



Episode 265: Näeff

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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: Hey, this is Everybody Hates Rand. We're free of the car alarm sound outside now. And! Construction for once.

SALLY: Thank god.

EMILY: We're a Wheely Time podcast [laughs]. I'm Emily Juchau.

SALLY: And I'm Sally Goodger.

EMILY: And this is *Towers of Midnight*! And Egg? I read this yesterday and I've already forgotten everything that happens.

SALLY: It's Egg, Nynaeve, and Faile.

EMILY: Wow. Three...

SALLY: Girlbosses.

EMILY: Yeah, girlbosses. I was gonna say queens but that's too confusing in a series where there are literal queens.

SALLY: It's not derogatory enough.

EMILY: Yeah, and girlbosses really gets the job done. First, we have Egg in *tel'aran'rhiod* being like, "Wow, I was such an idiot *one year* ago when I started going into *tel'aran'rhiod*." And I'm like, "It cannot have been just one year ago."

SALLY: I know. It feels like we've been doing this for a decade.

EMILY: You started going into *tel'aran'rhiod* in Book 3. It's wild that everything between books three and twelve would take place in the span of a year. But then we get Faile's point of view and she's like, "It's our one-year anniversary." And I'm like, "So...it has only been one year."

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: It's too...no, you guys. No.

SALLY: This is what we're talking about when we say this series has a pacing problem.

EMILY: It really, really does.

SALLY: You're telling me it takes you fourteen books to get through, like, two years max?

EMILY: A single year?

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Rand's fought, like, nine Forsaken *in a year?!*

SALLY: Yeah, also, I always forget that, like, in Book 2 there's like a four-month time skip or whatever.

EMILY: Yeah, the only time skip of any length in the entire series happens in Book 2 and between Book 2 and 3.

SALLY: [laughs] So, when they're like, "This series takes place over like two years or whatever," I'm like, "Okay, but like six to eight months of that we just, like, don't get. So, it really is only like a year."

EMILY: Yeah, it's, like, a year. But – it's two years, but the first year is Books 1 and 2, and 2 is, like, three months.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: It's *wild*.

SALLY: It's ridiculous. No wonder Rand is having a psychotic break. He's been working non-stop for a year.

EMILY: Yeah, I'd be having an existential meltdown if the sheer amount of things that had happened to these characters had happened to me.

SALLY: In a year.

EMILY: In a year.

SALLY: Or over a lifetime [laughs].

EMILY: Do you know what happens to me in a year? Nothing. My life is so boring.

SALLY: The holidays.

EMILY: And I'm hanging on by a thread [laughs].

SALLY: Yeah, seriously. Are you freaking joking?

EMILY: What happens to me twice a year is Daylight Savings Time, and both those times I reach nearly nuking Graendal's hideout status.

SALLY: Daylight Savings –

EMILY: [laughs] So, I guess what I'm saying is we all have our limits.

SALLY: It's extremely rancid. All week I've just been like, "No."

EMILY: Pitch dark!

SALLY: Pitch dark.

EMILY: At 2pm!

SALLY: At 5pm. The cats are just so mad.

EMILY: I'm so mad. Who cares about these fuckers?

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: This is about *me*.

SALLY: They're feeding schedule – and by 'they're,' I also include Emily's feeding schedule.

EMILY: [laughs] My feeding schedule!! My food! Okay.

SALLY: Okay.

EMILY: Hey. Wow. Tybalt –

SALLY: Tybalt has really had a hard day.

EMILY: Tybalt does this thing where he gets in your lap and then when you try to exert your rights to your own body, like having your arms in any way, shape, or form near him. Tybalt, there's nowhere else for my arms to go. You're on my body.

SALLY: Then he'll just lunge at you.

EMILY: He's like, "This is the worst – you're threatening me, and I have to attack you."

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: It's castle doctrine. It's not castle doctrine if I am the castle, Tybalt. You evil bastard.

SALLY: [laughs] Why are you here? Why are you in England? [bad French accent] Mind your business!

EMILY: [bad French accent] Mind your business!

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: So, Egg's in *tel'aran'rhiod*. She's like, "What an ignorant slut I was [laughs] one year ago."

SALLY: I mean, that is relatable to thinking about yourself one year ago.

EMILY: I guess, yeah.

SALLY: Just being like, "Ugh, what was that idiot doing?"

EMILY: I guess when I was twenty-two that's how I felt.

SALLY: [whispers] I still feel that way [laughs].

