



Episode 204: Poverty-Stricken in Cheese Town

Release Date: June 13, 2022

Running Time: 42 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)

Sally: Okay, let's start the ding-dang podcast.

Emily: (laugh) Hi, this is Everybody Hates Rand. It's your friendly neighborhood Wheel of Time podcast. What?

Sally: Just – the New York Times headline is so dramatic.

Emily: Oh. I'm Emily Juchau.

Sally: And I'm Sally Goodger.

Emily: And it's Crossroads of Twilight, bitch. It's Britney –

Sally: It's Brintey, bitch.

Emily: I actually shouldn't put Britney and the Crossroads of Twilight within the same comparison. It's unfair to Britney.

Sally: (whisper) It is unfair to Britney.

Emily: Um, so here we are, with the second half of the world's longest prologue. That's a lie. It's only the longest prologue until we get to, probably, Knife of Dreams.

Sally: Yeah, the Knife of Dreams prologue is equally as long if not longer.

Emily: At the very least, the Tower – A Memory of Light is like 300 pages, so.

Sally: What the? Why even call it a prologue?

Emily: I mean, I don't really know how long it is; I just know –

Sally: No, I believe that. I believe it.

Emily: (laugh) It's so long.

Sally: I'm staring at A Memory of Light right now –

Emily: With hatred.

Sally: With, yeah, fury. It's right next to –

Emily: If I had laser eyes – yeah.

Sally: Dune and whatever comes before it. Towers of Midnight.

Emily: Yeah, Towers of Midnight. Between two not-great books. Um.

Sally: This is much less exciting half of the prologue than the first four points of view, I feel like.

Emily: Because it doesn't have Ituralde?

Sally: I mean, that's true. It does have Davram Bashere, which is pretty exciting.

Emily: It does have Davram Bashere, yeah. And the sexual tension between Davram Bashere and Bael the Aiel, which –

Sally: Bael the Aiel.

Emily: I'll never – I'll never stop finding amusing. (laugh)

Sally: I just feel like Davram Bashere has sexual tension with everyone. With, like, his lieutenant –

Emily: He does, yeah.

Sally: That he's talking to in this point of view.

Emily: Everyone who meets Davram Bashere is like, "I wanna fuck him," and he's like, "Hmm."

Sally: "Hm."

Emily: "Sounds great."

Sally: "Intriguing."

Emily: Yeah, it is kind of boring because there's assassination attempts, but they're happening to people who aren't the point of view narrators.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Which is, like ... I mean, I – I theoretically understand why, like, Dobraine isn't telling us about his assassination attempt, because he's just unconscious for half of it, but you know, it just leaves a little bit to be desired, as does this entire prologue. I have no idea what's going on with Gawyn. I never do.

Sally: I will say that Gawyn is in a town that's only claim to fame is sending cheese to the White Tower.

Emily: Which is so fabulous. They're just like, "We are the cheese patrons of the White Tower. Hear us roar."

Sally: Or maybe, like, all of Tar Valon; I don't know. But I was like, what a wack-ass piece of world-building for Robert Jordan to just –

Emily: I know.

Sally: Sprinkle upon us.

Emily: Do you think his, like, world-building Word document, he was just, like, scrolling to the end of it and was like, "A town that just sends cheese to the White Tower"? Sure, I might as well throw that one in there."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: "In a Gawyn point of view, which people will be skipping anyway, so they won't necessarily see and notice how wack that is."

Sally: (laugh) Yeah. I mean, I think it's quite whimsical. I like to think of all these cheese folks making their fancy cheeses.

Emily: Do they have, like, caves, do you think?

Sally: (gasp)

Emily: 'Cause cheese – some cheese gets made in caves.

Sally: (whisper) Oh my gosh.

Emily: I know so little about the cheese-making process, but I do know that some of it is made in caves.

Sally: Yeah, I feel like my dad or step-mom was telling me that they just read a book –

Emily: Of course they were.

Sally: All about the history of cheese.

Emily: Of course they were. (laugh)

Sally: Yeah, I was like, "This makes a lot of sense for you two," but I'll – I'll – I'm seeing them this weekend; I'll mine them for some more information about cheese, and we can expand – we can expand upon this town.

Emily: Yeah, that's your homework assignment, is to find out more about –

Sally: More about cheese. I bet they have –

Emily: What this cheese-making town would look like.

Sally: Some lovely cows.

Emily: Maybe it's just inhabited by mice.

Sally: (gasp) Cute. It's like Cinderella; the mice make all the cheese.

Emily: We don't see any village – villagers; we only see Gawyn and some Aes Sedai and Gawyn's lieutenant dude, Rajar. Rajar.

Sally: Rajar. So yeah, I'm – I'm choosing to believe the town is peopled – is populated by mice who make all of the cheese, and the mice are unionizing.

Emily: Imagine unionizing against Elaida. I mean, she – it needs to happen.

Sally: It needs to happen.

Emily: It needs to – get – take her down!

Sally: It – it's very akin to the – the Amazon workers who unionized while Elon Musk was in space. (laugh)

Emily: (laugh)

Sally: No – Bezos was in space. Whichever one was in –

Emily: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Sally: I don't know. Whichever one unionized. While someone was in space.

Emily: I think it was Amazon.

