

Episode 292: The Cringe to Gay Forsaken Spectrum
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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: Let the games begin.

Sally: Let the games begin.

Emily: Every time we take a week off, it's like I completely forget how to do this.

Sally: How do we podcast?

Emily: And also how to, like, read Wheel of Time. I'm like, what is this?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: What?

Sally: Yeah. It sort of –

Emily: It's completely evacuated my mind, been replaced entirely with Survivor content.

Sally: Well. "From Raro Tribe?"

Emily: (simultaneously) "From Raro Tribe?"

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Only Survivor fans. (laugh)

Sally: Only Survivor fans in the building. Um, I wanted to bring a phrase that I read in this book –

Emily: Oh, okay. I love that.

Sally: That I was just reading that felt like a good thing to wrap up gender politics – not to, like, wrap up; to just kind of, like, pin up what we've been talking about –

Emily: Mm. Mm. Mm.

Sally: In Wheel of Time for, um, gosh, what, seven years now? Something like that.

Emily: Seven years, baby.

Sally: Um, so I'm reading this book called *Empowered: Popular Feminism and Popular Misogyny* by Sarah – Sarah Banet-Weiser – sorry, Sarah, I totally butchered that – she is a professor of media and communications at the London School of Economics. Um, and in this book, she's obviously talking about popular feminism, the type of feminism we see – the type of white, cisgender, heterosexual feminism.

Emily: Strong female characters.

Sally: Yeah, exactly. Um, and she referenced this quote that, um, what – um, what she says is, “What feminine – what feminist historian Joan Scott has called an ‘add women and stir’ kind of liberal feminism in which the presence of women is sufficient to call feminism into being. The inclusion of women becomes the solution for all gender problems, not just those of exclusion or absence. It is, of course, important to have bodies at the table, but their mere presence doesn't necessarily challenge the structure that supports and builds the table in the first place. As Scott points out, merely including women does not address the framework of historically contingent dominant patterns of sexuality and the ideology that supports them.”

Emily: So, essentially, although *Wheel of Time* has a great many female characters and has often for that reason been called a feminist text – including by me, I believe, in my early years –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: It is – it remains an inherently sexist text because all of the politics within it are based on a, um, foundation of sexism, Robert Jordan's latent Southern American sexism.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: That was a great quote. I really liked that.

Sally: Thank you. I was really, um – it's so – like, reading academic stuff is really hard. But, as you guys know, we're a bit – uh, we're very academic. I in particular am a bit of a theory-head. It's just nice sometimes to have smarter people give me the words to try –

Emily: Yeah, “Add feminism –”

Sally: And express what I'm –

Emily: “Add women and stir.”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: That's incredibly funny.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Ugh.

Sally: That was just, like, so perfect for being like, yeah, some people really do just think you can throw a woman into any situation and therefore inherently call it a feminist text, a feminist piece of media, which is not true at all. So.

Emily: Yeah, and it's not just Wheel of Time. You get similar dynamics with a lot of inherently sexist media. For example, superhero –

Sally: Mm. Yeah.

Emily: Comic books and media.

Sally: Yes.

Emily: If you throw a woman in it, then – if you throw a woman superhero, then does it become feminist? Well, are you still depicting the woman superhero in a skin-tight latex costume and, you know, having her boobs front and center?

Sally: Yeah, her boobs out; full face of makeup; hair done.

Emily: Yeah, so tight –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: You can see her labia, you know? Like – (laugh)

Sally: Yeah. Truly. We're talking specifically – I'm at least thinking of Black Widow from “The Avengers.” So.

Emily: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Sally: Almost anyone would fit that dynamic. But.

Emily: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Sally: So, um, when you are consuming media, uh, consider: has it just been “add women and stirred” or has someone actually done the work to build a feminist politic into that piece of media?

Emily: Yeah, it's an interesting thing, I think, also, with Wheel of Time's adaptation that is now coming out –

Sally: Mm.

Emily: Like, to consider: um, are they doing enough structural work to –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Actually make Wheel of Time feminist?

Sally: Mm.

Emily: Or are they still operating on the same, like, “Well, we have women who are female characters” who are perhaps in the last 20 years, the, uh, presence of women has slowly become not enough.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So now we're saying, “Okay, well, women have to be also doing more active roles. Women have to be ta'veren as well as men do.”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So are we merely doing that or are we also doing structural damage to the –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Inherently patriarchal structure?

Sally: Yeah, absolutely.

Emily: Interesting.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: I don't have an answer for that. I – I won't, I suppose, until the Wheel of Time TV show is concluded, wherever it concludes –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Whether that's with a cancellation, in a season or two, as streaming is wont to do –

Sally: I know.

Emily: Or, you know, it gets to wrap up on its own time. Who knows?

Sally: Yeah, that is a very interesting question, and I'll be keeping it in mind when the next season comes out. I would love to, at some point, maybe when I'm less inundated in Wheel of Time world, to just, like, sit down and watch the show as a – as a viewer, not as a –

Emily: Yeah, we're going to need, like, three years –

Sally: Yeah. (laugh)

Emily: Of a detox, I think.

Sally: Yeah. Not as a, quote unquote, “scholar” of Wheel of Time. (laugh)

Emily: (laugh) What a horrendous thing to add to your resume. “I'm a scholar of Wheel of Time. Don't ask me what that means, please. I'll have to point you to my eight-year-long podcast, where you slowly see my will to live crushed.”

Sally: Our will to live crushed, but hopefully, our arguments and our analysis has grown somewhat more nuanced. Um.

Emily: Oh, for sure. I mean, we're no longer just talking about tapestries. (laugh)

Sally: No longer talking about tapestries, although it still haunts me.

Emily: How could it not? I am coming at this from a similar tapestry standpoint in that I read this a few days ago and I have no idea what is involved in these chapters.

Sally: Okay.

Emily: Um, Demandred's there.

Sally: Dumpling has showed up.

