



Episode 202: THE CLAW
Release Date: May 23, 2022
Running Time: 45 minutes

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, it's the end of an era. The Winter's Fart era.

Sally: (sigh) It's the end of the world as we know it.

Emily: (sing-song) And I feel fine. (laugh)

Sally: I do feel fine. I mean, it is technically the end of the world as we know it because Rand cleanses saidin, so it's an appropriate song.

Emily: Yeah, that's true. So there's a major change –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Happening in the landscape of the universe.

Sally: Yeah. But we did do it.

Emily: We did it.

Sally: I never thought I would get through Winter's Fart the first time, much less the second time.

Emily: Yeah. And now we just have the incomprehensibly large mountains to climb ahead of us that are Crossroads of Twilight and Knife of Dreams. Not even to mention the last three books of the series, which –

Sally: (whisper) They're so thick.

Emily: I know aren't thicker, really. Just – we have the hardback covers – the hardback editions.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So they seem bigger.

Sally: Yeah, they're just more unwieldy.

Emily: (sigh) Yeah, they're quite – you can't really carry them on a plane, you know?

Sally: (sigh)

Emily: Not that you would want to. Imagine the humiliation of being seen reading a Wheel of Time book in public. Um, this is Everybody Hates Rand – (laugh) your friendly neighborhood Wheel of Time podcast. I'm Emily Juchau.

Sally: And I'm Sally Goodger. Insurmountable mountain is a good way to describe Crossroads of Twilight because, like, I only read that book a couple months ago, and I don't remember that anything of any significance took place, so.

Emily: Yeah, much like Path of Daggers, it's gonna be a tough one, only we've done the Path of Daggers bit already, so we can't skip another one.

Sally: Can't skip Crossroads of Twilight.

Emily: Can't skip another one.

Sally: Or can we? (laugh)

Emily: Or. (laugh) Unless.

Sally: Unless.

Emily: Don't worry, guys, we won't do that to you – without warning, at least. (laugh)

Sally: No, yeah.

Emily: Um, well, the very last chapter of Winter's Heart is the cleansing of saidin, the much built-up-to – or perhaps not much built-up-to –

Sally: Yeah, I feel like as – for such an important, climactic event, which, as you mentioned, changes the literal make-up of the universe, we spend a lot of time not talking about it. (laugh)

Emily: Yeah, it's not something that Rand, um, you know, when we're in his point of views, is planning seemingly a lot.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Um, what's interesting about it is that there are, like, clues there. Like, Rand's whole plan to cleanse saidin, which involves, um, using the Choedan Kal access keys to use huge amounts of the Power; um, linking with a woman, Nynaeve; and then ultimately the technicalities, blessedly, I would say, Robert Jordan doesn't give us too many details – um, he just sort of gives a – a very interesting couple of visuals –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: To work through. And the idea is that, uh, Rand is pushing the entirety of saidin through, uh, saidar like a sieve.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Um, and just condensing it all – all of the grossness into, um – or leaving all of the grossness right where Shadar Logoth is and letting those two evils sort of bounce off of each other and nullify each other.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: I believe. I could be reading that wrong, but I think that's the plan.

Sally: Um – to the best of my understanding, you are correct. That's what I have understood as well –

Emily: Okay.

Sally: Regarding the mechanics of the magic. But, like – also like you said – and I agree with the fact – I – I agree with what you said about it being a good thing that Robert Jordan doesn't really linger on the technicalities of this. He kind of just lets it be mysterious in a way that I find really interesting.

Emily: Yeah, I think bogging us down with the mechanics would be, um, unwieldy in a text that is already very unwieldy, and so I appreciate that we're not being forced to slog through what amounts to scientific equations. Which, um – and this is relevant because in a few books Brandon Sanderson will be taking over – but Brandon Sanderson does favor technicalities in his magic systems and really, like, rigid rules and, um, structures to what's going on. And in a lot of ways, that can end up being very satisfying –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Like, if you're reading along and for a long time you won't really grasp it, but then you'll have this sort of moment of epiphany, and when it all clicks together, it'll be sort of right when a character is doing something big, and you'll be like, "Oh, I understand this and how they got there."

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: That can be really exciting. But that's not what Robert Jordan usually favors. He's more of the, uh, liminal magic guy.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Despite having a fairly structured magic system, when big events happen like this, they're not usually, you know, um, bogged down in the details.

Sally: Yeah, and we've never – for – like, when – particularly, like, Nynaeve, Egg, and Elayne were in the White Tower, we knew they were going to classes, but we never had to, like, go to class with them.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Which is something I always appreciated. It's like, I don't really want to sit in magic class the way you do in a lot of books. Which can work in a different setting; I just agree that there's so much going on, I don't really want to have to be needing, again, to understand chemical equations to –

Emily: Yeah, and I just think as we get into the later books, um, the sort of switch between those two philosophies regarding magic and how to treat magics – magics, plural – (laugh) um, is going to give us, like, a little bit of whiplash.

Sally: Mm.