Sally: Yeah, I think it was Amazon. So they unionized against Bezos. It's like that. That's – that's the equivalent. Uh, but it wasn't Bezos in space. It doesn't matter. Unionizing against Elaida is what matters.

Emily: Gawyn starts every point of view by being the most dramatic-ass bitch that has ever existed.

Sally: That's true.

Emily: He's like, "His sleep was always fretful, troubled by dark dreams, haunted by the woman he loved," which could be literal if Egg is just, like, hanging out in his dreams.

Sally: In his dreams? "Hi, it's me."

Emily: But Egg usually is like, "I will avoid Gawyn's dreams so I don't get sucked in to his sexual mind palace, where he just ravishes me non-stop."

Sally: And decapitates people.

Emily: And also decapitates Rand non-stop, which – ladies, red flag.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: That's a deal-breaker. (laugh)

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Um, anyway, he's just like, "I'm just so worried about Egg and Elayne, but I won't do anything to actually do anything."

Sally: Just gonna sit here and languish in Cheese Town.

Emily: "Here I am in Cheese Town, and I can't do anything about it, and nothing can be done, and I'm the most miserable man that's ever existed," and I'm like, shut up.

Sally: No one's suffered more than Gawyn.

Emily: That's true.

Sally: This is what I say about Tybalt every time Tybalt has a crisis.

Emily: Yeah, "No one has ever suffered more than you."

Sally: And that's very much the energy Gawyn gives off, of a pampered house cat who's like, "Ugh, the pillows are in the wrong spot today." (laugh)

Emily: "Oh, no-o-o-o. Oh, no."

Sally: So, I hate him.

Emily: Yeah, it's hard to feel sympathetic with Gawyn when literally all of his woes are of his own making.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Maybe not, like, being at the White Tower – Morgase sent him there; he didn't necessarily have a choice in that – but that was, like, who he sided with in the White Tower schism –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And blah blah blah blah blah. And also, like, you're a privileged rich boy. He also tells us explicitly that he didn't have to go back to the White Tower. He could've gone back to Andor. Like, you've had multiple opportunities to peace off and make different choices –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: If you would like to, but instead he's just like, "I'm Gawyn, and I don't make decisions, and if I do, they're bad ones."

Sally: Yeah, and it's really hard to figure out, like, why. Like, I'm sure it has something to do with, like, honor and the – the oaths that he took and whatever. Gonna go back to the White Tower for reasons that just don't make a lot of sense to me. Because it's like, yeah, even if you – I mean, this is coming from me, someone who doesn't believe in oaths of fealty or whatever. But if, like, your promise was to Elaida, who obviously is very horrific and tried to kill you at Dumai's Wells or have you killed, leave. Just leave.

Emily: You can just leave.

Sally: You can just leave.

Emily: And it's like, is he feeling guilty because he was the one who let Siuan go?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Is this just all trying to make up for that? Also, if it comes back to honor and oaths, your very first oath of honor –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Was to, like, be the prince – sword prince –

Sally: Yeah, the sword prince –

Emily: The sword man of Andor. Like, Elayne's right-hand dude. But you're not doing that, despite the fact that you're pretty well-assured that Elayne is probably on her way to Andor, if not there already.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Like – I don't know. Gawyn, of all of our characters in the Wheel of Time, seems to be the most behind the times at any given moment.

Sally: Mm.

Emily: You know, he's reacting to things that were resolved or, um, became irrelevant literal books ago.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: You know? And that's – those – those things are especially – especially, like, um, obvious to the readers, but even to, like, other characters.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: You know? It's like, if you met most other characters, they'd be like, "Oh, you STILL think Rand killed Morgase?"

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: "Why would you think that?" You know?

Sally: Yeah. Yeah.

Emily: And we're not really – because we don't spend much time with Gawyn – and this is not me asking for more time with Gawyn –

Sally: No, please.

Emily: Let me clarify: I don't – I don't like him; I don't want to be with him – but it's like, we're – we're never really sure how much of that, again, is of his own making and how much of that is just, like, willful ignorance.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: You know? And how much of that is the fact that he is in this weird, like, backwater position, just stationed with a bunch of guys who are outside of the siege of Tar Valon but sort of still expected to be loyal to the White Tower, even though the White Tower sent them away to get killed.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Like, what's going on there?

Sally: Yeah, it's – it is very, just, confusing, and it's also really frustrating, and I believe we've made this point before, so I'm sorry to belabor it, but, like, Gawyn reacting to things that happened books ago, like, logistically make sense, like, technically makes sense, like, if news is traveling very slowly, we're jumping timelines, but, like, I am not interested in Gawyn learning for the first time that his sister is with the rebel Aes Sedai in book ten, when that happened –

Emily: When she was with – yeah. Book five.

Sally: Book five. Like, that is not interesting to me.

Emily: Hmm-mm.

Sally: Like, Gawyn should have heard that and Gawyn should have reacted to that off-screen books ago, and by book ten, he should be in a different position than being like, "I finally know where my sister is."

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Or, "I finally know where my sister is aligned," or something. Like, it's just, like, so tedious.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: I really hate it. Like, I don't know what Robert Jordan was going for there, but it's some sort of verisimilitude, I guess, but it's – you're also writing a high fantasy series; you don't have to be loyal to how the pigeons fly.

