



Episode 286: R.I.P. Bulen
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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: Hi, this is Everybody Hates Rand, your friendly neighborhood Wheel of Time podcast. I'm Emily Juchau.

Sally: And I'm Sally Goodger.

Emily: (laugh) You okay?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: This week, we're talking about warfare. (laugh) You know it, you love it. It's – it's war.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Uh, that's not true. Um, tragically, we have to see it primarily through Lan's viewpoint, and he is absolutely not the right person to convey the horrors of war to us. Like, can't emphasize that enough. Every time Lan is, like, referencing the glory of dying in battle, I'm like, hey, I need you, if you feel so strongly about it, to go die in battle.

Sally: Well, he's absolutely trying his best.

Emily: Yeah, Lan still is suicidal. Still, that's not being taken care of.

Sally: Except by Agelmar, who very gently sort of bonks him on the head.

Emily: Agelmar finally is the first person –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: In Lan's life ever to tell him that it is selfish –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: To just sort of march toward his death, unheeding of what other people need from him.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: He's like, "Hey."

Sally: Yeah, "Your particular approach to your own death is –"

Emily: "Causing problems."

Sally: "Is causing problems, not only for you, but for the people who are reliant upon you." And, like, it's not as though, like – suicide is not inherently a selfish act.

Emily: No.

Sally: There are a lot of, uh, factors that would lead somebody to becoming suicidal. That's not what we're trying to say. Like, no blame on anybody who, um, takes that route. But in this particular instance, Lan is being incredibly selfish. His sort of suicidal ideation here that is dragging hundreds, if not thousands, of men into their death, because he keeps talking about how glorious battle is when he knows he has a position of influence over them.

Emily: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Sally: So, just to – I know that's not what you meant. I just wanted to clarify.

Emily: No, the – it is – we've talked a lot about Lan being suicidal or having a suicide ideation.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, and Lan is not ever actually portrayed by this book, except – by this series, excuse me – except perhaps in the immediate aftermath of Moiraine's death –

Sally: Mm.

Emily: To be suffering from any sort of mental illness.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: He's a very rational character. He, um, does not seem to be clinically depressed, shall we say. Lan's approach to his own death is less about, like, the act of wanting to end his life, the way we understand suicide in modern terms, as sort of a, like, you know, giving up on life and more as a, like, sort of classic old-timey knight, shogun, whatever, man wanting to embrace death as unto a lover, you know.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: It's a – it's a different thing, but in our modern parlance, suicide –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Suicidality is sort of the closest we can come.

Sally: Yeah, that's – that's true. I was, uh, probably a little off-base taking us in that direction because you're right, like, Lan is not presented as, uh, mentally ill, to the best of our knowledge. Um.

Emily: Yeah, it's possible Robert Jordan was trying to portray him as mentally ill, but Robert Jordan isn't good at portraying characters as anything. So.

Sally: Robert isn't – Robert Jordan isn't a good writer, question mark?

Emily: Robert Jordan isn't a good writer. He's sort of only good at – his only labels for character are man, parentheses, insufferable; woman, parentheses, insufferable.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Like, that's the only thing he's capable of portraying.

Sally: Yes. Um, so, yeah, we have – unfortunately, have to get the horrors of war through Lan's point of view. And Lan is obsessed with his own death, um, is maybe a better way of putting it.

He is obsessed with the idea of dying for Malkier because he has a complex about how he left Malkier, even though he was a baby.

Emily: When he was a month old!

Sally: (laugh) When he was an infant.

Emily: We have heard so much about Malkier while getting absolutely – Malkier is giving us nothing.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: We know nothing about, you know, the, like, glorious rise and fall of Malkier. It was referenced in the Eye of the World. And I believe, ever since then, it's just been like, “And that's Lan's tragic backstory. And everyone should know and acknowledge and understand that it is driving all of his actions.” And it's like, no. It's possible that we get more of it in, um –

Sally: New Spring?

Emily: New Spring, that prequel – yeah, prequel book that's about Lan and Moiraine that, um, you haven't read and I read about 15 years ago. So –

Sally: Right.

Emily: I have retained nothing from it. Um, but, like, in the series proper, we have not been given enough context about Malkier –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: To understand why, um, we should care about it.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: You know? It's like, yeah, okay. People – people caring about their homelands when they are in – experiencing a diaspora is very, like, understandable and empathetic. But Lan is our single point of view character. He is from the ruling class of Malkier.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Um, and that sort of – and also he's an unapproachable, unempathetic figure generally.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Which makes it really difficult to empathize with the, like, cause of Malkier. Maybe if you're a man, then that's different. I don't know. But. (laugh)

Sally: Yeah, sorry. I'm not a man, so I don't understand man feelings, which I know are very different.

Emily: I guess.

Sally: No, I'm right on board with you. Right on board with you. What, um, Lan – the Lan and Malkier story is playing so much on is, um, to literally use this phrase, the return of the king –

Emily: Mm-hmm, yeah.

Sally: You know, like, we're supposed to be like, “It's so triumphant.” And it's like, uh, that is not only a Lord of the Rings thing, it's sort of like a mythological archetype. But, um, one, this is not a myth or an archetype where we are – not a myth, where people are allowed to be archetypes.

