



Episode 248: Alpha-Core Gawyn
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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: Okay, hey, this is Everybody Hates Rand, your friendly neighborhood Wheel of Time podcast. I'm Emily Juchau.

Sally: (whisper) Ed. (normal voice) And I'm Sally Goodger.

Emily: And all that sort of microphone feedback you might be getting is from Ed, just so you know.

Sally: Ed, who just loves nothing more than the hour of the week when he gets to sit on the couch and bother us.

Emily: Yeah, we're not complete amateurs; it's not us hitting the boom arm. That's Ed. Um, and we just can't lock him out of this room or there would be hell to pay and –

Sally: Or you'd just – (laugh)

Emily: Similarly distressing audio.

Sally: You'd hear Tybalt – mostly Tybalt – in the background just yowling at the top of his tiny little lungs and throwing his body against the door.

Emily: Separation anxiety is so, so –

Sally: He's –

Emily: Real.

Sally: He's got some issues on a psychological level. God bless him.

Emily: (laugh) Okay, guys, we've got some weird chapters here. Um, we did in fact read three; I think I mentioned last time that we'd be reading either two or three, and we read three out of a desire to see Aviendha's plot wrap up, 'cause, you know, it's a little irresistible knowing that it would wrap up.

Sally: Yeah. Yeah.

Emily: You wanna see something –

Sally: Something's gotta end.

Emily: Some sort of end point. Um, first we start with a Gawyn chapter, which, as you all know, is always difficult and sort of a – a real Sisyphus –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Sisyphus feat, I guess. It sort of feels like any time Gawyn makes any sort of personal progress, we just pick up in the new chapter exactly where we started the last one. Um, he just doesn't seem capable of maturing, which you'd like to think maybe is the point, but it's difficult to say. So we have Gawyn approaching the camp, um, the rebel Aes Sedai camp because he wants to go speak to Gareth Bryne. And we have him just being the biggest asshole.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Um, what Gawyn tells us to excuse this behavior is that he's had a couple of nights sleeping on the ground, so he hasn't had much sleep, which is, like – yeah, it would be – it's always bad – you know, like, lack of sleep really does impact people's moods and behaviors –

Sally: Sure.

Emily: And it's realistic in that way. But the problem is that we have one million other characters in Wheel of Time not updating us about their sleep schedule to excuse the fact that they're behaving poorly.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: So it kind of makes it sound like Gawyn's just making excuses.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: In a way. And he is making excuses; he's also, like, an army guy. That wouldn't be the first time that he's slept on the ground.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: He just got back from an extended campaign where most of his guys got killed; like –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Sleeping on the ground isn't the worst thing that's happened to you, Gawyn. Um, but Gawyn rides up into the camp. He assures us many times that it's not a problem for him to just enter the camp. It is a problem if he leaves. He really has to explain in detail to us why that is so to prove to us that he is strategically minded.

Sally: Yeah. I was also like, I don't really believe this. He's like, "One man entering the camp is not dangerous," and I was like, that feels patently – I'm not a war boy, but that does feel a little bit incorrect to me. Like, not a single person was like, "Hey, what are you doing?"

Emily: Yeah, "Hey, uh, wait a second."

Sally: Yeah, "Wait a – wait a minute. You can't just wander about freely. You should maybe at least have, like, an escort."

Emily: Um, yeah, like, "Driver's license and registration, please."

Sally: Yeah. I don't know. Again, I'm not a – I'm not a super good sword and war boy, like Gawyn, so maybe I just, like, don't get it. But.

Emily: I just think, like, you wouldn't let a random dude come into a camp that's surrounding a smaller camp of Aes Sedai –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Who are prime targets for assassination, I would think.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: There's also this hilarious moment where Gawyn informs us that the camp is shaped like a bubble. And I'm like, do you mean a circle? (laugh)

Sally: Yeah, I was – (laugh) I kept trying to be like, what is he talking about? Is it somehow three-dimensional?

Emily: You can't – I know, I was like, a bubble is a sphere. So ...

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: You can't – you can't have a bubble-shaped camp –

Sally: Yeah, it's like –

Emily: Anymore than you can have a planet-shaped camp.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: That's no moon. That's the fucking Death Star. (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) Um, so Gawyn: really good at war, allegedly; not very good at geometry.

Emily: Yeah. Um –

Sally: Gawyn flunked geometry.

Emily: (laugh) I don't believe Gawyn did good in any of his classes. Among Gawyn's bad behaviors are –

Sally: Oh my God.

Emily: A woman gets in his way with – gets in the way of his horse, and he’s basically like, “Get out of my way, bitch.” (laugh)

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Yells at her and then kind of is like – takes extra note of her when he sees that she has an Aes Sedai face, and I, reading this, was like, “I have no memory of this place.”

Sally: Yeah, I was like, what?

Emily: I was like, okay, clearly this is important; this is some sort of, like, narrative hook that we are going to come back to. Which I at least believe now is a thing because Brandon Sanderson’s at the wheel. Generally, in Robert Jordan’s hands, narrative hooks are, uh, less reliable.