Emily: What's frustrating about Gawyn, besides everything about him – (laugh)

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Is that he is so, um, it – he's sort of, like, the walking embodiment of missed opportunities.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: He's usually in positions that could be interesting.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: He tells us that he's the only one of the Younglings who does not actually feel loyal to Elaida and doesn't think that, like, they should be going back to the White Tower. And all of the other ones are just, so, like, brainwashed into wanting to be Warders –

Sally: Right.

Emily: That they're gonna go back anyway, and it's like, if you actually cared or were willing to, like, take actions or do things, then this could be a very interesting story about you sort of, like, liberating –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: The rest of these young men.

Sally: Yeah, do some deprogramming.

Emily: Yeah, but instead, you're just, like, so apathetic about everything and yet still have such a misplaced sense of your own importance in the scheme of things. You know, Gawyn is our character with protagonist syndrome –

Sally: Yes.

Emily: He thinks he's the protagonist of the story –

Sally: Yes.

Emily: And he very much is not.

Sally: Correct.

Emily: Which, at the very least, is emphasized pretty hilariously with his death, where he's like, "I'll be the one to kill Demandred," and then he immediately gets killed.

Sally: What an idiot. (laugh)

Emily: I know. (laugh)

Sally: "I, Gawyn Trakand, will take on one of the Forsaken."

Emily: "I'm in charge."

Sally: "I am powerful enough to take on one of the Forsaken. I can't channel. I'm not all that great at using a sword; Mat Cauthon beat my ass with a stick."

Emily: "Mat Cauthon beat my ass with a stick." How would you ever recover from that?

Sally: (laugh) Yeah. Like, if nothing else, that should've humbled Gawyn and sent him on to just be, like, a blissful little himbo.



Emily: Yeah.

Sally: But instead he's like, "No, I am the most important person in the world."

Emily: Remember when Gawyn was, like, likable and cheerful?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: All the way up until, like, about book four? The White Tower schism?

Sally: Uh-huh.

Emily: And then suddenly Robert Jordan was like, "I'm going to give Gawyn a ton of self-inflicted PTSD, but you're not gonna be with him when it happens; you're not going to be in his head in the immediate aftermath of it happening, so for the rest of time, it will absolutely haunt you that Gawyn act – suddenly became a different person –"

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: "With no on-screen explanation for that."

Sally: Yeah. It just becomes more and more annoying to me that he didn't just go with Siuan –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: And Leane and Min. Just, like, leave. Again: Just leave.

Emily: Just leave!

Sally: Um.

Emily: Yeah, there were a lot of ways that Gawyn's arc could have gone differently, but it's just character oversaturation –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Robert Jordan had too many characters at this point, and he only had, like, three things he ever wanted Gawyn to do.

Sally: Yeah, it's also, in terms of, like, character saturation – and, like, perhaps some of this is, like, intentional, um, on Robert Jordan's part, but, like, obviously Gawyn and Rand act as foils or mirrors of one another in many ways, and Rand – Gawyn's protagonist syndrome, Rand being the actual protagonist, like, they've got some similar things going on. But part of what, like, makes Gawyn so frustrating – well, again, among many other things – is, like, he's just doing what Rand did, like, four books ago, languishing over what decisions to make, what is his role, what type of leader does he need to be, where is Elayne, where are all these women that he cares about, not making decisions. Like, it's a very similar character arc. And it's like, I didn't like it the first time around; why would I want to do it again?

Emily: Yeah, and I didn't even like it when we were having the much more palatable rags to riches storyline that Rand –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Was getting; you know, we're programmed to like that.

Sally: Yeah.

(car horn honks outside)

Emily: Hello?

Sally: Honk, honk, honk.

Emily: Honk, honk. And I don't like it – I don't like Gawyn's fall from grace –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Any more than that. He's not –

Sally: Yes.

Emily: He's being humbled in the narrative, but he – in his own psyche, he is not being humbled one iota, so, like –

Sally: Yeah, that's a good point. Like, he's not following his own character arc. Like, he is stuck – he's got, like – (inaudible)

Emily: He might be the most poorly written character in this entire series.

Sally: (laugh) No, it's so true.

Emily: It's – we get so much mixed messaging about him. Is his protagonist syndrome intentional?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Like, is Robert Jordan trying to make a point about masculine privilege? I highly doubt it because of literally everything else in the Wheel of Time series; I don't believe that Robert Jordan is that astute about masculinity –

Sally: Yes.

Emily: And toxic masculinity, but, like, there's a possible reading there that it was intentional or is – I don't – I don't know. Is he just sort of popping up whenever Robert Jordan needed him to do something? And he had to make him depressed as fuck in order to justify the fact that he's not doing anything any other time?

Sally: No, you make such a good point. Like, Rand's rags to riches, so to speak, thing is part of what makes him so insufferable. Like, he was once this, like, lovely –

Emily: Man of the people.

Sally: Charming little farm boy who was like, "I don't want anything to do with this –"

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: And now he's like, "I will conquer all of the known world and make deals with fascists." (laugh) Gawyn is this insufferable, pretty boy prince, and if he actually followed his character arc to, like, reverse that and become, like, the type of person who gives a shit and is, like, again, humbled, like, it would have been really interesting to watch those two things happen, kind of revolving door of what roles they are taking. Instead – again, he's just languishing in Cheese Town.

Emily: Yeah, Gawyn's story is ultimately a story of failure –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: And, like, I don't – I – I just don't – I feel like that can be interesting to read in, like, Shakespearean tragedy, but it's hard to feel anything for Gawyn.

