



Episode 252: Will Poulter
Release Date: July 24, 2023
Running Time: 42 minutes

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 truly do not know how to process the Halsey music. (laugh)

Sally: Yeah, um.

Emily: Off the debut album, "Control" by Halsey.

Sally: Yeah, that's a great song, and that's a great album. I think it is a weird pull for the Wheel of Time trailer.

Emily: Who's in control? Don't you get it? Who's – it's Rand, or maybe somebody else. Like Lanfear.

Sally: Like Lanfear. I – I'm sure that – I'm sure the song is trying to get at the, like, developing madness, quote, that Rand is –

Emily: Mm. Mm. Yeah, that's a very, like, spooky song.

Sally: Yeah, that Rand is – experiences as he begins to delve into his use of the Power. But it has a very unfortunate secondary meaning, which is the, like, very grating part that's very difficult early in the books but is still really difficult, of, like, who is in control of Rand, not only in terms of, like, him and Lews Therin, but, like, Rand's resistance to being, quote unquote, guided.

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: Moiraine, Lanfear, Lan, Cadsuane, the Aes Sedai, yadda yadda yadda. Um, and I mean, Moiraine even says in the – the trailer, it's all about guiding him, so that bugs me. Don't use Halsey for that type of nonsense.

Emily: (laugh) It's just never been a very compelling plot point to me.

Sally: Yeah, I agree.

Emily: Especially – especially early in the books, when, to be frank, it didn't ever really seem like Rand wasn't the one in control –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Of his own destiny. Like –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: There is a certain element when he was sort of, like – like, there was that moment in early book two, when he wants to leave –

Sally: Oh, yeah.

Emily: Um ...

Sally: Fal Dara.

Emily: Fal Dara, and can't because the Amyrlin Seat or Moiraine or whoever has, like, ordered him into lockdown.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But I think that's the only, like, example of anyone ever exerting, like, explicit control over him.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: At least that I can think of. Otherwise it's just sort of, like, transparent manipulations that even Rand isn't stupid enough to not see for what they are.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So it's just kind of like, yeah, it would be annoying if everyone was constantly saying enigmatic things to you in an effort to shape your beliefs and opinions, but it gets to the whole point of the Wheel of Time series, which is, like, we're being told that women have power, but women are never actually shown to have any significant power over men.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Yeah. I dunno. Perhaps the show will be better about doing that.

Sally: I hope so.

Emily: The show has certainly lingered more on the sort of, like, effects of – the sort of, like, what happens to men who can channel –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Under Aes Sedai control. Like, the season – the first season had so much more to do with Logain – like, that subplot was sort of made explicit.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Which I think was, like, a very, like, latent threat to Rand.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Um, but was never actually made explicit. Because in the book, he never goes to Tar Valon.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: He's never, like, directly within that sphere of power.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But obviously that's changed in the show, so. I dunno. I thought it was pretty funny. I thought, um –

Sally: Just really unexpected.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Halsey. I don't like Rand's haircut this season.

Emily: The fact that they gave him a buzzcut? It's sort of the equivalent of, like, a girl goes through a crisis, so she cuts off all her hair into a bob. (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) Yeah, there certainly is something to be said for the human instinct to, like, shave your head when you're really going through it, you know?

Emily: Yeah, like, I get it, but it's like they're trying to make him look, like, harder. (laugh)

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: You know, scarier with the whole crucifixion posture. They're like, "Look at this shirtless pose."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And I was like, besties.

Sally: I don't like it. I cannot see a man with that – a white man with that haircut and not immediately think he is a literal skinhead, so.

Emily: Yeah. Yeah – you –

Sally: That's –

Emily: You just sort of veer into – over into Nazi territory with that look –

Sally: Yeah. Yeah. I'm just like –

Emily: Especially a dude as, like, pasty-white and Scandinavian as that poor actor.

Sally: Yeah, and – (laugh) Yeah, he's got that very, like, facial structure, you know –

Emily: Yeah, yeah.

Sally: Where you're just like, okay.

Emily: And I'm like, hey, listen, I wouldn't mind putting some, you know, unfortunate imagery on Rand later in the series.

Sally: Sure.

Emily: But unless you're planning for the Amazon series to be three seasons long? Might be a little early for it.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Which, I have no idea what their plan is. I'm not exactly keeping tabs.

Sally: Yeah, me either. Um, so I don't like that. Um –

Emily: I dunno, I enjoy Rosamund Pike.

Sally: Fuck yeah.

Emily: I'm a Rosamund Pike enjoyer.

Sally: Yeah. I was literally thinking about – I was watching it, and I was like, they did such a good job pulling Rosamund Pike into this. Like –

Emily: I know, she's great.

Sally: She's a powerhouse. The – all the actors so far have been really good, especially the older actors.

Emily: Yeah, for sure.

Sally: Um, um, the younger ones I have no problem with, it's just like –

Emily: They're not as good because they're younger.