Sally: Yes, because we are with Brandon Sanderson, who believes in, uh, loose ends, which is nice.

Emily: But it’s a little bit of a – it’s – as plot hooks go, it’s a little annoying because it’s just, like, Gawyn being an asshole, you know?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Is the plot hook, as opposed to just Gawyn noticing a woman with an Aes Sedai face who does not appear to be an Aes Sedai, which is weird.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Um, which would put points in the column of, like, Gawyn being observant, Gawyn being perceptive, all –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Neutral qualities to have rather than just “Gawyn can’t go for two days without sleep before acting like a cranky toddler.”

Sally: Yeah, he’s such a little baby.

Emily: And yelling at people to get out of the way of his horse. Like, when you are on a horse, riding through places that are mostly populated by people on foot, it’s like, pedestrian right of way, bitch.

Sally: Yeah, like, I don’t, like, honk at people in my car when I happen to be –

Emily: I don’t veer onto the sidewalk and then –

Sally: Driving through a campground. (laugh)

Emily: “Hey, get out of my way.” (laugh)

Sally: Beep, beep. “Why are you walking on the sidewalk?”

Emily: “You’re in – you’re in MY way.” Like, come on, dude.

Sally: Fucking loser. And it just, like, escalates from there.

Emily: Yeah, Gawyn then approaches someone to be like, “I need to talk to Gareth Bryne; I’m so-and-so, and he’d want to see me, obviously.” And this guy’s like, “I don’t believe you; go talk to so-and-so.” And Gawyn, later, is like, “Yeah, there are two options here. One is that I could just, like, go through the bureaucratic loop-de-loops,” and it’s like, yeah, that’s what normal people do. Sometimes you don’t get what you want immediately, but you can’t just, like, act out about it.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Sometimes other people are slightly assholes to you. But you know what you do? You be the bigger person.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But Gawyn decides to do the – his – what in his mind is the alternative – God, Ed –

Sally: Hello. Welcome back.

Emily: In his mind what is the alternative, which is just fighting these guys. Like, this guy and the other people around him, which is just, A, to prove his martial prowess, as he is so fond of doing, um, which – any time you get this, like, dick-measuring contest in fiction, it’s not as cute as I think men think it is.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Not to, like – um, not all men, hashtag. (laugh)

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But, like, it’s portrayed as this sort of, like, male fantasy thing of, like, when men walk into a space occupied by other men and have to, like, prove that they’re the best man with the biggest dick and the biggest sword in the room, then, like, inevitably everyone finds that really attractive and really cool and obviously that guy was in the right and all of those other guys who were not being cool to him were just such, um –

Sally: Such betas.

Emily: Yeah, such fucking betas. (laugh) Christ.

Sally: (laugh) Gawyn is an alpha. This is alpha-core.

Emily: I’m gonna mcfucking lose it if we ever say that series of words in that order again.

Sally: (laugh) Alpha.

Emily: Ugh.

Sally: Here comes the alpha.

Emily: So it's sort of, like, interesting and exciting, a little bit, when what happens after this, after Gawyn has, like, wounded a few people and humiliated the rest of them, is that Gareth Bryne comes up, grabs him, and is like, "That was an asshole thing to do."

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Like, "You're a jerk. What the fuck are you doing?"

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And Gawyn's like, "Oh, sorry, Gareth. I just, like, haven't had a lot of sleep." And you're like, okay, it's nice to see Gawyn called out –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: It's frustrating for two reasons. One is that it's Gareth Bryne doing the calling out. Um, and that itself sort of branches out into multiple reasons. It's frustrating that Gareth – Gawyn listens to Gareth, as opposed to some of the other people who have tried to call out his behaviors, mainly women.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Um, of course he gives Gareth the time of day because Gareth is from his man's world and would understand.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: It's also frustrating because Gareth Bryne has been framed more or less as this sort of moral compass by the narrative. Um, as this sort of, like, good old boy type who's just, you know, so good and honorable.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: And blah blah blah blah. And it's like, sometimes Gareth is fine. Whatever. It's difficult, though, when we've also seen the way that he interacts with, say, Sivan – which, we're not saying Sivan's on her best behavior in those interactions either – but it's just more of the, like, everyone is bad in relationships in Wheel of Time.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: So it's hard to take seriously, like, wow, Gareth. Apex – like, paragon of good behavior, you know. He is totally justified in calling this out. So that's frustrating to me. It's also frustrating that besides this, like, small call-out speech, there are not any consequences –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: For this behavior of Gawyn's. Um, like, he gets talked down to. That's it. Which is, like, the correct response when you're correcting a toddler. But a grown man should be able to, like, actually face consequences. So what we're left with is the vibe that this is, like, you know, some judge who knows that the guy who's on trial for drunk and disorderly conduct or whatever the

hell – violent crimes – is just like, “Oh, I know his parents, and he’s a good kid, and he has a great career in swimming ahead of him, so, um –”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: “Yeah, he shouldn’t have to have any consequences.”

