



Episode 267: Mom Said It's My Turn at the Front of the Phalanx

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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: Welcome to Everybody Hates Rand, your friendly neighborhood *Wheel of Time* podcast. I'm Emily Juchau.

SALLY: And I'm Sally Goodger.

EMILY: And we just read two chapters today. So, that's nice, I guess.

SALLY: Mm-hmm!

EMILY: The first chapter in this section is just Nynaeve, um, and it is her going through the test to become an Aes Sedai.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And the best I can say of it, really, is that it's slightly less torture porny than most Robert Jordan magic woman rituals. Still, pretty torture porny, though.

SALLY: I guess I would say I only think it's slightly less because we don't really linger on any of the situations.

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: Like, I think it's quite egregious. Like, Nynaeve is naked.

EMILY: Most of the time, yeah.

SALLY: Because why the fuck wouldn't she be?

EMILY: No one's ever not naked when you're a woman doing a magic ritual. That would be stupid.

SALLY: Yeah, and at least I guess it's less of Nynaeve being tied up or spanked or threatened with sexual assault.

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: And more just being in, like, hazardous situations.

EMILY: Yeah, there's nothing overtly sexual about it or, like, yeah. Exactly like you said. There's no Trollocs or Myrddraal approaching to sexually assault her. Most of her bad situations seem to be gender neutral let's say.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Getting bitten by a lot of scary bugs or having to leave some children to die.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Or being in a battle where she can't assist at the front lines people she cares about. Yeah, so, that's great. So great, I guess, Brandon, [laughs] but also what a stupid test.

SALLY: Yeah. Um, we also start, like, immediately at the test. Like, we don't get any of Nynaeve's return to the White Tower, which kind of bummed me out, like, I was kind of interested to see how that played out.

EMILY: Oh, like the politics?

SALLY: Yeah, I just feel like we get so much Aes Sedai politics all the time. It was kind of a weird time to finally skip that.

EMILY: Yeah, what we get instead is like – Nynaeve's being escorted by some nady – some nady – some lady named Rosil, who, I swear to god, like, how are we still coming up with new Aes Sedai? You know? This chick's the new Mistress of Novices, and I'm like, "How the fuck have I never heard of her then?"

SALLY: Yeah. Couldn't we have picked one that I've already met?

EMILY: Can we just pick people I know? Anyway, Rosil is of the Yellow Ajah and Nynaeve is like, "She's surprisingly nice to me. Most Yellow Ajah hate my fucking guts for some stupid reason. But she's pretty chill and respects me and we have a nice working relationship. As opposed to everyone else who's doing the testing of me and they all hate my guts also."

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: And I'm like that's not a lot of – yeah, you're right. There's just not a lot of nuance in terms of how people see Nynaeve. I think it would be, I don't know, I think it would be one thing if she came back and met some resistance because people think, like, Egwene, favors her or something. Anything. But it's, like, I don't even know how long she's been here.

SALLY: Yeah, it's, like, impossible to tell.

EMILY: For all I know, she arrived thirty minutes ago.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: But she, yeah, we're just jumping right into the test. Which involves a *ter'angreal*, because of course it does. It's shaped like a vagina because of course it is.

SALLY: Like, aggressively like a vagina. It's just, like, a big oval on the floor.

EMILY: Tapered at either end.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Yeah. And they're like, "Here it is!" And I'm like, "How is no one – ?" [laughs]

SALLY: Like, the White Tower couldn't *get* any more yonic.

EMILY: Yeah, they're just like, "*Remember*, you must remember that we all have pussies, because transgender and intersex people don't exist in *The Wheel of Time*." And if they did, Robert Jordan would find some horrible way to torture or sexualize them. So.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Here we are. Anyway, the test is that you go through the *ter'angreal* and you get, like, some dumb memory wiping spell. So, it's like you go in, you're in a situation, you don't remember how, but then you have to go to a marked place and do the weave of the one hundred weaves. So, there's a hundred little situations that you have to get through and do. You're not allowed to channel except for the weave and all you remember is, "Okay, I need to do the fifty-sixth weave or whatever."

SALLY: Yeah, the rules are, like, you can't channel until you get to the star.

EMILY: You have to be, you have to walk calmly to everything.

SALLY: Yeah, you can't, like, rush and you're just supposed to go from one of the stars to another and not do anything else. And it's, like, really silly as Nynaeve will point out.

EMILY: And unlike the *ter'angreal* from the Accepted test, which just seems to draw, you know, it's situations from the person's psyche, you know, there's a sort of mind reading element there.

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: This one is, like, crafted by people. So, there's a hundred situations and, I don't know, eight or nine women, who are just standing around coming up with these.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Like, here's the new things to have Nynaeve get through, here's terrible shit. And it's, like, you can't get physically injured in there. Things that happen in there happen in real life. Um, and yeah, like, Sally said [laughs] we obviously don't go through all one hundred, because that would be insane.

SALLY: Yeah, thank god.

EMILY: We get, like, five and then Nynaeve just skims over them. They're just intercut. Like you said, the challenges are, like, you have to run away and not panic from something that's happening or you have to leave sick children to die, or you have to – quote “die,” we don't know what happens to them. You're in the Two Rivers and it's under attack and you have to walk away from everyone being under attack. Oh, and of course, at the end Lan shows up and is going to die and you have to choose between rescuing him and doing you're test.

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: Obviously because of who Nynaeve is as a person, she's bad [laughs] at the parameters of the test. She can do all the weaves, um, which is, like, the standardized testing element of this. They're kind of like, “You need to know how to act under pressure.” And I'm like that's exactly what the American school system says when they give you the stupidest fucking rote memorization test on the planet and people's ability to pass or fail has almost literally nothing to do with whether or not they have learned the content.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: So, great. And the weaves are useless, so it's dumb. And the other things Nynaeve, uh, the other things they're tested on are like, uh, can you act calm and collected and not show any emotion under pressure and, um, also can you choose a higher purpose instead of assisting, you know, whatever, whatever bad situation is right in front of you. And Nynaeve comes out of this test, um, all, like, beaten the fuck up.

