



Episode 232: Feel Bad? Just Don't!  
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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: I – I need to focus. I have nothing to say.

Sally: It's – there is not a whole ton to say. We keep saying that, but.

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

Sally: And I'm Sally Goodger.

Emily: And –

Sally: And this is Ed.

Emily: And this is Ed, and this is Egg. Would you like an egg in these trying times? Well, here she is, in the world's longest chapter.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: About her rising insurrection within the White Tower, changing hearts and minds, overcoming pain with the – with the power of willpower, which is certainly something that can physically and psychologically be done.

Sally: Mm.

Emily: If you're feeling bad, just don't.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: (laugh) Have you considered that?

Sally: Uh –

Emily: If you – if you have – if your femur is broken and the bone is sticking through the flesh of your thigh and you’re looking at it right now, thinking, “Sure would like to – to scream, go into shock right now,” have you considered the wisdom of the Aiel: Just don’t. (laugh)

Sally: Just –

Emily: Just don’t feel that way. Just don’t feel bad. You can do it. That’s what my dad says every time that I have a panic attack. (laugh)

Sally: Hey, have you considered calming down?

Emily: Have you considered not doing that? And what’s miraculous about all of this is that it’s only been nine days, baby. In Wheel of Time world, that’s not even a fuckin’ week. (laugh)

Sally: How long are their weeks?

Emily: I think ten days.

Sally: That seems –

Emily: I think I read that somewhere. I could be making that up. Either way, not even in the double digits, baby. But Egg is just that powerful. I’m beginning – you know, I was – I started out this series being an Egg apologist; in many ways, I still am. And I was like, why do you guys call her, like, a Mary Sue and things like that? First of all, that’s a silly, nonsense title that doesn’t mean anything.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: “God, women can’t do anything.” That was what I said. But after this chapter, I’m kind of like, “You know what? It was a little unrealistic that Egg accomplished this much in nine days.”

Sally: In nine days.

Emily: After we’ve had Perrin hunting for his stupid wife for the last four books. Your time management skills are simply bizarre, Robert.

Sally: Yeah, like, I know we joke a lot about – I know we make the joke “girlboss” a lot in regards to the female characters in Wheel of Time, um, but I intend to sort of put this term on the table as, like, a critical tool in this instance. (laugh)

Emily: Sure.

Sally: For a second. Like, the idea of, you know, quote unquote, girlbossing – um, I’ll admit I have not done a ton of research –

(background sneeze)

Sally: Into the term, so if some girlboss scholar wants to correct me, that’s fine.

Emily: That sneeze was Ed, by the way. (laugh) Not –

Sally: Yeah, sorry. (laugh) I'm so used to Ed just sneezing all the time, I didn't even clock it.

Emily: Ed's a sneezer.

Sally: Um. The term originates, I think – again, I'm not a scholar – with the idea of this sort of, like, rise and grind culture that has come up, obviously, just in the modern day of, like, you need to be waking up at four a.m. in order to achieve your goals, and da da da da da, and work all the time and just be an absolute machine of capitalism, but the specific attitude has gotten a lot of traction in, like, a very bizarre stream of feminism about, um – it's very the type of, like, lean in-type feminism, of, like, you too can be an executive if you sacrifice your life to the gaping maw of capitalism.

Emily: Yeah, I think it comes back to the fallacy of – what's that called? The fallacy of excellence.

Sally: Mm.

Emily: That, like, you, an individual, can overcome the patriarchy sheerly by –

Sally: Mm.

Emily: Waking up at four in the morning, doing way more than should be humanly possible –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Becoming a CEO, et cetera, et cetera.

Sally: Sure, yeah. That's a good way – that's a –

Emily: Um, and therefore, if you can do it, any woman can –

Sally: Yes.

Emily: Regardless of the advantages that you might have –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Uh, innately or via other systemic forms of oppression.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: So it's more or less a – it – it's – as you're saying, it's rooted in a specific kind of feminism, and, uh, that's the sort of feminism that's, um, related to white feminism, um, and a pro-capitalist form of feminism.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So not really intersectional, I would say.

Sally: Yeah, not really intersectional. I mean, it – like you said, it very much relies on the ways that cultures are formulated in white communities, this idea of – white and Western communities – this idea of individualism; um, that the family unit is much less important than the type of work

you are doing; that the family unit – perhaps, if your choice is between being a CEO or having any type of support system, you should choose your job. Just, like, attitudes that you see really common in Western societies, um, that just kind of disregard the aspects of other cultures and communities and, like, cultural values that have nothing to do with capitalism.