Emily: Boooo. Dumpling – our boy Dumpling.

Sally: Our boy Dumpling.

Emily: But first, this is Everybody Hates Rand, your friendly neighborhood Wheel of Time podcast. I'm Emily Juchau.

Sally: (pause) And I'm Sally Goodger.

Emily: (laugh)

Sally: Sorry, I just sort of expected that would drop from the sky. (laugh) Who's talking?

Emily: Who – where is she?

Sally: Who runs this podcast? Tybalt.

Emily: And you might think the, uh – Demandred's alias couldn't get any more stupid, but wait until you hear his title. It's "The Wyld," but –

Sally: Bao.

Emily: Spelled with a "y" instead of an "i" –

Sally: Bao the Wyld. Sorry.

Emily: So that you really know he's wild.

Sally: He's wild.

Emily: He doesn't listen to the spelling convention. (laugh)

Sally: No way.

Emily: He's wild. Yeah, like he's at a music festival or something.

Sally: Wild! "Bao the Wyld" does sound like some type of performer.

Emily: Yeah, Egwene's like, "He's wearing this slay outfit," whatever. And I'm like, if it's not fucking cargo shorts and a crop top, I don't care.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: That's what I expect from Bao the Fucking Wyld.

Sally: Bao the Wyld. Um. Yeah, Demandred – um, you guys know this – is one of the most embarrassing, if not the most embarrassing Forsaken.

Emily: “Ah, you're so cringe.”

Sally: “Ah –” literally. If I had a button of Chilchuck from Dungeon Meshi, just saying, “Ah, you're so cringe,” I would push it every time.

Emily: The heavens open up.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Every time I cook, the heavens open up and Senshi is there.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But then every time I'm about to do something anti-work, the heavens open –

Sally: Mm.

Emily: And Chilchuck is there.

Sally: Chilchuck is there. Chilchuck Tims.

Emily: Or just when I need a, you know, grounded voice telling me to take myself less seriously.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: That's Chilchuck Tims.

Sally: I love him.

Emily: That's – that's –

Sally: Girl dad.

Emily: America's girl dad. (laugh)

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: You also have to be a Dungeon Meshi fan –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: To appreciate this podcast now. Um –

Sally: I hope our longtime listeners have listened to our podcast and been like, “I'm going to go through the same hyperfixations that Everybody Hates Rand goes through.”

Emily: There's someone out there –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Who's bouncing around between Sex and the City –

Sally: Yeah. Survivor.

Emily: Survivor. Our very long Naruto phase.

Sally: Oh, that was a good phase.

Emily: I mean, it wasn't that long because it could have been longer.

Sally: We watched it pretty quick.

Emily: Yeah, Naruto's so –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Expansive.

Sally: That was – that was one of our best winters. We would drink hot chocolate and watch Naruto almost every night. And do I have any regrets? No.

Emily: Yeah, it was pretty life-changing, I think about Naruto all the time.

Sally: Um, anyway. Demandred, in terms of, like, most embarrassing Forsaken – at the end of the podcast, once I know what happens to all of them –

Emily: Mm.

Sally: I think we should make a definitive ranking of which members of the Forsaken is, like, the most cringe and embarrassing.

Emily: Yeah, for sure, for sure, for sure.

Sally: Cringe fail. Um, Demandred is really close to the top for me.

Emily: Yeah, somehow – we've sort of been lured into a false sense of thinking Demandred is cool –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Because he at least hasn't been on-screen for most of the book –

Sally: Yeah. (laugh)

Emily: And when he does, he's mostly just, like, saying ominous things.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: You're like, surely Sammael is more cringe than Demandred because Sammael came, saw, got eaten by mist.

Sally: Yeah. (laugh) And you're like, that was humiliating.

Emily: Yeah. Or Be'lal, who literally gets killed in a millisecond.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Surely they're more embarrassing. Nope. Here's Demandred, waltzing out in what he thinks is serving cunt, but –

Sally: Yeah. Is –

Emily: Is just sort of embarrassing.

Sally: Yeah, Demandred really does think he's serving cunt. He's like, "I've got, yeah, like, my Met Gala outfit," and you're like, this is one of the Met Gala outfits that, like, does not have the theme correct at all. He just looks so bad. And he's like, "Blah blah blah blah blah." Leane, of all people –

Emily: Gets captured.

Sally: Yeah, and he's like, "You tell the Dragon Reborn that I'm back. Blah blah blah."

Emily: "You tell him that I'm coming –" Yeah, he, in his milliseconds on screen, he does a mass murder –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: By immolation, which is –

Sally: Horrifying.

Emily: Horrifying, um, but pretty standard for the Forsaken, I guess we could say. Um, but then he also is like, "I just need to field my psychosexual parasocial relationship with the Dragon Reborn –"

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: "And make that literally everyone else's problem." Egwene herself is like, "Why the fuck is he asking for Rand?"

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: "Doesn't – don't he know where Rand is? It's the Last Battle."

Sally: Truly. She's like, "Everyone in the world knows where Rand is right now." And here comes fucking Demandred, being like, "I – I'm the one that saved the world." He, like, gives himself some, like, title that is basically like He Who Comes with the Dawn but, like –

Emily: Yeah, it sounds like his propaganda campaign –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: For the Sharans that he's sort of done this whole, like, "I am your savior in Shara –"

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: In, I guess the last two years, or however long it's been.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: He's like – and – and, I mean, it's a pretty succinct way of showing us what Demandred's status is amongst the Sharans and presumably what he has done in terms of grabbing power there.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: He has done some sort of massive propaganda power grab with the existing, very bad hierarchy.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: That we, you know, really only see sort of implied based on Egwene's observations. Um, but it seems kind of like, uh, okay, the Shemand – (laugh) the Shemandreds.

Sally: (laugh) The Shemandreds.

