herself or her class exist in the world. With Tuon, it’s very sort of, like, armchair anthropology-esque.

Emily: Yeah. Like, I think she’s supposed to be charmingly kind of awkward –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But it just comes – it makes her look like she’s visiting a zoo.

Sally: Yeah, exactly.

Emily: Like, the way she walks in and just, like, walks right up to the tavern singer girl, who’s just singing, like, a dirty song –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And is just, like, three feet away from her –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Like, figuring out how much clothing she’s wearing –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Basically ogling her.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: That’s, like, yeah, probably Elayne wouldn’t do that. (laugh)

Sally: Yeah, Elayne – (laugh) Who knows?

Emily: Probably.

Sally: Probably not. Um, yeah, so the dynamic just is – it just grosses me out.

Emily: Yeah. Um, but that’s not even the first chapter in this section.

Sally: Oh, yeah, sorry.

Emily: We read two chapters. The first one is called “A Village in Shiota” – Shiota? I don’t know how to say that – um, and tellingly, I think this is the very first chapter we’ve ever seen with the Aelfinn/Eelfinn symbol.

Sally: Ooh, sick.

Emily: It’s got a little upside-down triangle and a wavy line through it, and one end of the wavy line is a little snake head, and the other is a little fox head.

Sally: That's very cool. And the triangle itself kind of looks like a fox head, with, like –

Emily: Yeah, the dark ears.

Sally: Little ears, yeah.

Emily: Yeah, very interesting.

Sally: It's very cool.

Emily: Um. Yeah, who knew snakes and foxes could get, like – you know, could go together so well?

Sally: Yeah, do you think the Aelfinn and the Eelfinn can interbreed like horses and zebras?

Emily: Do they want to? Is – is the question. (laugh)

Sally: Mm, that's a much better question, Emily.

Emily: I wanna know the dynamics of –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: The Eelfinn/Aelfinn.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Is it, like, a civil war constantly?

Sally: Ooh. Yeah.

Emily: Is it, like, I don't know, like sexy politics between them?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Who's gonna be on top? Or are they just, like – maybe they don't even, like, know about the other ones?

Sally: (sing-song) You wanna be on top? Na na na na. (laugh)

Emily: You wanna be on – Boyz in the house. Snakez in the house. (laugh)

Sally: Yeah, that'd be pretty funny, if they're just like, "Who? The Aelfinn?"

Emily: "What? We don't know them."

Sally: "No, we're the Eelfinn."

Emily: "I don't know her." (laugh)

Sally: :I don't know her."

Emily: Um, this chapter deals with the circus moving at its very slow pace. Um, and eventually they are passing a field in one of these many, you know, just sort of empty spaces between cities that we get in Wheel of Time. Um, they're passing a field where there appears to be just, like, a small village –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Uh, you know, people working, doing their thing. A peddler is approaching them. Um, and it's sort of set up initially to be a little bit eerie, because Mat kind of gets a little twinge of, like, déjà vu when he sees them –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: And sort of recognizes the village's being, uh, odd, sort of anachronistic in some way, you know?

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: So he's already got his eye out, and Luca's like, "Oh, this is a good spot to stop," because of course there's people, and Luca loves to entertain. But Mat hears, um, the peddler's horses, like, on paving stone –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Or something, which, like, does not match, I believe, with, like, the visual that they're seeing.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Or Mat extrapolates from that somehow that, uh, what they are seeing is not real –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: In some way but that the peddler and horses are very real. So he's the one to sound the alarm, and I don't think that's too OP of him because Mat, we've seen, has been having experiences with, like, dead people –

Sally: Yeah, totally.

Emily: And seeing images, and he seems more willing to engage with them. You know, if it's gonna happen to anyone first, it might as well be ta'veren.

Sally: Sure.

Emily: But anyway, he's like, "Get out of there!"

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And the peddler's like, "Doo ba doo ba doo." Just doing his thing, and then, very creepily, the horses start freaking out –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And we watch as the peddler – the horses and the peddler himself – just start, like, sinking into the ground. Not like quicksand – it’s almost like a glitch.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: You know – just, they are disappearing –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Beneath that horizon. And at the same time the village itself is disappearing, but none of the people are reacting, so it’s clear that it’s sort of, like, a – a – like, a simulation, almost –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And, just, the peddler has stumbled into it. So they have to watch this incredibly horrifying scene of the peddler and horses just sort of, like, sinking and – drowning? We don’t know. We don’t know what happens to them.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Mat, like, almost goes toward them, but Tuon stops him and is like, “You physically cannot do anything.” Um, Mat almost, like, shoots the peddler, which I – I don’t know, I would have done if I had bow skills.