I need Lan to –

Emily: Be a person.

Sally: Be a person and exhibit feelings. And, like, I think in particular, it is drawing up – a lot upon imagery from Lord of the Rings, the way modern-day fantasy so often does. And, like, that works so well in Lord of the Rings because Aragorn is a human being who we like.

Emily: Who loves horses!

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: He's a horse girl.

Sally: He's a horse girl. He loves his friends.

Emily: Yeah, he presses his head against the earth.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, yeah, that's so astute. We haven't really talked – I mean, we've mentioned it in passing every once in a while – but Eye of the World was so Lord of the Rings.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: It was just Lord of the Rings.

Sally: (laugh) Yeah, it's sort of, like, a different font.

Emily: Yeah, it's just Lord of the Rings in Helvetica –

Sally: Yeah. (laugh)

Emily: Instead of Times New Roman.

Sally: Sure.

Emily: Um, and Lan is therefore just meant to be Robert Jordan's copy and paste of Aragorn. And we, in our coverage of Eye of the World, talked a lot, I believe, about the ways in which Robert Jordan doing a one-to-one of Lord of the Rings fails and succeeds in some ways.

Um, but it – Lan is definitely one of the failure points.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Lan doesn't work as a Return of the King figure because unlike Aragorn, he doesn't have jack shit to return to.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Malkier is gone, literally.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: It has been overtaken by the Blight.

Sally: Yep.

Emily: It's not – there's not going to be some, like – you can come back to your country and resume – take the crown from the steward.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And come to the throne. You know? The people are scattered. We see no effort of Lan to try and reconnect with any of the people. He's just avoiding it.

Sally: He's incredibly rude to most of them.

Emily: Yeah, he's like, “Get the fuck away from me.” So, yeah, it's just not working. Lan doesn't work.

Sally: Yeah. I think that is the thesis of so much EHR coverage. Lan as a character does not work.

Emily: Absolutely doing nothing.

Sally: Um, I know he is a fan-favorite for some, so controversial take –

Emily: Is it?

Sally: But I think we're right.

Emily: You're wrong if you like Lan. Sorry. Actually, I'm not sorry. You're wrong. You need to address that in therapy. Why do you like Lan? Is it 'cause you're a man? Is it because you watched "Band of Brothers" at too young of an age?

Sally: Yeah, that'll get you.

Emily: Like – (laugh)

Sally: That war propaganda.

Emily: Is your favorite movie "The Godfather"? Then you have a problem.

Sally: Yeah. Yeah, I mean, that is in some – I mean, in a lot of ways, true. Like if you're looking at this archetype of destructive masculinity, uh, who is sort of a pinnacle of leadership, only in the fact that, like, leadership is a symbol to him – he is not actually doing anything to care for the people of his broken country. It's not like Lan dedicated his life to going around, helping the people of Malkier.

Emily: Getting their fucking welfare benefits in, you know?

Sally: Yeah. Yeah, like it's not like he's done anything to lead, to care for people. All he's doing for these people is literally leading them to their death and – in some sort of last-ditch effort to recreate a symbol. And it's really gross.

Emily: Yeah, recreate a feeling of glory.

Sally: Yeah, and it – so it's like – so, yeah, Emily's right. If Lan is your favorite character, I think you should look at what's going on with you.

Emily: Ironically enough, Lan in this very chapter, um, makes fun of Tenobia, the queen of Saldaea, for glorifying and having too much, like, idealization about warfare and battle.

Sally: Uh-huh.

Emily: And the – the sort of effect of that is just, like, "Well, she's a stupid woman who's never actually experienced any warfare. So she doesn't understand – she doesn't understand the epic highs and lows –"

Sally: (laugh) "Of high school football."

Emily: "Of high school football." How could she?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: She's just a woman.

Sally: She's just a woman.

Emily: “She doesn't understand the nuances of it the way I do. She's just heard too many stories.” And it's like, Lan, you are trying so hard to be one of the stories.

Sally: Yes.

Emily: And, like, he tries. Brandon Sanderson tries so hard to get Lan to grapple with that nuance and just absolutely tanks it. Fails.

Sally: Yeah. Fumbles it.

Emily: Um, Lan also, in this first section, finds that his buddy Bulen, which –

Sally: Bueller.

Emily: Sorry. Bulen. it's just such a stupid name. (laugh)

Sally: I know. Rest in peace.

Emily: RIP, my guy. Bulen, who's been, like, slavishly following him around for the last book and a half. Bulen has no personality, except that he's absolutely devoted to Lan.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, he died. Lan finds his body and does some CSI on it and is like, “Oh, he tried to cover the wound because he didn't want me to go into battle without him.” Lan has irresponsibly been going into battle more than he is supposed to.

Sally: More than is safe.

Emily: Um, and so that's on Lan. And B, he's like, “Bulen probably didn't want to, like, bother one of the channelers to heal him because he wants them to save their power.” Lan takes that noble sacrifice and immediately goes to Narishma and has him Travel – a much greater output of the One Power – Bulen's body to the top of Mount Everest. (laugh) So he can be preserved.