Emily: That's my celebrity – (laugh)

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Couple name for Demandred and the entire continent of Shara, I guess. Um, the Sharans aren't necessarily like, "We're here, doing evil." They're about as evil as the Seanchan in that they are definitely operating on a system of regularly enslaving and torturing people –

Sally: Sure.

Emily: Don't get it twisted. But they're not like, "We're serving the Dark One." They're like, "We're following our guy and he's telling us what to do."

Sally: Yeah, it, uh –

Emily: It's almost – it's just Seanchan 2.0 at that point.

Sally: Yeah, it's this, like, weird – it's like we've speed-run everything we can possibly do to set Demandred up as our key foil for multiple characters, like, in terms of – even if he's not actually directly opposite them on-screen in terms of, like, some structural stuff, some thematic stuff. Yes, he's there. He's, like, sitting opposite Tuon as, like, the leader of this intense, very militaristic, very, um, imperialist authoritarian society. He's sitting opposite Rand in that, yeah, he has run some insane – he's sitting opposite Rand and also opposite, like, the entire arc of the Aiel Waste and the and the entire arc of the series and Rand becoming the Dragon Reborn and that – (laugh) I like you calling it a propaganda campaign. That's pretty funny in that he's like, "Actually, I'm the savior of the world. I am –" Instead of He Who Comes with the Dawn, it's like He Who Breaks the Earth or something unbelievably –

Emily: Which doesn't sound positive, so –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: It does make you question –

Sally: Edgelord.

Emily: The Sharans. (laugh)

Sally: Yeah, they're like, “That sounds – I don't know what that means, but sounds sweet.”

Emily: Yeah, he talks about how he's fulfilled the Sharans' prophecies. Blah blah blah blah.

Sally: “He who is owned by only – he is owned only by the land” is what the – they call him.

Emily: The Dragonslayer. Yeah, no clue what any of this means.

Sally: And you're like, that is so – it's just so embarrassing. Like, your obsession with Rand is next level.

Emily: Yeah, let's take a step – let's take a moment to talk about Demandred's obsession –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: With Rand and how it is, unfortunately, going to utterly shape this narrative.

Sally: Cool.

Emily: Demandred is going to be so obsessed with meeting Rand. This is a spoiler, so if you're not prepared for this, then skip to the next, uh, minute or so. Demandred is going to be waltzing around the entire Last Battle, saying, “Bring me Rand. I just want to fight Rand.” And multiple wannabe Rands, men who wish to be the center of the narrative themselves –

Sally: Mm.

Emily: Will sort of step up to challenge Demandred in Rand's stead and, one after another, generally fail.

Sally: Sure.

Emily: Which is kind of funny. Um, but obviously, we the readers are like, well, if Rand's not here, Mat should challenge Demandred and that's an appropriate, like, one-on-one fight. If those are the rules we're going with, is that this absolutely has to be settled in a one-on-one –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Contest of weapons for some reason.

Sally: Right.

Emily: Because that's clearly all the Demandred wants. Then it's – should probably be Mat. He's, at that point, the only main character operating in his vicinity. But over and over, it's just like, “Hey, Demandred, you know where Rand is.”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: He ain't here.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Do you think he's going to be like, “Sorry, the Dark One”? “I have to go talk to Demondred.”

Sally: Yeah. “Hold. I'm so sorry. Your annoying brat teenage son is calling me.”

Emily: Yeah, like, the Dark One – I – it would all be worth it if the Dark One showed – the Dark One shows Rand a lot of visions of what's going on –

Sally: Mm.

Emily: You know, if only he was just like – (sigh)

Sally: (sigh)

Emily: “And there's Demandred.”

Sally: There's – in all-caps. Sighing. AND THERE'S DEMANDRED.

Emily: THERE'S DEMANDRED. MY CRINGE SON. (laugh)

Sally: “Every family has a cringe-fail cousin.”

Emily: “The most cringe of my children.” (laugh) “It's like he doesn't know that you're here.”

Sally: It really is, like, being like, “I want to – (laugh) I want to challenge the president of the United States to a duel; will someone bring him to me?” And everyone in the planet being like, “He's probably at the White House.”

Emily: Yeah. So, in a way, it's appropriate that Demandred gets all of these, like, in his mind, lesser –

Sally: Right.

Emily: Challengers. You know, it would have been much more funnier if one of them just killed him.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Like, immediately, Gawyn's just like, “Pew pew.”

Sally: That would actually be so funny. That would be almost redemptive for Gawyn.

Emily: I know. It would be – if Gawyn was just like, “I'm the best swordsman ever,” and then he is and kills Demandred. Tragically, this will not be – tragically for Gawyn; not for literally anyone else.

Sally: Yeah, it's actually probably good for – if we're talking about embarrassing characters, Gawyn's pretty close to Demandred, so.

Emily: Yeah, it's just a lot of cringe characters walking around right now. Um. Yeah, so in a way, it's funny that it – (laugh) it's just, no one's gonna give Demandred what he wants.

Sally: Right. Oh, sorry. I had, like, a full body recoil.

Emily: Sally just punched me in the face. (laugh)

Sally: No, I'm sorry. It was an accident, I promise. (laugh)

Emily: No, it was fine. Yeah, no one is going to give Demandred what he wants. And it would be a little funnier if there was more meta commentary on it in terms of like, what – why is this – why would anyone?

Sally: Yeah. Yeah, it would be funny. Like it is obviously so funny to me, but I don't know at this point in the narrative if the narrative thinks Demandred is funny and embarrassing.

Emily: No, the narrative takes Demandred pretty seriously.

Sally: Yeah, like, it would be actually so funny if everyone was like, “This fucking loser is running around, asking to fight Rand. Obviously, he sucks. So we're just going to send him Gawyn, Lan –”

Emily: Or no one at all.

Sally: Yeah, or just let him run around and run himself in circles, ‘cause he's not –

Emily: Like, everyone's going to keep being like, “It's so important that we kill Demandred.” And at a certain point, it's like, is it, though? Why?

