

Episode 297: Olympic Boob Athletes

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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: Well, another day, another...

SALLY: Another murder, am I right?

EMILY: Another murder. What happened? [laughing] I'm drawing a blank. What happened?

SALLY: Um, I feel like it was a particularly violent set of chapters. I guess it's not. I guess it's just the Bubble of Evil that I'm thinking of.

EMILY: Oh yeah. That was gruesome. And also, um, yeah, Perrin just fighting Slayer for so long.

SALLY: Yeah, and apparently just getting absolutely nerfed by a single arrow to the shoulder.

EMILY: I was like, "What?" That's what does it?

SALLY: [laughing] The whole time I was like, "They're going to tell me it's poisonous at the end." And then Lanfear was just like, "Hmm. Cringe fail." And leaves [laughs].

EMILY: It's just an arrow. In a non-vital spot on your body.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And I'm like, "What?"

SALLY: Yeah, I feel like, if your shoulder were going to hit you – on your scapula, I know that the velocity is probably pretty intense, but that's a pretty solid bone. I don't know if it's going fully through the body.

EMILY: He's like, "The arrow is sticking straight through me." And I'm like, "Okay, I'm not understanding something here. Which part of you is it sticking straight out of?"

SALLY: Yeah, he kept saying "my shoulder." So I'm like, "It pierced your entire ball and socket joint?" [laughs]

EMILY: Yeah, the meaty part? Whatever that part is. He is quite meaty, so I guess it could go through muscle. But I'm like, "Perrin, we're at the stage where you, you're a sort of class of people, your little heroes are just walking off sort of maimings, regularly. Like, Mat's up and going after having his eyeball ripped out of its socket. Rand's like, 'Lost a hand? What about it?'"

SALLY: Yeah, so for Perrin to be like, "An arrow." I think that's maybe the problem I'm having. A human in, like, our world logic, if they were shot through the shoulder with an arrow that would be quite debilitating.

EMILY: John Wick, on the other hand.

SALLY: [laughs] John Wick. Exactly, John Wick on the other hand, operating in the World of Dreams where Perrin can just make oceans disappear. For him to be like, "This is absolutely destroying me." Was just confusing.

EMILY: Yeah, and also, I guess, Aviendha fighting Graendal who's sort of on a murder rampage, threatening our boy Darlin.

SALLY: How dare she?

EMILY: How dare she?

SALLY: Why didn't she look at Darlin and go, "He's too hot? I can't."

EMILY: [laughs] This Damocles sword hanging over Darlin's head, I shall remove due to his hotness.

SALLY: Due to his incredible, sexy rizz.

EMILY: Come on, though. If that had been a factor, Bashere and Ituralde would have carried the day already. Gareth Bryne on the other hand?

SALLY: She'd be like, "Hmm. Kind of an uggo."

EMILY: [laughs] Loser!

SALLY: [laughing]

EMILY: *Loser!* [laughing] This is Everybody Hates Rand, your friendly neighborhood *Wheel of Time* podcast. I'm Emily Juchau.

SALLY: And I am Sally Goodger.

EMILY: Is it even an episode of EHR if we don't start by bullying some random male character whomst we hate?

SALLY: No. It's what we're here for. [pause] Things EHR believes in. One, feminism [laughs].

EMILY: Feminism. Bullying men. Those are separate things, by the way.

SALLY: Yeah, they are entirely separate. Related, perhaps, but...

EMILY: And not just bullying any men. Bullying the dumb men. Objectifying the other men.

SALLY: Exactly. This is our platform.

EMILY: That's what we're here for.

SALLY: Bullying and objectifying, the podcast. [laughs] Colon: the Podcast.

EMILY: [laughs] Um, our, our, like we sort of referenced already, we've got Perrin. We've got – finally – some Faile. We've got Aviendha, and we've got a very brief Rand point of view in this...

SALLY: I know. I was so mad at how short it was. I was like, "Finally, this shit's getting interesting."

EMILY: Nope, not yet. Not yet it's not.

SALLY: [laughing]

EMILY: So, going –

SALLY: [laughing] Brandon Sanderson is like, “Oh, you want to have a little fun? Psych. I’m gonna edge you towards the Last Battle.”

EMILY: He really is. It’s so many. I’m like [heavy breathing], “Come on...come on...come on!”

SALLY: [laughs loudly]

EMILY: It’s, you know it’s bad when you’re longing for the days that EHR had *chunky* chapters of single points of view.

SALLY: Yeah. Yeah.

EMILY: You’re like, “Come on. Just give me three pages in the same point of view.” This, um, problem [laughs] will get worse. Not better.

SALLY: Does he have points of view that are less than a page long?

EMILY: Yes! Many!

SALLY: Brandon. Brand – Branderson!