Emily: Um, I mean, we're still a few books out, so I'm not ready to, like, have a thesis about this yet, but I do think that there's a discernible difference once Brandon Sanderson takes over and, um, you know, not his fault, necessarily, but it doesn't quite mesh with the Wheel of Time up until that point.

Sally: Yeah, that's so interesting; I never even considered that. I guess I always thought Brandon would sort of fall more into – that he would relinquish his need for rigidity –

Emily: (laugh)

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Brandon Sanderson? Relinquish his need for structured magic systems? I mean, to his – to – to grant him, um, some credit, the Wheel of Time magic system is set up in such a way that I can see how you would want to approach it rigidly. I just think it fails in bigger moments. Um, and, like, the big climactic moment, um, at the end of A Memory of Light – I have no idea what Robert Jordan's initial plan was; maybe it was this exact same thing – but, uh, Brandon Sanderson took a real, um, play with the rules, use the rules to your advantage type thing with it, which is classic of him. Less –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Less classic of Robert Jordan, I'd say.

Sally: No, yeah. That's – it's not – that's not to dunk on Brandon; I just had never even thought about the entirely different approaches in magic systems that these two authors seem to have and how that would collide. So I'm interested to see how it plays out.

Emily: Yeah. Just something to think about. I was also thinking about that because this chapter itself is structured in a lot of really very small points of view. We switch around between characters a lot. This entire, like, set-piece involves a lot of people. Um, and it's pretty interesting, I would say, the way that it involves a lot of people. Um, but it seems like we get a point of view from the majority of those people.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, and the reason anyone – any author – uses that structure, especially at the end of a book like this, is to increase pace and tension.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Um, as well as to give you sort of an eagle eye on what's going on in a lot of places. Um, and this is a technique that will come back to haunt us a little bit in the last three books of Wheel of Time, especially A Memory of Light. There's an entire long, 200-page chapter that's pretty much in this structure. And it's, you know, to handle the Last Battle. And the question becomes, um, well, why does that structure work for this last forty pages of Winter's Heart but not for what is essentially the entirety of A Memory of Light. And the answer is that it's an unsustainable pace.

Sally: Correct.

Emily: Um –

Sally: It's like you ran three marathons back-to-back.

Emily: Yeah, so –

Sally: And which – and, if we remember the founding myth of Marathon, the man died at the end. (laugh) So.

Emily: He sure did. Just keeled over. Just – goodbye.

Sally: Just keeled right over. Yeah, it definitely is unsustainable. It's even almost unsustainable at this length. By the end, you're kind of like, okay, let's –

Emily: Yeah, I would say it ends –

Sally: Let's wrap it up.

Emily: About as long as it – it goes about as long as it could.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, so in terms of the plot of this chapter itself, I won't be able to track all of those points of view, so we'll sort of do an overview. Um, we start out in Rand's head as they are leaving Far Madding. Um, you know, having – had some, like, paperwork granted to them to basically put them all in the clear regarding their swords that many of them, uh, took out against the rules, et cetera, et cetera. And, like, Rand and Lan got out of prison and have since been Healed by Nynaeve magically, so they're not as beaten up from their fall. Like, Rand – Lan had a bunch of broken ribs or whatever from falling off a two-story building.

Sally: Tends to happen.

Emily: Yeah, does – does tend to happen.

Sally: Bones are weaker than we think. Mine are, anyway.

Emily: Yeah. And Rand, in his headspace, is obviously very traumatized, um, by what he experienced in the prison –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: You know, his sort of claustrophobic, um, panic attack down there. Um, but, uh, we don't linger too much on his trauma because Rand himself is not allowing us to linger on his trauma; it's not something that Rand is internalizing at this point. Um, he is, I would say, compartmentalizing and thinking he's internalizing.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: He'll, like – his stance right now is he'll have a bad experience that's very objectively upsetting and traumatizing for him, and he'll be like – at the end of it, he'll be like, "Well, I'm stronger now."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: "Because less can touch me, and I'm feeling less, and I am, uh – I – I'm so much colder and less likely to be upset by things," and da da da da. And it's like, that's compartmentalizing, babe, but you are acting as though, you know, it's all just coming into your make-up.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Min's like, "We're leaving now, so you don't have to, like, think about it anymore," and I'm like, Min, it's not something he should not think about.

Sally: Yeah, that's not a great response, girl.

Emily: Not great advice. I – I mean, whatever. Um, and he's like, "No, I really – I really appreciate the time I had in Far Madding because it forged me like a fire," or whatever, you know, which really just reads like Robert Jordan being like, "This was necessary."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: "I promise you: this subplot was super necessary to the things I'm doing to Rand psychologically," and we're all like, no, it wasn't.

Sally: It – it wasn't. You have also already done enough to Rand psychologically. I don't really understand the sort of escalating traumas in order to make Rand further compartmentalize and dissociate.

Emily: Well, speaking of unsustainable. You simply –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Cannot have a fourteen-book series where the main character plateaus in terms of trauma.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, because that's just not how the structure of books works. It seems like something new should be happening every time. It's like – it's a lot like, um, fifteen seasons into Supernatural, you know?

