



Episode 207: It's Homer with a Steel Chair!

Release Date: July 11, 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)

Sally: I – this – the hospital was like, "Haha, we gave you a cheap ice pack," and I was like, "I will use it indefinitely until it falls apart, what are you talking about?"

Emily: That's the only way to scam the system.

Sally: Exactly.

Emily: Get your money back.

Sally: They want me to pay twelve hundred dollars for anesthesia, so I will use this ice pack until it falls apart.

Emily: Yeah, it's like a – it's like, um – it's a ... swag bag. (laugh)

Sally: It's a swag bag. It's my hospital swag bag. I got yellow grippy socks and this ice pack and a barf bag.

Emily: That's what they don't tell you about the American health system. It will cost you quite literally millions of dollars, but you can have free socks.

Sally: You can have some truly mind blowingly yellow grip socks.

Emily: Yeah. We're gonna talk about Wheel of Time this time, but –

Sally: Are we?

Emily: Not a lot. (laugh)

Sally: Are we?

Emily: Because it's Perrin chapters, and what do I have to say about Perrin chapters that hasn't been said already? Like, literally. That's my main problem these days.

Sally: Yeah. Um, as evidenced by the – if you follow us on social media – as evidenced by the paper chain that has been hanging on our wall for literally months –

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: Um, this arc where Perrin is attempting to rescue Faile lasts so long and basically the same thing happens in every chapter.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Um.

Emily: This –

Sally: And that, like – go ahead.

Emily: This is Everybody Hates Rand –

Sally: Oh.

Emily: Your friendly neighborhood Wheel of Time podcast. I'm Emily Juchau.

Sally: And I'm Sally Goodger.

Emily: Carry on. Carry on, my wayward son.

Sally: Um. And, like, while technically not in terms of events the same thing happens every chapter – sure –

Emily: Yeah, there are slight variations.

Sally: Different – vaguely different things are happening; like, it's basically just, like, a remix of the events that happened that last time. It'll be, like, a scouting mission. Something discovered in the camp. A conversation with Balwer. Aram is being pouty. Perrin talks about being some form of weapon. We start talking about the Seanchan and then we start talking to the Seanchan, and it's just like –

Emily: Masema's being vaguely threatening –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: In the background, but nothing comes of it –

Sally: Nothing will ever happen.

Emily: In any significant way. Yeah.

Sally: Yeah. "Berelain is flirting with me against my will."

Emily: Yeah. "Berelain smells confusing."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um. “My – my mind is a metaphor – like a Rubik’s cube.”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Oh, hi, Ed.

Sally: Hi, Eddie. What’s going on?

Emily: Yeah, like, you could literally craft a Bingo sheet –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Of shit that Perrin says or does in every one of these chapters, essentially, and you’d just, you know, get a full blackout every single time –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: because there’s so little, um, progression, which is what really makes this arc frustrating. There’s nothing, like, inherently wrong with the “member of the family gets kidnapped –”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: “Person goes after them to save them.”

Sally: Sure.

Emily: That’s, you know, been – been a – a storytelling trope –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Many a time. And, like, with all stories, at their base, probably ninety-nine percent of them, you know, there’s nothing inherently wrong –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: With that. You can start playing into problematic tropes and things like that, um, but when we just take the stories as – as they are, they’re not – without intention or anything like that, then there’s nothing wrong with them. The problem is that it’s so – the – and the reason it’s so boring and people find it so frustrating is that we are still in the same spot after rescuing Faile that we were, uh, before she disappeared, emotionally –

Sally: Yeah

Emily: In terms of Perrin. Um, we’re at the same spot in his character development.

Sally: Right.

Emily: There aren’t any big moments that happen in the course of Perrin rescuing Faile. Um, for whatever reason, when the – when the Wheel of Time got, like, new covers –

Sally: Mm.

Emily: Where each, um, cover was drawn by individual artists –

Sally: Right.

Emily: To varying degrees of success, I would say – well, I mean, it's – it's, of course, super tough to beat Darrell K. Sweet's –

Sally: (laugh) Masterpieces.

Emily: Literary masterpieces, but, um, some covers were obviously better than others. And the one for, I think, this book, Crossroads of Twilight –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: 'Cause that's when this happens –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Later in this book is, like, Perrin walking away from the axe he's stuck in the tree, and this is Perrin's big moment of finally ditching the axe and turning to the hammer –

Sally: Right.

Emily: As though there is, um, some significant difference between them when he uses them the exact same way in both instances.