Sally: Yeah, it, um – I don’t know, it’s frustrating because there’s this moment where you’re like, maybe in a different context, Gareth Bryne would’ve been one of my favorite characters.

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: Like, if we just saw him as, like, Gawyn and Galad’s mentor and he was sort of functioning in that role as, like, an older male mentor figure who actually does have a moral compass and, like, and a sense of duty and honor that isn’t necessarily just based on this sort of, like, suicidal self-sacrificing that we get out of Lan and Rand and others, if he was able to just be this kind of, like, grumpy sword guy, I’d be like, maybe he’d be interesting to me, if he was just the type of guy who was shaping who Gawyn and Galad were. And he –

Emily: Yeah, it would be really cool if he could join the Hall of Great Generals –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Who are also total DILFs, you know, like –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Ituralde, Davram Bashere –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Agelmar, those are all A-grade hotties –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And, like, Gareth Bryne as just, like, Morgase’s weird ex who had to go into exile and now has been, like, number one Egg supporter –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Throughout this whole thing, and, yeah, is just Gawyn and Gareth – God, they all have “Guh” names –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Gawyn and Galad’s mentor is, like, a really compelling figure.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Except. (laugh) Then there’s the whole Siuan romance subplot.

Sally: Yeah, there's the whole Siuan romance, which really does, like – sometimes heterosexuality can just really tank a character arc, you know what I mean?

Emily: Oh, God, it, like, brutalizes it.

Sally: (laugh) Yeah, and, like, even – I was about to say, like, he annoys me as a character 'cause he's almost, like you said, too good –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: And therefore anything he does almost doesn't matter at that point.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: He's not actually making real, human decisions very often, it feels like. Um, but that's just, like – again, I think in a different context it wouldn't bug me so much. Like, if he was just, like – I don't know. But also, in that subject of, like, he's such a good, Good – capital G – it feels almost out of character to me that he's like, "The only thing I'll do is, you know, slap Gawyn on the wrist," you know? Like, you mean to tell me that Gareth Bryne hasn't thrown Gawyn Trakand into a wall? Through a wall?

Emily: Yeah, this is Mr. Consequences –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: This is Mr. "I'm Gonna Hunt Down the Two Women" –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: "Who Did Some Mild Property Damage" – three women, excuse me – "because they ran away without giving me an oath." Like, literally hunt them down.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But, no, it's just Gawyn. What if Gareth Bryne spanked Gawyn in this scene?

Sally: My God. (laugh)

Emily: The entire Wheel of Time would be redeemed for me. (laugh)

Sally: If he was just like, "Well, you're behaving like a child and do you know what happens to children?"

Emily: "Oh, naughty children? They get spanked."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Presumably – probably in front of everyone.

Sally: Yeah. That would've been sooo iconic, oh my God.

Emily: I know, now we just have to live with the possibility –

Sally: Ugh.

Emily: I mean, it was never a possibility –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: In either Robert Jordan or Brandon Sanderson's minds, because, again, women are infantilized.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Even when Gawyn is the one here with the most infantile behavior.

Sally: Yeah. Um –

Emily: Men don't have to face consequences for their childish behavior the same way women do.

Sally: No. And it's exactly that sort of vibe of Gareth being like, "Well, yeah, I've known Gawyn since he was a kid, and he's, like, a good kid even though he literally sliced a couple men on the legs and the Aes Sedai don't Heal my men, so, like, that could maybe be debilitating."

Emily: Yeah, those guys could have injuries – like, could have major mobility issues for the rest of their lives.

Sally: Yeah, lifelong issues, but I don't know, Gawyn's just, like, a good kid with, like, a good career ahead of him.

Emily: And, like, it's so cool that he could take down four guys at once.

Sally: Yeah, so it's a really satisfying peek into the type of character that Gareth Bryne could have been.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: But.

Emily: We then also get in this scene the absolute most unhinged Gareth Bryne behavior, which is as he and Gawyn – just, like, in the process of them talking and being like – Gawyn's like, "Here's what I'm here to do, I'm here to rescue Egg," and Gareth is like, "She doesn't want to be rescued," and Gawyn is like, "We'll see about that," um, he brings up this, like, random Aes Sedai, and Gareth is like, "That's weird; bring me to her," which, first of all, like, bring you to her? Like, it's been at least thirty minutes. She could be anywhere.

Sally: Yeah. Yeah.

Emily: You guys are so weird. But then as they're walking and Gawyn is complaining about, like – they're, like, talking about Andoran politics, and Gareth Bryne breaks the news to Gawyn that Morgase, like, totally went off the deep end at the end of her reign –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And he does it in the least sensitive way possible. (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) I'm gonna be honest: I kind of loved it. It was so messy.

Emily: It was so funny. He was just like, "Your mom's a ho, and she deserved to die, maybe." It was so wild, you guys. Like, you're gonna think, "Emily's being dramatic –"

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: No, Gareth Byrne, almost verbatim, says, "Your mom's a ho –"

Sally: "Your mom's a ho."