EMILY: [laughs] But, uh, Egg is like, Egg meets with the Wise Ones in, um, the Stone of Tear. Just Amys and Bair, I guess. Um, and makes a whole big deal about how they need to treat her like she's the Amyrlin and then they just do, so not a big deal. And she's like, "I have bad news. Rand wants to break the seals on the Dark One's prison," and they're like, "Ugh, that's weird. We'll talk to him about that, because that's a no go." And she's like, "Great, that was easier than I thought." And they're like, "Yeah." And they talk about how maybe they should send Aes Sedai to the Wise Ones for apprenticeships. Egg is like, "Probably not full Aes Sedai. Accepted, maybe, though." And she also wants to get the Wise Ones trained at the White Tower because she has this whole dream plan of getting every channeling women locked in a relationship with one another. Which I have a hard time investing in, I guess, because the series ends before anything can come of it.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: So, it doesn't terribly matter to me.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: I guess it would matter to me if I was more invested in Egg as a person or the Aes Sedai as an institute, but I want to burn that sucker down, so don't terribly care. Egg then goes to meet with Nynaeve and once again is like, "I have to make sure that Nynaeve treats me like the Amyrlin." I feel like this, again, is something that has been going on for eons, Egg and Nynaeve's weird power struggle.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Um, and Egg is like, "I can't just ask Nynaeve to respect me, because she's a stupid woman that Robert Jordan wrote, so we can't clearly communicate. I have to do some sort of psychological tomfoolery. I have to wage war, Sun Tzu style, in order to get her to admit that maybe she needs to respect me for the good of us all." So, she does that. And also is like, "Nynaeve you need to come back to the White Tower to get tested." Or, like, not – to take the Oaths. And Nynaeve's like, "I really don't want to, because then that would mean leaving Rand with just Cadsuane as an Aes Sedai councilor." And Egg's like, "Eh, well, can't be helped." And yeah, it's, like, not that big of a deal. It's not like Rand really needs you, Nynaeve [laughs].

SALLY: Yeah, I actually get where she's coming from. I wouldn't want to leave Rand –

EMILY: Oh, for sure I wouldn't want to leave Rand with Cadsuane, but I guess my – teleportation is a thing. You can go there for an afternoon and be back. I don't know why they always act like going somewhere when they can teleport is a big deal.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Elayne also shows up and, um, Egg has this whole thing where, they're in the White Tower in *tel'aran'rhiod*, and she's, like, woven wards. Woven? Wo –

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: She's put up wards against eavesdropping and, like, a bell will ring if someone shows up, because she had already put up wards. And a bell rang and they went, thinking it was Elayne, but it, uh, Elayne hadn't gotten there yet, so they know someone is trying to eavesdrop on them. Anyway, they talk to Elayne just about how the two of them need to come swear on the Oath Rod. Eventually they agree Nynaeve will come. Will swear on the Oath Rod and will also take the Aes Sedai test. Elayne and Egg are like, "Are you sure you can do that? It's supposed to be super complicated and dangerous." And Nynaeve's like, "Meh."

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: [laughs] Nbd. I beat Moghedien twice and cleansed *saidin*. Not really, not really something I need to worry about.

SALLY: What's the bar exam to me, you know?

EMILY: What is the bar to me, a mean woman? Um, they decide Elayne can't take the test and, um, they're not sure about her swearing on the Oath Rod yet because she's pregnant, and they don't really resolve that except Egg is like, "I'll have someone look into it to see if anyone's ever done it while pregnant before."

SALLY: Yeah, Elayne says she doesn't want to do it in case there's any harm to the children, which I think is fair, but she's also, like, weirdly hesitant to tell them that she's struggling to channel while pregnant. I don't know. Their whole dynamic is really weird. All three of them.

EMILY: Yeah, they're all just like we – it's weird how they go from hugging each other and greeting each other like normal friends to being like, "We're not telling each other anything." And it's just not indicative of any sort of real friendship on any deep level. It's more like a political power struggle between the three of them.

SALLY: Yeah, exactly. Which I think is fair, I guess, since they haven't seen each other in so many books, I just...I don't know.

EMILY: I just wish that this wasn't what Robert Jordan is presenting as the apex of female friendship.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Um, yeah, Elayne's like, "It's – I'm starting to get better at channeling while pregnant. Like, it's starting to..." Instead of having morning sickness, you can or can't channel or something. That's the deal. She's like, "But since I'm two months pregnant now instead of one month, it's all getting better." And Egg's like, "That's great, because I need you to make more copies of the *ter'angreal* that gets people into *tel'aran'rhiod*." And Elayne's like, "Yeah, sure, but what happened to the ones you had?" Egg's like, "Oh, yeah. Big news. Everyone you knew [laughing] was Black Ajah. They were all Black Ajah." And starts to tell this story, but suddenly one of her wards pings, so she quickly goes outside and finds a Black Ajah lady who she shields. Then Alviarin also shows up and, long story short, Alviarin accidentally friendly fires the other Black Ajah lady, burns her to a crisp, but gets away. And Egg's like, "Dang it. I'm gonna have to deal with them eventually."

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: Then we get Nynaeve, which is confusing because Egg's like, "Come tomorrow," and apparently it's the next day but Nynaeve hasn't come yet. So, again. Teleportation. Is it real, or is it not?

SALLY: Yeah, it's also just this dumb hesitancy that Nynaeve has around, like, um, having Egg been in charge of her. And I was trying to think about this today and one, Emily is right. We are long past – this plot should have been over. Egg got raised in what? Book 6?

EMILY: Six.

SALLY: Okay. So, seven books ago. We're done. Like, I know they haven't interacted a ton, but Nynaeve should have resolved this on her own or something. But two, I was thinking about it and I was like if one of my friends was suddenly, like, the Young Pope, and I suddenly had to –

EMILY: [laughs] The president.

SALLY: Yeah, you know [laughs].

EMILY: Bend and kiss the ring.

SALLY: If Elise became the president of the United States [laughs].

EMILY: I'd be thrilled.