Emily: Production.

Sally: Production, yeah. Um, and this is, like, a really troubling form of feminism. I mean, many types of feminism we've referenced – pop feminism – on this podcast before, this sort of, like, popular feminism that you see of, like, again, in the individual, there's nothing inherently wrong with, like, loving make-up and loving to do, like, these elaborate looks and loving fashion or whatever, but the way that this is presented – or, like, perhaps a better example is, like, um – I cannot think of any terms that are not charged, but this idea of, like, dressing provocative is sort of, like, presented in pop feminism and sort of these, like, celebrity cultures of, like, look how great it is that you are taking back control of your own body and dressing however you want. Obviously these are totally fine values, but when they are presented in mass, it will inherently lead back to gratification of the male gaze. You know? That's just what that – that's just what's gonna happen when you, like, are presenting to young women across the world that this is the certain way to look.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: And the same thing sort of happens with this, like, girlboss feminism, for lack of a better term, of, like, the idea is, like you're making money, you are operating in the world of the rich and powerful, which has been the male world for so long; like, you have a seat at the table in business. But all that's ultimately doing is continuing the cycles of oppression because you are – you cannot operate at a – a C-suite level, as a CEO or a CFO or whatever, without just, like, contributing to, like, the oppression of your workers, basically, and, like, not supporting fair wages, typically, in those types of places, so it just ultimately contributes to the same type of, like, capitalistic, white male systems of oppression. Anyway, that was really convoluted, but that's what I think about when I think about Egg.

Emily: Yeah, just, like, the idea that, um, that something is feminist because a woman is doing it is the sort of inherent –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Uh, thing in – in this sort of girlboss mythology, as it were. Uh, you know, like, a queen is better than a king because the queen, after all, is a woman, and women are historically oppressed or something like that.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Um, which disregards that the system itself does not care about your gender. Um, and a woman CEO or a woman monarch or a woman fascist is still, first and foremost, a CEO, a monarch, a fascist.

Sally: Just because a woman is doing it does not make it progressive or valuable, necessarily. And I wouldn't say that what Egg is doing in the White Tower is invaluable – like, yes, it's

important. I mean, is it important? Mm. Sure. Elaida's a bad ruler, kind of objectively. But it's important in terms of the politics of this world and this story for her to undermine the power structures in the White Tower, so, like, sure, that's nice. But, like ...

Emily: Ultimately Egg's end goal is to preserve the status quo.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, and we're seeing some sort of, like, cosmetic forms of change happening in the White Tower under Egg's leadership – or, rather, I should say, the rebel Aes Sedai. You know, the idea of the novice books being opened. Um, the idea of the entire structure of novices changing a little bit so that it's less, um, uh, individual and insular and more, like, community-oriented with the, like, families that are happening with the novices. We're seeing, you know, collab – some small amount of collaboration with men who can channel, et cetera, et cetera. But ultimately, um, Egwene, regard – like, regardless of who's in charge, whether it's Egwene or Elaida, what they are desiring is Aes Sedai supremacy of some kind –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: For the Aes Sedai to retain their position of power in the world, for the world not to question that.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Uh, for Aes Sedai to continue being these symbols rather than people, et cetera, et cetera. All the things that are bad about Aes Sedai –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Like the fact that they don't seem human, the fact that they walk around telling people what to do without offering any explanation –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Um, and just sort of bending people to their wills. Egg – Egwene doesn't want to change that.

Sally: Yes.

Emily: She wants to actually expand that by bringing in the Sea Folk and the Kin and the Aiel, et cetera, et cetera.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So ultimately it's difficult when you're coming at this with a, uh, a liberal bent –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: To really be on board with that. It's also difficult because after fourteen books, what we're hoping for is more significant and more lasting change.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And the project of these books is, uh, short-term change.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: You know, the ruler – the – whoever's in charge of whatever country changes hands.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, the only significant long-lasting changes we've seen or that have been hinted at are, like, the Seanchan invasion, which is bad and Robert Jordan handled badly, and what happened to the Aiel, which we sort of saw and then has not been, um, examined in the correct, um, sort of lens.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Um, you know, the Aiel have just been, after that, shunted to side characters. The – the future of their society will be alluded to via Aviendha in, like, a single scene in the upcoming books, but otherwise it's not really important.