Sally: Yeah. Like, it’s very tragic, and the horses are making these just, like, horrible noises.

Emily: I know, it’s just gross to think about.

Sally: Yeah. It’s very – the whole thing is very, like, good. Like, it’s –

Emily: Oh, yeah.

Sally: Extremely well done, from just, like, the way that – like, I really do love this chapter in particular. We get, like, back to the sort of, like, core of Mat’s character, where he is, like, doing these really freaky things with his memory, and also the way that he puts together that it’s basically just, like, a hologram that they’re looking at is so good. I can’t remember exactly what it is either, but it’s something about, like, the paving stones should or shouldn’t be there, and, like, the fact that Mat would notice such a detail is, like, such a – like, a little trickster moment to be, like, getting – just, like, clicking in a way.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Um. It’s just, like, extremely good, and then extremely horrifying in such a – a well-done way. So good job, Robert Jordan.

Emily: Yeah, we – we really are getting back to core Mat in this chapter –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And to some extent in the next chapter, but –

Sally: Yeah, when he’s just gambling and –

Emily: Gambling and getting in knife fights. Um, but – so they – after witnessing that, everyone’s like, “Eugh.”

Sally: “No, thanks.”

Emily: “We don’t wanna go across those – that dirt.”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: “That’s dead people dirt.”

Sally: “It’s dead people dirt.”

Emily: No.

Sally: “The dirt’s gonna eat you.”

Emily: “The ground is cursed –”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: “In these here parts.”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, but going back would, like, significantly delay them, and they’d be moving – backtracking through territory where they’ve already performed is probably the more relevant thing to Valan Luca.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So we have this pretty hilarious scene where Mat and everyone are just watching Valan Luca move around, like, persuading people –

Sally: I know. It’s so funny.

Emily: And Thom and Mat are just, like, betting on whether –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: He can actually get them. ‘Cause Thom comes up and is like, “I think we’ll have to separate from the group –”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And Mat’s like, “Oh, let’s see.”

Sally: “Let’s see what happens.”

Emily: And then they, um, bet on it, and Mat has to pay Thom because Thom bets on Luca’s, um, you know, bard persuasion checks. Very good, very high stats.

Sally: Yeah, Valan Luca is such a – an underrated comedic figure, I think.

Emily: I know.

Sally: Bard is the perfect way to describe him.

Emily: Like, the most annoying bard you've ever met.

Sally: Yeah, just, like, the most annoying, insufferable bard but is just, like, so damn charismatic.

Emily: Yeah. Everyone's like, "Oh, damn, Valan Luca. He's so handsome."

Sally: Yeah, "He's so handsome." Performance –

Emily: He's like, "We're gonna go to Caemlyn, and then I'm gonna hire ships to Tar Valon," and Mat's like, "No, you're not." (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) Yeah. Mat's like –

Emily: "You would never drop that much money to hire ships. What are you talking about?" (laugh)

Sally: Ugh, it's so good. He's just, like, got these performance and charisma stats off the charts.

Emily: Just outright lying to everyone –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, but yeah, he eventually convinces the whole circus to keep moving forward. Then, of course, he has to be the first one across, so he, like, sprints, basically, which is all quite funny.

Sally: (laugh) I like to imagine him doing all of this in one of his extremely flamboyant outfits.

Emily: Oh, yeah, he's definitely wearing, like, sequins or something like that.

Sally: Yeah. Fucking rhinestones.

Emily: Um, uh, but that night, Mat does not have his usual, like, dinner with Tuon and company, because she and Selucia are like, "That was very creepy and ominous, so we have to spend the night in prayer." Um, and Mat's like, "Okay, yeah, we should probably all say a little prayer. That was fucked up." (laugh)

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: But he retires to his tent, where he is joined by, um, Thom, Noal, Olver, and Juilin and Amathera, and they're having a very quaint little game night –

Sally: Sure.

Emily: Playing stones and Snakes and Foxes –

Sally: Snakes and Foxes, yeah.

Emily: And Thom's just reading and rereading this creepy letter. Then Egeanin and Bayle Domon show up. Egeanin makes an effort to make amends with Amathera, just to be like, "No,

you don't have to treat me like Seanchan anymore. I just want – you know, we're equals. You need to buck up. Why don't we go on a double date, have dinner back at our wagon?" And Juilin's like, "Okay." Amathera, notably, does not get to weigh in on this.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: The whole conversation's with Juilin. But they peace out, and then – leaving the – the three main guys plus Olver. Um, and, uh, Mat finally breaches the topic of what is in the letter with Thom.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: He's just like, "Why the fuck do you keep reading this letter?" And Thom's like, "Here," and Mat's like, "I don't want to read your fucking mail."

