



Episode 271: The Most Man

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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 Glynn MacKenzie plays]

EMILY: Yeehaw! Back in the saddle.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: 2024.

SALLY: Um, okay. We're back. It's a new year.

EMILY: New year, new us [laughs]. That's not true. It was aspirational. Maybe I would –

SALLY: We're just entirely new people.

EMILY: I wish the books entirely new.

SALLY: [laughs] We opened it on 2024 and it was like –

EMILY: New Year, new 20 – new *Towers of Midnight*. And it was suddenly good.

SALLY: It was very interesting instead of...

EMILY: Just kind of sad.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Yeah. So, this is Everybody Hates Rand *still*. [laughs] Your friendly neighborhood *Wheel of Time* podcast. I'm Emily Juchau.

SALLY: And I'm Sally Goodger.

EMILY: Okay, um, *so*, we've got a, a Mat chapter wherein he finally defeats the *gholam*, so it's nice to finally have that plot point wrapped up.

SALLY: Check!

EMILY: It's of course like an edgy action sequence. A little silly.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: We're led to believe by the narration, um, that, like, it gets out of control but actually it's in control the entire time. Except Talmanes set a building on fire that he wasn't supposed to, I guess, but it all worked out fine in the end. The clever ruse that Mat concocts is to, is to have the, like, just sort of go on the offensive with the *gholam* in such a way that he goes into a gateway. You know, not like a regular gateway that goes from point a to point b but one of those skimming gateways that has the long ass falls through the abyss. Which seem to be a hallmark of fantasy literature. It seems like any time there's any sort of magical travel, there's also some sort of endless falling mechanism that *will* be used against a bad guy at some point.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: So, it's nice to sort of have that Chekov's Abyss.

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: [laughs] Fulfilled.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Mat makes use of the extra *ter'angreal* that Elayne has made. Talmanes' life seems to be briefly in danger, so for those of you keeping score there are a couple of homoerotic moments between – you know, like, intense eye contact between him and Mat.

SALLY: Yeah, they're communicating telepathically.

EMILY: Yeah. Um, but that's the *gholam* taken care of. I don't really have anything to say about that scene. I didn't find it particularly, um, it wasn't one of the better action sequences in this series, I'd say, especially when it comes to Mat. It's a little drawn out and silly at times.

SALLY: Yeah, and not to, like, belabor the point, but, um, Brandon is attempting to make use of unreliable narration in order to make this interesting. As Emily pointed out, like, Mat is, like, "Oh no! Talmanes!" to us, but...

EMILY: But the problem is Mat has no reason to be say, "Oh no! Talmanes!" to us.

SALLY: Yeah. Yeah.

EMILY: Like, there's unreliable narration. There are a few things where if Mat had just not commented on them, it would have been like, "Oh, this is happening not according to plan." That would have been the assumption because it seems to not be any sort of plan. Um, but by Mat going like, "*Oh no.*" Sort of –

SALLY: The lanterns!

EMILY: The lanterns! The *gholam*'s going after the lanterns! I didn't expect that! And it's like bestie [laughs].

SALLY: You're a master strategist. I would assume that you've expected everything. So, it just, um, the whole, which should be, like, climactic and fun and have these sort of monster showdown vibes that you see in such, like, fun horror and monster of the week type stuff, and it just felt kind of anticlimactic. I feel like I've been using that word a lot in regards to Brandon's writing and I'm sorry to Brandon, but even, like, the appearance of a gateway that he fell through, it took me a re-read of the pages to understand why – like when it appeared and what was going on. So.

EMILY: Yeah, um. Brandon's really good at, and capable of, writing action sequences when he's working in his own mythology, but it would be incredibly hard to wrap up something that someone else has set the stage for.

SALLY: Sure, sure, sure.

EMILY: Um, and yeah. This section just also has the usual hallmarks of another author trying their hand at Mat's character unsuccessfully. Mat has sort of a, like, hickish twang in his voice that he doesn't normally have. He swears in sort of weird ways.

SALLY: Right.

EMILY: Um, he seems a lot stupider than he is usually.

SALLY: Yes.

EMILY: And we've got the usual misogyny.

SALLY: So needless.

EMILY: Just throughout. Yeah. Um, but at least it's done, you know?

SALLY: At least it's done. The *gholam* is off the table as a baddie.

EMILY: Yeah. RIP, I guess. The *gholam* was an excellent villain for a while.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Very fun vampire slash Jack the Ripper amalgamation going on with it.

SALLY: Totally.

EMILY: That was very fun to have in pursuit of Mat, so [clicks tongue].

SALLY: You did good service.

EMILY: We salute you. For your narrative purpose. Now we switch back to Ituralde who is in Maradon.

SALLY: Good job. You did it.

EMILY: [laughs] I'm really struggling with it.

SALLY: You can call it Malden.

EMILY: Uh, he's still in Maradon. Not, not clear how long it's been since the last point of view we've had. It's actually unclear how long Ituralde has been in Maradon period. Because it's unclear how long it's been since Rand's enlightenment.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Which, um, you know, Rand was enlightened after he sent Ituralde to Maradon. The whole timeline thing is just confusing right now, especially because now we've caught up with the Perrin timeline, but not really? Perrin is caught up to the end of last book, so Perrin is still behind and it's like, "What's going on?"