Sally: This is just like in Artemis Fowl. (laugh)

Emily: (laugh) Okay, you're right, you got me. Everyone knows where they were when Butler died and Artemis Fowl cryogenically froze him. Why haven't we talked about Artemis Fowl on We Don't Watch Outlander? It's the best series of books.

Sally: It really is so good.

Emily: That moment wrecked me for every – for all of time.

Sally: I know. Butler and Artemis are such a good relationship. I love you, Butler.

Emily: I love you, Butler; I love you, Artemis Fowl. That moment is about the sacredness of friendship and love and life.

Sally: Yes.

Emily: Whereas Lan putting – Lan yeeting Bulen onto the top of the mountain is once again about glorifying death.

Sally: You're right. I'm sorry to bring such a – sacred text into this.

Emily: How dare you bring our holy scripture, Artemis Fowl? (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) But it is so stupid. They were doing this, and I was like –

Emily: I was, like, weeping with laughter.

Sally: It's so silly, and, like, all of this is just, like, a perversion of what it means to, like, honor the dead.

Emily: Yeah, it is so incredibly important in – for soldiers –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Who are experiencing war to appropriately honor the dead.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Um, it's important for, like, keeping up their sense of community and morale and also for preventing, um, sort of psychological repercussions after the battle if people are able to grapple with death and loss and grief –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: As it is happening rather than just shoving it aside and moving forward.

Sally: Yes.

Emily: That is not what Lan is doing.

Sally: No. For the kind of, like, two instances we get of these, like, horrific perversions of what it could mean to, like, honor someone in the moment is Lan being like – going back to his stupid fucking speech from last time, being like, “It is so honorable what we are doing because we are dying well. And so therefore we should tell these stories about all these, quote unquote, heroic things that people are doing” that are actually just, like, incredibly dangerous, sort of also selfish in the way that Lan is thinking about them in that they're not really getting the army a ton of gain. They're just kind of these, like, shows of masculinity, like charging 12 Trollocs in order to buy people a couple more minutes. And it's just like – it just – the way – it's like honoring their death rather than honoring the person that they were and, like, the friendship that they had and the fact that it was bad that they have to die in this horrible way. Um, so that's sort of a fucked-up way to be like, “Let's eulogize these people by talking about these honestly kind of silly things they did that got them killed.”

Emily: Yeah, their top badass moments.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Top 10 anime moments.

Sally: Yeah, exactly – top 10 Kakashi moments.

Emily: Okay, these guys wish they were Kakashi. (laugh)

Sally: Yeah, you're right. Again, I keep bringing –

Emily: Speaking of – speaking of people who didn't deal with grief appropriately. (laugh)

Sally: Did Kakashi sit on the battlefield and remember the fallen comrades? And then, yeah, this idea, this very important idea of what physically happens to somebody's body after they die – like, funeral, funeral rites are very important in every culture. Like, what do you do to bodies?

Emily: Yeah, that is –

Sally: How do you honor them?

Emily: Something that can cause major PTSD, is bodies being mutilated.

Sally: Yeah, bodies being mutilated –

Emily: Or lost, yeah.

Sally: Not being able to bury them. Yeah, not ever knowing exactly what happened to them. Like, if people don't ever return, you have to assume that they're dead, but you don't have a body to do anything with. So Lan just, like, putting Bulen on top of a mountain is just, like, such a perverse way of trying to get at this incredibly important ritual of grief and death. And he's – and is exactly what Emily's saying. He's like, “I have to put Bulen on a mountain ‘cause God forbid I do anything right now to give him a funeral.”

Emily: Yeah, Bulen – does Bulen have a family? Does Bulen have friends who are never going to know that his body's on top of a fucking mountain?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: A random mountain that Narishma chose.

Sally: Yeah, Lan makes Narishma – yeah, so, like, first of all, Narishma, what is this mountain?

Second, Lan's like –

Emily: Narishma – what if Narishma chose the exact same place that Aviendha and Rand went to for igloo sex? (laugh)

Sally: It's just on the Seanchan continent. The igloo's still there. Bulen's in the sex igloo.

Emily: Bulen's in the sex igloo.

Sally: Narishma's like, “I might as well get another use out of it.”

Emily: Sure, why not?

Sally: He's a reduce, reuse, recycle kind of guy.

Emily: The three Rs. "My name is Narishma and I am a green king." (laugh)

Sally: Exactly, he's Captain Planet. (laugh) But Lan makes Narishma tell him which mountain it is so that if Narishma dies, Lan knows, but it's like, does Lan tell anybody else? (laugh)

Emily: Yeah, Lan's just like, "And I'll just carry that secret to my grave. One of us will have to live, me or Narishma."

Sally: "Might as well be me."

Emily: So yeah, just – ugh. Lan's whole thing about, like, cheering people on and how they died is really just, like – um, like you're saying, a perversion of grief. It is also very much in line with, like, what states and governments prefer soldiers and the military –

Sally: Yes.

Emily: To, um, bring to warfare –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Is to think about the, like, honor of death and sacrifice rather than the horror of death and sacrifice. Like, it serves the higher-ups so much –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: To just be like, "Death is great and when we see it, we should celebrate it because they're dying for a worthy cause."