Sally: Yeah. "That's a felony, Thom." (laugh)

Emily: "That's a felony, Thom. Oh my God. I, Mat Cauthon –" (laugh)

Sally: Yeah, "I am many things, but I am not a – a mail reader."

Emily: "Noted law keeper." (laugh) And he, like, starts it, and it's like, "My dearest Thom," and he's like, "Thom!"

Sally: Blegh.

Emily: "What is this, sexting? I don't want to –"

Sally: "I don't like you – read your sex letters."

Emily: And Thom's like, "No, no. Read it." So the letter, of course, is from Moiraine. She has, like, a – a smoochy sort of first paragraph, where she's like, "There are many words I would like to write to you, words from my heart," and it's like, shut up.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, but she's like, "In a minute, I'm gonna go confront Lanfear. How can I know that? I just know." You know, "I know the future," blah blah blah blah blah. She's like, "When you get this, you'll think I'm dead; everyone will think I'm dead, but there is a chance that you and Mat and another guy can rescue me, but it will only work if it's you and Mat and another guy. You know, the – that's the only chance for success, and even if the three of you come, then it still might fail. So, risky endeavor; I do not know the future completely," conveniently enough. She also says, like, "Whatever you do, don't show Mat this letter until he asks about it," which really shines a light on the fact that Thom has just been performing reading this letter in front of Mat –

Sally: (laugh) Yeah.

Emily: Trying to get him to finally –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Show some curiosity about Thom's personal life. (laugh)

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: You have to imagine Thom's just, like, sighing in the background constantly.

Sally: (sigh)

Emily: (sigh) And Mat's just going, "Jesus Christ."

Sally: "What is up with this guy?"

Emily: "He's so annoying."

Sally: "God."

Emily: And Moiraine says, "Finally," um – does she say she's in the Tower of Ghenjei? No. She just says, um, "A final point: Remember what you know about the game of Snakes and Foxes." Which is such an ominous –

Sally: Yeah, just fucking –

Emily: Little line. Um, and Mat's like, "Um, okay, well. Thom, Moiraine's super dead." (laugh)

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: "Lan even said so." And Thom's like, "Well, she said we'd all think we were dead," and Mat's like, "The little, like, doorway thing she went through melted."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: "That seems like a pretty good indication that she's dead." And Thom's like, "Meh meh meh meh meh." Um, and Mat's like, "She just went to where the Aelfinn are," and we have no idea where that is," and Olver's like, "The Tower of Ghenjei."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: (laugh) "Birgitte told me." And Mat's like, "Goddamnit, Birgitte."

Sally: "Birgitte!"

Emily: "You and your infinite wisdom."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, so they're just having this very funny conversation about it. Um, but Noal's like, "Oh, yeah, I've heard of the Tower of Ghenjei." Like, "That would be a fun adventure, to go there." And Mat's like, "Well, we don't know where that is," and Thom's like, "Well, according to the letter, you should know where it is," and Mat's like, "I don't know where it is," and Noal's like, "Well, it's this beautiful silver tower that's just, like, super tall and doesn't have any doors," and Mat's like "Goddamnit, I do know where that is."

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: (laugh) Mat has, like, this sort of flashback to seeing that tower when he was on the riverboat with Bayle Domon, traveling from Shadar Logoth, uh, to Whitebridge. Notably, Thom was on the same voyage, so it's funny that Mat saw it and Thom didn't.

Sally: Yeah which, like, could just be, like, a writing thing, you know –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: But I do also like the implication that maybe only Mat can see it.

Emily: Oh.

Sally: You know?

Emily: That is fun.

Sally: Yeah, I don't think that's actually what happens, but it's just fun to be like, "Only Mat."

Emily: Yeah, it's also weird because we've also had Perrin see the Tower of Ghenjei, I believe –

Sally: Mm.

Emily: Just, like, in one of his dream sequences, where he was –

Sally: Mm.

Emily: Sort of running around with wolves, chasing Slayer. I think this was in book four. He ran into the Tower of Ghenjei, so it's just sort of, like, confusing. I wish –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: It had just been Mat. But Mat talks about how creepy that is because he has so little memory of what transpired, especially after Shadar Logoth.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: And he's said before that he has holes in his memory, and we don't often linger upon what that means, but, um – I was just reading this in another book – but, like, Mat has entire years of his childhood and growing up missing.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And he has, like, you know, this extremely spotty memory of everything after Shadar Logoth.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Which is just, like, I don't know, an underrated form of trauma –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: For Mat, especially the idea that everything that he's missing, plus some, has been replaced –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: By dead people's memories, and Mat is now, like, "Is that, like, surveillance on me?" It's all very, just, like, creepy.