Sally: They don't have as much experience, you know?

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Rosamund Pike went through the whole "Gone Girl" thing and certainly learned a lot, I'm sure. That was Rosamund Pike, right? I didn't just make that up?

Emily: (laugh) Sorry, yes, it is Rosamund Pike, but I also just, like, went on a wild fantasy of, like, what if they got Timothee Chalamet –

Sally: To play Mat?

Emily: Into Wheel of Time. I don't know. I just suddenly went through, like, a vision of, like, what if Timothee – 'cause you were like, we were like, "blah blah blah, it's not very good actors," and I was gonna say, like, "Yeah, they're no Timothee Chalamet," which is a joke because I don't like Timothee Chalamet –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: I don't think he's a stellar actor. But, um –

Sally: Tillamy Chillamy. (laugh)

Emily: Tillamy Chillamy. You guys know he's playing Willy Wonka? (laugh)

Sally: Which is wild to me. Um –

Emily: Yeah, every day I wake up and think about how Till –

Sally: Tillamy Chillamy?

Emily: Tillamy Chillamy is playing Willy Wonka in the most strait-laced way possible.

Sally: Yeah, listen, we need someone who is more feral and fucked-up to play Willy Wonka.

Emily: Where is the – where is the Gene Wilder sociopathy latent in the Willy Wonka movie? You know?

Sally: Yeah, I saw someone say that the guy from the Bear should've been Willy Wonka – Jeremy Allen White –

Emily: He should have!

Sally: 'Cause, one, he looks like Gene Wilder –

Emily: Yes, chef.

Sally: And two, um, I haven't seen the Bear, but from Shameless, his character is a little unhinged and wild in that show.

Emily: His character is extremely unhinged in the Bear. In a much healthier way –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Than he is unhinged in Shameless.

Sally: Shameless? So I'm like –

Emily: In – in the, like, greasy line chef way that –

Sally: Nice.

Emily: Is hot.

Sally: That is hot, yeah, sorry.

Emily: Everyone in America knows there's nothing hotter than a line chef.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Like, they made Will Poulter a line chef in the Bear season two, and he got hot. I'm not joking.

Sally: I've always kind of had a thing for Will Poulter, so. (laugh)

Emily: (laugh)

Sally: I dunno, I just always – I dunno, I like a man with a fucked-up little face, I guess. (laugh)

Emily: (wheeze) I'll – I will say this for Will Poulter. On the, like, spectrum of white men looks, he is at one end, and Timothee Chalamet is at the other –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Is at the other, and I far prefer the Will Poulter side of things.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Yeah. I – I mean, agreed. But everyone was like, "Damn, look at those forearms."

Sally: Yeah, I do – I do think Will Poulter – I guess I shouldn't say "always." Like, I wouldn't, like, really get down for, like, Maze Runner era Will Poulter.

Emily: Yeah, that was an unfortunate era.

Sally: But in the last couple years, I would say he's really sort of grown into his own vibe.

Emily: Yeah. The line chef vibe.

Sally: So maybe it was the Bear. Maybe it was that, and I'm just not keeping track of my timeline of attraction to Will Poulter. Anyway. (laugh)

Emily: So we're –

Sally: The Wheel of Time trailer.

Emily: So we're, like, thirteen minutes into this podcast. This is Everybody Hates Rand, where we talk about the books, not the show. But we had to talk about the show because you're so goddamn hungry for it.

Sally: Wheely 2 trailer drop.

Emily: Wheely 2 trailer drop, and also there's nothing to talk about in these chapters that we haven't said already.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And we just have to make this fast because it's 100 degrees outside, the AC is off, and we'll die.

Sally: That's true.

Emily: We'll die. So this is EHR, said that already. It's a Wheely TIme podcast. Check. I'm Emily Juchau.

Sally: Check. I'm Sally Goodger, and I'm sorry I called your face weird, Will Poulter.

Emily: Do you think he's listening?

Sally: Yeah, I do. I think he's –

Emily: He's crying. (laugh)

Sally: I think he's a big fan. (laugh) You're a very handsome man.

Emily: That would be such a get. If I was gonna have any celebrity listen to our podcast, I think it might be Will Poulter.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Will, if you're out there – (laugh) You should know that my friends have a drink named after you.

Sally: Oh, that's nice.

Emily: It's like an Arnold Palmer, but different.

Sally: Oh, yeah, I've heard about this. Um, anyway, I was gonna say final thoughts on the Wheel of Time 2 trailer, but I don't – I don't have them. I think they're making saidin a different color than saidar, which I think is fun.

Emily: Oh. Color-code.

Sally: I think it's –

Emily: What if it was blue, and saidar was pink? Like a baby reveal? (laugh)

Sally: Gender reveal. Um, this is, in fact, a podcast about the Wheel of Time book series. As a reminder, we will not be covering the show on this podcast. Um, if you're interested in that content, um, we'll – if more people start talking about it as the show comes up, we'll direct you to some places. So.