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Rather than being like, "Death is a complicated topic, and this person might have felt that it was worth it to die in this instance, to sacrifice their life in battle. They may not have."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: "Their family may disagree with them." This is a complicated issue that will never be resolved, and we have to live with that lack of resolution and by living with it is how we accept death.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Like, sorry that's so complicated. Sorry you need therapy, but you can't just wellness influencer your way into the five – past the five stages of grief, all the way to acceptance.

Sally: Yeah, you're right, Lan is a war influencer. (laugh)

Emily: He and Rand are the most toxic –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: The most toxic –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Instagram girlies out there. (laugh)

Sally: Instagram girlies. They have a feud and it's kind of, um –

Emily: I hate them.

Sally: Sexual. Yeah, so that – you're exactly right. It's just the narrative we always hear coming out of what feels like American military offices in particular: nothing better than to die for the cause of American freedom. Right?

Emily: Mm-hmm, yeah.

Sally: She said very sarcastically. In case anyone –

Emily: She said after watching 12 seasons of Bones, which is –

Sally: Ugh. We did it, though, you guys.

Emily: All about patriotism. Yeah, we did do it, guys.

Sally: We finished it.

Emily: Important update. We can move on with our lives.

Sally: We finished Bones.

Emily: Um.

Sally: How will we live? We'll have to start watching Lost again.

Emily: Well. So –

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Lan bad. Other things happening here.

Sally: (laugh) Lan rancid, trash.

Emily: Trash, I hate him, wish he was dead, but that's not even – like, I almost wish he would just live because that would frustrate him more.

Sally: (laugh) Poor Agelmar, can we just say? Pour one out for that man's sanity.

Emily: Yeah, moving on to sort of, like, the overall –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Status of what's going on. Um, Lan and his now much, um, enlarged army, uh, led by Lord Agelmar – it's mostly Borderlanders and rulers here – are dealing with the just, like,

onslaught of Trollocs at Tarwin's Gap. They, um, are – this is such extended warfare – you know, this is not warfare that, um, even our world really knows how to cope with.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Typically how battles worked even in antiquity and, like, back to how, you know, if we're paralleling Wheel of Time world, to other sorts of worlds or even to Lord of the Rings –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Battles last at maximum a day or two.

Sally: Right.

Emily: But, uh, the characters keep talking about how this is likely to stretch on for weeks or even months.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: And so they have to, like, make concessions for that. Um, so Agelmar, uh, has, like, instituted: people are only allowed to go out and fight in, like, hour-long shifts. As we referenced earlier, Lan is disobeying that and is just fighting whenever he – whenever the whimsy takes him. He's like, just, you know, “Got to get my die on.” Um, there are also frequent earthquakes happening, and we are going to get our first – this is a through line that we will follow through this book. There's an earthquake, cracks appear in the ground, Lan looks at them and is like, “This is particularly eerie and weird.” It seems like there is, like, between the cracks, not just earth, but void.

Sally: Mm.

Emily: There is nothing there. There's something creepy going on here. So: cracks in the ground, point one. Put a pin in that.

Sally: Clocking it.

Emily: Um, Agelmar and Lan talk. Agelmar is talking about how, like, what they are going to do next is just – they have to do a controlled retreat because, um – I can't remember his reasoning. He's basically like, “We can't – there are too many Trollocs. We can't hold it forever. Eventually, we are going to have to retreat.” Tarwin's Gap is a very, like, defensible location, as we have been told multiple times, and we don't really understand – Lan doesn't seem to really understand why they would have to retreat from it.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Like, this is a bottleneck. As long as you can hold the bottleneck, that's okay.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Um, so there is some sort of, like, tension going on here with Agelmar and Lan. Agelmar makes it about Lan's personal issues. He's like, “Maybe you don't want to retreat just because you came here to want to die.”

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: “So think about that.” And Lan's like, “Okay, fine. I will think about that.” Um, we switch over to Egwene, who arrives on the battlefield in Kandor, where they are setting up their base. We are told that, uh, the Trollocs who are in Kandor are, like, making their way over to Arafel. So the White Tower forces are trying to rescue refugees, blah blah blah blah, setting up their front lines. Egwene gets a message from Elayne that's like, “How do we want to handle Healing?” Elayne has proposed that they set up, like, a stationary place where people who need Healing can go. Um, and – you know, a place that can be relatively well-defended because we don't want their Healers to get, um, picked off.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So, um, Egwene agrees with that and proposes that they do it in Mayene just because it's a random place, I guess. If you're going to travel somewhere, you might as well travel to Mayene.

Sally: Yeah, it felt very much like, well, I guess we got to give Berelain something to do.

Emily: Yeah. Yeah, exactly.

Sally: So it might as well be Mayene.

Emily: Egwene told us that she and Gawyn are now married. So. (laugh)

Sally: Whatever.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Good for them.

Emily: Who cares?

Sally: Stupid. At least I didn't have to watch it.