Sally: Yeah, I also just – maybe we've said this before, but I am just, like, obsessed with the visual imagery of, like, there needing – there needs to be memories gone before they can shove more memory in his head, as though, like, memory is not an infinite pool –

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: You know? It's just, like, really fascinating.

Emily: I know, and it's just, like, his memories have been missing, I think, since he woke up –

Sally: Yeah, that's true, that's true.

Emily: But, like, also, did that make him the ideal vessel –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: For this, like, Aelfinn and Eelfinn thing?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: It's very, like, weird.

Sally: Yeah, or is it just totally unrelated?

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: And he just also happens to have –

Emily: Like, clearly this doesn't happen to everyone who goes into the Tower of Ghenjei, because –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: You know, Rand went in.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But, I don't know, Rand and Moiraine talked to the ones who answer questions.

Sally: Mm.

Emily: Mat was the one who talked – the only one that we know of who talked to the people who grant –

Sally: Mm.

Emily: Boons or whatever. So. I don't know, it's just a very – it's one of Robert Jordan's, like, like, good plots. He really went off with the Aelfinn and Eelfinn.

Sally: I know. I was thinking about it, and, like, I think he does a relatively good job of, like, merging the Eelfinn and the Aelfinn with, like, everything else that is going on, but I also just feel like that could have been – it's like, Mat could have just been his own –

Emily: Thing.

Sally: Thing entirely, and I would have been so fascinated.

Emily: Yeah. Just the Eelfinn and the Aelfinn, no Dark One. No –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Whatever, whatever.

Sally: Yeah, just, like, what is –

Emily: It's very interesting.

Sally: Ugh. So good. You're right, Robert Jordan really popped off.

Emily: So Mat's like, "Yeah, actually, I do know where that is, but, like, honestly, we cannot go." And for the first time in his life, apparently, tells the entire story of what happened to him in, I think, both Towers of Ghenjei –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Indicating, like, it's so dangerous, "I forgot to ask to be able to leave alive, so they hanged me."

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Like, he's showing his scars. Da da da da da. Hilariously, he's also telling this story in front of Olver without questioning whether it's appropriate for a ten-year-old. Like, "They're wearing human skin," and Olver's just like –

Sally: Are they wearing human skin? Is that what's going on with them?

Emily: The Aelfinn and Eelfinn?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: They are always wearing, like, these creepy, like, leather –

Sally: Oh. Outfits made of human skin, not –

Emily: Yeah. Sorry.

Sally: I was like, hold on. (laugh)

Emily: No, like a, like a, um, Ed Gein situation?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Eugh.

Sally: (laugh) I was like, “Wait a second. Missed that.”

Emily: Ooh. That just creeped me out so bad.

Sally: Sorry.

Emily: Their little snakey fox faces –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Whatever, but just wearing a meat suit. (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) I’m so sorry. But no, they are wearing, like, human leather, which is gross.

Emily: Also gross, yeah.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And so he’s just like, “Yeah, that’s all what’s happening, like, don’t tell anyone, but, um, yeah,” and Noal’s just like, “Wack, dude. Do you think I could come?” (laugh)

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: And Mat’s like, “Are you guys stupid?” and Thom’s like, “Meh, doesn’t matter. We’ve gotta go. Like, I’m going, regardless.” And Mat tells us he doesn’t really care about Moiraine, but he does care about Thom.

Sally: Yeah, it’s very sweet in it’s fucked-up little way.

Emily: I know, it’s a very interesting –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Thing. Mat and Thom have one of the most interesting relationships in this book –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: As sort of, like, a mentor-mentee without any of the usual, I don’t know, toxicity between mentors and mentees –

Sally: Right.

Emily: Like between Moiraine and Rand.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um. You know, all three boys have their own sort of mentor figures that are all met in the Eye of the World –

Sally: Uh-huh.

Emily: Perrin has Elyas, Mat has Thom, and Rand has Moiraine slash Lan.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And, like, Elyas isn't all that helpful to Perrin.

Sally: Sure.

Emily: He's just like, "Yeah, Saldaean women like to get abused, so do more of that."

Sally: Yeah, helpful. Thank you.