Emily: There's usually some fun podcasts about it.

Sally: There's usually some fun – yeah.

Emily: We might Tweet about it occasionally, but.

Sally: Yeah, maybe I'll make my family live-Tweet their reactions to me again. Okay. In these chapters, boo, hiss hiss, tomato tomato, Rand and Tuon meet. Boring. Pfft.

Emily: Yeah, at the long – the long-hyped confrontation, two powerhouses, we were told, would finally duke it out. And then they meet, and it's, like, a two-page conversation, and the only thing that happens is that Rand is like, "We have to do this," and Tuon is like, "Could we talk a little

bit about what your terms are?” Like, you know it’s a bad chapter when it seems like Tuon is the reasonable one in a conversation.

Sally: Maybe I just hate her, but I was like, “It’s fine for Rand to bully her.” (laugh)

Emily: I mean, I am also fine with that –

Sally: But no, from, like, a diplomatic standpoint, Rand is incorrect to just try and, like, strongarm his way into a treaty. That doesn’t make any sense.

Emily: Yeah, like, Rand comes in there after working and working and working, sending a million people out to do this, it’s like he has made the decision, it becomes clear, to rely on brute ta’veren force –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: To get his will in this rather than doing any sort of, like, work in terms of diplomacy, negotiation, actually forming a treaty.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Which, to be clear for the millionth time, we do not negotiate with terrorists. (laugh)

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: There – we have no actual interest in there being a negotiation with the Seanchan, but that has been Rand’s interest, he has been telling us a million times, and now he’s apparently going back on that.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And just being like, “Well, I’ll just make them do what I want.”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And it’s like, if you can just make them do what you want, then –

Sally: Make them surrender.

Emily: Can you make them not be enslavers?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Can you make them leave? Like, what’s the deal?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And just for a book that is so painfully telling us every thought in Rand’s head, this decision has not been talked about at all.

Sally: Yeah. Um.

Emily: Like, Rand hasn't been like, "I just need to meet with the Seanchan because once I meet with them, things will work out."

Sally: Yeah, the ta'veren-ness will kick in.

Emily: Everything will work – like, it will just happen because I need it to. That's how this always works. Like, it would be one thing if Rand had that level of self-awareness at this point in the series –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: We have shown in earlier books that he does have something like that self-awareness.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Like in book seven, when he's like, "Everything's turning up Rand –"

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: "So I'm gonna go solve one of my problems," and then immediately gets stabbed.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Which, love that. (laugh)

Sally: Yeah. That was a good – that was a good decision on Robert Jordan's part.

Emily: Icarus –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Flew too close to the sun and Padan Fain stabbed him in the side. Um, so, like, that's one thing, but Rand has not exhibited that self-awareness. And we are limited by it being in Tuon's point of view, their conversation, but that can – like, that's the only thing that can be going on in Rand's head because otherwise he sounds like a weird robot.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Not – not to throw too much shade on Brandon Sanderson, but dialogue is not his strong suit.

Sally: Not in this book, at least.

Emily: Yeah. Natural-sounding dialogue, I would say.

Sally: Yeah. Um, so it's just silly. It's really frustrating. Um, I feel like I've been saying that a lot lately. I just am doing the transcript for the last episode, and I've said it like ninety-seven times, so I apologize if that's getting really old. But, um, Rand's decision here very much feels, um – the – the decision on the part of the authors to have Rand behave in such a way feels like we are forcing what seems like a very natural conclusion, um, which would be sort of, like, the treaty that Rand is proposing in order to get us to the Last Battle. It seems like a way to force us away from that and instead force Rand and the Seanchan into conflict.

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: Which is frustrating to me for a couple of reasons, 'cause it's like, one, as we've discussed multiple times, we are at the endgame. We do not have the space within the next two and one-third books for a full-blown conflict between Rand and the Seanchan in order to somehow resolve that and get to the Last Battle.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: That – I mean, I guess technically we do have the page space, 'cause these books are so long, but it just feels exhausting at this point to bring another – a huge, full-blown war between two global forces into play. That's so silly. And two, it's frustrating because, like, if Rand was going to go into conflict with the Seanchan, why can't that be Rand's decision as, like, a leader who has a conscience? Like, he stresses – stresses very much in this conversation that he is disgusted by their practices around people who can channel, that that is not a point he is willing to budge on, like, there will be no more of that. Um, so it's like, why can't we give Rand the ethical ground or something? You know, it's just like, why did it play out this way?

Emily: Yeah, also they were already in conflict. Obviously –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Not, like, a full-scale war –

Sally: Good point.