SALLY: Yeah, like, fucking brutalized.

EMILY: Yeah. And everyone's like, "Quick, heal her. Oh my gosh! I can't believe this happened." One of them is – Saerin, I think? – is like, "I've never seen anything like that in my life!" And I'm like girl you were there. You were in that. You were part of that.

SALLY: I know, it's very interesting to me. It's, like, if there are approximately ten women doing approximately ten of the tests, do they, like, go – like do you do ten and then the next women does ten? Like, was Saerin the, like, really chill one at the beginning and then had to sit there and be like, "Lelaine just tried to kill this bitch with napalm."

EMILY: She's like, "Whaaaaat?"

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: I didn't know we were doing this!

SALLY: She's like – and it's, like, one of those things that feels, like, needlessly intense for Nynaeve. Like, Saerin is like, "There was absolutely no reason for that to be intense." And it seems like everyone just fucking hates Nynaeve for truly no reason.

EMILY: Yeah, everyone's just like, "Oooh, we just have to test her extra hard because we don't like that she got raised to an Aes Sedai before taking the test and we don't like that she is Egg's friend and we just don't like her, period, because she's a raging bitch."

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And I'm like, "Every woman in this room is a raging bitch, so, look in the mirror."

SALLY: Look in the giant vagina mirror on the floor.

EMILY: Mm-hmm. Robert Jordan doesn't know how to write women who aren't bitches. So. Or sluts. It's the bitch or slut –

SALLY: You're either a bitch of a slut.

EMILY: Yeah. Those are the two genders [laughs].

SALLY: Madonna-whore complex who?

EMILY: What?!

SALLY: It's the bitch-slut complex.

EMILY: [laughs] It would be so great to have that as the title of this episode, but iTunes would censor us [laughs].

SALLY: [laughing] iTunes would – we’ve been censored on iTunes – it’ll just put stars where it says ‘bitch’ and probably ‘slut.’ So do it.

EMILY: I’ve tried to put ‘slut’ in the fucking episode title, you guys.”

SALLY: iTunes is like [in an exaggerated valley girl voice, “That’s a bad word!”

EMILY: Oh my word!!

SALLY: Spotify doesn’t censor it, I don’t think. Um, Nynaeve gets healed.

EMILY: Oh, yeah. Nynaeve gets healed. Saerin is like, “This was an outrage!” And I’m like, “Okay, you participated, but whatever.”

SALLY: [laughs] It’s always funny when people participate in the horrors and then are like, [licks tongue] “That was pretty horrible.”

EMILY: “That was...a lot more horrible than I was expecting.” I’m like you could have done something.

SALLY: You could have ended it.

EMILY: Yeah, we don’t really see, outside Nynaeve’s perspective, obviously, but it’s, like, once you start can you not stop? Can we not pause to talk about this? Give Nynaeve a, like, scenario where she just has to walk a [laughs] really long way while we chat this out.

SALLY: This, like, you know, debrief.

EMILY: Okay, ladies.

SALLY: Roundtable.

EMILY: I think we’re getting a *little*, a little hateful here.

SALLY: Yeah, this feels a little malicious.

EMILY: Um, the ethics board will hear about this.

SALLY: Ugh, I wish the White Tower had an ethics board.

EMILY: God, I wish everyone in this series had an ethics board.

SALLY: [laughs] Rand just has an ethics board following him around.

EMILY: I wish Robert Jordan had an ethics board. That – you know what, that’s a really compelling thought. Rand – you know, your Chosen One War Criminal having an ethics board following you around. Just someone who’s documenting all the war crimes.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: That should have been Loial.

SALLY: Loial being like, “Mmm. The board’s gonna hear about that one, Rand.”

EMILY: Loial’s like, “The assignment has changed. I was going to write a biography, but it has now become a documentation.”

SALLY: Yeah. I’m documenting the war crimes you are committing and I’m taking it –

EMILY: After the last – assuming we all survive the Last Battle, there will be [laughs] Geneva Conventions.

SALLY: Yeah. Loial’s gonna use his Book of Translation to take these complaints directly to the Creator.

EMILY: Yeah. He’s gonna be like, “Um, hewwo? I would like some international laws please. Pwease.” Not that some people pay attention to international law.

SALLY: [sighs, screams softly]

EMILY: [laughs] So, Saerin’s like, “That was an outrage,” and then, um, Nynaeve immediately is like, “It was an outrage, but not for the reasons you think.” They’re like, “Obviously, you failed.” And Nynaeve’s like, “Why? It’s a stupid test. Stupid tests get stupid results.”

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Um, they’re like, “Well, you didn’t, you didn’t always walk like you were supposed to and stay calm.” And she’s like, “In the real world would I walk everywhere?”

SALLY: Yeah, if people were being burned.

EMILY: “If I’m being bombed?”

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: “Would I walk? What in the world.” And they’re like, “You didn’t stay calm under pressure.” And she’s like, “Um, I did all the weaves. And in that I was able to stay on task, but of course I diverted some attention to the things that required my attention. And, of course, if it was a choice between my husband dying and the White Tower, I would choose my husband because I’m not some weird freak.” [laughs]

SALLY: Yeah [laughs]. And before –

EMILY: And they're like, "Gasp!"

SALLY: Yeah, before, like, the board comes over to deliver their results, Egg, like, walks over serenely and bitchfully to be like, "I'm the one that put Lan in that test, the most traumatic one you had to go through. I just wanted you to know that I did that."