Sally: Yeah, like, I'm sorry I always make the – this Hamlet comparison, but it's just, like, really writes itself, of these two, like, sad boys who cannot make a decision.

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: And it's like, part of why it doesn't work for me is, like, Shakespeare already did it, first of all. But, like –

Emily: And he did it well.

Sally: He did it well, and it – so, again, I know Hamlet is, like, five hours when performed start to finish, but that's so much shorter than the Wheel of Time.

Emily: (laugh) Imagine performing the Wheel of Time on the stage.

Sally: (laugh) Yeah. So it just – yeah, there's just something about it that doesn't work. Gawyn as a character doesn't work. Aside from his, like, truly insufferable personality, like, nothing about his arc works because his decisions don't make sense; he doesn't make any sense; I also feel like everything we really needed Gawyn to do, Galad could have done.

Emily: Yeah. Yeah, I agree. Elayne only ever needed – I mean, Elayne is sort of an unnecessary character too, but she really only ever needed one brother.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Well, fuck Gawyn, am I right? Um.

Sally: Yes, you are.

Emily: Yeah. The crowd cheers.

Sally: "Yeah, woohoo!"

Emily: Everyone loves to hate Gawyn. Um –

Sally: Everybody hates Gawyn; welcome to our new podcast.

Emily: I can't say his name that often, you know?

Sally: Ga-win.

Emily: Gah-win.

Sally: Gah-win. Gar-win.

Emily: Gah-win; I think that's how it's actually pronounced. Uh, the actual thing that's happening with Gawyn while they're in Cheese Town – Cheeseville –

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: He and all the other Younglings who escaped Dumai's Wells – and at – like, right around when they got back, winter restarted –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And also the White Tower suddenly under siege. Um, so even if they could – even if they were welcome back in Tar Valon – uh, which they're not, patently – uh, they couldn't get back to Tar Valon. They're snowed in and also there's no way in.

Sally: Sieged out.

Emily: They're accompanied by, like, a few of the Aes Sedai who were at Dumai's Wells, also. Um, but this picks up with Gawyn waking up from his night terrors about Egg being helpless and vulnerable without him – (laugh) um, and he is, like, leaving when his lieutenant, Rajar, comes to get him and is like, "An Aes Sedai just arrived in the camp from the White Tower," which is rare, obviously, because, you know, no one's getting in to Tar Valon; people are also not getting out of Tar Valon, so someone slipped the siege lines. Um, Gawyn goes to find out what's going on. They go to, like, this house where the two – top two Aes Sedai are staying, and, confusingly enough, these are two Aes Sedai who were not with Dumai's Wells. Uh, they are Tarna Feir – or Feir – who we last saw in book six, haunting Salidar, where the rebel Aes Sedai were. Which, on the one hand, is sort of an interesting commentary on, you know, how quickly Traveling manages to overtake normal travel, uh, but that also doesn't make a – a ton of sense because Tarna left Salidar in book six, and the Aes Sedai didn't Travel until book nine, so, like, months – there were months between that. It doesn't make a lot of sense that she was just – (claps)

Sally: There.

Emily: Suddenly. I don't know. Um, and the other lady is Katherine, and I don't remember what she's been doing, but she is sort of like, "I'm not with the Aes Sedai." Um, and they're just – there's some random Aes Sedai who's like, "Yeah, I had to go on this weird boat and down to, like, a tiny fishing village to get here, but I'm here," and blah blah blah blah. And I don't even know – oh, she has orders for Gawyn from Elaida. And Gawyn's like, "Why would I even fuck with Elaida," you know? "She tried to get us killed." And there's no good explanation for that.

Sally: No. Just leave.

Emily: Yeah. Gawyn's just like, "Well, okay."

Sally: No. Not okay.

Emily: Anyway, Katherine and Tarna are like, "Well, we want to get into Tar Valon," um, so they're gonna go back the way that this lady came even though it will be painful or whatever. Hard. Um, and I believe we'll see Tarna again in this book – later in this book. I dunno about Katherine. I'm pretty sure Katherine is Black Ajah. I can't remember.

Sally: Like, seventy-five percent of the White Tower is Black Ajah, so that's – (laugh)

Emily: Yeah, I mean – seriously. Most of the named Aes Sedai at this point are Black Ajah; it's just everyone.

Sally: So it's a good assumption.

Emily: I'm pretty sure she's Black Ajah, so I don't know what she's doing, if she wants to talk to Alviarin or something. I don't know. Whatever, whatever. I cannot keep track of their machinations. Uh, but this is when Gawyn finds out that Elayne is with, um, the Salidar rebels because Tarna says so, and Gawyn's like, "You could have told me that, like, weeks ago, when you first got here," and she's like, "Well, I didn't think that –" Whatever. Whatever. She's like, "Whatever, you don't have to worry about Elayne because, you know, even if she joined with the rebel Aes Sedai, she's not gonna get in trouble because she's only an Accepted. Or, she might get in trouble, but they're not gonna, like, murder –"

Sally: Kill her.

Emily: "Or still her or something like that." Which, I guess just is all the – again, Gawyn is this guy who just takes everyone at their word.

Sally: He's like, "Ah, that sounds right."