SALLY: Yeah, it's really silly.

EMILY: Anyway, it feels like Ituralde's been there about three months [laughs].

SALLY: Yeah, poor guy.

EMILY: Um, and he's in a real state, but he is still using, like, urban guerilla warfare tactics on the monsters that are infiltrating the city. Still unclear where any civilians are, if there ever were any.

SALLY: Yeah, like, are there civilians in the Borderlands? Is anyone considered a civilian or are they all...soldiers?

EMILY: Yeah, like, are women and children out here fighting? [confused noise]

SALLY: Hard to say.

EMILY: Um, but Ituralde's men have obviously been cropped down severely. He says he's lost about seventy-five percent of the people he – like the little squad he started out with. We don't know about his full forces. Um, but at one point they're, like, moving buildings and they hear what they think is Trollocs, um, moving around outside, but then they realize that oh, it's actually soldiers, reinforcements. Bashere's men. So everyone's like, "Oh my gosh. Is Ituralde here?" And Ituralde's like, "Present."

SALLY: And they're like, "Oh my god!"

EMILY: They're like, "Oh my god, man! Dude what the fuck?"

SALLY: [laughs] Yeah, he's, like, covered in soot and blood.

EMILY: He's like Final Girl from –

SALLY: Yeah [laughs].

EMILY: He's like, if you guys haven't seen the comedy-horror movie *Ready or Not* it's one of the sort of more classic horror movies that have been coming out in the last five years about poor people versus rich people.

SALLY: Right.

EMILY: And it just has this iconic final girl shot at the end where she's just been in a wedding dress the entire movie.

SALLY: Amazing.

EMILY: And she's just absolutely drenched in blood.

SALLY: Amazing.

EMILY: [laughing] And she just starts smoking a cigarette.

SALLY: Oh my god. I wish Ituralde had a cigarette.

EMILY: Anyway, that's very Ituralde right now. He deserves a cigarette.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: But they take him to Bashere and Bashere's like, "UGH!"

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: [laughs] “Don’t you need like a nap or a shower or something?” and Ituralde’s like, “I’m...gucci, homie.”

SALLY: Yeah, who cares what happens to me now?

EMILY: Yeah, he’s like, “What’s going on? Where’s Yoeli?” And Bashere’s like, “[laughs] So dead. He’s just super dead. I have to say I was surprised to find him in charge and not the other guy who was my cousin.” And Ituralde’s like, “Sorry, dog, your cousin sucks. So.”

SALLY: Yeah, and Bashere’s like, “Yeah, I agree.”

EMILY: Bashere’s like, “Yeah, fair enough. Not my fave of family reunions.”

SALLY: “Not my favorite cousin.”

EMILY: “Not my favorite cousin, obviously.” And Ituralde’s like, “Also sorry, I guess.” Because this is the capital of Saldaea and your home. And Bashere’s like, “No, you held it real good. You did so, you did so good.”

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Kisses him on the mouth, like [laughs].

SALLY: I wish.

EMILY: He deserves.

SALLY: [softly, to the cat] Hi, honey.

EMILY: So, they’re, like, talking about next steps. What are we going to do now? Um, and they’re basically like, “All we can do is just retreat, completely abandon the city.” But as they’re talking about this there seems to – they realize that, they look out the window and there’s a *huge* bad guy army, even bigger than before – I know. Shocking – that is there suddenly, and they’re like, “Yeah, we just have to leave, like, immediately.”

SALLY: Right.

EMILY: There’s nothing we can do here. Then Rand walks in. Oh. [laughs] Ituralde’s like, “Gosh, I hope, I hope the Dragon Reborn made peace with the Seanchan.” And Rand’s like, “[dramatically] I have failed in that. Like a lot of things.” And I’m like, “Okay, drama queen.”

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: But also, title of your autobiography. I’m a Failure: the Rand al’Thor Story.

SALLY: I Didn’t Do Anything When I Was in Charge of the World.

EMILY: I did one good thing. Goodbye! Um, and of course Ituralde is like, “Oh my god, he’s in his weird era!”

SALLY: [laughs] Something’s wrong with him.

EMILY: He’s like, “Ugh. What’s he doing? What’s he on?” Rand’s like, “I’m so sorry, homie, that I just abandoned you here.” And Ituralde should have been like, “Yeah, you should be.”

SALLY: Yeah, fuck off.

EMILY: And slapped him in the face, but for some reason he’s like, “It’s fine.”

SALLY: It’s not fine.

EMILY: It’s not fine. Um, and um [laughs] Bashere’s like, “Can we please leave? We’re about to all be smushed and die.” And Rand’s like, “No! I won’t abandon this city to the Shadow” and he just, like, jumps through a gateway. Takes a couple of Maidens with him so at least he’s sort of keeping that promise. But he basically goes out to the frontlines and does some, like, sick channeling for, like, fully an hour.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: To just kill so many orcs [laughs].

SALLY: Tens of thousands is what Ituralde says.

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: Which doesn’t feel possible. Like, at some point you’d run out of, like, physical space for that amount of bodies.

EMILY: Ituralde’s like, “There’s a literal wall of bodies before him.” And I’m like, “This feels like such Hot Topic shit.” [laughs]

SALLY: [laughs] It is, like, a page and a half description of Rand channeling and it’s just, like, he’s doing the sweetest...

