

Episode 299: The Alpacalypse

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SALLY: Everybody Hates Rand is a *Wheel of Time* podcast that will contain spoilers for all fourteen books. So, if you're anti-spoiler, stop this, read all fourteen 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: Okay.

SALLY: All right, divas, let's DO ITTTT!

EMILY: Have you heard about, um, this new reality TV show that they're making that's like *Desperate Housewives of Salt Lake City*, but it's, um, like, *Mormon Wives* is in the title.

SALLY: Oh dear God.

EMILY: But it's, like, not *Desperate Housewives*, cause it's, like, younger girls, or you know, women in their thirties or whatever.

SALLY: Sure.

EMILY: You haven't heard about this?

SALLY: No, I haven't heard about it.

EMILY: Well, my, um, high school friend group chat is currently embroiled in debate over whether one of them went to high school with us.

SALLY: Mmm.

EMILY: We can't remember because between, you know, fifteen years of not seeing people, and also...all of them kind of look the same.

SALLY: *The Secret Lives of Mormon Wives*, is that it?

EMILY: Yeah, apparently it's like, you know, um, some sort of reactionary money-making thing because there was some sort of TikTok scandal about swinging in Mormon community, in the Mormon community.

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: I guess these women are in the middle of it, or at least one of them is. Anyway, just who knows? Maybe I went to high school with one of them. Maybe I didn't. Who's to say?

SALLY: Well, I sure am going to have to watch this [laughs].

EMILY: [laughs] I was going to say, I was like, this seems like the sort of things you and your friends will like. My friends were all like, "Yeah, it's because of that TikTok swinging thing." And I'm like, "What the fuck are you guys talking about?" And they're like, "Don't you know?" And I'm like, "I'm not on TikTok. Am I missing out this much?"

SALLY: No.

EMILY: And they're like, "We're going to make you a PowerPoint to explain."

SALLY: Sure, I would appreciate that.

EMILY: Yeah, I would love that.

SALLY: I'm on such niche, *niche* sides of TikTok that people will be like, "Did you see about this TikTok thing?" And I'm like, "I need you to understand that my TikTok feed right now is 90% the Japanese National Volleyball Team [laughs] and, like, edits of games that they did and silly things that they did."

EMILY: Hell yeah, dude. Hell yeah.

SALLY: And like the other 10% is, like, silly cat videos dancing to Charli xcx.

EMILY: Sure. Yeah, you do have to sort of buy in to that sort of algorithmic...

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: If you have any form of resistance to that by having different interests [laughs] then I guess you still miss the gossips.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Which I think if I saw, like, a white lady talking, I'd just be like, skip.

SALLY: I'd be like, listen, this i – I'm also starting to get a lot of really nice *Haikyuu!!* edits. *Haikyuu!!* is coming – it's because I've been watching videos about the Japanese National Volleyball Team.

EMILY: Sure, yeah.

SALLY: So I don't know. The algorithm is a complicated and crazy thing, but people be like, “This TikTok thing.” And I'm like, “I'm not on like TikTok TikTok. I'm on, like, freak TikTok.”

EMILY: [laughs]

SALLY: For like little gremlins.

EMILY: [in a scratchy voice] Welcome to freak TikTok. It's a hot topic of TikTok.

SALLY: So I can't wait to watch *The Secret Lives of Mormon Wives*. There's also a wife, one of the Real Housewives of Salt Lake City. I can't remember her name because I don't remember.

EMILY: Did I say Desperate Housewives? I mix those up all the time.

SALLY: You did, but it's kind of the same thing, right? Who was also kind of embroiled in a swinging scandal. So, it's so funny to me that people keep being, like, swinging *scandal*. I also, like, I know it's because it's Mormonism, the real housewife with the swinging – who's like everyone's like, “She's a swinger.” She's like, “I'm not a swinger.” She's also Mormon. So I know it's, like, part of the, like, the Mormonism bracket around that. But it's so funny for me when people are like a swinging scandal, as if swinging isn't, like, a very...mild.

EMILY: Yeah, pretty ubiquitous form of, um, non-monogamy.

SALLY: Yeah, it's, like, totally, like, it, to me, I'm like, “Whatever, if you want to swing with another couple that you really like or what are just, like, another couple in general, that's like so, like, not a big deal, I think, for so many people.” So it's just a fascinating insight into, um – but I

do think also, not only in the Mormon culture, but I do think there's still, like, a pretty big stigma around swinging in particular. Like, people think it's, like, such a freaky, kinky thing to do.

EMILY: Yeah, you're a sex freak if you're a swinger or something. And it's, like, if you guys knew the sex perverts that I knew on tumblr.com, then you wouldn't [laughs] be like...

SALLY: I know. I was about to say. You wouldn't last *thirty seconds* on my tumblr when people are like –

EMILY: Come on.

SALLY: Say the most heinous things about an anime mentor that you've ever heard in your life.

EMILY: [laughing] And who can blame them?

SALLY: [laughs] And you're like, “I get it.”

EMILY: I would also do those things to Kakashi [laughs].

SALLY: Yeah, given the opportunity, I'd be like, “My body belongs to you, whatever you want, my king.”

EMILY: Gojo on the other hand?

SALLY: No, gun to the head.