EMILY: That’s why the way I had to split this chapter is so insane. Um, but we’ll get to that eventually. Um, in order, more or less, we first deal with Perrin fighting Slayer. Um, they’re just fighting. I don’t – it’s a very long action sequence, just in terms of how these things go. Uh, we’ve said before that Brandon Sanderson is pretty good at writing these sequences in *tel’aran’rhiod*. Good blend of, you know, fun sort of magical things happening in terms of the rules of *tel’aran’rhiod* and occasional snippets of conversation. And, speaking of edging, Slayer has still not really given us any of his tragic backstory. [laughs] He, at one point, to Perrin – Perrin’s like, “Hey, what the fuck is up with you? Why are you so [laughs].”

SALLY: Why are you this way?

EMILY: Why are you so weird, parentheses, derogatory.

SALLY: Derogatory [laughs]. Yeah, not in a sexy way.

EMILY: Yeah, not, in the Republican way.

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: He's like, "Why are you being so fucking odd?" And Slayer's like, "[scoffs] If you even knew what I've been through, you would absolutely lose your mind." And Perrin's like, "Okay?"

SALLY: Then tell me!

EMILY: Then tell me! And Slayer's like, "[whispers] No."

SALLY: [whispers] Secret.

EMILY: [whispers] It's a secret. And I'm like, "Is it going to remain a secret, though?"

SALLY: Apparently.

EMILY: Like, I get it. It's a little bit cringe to have your villain be like, "Here's what went down. It all began with my father." [laughs] As it always does.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: You know, this isn't anime, where we can watch the tragic backstory unspool behind, um, the villain's eyes so that we, at least, can gain a connection to him. At some point, someone has to say something. But we're on Book 14 and everything we know about Slayer is extrapolated *highly* from sort of marginal notes on this text, and that I find extremely annoying. Because if you want me to have any investment in this fight between – in this rivalry almost between Perrin and Slayer, you know, that's one thing anime does good. Is it's like, "Yeah, the villains are real people too that you have to deal with."

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And they have complicated emotions and backstories and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. Instead of just being a cardboard cutout of a villain.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Which is what Slayer does. And also, Slayer presents his whole philosophy to Perrin and it's the most boring shit you've ever heard. He's just like, "We live in a world of predator and prey. And I'm gonna be a predator not a prey." And I'm like, "That's just boring." That sort

of lateral thinking is classic in, like, comic book villains. But comic books, sorry to those who partake, are not often...full of deep thought.

SALLY: Right.

EMILY: They are a medium meant, uh, to convey something else, generally.

SALLY: Totally.

EMILY: Um, and comic book villains are generally villains of the week. Or Magneto, who does have deep...

SALLY: Yeah, Magneto who's one of the best, most interesting villains of all time.

EMILY: God, I love you, Magneto.

SALLY: I know.

EMILY: Tell me more. And it's just, like, you can do things with the predator-prey dynamics that are really interesting, um, like the fact that Slayer goes around killing wolves sort of subtextually speaks to that. But having him literally say it is so weird and boring.

SALLY: Yeah. [clears throat] Um, yeah, it feels really old. And to your point – I think I was going to make – I know we make this point frequently, but to sort of pin up a bad example of it. We often talk about, um, to go back to some of our foundational, um, literary theory around fantasy, there are generally four different types of fantasy otherworld, like, fantasy presentations that we see. *Wheel of Time* is working in what we would call an Immersive Fantasy, so that it has built an entirely other secondary world that does not rely on real world context. And a tool you'll often see is that, in order to build depth and make the world feel real, is the author gesturing to something that isn't something necessarily happening on the page. A really common example of this is the, what I call, Ozymandias mechanic, where they walk past a ruin and they see something.

EMILY: And they're like, "Oh, this world is so old and has such a rich history." Without us having to read an entire history book.

SALLY: Without Moiraine standing up in the Two Rivers and giving us the history of Manetheren, which I know a lot of people have strong feelings about, but I think was very weird [laughing] of her to be like, "Hold on. My PowerPoint presentation."

EMILY: It was a little Ted Talky, shall we say.

SALLY: And, I think, in the most generous interpretation of Slayer, he is supposed to be something like that. Like, there is magic in this world that we do not understand. Like, look at this person who is two people and can do all this stuff in the World of Dreams. However, it does not function at this point in the story to have something that we do not understand, because I've read, *literally* like five thousand pages plus of *Wheel of Time*. It's very frustrating to be at this point where something that is pivotal to the plot is something that I don't understand. What is Slayer's power set? Who even is he? I don't even know. So, just to, I don't know, put a little structure around my own personal beef.

EMILY: Yeah, no. I agree completely. Like, at this point if you are avoiding telling, giving us information, then, um, that – then it needs to gesture – it shouldn't be obvious that you're avoiding giving us information. If you have some reveal that you want to come back to, then that needs to be, like, something that was foreshadowed but wasn't, like, need to know until it happens. Uh, the prime example of that functioning well in *Wheel of Time* is Mat's spear that turns out to be the key to getting out of the Tower of Ghenjei. None of us were like, "Hey, the spear must have a secondary function." But then when it does, it makes total sense.

SALLY: Yeah, and it's super satisfying and very clean narratively.