EMILY: He’s doing such sick moves and so many things. And it’s just, like, if he could do this...like what’s the point?

SALLY: [sadly] Yeah.

EMILY: You know? Like, after this we’ll, we’ll see the aftermath of this and Rand’s like, “I shouldn’t have done that because it got really close to an actual confrontation between me and The Dark One. And also I can’t let everyone just rely on me to do this.” And I’m like okay but if

you can do that – the only reason you can do that, that I’m aware of, is that you’re a very strong channeler and you have knowledge from the ancients or whatever. But then, why can’t every strong channeler just do similar things? We’ve seen, like, Nynaeve and Egwene, everyone, all the strong channelers are, like, good innovators.

SALLY: Right.

EMILY: Just because they don’t have all their special weaves specifically designed to kill Trollocs, which by the way, they should. Trollocs have been around for forever.

SALLY: Yeah, feels like ones the Aes Sedai should just, like, have on lock.

EMILY: They should be like, “Yeah, this is a thing we’re good at: killing Trollocs. But instead we just have basic fire bending.” And it’s like come on, come on, Robert.

SALLY: Come on, bestie.

EMILY: Yeah, so setting that aside it just seems like okay any strong channeler should just be able to take out an army of tens of thousands, which feels pretty overpowered. So it’s like what’s Rand doing differently here? We don’t know that he – he doesn’t seem to be using an *angreal* or a *s’angreal* of any kind here. It’s just him.

SALLY: Yeah. Yeah.

EMILY: which is just, like, a wild – we’re clearly trying to differentiate here between Bad Rand and Enlightened Rand, and I’m like but Bad Rand could only do the incredibly dark and evil things he did, like nuking a place, because he had that massive *s’angreal*.

SALLY: Right.

EMILY: So, it’s just like out of nowhere that he can just do all of this shit.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And it’s, like, okay so he’s tired afterward, but you still just killed *tens of thousands* of Trollocs.

SALLY: Right.

EMILY: This is just, this is introducing an issue that will be prevalent throughout most of *A Memory of Light*, which is just that physically there can’t be that many Trollocs.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: When you introduce a threat re: like Helm’s Deep in *Two Towers*, you know? And the threat is just, like, a big army, eventually the army has to run out at some point.

SALLY: Yeah. Um, like there are couple things here that are operating, or I think it's helpful to think of them as operating in, like, game mechanics. The first is the, like, autogenerating hoard of bad guys. Like, that is, like, a video game concept.

EMILY: They're respawning, yeah.

SALLY: [laughs] Yeah. Like, it's like the Trollocs are respawning and unless, um, like your world has generated previous knowledge that the monsters do respawn, like in *Percy Jackson* you never actually completely kill the monster, they go to the Underworld, it may take a long time, but they do respawn. That has not been introduced here, you know. As far as we know, Trollocs are mortal, so it is truly, like, how many? There has to be an end at some point. Again, this respawning *literal* hoard is not a functional book mechanic. And then, as we've talked about before several times, like, there's a problem with, like, the power scaling and the, like, leveling up system. Um, with Rand in particular this has always been a problem. He seems to just randomly jump, if we're using video game lingo, ten to twenty to fifty levels at a time and it doesn't make sense what that means, why that happens, where he is in terms of the world's power system. And it's just really frustrating because, like you're saying, if we're dealing with a magic system the rules should be applied across the board. And yes, Rand is – Rand. Rand is this savior and we're supposed to be like, "He's Enlightened," but why is enlightenment making him more powerful. That doesn't necessarily make sense. So, yeah, it's just like he's two hundred levels more powerful than everyone else and –

EMILY: Yeah, like from a game mechanics standpoint, again, typically in games you max out at a certain level.

SALLY: Yes, good point.

EMILY: Take D&D, you max out at level twenty, at which point you are functionally a demigod.

SALLY: Right.

EMILY: Maybe not kill tens of thousands of Trollocs levels of powerful, but quite powerful.

SALLY: Right.

EMILY: The only way you can make yourself – the only way you can make anything more powerful than a level twenty D&D character is to, like, give them lair actions, I don't know.

SALLY: Or give them magical items or things like that.

EMILY: Yeah, but what Brandon seems to be showing us here is that, like, the scale no longer even applies to Rand. He's no longer even a playable character who can max out at level twenty. He is now functionally a god.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And it's like okay, but then where are the stakes of the book now?

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: At that point – you can't just level someone up that high and then be like, “[laughs] And they still have problems?”

SALLY: They still have problems. We're still concerned about the Dark One being able to win.

EMILY: Yeah. We still think they might die, you know? Like *what*?

SALLY: How many more Trollocs can the Dark One have?

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: And, like...

EMILY: It is also a problem that as an entity the Dark One has never really been introduced in terms of threat levels.

SALLY: Yeah!

EMILY: He's just a sort of spooky voice in the dark thus far.

SALLY: I don't even know if he can channel? You know, like?

EMILY: What's he going to do?

SALLY: How does Rand fight an entity?

EMILY: Yeah, I don't know.

SALLY: In any, like, functional way. I don't know. I'll be curious to see how it plays out, but yeah. Yeah. Rand is the Dragon Reborn, but he is also just a person so he should max out at some point, right?