EMILY: Gun to the head.

SALLY: So anyway, I just is...

EMILY: Yeah, one of my friends, one of my friends in this chat claims that swinging is like a big, quote unquote, “problem” in the Mormon community.

SALLY: What?

EMILY: And I'm like, I don't think that, like granted my, you know, actual face time with Mormons these days is pretty limited to my parents who are not going to be talking about swinging and possibly do not know what swinging is.

SALLY: Right.

EMILY: I take that back. They probably know what swinging is, but only because there have probably been *Law & Order* episodes about it.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: So it's like, it's not like we talk about the sexual deviance within the Mormon community over family dinners.

SALLY: Sure, sure, sure, sure.

EMILY: But I'm like, I don't think it can possibly be that – I don't think like Mormonism breeds swingers, you know? I think probably there's as much swinging – there's a proportional amount of swinging in the Mormon community as in literally every other community.

SALLY: Yeah!

EMILY: And just being in a, you know, Protestant religion makes everyone more weird about it when they find out. Um, yeah, we are not being paid by the *Secret lives of Mormon Wives*, but I guess [laughs] updates to follow.

SALLY: I mean, yeah, I'm just fascinated by it. I would love to know what everyone's, like, obsession is with, like, swinging in particular. I don't know.

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: I just feel like everyone is just, like, particularly weird about swinging. Maybe it is, like you said, just, like, a particularly weird violation on monogamy that people are upset about. I don't know. Anyway, that's a thought exercise for another time. I'll ask Janet sometimes.

EMILY: Mm. I bet Janet would have interesting things to say. Janet's our friend who is a sex therapist in Utah, so.

SALLY: Yeah. Maybe Janet will know if swinging is a big, quote unquote, “problem” in the Mormon community.

EMILY: She probably would. Yeah. Um, okay. This isn't about swinging.

SALLY: Should I just cold drop this link to Janet and be like, “Thoughts?” [laughs].

EMILY: Yeah. Discuss.

SALLY: [laughing] Should I include it in our *Survivor* chat?

EMILY: [laughs] Include my sister too, because Sarah will want to – Sarah loves gossip. Okay.

SALLY: You're right. I need to bring more gossip into Sarah's life.

EMILY: Yeah. My sister.

SALLY: Okay, I'm so sorry.

EMILY: It's my nephew's first day of first grade today as we're recording this, and my sister was already gossiping about the main kids in his class, and I'm like, “Don't become that mom. You need adult things to gossip about [laughs].”

SALLY: Yeah, like those secret lives of Mormon wives. [clapping] That's not what we are talking about. We are talking about [shooting noises].

EMILY: The Last Battle.

SALLY: The Last Battle.

EMILY: [vocalizing] And we get yet another epigraph.

SALLY: This is our podcast, by the way. I don't know if you did the introduction.

EMILY: [laughs] Sorry. We didn't. I just got embroiled one last time in epigraph versus epitaph.

SALLY: You did such a good job.

EMILY: Um, yeah, this is Everybody Hates Rand, your friendly neighborhood *Wheel of Time* podcast. I'm Emily Juchau.

SALLY: And I am Sally Goodger.

EMILY: And welcome to Chapter 37, y'all. The *titan* of chapters.

SALLY: Yeah, the Damocles' Sword that's been hanging above our heads. Yeah, Emily got a sweet ass tattoo with Damocles' Sword.

EMILY: [laughs] It's *so* niche.

SALLY: No, I love it.

EMILY: Yeah, it has been, has been swinging over our heads for quite a while now. Here it – and here it is. We've arrived and it's sort of exactly what you'd expect.

SALLY: There is, you guys are going to believe this.

EMILY: Any surprises?

SALLY: There – I mean, even though I was prepared for it, it still was a bit shocking how frequently we switch point of view and how disorienting it was.

EMILY: Oh, you ain't seen nothing yet. They get shorter as the chapter goes on.

SALLY: That is absolutely asinine, Brandon. You have committed a crime against literature and [laughs] I'm taking you to court.

EMILY: [laughs]

SALLY: So that was a little shocking. Um, other than that, um...no. I mean, you guys won't believe it. There's a lot of battle happening, so it's a lot of just, like, wow, we're fighting.

EMILY: Quite a bit, quite a bit of battle, yeah.

SALLY: Quite heavy on the *battle*. And then I was kind of, I guess...we'll talk way more about this, but I was not shocked or surprised, but I was...a little – and I guess it's thematically relevant, but I was a [laughs]. Emily's sister is the funniest texter in the world. She will say something very dramatic, but, like, like a lead in to something very dramatic.

EMILY: Yeah, she can't.

SALLY: And then like, it will take a while for the dramatic text to follow.

EMILY: Sarah texts, Sarah texts the way she talks.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Which is, like, with pauses.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: In between. Crazy.

SALLY: I guess I won't say disappointed. I guess I'm, like, personally disappointed, but narratively it makes sense that, like, so far Rand's encounter with the Dark One has been, like, psychological dream space, very Book One, pulling each other into different visions type things. So it makes sense. I just – I don't really know what I'm wanting out of that encounter, but I feel like I'm not...I don't know. I don't know. I'm struggling to form an opinion on how the battle with the Dark One itself is going.