Emily: And Moiraine famously fucked up her and Rand. But Thom and Mat are just, like – have a healthy sort of relationship between bros.

Sally: Yeah, and I think that – hello. Goodbye. Um, I think that's part of what makes it so healthy, is, like, it is not a formalized mentor/mentee relationship. Like, it's very fluid. Thom obviously offers Mat a ton of mentorship and advice and basically is like, "This is my boy."

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: "I'm just hanging out with my boy."

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: But Mat also offers Thom advice in certain situations that Thom seems to actually, like, put a lot of value in. So it's just – you're right. It's much less toxic and much more, like, real, I think.

Emily: Yeah. Mat's just like, "This is my weird old man –"

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: "Friend who follows me around, and I sort of follow him around, and we just ran into each other in Tar Valon and I was making my big escape attempt, and we've sort of been stuck together ever since." Except, tellingly, the gap between, um, the Shadow Rising, and, uh, Lord of Chaos, I think it was, before they met back up again in, uh, Salidar.

Sally: Mm.

Emily: So I just like to think about Thom's perspective there.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Thom didn't really get the whole slow slide into Mat's military genius –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: That everyone else got.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So, to Thom, Mat just sort of came back strange. (laugh)

Sally: Yeah. (laugh) I love that idea. He just came back strange.

Emily: Yeah, he's like, "Okay, you – clearly something happened to you."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But he doesn't really, like –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Question about it.

Sally: Thom's like, haven't we all? Gone somewhere and come back a little strange?

Emily: Ba da da da da.

Sally: "For me, it was when I killed two kings." (laugh)

Emily: (laugh) And Mat's like, "Oh. I went to fantasy hell."

Sally: Yeah, and Thom's like, "Oh, sick." Imagine being Noal, who's just, like, addicted to adventure, and Mat's like – Thom sets up this mythical quest, and Noal's like, "Okay, I'm interested," and Mat's like, "I went to fantasy hell. I was hanged. I came back alive. Rand saved me. I've got people's memories in my head."

Emily: "I had to do – the Dragon Reborn had to give me mouth-to-mouth –"

Sally: Yeah. (laugh)

Emily: "The most traumatic part of any of this."

Sally: And Noal is just, like – with each more insane thing Mat says, Noal is just, like, more and more excited.

Emily: Noal's like, "Sick. I love this."

Sally: "That sounds fucking rad. I want to go to fantasy hell." And Mat is like, "No, you do not."

Emily: Noal is so funny for being this genre-savvy little lunatic.

Sally: I know. I love him.

Emily: Noal has the vibe of, like, a D&D player who's, like –

Sally: Mm.

Emily: You see – you, like, see the set-up –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: That the DM is giving you –

Sally: Totally.

Emily: There's gonna be something fun there –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: If you only push the red button.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And it's like, your character's like, "I'm not stupid," but Noal's like, "No, I am stupid. Let's do it."

Sally: (laugh) "I wanna do it."

Emily: He's the Travis Willingham of this –

Sally: Yeah. "Roll to seduce Aelfinn." (laugh)

Emily: That's all the Aelfinn/Eelfinn plot was missing: a seduction.

Sally: A seduction. And here's Noal.

Emily: Um, but anyway, Mat agrees, finally, and the last set of dice of the congruent ones that he's been dealing with stops.

Sally: God, I know we've said this before: Robert Jordan also popped off with this dice mechanic.

Emily: I know. God –

Sally: This is why I feel like Mat could hold the story on his own.

Emily: Yeah. Mat just has so many interesting –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Mechanics. He really loses it in terms of, like, romance at the end –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: But, like, most of his other interpersonal relationships are very interesting.

Sally: Totally.

Emily: Um, he has really fascinating relationships with other people, um, and with the world –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Just generally, so I don't know. Tuon's really just the – the wrench in there.

Sally: Really the iceberg on this Titanic.

Emily: Oof. Woof. And Thom is just playing his harp as the ship goes down. Anyway, the next day, the circus gets up pretty early, and they continue on for, like, a few days; they keep a good pace before eventually everyone calms down and they slow down again –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, outside this city called, uh, Maderin. Maderin. I'm not sure how to pronounce it.

Sally: Maderin.

Emily: Who knows?

Sally: 'Cause it's a Maderin to me. It's Maderin to me. (laugh)

Emily: I'm not going to respond to that. (laugh)

Sally: That was a good one. You're so rude.