EMILY: Yeah. You're like, "Great." So, if earlier we had had some sort of, like, surface level understanding of Slayer's backstory and it was, like, deepened at this point that would also function. But our understanding of Slayer has been so piecemeal and so scattered that it's just completely – like, at this point I would settle for having a monologue about his backstory [laughs]. That's the desperate straits we're in.

SALLY: I know. I'd be like, "Thank God!"

EMILY: Finally someone is telling me what this man's deal is. Because it's just like he doesn't like wolves and he doesn't like Perrin.

SALLY: And you're like, "One of those is understandable [laughs]." Not liking Perrin.

EMILY: Not liking Perrin... I understand that on a daily basis, you know?

SALLY: Yeah, I think we keep talking about how there are many extraneous plots in this book and I think it's like – if we needed to have Perrin in the World of Dreams fighting someone who is also good in the World of Dreams it's kind of frustrating to me that it's not Lanfear.

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: Like, we have almost all of our other characters facing off against a Forsaken and here's Perrin with Lanfear just, like, walking around.

EMILY: Yeah. Slayer is a secondary villain at best, who should have been defeated in the last book.

SALLY: Totally! If not in Book 4. You know, like?

EMILY: Yeah, if we're gonna have to have him keep running around then it would have been in Book 4. But then it should have been last book.

SALLY: At the very least he should be done by now. End of Slayer era.

EMILY: You're totally right. Lanfear and Perrin are already interacting. It should be more of, like, an adversarial thing. And I think the authors felt limited by the trap they'd written themselves into, which is that Perrin wouldn't fight a woman. But it's like you can have interesting things going on with Lanfear and Perrin since the World of Dreams is so cerebral and just dependent on your creativity and what's going on and what could happen.

SALLY: Totally!

EMILY: But Brandon Sanderson, clearly, wanted to write these rollicking action sequences, which of course Lanfear could never participate in, because she's a delicate flower.

SALLY: Her boobs would get in the way.

EMILY: [laughs] Perrin wouldn't want to kill her! Her boobs would get in the way. If boobs didn't get in the way for the pink-haired lady in *Demon Slayer*, then nobody else has an excuse.

SALLY: She's out there doing, like, speaking of the Olympics. Gymnastics level shit.

EMILY: An Olympic boob size.

SALLY: Yeah, an Olympic boob — and just, like, a mini skirt and thigh highs.

EMILY: Yeah, girl.

SALLY: And she's out there doing martial arts. So.

EMILY: Anyway, Perrin [laughs] eventually just sort of loses this fight because he's slowing down because he's been in the World of Dreams. He goes so fast from being like "I'm at my ultimate power here in the World of Dreams," to, like, fully collapsed. Like, "Damn, it all caught up to me at once."

Yeah, like, okay, I would have liked a better, more of a smoother downhill.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Slope.

SALLY: I guess the arrow makes sense...when you add his fatigue into it.

EMILY: But we haven't had the fatigue set up very well. Um, Perrin, like, gets away and then is kind of like, "I'm dying or something." He's, like, hallucinating fully. He's like, "Faile." And I'm like, wow, this is the first time you thought of Faile in ages.

SALLY: Literally weeks?!

EMILY: So weird. And then Lanfear appears and is like, "Well, bitch ass."

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: "You done fucked up." He's like, Perrin's literally begging her for help. And she's like, "No! Goodbye!"

SALLY: Sowwy!

EMILY: And leaves. And I'm like, "Honestly, girl, kinda slay."

SALLY: Yeah. One of the funnier things you've done, Lanfear. Just, like, I like to imagine Perrin on the ground bleeding out. Lanfear walks up and is just looking down at him.

EMILY: And is like, "Then perish."

SALLY: Yeah. Then perish [laughs].

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: Bye! My work here is done.

EMILY: Goodbye. And then Perrin just, like, sort of loses consciousness. And it's like, he's like, "At least the wolves are watching Shayol Ghul." And I'm like, "What about Gaul?" The important mechanical thing is that he doesn't manage to shift himself back to the Fields of Merrilor, which is where Rand had set up his sort of daily gateway to pick him up and also where everyone is converging now. So there's some like, well, maybe he'll have help. But that's where we leave him. Okay, here's what's going on with Faile. And you guys aren't going to believe this, but somehow Olver's involved [laughs].

SALLY: I don't even want to talk about Olver and the fucking Horn of Valere.

EMILY: [laughs]

SALLY: Let's talk about the opposite of narrative payoff.

EMILY: Faile is, Faile tells us that she has been running random supply runs, just sort of to, like, establish the pattern, the MO. So no one will be suspicious when she does a supply run directly carrying the Horn of Valere in secret. Um, they take off from Tar Valon, which is where they're picking up supplies and are intended to just go straight to the Fields of Merrilor. Faile has the, simply the most unhinged group with her. None of them, there's one person who's, like, connected to her, and that's Aravine, who has sort of been functioning as her quartermaster, very behind the scenes-ish. But everyone else is from Mat's group of people. We have some classic figures from the Band of the Red Hand, uh, prime among them, Vanin, our good old horse thief slash scout, and then the, like, sort of beefy guys who have been around, Harnan and Mandevwin. Seattle Anan is here for some reason. Um, and, am I missing anyone?