EMILY: Yeah, we'll, we'll get to that at the very end because Rand's first, um, encounter, I guess, Rand's first reality sharing with the Dark One is what takes us – what ends this little episode. But first, we start with an epigraph from the Notebook of Loial. So spoiler alert, I guess he lives. It's very, um, I say this a lot, but I grew up reading the Bible and shit like that. And so did Brandon Sanderson. So, it has a lot of that sort of scriptural language. To win this one last battle and cast a shadow across the earth to usher in an age where the wails of suffering would go unheard.” Everyone's deaf in the next age.

SALLY: You said that – I've read, I read this with my own eyes and you said the ‘wails of suffering.’ And I, my head immediately brought up whales, like the creatures [laughs].

EMILY: Yeah, like blue whales.

SALLY: These are the whales of suffering.

EMILY: [laughs] Like in the *Moby Dick* times.

SALLY: These are the whales of suffering themselves.

EMILY: Whales of our suffering. Um, yeah, there's no way to go but through, I guess. Uh, first, the sort of overarching theme. We're getting a lot of battle segments within the Fields of Merrilor area, and then we get our one Rand point of view. I believe that's all we cover.

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: On the Fields of Merrilor, the main thing that's happening is that people are experiencing the first few hours of battle, and the big takeaway is that we're losing bad.



And we hear from Mat multiple times, or from characters who are close to Mat, that this is intentional. Mat is trying to, like, create a sort of trap. Mat himself compares it to playing a game of cards where you have to lose a little bit in order to win in the later rounds.

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: But, you know, people are still dying, lots of them. So, um, it would be interesting, I think, to see Mat reckoning with that on more of an ethical level. And I think it's possible that the Robert Jordan version of Rand *would* be more concerned with that. But this version of Mat is more interested in, you know, sort of jokey joking while he's on screen. So, first we get Lan leading some kind of charge. He's like, "Wow!" Yet again, he's like, "Oh, my God, poor people and women are [laughing] are also doing this."

SALLY: Unreal.

EMILY: And everyone's like, "Yeah, crazy, dude. What the?"

SALLY: Crazy how nobody wants the world to end. Even poor people and women.

EMILY: Yeah. What the fuck?

SALLY: That's crazy.

EMILY: We then get an Elayne point of view as she's walking through the camp to go meet with Mat. And there's, like, an attack of the [exaggerated] *dragkhar!* [laughs] The dragkhar, the drag car! [laughs]

SALLY: The drag car.

EMILY: It's like a drag race. You know, those vampire bat freaks. [laughs] Um, and Elayne's solution to their, like, cursed singing is to blow out everyone's eardrums, which I'm like, "Girl, there must have been a better way. [laughs] I feel there must have been a better way, but what do, what do, what do I know?" Um, anyway, they take care of that and then get to the sort of command center where Mat is stationed along with, like, Tuon and Min are there. Mat is like – got his maps. We also see throughout this, Mat is constantly interfacing with, like, messengers. People on the battlefield are constantly receiving airborne messages. I wish that there had been like a messenger pigeon division in this battle, but unfortunately, it's the Seanchan dragons delivering most of the stuff.

SALLY: That drop, like, cannonballs.

EMILY: [laughs]

SALLY: And I'm like, you couldn't have figured out something to drop that doesn't kill people.

EMILY: Yeah, just once I'd like to have seen one just, like, absolutely obliterate some guy. And then, you know, Galad has to pick through the fucking bone fragments.

SALLY: To find the message.

EMILY: To get to the message. Um, but basically, Elayne's like, "Why did you change the battle plan? What the fuck is going on?" And Mat's like, "I've changed it because people are listening. There's, you know..."

SALLY: A spy.

EMILY: "There's spies afoot. And so only I get to know what's going on." And Elayne's like, "Okay, you've got to, like, appoint someone to take over if you're gone, though." And he's like, "Okay." Um, we then get an Uno point of view where he's like, "Fuck the French, first off."

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Specifically about Talmanes. And I'm like, enemies to lovers. Talmanes and Uno.

SALLY: It would be so funny.

EMILY: You'd love to see it. Their sexual tension is off the charts [laughs]. Uno's, like, commanding a force alongside Talmanes and Aludra's dragons. Um, and as they are fighting, they get, um, an order for Mat to retreat that doesn't really make a lot of sense to them. But right after that, they are attacked by, like, a massive show of channeling, which we extrapolate from it and from other characters later on, is Demondred appearing on the battlefield linked to a full circle of seventy-two?

SALLY: Seventy-two.

EMILY: Ain't that all of them, you know? How can there be more than seventy-two? I mean, I guess we never run out of Black Ajah. That's sort of the paradox of the Black Ajah. They don't exist, but we also never run out of them [laughs].

SALLY: We – they're always here.

EMILY: Um, and also, Channelers later are like, "He must have a *s'angreal*." Kind of similar to how Egwene has that special rod.

SALLY: Yeah, he's carrying... Demandred is carrying a staff –

EMILY: A scepter.

SALLY: Yeah, a scepter as if it is not clear enough that he's got some Freudian thing going on with Rand.

EMILY: YEah. You're like, hey, dude.

SALLY: It's –

EMILY: A little embarrassing.