EMILY: Which, to be clear, is what is appealing about –

SALLY: Right!

EMILY: Rand as a character.

SALLY: Totally!

EMILY: Is to have an avatar for the Light does still have to be a person.

SALLY: Yeah. Human.

EMILY: In a person-shaped limited vessel.

SALLY: Yes.

EMILY: Anyway, Rand does some sick channeling.

SALLY: Great. And everyone's like, "Wow!"

EMILY: Everyone's like, "Whoa!" Also there's a scream and they go in to find – they go into the next room, which is where the former leaders of the city, Bashere's cousin, um, had been under house arrest. And it's, like, the wife jumped out the window and the dude clawed his own eyes out *Oedipus Rex* style.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And they're like, "The light! Oh my gosh, the light!" And they're like, "They weren't even facing the battlefield," but it's, like, you know, they're clearly Darkfriends having some sort of confrontation with Jesus moment [laughs].

SALLY: Yeah, it's like they had psychic damage as a result of the attack.

EMILY: Yeah, exorcism was happening here.

SALLY: Yeah, so.

EMILY: And everyone's like, "Oh, well, that answers the question of whether they were Darkfriends," which, as we said when it happened, wasn't really a question.

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: Um, then we switch to Min's point of view as Rand and the others get back. Min's like, "Oh my god, Rand!" [laughs] Blah, blah, blah.

SALLY: She's like a Labrador retriever. Rand could be gone for thirty seconds and it's like [laughing] she's never seen him before.

EMILY: She's like, "Oh my god! Let me lick your hand."

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Rand's like, "I can't do that again. It was bad." And then Min's like, "Oh, Rand just so you know, Cadsuane said she found someone?" And Rand's like, "Yeah, let's go to her. Ituralde

come along.” They go to Cadsuane, and it is revealed that Rand had realized that maybe the king of Arad Doman was alive and just had been snowed in somewhere. It’s an extremely wild –

SALLY: I thought he said the White Tower had him.

EMILY: He said the White Tower, like, went to retrieve him.

SALLY: Right.

EMILY: And then, like, it was before Traveling so they were going on foot, so they were just, like, snowed in in the mountains because of that long winter.

SALLY: Oh, okay. Gotcha.

EMILY: He’s like, “So, I just found him miraculously.”

SALLY: Sorry, I must not have read that closely [laughing]. Sorry, guys.

EMILY: Uh, it’s, like, wow truly a miracle. But Ituralde’s happy.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Meanwhile Min talks to Rand about her research. She’s like, “There’s something bothering me about *callandor*; um, that says ‘The blade will bind him by twain.’” And Rand’s like, “Yeah, I thought that referred to how you have to be in a circle with two women to use it.” And Min’s like, “I think it makes you vulnerable in some other way.” And Rand’s like, “Okay, maybe that will be how I die.” And she’s like, “You *won’t* die.” And he’s like, “Okay.”

SALLY: Might, though!

EMILY: Live in denial. [laughs] Please. But they’re all so happy because a king is alive.

SALLY: I don’t even know this guy’s name.

EMILY: I forgot, too, but at least it means that Rand can’t assign some rando to be in charge of Arad Doman.

SALLY: Imagine being this guy and you get snowed in, just by the, you know, the luck of the climate. A very bad winter.

EMILY: I mean, first you get kidnapped by a bunch of Aes Sedai.

SALLY: That’s true. First you get kidnapped. Then you get snowed in. Then you get taken to see the Dragon Reborn.

EMILY: Yeah, then you get introduced to the concept of teleportation just generally.

SALLY: [laughs] Yeah, that's true. You're like, "Okay?"

EMILY: So, you're going through some, like, eldritch horror shit. You get taken to Tear? Which is not your country by the meanest lady in the world.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And she's like, "By the way, in the last eight months or however it's been, your country has been fighting the Seanchan." He's like, "Who are the Seanchan?!"

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: Everyone has almost or have starved to death. There was a nuclear incident [laughs].

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: All your council has fled. One of the Forsaken was basically in charge. But now everything's fixed because the Dragon Reborn on his walk with Christ [laughs] has really come a long way. And by the way here's your fanboy, Ituralde, he is absolutely covered in blood.

SALLY: [laughs] Yeah just –

EMILY: And crying [laughs].

SALLY: A feral little gremlin crawling out of the ooze.

EMILY: [laughs]

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: And this guy's just like [screeches, laughs].

SALLY: Okay!

EMILY: So, anyway, he's my favorite ruler in this – [laughs].

SALLY: Yeah [laughs]. Just the sheer amount of stuff on his desk to deal with.

EMILY: Yeah. He's like, "I'm never gonna catch up" [laughs].

SALLY: There's no way.

EMILY: Yeah, but, you know, at least Darlin's [laughs] not in charge of your country or whatever.

SALLY: True. At least it hasn't been annexed by Tear or whatever.

EMILY: Or the Seanchan.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Anyway, we then switch over to a Siuan point of view, which, there's no reason for it to be a Siaun point of view. I just want to say that. Like, we have completely, at this point, disregarded the point of view hierarchy.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Like, Egwene and Nynaeve are both there and yet we're in Siuan's point of view.

SALLY: It's really strange. Like, the point of view hierarchy was one of the more interesting things about the beginning of the series and I think helped to maintain a little bit more...cohesiveness.