Sally: Yeah, like, I –

Emily: He's a powerful channeler, but, you know, that's literally the only reason.

Sally: Yeah, it's also very frustrating.

Emily: It's not like if you kill Demandred, all the Sharans will fall over dead, Phantom Menace-style.

Sally: (laugh) Yeah. Yeah, they think that Demandred – Demandred is, like, Myrddraal-ified. All the –

Emily: Yeah, God.

Sally: Sharans – like if you kill the Myrddraal, all the Trollocs around him die or whatever.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Um, so, yeah, this obsession is next level. I– it's so unhealthy. Someone should sit Demandred down. What if Nynaeve walked in there and is like, “Listen.” I know Nynaeve’s at Shayol Ghul. I need somebody else.

Emily: Oh, who would I picture for Demandred's therapist slash reality check? I mean, the problem is that every other character in Wheel of Time is so delulu at this point that –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: No one is able to – no one is equipped to deal with this.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Everyone is taking him seriously. Everyone is taking themselves seriously. Blah blah blah blah blah. I guess that role traditionally would fall to Mat as trickster –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: To sort of upend that hierarchy and, uh, make an authority figure make a fool of himself.

Sally: Right.

Emily: So that's another reason why I just want – if anyone's going to face down Demandred, it should be Mat.

Sally: It should be Mat. But no.

Emily: No.

Sally: Um, anyway, Demandred shows up; so embarrassing. Like, just doing murder; he gets – he, like, floats Leane over to him, also very Star Wars-style, using the Force –

Emily: (laugh) Yeah.

Sally: Um, which is just like, “You bring a message to the Dragon Reborn,” which is –

Emily: Insane? Like, why her?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, yeah; we're in Egwene’s point of view. She and Gawyn have just been hiding under, like, an overturned cart or something –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: For hours at this point, watching captives be gathered when they see Demandred come through, not a gateway, but some sort of, like, just appearing out of the air. I think – we see Graendal do this later, and I guess it is, um, meant to be like they're channeling using the Dark One’s power –

Sally: Mm.

Emily: Whatever that's called. True Power?

Sally: True Power.

Emily: Yeah, whatever. Um, I think that's the implication, but it's a subplot that I have a hard time keeping track of. So whatever. Demandred comes; we're clearly supposed to take him very seriously as a scary threat. Um, he does an – he literally does a villain monologue, orders a mass murder so that we're like, “Wow, he's scary.” He is able to locate a woman who is – a woman channeler, you know, which – channelers are able to sense each other along the gender spectrum. So it's weird that Demandred can do this with women. And, of course, that scares Egwene because she's also close by. But he's like, “Leane –” He doesn't call her by name. That would be so funny. (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) “Leane!”

Emily: “I've been watching you.”

Sally: “You, specifically.”

Emily: No. He grabs Leane and is like, “You tell the Dragon Reborn I want to fight him.” And Leane's like, “Literally what?”

Sally: Yeah. She's like, “Um ...”

Emily: “Okay?”

Sally: “Go find him then. I'd – pick up the phone.”

Emily: “Yeah, what? Okay.”

Sally “Go find him. You don't have to tell someone you want to fight him.”

Emily: Yeah. “Uh, okay.” And then he's like, “Blah blah blah blah blah.” Leaves, or goes somewhere else. I don't know. Egwene and Gawyn, meanwhile, enact their escape, the Fallen Camp Plan, which just involves hoping that they sneak real good. Gawyn's, like, scouting ahead.

Sally: Gawyn – wow; surprise, surprise – has activated one of the Bloodknife rings.

Emily: Yeah, we've manufactured a situation in which it would be stupid for Gawyn not to –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Activate the rings. Wouldn't you know it? He needs – he absolutely needs a boost to his stealth stats.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: And what does he have? A magic ring – a set of magic rings that will get the job done and also give him some light superpowers. If Gawyn was really willing – if Gawyn was really, like, just like, “Yeah, this is a net good,” then he would give one of the rings to Egwene –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And be like, “We'll figure this out together.”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But of course, he doesn't do that, doesn't tell her. Is just like, “I'll scout ahead, take out any threats, clear the path for you.” She obviously does not know he's wearing one of these rings. Um, Egwene gives us some, like – as they're trying to shuffle away, Egwene gives us, or – as best she can, her observations of the Sharans. Um. I – I don't really care to go over it. I don't know how necessary at this point it is to understand the Sharans, um, only that their channelers, much like the Seanchan channelers, are, you know, low in the hierarchy. Very much creepy, sul'dam-ified, I guess.

Sally: Yeah. Yeah.

Emily: Um, Egwene happens to get snatched by one who's like, “I'll kill you,” and Egwene's like, “It's so convenient that you're talking to me about killing me for a long time. Long enough –”

Sally: A long time.

Emily: “Long enough for me to telepathically alert Gawyn that I'm in trouble and have a panic attack because I don't want to get captured,” obviously. Um, Gawyn doesn't get to her, though, before Leilwin – Egeanin does. Egeanin, I guess, has come back with Bayle Domon and has just been sneaking around, looking for Egg, which is honestly incredibly funny of her.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: She's like, “What? Like, it's hard?”

Sally: Beep beep beep beep beep.

Emily: Gawyn's like, “I need magic rings.” And Egeanin's like –

Sally: “Cringe.” (laugh)

Emily: “Skill issue.” (laugh) Egeanin, of course, notes that Gawyn is using the rings and is like, “Urgh.” Finger guns.

Sally: I would too. Egeanin – what if Egeanin just killed Gawain?

Emily: Egeanin's like, “What did I just tell you?”

Sally: What did –

Emily: Gawyn's like, “I do not see it. Pretend I do not see it.

Sally: He's like, “You didn't – you – that sign doesn't apply to me because I can't read, so.”