Emily: Yeah. For real. At least we didn't have to sit through their wedding for real. Um, Egwene then goes to the tent where Egeanin and, uh, Bayle Domon are being kept and starts talking to Egeanin. She's like, “I just want intel on the Seanchan.” And Egeanin's like, “I don't really know shit because I was in the navy, so.”

Sally: “So I don't know anything.”

Emily: And Egwene's like, “I'm sure you know something that can be of assistance to me.” They start talking, and we leave them there. Rand waits in Elayne's tent for her to come back. And, um, they have date night together.

Sally: It's giving the Bachelor. (laugh)

Emily: It's giving the final rose. (laugh) It's giving – what are those fucking – honeymoon suites?

Sally: Honeymoon suite. It's giving one on one. It's giving –

Emily: It's giving ... I love that.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Elayne's like, "The battles are going bad, Rand." "I love that."

Sally: "I love that." "I love that" was a catchphrase of the most recent Bachelor, Joey, who –

Emily: And it's now my vocal tic.

Sally: Yeah. (laugh)

Emily: I say it all the time.

Sally: I love that.

Emily: Um, Rand and Elayne talk about Elayne's pregnancy. Elayne's like, "Well, I'm pregnant." And Rand's like, "Whoa."

Sally: No way, dude.

Emily: She's like, "I think if there's a boy, I want to name him Rand." And Rand's like, "Please, God, don't do that."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Setting that boy up for absolute failure. And she's like, "Fine." And I'm like, wow, Rand's only parenting decision, I guess, is going to be an optimal one.

Sally: Yeah, a pretty good one.

Emily: A pretty good one. I – yeah. Woof. "Well, Mary, what should we name our children?" "I was thinking Jesus." (laugh)

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: "The Da Vinci Code will love this."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Been a while since I referenced the Da Vinci Code.

Sally: You're right, Emily. You were doing a really good job there for a bit. I have to – there's actually a whiteboard hanging –

Emily: "It's been zero days since our last –"

Sally: You don't know that? (laugh) I now have to erase it.

Emily: Um, Rand is doing his whole, like, philosophy – you know, his very surface-level philosophy spiel that Brandon Sanderson loves to get us, about how he wishes people didn't have to die in the Last Battle. And it's like – (laugh) yeah, the horrors of war. This is what they are.

Sally: It is so silly. Like, duh, Rand. I don't have any sympathy for this conversation happening yet again, because it's like – it is a good thing that you feel bad about this, but it is not my responsibility as the reader to, like, indulge the fact that you feel bad about this.

Emily: Hand-hold you through this.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Yeah, we have here representing – Rand and Lan – two separate sides of the same coin that is toxic masculinity.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: You know, Lan is all gung ho about dying, death, the glory of death. Rand is like, “What if nobody had to die and I could just be the only one? What if I could sacrifice myself for everyone and no one would ever have to suffer or take any action ever again?”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And it's like, the appropriate healthy response is in the middle somewhere there.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: That's a spectrum. You guys are on two very opposite sides of the spectrum. Unfortunately, Elayne, in trying to comfort Rand, goes more on to the Lan's end of the – Land's End?

Sally: The Lan's – Land's End. (laugh)

Emily: (laugh) She goes to Land's End and it's like, “Well, people get to die if they want to, Rand. How dare you take that from him – them?” And Rand's like, “You're right, Elayne. You're so wise.” And it's like, hey, maybe people don't want to die.

Sally: Yeah, like, have you got – has anybody at all considered that this is a bad situation?

Emily: Yeah, no one wants to be in the Last Battle.

Sally: It's the last one. (laugh)

Emily: It's the last one.

Sally: And if you lose, it's the last of anything. So, like –

Emily: It sucks. And they're just like, “It's – meh.” They're just like, “But it's so glorious, and everyone just really wants to be fighting.” And I'm like, people would probably rather fight than –

Sally: Than absolutely be annihilated.

Emily: Than lay down the road for the Trollocs to massacre them. Yeah, that's probably true. But, like, no one likes it.

Sally: Yeah, like, once again, it's not necessarily, like, a choice so much as it is the choice between doing something and just, like – like you said, laying down and being absolutely annihilated or –

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: Other horrors happening to you. So, like, not everyone is like Lan, who's, like, super jazz that the battle of all time is happening.

Emily: Lan is so thrilled. He's so happy. I hate him.

Sally: He's like, "I'm so glad I was born now."

Emily: And Rand, meanwhile, is paralyzed by, like, grief.

Sally: Yeah. Yeah.

Emily: So neither of those is good. We need some fucking nuance in here.

Sally: Yeah, like you can have – again, like Emily said, death is complicated. Warfare is complicated. Grief is complicated. Being alive is hard. I'm sorry to tell you guys this. Human emotion is a complicated place.

Emily: Birth is a curse and life is a prison.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: You know?

Sally: Exactly.

Emily: Come on, guys. Just – please. Please.

Sally: I also really cannot overstate how much this reads like a scene from The Bachelor on ABC. Like, they're so obsessed with each other in the weirdest ways. So that's –

Emily: I know. They keep talking about their, like, very influential time together in Tear –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: When Elayne taught Rand everything he knows about politics. And that makes me so insane because, A, that was referenced twice –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: In those pages. That was very much, like, a montage –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Sequence that didn't linger very much on them having politics talks –

Sally: Doing anything other than –

Emily: It was mostly about them smoothing.