SALLY: It would be pretty funny. I'd be like – it would certainly be sort of strange to have to be, like, subordinate to them, but at the same time, like, I don't – I know this is me personally bringing my perspective to it, but I don't think I would have that hard of a time with it. Like, if it's my friend who I trust is doing a good job, I would be able to, like, work with them and also hopefully play the important role of making sure your friend doesn't, like, become corrupt when given power and stuff like that. You know? Like, I think Nynaeve is having a sort of strange reaction.

EMILY: Yeah, it would be weird.

SALLY: Sure!

EMILY: But, like, I'd be – I guess the problem is that Nynaeve and Egwene's relationship has always had an unnecessary power dynamic.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: In that Nynaeve was not just in an elder sister role, but in, like, a master-apprentice role that sort of got suborned when Egg then became an apprentice Aes Sedai rather than Nynaeve's apprentice.

SALLY: Sure.

EMILY: And it's, like, [sighs] that's weird, I guess, but we haven't really, um, like, – how do I say this? These characters – we didn't spend enough time with these two characters points of view in the first few books for it to be meaningful to us that their relationship dynamic has now

changed. In many ways, *Wheel of Time* characters are somewhat flat, you know? Like, their lived experience is very much stage directions.

SALLY: Yes.

EMILY: So, these sort of nuanced things that might make sense in deeper characters come across as extremely weird for these shallower characters.

SALLY: I think that's the perfect way to put it. Um, there's no depth of feeling beyond Egg shouldn't be in charge of me, and we're given no real, like, no meaningful – like you said, no meaningful explanation of why this is relevant to either of them. So, yeah. That's a good way to put it.

EMILY: Yeah, it's the same way with any set of relationships in any of these books. Like, whenever someone insists that they're romantically in love with a different character, I'm like, "There's nothing there."

SALLY: Prove it.

EMILY: You guys are saying that over and over again, but there's not feeling in it.

SALLY: No, you just happen to be a man and a woman on the screen together.

EMILY: Who were in proximity to each other.

SALLY: Therefore.

EMILY: Kind of seems to be the only requirement.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Um.

SALLY: Cough, cough Thom and Moiraine.

EMILY: [laughs]

SALLY: Cough, cough.

EMILY: Who were barely in proximity to each other.

SALLY: Who haven't even actually met.

EMILY: Yeah, it feels like.

SALLY: [laughs] Yeah, Nynaeve is walking through Tear with some random Asha' man.

EMILY: Named [pronouncing it exaggerated] Naeff.

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: [laughing] I don't know how to pronounce his name.

SALLY: Yeah, it's N-a-e-f-f.

EMILY: [exaggerated] Naeff! It's like knife but with an umlaut.

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: [laughs] Who, he, um, [laughs], Nynaeve tells us, um, has visual hallucinations that he's being followed by a Myrddraal, accompanied by sort of a pervasive sense of paranoia. Um, so symptoms of mental illness, quote unquote, "madness."

SALLY: The madness.

EMILY: The madness from the taint. And Nynaeve's like, "Yeah, it's so weird. After we cleansed *saidin*, everyone who was crazy didn't automatically go un-crazy, but they just, like, remained in stasis." So, if you were slightly crazy, having hallucinations that otherwise weren't bother you, that's how it stayed. And this is just such a wild thing to throw in there at this late stage of the game.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: We haven't been close with any Aes – excuse me, Asha'man, like, sense the cleansing of *saidin* we haven't seen anyone exhibiting, really, madness. If that makes sense? Like, who've we been with? Grady and Neald who have been overworked but fine. Um, Narishma, Flinn, also fine.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Kind of people in the Black Tower, but all weirdness over there seems more to do with Mazrim Taim being his –

SALLY: Weird cult self.

EMILY: Yeah, a cult leader. Keith Raniere.

SALLY: Ugh.

EMILY: I know [laughs].

SALLY: Yeah, Mazrim Taim's weird sex cult over there.

EMILY: They're playing volleyball.

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: [laughing]

SALLY: Nooooo!

EMILY: You guys need to watch *The Vow*. It's a really good documentary.

SALLY: The volleyball scenes are so upsetting to me.

EMILY: I know. It almost ruined volleyball for me. I have to cleanse my –

SALLY: Mazrim Taim in his little volleyball shorts.

EMILY: Shut up.

SALLY: [laughs] Sports glasses.

EMILY: [laughs] Um, like, the only person that has seemed to be going madder is Rand himself and that has always been very, like, distinguished from the taint, I guess. In a weird way, in that he's just our primary character and – I'm sure we've talked about this at length before – but just, like, the sheer amount of pressure he's under, the things he's going through in the space of a year, would drive someone crazy anyway, even if you weren't dealing with corrupt magic.

SALLY: Yeah, absolutely. And it always has seemed – you're right, it does seem – I don't really know how to put this together. It does seem quite distinct from the taint on *saidin*, like that seems to have played a role, especially in the earlier books in the way that it would make him sick, but as he progressed and became a more successful channeler, like, yes there's the, um, foundation of the taint, but it has always seemed more just like part of the prophecy and his fate as the Dragon to go mad.

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: Like, that's in addition or more relevant somehow.

EMILY: I really think it's just that as we've had more and more male channelers introduced to the, um, series, a very small percentage of them have gone mad on screen.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: I think we had that one guy who Rand then fucking...euthanized.

SALLY: Yeah, that was fucking brutal.