Emily: There were battles earlier, um, in book eight particularly. But, like, from Rand's point of view, nothing about his relationship with the Seanchan has changed after this.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: We the readers have the, um, foreknowledge that Tuon was holding off on this decision to raid the White Tower, and that after meeting Rand, she goes through with it.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: But A, that wasn't information that was necessary –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: For us to have. All it did was make Tuon look – it was, like, clearly an attempt to make Tuon look like a reasonable person rather than a tyrant.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Which, if you're the empress of a country that enslaves people, you're never not gonna look like a tyrant, which is something that the authors seem to fundamentally not understand.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, but yeah, for, like, Rand, it's just like, okay, well, the Seanchan are still at our backs.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Nothing has changed. If we – if they advance, we're gonna have to fight back; if we advance, they're gonna have to fight back. You know?

Sally: Yeah, no, you make a good point. Um, what I'm saying about them getting thrown into this war is not – not, like – I wasn't correct in being like, "It would happen now."

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Um, but it still feels like they're trying to escalate it a little bit.

Emily: Mm, yeah.

Sally: Within a very short – what I consider a very short section of the narrative, I guess is what I'm trying to say.

Emily: Yeah, I think what's frustrating to me is that this does feel like a mechanism to escalate things.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: But from Rand's point of view, nothing escalates. Things do escalate from the Seanchan side.

Sally: Yeah, that's a good point.

Emily: But, like, in the next book and a half or so, like, Rand isn't going to have any major conflicts with the Seanchan.

Sally: So what was the fucking point of this, then?

Emily: Yeah, exactly. The Seanchan aren't going to come back around for Rand, at least, until book fourteen, when he is finally ready to, like, make nice with Tuon.

Sally: Well, I don't think anyone should ever make nice with Tuon. Tuon – I'm sorry that I am, like, number one Tuon hater of the universe. Um. I'm not sorry, but I'm sure it gets old sometimes. (laugh) Um, there's so much in this chapter about her being like, "I haven't become the Empress yet because that means the Dragon Reborn could not meet me on, uh, the same level –" Like, everyone makes a huge fucking deal about the fact that their chairs are on the same physical level. And it's like, I – I know we've said this – again, I'm sorry – but, like, the Seanchan's insistence that everybody operates within the same cultural mechanisms as them is wild. Like, if you were like, "You have to sit on a chair that is beneath me," Rand would be like, "No."

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: "That's dumb."

Emily: And the fact that they can't be like – like, they don't have the sort of bandwidth to be like, "Oh, well, this person is from a different country than me and has different standards of how to behave –"

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: "To world leaders," like, yeah, it's absolutely bonkers that the entire nation is like this, and I think the effect is supposed to be like, "This is a nation of brainwashed cult freaks," you know?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But I'm like, that isn't how nations of brainwashed cult freaks work, you know?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: The people in power are less brainwashed than everyone else.

Sally: Yeah, like, Tuon would be like, "I'm –" Tuon would be aware of the theater that she is performing.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: You know. Um, but, like – and, again, this is not very good diplomacy, although it was very iconic, for Tuon to be like, "We're going to talk about enslaving people," and Rand's like, "No." And he keeps interrupting her; he's just like, "Absolutely not. This is not a point that I will budge on."

Emily: Yeah, that's one point for Rand al'Thor.

Sally: Yeah. And, like, all of her guards are, like, gasping and fainting 'cause he interrupted the Empress twice in a row. And it's like, okay. They're two world leaders meeting on equal footing.

Emily: Yeah, you guys.

Sally: It's not – like, it just is – it's a – it's a silly way to read. Um, and again, I agree the effect is supposed to be like, "The Seanchan are really strange, and they have a very specific worldview, which is how they justify conquering and enslaving people," and that's effective, I guess, to the degree, but it's like, Jesus Christ, is it annoying to read about.

Emily: (sigh)

Sally: Not a single Seanchan – except for Egeanin, I guess, and she doesn't even get that far into being like, "Oh, other people work differently."

Emily: Yeah, she's on pretty thin ice – it's especially frustrating because Tuon herself has spent months in the company of people –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Not of this worldview.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So it's like, okay, so what was the point of that?

Sally: Yeah, did you learn nothing about, like, being among the people of this land?

Emily: She brings up Mat at one point, and although the dialogue itself is very stilted and out of character –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Nynaeve jumps to Mat's defense, which is both very in-character and very sweet.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Probably the one highlight, I would say, of this chapter. It's nice to see Nynaeve being like – having that sort of sibling relationship –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: With Mat, of being like, "I will talk absolute shit to you to your face, but behind your back –"

Sally: "I've got you."

Emily: "I've got you. Ride or die. La familia," you know?

Sally: Yeah. And, also, like, "No one's allowed to talk shit about you except me."

Emily: Yeah. I'll kill you. That's very Nynaeve.

Sally: Yeah. Um, yeah. Nynaeve v. Tuon cage match.