Sally: No, that's such an – a good and interesting observation about the project of short-term change, which is extremely frustrating for a series that is as long as it is, as we keep referencing. But yeah, like, we'll obviously return to this sort of question at the very end of the series: like, what does the world look like post-Last Battle? But, like, many of our characters are not angling for anything except the preservation of the world. You know, they all want to, like, get through the Last Battle – Battle with the world looking as much like it currently does as possible. Or, honestly, as much, like, it did when the series was starting out as possible. We go back to this idea of what we talked about in, um, probably some of our very first episodes, this idea of the Two Rivers being – I think the term is a polder? This sort of, like, insulated –

Emily: Hmm.

Sally: Um, I talked about this in my Lord of the Rings class. Like, the Shire very much operates the same. It's this sort of, like, insulated place. It's very idyllic. Not a lot of conflict. Very, quote unquote, simple, back to the good old days. Um, and it seems like that's the sort of thing we're constantly trying to get back to, which sets a framework for the series of, like, preserve – preserving the status quo, not necessarily, like – you can take the Hunger Games as the first, like, uh, counterpoint to this that I can think of, where, like, you obviously start out in a bad place. The systems of oppression are very obvious to all of our characters. And we work to change that throughout the series. This is a series dedicated to preservation and, like, you – everything you said about Egg is so astute. She's not in here trying to be like, "There should be no Amyrlin Seat." She's like, "I am the Amyrlin Seat –"

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: "And you should do what I say." And basically, like – you know, two things can be true at once: it is very fun to watch competent people doing competent things. So it's nice, as we've talked about, Egg goes in with a to-do list, and she's sort of systematically –

Emily: Starts checking things off.

Sally: Checking things off. And that's, like, very nice and satisfying compared to the aforementioned Perrin Aybara plot, where there seems to be no, like, structure.

Emily: It's like wandering through a bog –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: With no end goal and no horizon in sight.

Sally: Ugh. It's a haunted bog full of Perrin. Um – (laugh)

Emily: (laugh) Just a nightmare. Everywhere you turn, there's a bearded man saying, "Where's my wife?"

Sally: "Where's my wife?" Or throwing his axe at things.

Emily: Yeah. Just – everywhere you see a tree, there's an axe in it. (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) Um, horrible. Um, so there's an element of this – to this that's satisfying. Um, but I think the fact that it's satisfying is, like, part of the trap.

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: You know? Like, it can be like, yes, it's so fun to watch people do things. And there's – it's kind of the same reason that, like, Game of Thrones is satisfying. It's nice to watch people accomplish things. That doesn't mean anybody's doing anything good.

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: Just because we see Egg move towards an end goal, if you, like, take a look at those, it's like, basically, kind of indoctrinating all of the other novices through pretty blatant manipulation techniques of just being like, "I am the better option because I am presenting you a modicum of kindness in a very cruel system."

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: And, like, at the end of this chapter, people are bringing her her food and doing all these, like, weird little –

Emily: Tasks for her, yeah.

Sally: Yeah, like, it's – it just doesn't feel good. There's no, like, actual camaraderie-building among these young women.

Emily: Yeah, at one point, she's like, "No one tries to make friends with me, and that's good, because the Amyrlin shouldn't be friends with anyone."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And it's like, yes, if the power system that you're working for is that, then, sure, that's true, but, um, have you considered that there might be benefits to making friends with people in this situation?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: You know, just not a lot of, like, um, creative thinking on Egg's part.

Sally: Mm-hmm. Yes.

Emily: She's got a very, like, linear mindset, which, as we've said, can be quite satisfying; it's nice to have Egg be like, "Um, okay, I'm in this bad situation; I'm going to make the most out of it by doing, like, the following things," and what's particularly compelling about this chapter is that for the most part it lists very quantifiable victories –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Because that's how Egg presents them to us.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: You know, she's like, "Okay. Dear Diary, today, I did better this way. Today, I went closer to my goal this way. Today, I talked to Beonin and got her on our side," blah blah blah blah blah.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: That, like, really scratches an itch in our hindbrains or whatever –

Sally: Sure.

Emily: The goal-oriented parts of us. But, like, the second you take a step back from it and go, okay, so what's the end goal here? Not just, like, in terms of the system, the White Tower itself, but, like, when does this end?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: When does Egg accomplish, like, victory?

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Is it when the other Aes Sedai suddenly rise up and take down Elaida?

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Egg would say that she doesn't want that to happen because she wants it to be a bloodless victory but, like, how can you predict that?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Uh, does it end when the other – the rebel Aes Sedai finally actually get their shit together and invade Tar Valon?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Just, like, there's not really – once again, Egg is not really accomplishing anything of serious value here.