SALLY: Yeah, again, it's a little obvious. It's a little embarrassing. It's so funny – the reactions of everyone to Demandred are pretty funny, though, where they're all like, "What is he doing? Why is he yelling for Rand?"

EMILY: They're like, "What's this guy's deal?" Yeah, he's still like, "I want the Dragon Reborn! Send for him! And everyone's like, "Dude."

SALLY: He's, like, out in the cosmos right now.

EMILY: He is out of office! Like, come on.

SALLY: Not even in this dimension.

EMILY: My brother.

SALLY: [laughing] Like, could you chill out?

EMILY: [laughs] My brother in Christ, you need to CHILL!

SALLY: Be normal about this!

EMILY: Demandred's also wielding balefire like it's his job. So people are getting balefired, which we remember is bad.

SALLY: It's creating the bad cracks in the rocks.

EMILY: [laughing] It's the bad cracks.

SALLY: [laughing] The bad cracks.

EMILY: As opposed to the good cracks.

SALLY: Some cracks can be good.

EMILY: Oh, we all know what cracks are good. Okay [laughs].

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: Fucking Logain.

SALLY: He's here.

EMILY: Logain of all people. So stupid. My nemesis. Um, in Logain's point of view, he's like, "I hate Rand, but I hate Mazrim Taim more. So, as much as it infuriates me to follow orders from Rand, it allows me to go after [laughs] Mazrim Taim, so I will."

SALLY: Yeah. Necessary evil.

EMILY: Logain's kind of got this little, uh, you know, A-team, which of course includes Androl and whatever. And his orders to them are like, "We're not going to operate alongside the rest of the Channelers on this battlefield. We are specifically going to go on a quest to find the seals of the Dark One's prison that have been stolen." So he's sending out everyone to do that. He's also, like, ready at the drop of a hat to engage with Mazrim Taim. He's like, "I am hunting Mazrim Taim." Simultaneously, and this kind of gets confusing, the whole Mazrim Taim-Demandred thing, which, again, they should have been the same person. But, like, he's also like, "Mm, but also I kind of want to fight Demandred to, like, test my skill against him." This is a classic man thought, and we are going to see it about eighteen more times within this chapter to varying results.

SALLY: Yeah, it's so funny because I'm, like, so on board with Logain's kill Mazrim Taim mission. I'm like –

EMILY: Yeah, who wouldn't be?

SALLY: I want that guy obliterated.

EMILY: I want Logain to, like, strangle Mazrim Taim with his bare hands.

SALLY: And I don't even like Logain that much, but I do think he's earned it. Like, if anybody's earned the right to kill Mazrim Taim, it's either me or Logain so [laughs].

EMILY: [laughs] Me or Logain, I'll fight him for it in the Denny's parking lot.

SALLY: The Denny's parking lot. But then you're like, I couldn't be less on board with Logaine fighting Demandred, so, like, how are these?

EMILY: No connection, narratively at all.

SALLY: It doesn't make any sense. So, yeah, it is just, like, man thought of everyone being like...Logain is and it's also kind of like, uh, Logain is one of our more powerful male Channelers on the battlefield, so might be a good one, you know, in terms of plot schematics to set up against Mazrim Taim, but it doesn't make a ton of sense.

EMILY: Yeah, we get these sort of, like, um, you know, this is both a battle on mass functioning at the same time as we get these sort of, like, anime battle setups wherein various high ranking enemies are finding each other and having these big old duels.

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: And, you know, to have a good dual type fight, you need the characters to have sort of investments in each other in a way. So, yeah, like, Logain and Demandred as a pairing doesn't make a lot of sense. But Demandred doesn't make a lot of sense with *most* people because he hasn't been on screen.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: The people I'd be okay with fighting Demandred include Mat, because they're set up as foils, as sort of the anti-generals. Egwene, maybe, because she's the top female Channeler on this battlefield. Or if Moghedien stabbed him in the back.

SALLY: That would be *so good*.

EMILY: Just like as sort of a...

SALLY: That's enough out of you.

EMILY: That's enough out of you. Someone's got to do it. This bitch is crazy and I'm going to put him down.

SALLY: Yeah. Fuck you.

EMILY: You know? But that's *it*. Anyone else going up against Demandred, you're like, you're just doing this for, like, um, what's the word? Clout.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And it doesn't feel like you're doing it for any reason other than clout. You got to know that you're not going to fight this guy...alone and be successful.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Anyway! Mazrim Taim, on the other hand, you know, you've got probably half a dozen more people who would function well enough to kill him. And I'd be satisfied with Logain being one of them. Um, probably the funniest part of this Logain point of view is that, uh, remember, Logain force bonded two White Tower women, Gabrelle and Toveine. Toveine got Turned, though. So Gabrelle is like, "What's up with that?" And Logain's like, "Yeah, I released the bond to her," which A) reminds us that that's a thing you can do, relevant to the Alanna subplot. Um, [laughs] but then Gabrelle is like, [laughing] in her head, "God, I wish that were me. I hate being bonded to this son of a bitch." And Logain's like, "[scoffs] Um, ouch? But we fucked though." And Gabrelle's like, "I still hate your guts. You forcibly bonded me. Like? It's not that complicated, idiot."