EMILY: Coherence.

SALLY: Yeah, coherence and cohesiveness as we move from different places. It's like we're getting what Egwene is thinking or what Nynaeve is thinking and for Siaun to just be like, "Man, this soup fucks."

EMILY: Man, this soup is so tasty. And then they're like, "It's because it's from Caemlyn." And in my head, I'm like, "Oh, because Mat's in Caemlyn?" That's been the sort of unspoken pattern up to this point, is that the boys make things not as bad.

SALLY: Right.

EMILY: Like, just earlier in that Mat point of view there had been kind of a throwaway line about how Mat had wine and it was good.

SALLY: Right.

EMILY: Not spoiled is sort of the implication as opposed to every other alcoholic beverage or beverage of any kind.

SALLY: Right.

EMILY: So, that's what I thought. Later, though, we'll find out that Caemlyn is under Rand's special shroud of lust for Elayne and his unborn children, so that's why it's protected.

SALLY: [laughing] It's so gross.

EMILY: And it's, again, like if he can just do that, why isn't he doing it everywhere?

SALLY: Why isn't he protecting the world? Why is only flowers blooming in Caemlyn?

EMILY: Yeah, only in Caemlyn. It's just, like, [laughs] if you couldn't hate Elayne any more, she's living in this paradise of beautiful roses and perfect food while around her, in literal Andor, outside of the city, people are just starving to death.

SALLY: [shudders] Yeah.

EMILY: And it's like, "Girl."

SALLY: She's just, like, the peak – everything about her is just, like, princess in her tower TM.

EMILY: Yeah, and it's, like, it would be one thing if Mat was having this influence over the city just on accident, you know? But the, like, intentionality of it is insane.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: [sighs] Anyway, yeah, Siaun's like, [laughs] "This soup fucking slaps."

SALLY: Yeah [laughing].

EMILY: What a way to start a chapter. I'm enthralled.

SALLY: [laughing]

EMILY: Tell me more about the soup. What kind is it?

SALLY: It – [laughs].

EMILY: Oh, it tells us! Broth and vegetables, bits of chicken. Delicious. It's chicken soup.

SALLY: She's having chicken soup for the soul.

EMILY: For the soul.

SALLY: Yeah. For the Aes Sedai soul.

EMILY: Anyway, this is just, like, a debriefing session of everything Nynaeve has been through with Rand in the last few books.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And they're like, "Well, good to know *saidin* is for real cleansed." And Egg is like, "Yeah, that makes is slightly less upsetting that Asha'man and Aes Sedai are bonding each other

now.” And she’s, like, still pissed that Asha’man are bond – like, bonded Aes Sedai against their will. Which, fair enough!

SALLY: Right.

EMILY: Um, and Nynaeve is also, fair enough, is like, “That was not Rand.” And Egg’s like, “Okay, well they’re still his responsibility.” And Nynaeve’s like, “Yeah, so it was also Aes Sedai who, you know, did naughty things by torturing him and kidnapping him, so are you going to claim responsibility for that?” And it’s just, like, yeah. These are all valid points, but, yeah, Egg maybe understand his perspective a little bit.

SALLY: Yeah, Egg also says no. She’s like, “That was Elaida. And I just inherited it.”

EMILY: Okay, well that was Mazrim Taim.

SALLY: Ye – and Rand just inherited it. So.

EMILY: Yeah, sometimes people do bad things when you’re in a leadership position that you can’t control.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: It’s like...and Sivan is like, “Clearly Nynaeve’s been spending too much time with Rand if she’s agreeing with his thought processes.” And it’s like no. It’s a good thing that she can sympathize with him. I don’t know why you guys aren’t, like, really taking this in. Except that you’re women in *The Wheel of Time*, so you’re idiots.

SALLY: Yeah, and it also is frustrating for, like, Sivan as an outside observer of Egg isn’t like, “It’s good for Egg to have advisors that disagree with her.”

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: Like, that’s really valuable for a leader.

EMILY: It’s great for Nynaeve to be like, “Hey, Egg? You’re being a little unreasonable about the whole thing.” But Sivan’s like, “She’s not enough of a yes man.” Anyway, they go over the plan to go into *tel’aran’rhiod* and confront Mesaana. Egwene is like, “I’m going to have a meeting with the Seanchan – with the Sea Folk Windfinders and the, um, Wise Ones to sort of, like, lure Mesaana out. Meanwhile you guys are also going to be doing something to, like, set up fortifications in *te’aran’rhiod* and then we’ll capture her.” And my main issue is like, “Okay, do the Windfinders know that they’re the bait for a trap?”

SALLY: It’s a good question.

EMILY: It would not seem so.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Um, but that's all they're talking about. And someone, uh Siuan is like, "Well, maybe since the Wise Ones are the best at *tel'aran'rhiod* ever, besides Perrin who's been training for two weeks."

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: [laughs] "Maybe they should, like, actually helps us." And Egwene is like, "Oh, that's a good idea." And it's like, "Girl? Why haven't you thought about it?" Speaking of Perrin, he's so good at dreams and nightmares now. You guys wouldn't believe it. He's like, "I should have started training earlier." And Hopper's like, "Okay."

SALLY: Yeah, probably.