Sally: Frenching, yeah.

Emily: Yeah. So, God. Anyway, Rand's like, "Elayne, you're incredible. I'm so glad I chose you. You're doing an even better job than I could have." And I'm like, I'd kill him. He's so fucking condescending.

Sally: I know. "You're doing such a good job, sweetie."

Emily: "You're doing amazing, sweetie."

Sally: Yeah, like Kris Jenner. (laugh)

Emily: Yeah. They exchange gifts – again, like The Bachelor.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, Elayne – uh, Rand gives Elayne a thing that, I don't know where he fucking got it, but he's like, "You can eventually make an angreal out of this. Just don't do it right now, because it'll weaken you in the One Power." And Elayne gives Rand a ter'angreal she found that – she's like, "This will hide you from the Shadow." So I guess that'll be important in some way.

Sally: The, like –

Emily: And then they fuck, it is implied.

Sally: Yeah, good for them. But the video – like, the video game mechanic of Rand having a special item that will hide him from the Shadow and him getting it right now –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Before he goes to where –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: The Shadow lives – goes to the town. It's silly.

Emily: Ohhhh.

Sally: Glad he has it, I guess.

Emily: Um, so we've had our updates from Tarwin's Gap, from Kandor. Uh, we know that Ituralde and his forces are still waiting on Rand to go to Shayol Ghul, and we know Rand is currently fucking his pregnant girlfriend. Um, now the Caemlyn front. We see that the Trollocs have been sort of – like, left the burning city, and now Perrin and his forces are, like, harrying them in an attempt to get them to chase them hundreds of miles –

Sally: Yeah, that was –

Emily: To Sherwood Forest.

Sally: Yeah. That was not clear. When they were like, “There's a forest outside of Caemlyn,” I was like, “Couple of miles.”

Emily: Yeah, great. This is the same forest that, like, the Borderlanders were camped in for forever.

Sally: Yeah. Wrong. This forest is 150 miles –

Emily: To the north. And it's like, why were we so fucking worried about the Borderlanders getting there then?

Sally: Yeah. That is not close.

Emily: You guys, what in hell?

Sally: Why is this – not that I'm an expert, and I trust Davram Bashere knows what he's doing, I guess. But it does not feel like a feasible plan for them to run their horses 150 miles.

Emily: 150 miles away from us is, like, mid-Idaho.

Sally: I know. Like, that's, like, fucking halfway to St. George.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: That's some Utah geography lore for the people. (laugh)

Emily: But it's, like, in another state.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And that's so far away. I would not be worried about an army in Idaho.

Sally: I know. Gareth Bryne was like, “I used to agonize over armies hanging out in Sherwood Forest.”

Emily: And it's like, girl, you shouldn't have.

Sally: You would see them coming.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: I don't understand this at all. This is so confusing to me, but I'm not Sun Tzu, so.

Emily: Anyway, Elayne and everyone else are just waiting in this forest for this maneuver to work. Elayne's like, “Maybe I should go check it out.” And Birgitte's like, “I'll fucking end your life –”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: “Pregnant or not. So stay – sit the fuck down.” Um, Uno comes along and gives an update on Kandor, just ‘cause he's the messenger, I guess, then leaves. Elayne goes to her sort of command tent to meet with the others, where she gets an update about, uh, Tarwin's Gap, and

Bashere's like, "Agelmar wants to do a controlled retreat." Elayne, like Lan, is like, "I don't think we should do that." And Bashere's like, "Well, Agelmar has experience and is a good general, so you should probably listen to him." And Elayne's like, "Okay." I am – I am bringing this up for a reason, so.

Sally: Oh, no.

Emily: If that will help –

Sally: Oh.

Emily: If that will help you guys keep a – keep a pin on that one. That's another thing to keep a pin on.

Sally: Okay.

Emily: Um, but they're, uh, still waiting when we leave Elayne and go over to Androl for a page. Update from Androl: still in that basement. (laugh)

Sally: This is the most efficient page in the whole –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Of Memory of Light.

Emily: Still in that basement.

Sally: (laugh) Every word of it was really necessary.

Emily: Hey, by the way: basement time with Androl.

Sally: Yeah. Basement time with Androl.

Emily: Androl's like, "It's fucked. We're all drugged on forkroot." Emarin – our, you know, the sole carrier of LGBTQ representation in this series, luckily has not been turned to the dark side yet because he has more willpower than that teen boy, I guess. You'd have to be to be a closeted gay. (laugh)

Sally: To be the only gay person on the entire continent.

Emily: Yeah, he should have more willpower than Logain, is all I'm saying.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But Emarin hasn't been turned yet. Logain hasn't been turned yet. And Androl is like, "The conference room full of Myrddraal is getting upset."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Everyone is tired.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And Mazrim Taim is really cracking the whip.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: They have come – they have come upon a new strategy, which is to grab one of the Aes Sedai that Logain forcibly Bonded, Toveine, who we've had a few view – uh, points of view from.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And they're going to turn her. Toveine is, like, Red Ajah and kind of evil to begin with in the sort of, like, she's a jerk, but not necessarily a Darkfriend. So I believe we can assume she will go quickly.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, that's – oh. Also important: Androl notices Taim looking at a little object in his hands shaped like a disc.