Sally: (laugh) Dean Winchester's died eight times.

Emily: Yeah. And now they're fighting God –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But, like, they've already fought a god and all this other stuff, and it's just like, boy, you can't make this shit up. But, like –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: It's why things can't go on as long as they go on.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Or why, sometimes, you – if you're going to keep doing things to your characters, you need to allow them to take a backseat, much like in book three, where Rand –

Sally: Yes.

Emily: Takes a backseat in terms of plot and we're allowed to just sort of project onto the void of his psyche. Um, but having left Far Madding, they all sort of get outside of the bounds of the ter'angreal, and – this is a large group now, by the way. Um, Rand, Min, Nynaeve, Lan, and Alivia – the original group – and now everyone who came with Cadsuane, including her Aes Sedai, the Aes Sedai who swore fealty to Rand, Verin, the Sea Folk are there for some reason, and, um, uh, the Asha'man and any Warders. So quite a – quite a group of people. And they stop and everyone's kind of like, "What's the plan?" Rand has hidden, um, the Choedan Kal – or, I don't actually think he left the Choedan – I think he's had the Choedan Kal with him the whole time, but he hid Callandor, like, in the ground, which is pretty hilarious.

Sally: Yeah, he just buried his nuke.

Emily: I mean, yeah. He, like, did some magic traps and whatnot around it, but it's still objectively hilarious that he just literally buried it in the ground.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Um, and he pulls out Callandor and is like, "Okay, here's the plan. I'm gonna go cleanse saidin." Um. And I think it would've been funny if someone, like, gasped and screamed. (laugh)

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Or fainted –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Or threw up or whatever. Uh, but everyone's just kind of like, "Oh. Well." Some of the Aes Sedai are like, "Are you sure? That could really fuck things up." And Rand makes the excellent point that things are already pretty fucked up, and leaving things as they are is going to put them in a bad situation also because more and more Asha'man who have been trained as literal weapons are gonna go insane. Which, technically, is a problem that you created, Rand, but

he's like, "But it's just an – you know, it's just an unsustainable problem. I could go insane." And it's like, buddy. You're halfway there already. He's like, "We just don't know, and we can't afford to divide our attention when the Last Battle comes," which is going to be his, um, same philosophical stance regarding the Seanchan, except that he does not actually solve the problem of the Seanchan; he just delays it. So. Hoo hoo. Um, but everyone is more or less on board. The Asha'man are excited. They're like, "Fuck yeah." Um, and it's very charming, I think, how everyone is just like, "Sweet, let's do this." You know, like, everyone's just like, "This will change everything." Eben is like, "I'm so fucking pumped to be able to touch saidin without the taint," and if you're at all an astute reader, you're like, "Ah, he's definitely gonna beef it." (laugh)

Sally: Just red shirted himself. (laugh)

Emily: Just – yeah, just automatically signed up for the casualties list. Never reference something that you want to do in the future. Retirement? No.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Touching saidin?

Sally: No.

Emily: Absolutely not. You're dead.

Sally: You're – ugh. RIP, Eben.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: We hardly knew thee.

Emily: We really did hardly know thee.

Sally: Just know that he had –

Emily: Um, Robert Jordan did not flesh you out at all.

Sally: Big-ass ears.

Emily: Just big-ass ears and a young buck. Um, Cadsuane's like, "Where are you gonna do this?" and Rand's like, "Shadar Logoth," and opens a gateway to take them to Shadar Logoth, and everyone's just like, "Okay."

Sally: Yeah, Cadsuane is like, "Ah, fitting place if you're gonna maybe blow up the world."

Emily: Yeah, she's like, "Well, if you're gonna blow up the world, might as well start there." And I'm like, oh, finally, I agree with Cadsuane on this one thing.

Sally: Yeah. (laugh) Yeah.

Emily: Um, they're not in Shadar Logoth, the city proper; they are outside of its boundaries, um, on, like, a little hilltop.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And Rand and Nynaeve get started pretty quickly. And it's sort of amusing that, like, Rand is just sitting on the ground, and Nynaeve's sitting on a rock. You know, there's no, like, set-up; it's just these very –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Two people in nature, each with their little statue. Um, and Cadsuane takes care of the logistics, sort of commandeering everyone. Nynaeve gives all her angreal that she's wearing to Alivia and the big group separates into smaller, patrolling groups. Um, and I'm not going to be able to remember all of these, but, like, there's one of just women, that has, like, Verin and a couple of the other Aes Sedai, and then the Asha'man are split into three different groups, each of which they're linked with their Aes Sedai who they're bonded to and then one other Aes Sedai. Alivia's on her own because she's just, like, a walking, you know, nuke, um, and Cadsuane stays at the top of the hill with, I think, one of the groups to sort of monitor and be the last line of defense.

Sally: Yeah, she's got an angreal that can point to where someone's channeling, so she is basically, like, one of those arcade games, pointing Narishma, who is –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Her gun. Who – he's got Callandor.