EMILY: Yeah, I don't know what to tell you. [laughing] And then we go to –

SALLY: [laughing] It's, like, such a stupid little sequence.

EMILY: I know [laughs]. It's just to, like, let us know. Perrin's still training.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And then we go to [gags] Gawyn.

SALLY: Yeah, trigger warning. Content warning Gawyn.

EMILY: It's really a bad one.

[pause]

SALLY: [laughing] It really is a bad one.

EMILY: Maybe not the worst one –

SALLY: As if the baby –

EMILY: But quite bad.

SALLY: Baby blossoming rose garden is not heinous enough.

EMILY: Yeah. We also have Gawyn walking around. And he confronts – he, like, talks to Elayne and I don't know if Brandon or Robert or whoever are incapable of writing sibling relationships, but it's giving Folger's Christmas –

SALLY: [laughs loudly] Sorry, Ed [laughing].

EMILY: [laughs] You're my present this year. Like come on.

SALLY: Bleck! Ugh!

EMILY: The vibes are extremely weird between them.

SALLY: Yeah, I've never talked to my brother – either of my brothers – this way. And I never would.

EMILY: Yeah, they, like, do some bickering about some childhood incident and I'm, like, this is not how siblings talk to each other at all. Yeah, it sounds like weird flirting.

SALLY: [high pitched] You pushed me!

EMILY: It doesn't help that Gawyn keeps commenting, "Wow, I'm so in awe of Elayne and how regal she's becoming and beautiful and she's fucking in bloom." And I'm, like, could we stop referring to women as being in bloom.

SALLY: [whispers] It's so gross.

EMILY: It's disgusting. [in a thick British accent] It's disgustin'.

SALLY: [in the same accent] It's disgustin'. At one point he says, "She's beautiful just like our mother," and I'm like where do the complexes –

EMILY: Stop. Stop...stop.

SALLY: Start and end?

EMILY: If you – if this were your real brother you would be like, "Here's my sister." No comment on her appearance unless she has a zit on her nose. And then, that's all [laughs] –

SALLY: Yeah. "Here's my sister. She's pregnant."

EMILY: Yeah. End. And then you'd probably actually shove each other in the lake.

SALLY: Yeah, I'd be like, "I don't care if you're pregnant."

EMILY: Because the Cain instinct.

SALLY: It's real.

EMILY: It's real and strong. You gotta punch your siblings.

SALLY: Yeah. If I see them it's, like, game over. I don't care that we're all in our thirties.

EMILY: Anyway, [laughs] they're, like, talking and Gawyn's like, "Dang, it's so pretty here." And Elayne's like, [breathy voice] "It's because of Rand. He just loves me so much." And Gawyn's like [gags].

SALLY: Yeah. That's an appropriate sibling reaction.

EMILY: [laughs] Um, he's like, "Elayne how could you have fucked him and be bearing his children after he murdered our mother." And Elayne's like, "Well, he didn't murder our other."

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: "[laughs] By no metric is their evidence that he murdered our mother. And also, I trust him to have not murdered our mother. You met him once. I don't know why this beef with him." And Gawyn's like, "Hmm, well, I don't really believe you." And they go out, like, paddling on the lake or whatever. And Elayne's like, "Gawyn, what the fuck are you doing here?" And he's like, "Well, I live – I lived here." And she's like, "Okay, you weren't here when literally the only time anyone's ever needed you, so."

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: So, it's sort of too little too late. And he's like, "Well, I'm here now." And she's like, "Well, you don't even want to be."

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: "You don't want to have responsibilities here, you're just here. So, like, which is fine, you don't have to be the Prince of the Sword." And I'm like doesn't he, though?

SALLY: Yeah, I thought that was like – can you just not have one of those?

EMILY: I didn't think that was not – I thought that was nonnegotiable. And she's like, "And Birgitte's doing a fine job as the captain general." And I'm like, "Birgitte does not want to do that."

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Which, like, okay, if Gawyn doesn't want to do that either, fair enough. But then can we please find someone who does want to do it, and will, if not enjoy the job, work hard at it? Have ambitions? Whatever. Um, and Elayne's like, "You should be protecting Egg." And he's like, "Well, maybe I don't want her anymore." And Elayne's like, "Oh my god, Gawyn! What happened to you?" And it's like first of all, he's twenty-three. So if he was like, "I'm over Egg," that would be fine. You guys are so weird about your crushes. But, uh, he's like, "Egg and I are fighting because I don't want to just bow to all of her whims, just because she's the Amyrlin Seat and she doesn't need me anymore and that makes me mad." And Elayne's like, "Okay, well probably that's because she needs someone who will back her up and actually support her, you

know? Support, you might have heard of it. It doesn't involve doing the opposite of what she tells you to do."

SALLY: Yeah!

EMILY: And he's like, "Well, I don't want to do that." He says, "I'm not sure I can be that man." And she's like, "Oh, I thought if anyone could do it, it would be you." And I'm like, "Elayne, why? Why would you think that?"

SALLY: Why would you think that Gawyn was capable of like...

EMILY: Suborning himself to a woman? I know he grew up in this monarchy where women are in charge, but he has given no indication that he is every comfortable with women being in power.

SALLY: No!