Sally: What could that be?

Emily: What could that be? Seal Watch 2.

Sally: (gasp) There are seals now. Arf arf arf arf.

Emily: Or are there? But we don't – we know of no other objects shaped like discs in this series. (laugh)

Sally: Yeah, no – no CD-ROMs.

Emily: Yeah, there's no fucking DVDs.

Sally: He's holding a DVD. “How to Turn People: A Guide.”

Emily: Um. Switch back to Lan at Tarwin's Gap, where the Trolloc army is suddenly backed up by a bunch of bad guy channelers. Narishma's like, “I estimate there are, like, 20.” Lan's like, “Can we do anything?” Narishma's like, “Not really,” you know?

Sally: Yeah, this is bad news.

Emily: And Agelmar's like, “Well, sweet, now we retreat.” And they do. Back to Elayne as the other force finally – Perrin's forces, finally succeed in bringing the Trollocs to Sherwood Forest. We're calling it Sherwood Forest because Elayne asks Birgitte, um, “Weren't you, like, a bandit here, robbing the rich?” And Birgitte's like, “Yeah, of course I was. Bitch.” (laugh)

Sally: And Elayne's like, “You robbed the queen.” And Birgitte was like, “She was a bad queen.” And Elayne's like, “It's the principal.”

Emily: And Birgitte's like, “Yeah, I agree. It was the principal.”

Sally: “It is – it was the principal of the matter, Elayne.”

Emily: “For which I robbed her. So shut up.”

Sally: “And I’ll rob you if you don’t stop talking.”

Emily: And I wish she would. Um, despite Birgitte holding Elayne back from going to look at Caemlyn and what was going on there, it sure seems like Elayne is just on the front lines here. Like, she’s literally calling orders, which isn’t very – is mostly just, like, stupid because her orders aren’t good. Like, at one point, she’s like, “Archers, you need to hold.” And Tam’s like, “No, they should shoot right now.” And she’s like, “I don’t know about that.” And Tam’s like, “Well, which of us has ever fired a bow?”

Sally: (laugh) Tam being like, “Is it okay to kill the mother of my grandchildren?”

Emily: Tam’s like, “Oh my god, in-law problems already with this woman.”

Sally: Ah, R.I.P. Tam.

Emily: Um, so, like, Elayne is just – you know, mechanically, um, calling orders so that we know what’s going on because it’s easier than just describing it. But I sure wish it was someone who actually knew what they were doing calling orders.

Sally: Like any of the military guys on the battlefield.

Emily: Like fucking Bashere or Tam or anyone.

Sally: Mat’s dad is also here. He’s not seeming to be doing anything, but he is here.

Emily: Yeah, Mat’s dad is here for some reason. Anyway, the Trollocs are led straight to the Band of the Red Hand. Talmanes is back in business, by the way, in case you were worried. Um, and, um, they just fire the cannons at the Trollocs. And Elayne is – you know, absolutely decimate them. And Elayne’s like, “Whoa.” And Birgitte’s like, “Whoa,” in a bad way.

Sally: Yeah, Elayne is like, “Whoa,” parentheses, delighted. Birgitte is like, “Whoa,” parentheses, horrified.

Emily: Repulsed, yeah.

Sally: Yeah. It –

Emily: And Elayne’s like, “This is the end of war. If everyone has these weapons.” (laugh) And it’s like, you’re telling me this bitch is the general of –

Sally: She’s like, “Nobody will go on the battlefield because these weapons are so horrible. Nobody will want to get – risk getting blown up.” And it’s like, Elayne, you think they want to risk getting gutted by a sword?

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: That’s not a fun way to die either.

Emily: Do you think people want to get ate by Trollocs?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Which is constantly implied in this series, by the way, that people are just getting ate by Trollocs.

Sally: Yeah, just constantly getting eaten, snatched, possibly eaten alive – just, like, truly horrific things.

Emily: Gross, yeah. Gross nasty stuff.

Sally: Like, it's also not pleasant to get shot by a bow or die in any of these other horrible ways.

Emily: All of warfare sucks and is bad, Elayne –

Sally: So, Elayne –

Emily: But you wouldn't know that.

Sally: No, 'cause Elayne doesn't think that archers should shoot when they can see their target, but whatever. Um, so is this the stupidest thing Elayne has ever said?

Emily: It's, like, top five, at least.

Sally: Yeah, really – a real contender.

Emily: Birgitte's like, "Maybe I'm just cynical," and it's like, no, Birgitte, you just understand.

Sally: You just understand that, unfortunately – like, you can't unring the bell, you know?

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Like, this is not going to stop warfare. This is only going to make it worse.

Emily: It's a bad thing.

Sally: And also, to bring in some of our, like, real-world experience of what happens when there are weapons of mass destruction, it is a way for people to make money. So people do things called war profiteering –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: And make wars happen so that they can sell cannons to each other. Elayne –

Emily: We just saw a ballet where the figure – the allegory for war profiteering –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Was a French mime.