SALLY: And Olver, we mentioned.

EMILY: Olver, yeah.

SALLY: I thought there was one more lady.

EMILY: Yeah, and Olver, who will get into Olver later. But this group is our – Faile is like, "There's a whole rationale to it, which is that..." [laughs] This is so convoluted. She's like, "I'll bring these supplies to the Fields of Merrilor, bringing this special box that I have established is a delivery for Mat and is full of tobacco." Tabac, exsqueeze me.

SALLY: Tabac. Tabac.

EMILY: And she's like, "But I'm not going to deliver it to him because that's suspicious. Instead, I have surrounded myself with members of the Band of the Red Hand who Mat will surely want to visit. And that's when I'll just slip the Horn to him." And I'm like, what? Girl, what?

SALLY: Yeah. The level of the, like, unnecessarily complicated eight dimension chest that Faile is playing against herself.

EMILY: Faile is a FedEx driver making a whole *Ocean's Eleven* scenario.

SALLY: A FedEx driver [laughs]. Yeah, it is like if you can get to Mat, give him the package.

EMILY: Girl, it is not that hard.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Like what?

SALLY: No one will think it is weird for you to be like, "Hey, Mat, I have the Horn of Valere." And Mat will be like, Mat will probably be like, "I don't want it." But.

EMILY: Mat will be like, "Ah! [hissing noises]."

SALLY: [laughing] Yeah.

EMILY: [laughing] No! Take it away from me!

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: But it's, like, that's not your problem anymore. I'm just –

SALLY: It really is adding – even the level of, like, we're making multiple supply runs, we're doing all of this stuff. I have all these people with me. I've concocted this specific –

EMILY: Elaborate backstory

SALLY: Story, yeah. She's, yeah, very Brandon Sanderson to be like, it needs an elaborate backstory for no reason like...

EMILY: Except not for Slayer.

SALLY: But for the Horn of a Valere slash tobacco box, absolutely, baby girl. We are in a heist movie now.

EMILY: AH! I, like, can't even did, was anyone like, "Yeah, this is what should be happening."

SALLY: Or is Faile just like "Tee hee!"

EMILY: Faile should be delivering the Horn of Valere to Mat.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Like that's something that needs to happen. The Horn [groans]. I just can't even, like, I don't have the words to communicate how stupid this is and how condescended I feel.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: How condescended *to* I feel. Like, I get it, you needed to do something with Faile. For some reason, you needed to do something with the Horn of Valere, but at this point, it is not believable that anything would be happening.

SALLY: Yeah, it definitely stretches belief a little bit, which we'll talk a little bit more about in a second. But, um, Brandon didn't need to do anything with Faile. Um, I know that is kind of hard for this book to grasp, but, like, just because someone's been a point of view character in the past does not mean they need to have a significant batch of point of views in the next book. Um, we are kind of at the end stages here. It's perfectly reasonable to really whittle down. Faile is a main character, but, like, a main secondary character, secondary main, second tier main character. She's not any of our *ta'veren* or original Emond's Field Five. She doesn't need to play this big of a role. Perfectly reasonable to whittle it down to Mat Perrin, Egg, Rand, Nynaieve, and even Moiraine, you know.

EMILY: And if you were, ike, desperate, you just really felt, like, you couldn't betray her. There were other things she could be doing. For one thing, Faile could have gone to the World of Dreams with Perrin.

If that was something we were willing to do with Gaul, why not Faile?

SALLY: Yeah, why not his wif?

EMILY: Yeah. I mean, I know why. It's because Perrin is a huge misogynist who could never bring his wife into battle with him. But like, come on. That would have been at least satisfying because it would have felt like Faile was moving in conjunction with Perrin.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And was doing something that sort of it would, like, feel right to have Faile.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY:...Being Perrin's backup in that way.

SALLY: Yeah, it would also, um, it would be a satisfying end to their marriage arc, where they have been competing with each other for so long and, like, constantly hostile towards each other, or there's been a massive power imbalance with, like, Faile being kidnapped and threatened with assault and Perrin having to come and rescue her, to finally be at a point where they are operating in tandem as partners.

EMILY: Yeah, that would have been the feminist thing to do, I think. It also would have been like, it's been fun to have Gaul in the World of Dreams being reminded that, like, you can just be a normal person and still do pretty well in the World of Dreams. And that would have been really fun to have, like, Faile just sort of excel at it, you know? But alas, we can talk all day about what could have been, but here's what's happening, I guess. This is what Brandon Sanderson decided to do. Faile takes this latest caravan. Um, they're, like, traveling to, they're, like, crossing the bridge out of Tar Valon into some sort of Traveling grounds where there is a single Aes Sedai stationed, which seems kind of wild already. There's just [laughs] this plot is so convoluted on the, like, foundational level that every time it tries to, like, do anything with itself, it has to become even more convoluted. So it's, like, already this is insane that Faile is doing this, that this is happening. Okay, so now we have to add even more levels of insanity to get Faile to where we want, the narrative wants her to be. Um, but Faile has this secret box that she's carrying. They go to the Traveling ground. They're on, like, the bridge and there's a minor earthquake, but that's just sort of expository. At the Traveling ground, Faile's like "We're heading for the Fields of Merrilor," when a Bubble of Evil hits. And, like, right as the Aes Sedai is creating the gateway. Um, oh, a horse dies.