Sally: Yeah. Yeah, it would truly be one thing if Perrin is like, "I am no longer going to be this person who is so hyper-focused on revenge," to the point of literally letting Masema just, like, raid and murder and pillage village upon village because he cannot be bothered to deal with anything except Faile's kidnapping. It would be one thing if he truly made that transition, was like, "I'm going to be a holistic leader while attempting to rescue my wife," but he doesn't.

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: He just chops someone's hand off and everyone is like, "Eugh."

Emily: "Ewww."

Sally: (laugh) And Perrin's like, "Yeah, that's on me; that was maybe a little intense."

Emily: That was a big "yikes" moment for him.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Top ten cringe compilation: Perrin Aybara moment. Cutting off a man's hand while he's tied to the ground.

Sally: Yeah, it's extremely upsetting.

Emily: "In an attempt to get information about my kidnapped wife," you know, like, blah blah blah blah blah. But then he goes and tosses away the axe and is like, "I will go and continue the exact same things I'm doing in terms of leadership, in terms of my marriage, in terms of how I interact with violence –"

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: “And how I interact – and how I react to violence,” you know –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: “I will still be a person who goes into battle and, quote unquote, loses myself –”

Sally: Right.

Emily: “Enters these berserker modes.”

Sally: Right.

Emily: Um, “I will continue to not take advice from most of the people around me, and overall I will continue to ignore the problems that are problems –”

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: “Such as Aram moping, Masema doing crimes against humanity, just in my direct vicinity –”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Berelain being an awful person who you should probably distance yourself from –

Sally: Yep.

Emily: Et cetera, et cetera, you know?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So it’s fine – it would be fucking fine if Faile got kidnapped.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: No one is arguing about Faile getting kidnapped. I mean, sure, would I prefer Perrin got kidnapped and Faile had to rescue him, do a little bit –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Of gender work there? Yes. I would prefer that. But this is Robert Jordan; my expectations are not that high.

Sally: No, for sure. Like – like, back to your point, like, what is the – the Trojan War except “member of the family got kidnapped; now we have to go get her back,” you know?

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Like, it is, like, one of the oldest storytelling mechanisms in the book.

Emily: Tellingly, the Iliad is only the last few events of the war.

Sally: (laugh) Yeah.

Emily: Homer wasn't like, "And now I'm gonna have you read all about the first nine and a half years, because it's super compelling –"

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: "And –" like – (laugh)

Sally: I can't believe Robert Jordan got upstaged by Homer himself. (laugh)

Emily: Homer! (laugh) I mean, Homer has been better at writing –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And Homer probably wasn't even literate.

Sally: Yeah. Homer probably didn't even – if Homer even existed.

Emily: If Homer even existed –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: A potentially nonexistent, possibly illiterate, mythically blind author –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Is better than Robert Jordan in every conceivable way in terms of storytelling.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: How's that feel, Robert?

Sally: How does that feel, Robert?

Emily: Jesus Christ.

Sally: Big win for disability pride month. Homer trumps Robert Jordan in the ring. (laugh)

Emily: Yes. It's Homer with a steel chair!

Sally: (laugh) Um.

Emily: Excuse me, excuse me – the bronze tripod upon which the oracle of Delphi sits!

Sally: (laugh) Ugh, that would be – I would love for Robert Jordan to get hit in the head with a bronze chair.

Emily: Yeah, that's what the real heaven is for people like me. Instead of, you know, descending into Dante's Inferno, the seven layers of hell, it's just, like, watching various cage matches between dead authors.

Sally: Ooh.

Emily: Jane Austen kicks James Joyce's ass.

Sally: Ah. Jane Austen would kick James Joyce's ass.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: I – there's so many people I would like Mary Shelley to fight for me, personally.

Emily: Oh, yeah, I would love to watch her.

Sally: I think she would be great at that.

Emily: Dostoyevsky would just sort of cry in the background.

Sally: Yeah, and we'd all be like –

Emily: But then everyone would feel sorry for him, and be like, "He wins, actually."

Sally: Yeah, and you're like, "Fyodor, we need – we need to see something out of you," and he's just like – (wails)

Emily: (wails)

Sally: Ugh. Lord Byron feels bad or whatever. Lord Byron doesn't have a conscience; just kidding. (laugh) Um –

Emily: (laugh) Lord Byron would go down in some hilarious way. You know, knocking himself out on accident.

Sally: (laugh) Just trips out of the ring.

Emily: Pfft. Faceplants.

Sally: Ugh. Iconic.

Emily: What's his name? Who's the one who's dying? You know, the romantic poet?

Sally: Oh –

Emily: Keats.

Sally: Keats. John Keats.

Emily: Keats would just cough blood delicately in the background.