EMILY: [whispers] I did that. Tell Cersei it was me.

SALLY: Tell Cersei it was me. And she's like, "If I didn't do it, nobody would do it." Nynaeve is like, "Okay, Egg. Fuck your institution."

EMILY: Well, I'm glad. Yeah.

SALLY: Yeah, she's like, "I'm actually really glad you did that because it made me realize I don't get a fuck about this institution. Your institution is fucked and we should not all be so mindlessly devoted to the White Tower as a concept, versus being devoted to the people we're trying to help." And Egg is like, "[breathes in sharply] Don't say those things."

EMILY: Yeah, she's like, "I'm not here to be a worker bee to your queen bee. I am a person with agency and feelings."

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: "And sorry I have a lot of magic, but you're just gonna have to deal with that in a different way than basically paralyzing everyone with terror about what will happen to them if they disobey the White Tower." And Egg's like, "Not a popular opinion. Maybe don't spread that one around." And Nynaeve's like, filling out her propaganda campaign. She's like, "Sure! I won't spread it around [laughs]."

SALLY: She's got her ninety-two theses.

EMILY: She's like, "I'm not gonna nail anything to the door of the White Tower."

SALLY: Cough, cough.

EMILY: She's gonna nail Lan to the door of the White Tower.

SALLY: Mm-hmm. Be like, "Everyone else should have a husband."

EMILY: Yeah, look at how cool it is.

SALLY: But the board or directors, or whatever we want to call them, marches over and are like, “You failed.” And Nynaeve’s like, “No, I didn’t.” And they’re like, “Okay, well, I guess we have to vote on it.” And she passes by, like, one vote.

EMILY: First, they’re like, “We have to – you pass on the condition that you promise not to use balefire.”

SALLY: Yeah, she uses balefire in one of the tests.

EMILY: In the last one with Lan, because he’s being chased by Darkhounds. And she’s like, “I don’t know another way to beat Darkhounds.” And they’re like, “Well, you can’t use balefire except with approval.” And she’s like, “So, I’ve gotta fill out some paperwork if I’m getting attacked by Darkhounds? That’s great.”

SALLY: Yeah, yeah.

EMILY: She’s like, “No, I’m not going to do that.” And they’re like, “Fine, well, we’ll take a vote on it,” and she passes anyway by, like, one vote. They’re like, “Okay, well. Fan-freaking-tastic, bitch! You get to be an Aes Sedai for realsies. So, get your shawl and your ring at the door. Leave us a review on Yelp. See ya when we see ya.”

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: They’re like, “You need to spend the night in meditation. Nynaeve’s like, “I’m gonna pop off and do an errand real quick, but then, sure, I’ll come back and do your stupid meditation.” Um, and her errand is that she goes to, she travels to Myrelle, who apparently is camped outside the Black Tower.

SALLY: Yeah, that was wild to me too.

EMILY: Yeah, like, I know they were sending people to go. Like, Rand was like, “Hey, ladies, come get your Asha’man here.”

SALLY: Man for sale!

EMILY: MAN FOR SALE! I knew that was happening [laughs] but I didn’t know Myrelle went. Not that I need to know. It’s, like, fine. It’s just like well.

SALLY: I was like, “Oh, okay.”

EMILY: Okay. This bitch needs more Warders? Says who?

SALLY: She’s like, “I’ll take another.” And it’s, like, you have nine.

EMILY: You have *seven*. Girl.

SALLY: What are you doing?

EMILY: She's like, "I could handle seven more." And I'm like, "No, you can't."

SALLY: She's just got a fleet of them.

EMILY: [laughs] Here's my fleet of Warders.

SALLY: [laughs] She's building her own legion.

EMILY: They always walk in formation.

SALLY: Yeah [laughs].

EMILY: They're like backup dance – they're, like, Beyoncé's backup dancers.

SALLY: [laughing] I was gonna say they're always in a phalanx formation. With their little shields.

EMILY: And there's, like, a whole ritual about who gets to be the point of the phalanx.

SALLY: Yeah [laughs].

EMILY: It's, like, whoever fills their chore chart out first.

SALLY: Yeah, it's, like, a hierarchy thing. A point system.

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: A punch card system.

EMILY: [laughs]

SALLY: To get to the front of the phalanx.

EMILY: Yes. Mom!

SALLY: Mom!

EMILY: It's my turn!

SALLY: It's my turn at the front of the phalanx! [laughs]

EMILY: [laughs] Um, mom said it's my turn at the front of the phalanx.

SALLY: [laughs] Ah, so good.

EMILY: Okay, um.

SALLY: She demands that Myrelle give her Lan's bond and Myrelle's a real cunt about it.

EMILY: Yeah. She's like, "Pass it back." And Myrelle's like, "I don't think you can handle it." And Nynaeve's like...

SALLY: Nynaeve is so funny in this scene, though. Like Myrelle walks out in her slutty little nightgown and there's, like, a half naked man in the back of her tent, you know, like laying on a bearskin rug, basically.

EMILY: Yeah, it's like a tableau of, you know, sexual decadence, Robert Jordan style.

SALLY: And Nynave's like, "You're gonna give it to me, or I'm gonna come in there and whoop your ass." And Myrelle's like...

EMILY: She's like, "Guess what? I haven't taken the three oaths yet, which means [whispers] I can do violence. And I will."

SALLY: And I will.

EMILY: And Myrelle's like, "Fine!"

SALLY: Like, okay!

EMILY: Okay.

SALLY: I just think Nynaeve is so funny. Like, I'm so glad someone's finally threatening to just beat Myrelle up.

EMILY: Yeah, Nynaeve's canonically, like, five-foot-two and is just going around like, "I'm gonna rip your tongue out of your head if you don't give me my husband." And it's, like, hmm slay.

SALLY: Yeah, I think that's very powerful.