Emily: Yeah, Narishma's got Callandor, so he's –

Sally: Which he deserves, because he almost died collecting it from the Stone of Tear. (laugh)

Emily: He's like, "No, that's mine." You just know he and Damer Flinn and Eben had, like, a whisper fight, who's gonna have Callandor – (laugh)

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And Narishma was like, "Mine."

Sally: "I earned this."

Emily: "I almost died."

Sally: Yeah. So Narishma's got a big glass sword, and I say, good for him.

Emily: Yeah. Fun, fun. Um –

Sally: But he's shooting streams of fire at people.

Emily: Yeah. So, yeah, Cadsuane's just, like, aiming the gun that is Narishma.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And he's just like, fire. Um. so that's sort of the set-up of what is going on. The non-combatants, such as they are – Min, uh, one of the Sea Folk, Harine – one of the – the channeling

Sea Folk, Shalon, is, uh, paired with the Aes Sedai. Um, but, like, Harine and a few of the Warders as guards are all just up at the top of the hill –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Sort of protected. Um, so now we get into what's going on. We start with Rand and Nynaeve channeling. Most of what they tell us about is, um, how much power it is, just a super overwhelming amount of power. Um, and also, they both get to experience, uh, the differences between saidin and saidar and blah blah blah blah, and gender is different, blah blah blah. Not the most interesting part, I would say.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Um, and then we get into these really short, clippy points of view – Clippy, like the little paper clip helper.

Sally: (laugh) Horrifying.

Emily: He's like, "Hello."

Sally: Clippy's there.

Emily: Clippy's there. (laugh) We start out with two points of view from two randos, who are both witnessing the Choedan Kal, the big ones – the big boys – light up.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: You know, super bright. So there's a guy over in Cairhien who's like, "Hewwo? I'm going to go home and commit myself to alcoholism fully after this experience."

Sally: Yeah, which feels a touch dramatic to me. (laugh)

Emily: It's like, okay –

Sally: But what do I know about seeing a big statue. 'Cause the real – the real Choedan Kal are just –

Emily: Huge.

Sally: Disgustingly large.

Emily: I guess, like – you know the big creepy thing over in – over by the aquarium?

Sally: Oh, yeah, the claw.

Emily: The claw.

Sally: The claw.

Emily: The claw – you guys who don't live in Utah, which is most of you – um, in Utah, by the aquarium, so just off the freeway – and don't ask me why there's an aquarium in Utah, because – (laugh)

Sally: There is a great, scandalous history behind the aquarium in Utah –

Emily: Ooh.

Sally: But it's there. Loveland Living Planet Aquarium.

Emily: Yeah, not exactly a bounty of marine life here in, uh, the great Bonneville desert, but here we are. Um, there's this absolutely ridiculous structure right next to the aquarium. Um, the nonprofit owner of the aquarium bought it for – millions?

Sally: For less than twenty million dollars is all he –

Emily: Not sure how much less.

Sally: All he will say about it.

Emily: It was used in, like, stadium tours, particularly the U2 concert tour. You know, for, like, rigging up their lighting and – system. And it's basically – it does kind of look like a claw. It just is, like, this big, metal sort of structure. I really can't describe it. Anyway, if that lit up really bright, I would probably start crying. (laugh)

Sally: I would be like, "I do need some plum brandy after that."

Emily: Yeah, I'd be like –

Sally: But at least it would do something. The thing is, it's not like it – it's not attractive.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: I don't really get it. You can probably Google "Utah aquarium U2 claw" and get what you need to see.

Emily: Yeah, we all just call it the claw.

Sally: The claw.

Emily: Or the monstrosity.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: It's so heinous.

Sally: It really is so weird that the aquarium is right off the freeway, too.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Like, you could throw a stone from the aquarium and hit a car moving on the freeway.

Emily: Yeah, I mean they just are really set up to be a tourist –

Sally: I know. It's just weird to me.

Emily: Right on the north-south corridor.

Sally: Not very pleasant.

Emily: Sorry, that's some, you know, Utah-only banter.

Sally: But the aquarium is very tourist-y.

Emily: Um, and then we get a point of view from a woman on Tremalking, where we have never been before. It's just, like, a little island – uh, the biggest island that we know of. Uh, like, the Sea Folk kind of have a base there, when they're not on the ocean, which they are most of the time, and they prefer to be. Um, and we don't get a lot about Tremalking except that a woman sees the statue start glowing and is like, "Sweet, the Time of Illusions is about to end." Um, and we'll later find out that the "Time of Illusions" is the idea that, uh, you know, you have to die to wake up from life, which is a dream. So, um, everyone on Tremalking commits ritual suicide, which is upsetting, obviously, and sort of skimmed over –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Just in terms of – of, you know, anyone reacting to that. Um, it has very ... cult vibes.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Which I just really feel like is sort of, um, doing Tremalking, our single island nation off of the mainland, sort of a disservice. And –

Sally: Yeah. Sorry, go ahead.

Emily: I just – they're just like, "This weird thing is gonna happen on the island," and I'm like, couldn't it happen on the mainland or something? It'd be a lot spookier if it happened on the mainland, in my opinion.