EMILY: Which was brutal and weird, but one small scene in a huge series.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: So, what I'm saying is that what this feels to me is like Brandon Sanderson was like, "Hey, what about the fucking guys who were going crazy?" And is now trying to, like, give us answers. Um, Nynaeve and [exaggerated] Naeff are [laughs] investigating a bubble of evil that cropped up in Tear, which turns out to be, like, you know, a few blocks radius where everything just turned to dust, including the people inside. So, they go in, realize there's nothing to be done for the people who were there, and they use, like, wind to channel all the dust into one spot and then set it on fire. Nynaeve then, uh, is talking to Naeff, Neff, whatever, and is like, "Let me," and decides just randomly, "I'm gonna try and heal him."

SALLY: Yeah, she's having a crisis of faith because – a crisis of faith isn't the right word. She's frustrated in the way Nynaeve always gets frustrated about, like, there's nobody for her to save. And I think she's actually having an interesting reaction to, like, all these bubbles of evil are happening and there's literally nothing we can do about it, and it's incredibly just, like, maddening.

EMILY: Yeah, it's a crisis of confidence. You're supposed to be this super powered nuke of a magical woman, but you're powerless against a bunch of people turning to dust.

SALLY: Yeah. Um, but you're right, it is sort of random for her to just, in the middle of the street – because Nah-eff, or whatever his name is, is like, "There are three Myrddraal following us."

EMILY: And Nynaeve's like, "Hmmm, let me check you out." So, she goes and does brain surgery in the middle of the street.

SALLY: Without his consent, by the way. I just think you guys should know that. She does not get his consent for this.

EMILY: [laughs] She's like, "This won't hurt," and, like, goes into his brain? And does, um, surgery that she's never done before. And while it makes sense that she would do this, considering that, like, in the last book we had her sort of little, um, dalliance with learning about Compulsion and how it gets put on the brain and then how it gets removed from the brain. Um, so, now she's had some experience doing mind magic. It does still come out of left field. It doesn't feel like Nynaeve has been preoccupied thinking about that.

SALLY: Yeah, it's not like she's studying neuroscience in her free time.

EMILY: Yeah. The thing about Nynaeve is that we're told constantly that she's a healer and she does heal people constantly, but she never thinks about it.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: It just seems to be something she does reflexively. Um, as opposed to um – I don't know, if I had a talent for something I'd want to study it. To learn more about it and to make sure I was doing the best that I could at it. But no, Nynaeve will just do brain surgery.

SALLY: In the street.

EMILY: In the street. And we get, like, a visual metaphor for, like, the taint is a thorny blackness in the brain, and she has to uproot all of the thorns and she has to do, like, a reverse weave. And then [exaggerated] Naeff is cured of being insane. So, that's it, guys. Mental illness: gone [laughs].

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: As we've said *many* times [laughs].

SALLY: It's okay, I'm pulling it together. I'm pulling it together!

EMILY: It's okay.

SALLY: I'll form the thoughts.

EMILY: The whole, like, doing magic drives men crazy is not at all, like, comparable to people just suffering mental illness.

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: You know, it's meant to be like there's mental illness and then there's your 'doing magic made me insane' side effect. Those are supposed to be two different things. But, as we've said before, the problem is that, in the series, we don't see people just struggling with mental illness.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: If there's any person who is acting at all outside of behavioral norms, it's either because aww they had a bad day [singing] you had a bad day! You're taking one down.

SALLY: [singing] Now you're mentally ill.

EMILY: [laughs]

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: [singing] And now you're depressed.

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: Or [laughs], or maybe it's the taint. Like with Rand, constantly.

SALLY: Right. Like, is he under incredible amounts of pressure in an impossible situation or has the magic made him crazy?

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: Who knows?

EMILY: Exactly. So, what that leaves us with is a book where we – those two things aren't distinguished, even though they should be clearly distinguished, so it makes what the authors are saying sound like, "Magic can cure mental illness probably."

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: But, like, we've, we've talked before about how for a fourteen-book series, some of the worldbuilding in this series is lacking.

SALLY: Just lacks an incredible amount of nuance.

EMILY: To say the least. We don't know about, like, disease, how does disease effect people when there's magical healing. Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.

SALLY: Yeah, I think, um, from, like, the, uh, perspective of disability politics, disability rhetoric, whenever you get into the realm of, quote unquote, "curing" anything, that's really, um, like shaky ground for anybody to stand on. Um, because, I'm sure we've talked about this on the podcast before, but just to get, like, very, very cut – very, very simplified, you know, disability 101 is that the medical model of disability is that it is something to be cured. The medical system exists to cure people, to fix things, to cure your illnesses, to do surgeries, whatever it takes to cure you. Whereas the, like, social model of disability is that disability is something that exist and it can't always be cured, so what we need to do is build a society that is accessible to everybody and everybody's specific needs. It isn't something to be cured, it's something to be celebrated and to be built around and – not even built around, built with, um, disability in mind. So, I think, uh, it's very...again, it's just very shaky ground in any text to try and put the medical model of disability into anything. Um, one because it's not a model of disability that many, I think, if any what you would call – I think if any disability activists, if they are sort of true to disability politics, would, you know, ascribe to the medical model of disability as, like, the number one thing we should be striving for. So, it's really unfortunate as a person with a disability or a mental illness or a chronic illness or anything to be reading fantasy and be like, "Oh, the number one thing people want for me and I should want for myself is to be cured." It's just, it feels really gross. Um, and yeah, it's just, like, shaking ground. Because I think there's something interesting with the idea of magic as a healing property and what are we doing with it. And there are some really amazing things that you can do with it. Like, Nynaeve has done incredible things with, you know, making people feel better and curing horrible injuries and saving peoples' lives. So, it's a curious thing to explore, but it's just, again, really.... really risky. And, if you want to explore it, is something that would require much more nuance, um, in many of the ways Emily was talking about, including showing multiple people across the spectrum. Or,

at the bare minimum, giving Naeff a choice as to whether or not this was something he wanted to have happen. So, just, just a big gamble that is not paying off for Robert Jordan and Brandon Sanderson in this instance, I would argue.