EMILY: Yeah, I think more magic women should be like –

SALLY: My husband!

EMILY: Forget about my magic. I have two hands.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And a great capacity for violence. And I'm like yeah. Slay, bitch.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Anyway, the other things about Nynaeve's test that I think are worth mentioning. The whole balefire thing is obviously, like, a larger issue.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And it will come back in *A Memory of Light*. Like, balefire is more or less this world's equivalent to nuclear weapons.

SALLY: Sure.

EMILY: Obviously no one should have the power to fire nuclear weapons without some sort of, well, basically no one should have the power to fire nuclear weapons. The cost is too great to the world.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Of course, people have not been operating, um, people don't have, like, evidence of that. Thus far in the series we have not really seen that balefire has a detrimental effect to anything. It kills bad guys, or the good guys in Rand's case, but it brings people back to life. It seems like a sweet power. Um, all we have is that a lot, a lot of people are saying don't do it.

SALLY: Yeah, including people from the Age of Legends. Like Asmodean being like. "I *have* seen the consequences of this and these are very bad." So, Asmodean playing our Cassandra figure there for a minute.

EMILY: Yeah, and when we get Forsaken flashbacks, like, when Graendal's whole house gets balefired and she's like, "Ugh! This is bad!"

SALLY: This is bad, like, what does she call it? The weird aftershock?

EMILY: The balescream, which sounds like a *Transformers* name.

SALLY: [laughs] BALESCREAM.

EMILY: BALESCREAM.

SALLY: Um.

EMILY: Yeah, so we have some –

SALLY: [coughs] Sorry.

EMILY: Some long ago, some ancient wisdom pertaining to that, but our – the way, it’s a very, like, I don’t think it’s good but it’s a very human trait to be like, “Well, I’ve never – this sign doesn’t apply to me because I can’t read. I’ve never seen balefire do anything bad. So, why not?” Which is Rand and Nynaeve’s general attitude about it. Um, luckily *A Memory of Light* will fulfill the premise that, yeah, balefire is bad and overusing it leads to bad shit in the world. Um, so I’m glad that will happen. Um, but it’s sad that we don’t get any wraparound to this moment, you know?

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: Of people being like, “Yeah, we really should sort of, like, legislate in a way the use of balefire. Like, no, you don’t want to fill out paperwork when you’re being attacked by Darkhounds, but [sputtering] there’s a board of ethics that needs to be informed.”

SALLY: Yeah, I was just about to say, I know, the board of ethics is like a, a jokey little bit we were doing, but the more I sit here the more I’m, like, there is actual, like, value to a concept as a whole being applied. Not only to *The Wheel of Time*, but, I think, to a lot of the real world as well as [clears throat] epic fantasy in particular, or fantasy that’s dealing with, like, large scale battles with large scale enemies. Um, this balefire instance is very stark in terms of well we have something, why wouldn’t we use it? Like, the evil is so great, and that itself is such a slippery statement that has been used so often. Um, uh, like nuclear power really is the only thing we can kind of compare balefire to. And just think of, like, the dropping of the A-bombs on Japan, um, [clears throat] even the, like, testing of nuclear bombs in the American west, in particular and the effects that it had on those communities. Like, the idea of using these weapons is the lesser of two evils, the evil generally being, like, communism.

EMILY: [laughs]

SALLY: [laughs] The other, the great quote unquote “evil.” Um, little history joke there for my friends. But, it, um, it’s such a slippery slope that I feel like I’ve not seen a text do a good job examining the fact it is so slippery versus leaning entirely very sort of, like, pro-militarization of having these weapons in the hands of our quote unquote “leaders” to use at will. And it just feels extremely disgusting.

EMILY: Yeah, it’s a very American, or rather a very Western thing to do, to set up this premise where some people, just at random, just the luck of the draw, some people have the power. You know, this isn’t a thing where you get elected to a position and then you get the nuclear codes, whatever. Which is still a flawed system, but –

SALLY: Yeah!

EMILY: [laughs] It’s at least slightly better than just randomly some people can nuke others. And the premise just being like well, that’s not a problem and, in fact, it’s desirable because these are the good guys. They would never misuse that! And, of course, they have every reason to use that because they’re fighting evil, and it’s, like, that’s such stark black and white thinking and, of

course, you also can't make that argument in *The Wheel of Time*, because our good guys are all-around pretty narsty people.

SALLY: Yeah, like, Rand did nuke an entire town last book.

EMILY: Yeah, hey, remember that? Because I feel like we're the only ones who do.

SALLY: Yeah, it really does just feel kind of like "oops!" Which is also, like, a very Western idea to using weapons of mass destruction. I mean, already it seems as though people are consuming images from Gaza and immediately forgetting that people – like, weapons of mass destruction and chemicals weapons are being used on civilians. They're just like, "Eh."

EMILY: Yeah, Rand's thinking was very like, "I could bomb a hospital because I think there's one terrorist hiding inside."

SALLY: Yes. Yeah.

EMILY: And that's not okay.

SALLY: It's not.

EMILY: But we're just so American because we're like, "Well, it's fine. Because he feels bad about it now." Or he did, for like a minute, and now he has to live his life again with his hot girlfriends. So, maybe for his mental health stop thinking about it.

SALLY: Maybe for his mental health stop thinking about it and also, like, don't you think it was worth the risk? Or bombing that entire fortress with possibility of Graendal? Is sort of the attitude that, um, the narrative takes by not having Rand face any of these consequences, like we've talked extensively about the fact that Rand should be put on some form of, you know, legal trial at bare minimum. And for the narrative to *not* do that is, again, just taking this justified stance of, "Well, it was, um, collateral damage," I think is – um, obviously we're pulling a lot from the situation in Gaza, because that's what's happening right now and I have heard many people specifically refer to the citizens of Gaza as collateral damage in this fight, which is disgusting, but that phrase has been used in many, many other situations where weapons of mass destruction were used with the change of winning, quote unquote, winning the day. And, um, you know, the world at large paying the consequence for that. Collateral damage.