Emily: "And that's a capital offense."

Sally: Yeah. Um. (laugh) I know; it's really funny 'cause, like, Brandon or whoever tries to, like, walk back a little bit the, like, "Morgase was, you know, a ho for sleeping with this random guy" –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Where Gareth is like, "I'm not saying this as a jaded liver," and it's like – (laugh)

Emily: Maybe you are a little bit.

Sally: Okay, maybe a little bit. He's like, "I'm saying this as someone who, like, loves Andor, but she was, like, acting like a real crazy lady."

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: And it's like – I don't know, I just think it's really funny. 'Cause Gawyn is like, "How dare you," and Gareth is like, "Eh, sometimes the truth hurts." (laugh)

Emily: (laugh) He's like, "It is what it is." Gawyn's like, "I can never forgive Rand al'Thor; he killed my mom," and Gareth is like, "First of all, corroborated by whom?"

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: "Second of all, good, maybe?"

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And Gawyn's like, "What are you saying? You can't just say to the child –"

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: "Of this woman, 'It's good that she's dead.'"

Sally: Yeah. Like, very insensitive. Extremely funny, though. Extremely –

Emily: Extremely poor politics, I would say –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Like, you would expect Gareth Bryne to be slightly more tactful.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So it is sort of, like, wildly out of character in that way.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: It also just feels like Brandon Sanderson is trying to speedrun, like, these sorts of information drops for Gawyn.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Like, rather than being like, I need to sort of let him in on this with some tact, as most people normally would, or to, like, let him learn pieces of this bit by bit, instead Brandon Sanderson is, somewhat accurately, saying, it is insane that we are in book twelve –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: And Gawyn is so far behind the rest of the characters in terms of this plot.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Like, Gawyn is still – Gawyn still is at the moment of, like, the end of book five.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And we've had an entire, since then – let's see – six-book arc, not only of Elayne reclaiming power in Andor but also, like, Morgase going on this fucking, like spirit quest –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: To learn about herself in captivity and terror and shit.

Sally: Yeah, it's also, like, frustrating to me that, again, it's been six books – six and a half books or whatever – since everything went down in Andor, and, like, nobody knows that Morgase was being mind-controlled, you know?

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Like, not a single person has been given that information.

Emily: Yeah, it goes back to, like, the lack of communication in these books.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Because if Rand were politically savvy, maybe, or even if just Robert Jordan was a more interesting writer, then, like, the first thing Rand would have done after the end of book five is be like, "Here was my justification for invading Andor –"

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: "One of the Forsaken was in charge –"

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: “And was controlling the queen and perhaps murdered the queen.”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: “At least, that’s what my evidence tells me.”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: ‘Cause, like, that’s a pretty good reason for your army to be in Andor, as opposed to the army just occupying Andor with no valid reason for quite a while.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, so it’s like there’s an element of, like, the people in Andor and in Caemlyn specifically sort of seem to have been like, “Yeah, something was so wrong with Morgase that something evil was going on.”

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: But no one outside of that very small sphere seems to understand that.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And it’s very frustrating, because so many of our core characters, then, are cognizant of that information, and we just have, like, these random few, particularly the few closest to Morgase, Galad and Gawyn –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Who are just still, like, operating under these delusions –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And have not heard anything differently.

Sally: Yeah. And, like, I get to a certain extent it is, uh, a forced realism. Sometimes you don’t have all the information, particularly in a world without, like, you know, phones. But from a narrative perspective, you can sometimes get around real-world inconveniences in ways that make your story better, so.

Emily: Yeah, I also just think that, like, if you lived in a world without the postal system or any reliable means of, like, communicating over long distances, as far as you know, you would not just be like, “The rumor mill is one hundred percent accurate.”

Sally: Yeah. (laugh)

Emily: You would be like, “There’s clearly –” Like, I was trying to think about this, like, what would I do in Gawyn’s shoes if I heard that Morgase was dead or whatever, whatever, and I was like, I would have dropped everything and gone to Andor.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: It's frankly ridiculous that the children don't do that.

Sally: Yeah. Like, hearing that your mom is dead.

Emily: Like, it's a little bit different for Elayne because she at least gets, like, trickles of verifiable information throughout, but, like, Gawyn and Galad are totally in the dark and are not just like, "I need to go see what happened."

Sally: Yeah, it especially doesn't make sense for Gawyn, who, like, actually has an important political – an "important," quote – political role in Andor.

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: To not be like, "Okay, well –" Like, he is just, like, waxing poetic, just, like, a masturbatory, you know, rumination on his – his duty and where he's supposed to be, and it's like, that has been laid out for you very specifically.

Emily: Yeah, since you were a child.

Sally: Since you were a child.

Emily: Gareth Bryne is like, "What are you doing here and not in Andor?"

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And Gawyn's like, "Oh, Elayne's got it covered," and Gareth's kind of like, Yeah, barely."