EMILY: Yeah, the problem, well one of the problems with the medical model of disability is that, like, en masse it lacks nuance.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Of course individuals can want whatever they want for their disability.

SALLY: Yes. Yes. Absolutely, good clarity, Emily.

EMILY: Because Naeff might just really want to have his madness eradicated completely. Or he might now. We'll never know because Nynaeve didn't ask, um, and, you know, that's not something that's investigated within the series. But, under the medical model of disability, everyone needs to be cured, which is a really short step away from disability – disabled people shouldn't exist.

SALLY: [whispers] Eugenics.

EMILY: Yeah, which is eugenics. So, that's where the problematic stuff comes in. And just this series is not inclined to give that space or nuance, either, we're just – it's something Nynaeve's doing and it's something that's more important to Nynaeve, an un-disabled character.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: So, yeah, Knife is just like, "This is great! It's a miracle!" Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.

SALLY: Yeah, and like you said. It might absolutely be something that he wants, because afterwards he says, "Oh my gosh, for the first time in years, I don't feel like I'm being watched." And that, like degree of, that, that, that's a horrible feeling to feel like you're being watched all the time. So, you're right. Maybe he would have wanted it, but that's something that every individual should get to decide for themselves, you know? Nynaeve shouldn't be running around – she does the same thing to Rand, like, three pages later. She's like, "Hold still, bitch."

EMILY: Yeah, Rand comes up like, "Hey, Nynaeve, what's up?" And I don't remember the bulk of their conversation.

SALLY: He's being weird.

EMILY: Yeah, she's like, "I have to go to the White Tower. Egg needs me to go do Aes Sedai stuff." And Rand's like, "Okay, just don't [whispers] become one of them. You're the – you're good because of your passion, Nynaeve. I wouldn't have you any other way." And she's like, "Thanks?" Question mark. Weird, but okay. She's like, "Let me touch your brain." [laughs]

SALLY: [laughs] He's like, "Uh."

EMILY: She doesn't even say that. She's like, "Let me touch you. This won't hurt." And he's like, "Um." Again, doesn't say what she's doing. She investigates and, again, we lack clarity because she investigates Rand's brain and is like, "There's the dark, thorny shit, but there's also *light* thorny shit, so what the fuck does that mean?" And I don't know. As far as I remember, we don't get any answers, but it just leaves us more in the dark about what Rand's mental state is. This seems to imply that enlightenment – exclamation point – Rand is another form of madness, which is very weird.

SALLY: Yeah, it's very strange to me, because I read it almost as like the enlightenment is, like, blocking it from getting too far in his brain.

EMILY: Yeah, or that.

SALLY: So, yeah, it's, like, is it another form – but, yeah, I think there's definitely, like, solid evidence for the reading that this is just another form of quote unquote "madness." That it's –

EMILY: Psychosis, basically.

SALLY: Yeah, psychosis. It's also altering his brain, one way or the other. I think that's actually probably the more accurate reading to what is going on. Because it is also in his brain. Like, the dark stuff didn't go away. It's not like you watched someone get a lobotomy or whatever –

EMILY: Yeah, and it's –

SALLY: Lobotomy's a bad thing to bring up, I'm sorry. That was dumb.

EMILY: [laughs] It just leaves it, like, disturbing, you know?

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Because it's, like, we want for Rand for him to be himself.

SALLY: Yes.

EMILY: Um, and Rand has expressed throughout the series, quite a few times, that he does not wish to suffer any of the effects of the taint on *saidin*. So, we know that about him and we know that he's worried – that's something he's worried about. So, it's disturbing for us to be like, wow, is it just that, you know, the psychosis won and isn't, um, is manifesting in such a way that everyone else is like, "Yeah, this is fine." That's a very deeply disturbing thought, like, could you be suffering from a psychosis that no one noticed because it seemed to be an improvement upon you.

SALLY: Ooh.

EMILY: That's deeply upsetting.

SALLY: Yeah, it – ugh. You're right that is so unwell. This is a tangential sort of thing, but it makes me think of so often what you hear when people are suffering from eating disorders is that their behavior gets reinforced because everyone around them is complimenting them for the results of their behavior.

EMILY: Right.

SALLY: Like, oh you look so good, you must be doing the right thing. That's so disturbing.

EMILY: It's absolutely a horror story.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: We just sort of skim away from that like, "Well. Weird!" And I'm like, "No! Hold up!"

SALLY: Wait.

EMILY: That's harrowing.

SALLY: That is harrow.

EMILY: I'm truly, truly upset by that, but [confused noises].

SALLY: Yeah, I think [laughs].

EMILY: UGH.