Emily: A random peddler who assures him that the Dragon Reborn killed his mother.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Yup. That must be the truth.

Sally: Sure. Why would he lie to me?

Emily: These random Aes Sedai being like, "Yeah, you don't need to worry about Elayne. Elayne doesn't need your help. She's fine." Gawyn's like, "Okay. I guess that's true." You could tell Gawyn anything, and he'd believe it. He's probably a flat-Earther.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Gawyn's like, "The moon landing was fake." (laugh)

Sally: God, he would be a flat-Earther.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Deep QAnon-type motherfucker.

Emily: Oh, man, you're so right. Is that why – he'd just be scrolling on his Facebook feed –

Sally: Yeah, really into Reddit.

Emily: Like, "Wayfair is trafficking children."

Sally: "Inside couches and stuff."

Emily: (laugh) Stupid.

Sally: He really is just, like, the most gullible – like, he probably falls for scams all the time. Everyone has his credit card number.

Emily: (laugh)

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: It's why he's so poverty-stricken –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: In Cheese Town.

Sally: (laugh) He's gonna have to –

Emily: It sounds like a musical. Poverty-Stricken in Cheese Town. (laugh)

Sally: Poverty-Stricken in Cheese Town. (laugh) All the rats have to rally around and feed him.

Emily: Um –

Sally: He gets a Ratatouille rat –

Emily: Stop.

Sally: To guide him to finally make better decisions.

Emily: Any – you wouldn't even need a special Ratatouille rat; a normal rat would make better decisions than Gawyn.

Sally: A normal rat. (laugh) You don't need Remy, the master chef. Just, like, a regular subway rat from New York City.

Emily: Just, like, a regular subway rat could be like – yeah.

Sally: Would be like, "Just don't work with Elaida anymore."

Emily: "Just don't."

Sally: "It's a really easy choice." (laugh)

Emily: Anyway, we leave Gawyn, wallowing in despair, and float over to Bashere, who is standing on a hill, looking down on the armies that are besieging, uh, Caemlyn. So we're hopping from one siege to another. Um, Bashere's with Bael, not that that's super relevant; they just chat a little bit – but he is looking down at the, um, camp and his big takeaway is that it's super weird that, uh, Arymilla is the main claimant here –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: And that the two much more powerful House leaders, uh, Naeon and Elenia – Elenia? Whatever –

Sally: Yeah, I dunno.

Emily: Um, are supporting her rather than one of them being the backers, and we'll eventually bounce over to this camp and find out that, like, Arymilla basically kidnapped those two –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: And so they're hostages –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: And they really don't have a choice in the matter. Um, why it is that way, I have no idea. I don't know why –

Sally: I don't know why this entire thing has to happen. Like, this plot could have been just deleted.

Emily: Yeah, you really could have deleted the entire succession arc.

Sally: Like, there's enough complications with, like, running a country in the middle of the impending apocalypse. Like, Caemlyn could have – it's not even – the siege isn't even interesting.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Like, it doesn't add any major drama.

Emily: All Bashere witnesses is, like, a supply train trying to come to Andor or something like that – like, some wagons, refugees or something – and they start to be attacked by the bad guys, but there are some riders – come from out – come from inside Caemlyn to surround and rescue them. Um, except then, like, the main guy that Bashere sees, like, slaps one of these people that he's just saved, so that's very clearly Hatchet-face, and I think that will arise later. Um, and Bael's just like, "Well, this army sucks –"

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: "And we could take 'em easy, so why don't we just do that?" and Bashere's like, "Well, Elayne doesn't want us to because then she would have gotten the throne via foreign power, which, you know, is not really something you really want down here in these parts," and Bael's like, "Seems stupid," and Bashere's like, "It is, bestie, but what are you gonna do?"

Sally: “Too true, bestie.”

Emily: “That – Europe be like that. It just be like that.” And Bael’s like, “Okay, well, whatever. Peace out.” Bashere’s like, “Yep. See ya later, for our next lunch date,” I assume. I don’t know why they met up to do this inspection.

Sally: Just hangin’.

Emily: Just cute.

Sally: They’re just little friends.

Emily: Um –

Sally: Got coffee.

Emily: Bashere goes back to his own camp, um, with – which is just where all of his remaining Saldaeans are. They are sort of – they sort of have the looming threat of Tenobia and the entire Borderlanders’ armies, like, on their doorstep and the – Bahsere doesn’t know what they want; he has to assume that partly, they’re after him. He’s like, “And, really, Tenobia could arrest me for treason,” or whatever. It would be stupid of her to, but she could.

Sally: And Tenobia’s not known for being, like, very smart or compassionate.

Emily: Yeah. Bashere describes her as a good ruler, and then says, “She’s intelligent, but not wise, and she’s super impulsive and hot-headed,” and I’m like, that doesn’t sound like a good ruler. (laugh)

Sally: That was his – diplomacy statement.

Emily: Sounds like a teenage girl.

Sally: “She’s a good ruler, except –”

Emily: “Except that she fucking sucks.”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, and typically, of course, Elayne has not, like, clued in Bashere to the fact that they’re after the Dragon Reborn. They would, of course – Tenobia would love to get her hands on Bashere, so maybe stay out of her way, but –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: He’s not their main target. Anyway, Bashere gets back to camp and realizes that, um, his own tent, where his – he and his wife stay, is, like, surrounded by people, and there’s some sort of fuss, so he, very frightened and alarmed, runs in to see if his wife has been, like, killed or something, and to his relief, she’s wounded – like, she got a cut on her arm – and they have a pretty funny little back-and-forth. I don’t know, they’re just – they’re a charming, weird little couple. (laugh)



Sally: Yeah, they're fine.