Sally: Yeah, like –

Emily: "Like, it's been kind of touch-and-go for a while, pal." And Gawyn's like, "Egg needs me more here," and Gareth's like, "Gawyn, meet Egg's entire army."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Like, she's good.

Sally: Yeah. She's fine. But of course this gets down to the – the core of this problem, which is that Gawyn is operating – Gawyn very much has, like, blinders on the world. He only wants to see what he wants to see, which is just kind of evidenced throughout by his very, like, nobleman attitude about everything. He's like, "The camp smells. I hate everybody. I'm gonna be a bitch about everything. I'm not gonna listen to a single person who tells me that Egg doesn't want to be rescued, because I'm correct."

Emily: Yeah. Gawyn is, like – and Galad, both, to an extent – both of their names, as we know, from the sort of Andoran nobility generally, are derived from characters in the Arthurian mythos, and as such, Gawyn and Galad are both sort of, like – I don't even know if "commentaries" is the right word, but they do sort of have the vibe of being, like, characters from chivalric romances plucked out of those settings and dropped into this world.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: And in a way that could be interesting as sort of, like, commentary on the fact that chivalry doesn't work –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: When you have women who are intent on being independent.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, but Gawyn is trying so hard to make it work, and the narrative is kind of, like, not enforcing any sort of boundaries upon him –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: In any real way, that it's just like, yeah, it turns out if you drop a chivalric Arthurian knight into the Wheel of Time, he'll just sort of, like, pinball around aimlessly, looking for people – women – to rescue, and that's not very satisfying to read about.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Like, if you also – it's like if you dropped a chivalric knight into Game of Thrones: they'd be killed immediately –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Is sort of, like, the idea of setting versus character that's going on here. And that would be kind of funny, you know?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: You'd be like, oh-ho, what a comment – commentary on chivalry. In fact, I think there are a couple of characters in Game of Thrones who effectively are that.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But Gawyn is just like, here, enjoy the worst character you ever met, who, devoid of his context, just has no compelling traits.

Sally: Yeah, I think – two things. One: The narrative doesn't push back on them – on Gawyn and Galad for this. It rewards them. Like, they both end up in positions of leadership and –

Emily: They both get the girl.

Sally: Get the girl. Barf.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: So, like, they're not punished for operating under this code, and in some ways kind of held up as, like, well, this is what men should be doing.

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: And, two: Um, I agree that it's an interesting project, especially in the, like, genre of high fantasy, to, like, play around with the concept of knighthood in general; like, that's been so foundational, um, to, I think, our understanding – even if, like, knighthood as a concept doesn't exist in the fantasy world. Like, it really shapes, especially, how our male characters operate. Like, they always are, one, good at swords, two, have some sort of code of honor that is really important to them.

Emily: Right.

Sally: Um, I think that's an interesting project to play with, but it's like a project in and of itself. It cannot be dumped into a narrative this vast –

Emily: Right.

Sally: And contain any sort of compelling thesis or action when they're moving so slow compared to everybody else around them. So those are my thoughts on Gawyn.

Emily: Oh, Gawyn.

Sally: Barf.

Emily: Anyway, Gawyn brings Bryne to this woman that he spotted, who turns out to be a Tower woman named Shemerin who infamously was demoted to Accepted on Elaida's orders, and that has been sort of, like, a sticking point for a lot of people in terms of, like, Elaida's tyranny.

Sally: Yeah. You know who didn't remember this? This guy.

Emily: Yeah, because it has come up, like, four different times in – sort of in, like, the weirdest ways possible, and there are, like, six other women characters in this plot whose names start with "Sh," so. It's sort of hard to keep track of. I don't blame you.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, Shemerin is brought to the Aes Sedai, including Romanda, Lelaine, and Siuan, and they talk to her about, like, how she was demoted. We don't get any new information from this, really, except to find out that she escaped, um, Tar Valon by just, like, leaving through a small opening in the walls, and Siuan gets that information from her, which will be relevant later. During this meeting, we see a bubble of evil that is just, like, a bunch of cockroaches. So, gross.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, but not too important. There's a chapter here where we get – a very short one – where we get a point of view from Sheriam, who's, like, mega-relieved that Halima has been chased out of the camp, 'cause she's like, "Oh, great, nobody's breathing down my fucking back anymore."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Then who should show up but Mesaana, I believe –

Sally: Yeah, who fucking else?

Emily: Who's like, "What the fuck are you doing? Why aren't you doing shit?" And Sheriam's like, "Sorry, I didn't have any orders," and Mesaana's, like, "Well, you need to, like, get Egg deposed, and you also need to stop these dumb meetings that she's doing in Tel'aran'rhiod." And Sheriam's like, "Oh, well, we just have ter'angreal that allow us to do that," and she's like, "Great, steal the ter'angreal, or I'll kill you." So that's hanging over Sheriam's head when we leave her. We also bounce over to Egg who is in, like, literally a cell –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: At the bottom of the White Tower and the update on her situation is that, um, Elaida is being, um – Elaida is supposed to be tried for what she did to Egg because that was against Tower and also moral law.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Just beating up an unarmed person. Um, and Elaida's justifying her actions by saying Egg is a Darkfriend, so she can do whatever she wants, so it's sort of just like we're in the bureaucratic trenches here of – or the legal trenches, I guess, of trying to get Elaida to face any consequences. Egg is kind of like, "Well, what will most likely happen is that she'll get a slap on the wrist," um, "and the important thing is that her position has been undermined somewhat."