Sally: Yeah. Well, a place that we are more connected to. I also feel like there's a bizarre conflation there of cult and religion, which are not –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: The – those two things are often conflated, but they are distinctly different.

Emily: They're not mutually exclusive, I would say. Religion just has a franchise.

Sally: Okay, fair enough. Um –

Emily: Um, but yeah, it – I agree; I don't think it's fair to say every religion is a cult or that every cult is a religion.

Sally: Yeah, and so there's, like, this conflation of – I also just feel like – it seems like this is something that's been a belief in Tremalking for –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: God, who knows how many thousands, hundreds of years? And, like, cults do not typically have that type of lifespan.

Emily: Yeah, and we're also just not given enough information –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: To distinguish between a cult and a religion on Tremalking, and that sort of blurring of the lines, I agree, makes it hard to, um, tell and makes you be like, “Okay, well, which is it?” And –

Sally: Yeah, I also – I don't really know how to – like, these are kind of, like, floating thoughts – like, the pieces are not adding up – but it also feels, like, weirdly racially motivated in a weird way? 'Cause if the implication is that all the Sea Folk people are Black and brown, and island nations are typically full of Black and brown people – that's – I'm guessing that's the racial make-up of Tremalking – and there seems to be these kind of, like – to me, I'm reading a subtext of, like, “This is a very silly thing that they did.” And therefore it just feels very, like, infantilizing and dismissive of indigenous religions.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Kind of used for shock value.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: So.

Emily: I agree. Whatever – whatever it is, whatever it's intended to do, it's not done well.

Sally: No. And it – again – because it is sort of just skimmed over – like, if it was given any attention –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Perhaps I would feel differently, but –

Emily: We'll never know.

Sally: It's just a – like, it's one of those bizarre things where it's like, Robert, you didn't need this.

Emily: (sigh) Um, but we then get points of view from most of the Forsaken, most of which, I would say, are pretty comedic.

Sally: Yeah, it's just a bunch of bumbling idiots.

Emily: Yeah, it's just a bunch of idiots. We get one from Cyndane, um, who is never referred to as anything but Cyndane, even in her own point of view, but she does make specific references, um, like unto Lanfear. Like, she references being in love with Rand or Lews Therin and how they could have ruled the world together, you know, very Lanfear language, and she references having more power before her time with the Aelfinn and Eelfinn. So. Uh, you're kind of like, oh, well, if I didn't know that already, that's definitely Lanfear.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Uh, we also get points of view from, uh, Demandred and Osan'gar, a.k.a. Dashiva, and they all follow really similar patterns of them appearing in a – you know, just Traveling immediately to where this big, huge beacon of power is lit up and immediately being attacked because of these patrols or because of Cadsuane pointing them out and then them realizing, slow – like, Demandred is like, “Oh, shit, they have an angreal that can tell when someone is channeling,” even when they're inverting the weaves to make them invisible, so just these people kind of running for their lives, which is pretty hilarious, you know?

Sally: Yeah, I also think it's just, like, a very hilarious set-up that all of the Forsaken go to this place immediately.

Emily: Except Moridin.

Sally: Yeah, who's like, “Mm. Not for me.”

Emily: Moridin's like, “Fly, my pretties, fly, fly.”

Sally: Yeah, he sends Cyndane and Moghedien, but who knows what the fuck he is doing. But they're all just like, “Hmm, now's my chance to kill the Dragon Reborn.”

Emily: Yeah. They're all like, “It's my time to shine.” Perhaps if they had, you know, utilized teamwork –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Then they could have got through this, and that's the idea here, is that ultimately, Rand's coterie and the side of good is going to be about working together, and also specifically the genders working together, men linking with women, et cetera, et cetera.

Sally: Correct.

Emily: There is power in plurality. Whereas the Forsaken are a bunch of greedy individualist morons, who are just in it for the sake of themselves, you know? They have no interest in community, in growth, in love, blah blah blah blah blah.

Sally: Correct.

Emily: These are all very, very common good versus evil tropes, so, you know, in a way, they can just sort of fly under the radar because that's always the thesis in good versus evil type fantasy books. But yeah, it is very much illustrated here, um, en masse. Uh, we also get a few points of view from, you know, some of the good guys, like, um, the group that runs across Graendal and is just like – Verin's like, “What is this strange woman doing in the forest?”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: She's like, “She's an apparition. Is she a ghost?”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: 'Cause she's so, like, decked out in all her finest, and Verin's just like, “Why –”

Sally: Verin's like, "What the fuck is this?"

EMily: "Why would anyone wear that?"

Sally: "In the forest?"

Emily: Yeah, before they start attacking. Um, probably the most haunting of these little vignettes is when Eben and his group are, you know, patrolling and they run across a woman who none of them is familiar with – this is Aran'gar – um, and none of them reacts to because she's not channeling initially. Um, and she's like, "Can you help me? I've just, like, ridden into the wrong part of the forest," and they're like, "Well, that's fucking weird. What are you doing here?" and then Eben's like, "Oh my God, she's holding saidin." And, you know, that – tackles her or whatever and presumably dies in the attempt, uh, to protect the others, which is sad, obviously. RIP Eben. But also, like – the Aran'gar reveal – Aran'gar herself, as we have said many times, is sort of a – a trash concept of Robert Jordan's, but these little reveals, and, like, the idea of this serial killer who can only use the male half of the power in the Aes Sedai camp, and none of them knows that she has the ultimate disguise of being the hottest woman alive.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: That's fun.