EMILY: Um, he's like, "Well, getting back to stupid Rand, he's dangerous. You shouldn't be with him." She's like, "It's fine, *saidin's* cleansed. Why do you hate his guts so much?" and he's like, "[confused noises]" and she's like, "It's because you're fucking jealous of him." And Gawyn's like, [whispers] "No, I'm not." And she's like, "Yes, you are. Because while you were stuck in the snow, he was off conquering worlds. And maybe you should grow up about it." Um, and he's like, "[sighs]." And she's like, "And anyway, if you saw him are you going to duel him?" And he's like, "Yeah, probably." And she's like, "Okay, so if you kill him, you kill Jesus, are you good with that?" And he's like, [whispers] "I guess not." And, anyway, then she leaves. She's like, "Maybe just chill out and go back to Egg." [laughs] And then she leaves and Gawyn watches her go and then he, like, turns to the water and has this 'when will my reflection show' moment. And then he's like, "She's right at least about Rand. I need to stop hating him." And then he just does [laughs].

SALLY: And then – that's how it works, guys. You just flick it like a switch. Off.

EMILY: He's like, "Goodbye!" I mean, it doesn't work that way and it doesn't even work in this narrative. Like, Gawyn still sort of has beef with Rand throughout the next book and a half, it's just not, like, homicide level beef.

SALLY: [laughs] Sure.

EMILY: Especially because, spoiler alert, he will find out that Morgase is still alive.

SALLY: Right.

EMILY: So it's not like – he doesn't have a good excuse anymore to be mad. But it's just, like, such a, speaking of anticlimaxes. We've been building up this stupid non-rivalry between Gawyn and Rand, where Gawyn just hates Rand.

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: And if Gawyn can just shrug it off after a stern talking to from his sister, it's like, no offense, but what was the point?

SALLY: Yeah. What was the point?

EMILY: I mean, there was never a point. It was an incredibly stupid plot point, because the only way to satisfy it in any meaningful way would be – would be to have Gawyn actually confront Rand on some level.

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: But you cannot have Gawyn do that and still be a sane character.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Because Elayne's right. You would be killing Jesus.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: It would be incredibly wild for him to do that. So, there was just no satisfying conclusion possible for this, so Brandon's only way of handling it was just to be like, "Okay. I guess he'll get a reality check and for some reason he'll listen to it from Elayne instead of the millions of other people who have been telling him this.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Which is not my experience with siblings, again. [laughs] You ignore the things your siblings tell you about yourself.

SALLY: Yeah, my siblings have never been right.

EMILY: My siblings aren't wise.

SALLY: They don't know fuck all.

EMILY: They don't know shit about me. [flips page] Then Gawyn's walking and, oh, I think he's just staring at his dumb dagger that he found.

SALLY: Yeah, very classic man behavior.

EMILY: Yeah, he's just [vocalizing]. And one of the – remember there are still a bunch of freed *damane* and *sul'dam* walking around the palace at Caemlyn. One of the *damane*, who's sort of, like, being escorted around by an Aes Sedai, trying to be deprogrammed.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Notices it and is like, “Oh my gosh. How did you get that? It belongs to one of the Bloodknives, it is a Bloodknife.” And Gawyn’s trying to interrogate her and she sort of breaks down about it. Um, but the Aes Sedai – it’s not an Aes Sedai, excuse me, it’s one of the Kin. She’s like, “Well, we have other people here who might know about it, including one of the *sul’dam*. Who is trying to be one of the *damane*, and who we think is trying to, like, um, you know, maliciously comply with the whole *sul’dam-damane* thingy by learning how to channel bad stuff.”

SALLY: Yeah and, like, purposefully accidentally do some very bad and dangerous channeling to prove that she needs to be –

EMILY: Collared.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Yeah. Um, which, like, okay that seems like the subject of an entire other novel.

SALLY: Yeah. Fascinating.

EMILY: [laughs] It’s wild that it’s just introduced here. She comes up and is like, “Oh, yeah, I know about that shit, but I’ll only answer your questions if you agree to collar me.” And Gawyn’s like, “Sure.” And we’re like, “What?!”

SALLY: The Trakand family ethics...

EMILY: I know.

SALLY: ...course that Morgase was [laughing] running in this place.

EMILY: Nil. Nothing going on. Chidi Anagonye –

SALLY: [laughing]

EMILY: Would throw up and die [laughs].

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: If he stepped foot in here.

SALLY: [coughs, laughing] Who died and left Aristotle in charge of ethics?

EMILY: Plato! Um.

SALLY: [coughs]

EMILY: Yeah, it's like, "Dude, what?" It's just, like, wildly out of left field and Gawyn in his head isn't even like, "I'm just doing typical cop shit and lying to get the answers I want." Which isn't any better, but what's going on? And the Kind is like, "Uh. What?" And Gawyn's like, "Okay, I can't, like, legitimately do that, but I can talk to Elayne about it." And it's like okay. Hopefully Elayne is like, "No."

SALLY: Yeah. But.

EMILY: But what the fuck, dude?

SALLY: What if she said yes, Gawyn?

EMILY: Yeah. I mean. Elayne –

SALLY: Like he would care.

EMILY: Don't do that. Yeah! And he's just like, "That's fine with me because I don't care about the little people in my pursuit to be the world's dumbest detective."

SALLY: The world's Most Man. In the competition for most...

EMILY: Yeah, the most man. Like a superhero.