Sally: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

Emily: Um – oh, the whole cockroaches thing: they start using – sorry, this is such a sidebar – but these cockroaches invade this little meeting and, um, Romanda's like, "I just have to start killing them with the Power," you know, just, like, smushing them. And I was like, didn't you take an oath to not use the One Power as a weapon?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Like, so does that not count on insects?

Sally: It doesn't count on –

Emily: I just was, like, amused by that. Like –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: What's the boundary there?

Sally: Yeah, like –

Emily: Insects aren't important enough? Like, could you just, like, hunt that way?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Could you go out in the wilderness and be, like, living my Hatchet dream, but minus the hatchet because I can just kill wildlife from a distance?

Sally: Yeah, like, does their oath of nonviolence extend to non-human creatures?

Emily: Yeah. Just a curiosity that is going nowhere, but.

Sally: It is an interesting moral question, though.

Emily: Moral dilemma, yeah. Does it depend upon your personal attitude toward animals and insects? Like the vegan Aes Sedai are out here like, “I literally cannot do this,” but –

Sally: The vegan Aes Sedai. Wow, what a sort of eco-text that would be. What an interesting level of, like, ecology.

Emily: Yeah, I would love to know. I’m just like, some people, when they encounter, like, bugs and spiders in their houses, are like, “I will rescue this little critter and bring it outside – to the outside world, where it belongs,” and I’m like, I get that; that’s a lovely sentiment to have. If I personally see a bug or spider, it’s dead. ‘Cause that’s my personal sentiment.

Sally: Sure.

Emily: So, like, is that just, like –

Sally: We did rescue the cricket that Tybalt got one time.

Emily: Oh, yeah. I didn’t feel – I didn’t feel, um – uh, yeah, I should clarify. If it’s a – if it’s a bug, I will sometimes do my best to rescue it. Um, but spiders are goners.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Because I need to make very clear to them the consequences.

Sally: This is not a welcome place for you.

Emily: Yeah. Castle doctrine, bitch.

Sally: Yeah, that’s interesting. That’s an interesting thing to think about. Romanda lights her own tent on fire to get rid of the cockroaches.

Emily: Yeah, which is kind of funny. RIP to her –

Sally: Which I think is kind of a baller move.

Emily: Yeah, her romance books that she lost.

Sally: Yeah, RIP her smut books.

Emily: Yeah, her library. God. That must be devastating. I hope she has a Kindle somewhere. Um, so the last little point of view we’ll talk about is Aviendha, who is doing one of her dumb chores when she is approached by Min, who is like, “What the fuck are you doing?” And Aviendha’s like, “This is the most offensive thing anyone’s ever said to me.” Like, Aviendha has no patience with other people’s, like, cultural –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Misunderstandings.

Sally: I will give Aviendha this: Min has been around the Aiel long enough to at least have picked up on – like, if she was a more sensitive person. So I think – like, I’m not – the Aiel are very intense – the Aiel are very rigid in their cultural boundaries, which I think is, uh, while a valid way to go about the world, difficult when you are in such close contact with other people. Like, you need to – with other groups of people. Like, perhaps everyone would stop fighting so much if they were just willing to, like ask a few more questions. But also, like, it is on Min to understand – like, the Aiel are expected to understand, quote, “wetlander” culture much more than any of the, quote, “wetlanders” give any time of day to understanding Aiel culture. I think we’ve made this point before. But that’s what I was thinking this whole time.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Like, especially – like, Min should especially be doing this because she and Aviendha share the same boyfriend.

Emily: Yeah, it’s not like Min, like Egwene or whoever, who takes it a step too far, perhaps –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But it’s not like Min is going out of her way to, like, learn about the culture of these people, despite being surrounded by them, literally 24/7.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Like, there’s a serious lack of – and I would say this is on both sides –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: There is in most characters a serious lack of, like, um, just curiosity about each other.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Everyone is just – and this exists, I would say, not just between cultural groups but between gender groups –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: In the Wheel of Time; it sort of characterizes the Wheel of Time. But instead of any sort of, like, wonder or interest –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Or just, you know, positive ways of characterizing these things, it’s all just very, like, dismissive, judgmental –

Sally: Yeah. There’s –

Emily: All that sort of stuff. And Aviendha has her fair share of this, just being like, “Wow, wetlander refugees are such fucking cowards.”