SALLY: Yeah, it's very sad.

EMILY: Yeah, speaking of murder. One of the – it's, like, spikes that come up out of the ground and just sort of – and they have ghosts in them or something [laughing] I don't fucking know.

SALLY: Yeah. Haunting little...

EMILY: Crystals!

SALLY: People inside of them.

EMILY: Um, one of them goes through the Aes Sedai's foot while she's making the gateway, uh, but the gateway does open and everyone – Faile, rushes everyone through it. Um, then returns to, like, get the last few people or some – she returns to, like, check on the Aes Sedai, only to find that the Aes Sedai is dying, has been, like, stabbed in the stomach. Um, and so Faile gets through the gateway right as it closes, presumably right as the Aes Sedai dies.

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: And realizes they're not in the Fields of Merrilor. They're in the Blight.

SALLY: [resigned] Yeah.

EMILY: Which, I don't know if you remember this guys, but the Blight is bad news. I know a lot of people are running around the Blight right now, but...

SALLY: It doesn't mean it's a good idea.

EMILY: These are a bunch of normies, so yeah, it's bad.

SALLY: Yeah, Faile, when we jump to her next point of view, is like “Two people died when we were hiking to a campsite.”

EMILY: Yeah, Faile’s like, “We moved ten feet and two people died. So that's what it's like to not have plot armor in this world.”

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And you're like, “Damn, dude.” Yeah, the next time we see them is they're camped nearer to the site and are kind of deliberating on what to do, a lot of which stems from the conversation of like, what happened? They're like, did the Aes Sedai send us here deliberately? Was she some sort of Darkfriend? Faile’s like, “Maybe it was just an accident because, you know, she did get stabbed in the foot.” And Setalle Anan, former Aes Sedai is like, “[laughs softly] Shitty Aes Sedai then, you know?”

SALLY: [laughs] Yeah.

EMILY: [laughs] You should be able to focus while getting stabbed with a million knives.

SALLY: Yeah. She's referencing, of course, the *heinous* testing you have to go through to become...

EMILY: [laughs] Extremely dumb testing.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: She's like, "That doesn't make sense to me." And there's the fact that this Aes Sedai seems to have been killed...not by the spikes that came out of the ground, but, like, by a knife maybe. Obviously, we haven't had – [laughs] we aren't able to do an autopsy or anything. And [laughs] it gets worse. Since it was *one* Aes Sedai, a single Aes Sedai stationed here, they're like, "We don't know if anyone will find us." We don't know, like, it's possible to sort of read where a gateway was heading.

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: But why would anyone assume that we've been sent to the wrong place? We just don't know. So Faile executive decisions it and is like, "Let's wait here a day and then we'll move if no one comes to rescue us." They also decide, okay, we're going to make – instead of trying to go directly south out of the Blight, we're going to make for the distant peak of Shayol Ghul, because the area surrounding Shayol Ghul supposedly has fewer dangers, because it's just, like, that's the Dark One's zone. And they're like, "Hopefully, they will be able to, like, sync up with our armies, who will have Channelers who can send us to the right place."

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: That's the plan. Obviously, there's lots of – there's some level of, like, intrigue that's meant to be going on here. How did they end up in this situation? What machinations are happening in the background? Surely someone knew about the Horn of Valere. And this is some sort of convoluted plot to steal the Horn of Valere. Faile's suspicions are primarily on the members of the band of the Red Hand, who she doesn't know very well, and are men.

SALLY: Yeah, specifically Vanin. Like, Vanin watches her put the tobacco box in the wagon, and she catches him looking at her.

EMILY: And she's like...

SALLY: Criminal.

EMILY: She's like, "He's a criminal," and she doesn't even know he's a criminal. She's just like, "He gives off sleazeball vibes." And I'm like, "Yeah, because he's Vanin."

SALLY: Yeah, because he's a literal horse thief [laughs].

EMILY: Yeah. And he just heard you announce that you have a box full of tobacco, and he loves tobacco, probably.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Like, there are rational explanations for everything that's going on, you know?

SALLY: Yeah. But she's like, "Maybe it's Vanin."

EMILY: Faile's, like, trying to play 5D chess with some idiot soldiers.

SALLY: Who's eating all the pieces. Yeah, that meme.

EMILY: [laughing]

SALLY: Vanin's just eating them.