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: I am Most Man. Every *Marvel* superhero now. Most Man.

SALLY: Yeah, that's right.

EMILY: Anyway, she's like, "Yeah, it belongs to these assassins who are going to die because they're poisoned withing a few weeks or a month. But they're really good at they're job and they'll probably kill whoever their target is." And Gawyn's like, "They've just been killing random people." And they're like, "They're probably, you know, scoping the field." And Gawyn's like, "Oh, they must be after Egg." So, he's like, "I've gotta get back to Egg," when someone delivers a letter from Egg that's like actually from Silviana that's just like, "Hey, bitch boy, get back here."

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: We didn't give you permission to leave. And Gawyn's like, "I don't like this, so I'm not going to [laughs]..."

SALLY: So, I'm not going to go back to Egg, which I was I really want to do, because I got a letter that was like, "The Amyrlin was upset that you left," when all I want is for her to be upset that I left.

EMILY: Yeah! It's –

SALLY: [laughing]

EMILY: Grade school shit. What is happening? He – oh my god.

SALLY: Zero emotional intelligence and zero emotional regulation.

EMILY: And it's, like, Gawyn, this is important information that you have, which, you know, Egwene would probably take seriously coming from you, but instead you're handing it off to a messenger, who you don't know will get there. And also, like, not giving the full picture. He's like, "Tell Egwene it's some assassins and they can hide in the shadows." You know? It's just like –

SALLY: It's just ridiculous.

EMILY: I just can't imagine being in his place and if, like, someone I love was the target of assassins that I now knew a whole bunch more information about, I would just be like, "Yeah, I'm just gonna get on the phone and pass that to who – the secretary.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: I'd be like, "Okay, hey, teleportation is real. I'll just go there and deliver that myself."

SALLY: Yeah! And be like, "Hey, person I claim to love more than anything in the world, are you okay?"

EMILY: Which is, like, not an excuse for Silviana's bitchy letter.

SALLY: Right.

EMILY: But what's trying to happen here is, like, dramatic irony.

SALLY: Right.

EMILY: Like, oh, if only she hadn't been such a bitch in that letter to Gawyn, then of course he would have come back to save Egg's life and it's, like, that's not what dramatic irony is. Gawyn isn't making a mistake that any person would make here.

SALLY: Yeah, and, like, one, Silviana's letter, compared to a lot of what we've seen the Aes Sedai do is, like, low grade bitchy at best, you know?

EMILY: Yeah. Fairly mild.

SALLY: It's not like Cadsuane who would have come and literally spit in his face.

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: Like, it's definitely disrespectful, and the Aes Sedai do not treat men well, at all. That's not untrue.

EMILY: But Gawyn should be used to that.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: He should be used to filtering out the bitchiness and being like, "Okay, here's what's happening."

SALLY: Yeah, that was my other point. Gawyn's been working in the White Tower for at least a year now, serving directly under the orders of Aes Sedai. Like, if you've not built up a tolerance to that at bare minimum, what have you been doing? Do you have any skills?

EMILY: Killing people with swords. He is Most Man.

SALLY: [laughs] It must have been so hard for Gawyn to grow up with his desire to be Most Man and Galad was better at swords than him.

EMILY: [laughs] Galad was better at literally everything than him.

SALLY: [laughs] Yeah.

EMILY: Even critical thinking.

SALLY: [laughing]

EMILY: As hard as that is to believe.

SALLY: [laughs] Ugh.

EMILY: For the love. Well, whatever [laughs].

SALLY: Yeah. He's ridiculous. I can't believe he's a real character.

EMILY: Yeah, my mood is mad.

SALLY: Yeah, me too!

EMILY: So, our next section will involve Perrin finally going on his long-awaited mock trial. Um, and then we will start getting into this...climactic sequence two-thirds of the way through the book with Perrin and Egwene in *tel'aran'rhiod*. Um, but that's what's on the docket. Thank

you, everyone, for listening. Thanks to Glynna MacKenzie for our theme song and to our patrons on Patreon and our followers on social media.

SALLY: Yeah!

EMILY: Thanks for a great year in 2023 and another one.

SALLY: To another one!

EMILY: [in an accented voice] To another one in 2024.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Uh, do you have anything to add?

SALLY: Uh, no I don't think so. No updates, other updates, as far as I can remember.

EMILY: Do you have a sign off?

SALLY: I do. Um, uh, I, as you guys know, go to a lot of different doctors for various things and I had to go to one a couple of weeks ago where I walked into the waiting room – I am twenty-eight, soon to be twenty-nine [laughs] – and I walked into the waiting room and there were five other people who were all, bare minimum, eighty-three.

EMILY: [laughs]

SALLY: [laughing] Those were all of the other patients. It was me and a bunch of incredibly old people.

EMILY: A bunch of geriatrics.

SALLY: [laughs] Yeah. I was like, "Okay! Cool!"

EMILY: Great.

SALLY: Stellar.

EMILY: Great. Great.

SALLY: Love this for me and my failing body.

EMILY: [laughing]

SALLY: They – I don't mean this to be mean at all, but [laughing] they were *so old*, you guys. It's a miracle they made it to the appointment.

EMILY: Oh boy. Okay, goodbye everyone. Have a lovely week.

SALLY: Bye!

EMILY: Goodbye!