Sally: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

Emily: But yeah, Min is, uh, in some ways the outsider –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: When she is surrounded by Aiel, and so she sort of needs to be – like, take responsibility for, like, engaging with this culture. She hangs out with the Wise Ones enough; why can't she just be like, "Explain some things to me."

Sally: Yeah, like, "Can I ask some questions?" You know, like, there's a genuine lack of curiosity and respect, and everyone just takes – and you're right that it is everyone. I want to give Aviendha the credit in this instance because Min annoys me so much. (laugh)

Emily: Well, and Aviendha and the Aiel are sort of our, like – despite being white, we've said this before –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: They are sort of characterized as the non-white group.

Sally: Yeah, our sort of racialized minority. Um, but Aviendha definitely has her fucking fair share of it, as Emily just referenced, with her being like, "Refugees are fucking stupid." Um, but everyone just takes this stance of, like, "The other person is dumb for not knowing this thing that is so inherent to my culture that I can barely even explain it." And it's like –

Emily: It's so boring to read.

Sally: It really is. That's a really good way to put it. It's like, there's no, like, genuine empathy or genuine curiosity in, like, a single one of our characters to just be like, "Wow, this other part of the world is really interesting, and I would like to know more about it."

Emily: Yeah, we seem to be, like, operating under the assumption, or the authors do, that, like, because various cultures have been explained to us either through point of view characters from that culture or through characters very early on engaging with it –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: You know, like, we sort of got our, um, Aiel 101 spiel back in book four.

Sally: Sure.

Emily: It seems to be like they're like, "Oh, well, no reader would want to just read about that over and over again." And, like, you're right, I don't; but you don't need to, like, give me the conversation every time.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: You can just be like, "Yeah, Min hangs out with these people and behaves as though she hangs out with these people."

Sally: Yeah, like, just a genuine – her being like, "Oh, I came up to talk to you, but I see that you're doing a task."

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: So, like, “Maybe we should find a different time to talk.”

Emily: Yeah, “Could you talk sometime?”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And Aviendha be like, “Yes,” or “No,” and Min be like, “Okay, well, we really do need to talk.”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Like, “Can I talk to you now, while you’re doing this sort of thing?” Like – you know. But of course Min’s a rude bitch, as we have –

Sally: Yeah, correct.

Emily: Said many a time; they kind of all are.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Rand is attracted to women who are rude –

Sally: (laugh) He’s got a type.

Emily: I guess. That’s sort of the – the connective tissue there. Um, Min goes up to Aviendha and is like, “Mm, sorry I haven’t, like, tried to talk to you even though we’ve been in the same camp for weeks –”

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: “And that’s a little weird. But, like, I thought you would approach me, so.”

Sally: And Aviendha’s like, “Literally, why would I do that?”

Emily: Aviendha’s like, “No. I’m busy.” And Min’s like, “Doesn’t it bother you that I’m fucking Rand every night?” and Aviendha’s like, “As I said, I’m busy.”

Sally: Yeah, she’s like, “Mm, unlike some people, my whole life doesn’t revolve around Rand.”

Emily: (laugh) Yeah, Aviendha’s like, “When it becomes a problem, I’ll let you know.” Like –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: (laugh) Which is kind of iconic.

Sally: I know. When she’s like – (laugh) It is very iconic.

Emily: And Min’s like, “Eugh.”

Sally: Like, “Ten-four. Message received.”

Emily: Min also is like, “I thought you would approach me so we could, like, fight about him,” and Aviendha’s like, “I’m not going to fight you; I’ve seen you try and fight. You suck.” (laugh)

Sally: Yeah, and Min does her stupid – she’s like, “I’m good at fighting,” and does her stupid knife flashes –

Emily: And Aviendha’s like, “Then why did you not kill Semirhage?” Or at least that’s what I was like. (laugh)

Sally: Yeah, and, like, I think another iconic – I – and, like, this is an example of Aviendha being like, “I am perhaps the more empathetic – I’m not the most empathetic, but at least I’m more empathetic than Min,” ‘cause Aviendha’s like, “As a person who has actually trained how to use knives, I could have killed her –”

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: “In the time it took her to, like, fancily spin her knife out of her sleeve. But why would I say that? That would embarrass her.”

Emily: Yeah, mmkay. But anyway, they’re just like, um – um, yeah, Aviendha’s like, “I’ll let you know if it becomes a problem,” and Min’s like, “Okay. Until then, you’re just busy?” And Aviendha’s like, “Yes, I’m fucking busy,” and gets, like, mad enough about it to go confront the Wise Ones. Um, which is frustrating because instead of it being, like, an intentional sort of thing in terms of the narrative being like, “Here are Min and Aviendha, like, talking and collaborating, and Aviendha has this epiphany through that.”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, instead it’s just like, “Oh ho ho, comedic irony: Min pisses off Aviendha so much that Aviendha manages to solve her problems.”

Sally: Yeah, it can’t really count as, like, character growth because Aviendha does not get to the point where she’s like, “I am genuinely busy, because I have a new role in my life that I want to step into, and I should start being accepted –”

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: “As that.” Instead it’s just like, wow, Min is being such a bitch –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: That Aviendha throws a tantrum, is basically what happens, and it just conveniently happens to be the tantrum she needs to throw.