EMILY: She's like, "Obviously, it's Vanin." And we're obviously meant to also think that maybe there's some sort of, like, threat here amongst the band of the Red Hand. Darkfriends hiding till these crucial moments, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.

SALLY: If I had to predict, I will say that Vanin saves their bacon in the Blight because he's such a good scout and surprisingly sneaky.

EMILY: Vanin is a great asset to have. I would agree.

SALLY: I was trapped in the Blight I'd be like, "That's the number one bitch I want with me." Brandon Sanderson makes like six fatphobic jokes in a row, though, which is so unbelievably unnecessary, um, about Vanin being a fat man. It's just like boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom.

EMILY: Everyone's like, "Can he even get on a horse?" And I'm like, "I need everyone to shut up about Vannan being fat." Like, you can be like, "Vanin's fat," without having everyone be like, "And we hate him for it."

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And Faile suspects he's an evil because of it.

SALLY: She's like, "There's no way he's a horse thief."

EMILY: There's no way that a fat, ugly person could be a –

SALLY: A cool, sexy thief.

EMILY: A good person. And I'm like, "First of all, that's Vanin and I love him."

SALLY: That's Papa [laughs]

EMILY: How dare you? [laughs] That's my dad. He's been with us since the beginning.

SALLY: [laughs] Yeah, that's Papa. And yeah, it very much [clears throat] comes back to this idea that permeates English literature, at least, that your outward appearance is a reflection of your moral character. And so if you are ugly or fat or disabled, that means you are evil. So you just love, *love*, as most sarcastic as I could, I don't know if that always comes across, love to see in what, when was this published? 2014, the Year of Our Lord.

EMILY: 2013.

SALLY: 2013, that we just cannot escape this wretched foundation of English literature. English language.

EMILY: Um, the other two people who are with them, I just found are Setalle, or excuse me, some members of *Cha Faile*.

SALLY: Oh yeah.

EMILY: Like, Arrela, I guess. So yeah, bad. And also omnipresent, the sort of elephant in the room, the eleven-year-old child in the room is Olver who absolutely, at this point – like, I'm a little more tolerant of Olver having been here for the last thirteen books, but I'm drawing my line in the sand here. Faile's like, "We couldn't leave him behind, because," everyone simply is like, was like, "He'll join the fight anyway, he'll figure out a way." And I'm like, "If you guys can't control a child." Olver's not the only *orphan* on this continent. Where are all the other kids?

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: You got to stick Olver in a school or something. Where are all the other refugee children? Right. Like, if you're going to make space in this world for one child, you need to acknowledge that there are other children in the world and that, likely, that one child is going to be grouped with them.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: It's just like, we're trying to do this heinous Gavroche thing.

SALLY: [laughs] I think we're three episodes in a row on Gavroche.

EMILY: Well, I love Gavroche, okay?

SALLY: He's a perfect character.

EMILY: And it's like, Gavroche, for some reason, is allowed to just be on the barricades with all of the college students.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And you're like, okay, whatever. But Gavroche is charming and hilarious, so you let it pass. And Olver's incredibly annoying.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: So it doesn't make as much sense. And it's just, like, this holding is so transparently, like, the blueprint for the narrative, as we've referenced that metaphor before. And Olver being here can only mean one thing, you know? He's going to have to have something to do with the Horn of Valere. He'll finally have to play a crucial role in the narrative to justify his having been here.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: For the whole time. And it's like, no. Just get rid of him.

SALLY: Yeah, it is actually, like, I am absolutely zero percent tolerant of Olver's place in the narrative [laughs]. We all know that. I have never understood the point of giving Mat a child.

EMILY: So weird.

SALLY: And he's fine. It isn't like I hate Olver. He's just a kid. But, like, I don't – never understand why he was here. So to have this – talking about just, like, we all know, spoiler alert, that it's Olver that blows the Horn of Valere, not Matt at the Last Battle, which is, like, the most...

EMILY: So weird.

SALLY: Anti climactic thing we can think of. Like Brandon Sanderson decided in *A Memory of Light* to throw every writing convention out the window, including closing narrative loops in satisfying ways.

EMILY: Goodbye!

SALLY: So anyway, he was like, no, we're going to be a little more [laughing] post modern or whatever and have a child do it.

EMILY: We're being *artistique*.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Yeah, it's nuts. It also strains believability that adults would be like, yeah, this is fine.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Like it's one thing when Mat's in charge of this boy and Mat is more or less like, “I'm in a city where there are other people caretaking for him, or we're on the road escaping that city and I really don't have anything else to do with him.”

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: You know, it's – I don't have a choice. Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. But it's, like, at this point, the adults are making *active* decisions to allow this.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Which is insane.

SALLY: Yeah. You obviously do not need to have been responsible for a child to understand how crazy this is. But my oldest niece is eight years old, which is very close to Olver's age. And you

would have to pull every single one of my teeth out and then kill me before I would let that child anywhere near an active war zone on purpose.

EMILY: Yeah. Like what? What?