SALLY: And, like, basically kept me prisoner at the Black Tower. Soooooooooooooo.

EMILY: So maybe think about how I have agency, including agency to hate you.

SALLY: Logain's exhibiting a lot of man behaviors. Revenge, fighting for clout, thinking of women as property and getting his feelings hurt when they have actual feelings and thoughts of their own.

EMILY: Honestly, Mazrim Taim and Loghain killing each other would be my ideal outcome.

SALLY: Yeah, that would be pretty satisfying.

EMILY: We then switch to – speaking of man pain, we then switch to a Gawyn point of view as he's watching, like, Egwene and others getting debriefed on the Demandred situation. They're like, “Well, we've got to try and deal with him.” Just kind of talking about, “Well, he's killing thousands!” And Gawyn's like, “Killing thousands, and here they stood.” Like clearly thinking, oh, they're not doing enough.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And it's like, “Dude, you need to calm down.” Anyway, Gawyn just, like, leaves the tent without alerting anyone, just slips away. And then he's also been feeling really sick and tired because he took off the Seanchan rings that are supposed to kill you.

SALLY: Killing him? Yeah.

EMILY: But as soon as he puts them back on, wouldn't you know it, he's magically boosted again.

SALLY: He also puts all three of them on, which, if we know anything about magic rings, it's that one is bad enough.

EMILY: And so many is even worse.

SALLY: Yeah [laughs].

EMILY: That's so bad.

SALLY: So Gawyn just being like, “I'll take care of this.” There's a line where he's like, “You thought you were willing to stand in her shadow.”

EMILY: He's like, “You were gonna stand in her shadow.” And he's like, “Eh, this isn't mutually exclusive.” And it's like, “Yes, it is.”

SALLY: Yes, it is!

EMILY: You're so stupid.

SALLY: He's like, "Me!" So, another person who basically is like, "I will go fight Demandred myself." And it's, like, Logain at least has, like, some ground to stand on as –

EMILY: As a Channeler.

SALLY: Someone who can use magic. You are a sword boy...and an idiot.

EMILY: Yeah. Yeah.

SALLY: You're twelve years old, Gawyn, get off the battlefield.

EMILY: Pretty silly. Pretty silly. AH! We then switch over to Tam, who's, um, doing a battle. I don't think Tam has anything interesting to update us on.

SALLY: Yeah. The, like, key thing here is that they're holding a river. Basically.

EMILY: Yeah. Tam also alerts us to the fact that, um, everyone is aware that Perrin came back, but in bad shape and that he is now healing in Mayene.

SALLY: And I still beg for some explanation from the narrative about how Perrin got this badly injured, you know?

EMILY: He got, yeah, I thought an arrow and also, like, some exhaustion.

SALLY: Some fatigue. And they're like, "Perrin might die."

EMILY: Perrin's on death's door.

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: And I'm like, "Are we?! Is he?"

SALLY: [laughing] I don't understand what happened to him.

EMILY: What are we talking about? Then we get a bad Pevara point of view. She and Androl have graduated to full on telepathy. So, just don't worry about that. Um, they're on their sort of, like, strike force thing, just going around, doing shit with gateways. Um, Pevara is like [in a breathy voice], "Oh my gosh, I'm so in love with him." And I'm like, "Girl, I wish you weren't because he's insufferable."



SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Uh, I don't really know what they're doing here. They're just kind of, like, jumping around.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Like I think they're drawing attention or something.

SALLY: Yeah. Um.

EMILY: [sighs] The important, quote unquote “important” thing, because Brandon's really invested in this subplot of, like, the women and men bonding each other and then sort of becoming this hybrid magical Channeling creature, is that at one point they're in a circle with Androl leading and, um, Pevara manages to Channel while in the circle, like, she takes control of it almost. And they're just like, “That's weird and move on.”

SALLY: Um, this is so random, but there's not much else to talk about. So, I'm going to throw this random thought out there. And plots about telepathy – I feel like we really understate what it would be like to be in someone else's mind. Like, what if you're like, “I am magically linked with someone with, like, very bad anxiety,” [laughing] and so constantly you're just hearing this, like, ticker of every, like, anxious, paranoid, sad thought running through their head, you know?

EMILY: Yeah. And then now you have anxiety also. Yeah.

SALLY: Yeah. It's not, like not everyone is mentally well, you know? It's not, like, pleasant to be in – It's not pleasant to be in my head!

EMILY: [laughs]

SALLY: I don't want to be in my head!

EMILY: I would not inflict that on anyone.

SALLY: [laughs] Yeah It's not pleasant to be in here. This is so much anxiety in this bad boy.

EMILY: Yeah. Like, at least Jean Grey went crazy about it, you know?

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: [laughs]

SALLY And, like, you can understand that because it's, like, being in other people, like telepathy, sounds like one of the worst.

EMILY: Super bad.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Super bad!

SALLY: OK, sorry. That was so random. We just like – talk about the ableism in various superpowers. Telepathy.

EMILY: Well, I also just hate it when, like, telepathy is between a romantic couple.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And I'm like, “You need privacy in your romance.”

SALLY: I was also thinking, I was like, “I can think of nothing more horrifying than having to share every one of my bad, mean, petty, nasty thoughts with the person I love the most in the world.”