Emily: Oh, the other highlight of this chapter is that at one point, Nynaeve asks Rand something, and he's just had a little struggle with Lews Therin, so he responds using the royal "we." (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) Yeah, he's like, "We're fine." And she's like, "Who's 'we'?"

Emily: And Nynaeve just is like, "Okay."

Sally: "We?"

Emily: It's supposed to be like, you know, multiple personality thing, but just sounds like he's just taken on –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: A Shakespearean –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Royalty affect.

Sally: Yeah. So funny.

Emily: “We’re fine.”

Sally: “We’re fine.” Um, so yeah, there’s, like, a very, I think, funny description – we’re in Tuon’s perspective when Rand tries to out-ta’veren the universe, and she’s like, “Wow, he’s so scary.”

Emily: Yeah, she’s like – (imitates “Psycho” stabbing noise)

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And then it’s supposed to – we’ve talked about this before as well –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: This, like, big moment is that Tuon manages to say “no” to him, despite the very physical exertion of his will against her, and that’s meant to embody Tuon as, like, a particularly strong-willed person, or, if in a world where women were ta’veren, which they’re not in this world –

Sally: ‘Course not.

Emily: Maybe she’s ta’veren too.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, which I – um, I don’t know. Again, all that does narratively is force us to an escalation point.

Sally: Yeah,

Emily: Um, I guess they – I – I guess I can see from the authors’ perspective why it would be incredibly grating to be like, “Rand will just solve this problem by walking in and yelling at some people.” Of course that shouldn’t work.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But I would prefer if it didn’t work for a different reason than just, like, Tuon is the world’s manic pixie dream fuck.

Sally: Yeah, it also is like, I would be fine with this if Rand went in there and behaved like a world leader, who is –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Willing to be a diplomat and negotiate and make concessions – I don’t want him to do this, obviously – again, we’re not pro-treaty with the Seanchan. But at this point, it’s like, like we talked about extensively last week, Rand is just behaving like a tyrant without any consequences, and Emily made the very good point that, like, there aren’t really any consequences for Rand in this instance. Yes, he wanted the Seanchan under control. But, like, like Emily said, like, there’s no real escalation for him. He’s still got the Seanchan at his back, and that’s frustrating, but, like, it’s not like, suddenly — it’s not like they’re attacking – then, of course, it’s not like they attack Rand. They attack the White Tower.

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: So, again, women are paying the consequences for Rand's actions. Just wanna flag that. So it's just annoying. Like, if he went in there and solved this problem like a big boy, I wouldn't care.

Emily: Yeah, except Rand has never done a day's work of diplomacy in his life.

Sally: (laugh) That's a good point.

Emily: He has always thrown Aes Sedai at the problems that need to be solved with diplomacy.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: (clears throat) Which, for whatever – whatever reason, he doesn't seem to think is an option here. Um, and, like, to be fair, I probably wouldn't put the Aes Sedai in danger either.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, like, wouldn't just leave them to the Seanchan. That would be incredibly – uh, a – a huge risk.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, but, like, then he should have – this would have been an opportunity, if Rand was in a better place in the narrative, to be like, "I will go into this accepting that I don't know everything about negotiations; that is why I will bring advisors."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um. Get Merana back in the game. That's my bestie.

Sally: Ugh, Merana. That's my bestie. Um, yeah, so I also – I can see – again, narratively, where it's like, we're finally – like, again, it's another Icarus moment for Rand in his ta'veren-ness. Like, he's relied on it so much to solve problems. But, like Emily brought up, again, like, he's already had the problem where it's like he relied on it too much and it didn't work. So it's like, does Rand never learn a single lesson? I guess is –

Emily: Naur, he learns them all at once and becomes enlightened at the end of this book.

Sally: You're right, and then the slate is wiped clean. He's never done anything wrong; he's the universe's most perfect boy.

Emily: And everything's fine. He's Jesus. He atoned. Whatever.

Sally: Um, he atoned by being sad for a really long time and killing a bunch of people.

Emily: (laugh)

Sally: Um, that's what men are entitled to do.

Emily: You know, the way men do.

Sally: (laugh) That's how men deal with things. Um, the really unfortunate part of this, at the end, is just, like – it's not unexpected, so, like, calling it unfortunate, I guess, is a little extreme, but Tuon is straight-up like, "He has to be wiped off the face of the planet; he's way too powerful, way too scary. This is just, like, further fuel for my fire, my belief that channelers are dangerous and should be killed or enslaved." So that stinks. Just, like, some extra genocidal flavorings.

Emily: Yeah. Which is like, um, you know, it's not on Rand to make Tuon change her mind about channelers as a whole.

Sally: Sure.

Emily: Um, it's not on any individual – it's not on channelers, generally –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: To fix that sort of, um, bias. Um, that's completely on Tuon. But, like, what the point was, I think, in doing this from Tuon's point of view was to defamiliarize us from Rand and be like – for the nineteenth time in this book alone, be like, "Look how scary he is from the outside _"

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: "When you're not just wallowing in his sad little brain." And it's like, again, you're sort of just overstating the point here. And also, you really can't do that from Tuon's point of view when Tuon is patently also extremely evil.