Emily: Anyway, Egeanin and Gawyn and Egg all get out with Bayle Domon and are able to Travel away to safety. So I know you were all really stressed about Egwene surviving that, but

don't worry. She does not go out that way. Um. Meanwhile, Perrin and Gaul, in Tel'aran'rhiod, are, like, wandering around, kind of looking for Slayer. They don't know how long it's been. They're like, "Uh, we're kind of hungry." Perrin's like, "Maybe I can make food out of Tel'aran'rhiod," and then that doesn't work, and he's like, "Oh, fuck." He, uh, has a little telepathic conversation with the wolves where they tell him, "A, you need to call us into battle," which is like, what? You can't –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Perrin's like, "You guys are independent, like –"

Sally: Just go.

Emily: "Famously independent creatures. Do what you want; go into battle." But they're like, "Nope, we need the Wolf King" or whatever the hell. And he's like, "Okay, why didn't someone tell me that, like, back in book four or something?" Why was it not prophesied? Anyway, um, they're also like, "We've seen –" Uh, they call her Heartseeker because Perrin also is like, "Have you seen Slayer?" And they're like, "Meh. We do know this bitch Heartseeker though." And Rand – Perrin's like, "Oh, that sounds like a Forsaken."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Sounds like one of their classic nicknames for the Forsaken.

Sally: Yeah, Lanfear is Moonhunter.

Emily: Moonhunter, which is, again, stupid, cringe. Um.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: (laugh) Title of this podcast: cringe. Uh, Perrin and Gaul decide that they'll go investigate this for lack of anything better to do, basically.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: So they show up at the, uh, Fields of Merrilor camp – or, you know, the dream version. Um, and by doing some cool World of Dreams shenanigans, are able to spy on who we know is Graendal. Perrin and Gaul, of course, do not recognize her as she's, like, going through paperwork the way we have seen so many Wheel of Time characters do in the World of Dreams, sort of spying on each other. Um, eventually she, uh, decides to leave, and Perrin, like, tries to follow her, but she senses him or something, and they start having a little fight before he manages to wound her slightly. He – like, he manages to get her on the ropes, and so she also leaves the World of Dreams. Cue Lanfear, of course. Who's like, "Hi, I've just been watching, like I do with all of your little showdowns. Not helping, just sort of offering information afterward." Um.

Sally: She's so annoying. (laugh)

Emily: Perrin had a moment where he theoretically could have killed Graendal and again hesitated, the way the Two Rivers guys do, and iconically, he went back to Gaul and was like, “God, I should have taken that shot.” And Gaul is like, “Yeah.” (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) “Yes.”

Emily: “Yes, you should have.”

Sally: “Idiot.”

Emily: He's like, “You could also take her captive, though,” if – you know, according to Aiel culture, it's better to take your enemies captive. Perrin's like, “Yeah.” And then Lanfear walks up and is like, “Yes, you also should have killed her. What the fuck?”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: The only time I ever care about what Lanfear has to say is when she's like, “It is so annoying that you guys are like this.”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: “What the fuck?” She's like, “It was kind of cute when Rand did it, and now I'm just like – god, I'm fucking sick of it.”

Sally: “Over it.”

Emily: “Over it, dude.” And I'm like, girl, right there with you. Slay. Or don't. As they keep not doing.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Perrin's like, “What was she doing here?” Lanfear's like, “Oh, she's invading people's dreams. It's a classic Graendal move.” Perrin's like, “Oh, that bitch was Graendal?” Lanfear's like, “Yeah, it's her new name. It means ‘without forgiveness.’” He's like, “Oh, don't you have a new name?” And she's like, “Don't look at me.”

Sally: “That's not your business.”

Emily: She's like, “Stop. I don't want to hear it.” Um, she hits on him, blah blah blah blah. And then she's like, “You need to learn how to, like, enter and exit the World of Dreams at will.” And he's like, “Oh, well, can you teach me?” She's like, “No.” (laugh)

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: “That's just something you've got to figure out on your own.” And he's like, “What – why would you fucking bring it up, then?”

Sally: Lanfear is actually so funny in this book. Like, why are you here? You're being so unhelpful. You decided to show up and do absolutely nothing.

Emily: Lanfear is, from a narrative standpoint – like, a functional standpoint – the authors are clearly just sort of, like, throwing her in to dispense information to Perrin. Perrin's not exactly a detective.

Sally: Sure.

Emily: So while he's doing all this sort of, like, CSI work in Tel'aran'rhiod, it makes sense that there would be a character here to dispense information for him. But from a, like, character, actual standpoint, it seems like Lanfear just is, A, stalking Perrin.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Not exactly uncharacteristic for Lanfear, but what are you going to do? I guess she's just not doing the Last Battle. She's like, “Uh, don't worry about me. I'm going to be doing World of Dreams stuff.” And the Dark One is just like, “Yeah, I don't supervise you guys. Look at Demandred.” (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) “That employee is off the rails.”

Emily: He's somehow an extremely lenient manager, the Dark One. Um, Lanfear is just stalking Perrin, showing up, being incredibly unhelpful, and then leaving. She's exactly like that Sailor Moon meme, where it's like –

Sally: (laugh) Where Tuxedo Mask shows up.

Emily: “My job here is done.” “But you haven't done anything.” Leaves.

Sally: (laugh) Yeah, exactly.

Emily: That's Lanfear. She's like, “Well, my job here is done.” Perrin's like, “You have not helped me.” She's like, “Bye.”

Sally: I would love if this was the only book where we got a Gaul point of view, and he's just sitting there.

Emily: He's watching this, like, “There's this insane woman –”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: “Flirting with Perrin.”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: “It's a very Berelain move.”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: “In fact, she kind of reminds me of Berelain –”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: “Because she's ridiculously hot.”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: “What is it with ridiculously hot women throwing themselves at Perrin?” Gaul might ask himself.

Sally: Gaul might ask himself.

Emily: And then Gaul will break the fourth wall and be like, “Oh, it's a male author fantasy.”