EMILY: Yeah, my beef with this that Nynaeve's like, "Well, you're just gonna have to trust my judgement. And everyone's like, "Okay." There's no one being like, "Well, we physically can't stop Nynaeve from doing this, but we can set up some form of consequences if her judgement turns out to be wrong." Which, because she's human, it all too likely will be.

SALLY: Yeah, absolutely.

EMILY: [pained] There should be some form of consequence.

SALLY: Yeah, it is pretty wild for everyone – for Nynaeve – for them to be like, “You can’t do this,” and Nynaeve being like, “I am going to do this,” and them being like, “Ah, well, that’s the end of our power in this situation.”

EMILY: Okay, well, we tried.

SALLY: You could try a little harder.

EMILY: Yeah, you could do something, maybe.

SALLY: Even if she doesn’t agree, again, you are the governing magical body? And if you aren’t *governing* the use of magic, then –

EMILY: What are you doing?

SALLY: What are you here for?

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: What is the purpose of you?

EMILY: Insane. The other thing about Nynaeve’s test is that her hair gets cut.

SALLY: [groaning]

EMILY: Yeah, which is just a sort of gag-worthy trope, really, and I find that a lot of male creators, specifically, tend to use it to indicate that a woman has gone through a trauma or has gone through, like, a character shift. Often, it is used to refer to this woman is coming into her power, a la Sakura from *Naruto*. Anyway, and it’s just, like, silly. Your hair doesn’t indicate anything about you for one thing. For another thing, it’s just kind of a really subtle way, especially in this instance, for a woman to be degraded.

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: I believe we’ve talked about how women, women’s hair in a lot of cultures and in a lot of periods of history, is seen as, like, connected to her worth, her beauty, her, um, herself in a way. And so, to have something violently happen to it as to alleged collaborators throughout Europe during World War II is to, um, it’s, the sole purpose is degradation.

SALLY: Yeah, if you’re unfamiliar with that, um, bit of history, women who were found to be or accused of particularly sleeping with, um, Nazi soldiers, whether or not it was consensual, were often, like, dragged into the street and their heads forcibly shaved and it was extremely brutal and Emily is exactly right, the point is just to degrade them. And somehow dehumanize them, because, again, hair is so connected to womanhood in lots of ways for better or for worse it just is. And so, yeah, Nynaeve having it cut here is just a senseless way of degradation. It’s also masculinizing. Um, you’ll see a lot of, again, female characters cut their hair either to blend in

and quote unquote “cross-dress” like Mulan, um, therefore going through a symbolic masculinization or to elect a different role a la Arya Stark in *Game of Thrones*, you know, getting a boyish haircut. But it feels just, like, again a way to disconnect from the fact that she is a woman.

EMILY: Mm-hmm. And I fully believe in this instance, Brandon Sanderson, assuming it was his decision, meant it to be empowering.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Because Nynaeve always had her long braid and frequently has treated it as a crutch.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: A sort of emotional –

SALLY: Pulling on it.

EMILY: Crutches aren’t bad things in most cases. They help you.

SALLY: Yeah!

EMILY: Nynaeve pulling on her hair? There’s nothing wrong with that.

SALLY: It’s better than slapping someone.

EMILY: Yeah, which, if I were Nynaeve, I would be doing a lot more often.

SALLY: Yeah. No, that was the perfect bridge from masculinization to being, like, yeah, the point is more powerful when you don’t have long hair. And I feel like a lot of, like, in action movies or, like, male authors will be like, “It’s just not practical for a woman to have long hair.” And, well, buns and ponytails exist. [laughs] Like, you can still have long hair and, like, fight.

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: You don’t have to have, like a buzzcut, you know.

EMILY: Yeah, the only fighting hairstyle is a buzzcut. Or, if you’re a sexy woman, then loose hair.

SALLY: Loose hair. Which is not practical.

EMILY: Worse. So much worse!

SALLY: [laughs] Yeah.

EMILY: Tell me you've never had long hair without telling me.

SALLY: Like, my hair is barely shoulder length right now and the second it gets in my eyes I'm like, "Well, I'm – this is end for me."

EMILY: Yeah, it's, like, I can't cope with anything.

SALLY: Yeah, it's windy outside today and I'm like, "Well, can't leave the house."

EMILY: Yeah, so, it's just a silly, stupid thing that happens to Nynaeve. But we end with Nynaeve having Lan's bond to her and she's like, "Wow! I can tell he's still alliiiveeeee. Yippee!" And it's like well, I wish he wasn't. Speaking of [laughing] degrading women.

SALLY: Ugh.

EMILY: We then get a section, actually, first in the middle of this section is another Ituralde chapter. Ituralde has retreated from his, like, camp that he had set up in front of Maradon to now they are much closer to Maradon. We didn't mention this last time, but, uh, the prevailing issue is that Ituralde cannot use Maradon as a base of operations or to, like, build a defense inside, because the Saldaeans are like, "You're an Arad Domani army."

BOTH: You're invading.

EMILY: Yeah, we can't just let you in. Which, isn't really an issue I care to discuss. It is...yeah. Rand should have sent a Saldaean army and it's nice to see consequences of that, I guess. It is also a little silly, because the Domani are clearly fighting Trollocs. So, there's stupidity on both sides.

SALLY: Yeah, as per usual.