Sally: (laugh) I forgot about that. Yeah, he was a little French mime that would come on stage.

Emily: Okay, he wasn't literally a mime, you know, he didn't have the, like, white face paint and striped shirt.

Sally: Nor can we say that he was French.

Emily: Yeah. He gave French vibes. Actually, what he gave was Swiper the Fox from Dora the Explorer vibes.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: He was like, “Boo ba doo ba doo ba doo,” and he did have a bowler hat, so.

Sally: Yeah, he was dressed like a French mime.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: But we are –

Emily: That's a total aside. It was so wild, though.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: We were at that ballet, like, what?

Sally: Like, it was generally a very good, though very upsetting ballet –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: But every time he came on stage, I was like, of all the ways to dress war profiteering, as a little “Swiper no swiping” man.

Emily: As a little – yeah, weird fox man. Um, okay, that's those couple chapters. All about war, you know?

Sally: Yeah. I think Talmanes should have been laid up for this entire book.

Emily: He for sure should have.

Sally I –

Emily: If he wasn't going to die, then he should have.

Sally: Yeah, it's really annoying that they're like, “Ha ha, fake out, you thought Talmanes beefed it, just kidding, now he's back valiantly leading a charge of cannons.”

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: And you're like, I thought he almost died like three days ago.

Emily: Okay, we are next going to be reading three chapters. Um, a lot of that is just going to be continuation of the plots that are going on already: war, dying, how do we deal with people dying. But we are going to have our three main boys also doing relatively important things.

Mat, we're going to catch up with his first point of view, 240 – no.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: 246 pages into this book, we will get Mat on page for the first time. Um, Perrin is going to decide to take an action that is not just fighting.

Sally: Wow.

Emily: Um, and Rand is also not going to Shayol Ghul, but he's going to do some stuff. He's going to, like, do front line fighting –

Sally: Oh.

Emily: Just to sort of do it. He's delaying going to Shayol Ghul for narrative reasons and, I believe, personal reasons, but I can't remember. I guess hopefully we'll figure that out. But that's what's on the docket. Okay, thanks for listening. Thanks to Glynn MacKenzie for our theme song. Thanks to, uh, our patrons on Patreon and our followers on social media.

Sally: Yeah, you guys are the best. Um, to do a Patreon shout-out: there's a new Patreon feature called Chats, where just, like, everyone on our Patreon can just, like, be in what is effectively a large group chat.

Emily: Oh.

Sally: Um, so I've been playing around with it a little bit. I don't understand it all that well because I am old, apparently. Um, but have been, uh, chatting in there with some folks, which has been really fun. We've been talking about books and various things.

Emily: Cool.

Sally: So if you are on our Patreon and you want to come chat with us, um, it has been really nice. So.

Emily: Yeah, sounds kind of like a Discord server.

Sally: Yeah, exactly. That's exactly right, Emily. That's better than a group chat. So, uh, come check it out if you're on our Patreon or if that intrigues you. Come check out our Patreon. We're, uh, we're there.

Emily: Yeah. So are these guys.

Sally: Yeah, the cats feature heavily in the blooper reel.

Emily: Yes. Um, do you have a sign-off?

Sally: I do. Um, I am doing a big project at work. I'm not really doing anything; I'm just kind of on the review committee for a big project at work that involves, every few weeks, sitting down with a consultant because the project is so large and complicated and it has to do with, like, a regulation change at the federal level. So it's just, like – really, several regulation changes at the federal level. So it's just really complicated. But anyway, it's, like, a very important project and in these meetings are, like, my direct boss, my boss's boss, another high-up person in our agency, and our consultant, who, like, we're supposed to put on a nice front for. And this meeting is always at nine in the morning. So I feel like a dead – a total piece of shit on an average week. And, uh, I usually drink tea in the morning. I hadn't finished drinking my tea. So I walk in. It's a

virtual meeting. I, you know, metaphorically walk into this meeting and start drinking tea out of my Naruto mug. (laugh)

Emily: (laugh)

Sally: Um, and I was like – I don't know if anybody would, like, know that it was a Naruto mug or know what that is, but I felt like a jackass. (laugh) I love that mug. It's a great mug, which is why I picked it up.

Emily: There's nothing more professional than Naruto.

Sally: Oh, yeah? (laugh)

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: I mean, it was the Ichiraku Ramen mug that I have, which is –

Emily: They were probably just like, “This bitch loves ramen, like Naruto himself.”

Sally: I mean, the Ichiraku Ramen man is a very successful businessman, so.

Emily: Yeah, he's – yeah, a small business owner.

Sally: Yeah, small business king and probably the backbone of the Leaf Village –

Emily: Konoha, yeah.

Sally: If we're being honest. So.

Emily: He makes more money than anyone we ever see.

Sally: Yeah, that's true.

Emily: So.

Sally: Everyone else there is unemployed. (laugh) It's the only business in Konoha.

Emily: Or ninjas.

Sally: Um, so that was just my sort of silly moment of the week.

Emily: Ah, I think that's great. Okay, everyone, we'll see you next week.

Sally: Bye!