SALLY: Like it really does strain credulity to be like – we are also supposed to believe these are good people at the same time, accepting it's okay to have a child on the front lines of anything.

EMILY: Yeah. Faile's like, "This is the most dangerous mission I've ever embarked on. But here's a ten-year-old."

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And I'm like, girl.

SALLY: Yeah. And I know you guys might say, well, there she is technically just moving supplies. It's the Last Battle, baby. Anybody working towards that –

EMILY: Do you see any other kids walking around?

SALLY: Yeah, is in danger. So it's so silly at this point. So, yeah, just the blueprint. Like we can go on and on about the actual morals of having a [laughs] child in a battle, but it is just the blueprint coming through in a very obvious way.

EMILY: So crazy. Yeah. Meanwhile, over in Thakan'dar, that battle front, Ituralde has been returned from the wolves, tragically.

SALLY: Yeah. Tragic.

EMILY: He doesn't spend the rest of the Last Battle there. Um, Darlin is now nominally in charge, but also, like, Rhuarc and some other people. Everyone's still kind of, like, reeling from what we're going to do about this. Um, Aviendha is in camp, and senses Channeling, goes to investigate, and it turns out to be a creepy figure moving around Darlin's tent. Graendal, obviously. But there are also some Aiel, who we know are the creepy bad Aiel, but Aviendha doesn't initially know that, so she gets in a...jam there and has to be rescued by Cadsuane. Um, this is, I guess, no one has encountered these Channeling Aiel men yet, so this is like a big news blast for everyone here in Thakan'dar. Again, it's a little weird to us because we are well acquainted with this issue by now, so it's like, oh, we're making a big deal out of it. Okay, I guess.

SALLY: Yeah, I thought it was just kind of, like, old hat. Everyone was like, “That kind of sucks that that happened to them, but.”

EMILY: Yeah, but of course, it's like this big cultural crisis for the Aiel, you know? They're like –

SALLY: [laughs] These people can't get away from the cultural crises, man.

EMILY: They just had – no, no W's for the Aiel in terms of culture.

SALLY: No rest for the wicked.

EMILY:: It's really, like, the narrative is indicting them for their entire culture and no one else. It's weird.

SALLY: That's kind of crazy, dog.

EMILY: That's so crazy. Um, anyway, Aviendha, like, reports about seeing a crazy person outside Darlin's tent and they're like, “Well, what should we do? We can't protect any of our...” You know, communication is cut off from the other battlefronts, I guess? We are not really, like, discussing that as an issue.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Um, yet. I don't know if we ever will, but it's sort of weird that they're not communicating with everyone else. I guess the authors didn't want to have to deal with the, like, time differential, but again, weird.

SALLY: But, like, it's a mechanic that you built and you can't cop out from your own mechanic. Like –

EMILY: Fully agree.

SALLY: If you are going to build a mechanic where time is working differently on different battlefronts, man up and figure it out.

EMILY: Yeah. Um, but they decide, “Okay, well, we'll just try and kind of split command between multiple people, try and and – ultimately we're just not going to change the battle plan. So if anyone tries to change the battle plan, we'll consider them compromised.”

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And the battle plan is just hold position.

SALLY: [laughs] So it's not a particularly difficult plan to understand why someone might want to compromise it.

EMILY: It's not high level calculus [laughs]. Um, but we see another, we get another kind of actiony sequence where Aviendha's with, like, a little group of Channelers. And, um, while Aviendha is, like, doing something again, holding the circle, the other Channelers, she's linked to get attacked by Graendal in the background and a bunch of them get murdered. And then Graendal disappears with Sarene?

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Which is bizarre. She's just like – she's clearly done compulsion to her. Sarene is like, Sarene, if you don't remember, is one of the Aes Sedai who swore fealty to Rand. She's hella gorgeous, as everyone reminds us, and doesn't really have feelings.

SALLY: Is she one that Verin [laughing] also put under compulsion? Nice.

EMILY: I think so. So she's been double compulsed.

SALLY: Graendal got in there and was like, “Wait a second.”

EMILY: Graendal's like, “This is some wack ass shit.”

SALLY: What?

EMILY: This is some surgery with dental floss.

SALLY: Yeah. In the Spider-Man meme in Sarene's brain right now.

EMILY: Wait a second.

SALLY: [laughs] Surgery with dental floss.

EMILY: Sarene, Min also had a viewing a long time ago that Sarene would fall massively in love with someone. So, I don't know if that's what's being indicated here that Graendal has compulsed Sarene to be in love with her in the way that all of Graendal's...critters are. Um, because I don't

remember if Sarene lives [laughs]. Anyway, so absolutely wild that Graendall is just going around still kidnapping people.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: I don't know what to do about that, but...

SALLY: Graendal's like, "Listen, some people are too hot to murder."

EMILY: And this bitch is one of them.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And Sarene's like...

SALLY: Thank you!

EMILY: Thank you, my lady. And Aviendha's like, "What?"

SALLY: Damer Flinn also loses an arm.