Sally: Yeah. Yeah.

Emily: Like, it's one thing when Nynaeve is like, "Ooh, Rand is scary."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: When Tuon's like, "Oh my God, Rand is so scary," it's like, okay, bitch. (laugh)

Sally: Okay. Of course you think that.

Emily: Get scared, then. I don't care.

Sally: Yeah. Yeah, and also, like, good. The one person I support Rand intimidating is Tuon.

Emily: Yeah, a known terrorist.

Sally: Yeah, a known – mm. So the whole scene: disappointing. Zero stars. Well, maybe one star for the "no slavery" and also –

Emily: Yeah, that was funny.

Sally: "Mat is the best person you'll ever meet; don't be mean to him."

Emily: Then Tuon's like, "Okay, I'm the Empress now, and let's attack the White Tower." And the next little scene we cut to is of her sending off the people to do this raid. Again, it's going to

be an airborne raid. We get the information that besides just, like, normal soldiers and damane – damane and sul’dam on these flying beasts, they’re also specifically sending in five Bloodknives, which sounds like a thirteen-year-old boy’s D&D character class. Which are just highly specialized assassins who have special ring ter’angreal to make them super fast and strong.

Sally: Yeah. It’s also just, like, peak empire hypocrisy to be like, “No channeling at all, except for the weapons.”

Emily: Yeah, “Except for the ones we get to use.” Um, meanwhile, Mat finally talks to Verin.

Sally: Ooh.

Emily: Verin has an extremely long-winded talk to Mat; she’s like, “Here’s what happened; I was trying to go to a place, and the world kept conspiring against me, and eventually I accepted fate, and here I am, looking for you or Perrin, because I figured a ta’veren was pulling on me.” Mat’s like, “Cool story.” And Verin’s like, “So, if you want to get to Caemlyn, I’ll take you there for a price.” And he’s like, “Hate that. You know me. I hate having to pay any sort of price.” (laugh)

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: “I’m a cheap bastard.”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, and she’s like, “For my services, I am, A) going to warn you that you need to be careful because the Darkfriends are looking for you.” Notably, Verin says, um, “I just happened to get this from the Darkfriend, you know, information web.”

Sally: Yeah, that was so funny, when she’s like, “Someone gave this to me, *thinking I was a Darkfriend* –”

Emily: And Mat’s like, that’s fine, I won’t –

Sally: “Mistaking me for a Darkfriend.”

Emily: I won’t – I think she says “*thinking I was a Darkfriend*,” which allows – well. Allows her to – would allow her to – to not be lying, you know?

Sally: Yeah, yeah.

Emily: “They thought – correctly –”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: “That I was a Darkfriend.” But she can lie.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um.

Sally: So.

Emily: Just a funny thing. Um, but she's like, "First of all, watch your back, 'cause they're out to get ya, and it's big, bad news," and Mat's like, "Okay." She's like, "Second of all, here's this letter. I want you to open it in ten days and do what it says." And he's like, "I hate that. I hate having an invisible condition."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: You know? Which makes sense. Mat doesn't really have a great, um, trust relationship with other people in power, generally; he has no idea what Verin's going to ask of him; uh, but we also know that Mat is highly committed to keeping his word, so if he promises to do it, then –

Sally: He'll do it.

Emily: He'll do it, no matter how bad it is. So Verin finally talks him into being like, either you open it in ten days, or you just wait in Caemlyn thirty days without opening it. Now, pfft, Verin's – Verin's whole reasoning here is that what she hopes is that she will go take care of business elsewhere, then come back to Mat, relieve him of this burden, and have solved whatever problem she's going to ask Mat to solve on her own.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: The problem is that the next time we see Verin, she has already committed suicide.

Sally: Mm.

Emily: As in, given herself a slow-acting poison in order to have one last conversation with Egg.

Sally: Mm.

Emily: So it is unclear how exactly Verin expected to get out of that.

Sally: Sure.

Emily: Like, what her alternate gameplan was. It is also just unclear, as usual, why she isn't straightforward with Mat. Spoiler: What this letter says, basically, is, "I am expecting there to be an attack on Caemlyn via the Waygates; please defend Caemlyn." Why can't she just be like, "Hey, you know that Darkfriend underground I was just telling you about? I've also heard there's going to be an attack on Caemlyn. Please –"

Sally: Defend Caemlyn.

Emily: Defend it. You know, Mat takes her seriously about, um, watching his own back.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Like, when we catch up with him in the next book, he is very rigorously trying to protect himself from that. That's also 'cause the gholam is after him again, but.

Sally: (laugh) Your boyfriend's back.