Emily: Um, and then – Thom and Juilin go into the city to check it out, like they do, and while Mat is waiting for them and just entertaining himself by throwing dice, you know –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Just seeing how it's going. Uh, Selucia comes to get him and is like, "Tuon wants to see you." He goes to her, which is when he finds out that she wants to go into the city and, um, go to a hell. Uh, they are still arguing about this when Thom comes to find Mat, um, and is like, "Oh, yeah, we could do that," and Mat's like, "We can, Thom?" (laugh) And Thom's like, "Yeah, I've seen just the place," and there's, like, this silent conversation –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Between Thom and Mat where Thom's like, "She's – she's not even gonna know the difference, bestie."

Sally: Yeah, "I could take her to the Four Seasons."

Emily: Yeah. She's just gonna be like, "Whoa. Look at all these commoners."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: "These peasants." And Mat's like, "Alright. You're probably right. I will trust your judgment." So, that decided, they do, uh, pack up the four of them – Mat, Thom, Selucia, and Tuon – and head over to the city, which, um, is not occupied by the Seanchan, but has had Seanchan pass through occasionally, and Thom, through questioning, finds out that the city is not, um – the city's pretty ambivalent about the Seanchan. You know, they're kind of like, "Yeah, take 'em or leave 'em."

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Whatever, and Thom's like, "I've seen that attitude pretty much everywhere else, which is a real problem, because it's going to make the Seanchan really difficult to extricate from this

invasion.” Which is just a common theme that Robert Jordan has been returning to, that the common people are too stupid to realize that the Seanchan might not be a good form of government.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Or that the existing form of government was just so bad that the alternative, fascism, is better somehow.

Sally: Yeah

Emily: Which, I am not a scholar of fascism – I do think there’s a certain amount of truth in that fascist states via propaganda and efficiency –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Can bring the common people over to their side, as long as they are themselves not the people being Othered.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Um, that’s what happened in Germany during World War II.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, so there is an element of truth there, but it is a little bit troubling because Robert Jordan seems to fall on the side of, “This is a good thing for the common people,” rather than being like, “This will inevitably turn bad for everyone.”

Sally: Yeah. It goes back to what we talked about last week – wow, we’ve been doing a lot of callbacks; it’s almost like our episodes are finally connecting. (laugh)

Emily: It’s almost like we’re reading multiple chapters from the same point of view. (laugh)

Sally: Oh, man. Um, it goes back to what we talked about with the idea of kind of, like, um, representation versus endorsement.

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: And, like, it’s totally – obviously, you can represent whatever you want in fiction, and, like, it is a very interesting thing to explore the idea of exactly what you said, of, like, governments that are not democratic governments or oligarch – oligarchy-type stuff, any type of government that feels, um, ineffective because it moves very slowly or depends on the whims of one person like a monarchy or an oligarchy, anything that doesn’t necessarily have to go through the, um –

Emily: (cough)

Sally: Strenuous process of passing laws can feel really refreshing. That doesn’t mean it is a good thing, and, like, there’s nobody interrogating that in all of occupied Seanchan, except for, like, Thom.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: So, it come – it just, like – the – the framework of it tends to seem more like endorsement than representation and, um, interrogation.

Emily: Yes. Agreed, wholeheartedly.

Sally: And I'm just repeating what you said, but it's gross.

Emily: Um, they finally get to this random common room – this inn that is called the White Ring – the White Ring? Yeah, the White Ring, which is, you know, a garter, a woman's garter, like a little frilly thing that they throw at weddings or whatever.

Sally: Which is so weird. You guys –

Emily: I mean, they don't do that at Mormon weddings, but.

Sally: Well. Have you guys just, like, ever thought about that one for a second? It's so weird.

Emily: Um. So they go in. There's a gal who's singing a sexy little ditty about all her paramours. Um, and Mat's just like, "What the fuck is this place, Thom? Like, why are there so many people – it's, like afternoon. Why are there so many people here?"

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And Thom's like, "Oh, it's just, like, a custom, apparently, that people go and drink a little bit before they make their trades –"

Sally: Mm.

Emily: "In this part of the city." But Thom's, again, like, "She will have no idea," and Mat's like, "Do you want to bet on it?" and Tuon comes back and is like, "Well. What a hell." And then Mat's like, "Oh, goddamnit," passes a coin over to Thom, and Thom's just like, "Wheee. Won two coins off of Mat –"

Sally: Wheee. Yeah.

Emily: "In two days. How exciting." Um. Tuon's like, "What was that?" and Mat's like, "Nothing." (laugh)

Sally: "Don't worry about it."

Emily: I just think Mat and Thom are the funniest.

Sally: They are very cute.