Sally: Oof. (coughs)

Emily: (coughs) "I'm sick."

Sally: "I'm sick."

Emily: Byron would punch him in the face.

Sally: Byron would punch him in the face. I feel like a lot of people would punch John Keats in the face, and he would deserve it, so.

Emily: Including ... me? (laugh)

Sally: Including me, potentially?

Emily: Yeah. So anyway, Robert Jordan would go down in the first round, is what I'm saying –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Of the literary all-stars, if he even somehow made the list.

Sally: Um. Yeah, so circling way back around –

Emily: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Sally: Um, there is, like Emily says, nothing wrong with this plot. Robert Jordan loves to highlight the worst parts of it, including Faile being sexually harassed and assaulted an unnecessary number of times because one is an unnecessary number of times. But ... the languishing. The languishing. I can't do it. I'm not strong enough.

Emily: I can't do it. I'm not strong enough.

Sally: I'm not strong enough. Especially 'cause it – it really is so frustrating in this instance because you just see Perrin making the worst decisions, and it's, like, clear from a – like, a thousand miles away, that he's making, like, the worst possible choices.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Not only in regards to just, like, of course letting Masema, like, run around committing the aforementioned crimes against humanity upon the poor country folk. But, like, obviously something is up with Aram. And, like, Aram is your responsibility.

Emily: I've been trying to figure out, not in any productive way, because ultimately it doesn't matter, but was Robert Jordan writing Aram to be, like, in love with Perrin?

Sally: Right.

Emily: In a romantic, sexual way?

Sally: Right.

Emily: Because the way Perrin, like, refers to him multiple times in this chapter as basically, like, being possessive and –

Sally: Right.

Emily: Being jealous of anyone who spends time with Perrin who isn't Faile, it really reads like a weird, you know, baby boomer's attempt to write a character who is on the outside looking in of a heterosexual marriage –



Sally: Right.

Emily: And obsessed with one or both of the participants –

Sally: Partners, yeah.

Emily: In that marriage. And it's just, like, obviously, if that's the case, it does not improve Aram in any way. It's not like Aram's peak gay representation. All it really tells us about is that Robert Jordan seriously didn't know what he was doing when it came to writing gay characters.

Sally: Yeah, especially 'cause he just, like – like, if that were the case, like, he can't help but, like, pathologize homosexuality –

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: And make it deviant, because ultimately Aram ends up making some really bad fucking choices –

Emily: Including trying to kill Perrin.

Sally: Yeah. (laugh)

Emily: As though – as though overcome by the – (laugh)

Sally: Overcome by his passion.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: In a Byronic sense. (laugh)

Emily: Yes.

Sally: Um.

Emily: And, like, maybe – I will – I will give it this. There is some latent, um – um, what's the word I'm looking for? – there is some, like, latent eroticism in what is already happening, which is that Aram has sort of deified Perrin –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: As this, like, ultimate figure of being representative of the ideals –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: That Aram feels like he has to cling to, you know?

Sally: Right. Right, right, right.

Emily: Perrin is literally Aram's, like, life raft –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: You know, in the turmoil that has become of his life and his philosophy and ideals, you know? But it's like – but is – are we – are – is what I'm reading just the inherent eroticism of that –

Sally: Mm.

Emily: Or is Robert Jordan's intention behind it? And I dunno.

Sally: You're definitely not the first person I've heard posit that theory, that Aram is in love with Perrin. I can't remember where I've read it, but definitely other people have picked up on that as well, as just, like, an – a bizarre subtext going on there.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: That feels like something deeper than Aram just being like, "Perrin is the only – really my only, like, person." Like, nobody in the camp besides Perrin really seems to care about Aram, you know? So it seems, like, a little bit deeper than – I can totally see what you're saying; like, it seems, like, a little bit deeper than the , like, quote unquote, fealty relationship that's going on there.

Emily: I also feel like pretty much every one of Perrin's relationships is, um, portrayed as deeper than they are.

Sally:Mm.

Emily: Does that make sense?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: It's like the confusion that I encounter when I'm reading Berelain through Perrin's point of view. She's suddenly this character who's, like, labyrinthine.

Sally: Right.

Emily: You know, nothing she does or says makes sense; everything is at odds with itself; Perrin doesn't understand her, therefore I don't understand her, whereas when I'm outside of Perrin's point of view, I'm like, I have no trouble interacting with Berelain –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: As a moderately three-dimensional character.

Sally: Right.

Emily: Um, it's like everything is suddenly in four dimensions when you're in Perrin's point of view, which maybe speaks to Perrin being, like, a particularly thoughtful and obsessive thinker –

Sally: Right.