Sally: And you're like, “Why aren't all the incredibly attractive women throwing themselves at your feet, Gaul?” is the real question.

Emily: That is the real question. Because as we know, Gaul is way more attractive than Perrin on many levels. Anyway, uh, Lanfear gives Perrin two important pieces of information. Numero uno: it has been a long time since he has been in Tel'aran'rhiid. I think it's been, like, a week.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: She's like, “Yeah, time is fucky here. So you're going to have to deal with that.” Perrin's like, “Oh, crazy.” So, in a way, that means Perrin and Gaul physically have not, like, eaten for a week.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Um, numero dos: Graendal was not invading just any dreams, but, uh, Bashere's dreams specifically. Now the pieces come together. Perhaps Bashere, along with all of the other generals, are getting mind-melded by the Forsaken. This isn't surprising at all, but now we're getting confirmation. Um, next we get an Aviendha point of view, as she and her squad are sort of entering, uh, Thakan'dar, I guess, not Shayol Ghul. This is just, like, a battle sequence, Aviendha, uh, sort of spearheading a group of channelers; we're just getting the vibes, getting the sense of what this particular battle is going to look like.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, It's a whole lot of, you know, channeling, explosions, people linked, which always really freaks me out as soon as I, like, think about it. You know, the idea of being in a circle and you not having control of the circle –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Which means you're not able to channel to defend yourself – that's freaky and weird.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, Aviendha has a sort of minor confrontation with the most powerful channeler, uh, present in Thakan'dar, which, again, is Graendal. Graendal is going to be sort of the main force to contend with here in Thakan'dar for Aviendha specifically. Um, Aviendha, like, as they're all doing this, sees Rand upon the slope of the mountain and they do the, like, Fantastic Mr. Fox wave at each other.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Goodbye.

Sally: Goodbye.

Emily: Forever.

Sally: Forever.

Emily: And then are like, “Well, we've said everything we need to say,” and I'm like, you sure have. (laugh)

Sally: And then some, really.

Emily: And then some, yeah. (sigh) Um, and just sort of get on with the business. Aviendha's like, “I'm going to have to do leadership now, I guess.”

Sally: Um, there's a reference to some of the other women that they're fighting being – oh, what are their names?

Emily: Oh, yeah, we see a couple of, um, way – we see a couple of Black Ajah.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: One of them, I think, is one that has been omnipresent since book three, so.

Sally: Yeah. Falion or whatever her name is.

Emily: Um, and they're referred to as “Dreadlords.” Aviendha – uh, someone's like, “Is there a difference between Dreadlords and Black Ajah?” And one of the Aes Sedai is like, “Yeah, duh.” And then we don't hear what the difference is.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So there isn't. Don't worry about it.

Sally: That really pissed me off.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: I was like, okay?

Emily: Well, what is it then?

Sally: Is it just, like, a Girl Scout badge?

Emily: No, “Dreadlords” is just the umbrella term that they're going to use for enemy channelers. I have no idea – like –

Sally: Okay.

Emily: Within the actual context of the book, I have no idea if there's some sort of meaningful difference.

Sally: I like to think that it's like becoming an Eagle Scout.

Emily: Mm.

Sally: Like, you have to complete –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: A community anti-service project – (laugh) a community disservice –

Emily: You have to do enough murders.

Sally: Yeah. Community disservice project in order to get – (laugh)

Emily: (laugh) You have to participate in enough failed evil plans –

Sally: Yeah. (laugh)

Emily: And then you become a Dreadlord. What are we dreading? It's unclear. They're kind of losers, all of them.

Sally: You're dreading doing more failed evil plans.

Emily: Yeah. God, I hate them. And their evil plans. Swiper, no swiping.

Sally: Swiper, no swiping. “You have to participate in enough failed evil plans.” (laugh)

Emily: (laugh) Well.

Sally: You have to log your hours in failed evil plans.

Emily: Just – that's all they're good at, is failing –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: At evil plans. Finally, we get, uh, a Rand point of view as he is preparing to step into Shayol Ghul proper. He is with Moiraine, Nynaeve, and Thom has also accompanied them.

Thom's function is going to be literally sitting outside of the cave entrance and, um, sort of bodyguarding it, making sure no one sneaks in to, I guess, stab Rand in the back while he's in there. Uh, Rand starts bleeding as soon as they're approaching – his good old side wounds. Nynaeve's like, “Ugh,” and Rand's like, “That's fate, baby. That's those prophecies.”

Sally: Yeah, we get the infamous “blood on the rocks” –

Emily: Oh, yeah.

Sally: The fulfillment of the infamous “blood on the rocks,” which Rand has always – it's always seemed to reference that that means he dies there. That's what I've always kind of pictured. But.

Emily: Yeah, so when we're getting, like, oh, blood on the rocks – oh, maybe he just needs to bleed on them lightly.

Sally: Yeah. Yeah.

Emily: Although he's bleeding quite a bit, enough to, like, go down his –

Sally: Yeah, into his – he's like, “It pools in my boot,” and I'm like, that is so much blood –

Emily: That's so much blood, dude.

Sally: To have run down your leg to pool into your boot and then out of your leather boot.

Emily: Yeah, that's, like, insane.

Sally: I'm very concerned.

Emily: Are you going to be bleeding that hard for the entire Last Battle? We did, at one point – I can't remember if it was Lanfear or someone else who gave us this information – but we learn of a sort of time dilation effect that is going on, uh, with Shayol Ghul at the epicenter.

Sally: Mm.

Emily: And which is a pretty clever move, I will say, on the parts of the authors in order to allow us to bounce back and forth between, um, Rand, whose confrontation with the Dark One – you know, there's no way could stretch for the weeks –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: That the rest of the Last Battle is going to go for. Um, so from here on out, Rand's confrontation with the Dark One is, at most, a couple hours –

Sally: Mm.