EMILY: Um, but this section involves, uh, more trauma. Everyone's upset. Ituralde ends up, like, actually fighting in the thick of things because his front lines buckle. Um, his horse falls on him. His leg breaks, but luckily the Saldaeans inside Maradon emerge and usher Ituralde and his men back inside. We meet a guy named Yoeli, who is like – Ituralde's like, "It took you such a long time." And Yoeli's like, "Yeah, I'll really pay for this day." And we'll find out later that there was infighting in Maradon about whether or not to assist the Domani army, so, yeah, big issues.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: But, that's it, Ituralde's stressed [laughs] is the main takeaway.

SALLY: Being calvary would be so scary. The idea of a horse falling on your leg, which happened and happens all the time.

EMILY: Yeah, Ituralde getting attacked is very King Theoden in the Battle in front of Minas Tirith. Okay, now [laughs] speaking of degrading women.

SALLY: Hmmm.

EMILY: We have a sequence with, um, Perrin and one of his councils with the rest of everyone. The people who had gone to Cairhien are reporting on what they found. There's not really anything terribly relevant in what they – like, nothing that we don't know. We're just seeing Perrin respond to stuff we already know. Um, Perrin does mention very casually, as they're talking about the Andor-Cairhien crown situation, he's like, "Well, Rand told me one of the Forsaken was in Andor, masquerading as this nobleman and seducing the queen and whatnot." Uh, Morgase, of course, is serving tea and, believe it or not, this is the first time that anyone has even mentioned in Morgase's presence that one of the Forsaken was Gaebril.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: So, she, of course, has a crisis. Like, drops her tea and is like, "I need to leave."

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: And everyone's like, "Okay. That was weird."

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: They're like, "What an odd woman." But they go on with their council. Perrin talks about, like, let's start sending people away because Grady and Neald are well enough to make gateways again. Tam's like, "I'm telling you no one wants to leave." And Perrin's like, "Well, some people have to want to leave." And Tam's like, "They'll wanna come back. They all know it's the Last Battle. They're just gonna maybe go see if anything is left at home and then want to join the army again." And Perrin's like, "I don't...[sighs] I choose not to see it."

SALLY: This sign doesn't apply to me because I can't read.

EMILY: Yeah, yet again. Everyone's like, "What's the Whitecloak situation?" And Perrin's like, "Well, they won't get out of our way, they won't return our people, they want to fight, so, guess we're fighting."

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And everyone's like, "Okay, sick." Um, but Perrin stays back, or Balwer calls Perrin to stay back. Balwer's like, "Yeah, I need to tell you something about the Whitecloaks." And Perrin's like, "Balwer, I don't want to hear about the Whitecloaks if it's not anything to do with this particular group." And, like, I get it. Balwer's annoying about his parasocial relationship with the Whitecloaks, but also, you can't just tell your spymaster, who you don't know is your spymaster because that's how oblivious you are 'maybe don't tell me about some things.'

SALLY: Yeaah.

EMILY: It's an insane thing to do.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Perrin's like, "I don't want to hear it." Balwer's like, "But..." And Perrin's like, "*No!*"

SALLY: Do you know what he was gonna tell him?

EMILY: What?

SALLY: Do you know what it was that he was gonna tell him?

EMILY: No. Probably not anything important.

SALLY: Still. The whole thing grates because it's, like, you pay him to get information for you.

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: Let him give you information.

EMILY: Yeah [laughs] duh.

SALLY: Don't be a bitch.

EMILY: Uh, Balwer gives Perrin a copy of the, like, wanted poster of his and Mat's faces and is like, "Hey, these are circulating amongst, you know, bad people, assassins." And Perrin's like, "Well, must be Tuesday. Someone's always wanting to assassinate me. Not really anything I can do about that." Balwer's like, "Okay, extremely cavalier, but what are you gonna do." Perrin's like [laughing], "Balwer, I've noticed there's something a little odd about you. I don't think you're really a secretary." And Balwer's like, "Oh, did you notice that? That's so strange."

SALLY: Yeah. Balwer's like, "Oh, worm?"

EMILY: Wild. And Perrin's like, "So, I just think, like, you're doing so much more. I should be paying you more." [laughs] And Balwer is like, "But I love – you never work a day in your life when you love what you do, my man!"

SALLY: Yeah, it's very silly.

EMILY: Yeah. And I'm like, "Balwer, take the money."

SALLY: Yeah, his one practical argument he's making is you don't want to pay me like I'm a spymaster because anyone looking at your books will know that I *am* your spymaster. So, it's like you could do an under the table thing.

EMILY: Yeah, so pay him off the books. Duh.

SALLY: Balwer's like, "No. It's fine to me that I make five dollars an hour."

EMILY: Balwer's like, "I actually love it because you're just the best leader that there ever has been. And I just love working for you, specifically." And I'm like, "You'd like working for Mat more."

SALLY: Oh! Are you joking? That would be amazing.

EMILY: I can list five people off the top of my head who you'd enjoy working for more. Thom [laughs].

SALLY: Thom, Mat, Ituralde.

EMILY: Yeah [laughs]. Ituralde. Bashere.

SALLY: Bashere.

EMILY: Rhuarc.

SALLY: Rhuarc. Berelain.

EMILY: Bere – ah, yeah. Berelain.

SALLY: Berelain would actually know what to do with the information you gave her.

EMILY: Berelain would be like, "Fuck yeah. This is incredible."

SALLY: Egg, you know?

EMILY: Mm. Yeah. Yeah, Balwer, you could, you – there's so many bigger dreams that you could be having, so it's just silly that – this scene is silly.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: We then flash over to Morgase who's having, like, some me time. Tallanvor comes up and is like, "I'm off to enlist in Illian because you don't love me." And she's like, "Oh, that's so weird. I thought I heard you say that you were never going to leave my side." And he's like, "Well, you've made it clear that I'll never get to fuck you, so devotion out the window." He's like, "[breathy] I'm still devoted to you body and soul, but my actual body will be in Illian."