Emily: Hey, bestie. But, like, he's not a total idiot. If Verin was like, "I think that there's –" Or she could've just been like, "Could you close the fucking Waygate?"

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: It's an – it's an insanely convoluted plot.

Sally: Yeah, why didn't she just tell him to close the Waygate?

Emily: Is what I'm saying, that just doesn't make sense, and it's all setting it up for this sort of dramatic irony of Mat never opening the letter because of course he would never open the letter, and so then Caemlyn gets attacked and nobody knows.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And it's just not very satisfying to read, you guys.

Sally: So he doesn't end up opening the letter.

Emily: He never opens the letter. And to his credit, he does leave the Band of the Red Hand in Caemlyn, um, to defend Caemlyn, unbeknownst to him, so there's – it's not like Caemlyn is completely undefended, but obviously he would have behaved differently if he opened the letter. So, like, sorry to spoil the next couple books for you guys –

Sally: I don't care.

Emily: But it's like, we have to talk about –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: The sort of logistics of this in order to be like – this is such a convoluted plot. The payoff isn't good. Um, character-wise, it doesn't really make any sense.

Sally: Yeah, also, like, do we need to attack Caemlyn?

Emily: Yeah, can Caemlyn catch a fucking break?

Sally: Yeah, like –

Emily: Why does it always have to be Caemlyn?

Sally: I don't want to be in that city anymore. That city has had nineteen thousand words of plot.

Emily: I know. So many.

Sally: Probably more than that. Um, so that's all very silly. I don't understand what the point of any of that is. Um, and if we're talking about dialogue that reads pretty weird, Verin reads like a puppet being controlled by a ventriloquist in this chapter, so.

Emily: So does Mat.

Sally: Yeah. Um. Well, that's all very silly and stupid. I wish it was something more exciting, like.

Emily: Yeah, like, it would have been so cool if it was something neat. I don't know what it would've been, but something neat.

Sally: Yeah, it also would've been exciting if Mat just, like, opened the letter. I get that Mat's like, "I don't want to be controlled anymore," but, like, I, who has, like, very minimal trickster points, would be like, "I have to know what's in that letter or I am going to absolutely go insane." So it also doesn't make a ton of sense to me that Mat wouldn't be like, "I at least have to read it." (laugh)

Emily: Yeah. Mat – like, the entire next book, Mat is like, "I want to know what's in the letter."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And doesn't open it. And I think it's meant to be like, look, character growth because he's not, I don't know, controlled by his curiosity or whatever? But it's like – it's – it's meant to be a perfect portrayal of dramatic irony, you know?

Sally: Sure.

Emily: Mat is experiencing, unexpected from Verin's point of view, character growth, which prevents him from doing this plot-relevant thing.

Sally: Sure.

Emily: Um, so a good thing for Mat ends up being a bad thing for other people.

Sally: Sure.

Emily: That's what it's meant to portray. But that sort of irony is – we've talked about this before – the Wheel of Time over-relies on dramatic irony –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: To the point that it is no longer satisfying.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Dramatic irony, like every other narrative tool, needs to be used in moderation and with intention.

Sally: Yeah, does he stay in Caemlyn for the thirty days?

Emily: Um. He must. I can't – I'm sorry, I can't recall. I know that he is actively in the Tower of Ghenjei when it gets attacked.

Sally: When it gets attacked. So it's just like – I don't know if I – again, we'll – we can hash this point out when I know for sure if he stays for the full thirty days, but it is also, like, much more

of a character point for Mat to be, like, committed to his word and to do the things he promises to do than for, like, any of the curiosity shit. You know, that's kind of, like, sprinkles on top.

Emily: Yeah, I think he must stay the thirty days –

Sally: Okay.

Emily: But it's clear from, like, Verin starts negotiating at fifty days that she just doesn't know when this will happen. I think it's supposed to be like Verin is gambling that Mat will just open this letter.

Sally: Sure.

Emily: But it's then – it's just wild. Because Verin has plenty of time to get her sort of, like, last will and testament in order. She has a very long conversation with Egg.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Um, she leaves a bunch of papers for Egg. She's also got all of these other letters as, like, failsafes. And so it's just sort of, like, wild that this isn't communicated to anyone else.

Sally: Yeah, yeah, you're – you nailed it on the head again this episode. This overreliance on dramatic irony is, like, exhausting. And it's a real – it's a real detriment to the narrative at this point. Um, not only because we've used it so much. But it's like, again, we are at the end of the series. This is the time for things to be being revealed to us, not being hidden from us. This is the time for us to, like, wrap things up, really dive in. Everyone is having the hard conversations. I dunno.

Emily: Yeah, I also think it's meant to represent Verin as the – our classic manipulative Aes Sedai figure. She's just unwilling to just tell people straightforwardly what is going on, and so she resorts to sort of this intricate and totally unwieldy system of letters and things like that to sort of, um, cover her ass. Which, um, is frustrating. I won't say it's out of character for Verin, because Verin has very much operated in the shadows as a manipulative figure.