Emily: In his interpersonal relationships, but really I think it just comes down to bad writing.

Sally: Mm.

Emily: And it's – and it's weird that it's just Perrin. But, like, Berelain's that way; Aram's that way; I really don't think Aram is that deep, regardless of whether Robert Jordan intended it or not, I think Aram is just a character who he was kind of like, "I don't know what's going on here." Aram's clearly messed up and psychologically, um, unbalanced, but it doesn't necessarily have to go deeper than that.

Sally: Yeah, I – I'm sorry; I'm trying to, like, form a thought. You've put so many interesting –

Emily: Yeah, there's a lot going on there.

Sally: Bubbles in my head, and I can't, like, congeal them into one bubble and speak. Um, I have never in my reading of it been like, "I think – I think Aram is in love with Perrin." I totally see what you're saying –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: But as I've been, like, reading it through the first time, I'm like, I don't think he's in love with him. I think it is kind of strange that Perrin uses terms like "jealous" and "possessive" in regards to Aram, but I also think that I – I don't know if Robert Jordan is great at creating characters who are, like Aram, deeply traumatized in dealing with some mental instability without slipping back into really, I think – not that it doesn't happen; but I think these are very stereotypical characteristics of, um, women who are going crazy.

Emily: Mm.

Sally: Like, they are –

Emily: Hysterical.

Sally: Hysterical. Yeah, that's great. They are jealous; they are possessive; they are irrational. Aram is hyper-violent; he is, um, violent in a way that he shouldn't be; like, Aram is a Tinker who chooses violence the way that, quote unquote, women are – suddenly snap and become violent.

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: You know, so I think – I mean, in general – more generally, perhaps we can remove gender from it and say, like, he's developing stalker-like feelings toward Perrin, you know?

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: But I think some of the, like, latent eroticism comes out because Robert Jordan cannot seem to remove that – that position of stalker away from the gendered aspects of it. 'Cause I think, like, the way that men – I don't know enough about criminal psychology, but I think when we see men stalker – men who are stalkers – they tend to be somehow, at least in my consumption of media, they are always presented as a little less hysterical and over-the-edge as women who become stalkers. I don't know if that is true, like, across the board in terms of psychology, but in terms of, like, presentation, it's always women who are more insane.

Emily: Yeah, I agree with you a hundred percent, in terms of presentation.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Like, of course the stalker pathology is ungendered, you know?

Sally: Yeah. Yeah, for sure.

Emily: The stalker pathology, um, is totally its own thing that we're not really licensed to speak about, but it's like – it's like that Netflix series that gained a lot of traction with Penn what's-his-name –

Sally: Oh, yeah, Penn Bagley? Badgley or whatever his name is?

Emily: Yeah, that everyone's really into. It's like, here's a stalker who's, like, methodical and –

Sally: Yes.

Emily: Super with it, one hundred percent, in his, like, intellect and his way of interacting with the world; he doesn't have any, like, psychological slippage except for this one thing, that he's stalking women, you know –

Sally: Right.

Emily: Whereas if you get a woman stalker, she's always foaming at the mouth, more or less.

Sally: Yeah, and she's got, like, snippets of his hair in a shrine in her room and, like, stuff like that. Um. That just makes me think of the shrine that Helga Pataki has –

Emily: I literally was thinking that too –

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: But I was like, "I'm not gonna bring 'Hey, Arnold' into this right now." (laugh)

Sally: I'm sorry – I'm sorry I brought "Hey, Arnold" into it.

Emily: How dare you – (laugh) taint "Hey, Arnold" –

Sally: (laugh) Um, so again, I don't fully know what, like, the full thought I am trying to get out here, and maybe I am just, like, not – maybe I'm so inclined to not give Robert Jordan any credit when it comes to, like, accurately portraying things that are gendered, but I just feel like Aram is given a lot of the similar characteristics that we see of, like, Lanfear.

Emily: Mm. Yeah. Yeah.

Sally: You know? Um, and she definitely has got, um, some hysteria-type behaviors going on there. So it's really frustrating. Again, I don't really have anything super coherent to say about everything that's going on with Aram because what is going on with Aram? Who knows?

Emily: Well, that's interesting because I think we could very easily reduce what's going on with Aram to the psychological breakdown, um, that occurs when you trespass against a major sociological taboo.

Sally: No, that's totally fair. That's totally fair.

Emily: But I don't think Robert Jordan is representing that at all.