Emily: They're fine.

Sally: I think the whole Saldaean –

Emily: Yeah, that –

Sally: Relationship dynamic is intense, but when you take that out of it, they're just, like, a funny middle-aged couple who bickers –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: And loves each other a lot.

Emily: Like, they bicker performatively, it seems like, you know?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Just to make everyone else be like, “Ah, yes, everything's fine –”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: “With the Basherers.” Keeping up with the Basherers.

Sally: (laugh) I would watch that, except then I'd have to look at Perrin and Faile, I guess.

Emily: Yeah, they'd be the Kim and Kanye, or I guess the Kim and Pete Davidson? (laugh) Gross.

Sally: Kim and – oh, woof.

Emily: Um –

Sally: Oh, woof.

Emily: So, uh, Deira, Bahsere's wife, is like, “Yeah, there were these two guys who were in here, looking for something, like, rummaging around, and I walked in on them and hit one of them with a chair and took a knife to the other one, but they managed to slip out after they stabbed me, but they won't have got very – you know, they're easily identifiable because I hit one with a chair.”

Sally: (laugh) Freaking worldwide wrestling over here.

Emily: I know, and Bashere's like, “Okay, fucking sexy of you –”

Sally: Yeah, “Good for you.”

Emily: “Thank you so much.”

Sally: “You're the – you're the coolest.”

Emily: And she's like, "Now leave while I get stitched up," and he's like, "Ten-four," walks out, and, you know, his lieutenant comes and – I don't know why I keep saying "leftenant" instead of lieutenant like I'm British –

Sally: You can say whatever you want.

Emily: Whatever the hell.

Sally: I like "leftenant" 'cause it sounds like "left," and that makes me think, "Oh, it's his left-hand man."

Emily: Oh, yeah, that's nice.

Sally: I don't know why it would be left-hand, not right-hand, but maybe he's left-handed.

Emily: (laugh) Yeah, you're – maybe.

Sally: (laugh) We don't canonically get –

Emily: We don't know what –

Sally: Bashere's dominant hand.

Emily: Yeah. Um, he's met by this guy who's like, "Yeah, we immediately found those people, but they were already dead, and they, you know, had been killed very quickly by someone else," and Bashere's like, "Ooh. Well, that's weird." So there are multiple people, you know, in this conspiracy. And he's like, "Eh, we don't know who it could be; we don't know if it's, like, the Forsaken or Darkfriends or something like that, Aes Sedai, who knows." But then he has this very mysterious statement where he's like, "You know where to find the man who came to me yesterday? Find him and tell him I agree. But there will be a few more than we talked about." I think he's referring to Logain? But I could be wrong.

Sally: Mm.

Emily: I don't know. And I only know that with the benefit of foresight, because I know Bashere and Logain show up together –

Sally: Yes.

Emily: To talk to Rand later in this book. I – but I also don't know why it's so –

Sally: Why it has to be so mysterious.

Emily: Mysterious, because at that point in the book, when they actually do show up, I will have forgotten that Bashere said this mysterious thing.

Sally: Yeah, and I'll be like, "Bashere?"

Emily: "Hello?"

Sally: "Papa?"

Emily: Smash cut to Cairhien, where we're with an Aes Sedai named Samitsu. She's one of Cadsuane's insufferable Aes Sedai; she's the one who's good at Healing. Um, and she's in the middle of a power struggle with this other Aes Sedai named Sashalle, who is one of the White Tower Aes Sedai at Dumai's Wells, specifically one of the ones who was stilled by Rand –

Sally: Mm.

Emily: But has since been healed by Damer Flinn and immediately swore fealty. Um. That's sort of the overarching plot of this thing, is that Samitsu hates her fucking guts because she just wants to be in charge, even though she doesn't want to do anything while she's in charge. She just wants to do her job, like Cadsuane told her, of being in charge of Cairhien. And it's like, bestie, Sashalle is right most of the time, and also, who cares?

Sally: Yeah. Like, we're ten books in. The power struggles no longer interest me. Can we get along to the apocalypse, please?

Emily: Yeah, especially because it's not, like, relevant. Like, Robert Jordan really felt the need to add these little, like, spices of flavor to every single one of these one-off chapters, and mostly it's just bad flavor; it's just over-salted.

Sally: Yeah, and it's like, we don't need any flavor – Dobraine almost dies.

Emily: Dobraine almost dies. Loial shows up. My beloved.

Sally: Yeah. Loial, my beloved.

Emily: Anyway, Samitsu and Sashalle are arguing about, like, dumb Cairhien politics when someone comes in and is like, "Hey, there's an Ogier here with a man, and they claim to be looking for work as masons, but it's super weird." So Samitsu and Sashalle go down to see them. Um, to us, the reader, it's immediately obvious that this is Loial, and it's pretty obvious to Samitsu too. And she – they confront, um, Loial and also the Asha'man who's with him, whose name is Karldin, a, just, random guy. Uh, kind of grumpy but kind of normal. You have to wonder how he and Loial got along –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Over the last –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: 'Cause they've been gone for quite a while, since book six, on some mysterious errand, and they try to leave before, like, Samitsu can call them out, but she's like, "What are you doing? What do you want?" Uh, and Karldin's like, "Just tell me if the Dragon Reborn's crazy and what happened to the other Asha'man – did they really get bonded as Warders – what happened to –" what's his name? "Fedwin Morr? What – he – everyone's saying the Dragon Reborn killed him?"