EMILY: Yeah. Like sometimes you just got to be by yourself.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: In *your* head.

SALLY: Like thoughts are not...what people actually feel or believe, you know?

EMILY: Yeah. I already have to worry about, like, being judged by the things I say. I don't want to be judged about the things that I think, because thoughts are neutral.

SALLY: Exactly. They're just thoughts, you guys. You're not a bad person.

EMILY: But suddenly it becomes a conversation once you're in telepathy. [singsong] Anyway! flip to Mat's point of view as he's Facetiming with Galad, and is just like, “Keep doing your job,

dude.” Min has, like, a viewing of Galad, and she's like, “I see him laying alone on a battlefield.” And we're like, “Oh no, is Galad going to die?” Too bad, I guess. Wouldn't be the worst thing.

SALLY: Yeah, I don't think Galad dying would really be, like, a super tragedy.

EMILY: Yeah, I'd just be like, “Okay, another one bites the dust.”

SALLY: Wish he was more normal at the end, but.

EMILY: Yeah. Um, we see Mat communicating with various people through, like, codes. We find out that the situation with the cannons, a lot of them got really damaged when Demandred attacked that particular, um, part of the battlefield, but a lot of them look bad, but are still functional. So I guess just keep that on a back burner for the next six weeks [laughing] as we talk about this.

SALLY: We should start creating, like, a reference chart, being like, “Do you remember the bad cannons? Do you remember the river? Do you remember the dragon?” The dragon – I mean, they are dragon balls, technically, that the...

EMILY: Dragon Ball Z, yeah.

SALLY: That the, the *raken* are dropping full of messages. It's the Dragon Ball Z cipher up in here.

EMILY: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Um, we have Mat talk to Elayne about spying and strategy, whatnot. And finally, Elayne is just like, “Okay, I'm going to go fight on the battlefield.” And Mat's like, “Good luck, Birgitte!”

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Birgitte's like, [singing] “Who can say where the road goes? God help me.” Um, then we see a Galad point of view during the battle. He also receives a coded message for Mat. Yeah, just a bunch of people at this river, but I'm not going to remember the river in next section.

SALLY: I know. They're like –

EMILY: I don't know how –

SALLY: People keep being like, “It's so smart that Mat sent troops to the river.” And I'm like, “I know the whole thing is like the Trollocs don't want to cross the river, so they're trying to block

it. Like, blah, blah, blah, blah.” But I’m like, “But what else is going to happen? Am I going to remember why the river matters in four weeks?” No, this is ridiculous, Brandon.

EMILY: Absolutely not. Absolutely not. Yeah.

SALLY: Yeah. So, like, just a couple of running themes, of course, everyone keeps being like – we’re dealing with a lot of chaos. Mat is sort of – we’re supposed to be at a point where Mat is on his, like, fully realized trickster god stuff, where he is dealing with, like, the most chaos imaginable and supposedly arranging it in a careful pattern. Um, obviously, this isn’t entirely true because Mat himself will admit that he’s losing at this point in time, which I think is fine. I think it’s fine for Mat to be in a corner a little bit. But, um, so, like, the concept is really fun. I just think it’s the execution of Mat that makes it a little bit less pleasant. Like, if this was fully embodied Robert Jordan, Mat, I think it would be cool to see him moving these pieces around and I would feel good and happy about it.

EMILY: Yeah, it’s conceptually a really, really cool thing. I agree. I have no beef with, like, Mat being in charge at this stage of the battle. And the way that he is being in charge, I think is really interesting. Having everyone so dependent upon him and him having to, like, maneuver all of these pieces is really fun. And it’s fun to see him kind of working on, like, an intellectual level. Like Mat is arguably our most clever character. And it’s fun to see that and to have other people recognize that. But yeah, there’s – it’s so gratifying to be in the Brandon Sanderson version of Mat that it sort of kills all the vibes.

SALLY: Yeah. And there’s also just, like, in almost every point of view, we’re getting like, “Why is Mat moving us here?” And then someone will inevitably be like, “Wow, that was really smart!”. And I’m like, “Okay, I get it.”

EMILY: Okay, we get it.

SALLY: At some point, I need you guys to be like, “We’re just going to do what Mat tells us because Mat’s in charge.”

EMILY: We’re just going to trust him. Um, which, you know, it would be great if there were more characters on the battlefield who already trusted Mat. But.

SALLY: Crazy.

EMILY: Crazy how that works out.

SALLY: Instead, it’s...Elayne.

EMILY: Then we get Rand and the Dark One fighting on this sort of cosmic level, uh, which eventually descends into them being like, the Dark One is like, “I’m going to show you the truth,” and, like, weaves the cosmos into showing Rand a version of reality, wherein the Dark One has won, is the reality that he’s showing. Um, I guess I think that this is once again, like you sort of mentioned, returning very much to the series’ roots in *Eye of the World* and *The Great Hunt*. It is also very reminiscent of, like, Egwene and Nynaeve’s Novice and Accepted tests that had to deal so much with, like, alternate realities and, like, possible futures.

SALLY: Sure.