Emily: Um, but they have this awkward little lunch with Tuon just being weird and awkward. Eventually Tuon sort of pushes Mat into gambling, playing some dice games. She's like, "Thom called you the luckiest man in the world, and I want to know what that's about." And Mat's like, "Okay, yeah." Starts playing dice. One of the guys, like, immediately leaves the table as soon as Mat sits down and departs the inn; Mat doesn't know what that's about. Um, he's playing and

playing and playing, winning and winning and winning. This is a constant pattern with Mat. Eventually he realizes, like, some of the people who are acting very drunk are not really drunk, and this is a dangerous situation, so we should get out. So he throws and immediately loses all his winnings. So he's just like, "Time to go," and Tuon's like, "I thought you were supposed to be lucky," and Mat's like, "That was lucky." (laugh)

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, but they get hustled out of there and on their way back, um – while Mat is playing this game, Thom is, of course, gathering information. Um, before they leave the inn, Tuon and Selucia go to the bathroom, and Thom comes back and is like, "Bad news: so apparently the Seanchan are being told that there's a – like, that they need to catch a Daughter of the Nine Moons imposter, and all of the barracks that are set up between here and Lugard are gonna be looking out for her." And Mat's like, "Eugh, that's a real problem, because that was my plan to send her back, was just, you know, turn her over to the Seanchan as soon as –"

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: "We are far enough away from Ebou Dar. But if they are gonna try and kill her, then obviously that's a problem, um, and we can't really stay with the circus, because at some point the circus is going to run into one of those, and Tuon's little letter of protection is no longer quite the –"

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: "Letter of protection that it was." Um, so they're kind of making plans, like, "Let's start buying horses and get ready to depart from the circus." Tuon comes back and Mat just tells her about this, and she's like, "Yeah, it's probably one of my sisters that's trying to kill me," and Mat's like, "Okay, freak. You weirdo."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: "My sisters tried to kill me too but it was, like, we were ten and –"

Sally: Yeah. (laugh)

Emily: "You know, normal stuff." (laugh) "Normal Cain and Abel behavior."

Sally: Yeah, obviously.

Emily: Not, like, serious shit. But as they're leaving, uh, they run into a group of armed people. Um, Mat just has no option but to engage with this. Um, very unrealistically, he takes out five guys –

Sally: Yeah, a lot of them.

Emily: With his little knives. They are armed with swords and, given, he does have ranged weapons and just, like, kills two guys instantly, but then it's still you against three guys. Um, and I do appreciate the verisimilitude of him just being like, "I'm not going to get out of this unscathed, so the best thing is to just get wounded in – as unseriously as possible." So he's pretty

beat up by the time he gets through all of those guys. He's just a real John Wick over here. Um, and is face – facing the last person, who turns out to be a woman, tries to get her to run off. She is not about that, so Tuon has to kill her 'cause Mat hesitates. Just the, you know, usual Wheely Time gender politics stuff. Um, and then Mat turns around, and Thom has also had to fight off six people, albeit with Selucia's help, and Selucia's a very highly trained hand-to-hand combatant, so probably that went a little easier for them, but, uh, Mat does not know that Selucia is Tuon's bodyguard even though it's incredibly obvious. So: smart boy, also dumb when the plot calls for it, I guess. But Thom's like, "Oh, yeah, I'm just gonna not remember that. Your secret's safe with me." And Mat's like, "Is Thom going insane?"

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: He's like, "Sometimes I wonder about Thom." (laugh) But Mat recognizes one of these guys as the guy who, like, left as soon as he sat down to dice, so although he does not know what this means, he gets the heebie-jeebies and is like, "We need to leave the circus now."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, "Regardless of whether we are prepared to do so –"

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: "And just take off on our own." So that is where we end, with Mat being like, "We're going back and then we're leaving." RIP Valan Luca –

Sally: Ugh.

Emily: We will never see you again, which is –

Sally: Oh, really?

Emily: So tragic.

Sally: That's awful.

Emily: I know. I really wish he was in the Last Battle. (laugh)

Sally: I know, it feels like everyone else rolls up. Why isn't he – just happen to be where the Last Battle takes place?

Emily: I know. There are so many, like, cute ways that you could integrate the circus too.

Sally: Yeah. Yeah.

Emily: Like, I would love to see what Valan Luca's showmanship could contribute –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: To the war effort. Slash, maybe they're just, like, you know, tying bandages for people.

Sally: Yeah. Yeah. He could – he's – he's giving stirring speeches on the battlefield.

Emily: But also, it's sort of iconic –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: To be like, “Everybody showed up to the Last Battle but Valan Luca.” (laugh) Who was like, “Is there money involved? No.”