Sally: Yeah, it is fun. Um, the – the – the way people react to it is much more fun than the concept itself, which I know – I feel like those two things can't be separated, but for me, they are separated.

Emily: No, yeah, I agree.

Sally: I also think that if Eben had to go, tackling Halima is quite the blaze of glory to go down in. (laugh)

Emily: Yeah. "Bring her down! Do it!" (laugh) Um, Osan'gar, hilariously – (laugh)

Sally: This is my favorite one. (laugh)

Emily: He's such a derpy idiot.

Sally: I know.

Emily: He's like, "I'm not athletic; I'm just a big nerd."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: "I'm a mad scientist. That's, like, my whole thing. I'm just here 'cause I feel like I have to be, blah blah blah blah blah. I hate these – this. I'm trying to be sneaky. I'm obviously not –"

Sally: Yeah, he's, like, sneaking Pink Panther-style around the forest.

Emily: Boo ba doo ba doo. Like Wile E. Coyote.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: And everyone's just like – like, eventually Elza – is that her name?

Sally: I think so, yeah.

Emily: Elza, who is holding the Power for the group of three including Narishma with Callandor, so a ton of Power, on, um, the – the top of the hill – uh, this, we find out that Elza is a Darkfriend, which is sort of a, you know, loaded gun pointing at Rand because now she's in Rand's inner circle. We know that Min has told Rand that he can trust her amongst these other Aes Sedai. Um, and that will come back to haunt us, I – in a fairly, I think, satisfying way, so. Uh, it's a fun reveal here. Uh, but Elza, like, refers to the Forsaken as "the Chosen" and the Dark One as "the Great Lord." Um, but she's like, "Yeah, I don't think – I think the Dark One would be okay if I, like, killed one of the Forsaken because obviously I have to get the last – the Dragon Reborn to the Last Battle." You know, that's the – the – the sort of canyon that her mind has carved in logic in order to coalesce with the brainwashing that she's undergone.

Sally: Yeah, she also, like, very – like, it sounds so bad to call it funny, but she's got this line where she's like, "When I was in the Aiel camp, I had this just, like, sudden realization that I had to get the Dragon Reborn to the Last Battle."

Emily: And we're like, "Oh, did you?" (laugh)

Sally: She's like, "And it was just, like – I can't believe I'd never realized it before."

Emily: "It was an epiphany." And I'm like –

Sally: No, it was the brainwashing – it was the lobotomy tent, my friend.

Emily: It was the lobotomy tent, bestie.

Sally: Um, yeah. But then she, like, sees this guy and she's like, "Well, he's not one of the Forsaken, so."

Emily: "He's not one of the Forsaken; that's just one of the rogue Asha'man." So –

Sally: Bang, bang.

Emily: (explosion noise)

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Literally blows the top off a hill. So Dashiva is no more.

Sally: RIP, my good bitch.

Emily: Of course, we don't see a body, so we're left with the possibility that he's alive, but I'll let you down easy here; he is super dead.

Sally: Good, because that's the funniest possible way for him to die.

Emily: I know. Um, and I think – I'm trying to think of the other pair-ups. Cyndane, I think, ends up fighting Alivia, who is just –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: A single person, you know? And Cyndane's like, "Oh my God, this woman is terrifying."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: I'm like, yeah, Alivia is terrifying.

Sally: Yeah. She's terrifying on her own, but now she's in a bunch of magic batteries.

Emily: Yeah. Sick.

Sally: Good for her. I love Alivia.

Emily: I know. Good for her indeed. Um, those are, I think, the bulk of –

Sally: Yeah, I think those are all of them.

Emily: Yeah. We just never see –

Sally: Oh, Moghedien is also there –

Emily: Oh.

Sally: But she just, like, sits on a hill and watches. She doesn't really do anything.

Emily: Yeah, Moghedien's my favorite. She's just like, "I've been forced to come here, but it looks like everyone's dying, so I will keep my distance and observe."

Sally: Yeah, "I'm just gonna chill."

Emily: And I'm like, yeah, good for you. I mean, you shouldn't be alive, objectively, but. Whatever. If you're going to be, I'll allow it.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, so –

Sally: Um – oh, this doesn't really add anything, but I don't know if we talked about Demandred. He is also there.

Emily: Yeah, I think I mentioned –

Sally: I'm sorry. I can't keep track of them.

Emily: That he comes through a gateway and immediately – he's hilarious. He's, like, saying all these things about how, like, "I'm good at war –"

Sally: Oh, that's right, that's right.

Emily: And –

Sally: "I'm a great tactician," and all of a sudden –

Emily: And then he almost dies immediately. (laugh) He's so stupid. I love him.

Sally: (laugh) Regular Sun Tzu out here.