Emily: In terms of his real experience of time, which means what's happening with Aviendha and the others outside of the cave is a few more hours?

Sally: Mm.

Emily: Again, not that long, and everyone else is sort of going in much faster time.

Sally: Huh. Fascinating.

Emily: Um, so, mechanically, pretty clever in order to keep everyone on pace –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: In terms of Rand can have a climactic confrontation when everyone else is also having climactic confrontations.

Sally: Totes.

Emily: Um, so, yeah, if you're, like, stressed that Rand's going to go in there and be like, “Well, I'm stuck here for three weeks, not drinking or eating.”

Sally: And just openly bleeding.

Emily: And bleeding so much. No, shouldn't take that long. But, yeah, he has Moiraine and Nynaeve link up with him, with him guiding the circle, which as Moiraine points out, leaves him vulnerable to attack. But he's like, "Don't worry about it." Again, I would not be gung-ho about just being like, "Sure, take my magic power." It will also, again, leave Nynaeve and Moiraine pretty –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Helpless.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And, I mean, Nynaeve probably has, like, a knife, but –

Sally: Good for her.

Emily: Uh, that's sort of an aspect of circles and the sort of linking process that we haven't really explored for something that is so crucial in this last stage.

Sally: Yeah. Um, Moiraine actually has an AK-47 hidden under her dress that she's just gonna –

Emily: She just pulls out a Glock. (laugh)

Sally: (laugh, makes a machine gun noise)

Emily: "What, like it's hard?" Shoots the Dark One. (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) Yeah. So I think she'll be fine.

Emily: Um, as Rand enters the cave, he gets the all-caps voice of the Dark One.

Sally: "It is time – it is time. Let the task be undertaken."

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Which, like, the Dark One is so cunt-y in the way that all the Forsaken wish they were – like, they're trying so hard.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: The Dark One just being like, "Let the task be undertaken"? I don't know –

Emily: He's like, "Yeah, bitch. I'm ready for you."

Sally: I just think it, like, slayed really hard for him to just be like – and I also think it's really interesting to point to the idea that, um, this is the fate that Dark One has also been building to?

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: Like, it'd be fascinating, um, to explore the Dark One as, I don't know, not really a character. I don't know what – but, yeah, as a character, as a presence, as a consciousness, like what's happening with them – him.

Emily: I just realized this might not be meant to be the Dark One, but the Creator.

Sally: Oh, it makes sense too.

Emily: I'm having a vague recollection of that being clarified later on.

Sally: Oh.

Emily: I could be totally wrong.

Sally: Rand does say "thank you."

Emily: Yeah, Rand says "thank you," which seems odd to say to the Dark One.

Sally: Oh. Well, that's kind of less cunt, I'm going to be honest.

Emily: It is less cunt. It would be incredibly funny if the Dark One was like, "Hey –"

Sally: "Heeeey."

Emily: "Hey, girlie."

Sally: "Hey, girlie, are you ready to fight for the fate of the world?"

Emily: "Heh heh heh heh. You ready to fight, bitch?" And, no, it's just the Creator being like –

Sally: "Go forth, my champion."

Emily: "Go forth, my champion." Which, honestly –

Sally: Oh, boy.

Emily: I would be like, "Come down here and do it yourself, old man."

Sally: Yeah, what is – not to – what is the point of you? (laugh)

Emily: I don't want the Creator walking around at this stage of the game.

Sally: I know. Like –

Emily: He's been such a non-entity.

Sally: You showed up at the end of the Eye of the World to be – the most confusing sequence in the entire series –

Emily: So confusing.

Sally: Which is, like, a pretty –

Emily: A high bar, I will say. Yeah.

Sally: Yeah. And now you're here to just be like, "Okay, well, you did that. I told you to do that one thing a really long time ago and now I'm back to be like, 'You did all the things I apparently asked you to do but never helped with.'"

Emily: Yeah. Again, as a text that, um, is dealing so much with the, like, battle of good and evil, but also veering into religious terminology –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: The Wheel of Time remains weird and sort of uncertain of its own identity in that.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And I think bringing in the Creator really weakens its sort of central thesis, which is that Light needs a human champion.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, because then, for real, at that point, it just becomes, okay, well, why does he have to fight evil itself –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: When there's good itself or whatever the hell?

Sally: Right.

Emily: Up there to do it. Yeah; weird. And also, I think, um, they should distinguish somehow between the Dark One's all-caps and the Creator's all-caps. Like, maybe the Creator could be in, like, rainbow text.

Sally: (laugh) Rainbow text.

Emily: Happy Pride Month.

Sally: Happy Pride Month.

Emily: Let the task be undertaken.

Sally: Let the task be undertaken. (laugh) I just did my wrist like that.

Emily: (laugh) And does a fruity little wrist gesture.

Sally: Yeah, at the end of – the Dark One – it's every letter is different rainbow text. Like in Tumblr, if you type, like, "LGBTQ" in the tags –

Emily: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Sally: It'll make it –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Rainbow.

Emily: Cute.

Sally: And then at the end, there's an emoji of him doing the little gay hand. (laugh)

Emily: (laugh)

Sally: And the Dark One, yeah, just gets normal. It's kind of boring. I think if we were really going to talk about villain coding, the Dark One would have the rainbow text.

Emily: Yeah, because villains are queer-coded, as we all know.

Sally: Yeah. And the fruity little wrist.

Emily: The Dark One could have been so incredible.

Sally: I know.

Emily: If he was just like, "Look at my cringe sons."

Sally: "My cringe sons and my thot daughters." (laugh)

Emily: Yeah. Rand's like, "What happened to Asmodean?" And Demandred's like, "Who?"

Sally: "I don't know who that is."

Emily: "I don't know who that is. What are you talking about? I didn't resurrect him." (laugh)

Sally: "Asmodean? I've never heard of her."

Emily: "Um. What?"

Sally: Um. In my version of the Dark One, Asmodean would be his favorite.