EMILY: We’ve got, like, *The Great Hunt*, where everyone’s going through their various timelines, coming into play here. Um, and so on that level to me, it’s satisfying to just be like, oh, we’re playing with this trope that *The Wheel of Time* hasn’t, uh, really relied upon in a long time, but made up such, like, a core element of the early books that worked really well.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And, you know, thematically, it’s appropriate given this sort of like *The Wheel of Time*, the whole alternate realities thing that we haven’t played with for a while. But [stumbles over the word at first] simultaneously, it is kind of anti-climactic, *especially* this first one, I think. We’re going to be getting various variations, uh, on this theme for the next little while. But this first one, I think, is the biggest dud, because it’s just the Dark One showing Rand a future in which everything’s bad. Everything is the Blight. All Channelers have been turned evil. And it’s just like, okay, I could kind of imagine that on my own. You didn’t need to walk me through it.

SALLY: Yeah. And like, again, it’s – we’ve talked in previous episodes that it’s, like, a very, like, boring, middling representation of what evil is of just, like, sort of like twirling your mustaches. An evil wizard in his tower lordling over his minions, like it’s not a particularly compelling take on what the Dark One’s reason for existing on a cosmic level really is. So.

Yeah, you’re kind of like, okay. Obviously, I don’t want this to happen. But I don’t know. It also hits differently than, like, it reminds me of in *Fellowship of the Ring* when Frodo looks into Galadriel’s mirror and sees the Shire under attack, um, or sort of taken over by evil forces, which in the books at least does happen. Um, and I think, um, in that context, it’s very jarring because the Shire has been set up as this, like, utopia, you know, that remains relatively untouched until our heroes return to it at the very end of the series. But we’ve been checking in on the Two Rivers for the entire series and seeing that it’s, like, changing and going through an industrial revolution and has already sort of known the horrors of war. So it’s sort of, like, lost its power as this, like, you know, bucolic ideal of country living [laughs].

SALLY: Exactly, yeah.

EMILY: In a way, like, what's currently happening is just as hellish as what is going on in the Dark One's ideal future. So you're kind of, like, I don't know, man, like... Yeah, it's just not very interesting. It would have been cool – I don't know how they would have done this – but it would have been cool if the Dark One had surprised Rand and surprised us as readers with sort of his evil plans.

SALLY: Yeah, it just, like, I don't know what. Yeah, I don't know *what* version of evil out of the Dark One would be more compelling to me. I feel like with all of the Forsaken, we've gotten so many different facets of what you could consider, like, evil and evil motivations between, like, Graendal who's all like, you know, pleasure focused and Ishamael, who's like, "I'm just so nihilistic. I want the world obliterated." Like, I don't know what out of the Dark One could have been more interesting or more compelling or what. Um, maybe just even just being like, it truly is nothing.

EMILY: Yeah, it's just nothing. There's no people.

SALLY: Yeah, just a void. I guess that's what Ishamael kind of wants. So, I don't know. I like, like you said, I don't know what would have been interesting, but this was just kind of very, like, I don't know, Pixar animated movie.

EMILY: [laughs] Yeah, just like a little silly in a way. The one interesting thought I had as a result of this, like, section was that I got so mad when I had this idea that it's not part of the series, which is that one of the Forsaken should have been a Turned person.

SALLY: Oh, yeah.

EMILY: because Rand references, like, now Nynaeve, who's been turned, is one of the Forsaken. And, like, it would have been, it would have introduced such a compelling, like, sort of moral quandary to the Forsaken if one or multiple of them were, like, good Channelers who had been Turned by the forces of evil and now are just, like, A) that lets us see what sort of happens to people who are Turned and what that life sort of is. And I don't know, it would have been interesting to have characters, like, deal with that on some level.

SALLY: Yeah. And like, can you unturn somebody?

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: Can you re-turn somebody?

EMILY: Who's your ideal Forsaken to have been Turned?

SALLY: Um I think Asmodean has the most swag.

EMILY: Asmodean always has the most swag.

SALLY: So, like, that – if I were going to be, like, a character that I would've got more emotional depth out of, but I feel like Asmodean is already so close to leaning towards the nicest of the Forsaken, then I guess it's not as compelling. If it was Mazrim Taim as Demandred, I would maybe say D'mondred, because I think that could have been interesting. Demandred as he stands now.

EMILY: Yeah, yeah kind of boring.

SALLY: Kind of boring. I feel like most of the men are pretty boring. Maybe Moghedien.

EMILY: [sighs] A lot of them are boring. Maybe it would have made – like, maybe if Sammael I had been turned, it would have made him interesting [laughs], you know?

SALLY: Yeah. Yeah.

EMILY: Maybe it would have saved him.

SALLY: [laughing] You're right. Who's the most boring Forsaken that we need to resurrect?

EMILY: Be'lal.

SALLY: Be'lal [laughs].

EMILY: Fucking Be'lal.

SALLY: Nerfed in one, my man.

EMILY: [laughs] Oh, dude.

SALLY: So yeah, you are right, though, that it's getting back to some really, like, archetypical, um, stuff that *The Wheel of Time* is doing that is very compelling and interesting. So, as it builds up as more of the structure of their fight, which it sounds like it is, maybe I will feel more

invested in it as a structure. I was just, I think, a bit surprised that this was how this was going to play out. But I mean, how else would it? I guess the Dark One's not actually like a physical thing that Rand can.