Sally: Yeah. That's a very good point. The – the – gosh, what, Sivan was deposed at the end of book ... four?

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Is that right?

Emily: Yes.

Sally: And we're now in – I have to check every time. Book ten?

Emily: I know. (laugh) Book eleven.

Sally: Book eleven. (laugh) So that's, what, seven books of this? I know we keep harping on this point, and I'm sorry, it must be exhausting, but for a plot to have dragged on for seven books and for us to be in fundamentally the same place as we were seven books ago, I just don't really understand – like you said – what success looks like for any of the Aes Sedai, and I think it would be nice to see somebody finally give in to the idea that there's not going to be a success in this papal schism.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Like, if you have a fundamental schism and diplomacy is not an option, I would like to see somebody understand that, somebody who isn't, apparently, Romanda, who's like, "Yeah, sure, I'll kill Elaida. Whatever."

Emily: (laugh) Yeah. Romanda's one redeeming quality.

Sally: Yeah. She's like, "Sure, I'll kill the bitch."

Emily: Yeah, I don't – whatever the fuck.

Sally: "I don't give a shit." Or Sivan Sanche, I guess –

Emily: Yeah. Also ruthless.

Sally: Who's, like, ready to kill anybody at any moment. Yeah, it's just confusing. Like, at what point can we be like, this plot was resolved satisfactorily?

Emily: Yeah. The – like, there is no end to this plot that isn't just the Last Battle overcoming them.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: In a way.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Um, and, spoiler alert, it's resolved with, like, Egg in charge of the White Tower and the White Tower more or less resembling the sort of ideal form that it took to Egwene's sort of novice eyes.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: You know, this impenetrable fortress of powerful women.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Or whatever. But, like, okay, so, yeah, we've literally spent the last twelve, thirteen books, like, going from point A all the way back around to point A, just with a different person in charge.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Who, tellingly, is under the mentorship of the person who was originally in charge, so it's not like there's any real ideals changing here.

Sally: Yes.

Emily: So. (laugh)

Sally: And it's so – 'cause, yeah, like – and, like, the – Elaida's usurping of Siuan Sanche is always presented as bad, you know?

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: Like, the narrative – unless you're in, like, Elaida's point of view – is never like, "It was a good thing that Elaida did."

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Just because Siuan Sanche did some, like, batshit stuff, we can all just ignore that, right? Siuan Sanche was a great leader.

Emily: I would argue that it's not possible to be a great leader in the world of the Aes Sedai.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: It's not possible to not be a, like, conniving bitch.

Sally: Yeah. That's the only – it's like – it's politics. Those are the people that rise to the top, you know? Like, look at any fucking state senator. They're all spineless.

Emily: Yeah, and it is more or less sort of, like, this – this, um, uh, microcosm of a greater phenomenon, which is this sort of idea that if you put a bunch of people, men or women, in one place and tell one of them that they have to be in charge, like, these are the tactics that someone is going to use.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Uh, which is a pretty, like, cynical view of the world, but, like – and once those tactics have worked the first time, you start creating a system.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: This is why women are still becoming CEOs, monarchs –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Et cetera, et cetera.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: That's the proven system.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So maybe it's just that, like, the Wheel of Time is presenting a, um, set of ideals and a narrative that doesn't quite appeal to us in the modern day, and that's just something we have to struggle with, but, like, um, it is not particularly appealing anymore to watch Egg go about her business, um, because it just feels so boring and predictable in its way.

Sally: Yeah. And, like you were joking about at the beginning, there is this really troubling added layer of her just being beaten constantly, which, I believe as we've touched on before, is just, like, really gratuitous violence that we don't need. But it also – (laugh) like we were talking about, presents this just, like, really absurd idea of, like – Egg begins her count her, like, beatings as victories because she's accomplishing her goals but also, like, she's able to get through them without, quote unquote, succumbing to the pain; like, the Aiel have their strategies of just, like, screaming their way through it or whatever, you know, but she's never just, like, defeated by her pain, even though she is – most people would be if you were being beaten viciously six times a day, just be like, at some point, I am going to tap out because the human body should not have to and is not built to deal with these kinds of things, even if you are being Healed. There's a psychological element to it. And it's really unfair for us to be presented the idea that, like you were saying, just don't feel bad about it. Just don't feel bad.

Emily: Yeah, this sort of plotline of Egg overcoming pain – like, even if you're willing to accept what Robert Jordan is telling us about the Aiel and sort of, like, the psychological value of when you're in pain not hiding your pain –

Sally: Sure.