Sally: (whisper) They're right.

Emily: And they're like, "Oh, well, it was poison, but we don't know who did it," and, um, Karldin's like, "Ah, yes, the poison wine. I'm familiar." (laugh) And it's like, Jesus Christ.

Sally: Yeah, what – there's so many fucked-up things happening with these boys.

Emily: I know. Which, at least Samitsu is like, "What's happening over in the Asha'man camp that Karldin is just like this?"

Sally: Yeah. Well –

Emily: Well, I don't know if you noticed, but Mazrim Taim made it a cult, like, immediately.

Sally: Yeah. Like, within seconds.

Emily: Yeah, like, seconds. He was like, "I will be your cult leader," and everyone was like, "Ohh."

Sally: Well, Rand's not helping, so I guess we–

Emily: Rand's not here, so I guess that's my options.

Sally: And he just poisons people and – well, Rand poisons people too, so.

Emily: Yeah, but 'cause Mazrim Taim told him to do it, so. Not that it matters. He still did the poisoning.

Sally: Is Rand part of Mazrim Taim's cult?

Emily: He might be.

Sally: He's not doing anything to stop it.

Emily: He – yeah. (laugh) If you're part – if you're not stopping the cult, you're part of the cult. I don't make the rules.

Sally: I don't make the rules. Cult logic, baby.

Emily: John F. Kennedy said that. If you're not –

Sally: (laugh) Do not ask what the cult can do for you but what you can do for the cult.

Emily: (laugh) But what you can do for the cult. Ah, God. Um, while they're talking about the recent events in Cairhien – you know, Karldin's like, "Oh, it's a big relief that Rand hasn't gone crazy, but no one knows where he is, so that's unhelpful; what are Loial and I gonna do?" – someone runs in, is like, "Oh my God, Dobraine's been murdered." And everyone's like, "Murdered? Murder most foul in the palace of Cairhien?"

Sally: I know.

Emily: They rush off to check, 'cause Samitsu's, you know, a big time Healer, and they go into Dobraine's room, where he's just, like, laying on the floor, super stabbed, blood all on his face, there's a huge pool of blood all around him – you know, nightmare fuel –

Sally: Horrifying.

Emily: They're literally about to cover up his face. Um, and Samitsu here has her most important role in the entire series, I assume, which is saving Dobraine's life. She goes and Heals him – hilariously, she, like, goes to Heal him and she's like, "Oh, I'm worried that he won't survive this," so she says to Karldin, like, "Do you know how to do the Healing that Damer Flinn does?" and Karldin is, like, literally going through one of the dead guy's pockets. (laugh)

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: And he's like, "No. Why the fuck would I know that?" And I'm like, is Karldin my new favorite character?

Sally: He might be. Karldin brings a lot of, um, pizzazz that we've been lacking.

Emily: Yeah. (laugh) Joie de vivre.

Sally: Yeah. (laugh) Not necessarily joie de vivre, but –

Emily: Angst.

Sally: Angst de vivre.

Emily: Angst de vivre. Anyway, uh –

Sally: (laugh) "Angst de vivre" sounds like a pop star.

Emily: (laugh) Samitsu manages to Heal, uh, Dobraine without immediately killing him. Uh, obviously, if this were a real medical show, he'd probably still die instantly, but we can assume that Dobraine will be okay, though with some scars to, uh, show for his assassination attempt. More significantly, Karldin found a litter that appears to be in Dobraine's own handwriting that's like, "The bearers of this have permission to enter my apartments and look for some stuff; don't stop them," so clearly these guys, just like with Bashere's tent, were looking for something.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: And Karldin says something to Loial about it, and Loial's like, "Well, what if there are more than two?" So what I'm guessing they're talking about is the – the keys?

Sally: I thought it was the keys too. The Choedan Kal keys.

Emily: (simultaneously) The Choedan Kal keys. Yeah, the access keys.

Sally: Yeah, I thought it was the access keys, but then I was looking at the Wiki today –

Emily: Uh-huh.

Sally: And the footnote there said it was the seals to the Dark – they were looking for the seals –

Emily: Oh.

Sally: To the Dark One's prison. I fully thought it was the Choedan Kal keys too.

Emily: Jesus.

Sally: But. I mean, I don't – I don't know. That's just what the Wiki said. And, like, I wanna have faith in the Wiki, but that didn't make a lot of sense to me.

Emily: No, that makes a vague sort of sense, but also, the Dark One's key – the Dark One's prison seals have stopped being a plot, like, four books ago –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So it's very confusing to bring them back now. But I do think it's sort of true that Rand, like, dispensed the Dark One's seals to various people –

Sally: Okay.

Emily: Which makes no sense to me, but when does Rand ever do anything that makes sense:

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So who knows? As usual, Wiki has to tell us what the fuck is going on.

Sally: Yeah. Yeah, I would have fully thought it was the keys, and I just happened to click on one of the footnotes to look at something else, and I was like, "The seals?"