Emily: (laugh) Because he's the gayest?

Sally: Because he's the gayest. The Dark One is like – the Dark One has a board where he's ranking the Forsaken –

Emily: "I will rank you all from cringe to gay."

Sally: (laugh) Yeah, exactly.

Emily: (laugh) "This is my –"

Sally: At the exact center is someone who manages to be both cringe and gay.

Emily: "My fruitiest employee of the month." Who is equally cringe and gay?

Sally: I know; I'm trying to think.

Emily: It might be Ishamael. (laugh)

Sally: Yeah, I was kind of thinking that too. (laugh) Ishamael or, like – yeah, probably Ishamael.

Emily: Ishamael died three times, but every time he comes back, he actually is serving cunt, so.

Sally: He really is.

Emily: Demandred should take a leaf out of his –

Sally: Yeah. Yeah, Ishamael's probably at the center. Um. Again, wait – await our official ranking of the Forsaken on the spectrum of cringe to gay.

Emily: Yeah, we are really going to spend a lot of time thinking about that this week.

Sally: I am. I'm sitting here being like, where would Moghedien fall? Where would Semhirage?

Emily: Mm. Further on cringe, I'd say –

Sally: Yeah, I'd say so too.

Emily: To gay.

Sally: Moghedien's –

Emily: Unfortunately, most of the ladies are more cringe than gay.

Sally: Yeah. Yeah, well, that's – feels homophobic, but we'll allow – I can't allow it, but there's nothing I can do about it.

Emily: Okay, next couple of chapters. Now that Rand has entered, we're not going to get a lot more of Rand, just in terms of, like, keeping up with that time stuff. Um, so, sideline Rand for a while. We're, again, mostly going to be focusing on more of the other battle fronts. With our new information about, uh, the generals being compromised, we're going to have to deal with the aftermath of the Kandor battlefield absolutely getting eviscerated. And as the Sharans entered the battle, so are the Seanchan about to, unfortunately. Yeah.

Sally: Could we not do that, actually?

Emily: And I wish we weren't, but here we are. Okay, everyone. Bye!

Sally: Bye.

Emily: Thanks for listening. Thanks to Glynn MacKenzie for our theme song. Thanks to our patrons on Patreon and our followers on social media.

Sally: You guys are sensational.

Emily: Yeah, anything to –?

Sally: Um ... oh, uh, we've made this announcement on our social media, but just to – I know not all of you follow us, which is totally fine – so to put the announcement out there: we only have a few, uh, transcripts left for this season – for the show –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Um, and typically we ask for sponsorship help in order to pay ourselves a little bit of money back, 'cause transcripts can be pretty task-intensive. Um, but in lieu of that, we are, um, offering up, if you donate five dollars or more to any of the GoFundMe's on Operation Olive Branch – if you guys are unfamiliar with Operation Olive Branch, it is a sort of community aid, mutual aid effort to help families who are in, um, uh, Gaza and Rafah and Palestine or looking to evacuate. Um, the evacuation fees are unfortunately very high, because there are many people in, um, the Egyptian transit authorities who are taking advantage of the situation. So. And, of course, the cost of living in Rafah and, uh, other areas of the Gaza Strip is incredibly expensive right now. So, um, if you wanted to support that mutual aid effort, which I think is really exceptional and it's a really cool, um, program that's being designed, you can pick any family on their spreadsheet. It's organized to help you find families that might resonate with you, whose stories might resonate with you. Just send us – um, you can DM us or email us a picture of your donation and we will put up a sponsorship tile for you on one of the transcripts. Um, it might not be the biggest incentive, but hopefully at least get you thinking about where, um, if you have an extra five dollars, how much that could make a difference in somebody else's life. So.

Emily: Yeah, the cool thing about Operation Olive Branch is that they have already done the work of vetting –

Sally: Mm.

Emily: These GoFundMe's.

Sally: Yes.

Emily: If you're worried about being scammed, which unfortunately is a reality in our day and age, people will take advantage of any situation. Um, but, yeah, they have vetted these GoFundMe's and listed them in a very consumable way.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So it's very easy to just click on one and donate.

Sally: Click on one and donate. And, yeah, like Emily said, that – thank you for pointing that out. If you are worried about that, like, you can know that the money is going to these families and not to someone scamming.

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

Sally: I do. This is a little medical, uh, trauma for the girlies.

Emily: Oh, hell yeah.

Sally: Um, I've been doing – uh, everyone in the world knows that I have, like, the worst stomach in America. And my allergist wanted me to do tests to test for sugar intolerances, which is truly, if you've ever done them, they're breath tests, truly wretched. Um, my allergist – their process is that there's four sugars, and the first test you do, you test for all the sugars, and if you test positive, you have to do each sugar individually. Well, I tested positive to all four sugars and then proceeded to test negative to every sugar individually. And my allergist walked into the

room after my test yesterday and sat down, and he's like, "You are literally the only patient in all my years of practicing that this has happened to." And I was like, cool.

Emily: Like you're going to be like, "Ah!"

Sally: I know.

Emily: "What an accomplishment."

Sally: I was like –

Emily: No one in a medical setting wants to be like, "You're the first person this has happened to."

Sally: I know. (laugh)

Emily: It's nightmare – nightmare fuel.

Sally: And then – at least he's being honest, but he's like, "I don't really know what to do." And I was like, okay.

Emily: I love that.

Sally: Thank you.

Emily: So reassuring.

Sally: He did give me some options, which was nice, but he's like, "I don't really know." And I was like, okay, thank you. This has been so fun.

Emily: Great.

Sally: This has been so rad. So anyway. Um –

Emily: Cringe.

Sally: Yeah, talk about cringe: my stomach.

Emily: (laugh) Cringe to gay on the spectrum – it's your stomach.

Sally: Where are you on the spectrum of cringe to gay?

Emily: Okay, everyone. Have a good week.

Sally: Bye!

Emily: Bye.