Emily: Yeah. Um. He gets taken down by Damer Flinn, which is my favorite.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: He's like, "What's that old guy doing?" and Damer Flinn's like, "Bang, bang."

Sally: (laugh) Old guy's gonna whoop your ass.

Emily: Yeah. Um, on the top of the hill, Cadsuane is doing magic stuff besides directing, uh, their fire. She is also, like, has a shield up because lightning is just coming down, sort of long-distance attacks. Um, and she, at one point, has to Heal Nynaeve because Nynaeve is about to keel over from exhaustion, which is just a little frustrating, that Nynaeve is on her – at her limit, but Rand is not.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: It's very gendered. Um, but finally we cut to it being over. It takes literally hours – the majority of a day. And it ends, through Moghedien's point of view, when – this all has been going on, and this big, black dome has been rising over –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Um, Shadar Logoth. It's a very cool image.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Especially as they're like – eventually like, it is no longer – black is not a descriptive term for it. It is literally just, like, sucking color and life out of the atmosphere; it's a black hole, essentially. And it collapses like a black hole, eventually; when it's over, it just, like, shrinks down in on itself and then there's a shockwave, and Shadar Logoth disappears into this crater and presumably so does the taint on saidin.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um. So we end with the casualty toll at Osan'gar dead on the side of the bad guys – that's it, unfortunately – um, and Eben died and so did one of the Aes Sedai, uh, one of Cadsuane's Aes Sedai – I think her name was Kumira? Obviously not –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: A really important –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: RIP, I guess, but. So it could've been a lot worse. And I guess we will say, casualty: the entire population of Tremalking, but.

Sally: Mm.

Emily: Shan't linger on that yet. Um, and all of the Asha'man – the surviving Asha'man, I guess, Narishma and Flinn – report that the cleanse on saidin is indeed gone. The Aes Sedai, of course, are having typical reactions where they're like, "But how could we tell?" And it's like, you can't. You just have to trust the guys who –

Sally: Who are literally crying because they can touch magic without –

Emily: Who are crying from relief and joy.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Yeah. Narishma's so happy. Just believe it. You know, dattebayo. God.

Sally: (laugh) Believe it!

Emily: Believe it. Uh, Rand and Nynaeve are passed out; some other people are wounded but have been Healed. And my one major quibble with this, um, un – unsurprisingly to Damer Flinn, who predicted this, the wounds in Rand's side have not been Healed.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: And I do understand from a story standpoint, right, Robert Jordan just needed to let those wounds be with Rand till the very end, you know, sort of a Fisher King whole set-up thing, and also the wounds themselves sort of helped give Rand the idea for cleansing the taint, you know, because of the way Damer Flinn didn't Heal him but stabilized him. But I don't know, I just feel like if Shadar Logoth is gone and the taint is gone, then those two wounds that were created with Shadar Logoth and the taint on saidin should be gone.

Sally: Yeah. Or at least one of them.

Emily: Yeah, I guess I'm just sort of – to be honest – sick of hearing about them, so.

Sally: Well, again, it's another thing that's just, like, unsustainable. This episode should be titled "Unsustainability in the Wheel of Time."

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Um – it's just like, he's had one of these wounds since, literally, book two, and the other one since book seven.

Emily: Book seven.

Sally: And even two books is just, like, a really long time to deal with an unhealing wound.

Emily: Yeah. Every time he exerts himself, it starts bleeding again or breaks open, and at – at a certain point, it becomes a little unbelievable that he ever doesn't just, like, keel over.

Sally: Yeah, and I think that might be my major complaint, is, like, if it was handled more along the lines of, like, a chronic condition –

Emily: Disability, yeah.

Sally: Yeah. I would be like, okay, that's kind of interesting, as much as I – as I have expressed, have a lot of issues with, like, magic and disability being conflated. At least it would have, like, a proper – like, it would have space in the narrative in times when it is inconvenient rather than times when it is just, like, convenient to have Rand be in – like, bed-bound for a couple of days or whatever. So –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: It's –

Emily: When we need a rest period.

Sally: And especially at this point, when there's, like, a very logical, in-universe magical reason for the wounds to be gone and they are not, it's kind of like –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: It – why are – why do we keep propping ourselves up on this? Like ...

Emily: It makes it seem also like a major step in terms of the plot and the universe in preparation for the Last Battle, but, um, Rand is – Rand himself personally is still at square one.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Which maybe is the point. You know, I – I don't want to discredit Robert Jordan too much. It is sort of powerful that Rand still has to go through the next five books or whatever and still is really facing down the barrel of dying –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: AND a lot of really depressing things in his future, so. In that way, I think it's interesting, but it also just frustrates me, yeah, because there's such a good, logical reason for them to go away, and they don't.

Sally: Yeah, I – this is not a – I'm having another episode where thoughts are not congealing, but, like, it feels like Robert Jordan is very dependent on Rand being disabled, sick, or incapacitated, mentally or physically, all the time. And it just starts to kind of – it starts to feel like Rand is being punished a lot with, like, ailments that are not being addressed, treated, or healed. And it's very frustrating.