EMILY: Yeah. People are getting maimed, mutilated. Aviendha's not doing well. Um, but, you know, there's some, like, Aviendha and Cadsuane are inching toward being sort of a duo on this battlefield. Um. and Graendal is continuing to be a threat. And that's the main things going on there.

SALLY: There's a moment where Cadsuane murders someone by just stopping his heart.

EMILY: Yeah. And we're just like, "Okay."

SALLY: And everyone, the narrative, like, gives her, she's, like, supposed to be explaining herself. And she's like, "I guess technically it's bad, but it's not any worse than lighting them on fire." And I'm like, "I guess that's true. Like it is a little more..."

EMILY: Less painful. Sure.

SALLY: Humane? [laughs] But you did just murder someone.

EMILY: Yeah. Like how do you learn how to do that without breaking the vows? But whatever.

SALLY: Yeah. Cadsuane is like, “The vows are not for me.”

EMILY: Um, and we get a one single tiny Rand point of view where he's kind of having his, like, outside of the cosmos moment conversation with the Dark One. Um, he's like, “So this is where it's really going to go down.” And Rand's like, “Well, never been here before in any of my past lives. So that's probably a good sign. Progress.”

SALLY: And we're like –

EMILY: You know, he's like a video game character who's finally gotten past.

SALLY: Got a checkpoint.

EMILY: Yeah. Um, and then it just says, “Then, like, a sudden storm, the Dark One brought all of his force against Rand.” So loose interpretation that Rand's being attacked on some sort of cosmic psychological level, but we don't really know what that means yet. And that's where we leave him for now. So?!

SALLY: Yeah, kind of a bummer that we don't get more of the Dark One just yet.

EMILY: We sure will in the future.

SALLY: I think he's pretty funny, to be honest.

EMILY: Until then, we have one more section before we get to the chapter 37, the Last Battle. going to be bouncing around points of view between that. Uh, I think there's a pretty long one with Mat, so it's just sort of setting up Fields of Merrilor. But now we've also got the Faile point of view to keep an eye on. Um, that's, I think, the only there – We've moved from having multiple battle fronts to now having one main battle front with some subplots on the side. We've got Faile. We've got what's happening in Thakan'dar with Aviendha and Cadsuane. We've got Perrin. That's more or less it.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And Rand, of course. But that's another of the main ones. So that's where we leave it, I guess. Kind of a bummer. Not really a bummer. An anger inducing one.

SALLY: Yeah, it's not a bummer so much as in, like, the Mat and Tuon...

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: Chapters have been a bummer, but it's a bummer. And just, like, it is not very good storytelling.

And it's frustrating because at – one, I know Brandon Sanderson can do better. For all that we complain about him, he can craft a perfectly fine story. Um, I know he was given kind of a deck of cards that he didn't have total control over, but it is just, like, frustrating. And I also know Robert Jordan can do better because Robert Jordan wrote *The Dragon Reborn*, which is an incredibly tight and wonderful narrative. So it's frustrating to just see, like, what feels very half assed writing and plots.

EMILY: L after L after L.

SALLY: Yeah. So it's kind of a bummer in that way.

EMILY: Yeah. Yeah. But, you know, thanks for listening, like always.

SALLY: There you go, besties.

EMILY: Hey, thanks to Glynna Mackenzie for our theme song. Thanks to our patrons on Patreon and our followers on social media.

SALLY: Yes, ma'am.

EMILY: Do you have a sign off?

SALLY: Oh [laughs] I went to a drag show last weekend, um, with some friends, which is incredibly fun. It was a drag kings, specifically drag kings. They called the Kings Kiki at a local drag, um, bar. And there was, I mean, every piece of that drag show could be a sign off because it was incredibly iconic. It was Disney villains themed. But one of them chose [laughing] to do Troy Bolton.

EMILY: Hell yeah.

SALLY: Troy Bolton's "Bet On It."

EMILY: I love that the interpretation was Disney villains. And they went Troy Bolton.

SALLY: [laughing] Troy Bolton.

EMILY: As we all know, the villain [laughing] of *High School Musical*.

SALLY: He's the problem. He's the real problem. Um, And it was just, like, such an iconic and fun performance. But there was a heterosexual bachelorette party there, including a couple. Like, I don't know if it was the couple that was getting married and they were all doing it together or if it was, like, the bride has a set of friends who are a couple, so the man and woman were both invited. But afterwards, the host was like, "All right, you guys saw that little twink perform. Are you ready to take him home?" And just like not to be like, "No straight people at drag shows," because I want you guys to enjoy it, too.

But the point of a drag show, if you've ever been, is to, like, riff with the host and have fun and, like, be silly. And they were just like, "Bo, we're not into that." And it's like, could you be less boring?

EMILY: Yeah, come on.

SALLY: OK, that was kind of a long one. I feel like my sign-offs are getting more and more elaborate. I'm sorry about that, friends.

EMILY: I don't mind.

SALLY: You don't have to listen to them, obviously.

EMILY: [laughs] Have a good week, everyone.

SALLY: Bye.