Emily: The correct thing.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Sort of fumbling over the finish line here. But she goes and confronts the Wise Ones and is like, “I’m not doing this shit anymore because, like, you guys don’t have anything more to

teach me. If all you're gonna do is give me punishments, then clearly we've run dry in the educational well."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And they're like, "Great. Go to Rhuidean; finish your stuff. Then you'll be a Wise One." And Aviendha's like, "That's it?" And they're like, "Yeah."

Sally: Correct.

Emily: Correct. Because that's a really great teaching method. They're like, "That's how Sevanna became a Wise One," and you're like, ooh, so maybe not great.

Sally: So maybe, like, if you just have enough confidence, you can get it? In a way, I get it: it's important for a leader to have confidence; but have you considered that some people have too much?

Emily: Yeah, like, they, like, call out the Aes Sedai system –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: They're like, "We don't like how the Aes Sedai just rank themselves based on, like, power and by, like, having to assert yourself, you are sort of saying, like, 'We're equals.'"

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: "'So you don't get to boss me around; I'll listen to you, but.'"

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Overall it's a more, like, healthy system. And I'm like, I agree that it is a more healthy system; I don't know if it's the most useful system in this case. Like –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: It seems like you should be a little more flexible about that sort of thing. Especially because they're like, "Sometimes it takes months or even years, and we've just had to speed-run you by giving you ridiculous task upon ridiculous task." Sooo.

Sally: It's just more of the Aiel being a little intense –

Emily: Mm, yeah.

Sally: About certain things. But you know what? That's their right, and I would love to know more about it. In a book that was curious, perhaps I would.

Emily: (laugh) So Aviendha Travels to Rhuidean, and I do not believe we will see her in the rest of this book.

Sally: RIP.

Emily: Uh, we will catch up with her in the next one with some very weird points of view.

Sally: Ruh-roh.

Emily: (clears throat) Um –

Sally: Do we get her while she's in Rhuidean? Is that why?

Emily: Yes, we'll get –

Sally: Okay.

Emily: An inverse of what happened to Rand in Rhuidean, which could be interesting, but, um, as we will see, maybe not so interesting. Um, the next two chapters are going to be, uh, Mat and company in Hinderstap. Prepare for that to possibly be a short episode because, um, it's more or less an action sequence –

Sally: Mm.

Emily: So there's not much actually going on in terms of plot to talk about there. Um, but you know, it'll be a little tough to deal with 'cause we have to deal with the character assassination of not just Mat but many people around Mat.

Sally: Yeah. RIP. I just wish they, um, got dealt a better hand.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: You gotta know when to hold 'em, Brandon.

Emily: But that's what's on the horizon.

Sally: You've gotta know when to fold 'em.

Emily: (laugh) Um, thanks for listening –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Thanks to Glynn MacKenzie for our theme song. Thanks to our patrons on Patreon and our followers on social media.

Sally: Yeah, Patreon supporters, you are probably single-handedly paying for Ed's medical bills right now –

Emily: Which are hefty.

Sally: Which are hefty, hefty, hefty. So thank you. Um –

Emily: Thank you kindly.

Sally: Thank you kindly. He is a beloved host on this podcast.

Emily: And a sick little guy.

Sally: And a sick little guy. So thanks for helping us take care of him.

Emily: Yeah. Do you have a sign-off?

Sally: Yeah, this isn't necessarily, like, a bad one. But today I had to do yet another medical test that involved sitting in – there were multiple – multiple of us doing it at one time, 'cause it's, like, a – anyway. It's hard to explain. But we were sitting in these, like, little curtained-off chairs, and there was a single TV, and the nurse, for, like, the first twenty minutes I was there, was scrolling through Disney Plus, and I was like, wow, I can't wait to see what she picks.

Emily: Uh-huh.

Sally: And she settled on the Princess Diaries, which I thought was so iconic. (laugh)

Emily: (laugh)

Sally: And I was just like, this is such a great – I told her – I was like, "This was such a great choice. I'm so happy that you made this choice." And she's like, "Oh, I'm glad. I just, like, hadn't seen it, and I wanted to watch it." And I was like, good for you.

Emily: That's so iconic – yeah, it's so funny to go into doctors' offices and stuff nowadays –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And they just have – like everyone, they no longer really have cable; they just have –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: The, like, streaming services –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So, yeah, you really get some hilarious picks.

Sally: Yeah, one time Emily came to the instacare with me this winter, and they were playing Little Rascals.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: And I was like, what? (laugh)

Emily: What in the world – well, clearly, they were just like, "We have to have something child-friendly on."

Sally: Yeah. Little Rascals.

Emily: But it's just so funny, the things they pick.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Okay, everyone. Have a good week.

Sally: Yeah, bye bye bye.

Emily: Goodbye.

Sally: Good bye bye bye.