Emily: Yeah, it feels almost deliberately like Robert Jordan is just nerfing him constantly. Like, wow, if Rand was operating at his full capacity of book one, you know, physically and mentally, then he'd be an unstoppable force or whatever, but instead, the only way I can stop him is by giving him physical and mental injuries. And I'm like, actually, that's what the plot is for.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Is to do things to delay or stop or oppose him.

Sally: Yeah, this whole thing, like, I don't know, the Seanchan invasion?

Emily: That's a pretty major delay and opposition.

Sally: Yeah, you don't need to have un – two – *two*, parentheses, two, unhealing wounds in his side. It just feels a little –

Emily: It's just unsustainable.

Sally: It's unsustainable, Robert. What were you doing?

Emily: Yeah. So. Then the end, I guess. (laugh)

Sally: And then the end.

Emily: Then the end. WInter's Fart is over.

Sally: Yeah, there's one – one little thing I want to say first. And I want – that is that I appreciate this scene happens with Nynaeve rather than – I think there could've been arguments for it to be happening with Egg, Elayne, or Aviendha –

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: Who are also very powerful channelers. And those are all women that Rand has been or is romantically connected to. So I, like, very much appreciate the, um, set-up here, where it's just, like, Rand and his very very good friend and mentor and person that he trusts, and there's no, like, weird extra gender stuff going on because of romantic or sexual tension. So.

Emily: Yeah, it's just platonic.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: In the true sense of the word.

Sally: And I just really think that's neat.

Emily: Yeah, I agree. I think there would've been a lot more, um, possibilities for it to be deeply annoying if it had been any of those other women.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But it's Nynaeve, and it's really interesting because rather than agonizing and worrying about Nynaeve's safety, the – the thought doesn't even cross Rand's mind.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: He just sort of trusts Nynaeve to be able to handle it, and she does.

Sally: Which is great for Nynaeve but also very annoying that Rand does not apply the same to other women in his life.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: It's like Nynaeve is the only woman he trusts to handle herself.

Emily: Yep.

Sally: Which is fascinating, but good for Nynaeve, I guess.

Emily: (sigh) Okay, you guys. How do we usually end books? I can't remember if we just end.

Sally: I mean, we can apply the We Don't Watch Outlander model and give them a rating.

Emily: How many farts out of – (laugh)

Sally: How many farts out of ten? (laugh)

Emily: I can't do it. I'm not ready. Um, I don't know, like five out of ten?

Sally: Mm. I would probably do four.

Emily: Okay. Four and a half out of ten.

Sally: It's just a – it's a rough one. There's some fun stuff, though.

Emily: It keeps the plot moving, but it moves too slow. There are some good character points of view, but some that are not so good. Some good plots, some not good plots. It's overall a pretty neutral book. (laugh)

Sally: Yeah, it – it very much feels just like a stepping stone between the last book and the next book, but yet Path of Daggers also felt like a stepping stone, and Crossroads of Twilight also feels like a stepping stone –

Emily: Yeah, we truly are just finding a way to bridge the gap between Crown of Swords and Knife of Dreams, and for some godforsaken reason, it'll take us three books to get there.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Okay, everyone. Thanks for listening –

Sally: Thanks for listening.

Emily: To season eight.

Sally: Season eight, following book nine.

Emily: Mm. Yeah. We're gonna be off the next – rest of the series. Um, thanks to Glynn MacKenzie for our theme song. Thanks to our patrons on Patreon and our followers on social media. Uh, by way of announcement, we'll be on hiatus next week, our usual between-seasons, um, break, but then we should be back as normal with Crossroads of Twilight. We'll let you know if that changes or if we need another week or whatever –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: To get our act together.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um. That's it for me. Do you have anything to add?

Sally: No. Thanks for listening.

Emily: Yeah. Okay, do you have a sign-off?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Ha.

Sally: Um, yesterday the carpets were cleaned –

Emily: Oh, no. (laugh) So –

Sally: In our apartment, and this, I think, was the most traumatic thing that has ever happened to Tybalt in his entire life because not only were there strangers in the home, but they were upstairs, where all his hiding places were.

Emily: And they were making a very loud, upsetting noise.

Sally: Yeah. And so Tybalt was, like, in hysterics and jumping around and was probably going to hurt himself, so Emily had to open one of our big cabinets and just, like, put him in the cabinet for time-out for a couple of minutes so that he would just, like, settle down. (laugh) It wasn't, like, a pantry, like a – above the kitchen counter cabinet. It's, like, a big storage cabinet. But it was, like, the only thing we could think of to get him to, like, stop having a meltdown and breaking one of his bones, so. And then we almost couldn't get him out of the cabinet.

Emily: Yeah, he really wanted to stay in there.

Sally: It was his safety cabinet. (laugh)

Emily: (laugh) Safety cabinet. Okay, everyone –

Sally: So whatever is happening, you're having a better day than Tybalt had yesterday.

Emily: Oh, God, yeah. Seriously. Have a good day – week, everyone!

Sally: Bye!

Emily: Bye.