Emily: And just sort of living in it. A sort of – a sort of mindfulness regarding pain, uh, which I don't necessarily know if I either really buy as a technique or – you know –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: You know, I haven't read the studies about that if any such thing exists. But even if you accept that, then we are still dealing with the added layer of Egg is being beaten far more times in a single day than, I would guess, ninety-five percent of Aiel –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Remember the Aiel don't necessarily value physical punishment in their training; it's mostly just, like, little boring tasks, you know, that are sort of meant to humiliate – humiliate.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, Egwene is doing this in nine days, apparently. She has no setbacks. It is a simple – the line graph of her coming toward this goal is just from the bottom up to the top.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Uphill slope. Um. And, yeah, we're not accounting for, like, the psychological toll of being in pain constantly. We're just supposed to accept, like, yes, she can just sort of compartmentalize that away and not have any ill effects of that.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So it's a troublingly ableist thing because, like, the second you say, well, what about people with chronic pain? Are you telling me that they just – if they just embraced it, everyone would feel better?

Sally: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

Emily: Like, if a doctor said that to someone, I would shoot them. (laugh)

Sally: Correct. Yeah. Absolutely. Immediate death.

Emily: Like, that's absurd. And, yeah, it's just – it feels like Robert Jordan is just – it feels like, a) he's written himself into a corner –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Whereby the fact that Aes Sedai build their entire, like, disciplinary structure upon women being beaten constantly, he's like, "Okay, well, Egg's in the Tower now, and I'm not gonna have her be a captive or whatever, so of course she's gonna be being beaten twenty times a day."

Sally: Yeah. Yeah.

Emily: So it seems like he doesn't know how else to deal with it, because again, Robert Jordan, like most of his characters, lacks creative problem-solving. Um, and it also, again, just – what – the second you have women being spanked, it starts to feel like a sex thing.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Even when it's specifically not, and I would say this, at the very least, is one of the few chapters where – let me restate that. This is, of all of the chapters we're presented where a woman is being spanked, it's probably one of the least sexualized. For one thing, a man's not doing it; Egg is so sort of far-removed from the physical aspects of it. But still, it's there.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And you just start to be like, Robert Jordan, what's your fucking perversion here?

Sally: Yeah, like, why, of all the things in the world, do we keep coming back to spanking? Like, it – there's just, like, no other explanation than it being this, like, weird underlying gratification –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Thing. I don't know. Or – or it isn't and it's just, like you said, the only thing Robert Jordan can think of that's, like, disciplinary without being too violent.

Emily: Yeah. I guess? But it also just feels like he's like, "What's the way I can beat a woman without – without, like, beating a woman?" You know?

Sally: Yeah, without it being a little too domestic violence-y.

Emily: Yeah. I don't want Egg to look like the victim of a –

Sally: Of an actual –

Emily: Of an abusive – an abusive situation.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: The pain, the marks have to be well-hidden. I don't – it's just – it's nuts.

Sally: The whole thing is whatever, however you spin it, you know, whatever lens you want to put on it, it's gross.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: So, yeah. Like, I – I think many readings of Egg are extremely misogynistic, and a lot of people, particularly men, don't like her as a character because she is exhibiting masculine traits, um, that they don't like to see; they don't like women to be in charge. Um. So I think many of the criticisms of her are just unfounded, misogynistic ones. Um. Maybe not unfounded, but, like, presented in such a misogynistic way that they – you can't agree with them. But I do think there are valid criticisms about the way that she – everyone loves to talk about how she isn't a figurehead, but, like, she's a figurehead for the system. You know?

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: She isn't doing anything to implement any change, as we say, so, like, there are some founded criticisms in her whole, like, she's too good at everything –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Too good at getting her way because Robert Jordan wants her to get her way –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: And ultimately not change anything.

Emily: In terms of plot in this chapter, it's just nine days of Egg moving throughout the Tower; she's getting beaten every time she – you know, she's decided, "Okay, I'm going to behave like the Amyrlin as much as it is physically possible while I am in this captivity," uh, which, of course results in her being sent to Silviana, the Mistress of Novices, like, upwards of ten times a day, including Silviana herself assigning her these beatings. Um, Egg is initially just supposed to move throughout the day like a normal novice, going to classes, but she immediately disrupts her classes by sort of a conscientious, um – or – what's that word? Um, when someone tells you to do something and you do it, but – malicious compliance.

Sally: Mm.