SALLY: Let's all just chew on that for a while. But I think –

EMILY: Let's all just have a moment of silence – let's all just have a moment of silence for the fact that Tybalt is sitting on my lap on his back, just legs...

SALLY: Sort of spread eagle.

EMILY: I'm gonna take a picture and it will be on the Instagram when we – ta da!

SALLY: Tybalt is also made up of black and white.

EMILY: Yeah, he's, he's the Aes Sedai symbol.

SALLY: I think the other thing of note here is that, um, Rand's brain becomes a visual representation of the Last Battle that's about to happen. You have light versus dark.

EMILY: Yeah, exactly.

SALLY: Fighting for the same space, which I feel like would have been a more apt metaphor like a book and a half ago.

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: Yeah, and now is just a disturbing, “Wait, I thought we fixed it?”

SALLY: A disturbing little set piece that we then just trot away from.

EMILY: Sweep under the rug.

SALLY: Yep.

EMILY: So, that’s that. We then get back to Egwene as she’s meeting with some of the Black Ajah hunters, basically just to talk about Mesaana. Um, she’s like, “Could she have defeated the Oath Rod?” They’re like, “Yes.” Brandon Sanderson gives us some clever reasons as to – to show us that he could.

SALLY: Thanks, Brandon.

EMILY: Thanks, Brandon. And they’re like, “What do we know about Mesaana.” And what we know about Mesaana is that she’s fucking boring and she’s a Forsaken for a dumb reason and she’s evil for a dumb reason and boy I hope we kill her soon. The end.

SALLY: Yeah, it was like she was a researcher and –

EMILY: Yeah! And I just don’t care about their villain backstories.

SALLY: I agree. It is so silly. They’re also – this is more –

EMILY: Okay, what?

SALLY: Tybalt is in boat pose. If any of you do yoga [laughing], I think that’s what it’s called.

EMILY: It sure is.

SALLY: [laughing] Look at his little feet.

EMILY: Oh, Tybalt. Why are you sitting like that? Is that comfortable?

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: Surely not, but you’re acting like it.

SALLY: You look like a little man, like an old man.

EMILY: Okay, bye [something hits the mic].

SALLY: Um, again, because we're coming back to this flatness, that we're being told constantly. Egg tells us that everybody in the world knows the Forsaken's, like, stats basically. Like, who they are, what they did.

EMILY: Everyone has Forsaken trading cards.

SALLY: Yeah! What their, like, biggest evil things were and I'm like, "I've literally never heard any of that." Like, you think someone would be – like, Rand didn't see Sammael and be like, "Sidebar, Sammael: notable accomplishments xyz. Stats." Like.

EMILY: Here are the war crimes he did. Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.

SALLY: Yeah. It's just like –

EMILY: And here's why I'm afraid of him. Blah, blah, blah, blah. Because he did this heinous thing. That would be slightly interesting. We got a little bit of that with Asmodean, I think.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Um, which mostly just made Asmodean funny, I think. They're like, "He left his mother to die," and then we see him and he's just strumming on his guitar.

SALLY: He's just capering around.

EMILY: [laughs] And we're like, "Okay. Dummy.

SALLY: Like some dude on a beach. [singing] And I will!

BOTH: [signing] And I will!

EMILY: And then with Mesaana, it's just, like, she got turned down for a job she wanted and had to become a teacher instead and she hated that. And yet, as a Forsaken she was still a teacher?

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And an administrator.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And is angry and hates that, so.

SALLY: But continues to do administrative work.

EMILY: Because she's good at it. And it's like, "Okay."

SALLY: Listen, sometimes you've just gotta pay the bills, girl.

EMILY: They're like, "She's like The Dark Amyrlin Seat." And everyone's like, "Oooh." And I'm like, "We're supposed to find this chilling, but I'm still stuck on the chilling fact from six pages ago that Rand [laughs], that Rand's brain is on fire."

SALLY: Yeah, that there are multiple forces fighting for real estate in Rand's brain and Nynaeve was just like, "Eh, well. Can't do anything about that."

EMILY: What're you supposed to do?

SALLY: What am I supposed to do? Brain surgery?

EMILY: Pobody's nerfect.

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: [laughs] So this is just setting up the confrontation for Mesaana. Not terribly relevant. Then we switch to Faile as she's walking around the camp.

SALLY: Administrating.

EMILY: Administrating. Just like Mesaana.

SALLY: [laughs] Faile's gonna go evil.

EMILY: Yeah, because that's what happens.

SALLY: That's what happens when you work in – I believe that.

EMILY: Admin work.

SALLY: That actually feels right a little bit.

EMILY: Yeah, well.

SALLY: Today I had to have an hour and half meeting about style guides, which I know is, like, your whole life, but I was like, "I'm going to McFucking lose it."

EMILY: Yeah, that's how I feel about doing the style guide.

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: And yet, it's my job.

SALLY: I don't care about what font you use.

EMILY: Yeah [laughs].

SALLY: It's just a font.

EMILY: Uhhh.

SALLY: Sorry, Faile's walking around. She's like my quartermaster – which I thought was just a ship thing, so that goes to show how dumb I am.

EMILY: [laughs]

SALLY: Um.