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: And she's like, "Okay, well, today I found out that this guy I had a relationship with was actually brainwashing me, so that's a big deal." And he's like, "Yo, what the fuck?" [laughs]

SALLY: Well, he says something incredibly rude where he's like, "You still think about Gaebriel. Gaebriel's the one you love. I know you love him more than me." And she's like, "The one who was brainwashing and assaulting me?"

EMILY: Yeah, she's like –

SALLY: And he's like, "Ohh."

EMILY: She's like, "He gave me a lobotomy, so. Like a magical lobotomy." And he's like, "Oh, well you still love him more than me." And she's like, "Oh my fucking god."

SALLY: Tallanvor should be shot on sight.

EMILY: I know. If he were in front of me, I'd kill him. Like, way to make it all about you, bud.

SALLY: I know! That's just the thing! Is it like some sort of horrible men's rights happening in Andor that both Gawyn and Tallanvor are like this? Galad's got some weird stuff like this.

EMILY: Yeah, I'm telling you, it's the, like, chivalry complex, that Robert Jordan doesn't seem to be aware of, yet he's given to all his Andoran male characters.

SALLY: Rancid. It's so rancid! But she asks him not to – Oh, sorry. Go ahead.

EMILY: No, just the – she's like, she also is like, "It's so crazy, because I've never had anyone like you before. No one's ever just loved me for who I am. And it's so wild. I don't know what to do with that. I've never had a man just love me." And I'm like, "I truly don't know what to do with this."

SALLY: Girl. Yeah, she talks specifically about how much Tallanvor fought to get her out of Malden, the same way Perrin fought to get Faile out of Malden.

EMILY: She's like, "[intensely] They said you didn't rest."

SALLY: And she's like, "There's no way Taringail would have done this. Or Thom." And I'm like, "Well, Thom would have solved the problem first of all."

EMILY: Thom killed people for you.

SALLY: Yeah, so.

EMILY: Yeah, it's just wild, because she's like, "I'm putting all of my past relationships up to some weird standard of devotion that none of them could fulfill because they didn't know that they needed to." It's just a really weird retrospective way to think about all of your exes.

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: It's like, "Morgase, yes of course you have had some bad exes." If you count Gaebril, absolutely rancid, terrible. No. Taringail was an arranged marriage. It sounds like you guys didn't love each other and he tried – you know? Bad. But Thom and Gareth Bryne? I don't really like either of them as romantic figures, but I don't think it's really fair to be like, "Thom just wanted to, to win me." And I'm like, "How do you know that?"

SALLY: Yeah, and it's like that is not a claim that we can substantiate because we've never really been in Thom's head when he's thinking about Morgase except for him being like, "It sucks that she chased me out of Andor the way that she did."

EMILY: Yeah, all we've ever heard about Thom saying about Morgase is, like, "I loved her. She was a wonderful woman, so smart."

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: "It's a real shame that I had to get run out of Andor. Oh, and I killed Taringail for her." Eee!

SALLY: [whispers] Good.

EMILY: In a quote "hunting accident" unquote.

SALLY: I killed that bitch. Um.

EMILY: And Gareth Bryne has been very similar. He's like, "Well, she ran me out."

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: But, you know?

SALLY: It's just, like, absolutely zero critical thought from Morgase. Like, yes, everything she says about Gaebril slash Rahvin is totally fair and valid, and I think there's an argument to be made that that's coloring kind of her thoughts about past relationships in general. Taringail sounds like a piece of shit, but not necessarily any more so than your average arranged marriage where you didn't really like each other, you know, and he was kind of, technically running things because he was, it sounds like at that point, maybe a more experienced politician or had more allies or something, like, not really his fault.

EMILY: Yeah, typical political stuff.

SALLY: Yeah. And it's just, like, not very critical and also her not really understanding that, like, this one-sided devotion in their relationship is *bad*. Like, the set-up of, like, Queen's Guard and Queen being in a romantic relationship is founded on such a power imbalance. It sounds like that's what she's been wanting in her relationships, is not an equal at all.

EMILY: It's to be the one *in charge*.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Or, at least, to have the relationship started that way. To have him looking up to her. Which is ridiculous, because she says of Gareth Bryne, “To him, I was just a queen to be served,” and it’s like what is Tallanvor to you, then?

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: What are you to him?

SALLY: Yeah, like, it doesn’t make any sense.

EMILY: His, like, long term yearning for you was very much, like, a parasocial – sorry to abuse that term this episode, but I am using it seriously this time. Like, he had a crush on a celebrity from a distance.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: More or less. He didn’t know you.

SALLY: No.

EMILY: He still doesn’t know you, I don’t think, because you guys have never had a real conversation.

SALLY: Yeah, it’s all just about how bitchy he is about not being able to fuck you when he wants.

EMILY: So, Morgase and Tallanvor are an absolute trainwreck and the narrative is begging us to view them as this sort of pinnacle of romance. They’re like, “Yeah, Morgase is right about her exes.” Like, we’re not being asked to exercise any critical thought. We’re just supposed to be like this is Morgase professing her maybe interest in Tallanvor being like, “You know, with the clarity of know that Gaebriel lobotomized me, I can really think about everything clearly.” I don’t know. Morgase went through a terrible trauma with Gaebriel and we’re not trying to undermine that, but the narrative largely does not treat it as though it was a terrible trauma that would require Morgase to maybe be alone for a while?

SALLY: Oh, yeah, *Wheel of Time* would never suggest that a woman in particular take time alone in order to reflect on herself as a person outside of a romantic relationship.

EMILY: Single women in *Wheel of Time* are an endangered species, I swear to god.

SALLY: Yeah, they are also an *invasive* species that need to be eradicated.

EMILY: Eliminated, yeah.

SALLY: It's *foul*. Like [sighs].