Emily: Um, and so she's moved to having individual classes with individual Aes Sedai, which, I'm like, how are they scheduling that? You know?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Is there a volunteer roster? Just something I'm curious about. But this gives Egg many opportunities to speak to women individually and get a feel for what's going on in the Tower. Nothing new there, and Egg immediately starts spreading, like, dissent about the biggest missteps that Elaida has made and sort of presenting herself as the better alternative because she's so calm, collected, even in her captivity.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Leane, meanwhile, is down in the prison cells, being treated extremely well, also being guarded and visited by lots of women, so she, too, is having an opportunity to spread dissent. Egg sees Beonin in the Tower and is like, "You must be Black Ajah because you betrayed me," and Beonin's like, "No, I didn't betray you because you're not the Amyrlin anymore," and Egg's like, "Okay, well, that's some real mental gymnastics to get there. Um, and I'm calling your bluff, so you still have to do what I say," and Beonin more or less does. Yeah, Egwene, uh, foments – foments, um, support amongst the novices; her staunchest ally of all the people is Nicola, who somehow has seen the error of her ways and is like, the only thing I – or perhaps this is just the best thing she can do to get attention and, um, the admiration of her peers, which I believe is what she has always wanted, though Robert Jordan has gone about presenting that by being like, "Isn't she the most annoying person in the world? As women who want attention always are."

Sally: Yeah. It's a – actually – psychological defect to want attention –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Rather than just, like –

Emily: A normal human thing. (laugh)

Sally: A human need, yeah.

Emily: So anyway, Nicola is sort of stating this little – little novices' rebellion, uh, for Egg. Egg is constantly dosed with forkroot so that she can't channel very much. She has a run-in with the former king of Illian, who has been kidnapped and in the White Tower the entire time.

Sally: Why?

Emily: No clue. It couldn't have just been that, like, Sammael killed him. That would've been too easy. No; Elaida kidnapped him. Um, and he meets Egg and is immediately like, "Yeah, this one's better than Elaida. I hate that bitch." (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) Yeah.

Emily: And it's like, yeah, everyone does. It's hard not to – you know, it's not like Egg is up against a charismatic leader.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: She's up against the worst woman you know.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So it's not much of a challenge. Um, Alviarin, who is in disgrace, um, and is also being punished all the time, keeps more and more stringently trying to get Egg to escape. We can, uh, assume that she's probably under orders from Mesaana, because Mesaana doesn't like that Egg is disrupting the chaos she's created in the White Tower, so doo ba doo, Egg's winning yet again. Um, and, yeah, I think that's it, the – the sort of chapter ends with Egg receiving yet another, uh, visual confirmation that she is being supported and accepted by the novices.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, we then switch over to Tarna's point of view, Tarna who is the new Keeper, um, and is trying so desperately to be Elaida's second in command, which is, like, the worst possible position to be in, even if you're not Black Ajah –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And a crazy person, like Alviarin. Tarna's like, "I just can't talk to Elaida about certain things because she'll freak out." And it's like, okay, sure, we've all had that manager, I guess.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Sympathetic to you, Tarna. Tarna's main concern as she's moving throughout her day is her idea that she wants the Red Ajah to go to the Black Tower and bond Asha'man, but so far she's comin' up dry on names –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: That she could, um –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: You know, actually get to do this. But she visits Elaida, um, to give her report, and I don't think anything exciting happens there except that we are yet again reminded of the predatory lesbian trope that Robert Jordan relies on. Someone told Elaida's old girlfriend to, like, re-seduce her, so this woman – Meidani, her name is – she's also one of the, like, moles from the

rebels – is, like, desperately trying to seduce Elaida under threat of blackmail. And Elaida’s like, “Yeah, I might sleep with her just for funsies.”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And Tarna’s like, “Okay, pervert.” (laugh)

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And Tarna’s also like, “Yeah, I thought every woman just grew out of her lesbian desires, so color me surprised when Galina was like, ‘Hey, do you want to fuck?’ and I was like, ‘No, I’m a good straight lady, not filthy Black Ajah like you.’”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So – (gagging noise)

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: I don’t remember anything. I think Elaida is like, “I’ll have dinner tonight, and Egg can attend me,” and we’ll get back to that in the literal next book.

Sally: (scoff)

Emily: I know.

Sally: This whole conversation is so hard to follow, ‘cause you’re like, what happens in Elaida’s brain?

Emily: It’s just, like, a wasteland of –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Mirrors.

Sally: Just, like, lasers bouncing back and forth constantly.

Emily: Yeah. Boo ba doo boo doo. “How can I make this about me?”