Sally: “Then I’m not coming.”

Emily: “Then I’ll be over here, wherever ‘here’ is.”

Sally: “Is the Dark One gonna give me money?”

Emily: “Then it’s a no from me.”

Sally: “It’s a no from me.” And maybe the Dark One is like, “But I would love to give you money, Valan Luca. Entertain me.”

Emily: And Valan Luca’s like, “Teehee.”

Sally: The Dark One never gets the chance. Nobody asks him if he’s bored. (laugh)

Emily: (laugh) We’re really crafting a Persephone and Hades sort of –

Sally: (laugh) Yeah.

Emily: Narrative here for the Dark One and Valan Luca. (laugh) The untold romance.

Sally: The untold – we’re working on some good romances.

Emily: I know. Maybe the Dark One is just, like – needs a bard.

Sally: Maybe – he just –

Emily: Although he did have Asmodean, so.

Sally: Yeah. So, I mean, the job is empty. (laugh)

Emily: (laugh) Valan Luca’s the next Forsaken.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: It’s Mazrim Taim and Valan Luca. Can’t channel. He’s just –

Sally: The Dark One’s just like, “I just think he’s neat.”

Emily: “I just think he’s neat.” (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) It would be – I just love – I just love to see Mazrim Taim losing, so if he sits down to be like, “I’m one of the next Forsaken –”

Emily: And then Valan Luca –

Sally: “I’ve worked so hard for this.”

Emily: Random circus ringmaster, who flirted his way into –

Sally: Yeah. (laugh) Sits down and is like, “Hello. It’s me.”

Emily: “I slept my way directly to the top.”

Sally: “And I’m not ashamed of it.”

Emily: “And by the top I mean the bottom of hell.”

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: But the king of hell.

Sally: But the king of hell is my boyfi, so.

Emily: Anyway. So at least we had one fantastic Valan Luca send-off.

Sally: Yeah, I know.

Emily: With him talking everyone into not going – not backtracking.

Sally: Yeah. Oh, Valan Luca, you will be missed. I love you, you little freak.

Emily: Yeah. Goodbye, the circus.

Sally: Oh, that’s so sad. It really was a – a linchpin of the series for many, many books.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: And to just send them off into Seanchan-occupied Lugard or whatever.

Emily: Never to be heard from again, yeah. Who knows.

Sally: I like to think he’s doing well for himself.

Emily: Well, uh, thus ends our Mat section of a couple in this book. Um, when we next show back up with Mat, then – when we next go back to Mat, it’ll be with the much-reduced company of only the relevant –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Figures in, um, this subplot. Meanwhile chronologically, we’re about to hop over to a single Perrin chapter and then over to Elayne for a little while, so not a lot to look forward to there, but.

Sally: RIP.

Emily: Hashtag prayers.

Sally: RIP.

Emily: Um, let’s see. When you listen to this, it will be December 19th. Uh, there will not be an episode next week, due to the holidays –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: So that we can have some family and friend time. Uh, but we will be back in early 2023.

Sally: That's right. We will – whether you want us to or not.

Emily: Whether you like it or not.

Sally: We'll be there.

Emily: Threat. We'll be back.

Sally: Threat. Pointing finger-guns at the laptop.

Emily: Yeah. Um, but thanks to Glynna MacKenzie for our theme song –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Thanks to our patrons on Patreon and our followers on social media.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Sorry the heater just kicked on.

Sally: Well, it is too cold to turn the heater off.

Emily: I know, very snowy.

Sally: Yeah, it is a-snowing here in ye olde Utah.

Emily: Anything to add?

Sally: No. And I'm trying to think of a sign-off.

Emily: Okey dokey. Well, here's a little holiday send-off from yours truly when I was being forced to watch Die Hard for the fourth time and to entertain myself was reading all the trivia on IMDb.

Sally: The fourth time?!

Emily: Yeah, Devin makes us watch it every year. It's a holiday tradition.

Sally: No, it isn't. (laugh)

Emily: Well, how many years does it take to become a tradition? (laugh) I don't know. Anyway, did you know that there's a scene in Die Hard where Bruce Willis has to shoot a gun up towards a table that is made of glass and so, um, he shoots through it to kill a guy, and that stunt permanently damaged Bruce Willis's hearing –

Sally: Oh.

Emily: So now he has a hearing aid. So.

Sally: Jeez.

Emily: The more you know.

Sally: The more you know.

Emily: But anyway, that's it. Happy holidays.

Sally: Happy holidays.

Emily: Goodbye!

Sally: Take care.