Sally: Sure

Emily: She is, in many ways, our sort of most Aes Sedai-ish Aes Sedai.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, so I guess what's frustrating is that she doesn't get any character growth.

Sally: Yeah. And, like –

Emily: And also, you know, it's just another way for Robert Jordan to dunk on women. Be like, "How stupid."

Sally: Yeah, and that's what feels frustrating. Like, it – it – you're right, Verin is totally one of our, like, spider figures, um, in the shadows, spinning webs. But so far everything has made pretty logical sense, what she's doing.

Emily: Yeah, I think she's one of the best Aes Sedai because she's doing all this shit –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But also, she is likable despite all of that.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Because, yeah, she's doing things for logical reasons –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: To her, at least.

Sally: Yeah. Like, they always make sense and, um – so, I – yeah. This feels silly, but I guess it is in line with the “women are shit” thesis –

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: Of this series, so.

Emily: So anyway, we've gotta go turn on the AC or whatever.

Sally: Yeah, that's the end of that.

Emily: That's the end. Bummer. Bummer-ooski, eh?

Sally: Bummer is right. That is so weird.

Emily: Okay, next chapter there's some war crimes.

Sally: Nice.

Emily: Um, and we start – we will start the sort of climactic sequence of this book, which mostly takes place in the White Tower. So it'll be, uh, Rand-centric and Egg-centric.

Sally: Pfft, 'kay, that tracks for this book. So we're done with Mat for this book?

Emily: I believe we are done with Mat. I believe we are done with Perrin. I believe, for the rest of this book, the only narratives we will be following are Rand's and Egg's.

Sally: Okay. Well, I guess I have no choice but to accept.

Emily: (laugh) No choice.

Sally: Um.

Emily: Yeah, we signed on for this.

Sally: Uh, we did. Um, this was informed consent, so here we are.

Emily: Um, thanks everyone, for listening. Thanks for giving us a week off. Um –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: We might be taking a little more time off in the future, but, um – like, a couple months from now, but nothing to worry about in the next few weeks. Just, we have a lot going on in terms of moving apartments –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And a couple little, uh, weekend trips.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, but that is on the horizon, so until then, thanks for listening. Thank you, Glynna MacKenzie, for our theme song. Thanks to our patrons on Patreon and our followers on social media.

Sally: Yeah, I've been doing some, like, uh, auditing of our Patreon, for lack of a better word, to see, um, outstanding rewards that we haven't given to people yet, and I just wanted to say a massive "thank you" to anyone and everyone who has supported – who currently supports us or has supported us in the past. There's a lot of you that have given, um, some financial support to EHR, and it really matters. Obviously we're not a big enough podcast to get, like, sponsors or anything, so that's really the only, um, money we get for this, um, labor that we do.

Emily: Endeavor, yeah.

Sally: So thank you so much –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: And it's just very kind to know that you like it enough to send some love our way. So thank you.

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

Sally: Yeah. Um, also, of course, another massive "thank you" to our patrons who have basically been keeping Ed's vet bills afloat over the last couple of months. Um, Ed, if you don't know, is one of our cats, who has been experiencing some health problems. He had to get a procedure done earlier this week where they had to place a little IV on him –

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: Is what I'm assuming all this is.

Emily: Yeah, he was – he was getting biopsies, and so –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: He had to go under anesthesia for a bit.

Sally: Um, and in order – (laugh) I'm assuming it is in order to place the IV, they had to shave a little – the – a little section of his leg.

Emily: Just a little bit. Just – but they did it all the way around –

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: I think so they could, like, wrap a little –

Sally: Wrap a little bandage around him without, you know, getting stuck in the fur. So, like, he's got, like, maybe an inch at most of his, uh, left front leg just totally shaved.

Emily: Just naked.

Sally: But it's like – (laugh) He still has his, like, paw fur –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Up to a bit, and then it's naked, and then it's the rest of his leg. (laugh) And it looks like he's wearing a little Ugg boot. (laugh)

Emily: (laugh)

Sally: It's so funny. Ed also has his stomach still shaved –

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: 'Cause he had to get an, um, ultrasound, so he's just, like –

Emily: Ed cut a really incredible figure when we brought him home.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: He was so drugged. He couldn't walk in a straight line and was just sort of, like, prancing around everywhere, like super bouncy in a weird way?

Sally: (laugh) Yeah.

Emily: And then was also – had the indignity of being shaved in certain parts of his body, so. He is really going through it, but don't worry –

Sally: I know.

Emily: He's still a very happy guy.

Sally: He's always just been such a happy little guy, but oh my goodness does he look silly at the moment.

Emily: Ugh, love that little Ed.

Sally: I know. He's the cutest.

Emily: Okay, everyone. Thank you.

Sally: Goodbye!

Emily: Goodbye!