EMILY: It's, like, the guy in charge of supplies in the camp. And she's like, "Obviously, he's talking bribes. And he's done a really good job of covering his tracks and his books. So I just need to let him know subtly that I know that he's taking bribes so he'll just change his behavior to avoid me coming down hard on him." Which she does. And then she just waxes poetic about how grateful she is that her mom made her learn all this shit and goes to meet Perrin. Perrin's on the top of a hill where Faile told him to meet her. She comes and she's like, "I've got this picnic all set up for us, because it's our anniversary." Or it's not, like, literally their anniversary, I think. She's like, "In Sadaea, everyone in, like, early summer celebrates the year of marriage, regardless of the actual date upon which you got married."

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: So, it's not like Perrin forgot their anniversary, although maybe he did. I don't know.

SALLY: I'd believe it.

EMILY: Yeah. But she's like, "So I just want to celebrate that." And he's like, "Okay. Why are we having a picnic?" And she's like, "Because I asked Tam what he did for his anniversary and he and his wife went hiking." And I'm like...okay.

SALLY: She's like, "I asked Tam what they did in the Two Rivers and Tam answers with what he and Kari did."

EMILY: [laughs] His personal anecdote.

SALLY: And she's like, "Well, this is obviously a ritual."

EMILY: [laughs] This is what everyone in the Two Rivers does. And Perrin's like, "No, Tam and Kari are freaks who like hiking."

SALLY: Yeah. So, they're on a hill or whatever.

EMILY: So, they're having a nice picnic and they're just talking. Um, ahhhh, this scene is fine, I think. It's just they talk more about Perrin being a leader. Um, Faile is like, "You just need to chill out about it and accept that you want to be the Two Rivers' leader because you wouldn't want someone else to do it, and you need to acknowledge that know that there is a leader, there's never not going to be a leader."

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: "It's kind of a thing you can't undo. And you would be unhappy if someone else was doing it, so just accept that you want to do it and stop being so weird about it." And then they're talking about wolf shit. He's like, "It makes me feel bad because," and then tells her everything, tells her his life story [laughs]. Basically about the Whitecloaks and that encounter with them where he killed two of them and how he become wolf dude 101, and also Hopper.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: She's like, "Great. I want to tell you about Malden." And she does, except she leaves some shit out, which seems, like, weird for their truth fest, but whatever. She doesn't talk to him about Rolan, which seems like a significant portion of what happened.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Overall, it seems like – it's, like, a sweet intention. Perrin's like, "Great! Faile and I are solid again. It feels like a cathartic moment in our relationship." It is nice to see a married couple have a conversation that does not involve them yelling. My sense from this scene is that Brandon Sanderson is a little exasperated by the whole Saldaean yelling at each other thing too because he doesn't have Faile do that, and he basically has her behave like a normal person.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Which, again, is great for a Perrin and Faile scene. It does feel like a very, like, unequal scene where it's a lot of Perrin talking about his troubles and Faile just talking him through them and offering a lot of comfort. And then it's, like, she gives her story and Perrin's just, like, "Thanks. Glad you told me." Because it's, like, she didn't give the full story.

SALLY: Yeah, and I think that's why I left that feeling like, "Well, that's great for Perrin. Like, he got so much catharsis."

EMILY: Closure, yeah.

SALLY: But it feels to me, like, Faile, in large part, left out everything about Rolan because Perrin – it would make Perrin feel bad.

EMILY: [whispers] Yeah.

SALLY: Somehow, you know? Whether it's like he was like, "Oh no, this horrible thing happened to my wife," or "I hate that guy and I'm glad that I killed him." Just, like, it would be all about Perrin's reaction to her continued assault for months or whatever.

EMILY: Yeah, which, like, on one hand I get. Like, you don't want to have to talk about something that affected you deeply and just have to manage the other person's reaction to it. Like, that's just an added burden and an added upsetting thing. But A) she shouldn't have to do that. Like, Perrin should understand that he needs to have his feelings about it somewhere else and with someone else.

SALLY: Yes. Yes.

EMILY: Also, I guess, just, like, again we're missing that nuance. Like, even if we were told, like, Faile's deciding this because she doesn't want Perrin to have to navigate – she doesn't want to have to navigate Perrin's reaction to it, like, even if that was something that was made explicit. Then, the text should have been like, "That's a problem in their relationship that they also need to face."

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: But instead the problem is just like, "Mm. Yep. That's just a normal thing in a relationship, that you step lightly around your partner."

SALLY: That feels healthy.

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: Um [laughs].

EMILY: Whooo!

SALLY: Especially because a lot of what this chapter is setting up, this whole idea that Faile is running around, picking up pieces of camp administration so Perrin doesn't have to, that she's so grateful that her mother taught her all these skills about how to be a good wife. Like, yes, Faile learned a lot of really good things about how to be a good leader and how to be – you know, effectively manage a household and a bunch of supplies. Like, those are really helpful. Faile always presents is as, like, "This is what the wife does. This is my role as a wife." So, so much of this chapter, rolling all the way up to Perrin just constantly unloading all these insecurities onto her about how he feels like he's a bad leader and then him being able to have full catharsis and her being able to have, like, partial catharsis, just sets up this incredible inequality in their relationship that the chapter is telling us is correct.

EMILY: Yeah, that's the normal husband and wife thing, is for husband to get all of his needs met. Of course they end by having sex.

SALLY: Classic.

EMILY: And for the wife to have some of her needs unmet and/or to spend – for it to be just so satisfying to her that her husband's needs are met.

SALLY: Yes.

EMILY: That it's catharsis to her that he has catharsis.