EMILY: Yeah, Rand can't fist fight the Dark One in a Denny's parking lot, tragically enough. But again, the Dark One is so, like, ubiquitous a figure that, um, we could have, uh, sort of given him like an actual personality at the stage of the text, and it would have been interesting. Sort of maintaining this lack of personality was maybe not the best move.

SALLY: Yeah, it'd be fun for the Dark One to have, like, an avatar.

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: And personality and thoughts and...

EMILY: And, like, something that was surprising to us. I don't know. Uh, but unfortunately, like, a lot of that like classic work of, like, the shadow self is already being done on the Morrigin level with Rand. So it kind of worked ourselves into a corner here.

SALLY: Carl Jung was not consulted on the manuscript of this text.

EMILY: He was not, yeah.

SALLY: Um.

EMILY: But this ends with Rand being like, "Okay, now I'm going to show you my version of reality." He's like, "Here's what's going to happen." So, presumably the next thing is Rand is going to show, like, the Dark One, like, here's what will happen when I kill you! Or something like that. I can't remember.

SALLY: Bitch. Yeah.

EMILY: But that's that first section of the Last Battle. Like you said, not a lot of surprises.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And where there were surprises, they were kind of disappointing ones. So, you know.

SALLY: I think that – what I was thinking about when you're like, "Rand can't fist fight the Dark One in a Denny's parking lot," which is very unfortunate. But it just made me think of *Fullmetal*



*Alchemist*, which does everything so wonderfully, including the very satisfying final episodes where Edward Elric does actually get to fist fight God.

EMILY: Fist fight God in a Denny's parking lot, more or less.

SALLY: Yeah. And you're like, this has been so satisfying on so many levels that what happens at the end is just, like, a very angry sixteen – a very rightfully angry sixteen-year-old boy beating the *shit* out of the cosmos.

EMILY: Yeah. *Fullmetal Alchemist* and *Wheel of Time* have some similarities, I would say, including in its sort of like bossification. You know, this is sort of classic in anime generally, but having, like, some lower ranking villains that you have to defeat to get to the biggest boss, which *Wheel of Time* is also functioning on, and *Fullmetal Alchemist* does *everything* perfectly.

SALLY: Yes.

EMILY: To make that satisfying conclusion. So everyone, you could have learned, could have learned from.

SALLY: Could have had Mat punching – Mat would be more closely aligned with Edward, I think, than Rand. But what do I know? I mean –

EMILY: Temper issues.

SALLY: In vibes.

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: Rand in like, I don't know, archetypes, I guess.

EMILY: Yeah. But that's where we leave off for now. Anything to add? Already got it. *Fullmetal Alchemist*. Watch that instead.

SALLY: Yeah, sorry. I'm having a lot of, like, disconnected thoughts about telepathy and anxiety and *Fullmetal Alchemist*.

EMILY: *FULLmetal Alchemist*.

SALLY: Watch for my upcoming book where someone with very bad OCD [laughing] develops telepathy and everyone around them is having a really bad time.

EMILY: NO!

SALLY: [laughs] TM, TM, TM. That's my idea. You can't take it.

EMILY: [laughs] Uh, thanks for listening. Thanks to Glynn MacKenzie for our theme song. Thanks to our patrons on Patreon and our followers on social media.

SALLY: Yeah, thank you guys so much.

EMILY: Do you have a sign off?

SALLY: Let me think for a second. We gotta have something in all of the travels that we've done.

EMILY: Yikes.

SALLY: Um, oh, I was in Minnesota visiting some friends this weekend, and we went to um – it's like just a person's farm, but they also open it up. It's, like, an alpaca visiting farm situation. Um, I was really excited because I like to think of myself as a person who, like, is very aligned with animals. Like, I just I love them. I always have. I've always just been really excited by being in the presence of any type of animal. Um, felt very connected to them, very soothed by them. So I was like, oh, it's going to be so fun to hang out with farm animals. And it was, like, mainly alpacas and one llama and then, like, some sheep and goats and cows. And I did – the sheep were a little big, but I did find, like, the — sheep are always bigger than I expect them to be. In my head, sheep are, like, wee little critters.

EMILY: Little lambs!

SALLY: So I did fine with the, like, sheep and goats and cows, but I was so, like, viscerally upset by the alpacas. And I don't know what that is, but they were *so* frightening to me, you guys. Like, we walked into the pen with, uh, the llama whose name was Taz, and the other ones were the boys. So it was Taz and the boys, two llamas. We had, like, food where we could feed them. And they started coming towards me. And my brain was like, we are fully in fight or flight mode.

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: And everyone around me was like “They’re –” All my friends were like, “They're so cute. It's so fun to feed them. Their teeth are so weird.” And I'm like, “Their teeth are so weird and full of evil.” So.

EMILY: Yeah, you, I think, sensed the demons.

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: You're the one who would live in a farm based horror movie.

SALLY: [laughing] In an alpaca apocalypse.

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: The alpocalypse [laughs].

EMILY: You have to respect – [laughs] the alpocalypse. Okay, I'm gonna –

SALLY: The alpocalypse, the alpocalypse. No! I would live, they're so upsetting.

EMILY: [laughing] Bye!