EMILY: A woman without a Warder? What would we do?

SALLY: [groaning]

EMILY: They have to have Warders. It's selfish not to.

SALLY: Yeah, it's selfish not to have sex with me. Did you guys know that? I just think you should think about that.

EMILY: Crazy!

SALLY: You should think about that one. [sighs] Yeah, I'm really – that was sarcastic by the way, in case anyone, like, reads the transcript and is like, "She said what?"

EMILY: Yeah, I don't think we put little sarcasm tags [laughs].

SALLY: Yeah, we don't put tags on the transcripts because I never really think about it.

EMILY: If you're ever reading the transcript and you're like, "Oh, that was a pretty weird thing for them to say." Might have been sarcastic [laughs].

SALLY: Might have been sarcastic. Probably was.

EMILY: Okay, well, fucking wow.

SALLY: We did it.

EMILY: My mood after that –

SALLY: Oh, yeah.

EMILY: Is bad.

SALLY: Bad?

EMILY: I'm gonna be honest, I'm feeling like quitting the podcast [laughs].

SALLY: Okay, that's fair [unzipping a bag]. I kind of feel the same way.

EMILY: I don't feel anything positive about Morgase and Tallanvor and that's the not we ended on.

SALLY: Yeah, Nynaeve's test wasn't, like, great.

EMILY: Yeah, Nynaeve's test wasn't redemptive in any measure.

SALLY: I'm doing mostly purple, which is feeling like quitting the podcast, with a little bit of red, which is mad, because that's how I feel.

EMILY: Yeah, I, I do feel mad, too. But thank you [laughs] for bearing with us. Thank you to Glynna MacKenzie, I mean it. Thanks to our Patrons on Patreon and our followers on social media. Anything else?

SALLY: Follow us on social media if you feel so inclined.

EMILY: Yaasss. Like, subscribe.

SALLY: Yeah, *oh*, speaking of which. There are, like, some pretty mean reviews of the podcast that are kind of fore fronted on our iTunes review page [laughs].

EMILY: Oh.

SALLY: It was, like, a long time ago and people don't really review the podcast, which is totally fine, you don't have to review our podcast to, like, like it or listen to it, but if you feel so inclined to leave a review that isn't calling us incredibly dumb –

EMILY: Oh.

SALLY: That would just feel nice.

EMILY: Or getting after us for vocal fry.

SALLY: Yeah or getting after us for vocal fry or having bad audio quality, which is, like, yes. Everyone knows that EHR had bad audio quality in the beginning. Like, sorry.

EMILY: Still do sometimes.

SALLY: Sorry we don't have a professional podcast studio.

EMILY: Mm-hmm.

SALLY: You don't have to listen and you didn't have to leave this mean review. So, if you feel inclined to give us a nice review that would certainly be a kind thing to do, but definitely not necessary.

EMILY: Mm-hmm. I'm gonna share a sign-off.

SALLY: Yeah, please do! Emily mix it up. Get a little spicy.

EMILY: I'm gonna share a sign off. So, last Saturday night I was with my friends [laughs], Devin and Janet, friends of the podcast and we were watching the Dropout show *Gamechanger*, specifically an episode where everyone is competing for money by doing, like, terrible and degrading things.

SALLY: Sure.

EMILY: Like, the thing is they propose a degrading thing and say, "How much money would I have to give you to do this?" And they sort of argue back and forth. And one of the suggestions was 'put a notch in your eyebrow.' [laughs] And everyone on the show was like, "There's no way. That's the cringiest thing." I think it went finally for like \$5,000.

SALLY: Sure.

EMILY: And I, jokingly, was like, "I'd put a notch in my eyebrow right now for five dollars," [laughs].

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And Devin called my bluff and now I do have a notch in my eyebrow.

SALLY: I was noticing it, but I thought I was going crazy.

EMILY: Um, but now I have a notch in my eyebrow so add that to your fan art.

SALLY: I think it looks very cool. I've always wanted to put a notch in my eyebrow.

EMILY: You could do it. Devin and Janet did a pretty good job, I think.

SALLY: Yeah, I, um, just – I don't think I'm cool enough to pull off stuff like that.

EMILY: Well, I don't think it's cool anymore. I think it was cool for, like, five minutes back in 2015.

SALLY: Sure.

EMILY: So now it's kind of maybe, like, Hot Topic of me to do.

SALLY: Um, if it makes you feel better –

EMILY: But, luckily, I'm a very self-confident person, so [laughs].

SALLY: That's true! Emily is very self-confident and very cool, and if it makes you feel better, a lot of K-pop stars are putting notches in their eyebrows.

EMILY: Oh my god!

SALLY: So, and K-pop sets the trends as we all know.

EMILY: That's true, so it's gonna come back in right as I got one. Now the question becomes whether I keep it. Hmm.

SALLY: It looks pretty cool.

EMILY: Anyway, if you're listening to this, Janet, it looks pretty good.

SALLY: You did a good job, Janet. You did a really nice job.

EMILY: Yeah, she had to take over for Devin because he was laughing too hard and so was I. So [laughs].

SALLY: Yeah, Devin and Emily are not, like, the safest combo around sharp things, I would say.

EMILY: [laughs]

SALLY: They get a sort of, like, small boy egging each other on sort of vibe.

EMILY: Yeah, for Christmas this year, I'm gonna get Devin throwing knives.

SALLY: [mouth opens]

EMILY: [laughs]

SALLY: Okay. [laughing] Has this been Janet approved?

EMILY: Uh, no.

SALLY: Not that –

EMILY: If she hears this – Devin, I hope you're not listening.

SALLY: Not that your partner needs to approve things because Devin's a grown man and can control his own safety. That was a joke, obviously.

EMILY: Okay, everyone! Have a good week!

SALLY: Bye!