Sally: And Tarna’s like, trying to take notes. “Lesbian,” question mark?

Emily: Tarna’s like, “Dear God. What the fuck?” It’s just – you look at Tarna’s notes and it’s just, like – (laugh) a crazy person’s scribbling.

Sally: (laugh) It’s just a Pepe Silvia board on a legal pad.

Emily: Trying so hard. Uh, we then cut over to Mat, randomly in the middle of the chapter – that’s gonna be happening a lot – happening a lot from now on. Um, where he and everyone have left the circus; they’re traveling with, like, sixty horses, he says?

Sally: I know, it’s unbelievable.

Emily: Which seems like such a huge group. Anyway, they're just finishing lunch; pretty much things are as they were, minus the circus. The only exciting thing that happens is that there's a snake and Mat is like, "Yeah, don't bother it; just, like – it's leaving." And it's, like, a poisonous, dangerous snake, so rationally Mat has a good reason for not killing it in that, like, you'd have to get kind of close to kill it – not really worth the risk. But Tuon interprets that as sort of a metaphor for, I don't know, the Seanchan? "Look, he can be non-aggressive toward my invading army," or something. I don't know. But that sort of feels like what Robert Jordan's going for. Um, anyway, she's like, "You can kiss me," and he's like, "Okay, word," and they make out a little bit, which is pretty homophobic considering that the next thing that happens is Talmanes rides up, so that was a hate crime.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, Talmanes, in company of Vanin, who's like, "Hey, what's up?" Mat's like, "What the fuck?"

Sally: "What are you doing here?"

Emily: "what are you doing here? How are you – how are you here?" And Talmanes is like, "Okay, well, I – it's just – it's just me and six thousand guys, so don't worry about that."

Sally: "So maybe tone it down a little bit."

Emily: Yeah, "First of all." Mat's like, "You're supposed to be with Egg." Talmanes is like, "Egg has it handled."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: "And now we're just mercenaries in Murandy, more or less, so at least we have money. But I came looking for you; here I am." And Vanin's like, "Bad news: we're literally trapped in Altara by the mountains because there was a landslide that blocked the pass that we were going to use." Um, so now they're trapped. What will they do? Guerilla warfare, I assume. (laugh) When there are no options left, turn to guerilla warfare.

Sally: That's how I think about my life.

Emily: Yeah. Um. It's a little frustrating that Mat did not, uh, take an aggressive stance against the Seanchan of his own volition, that he sort of has to get cornered into it.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: It is simultaneously very in character for him; Mat avoids fighting at all costs.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Um, especially pitched battles, um, where it is other peoples' lives on the line, I would say. He's not very keen on getting into battles –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Or leading battles. Um, so both a good and a bad thing there. Good that it's true to his character, bad that we don't have someone fighting the Seanchan.

Sally: Yeah. Yeah.

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: I – Mat is just, like, kind of spineless in the second half of the series, and it's really unfortunate. Earlier I referred to state senators as spineless, which is correct in Utah, perhaps, but many of them are quite vicious, so "spineless" might not be the best word. But Mat is behaving just, like, very – like, "I won't make a decision unless –"

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: "Literally cornered." So.

Emily: Simultaneously, he assures us that his sexual chemistry with Tuon is off the charts, and it's like watching any CW show, where it's, like, two kind of vaguely hot people are, like, kissing, but there's nothing going on.

Sally: Yeah, it's just, like, mechanics.

Emily: Yeah, you're just – it's like watching two mannequins make out.

Sally: And you're like, "This is a really pleasant experience."

Emily: Like, okay.

Sally: Yeah, I'm also really upset by the Mat-Tuon kissing scene for a variety of reasons, but also, she – speaking of being cornered into things – basically bullies him into kissing her in front of a lot of people when Mat is obviously very uncomfortable by that. And then she bullies him into kissing her again because she criticizes his performance in front of everybody, 'cause he gives her, like, a chaste kiss, 'cause he's like, "This is making me really uncomfortable."

Emily: 'Cause he's like – she's like, "Kiss me," and he's like, "Great, I'm not gonna go in with my tongue first –"

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: "In front of the thirty people watching."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And also, that's the polite thing to do?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And she's like, "How dare you."

Sally: She's like, "You fucking virgin, what are you doing?" (laugh)

Emily: (laugh)

Sally: Like, she's so rude to him.

Emily: And he's like, "Jesus Christ."

Sally: For no reason. Like, she – it's just, like, a really gross scene and just, like, really in the pattern of women throughout this series bullying, manipulating, coercing Mat into sexual interactions.