SALLY: Yep.

EMILY: The whole world revolves around hubby.

SALLY: Mm-hmm. [gags]

EMILY: So, yeah, it's just, you know, classic gender dynamics in *The Wheel of Time*, but it's sad that's ongoing under Brandon Sanderson. I get that he couldn't, like, lead a revolution in the gender dynamics series.

SALLY: Brandon was like, "Starting first with the suffrage movement."

EMILY: [laughs] Yeah.

SALLY: [laughs] *Wheel of Time world*, gotta get that passed.

EMILY: [laughs] But it's a little upsetting to have him reinforce it.

SALLY: Yeah, I was just gonna say it's wild to me that Perrin and Faile have been married since Book 4. So, this is what? Book 13?

EMILY: Mm-mm.

SALLY: That's nine books they've been married. And from the beginning of their relationship up until now, the authors find some new and horrible way for Perrin and Faile to just, like, embody toxic monogamy and, like, shit gender dynamics and, like, men are from Mars women are from Venus, love languages shit constantly. Just, like, every single book there's a new way for them to do this.

EMILY: And they're like, "And this is the story of a happy marriage."

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And I'm like, "This is a horror story, like unto Rand's brain on fire shit." This is just endless – who needs, who needs *Scream*, who needs *Halloween*, who needs *Friday the 13th* when I have Perrin and Faile's marriage.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Truly upsetting.

SALLY: It is so upsetting. And Faile's just, like, this is so nice.

EMILY: This is so great. I love being married and I love caring for my husband.

SALLY: My whole personality is wife.

EMILY: Okay, that ends those three chapters. The next few chapters we will have the long awaited between Elayne and Mat. You know, more Elayne stuff as she meets with the Kin. We'll hop back to Perrin. We will get our first of several Ituralde points of view.

SALLY: Oh, slay.

EMILY: Faile will have a confrontation with Berelain, and, um, that's it. Um, thanks for listening everyone. Um, my mood is...sad. Mostly because I'm too tired to be mad.

SALLY: Yeah, I was wondering if we should add a new one, which is just: afraid.

EMILY: Afraid [laughs].

SALLY: [laughing] Afraid of Rand's brain.

EMILY: [laughing] Afraid of Rand's brain. Yeah, that's my primary emotion after this. What the fuck is up with Rand's brain?

SALLY: I'm gonna do it. We can do sad and afraid [laughs].

EMILY: Sad and afraid [laughs]. Um, thanks everyone for listening. Thanks, um, to Glynna MacKenzie for our theme song, thanks to our Patrons on Patreon, and our followers on social media.

SALLY: You guys are the best!

EMILY: Yeah, do you have a sign off?

SALLY: Oh, I do. I could quote one of nine thousand. I've had the most humiliating week of all time.

EMILY: Oh now. Oh no.

SALLY: Starting with, I was all the mall the other day, which is already humiliating enough to be in your late twenties and be at *the mall*.

EMILY: [laughs]

SALLY: [laughs] There are children everywhere and teenagers. Um, but as I was walking to where I was going, um, there was, like, I assume they were, like, teenagers. They looked like teenagers in front of me and they both had really cool jean jackets on that had been painted and it had like cool wolves and cool designs on them. So, I was, like, I don't know, I feel like if I've worked really hard, like, I like when people compliment when I work really hard on stuff. So, as I passed them I was like, "Hey, did you guys paint your jackets?" And, um, I apologize for assuming these genders, but the girl said, "Yeah!" like laughing really awkwardly. And I was like, "Oh, they're, like, really sick. Like, you did a really good job." And her boyfriend just starting laughing at me. And they walked away. And I was like, "Okay, I'll go throw myself off a balcony now."

EMILY: I'll say that was more humiliating for them and I really hope that they mature in such a way that five years from now they're lying awake thinking about that moment. Like, *WOW* I was an asshole.

SALLY: [laughing] I was just like, "Okay." I think the girl said, "Thank you." But I was just like —

EMILY: Probably she has a scrub boyfriend!

SALLY: Yeah. I was like, "Okay." And then the rest of the day I was like what did I do wrong? Like, were their jackets secretly hate symbols, was I caught on camera?

EMILY: *Punk'd*.

SALLY: Yeah, *Punk'd*. Do teens not use the word 'sick' anymore, were they laughing at my choice of lingo? Like, the whole day I was just like, "Damn."

EMILY: No one bullies like teens.

SALLY: I know! I was like — you're right, I hope they look back and are like, "That was fucking rude." That person was just trying to be nice to me.

EMILY: Yeah, I hope when they're, like, thirty years old they just, like, jolt awake and are like, "Oh, fuck."

SALLY: That was rude.

EMILY: That was rude. Like, I do sometimes. Everyone does shit as teens.

SALLY: Yeah, so if you're a teen – I don't know if any teens listen to this, if you're a teen, please don't bully people at the mall.

EMILY: [laughs] Yeah, you're already in your zone.

SALLY: Yeah, [laughs] I'm already in your territory.

EMILY: I'm already in the fucking thunderdome! Do you need to make it worse?

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: Do you need to curbstomp me while I'm down?

SALLY: Do you need to rub salt in my open wounds?

EMILY: [laughs] Teens.

SALLY: God!

EMILY: Alright, everyone, have a good week!

SALLY: [laughing] Bye!