Emily: I guess the seals makes more sense because, like, no one really knows that Rand has the Choedan Kal access keys.

Sally: Yeah, and also, like, I think this prologue technically takes place before the end of Winter's Heart –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Because no one's responding to the big magic in the sky yet.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: They'll start to do that, I think, in the first Egg point of view.

Emily: They'll start to do that throughout this entire book. This entire –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Book is going to be reacting to the cleansing of saidin.

Sally: Yes, which is an interesting project –

Emily: A choice, yeah.

Sally: But it goes on –

Emily: Way too long.

Sally: For a long time, and no one is making any decisions.

Emily: (sigh)

Sally: They're just like, "Ah, a spooky scary – spooky – spooky."

Emily: "Guess we'd better not do anything about it."

Sally: So anyway, I guess this, like, technically takes place before that, but we don't know, like, how soon before. So, like, one assumes Rand has the keys and he did not, like, secretly leave them with Dobraine, you know? (laugh)

Emily: Yeah, why would he, even? He actually watches those. Pretty funny that he's just like, "Ah, here, Bashere, have one of the keys to the Dark One's prison," and it's like, "Bro?" I mean, I trust Bashere with my life, but, like –

Sally: Yeah, obviously, you would trust Bashere.

Emily: It's a piece of very breakable pottery.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Anything could happen.

Sally: And the man rides around on horses all day.

Emily: I know.

Sally: Who knows what –

Emily: He stands on horses and does tricks.

Sally: Yeah, he does, like, flips and shit.

Emily: Acrobatic shit.

Sally: He's just got one of those in his pockets, who know – it could fall out, and then a horse could eat it.

Emily: Yep.

Sally: (laugh) We'd never know what happened.

Emily: Who knows.

Sally: So.

Emily: So anyway.

Sally: Dobraine pulls through.

Emily: Dobraine pulls through; Bashere's wife was not murdered. Tragically, Gawyn's still alive. And that's where we stand at the end of the Crossroads of Twilight –

Sally: That's where we stand.

Emily: Prologue.

Sally: Yep.

Emily: Well, who was your favorite character and least favorite character?

Sally: Um, my favorite character was ... I'm gonna say Bael the Aiel –

Emily: Mm.

Sally: For being like, “I don't understand this dumb reason,” and I just find him very charming. He's a good side –

Emily: Mine was Karldin for doing the very Dungeons and Dragons thing –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Of immediately looting a corpse – (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) Yeah.

Emily: While a guy was, like, getting life-saving medical treatment right next to him.

Sally: Yeah. And he's like, “That – that's not my business; I'm not a cleric.”

Emily: Yeah. That was pretty funny.

Sally: Um. And, of course, Bashere. Honorable mention, always.

Emily: Honorable mention: Bashere.

Sally: My least favorite character was Gawyn.

Emily: Mm.

Sally: Low-hanging fruit; I apologize. But he's my least favorite character, all the time.

Emily: Hmm. Mine was, um, Samitsu –

Sally: Mm.

Emily: 'Cause she was so fucking annoying.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: I was like, could you go a single struggle without reminding us that you're in a power struggle that I don't care about?”

Sally: No.

Emily: And that has no impact on the plot generally?

Sally: No, she can't.



Emily: Please, I'm begging you.

Sally: Shut it.

Emily: If Robert Jordan had simply cut out those parts of her point of view, it would've been about ten pages shorter.

Sally: Shorter.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Yeah. They would've been like, "Oh my God, Dobraine is murdered," and then they would have saved his life.

Emily: And Loial and – boy, Loial and Logain look too similar; I'm gonna be mixing them up a lot.

Sally: Loilgain.

Emily: Loilgain and Karldin are back. Karldin.

Sally: I know.

Emily: What a name. It's just "Karl" with "din" at the end.

Sally: It's all – it all just sounds like "Carlton" –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Which is a real name.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Robert Jordan was like, "I like the name Carlton." He was watching Psych, which came out way later than this book, but. (laugh)

Emily: Okay. Thanks, everyone, for listening. Um, thanks to Glynna MacKenzie for our theme song. Thanks to our patrons on Patreon and our followers on social media.

Sally: Yes.

Emily: Do you have anything to add?

Sally: No.

Emily: Cool. Do you have a sign-off?

Sally: Let me think for a second ...

Emily: Um, I was babysitting last weekend, and my nephews were in the bath, and one of them broke a glass outside of the bathtub – they're fine; everyone was emotionally and physically undamaged – but I then had the super fun experience of trying to figure out a way to get possible broken glass shards out of a bathtub that was also filled with water beads.

Sally: Oh, no. Emily, no.

Emily: These little, like, jelly things –

Sally: Yes, I am familiar.

Emily: Multi-colored. And I didn't want those beads to go down the drain. And my nephews had both pissed in the water.

Sally: Oh, Emily, no, that's a horrible experience.

Emily: (laugh) It's okay, I got to do some creative problem-solving for a little while. But that's my sign-off.

Sally: That is – you are auntie of the year.

Emily: Salute.

Sally: Ten-four.

Emily: Ten-four, good buddy.

Sally: Oh captain, my captain.

Emily: Oh captain, my captain.

Sally: That's Davram Bashere.

Emily: They don't even know. Alright, everyone. Have a good week!

Sally: Bye!!!!