Emily: Yeah. And then instead of just being like – doing a normal thing and being like, "Thanks for the smooch; I was pretty turned on there by how you didn't kill that snake," or whatever the fuck, she has to make it this production of, like, she was just kissing him to check his temperature, 'cause he has a bunch of wounds, and she's like, "These are definitely infected."

Sally: And it's – okay, duh, Mat is all – Mat always has an infection from a wound; that's, like – (laugh)

Emily: Yeah, are you kidding? That man's a walking advertisement for gangrene. (laugh)

Sally: Like, my goodness. But also, like, that's another common theme in this series, that nobody can just admit that they're attracted to someone. Like, you have to be embarrassed about it.

Emily: You have to have ulterior motives.

Sally: Yeah, you can never just be like, "I want to kiss Mat because I think he's hot."

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Which is fine. We all think he's hot. Sometimes.

Emily: Yeah, not particularly right now.

Sally: Yeah, especially when he needs some antibiotics, ASAP.

Emily: Yehah. He's just, like, oozing or whatever the fuck. I don't want to get near that, bud. (laugh)

Sally: Gross.

Emily: Get some Neosporin on those wounds.

Sally: Yeah, Talmanes shows up and is like, "How many fucking infections do you have right now?"

Emily: Talmanes – you have to imagine Talmanes' point of view. He's like, "What? This man is covered in knife wounds? Can't – I leave him alone for, like, three months, and this is what he – how he repays me?"

Sally: His leg's been broken.

Emily: Yeah. So those are those two chapters.

Sally: Yeah, I just want to, like, circle back and clarify in case I might have said something offensive about the whole idea of, like, presentation of women's bodies being uplifted as empowering but obviously has ulterior motives for the men who run the media, you know? I don't know if I said that very well. Obviously do whatever you want, and it's totally cool and sick however much of your body you do or do not want to show. So.

Emily: No, but yeah, I think you're right that there are certain, like, fashion aesthetics –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: That are definitely, uh, more about men than they are about female liberation.

Sally: Yes.

Emily: Um. So. That – that's those two chapters.

Sally: That's those two chapters. We leave Mat and company in Altara somewhere.

Emily: Yeah, and we'll pick right back up with them, though in Tuon's point of view, which is horrendous. Um, and we're gonna be bouncing around a lot for the remainder of this book, so we're going to be bouncing between the ongoing Mat saga, um, Perrin's rescue of Faile, that last sort of scene with Rand going to meet the, quote, Daughter of the Nine Moons, and we're also going to be getting into a, quote, climax, unquote, in Andor, where finally something vaguely exciting will happen, but not really. So don't get your fucking hopes up. (laugh)

Sally: Yeah. Don't do it.

Emily: Um, but that's that. Uh, thank you to Glynna MacKenzie for our theme song; thanks to our patrons on Patreon and our followers on social media. Do you have anything to add?

Sally: Naur.

Emily: Do you have a sign-off?

Sally: Yeah, um, we currently have, like, really packed bookshelves, so we are in the process of trying to decide what books to get rid of, and Emily yesterday went through systematically and was, like, putting books on – like, pulling books out to be like, "Maybe we could get rid of these," or whatever, but, like, we didn't have a conversation about it, you know, so I woke up –

Emily: I was in a fugue state while I was doing it, so. I didn't remember doing it. (laugh)

Sally: No, just – (laugh) Which is totally fine. But she did this yesterday evening, and I must have been in a fugue state the rest of the evening because I, like, did not clock it on the bookshelves at all until this morning, when I was like, "Our house is definitely haunted."

Emily: (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) Like, legitimately my first thought – 'cause at first I thought it was the cats, but then some of them were, like, really up high, and I was like, "No, we definitely have a ghost."

Emily: I mean, yeah, you have to, like –

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Occasionally you'll walk downstairs and, like, the lowest shelf –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Will just be like, the books will be everywhere, fallen over, and you're just like, "Tybalt, you motherfucker." But yeah, it was, like, the top shelves –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: That I'd done some, like, weird-ass – (laugh)

Sally: Which I was like – when she explained it to me, I was like, "Oh, yeah, this is a very logical system; this is a great way for us to decide how to get rid of things," but at eight a.m. this morning, I was like, "Our house is haunted."

Emily: Everything is ghosts at eight a.m.

Sally: Yeah. (laugh)

Emily: It's ghosts all the way down, baby.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Alright, everyone. Have a good week.

Sally: Bye.