Sally: Yeah, no, I think I'm – I think I'm getting, a little bit, back to where I was trying to go a minute ago, but, like, yeah, I think – like I was saying, it's really frustrating because here is Aram, a character who we have seen trespass against this, like, core belief that he was raised with, that everyone he loves was – like, believed in so whole-heartedly, and he rejected everything about himself in order to transgress this. And, like we talked about, Perrin is really his only life raft. Perrin was the one who handed him the sword. Perrin does not see that as a moment of taking responsibility for this young man, but, like, nobody else will take responsibility for Aram. So, like, Perrin should step up and be like, "Aram is my responsibility, and I should maybe try to, like, mentor him in some way," because he's always talking about how Aram is too quick to use his sword, and Aram is really moody, and et cetera, et cetera, and it's like, these are all really disturbing behaviors when you give someone a weapon.

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: Um, but Perrin is instead extremely rude to Aram, very dismissive, doesn't listen to him, treats him like a servant and a second-class citizen; like, he does not give a shit about this person. And so it's, like, not hard to see why Aram goes over to Masema's side or is, like, getting, you know, inclinations at this point; let's not gesture too broadly.

Emily: Spoiler alert.

Sally: (laugh) Is, like, start – you start to see him becoming more and more, like, intrigued by the Prophet as we go through – the Prophet –

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: As we go through Crossroads of Twilight. And it's like, it's not hard to see why he would become involved with this, the way it's also not hard to see the way that, like, gangs and terrorist groups and cults prey upon young people who have no other social network, who, um, have no supervision – like, no supervision, no access to resources – um, and the way that they can, like, recruit in these ways by being like, "We are going to give you a family. We are going to give you a set of ideals that you can cling to. We are going to give you access to food and access to resources and, most importantly, like, access to, like, an identity that you can hold onto."

Emily: Yeah, you're not gonna have to be troubled by any of the –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Major philosophical questions that have been bothering you; everything's answered, just right out the gate. But –

Sally: Yeah. So, like, yeah, it – like you said, if you dial in on it for a second, you can be like, "I've locked into what's happening with Galad –"

Emily: Aram.

Sally: Aram, sorry. (laugh)

Emily: (laugh) Similar foils.

Sally: Yeah; yeah, I think that was my point, making, like, Galad – talking about, like, extremist groups, like, it also kind of makes sense. Galad is another person who doesn't really have a lot of people looking out for him –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Doesn't really have a stable identity or a family; also gets pulled into an extremist group, and they have very different things going on there. But, um, in a similar way, like, Galad is presented with a – a book of ideals, and the Whitecloaks tell him, "Everything you need to know about life is here, and if it's not in here, don't worry about it."

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: And, like, that's super appealing to a certain type of person.

Emily: Yeah. "Put it on a shelf." That's the phrase that, uh, is used in Mormon religious –

Sally: Oh, nice.

Emily: Yeah, if there aren't any answers, shelf it.

Sally: Hmm. Fascinating.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Um, so that's obviously what's going on with Aram, and Perrin is just like, "Not my problem. Not my problem at all that this very troubled young man looks to me, and I could help him with literally any of his troubles, and I instead treat him like a piece of shit."

Emily: Yeah. And –

Sally: It's so upsetting. (laugh)

Emily: And it's particularly annoying because it's not like Perrin has been obsessed with finding Faile this entire time –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Perrin has had months upon months, including when he was absent in the narrative proper, when he could have been helping Aram and –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Just clearly wasn't.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, and, you know, we're – we're a little more likely to excuse him when he's having this major crisis –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: In his personal life, but, like, he has not been having a major crisis in his personal life up until a few books ago.

Sally: Yeah, and, um, one thought real quick: I think when we talk about this language of being, like, possessive and jealous, et cetera, et cetera, it's like Galad has to have every emotion for Perrin that he should have for, like, a number of people in his life.

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: But, like, Perrin is, again, it for Galad. Galad has truly –

Emily: Aram.

Sally: Aram. Sorry! Ahhh!

Emily: It's okay!

Sally: Ah, these boys! Um, Aram has, again, it seems like, nobody else on planet Earth is paying attention –

Emily: Yeah. 'Cause his whole – he just was completely ostracized by his entire –

Sally: Yeah. Entire community.

Emily: Yeah, family unit.

Sally: He's not really, it seems to me, making friends –

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: Like, no one else in this camp has really taken to him. So it's like, Perrin, truly, is it. And so of course he's like – to me it makes a lot of sense that he's, like, jealous and possessive because Perrin is the only person giving him attention and the only person feeding him, whether or not there's a romantic –

Emily: Subtext.

Sally: Subtext there or not; like, it makes sense. And – but, yeah, it's so true; like, Perrin has been like this with Aram since the beginning.

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: He's basically been like, "Well, Aram is, uh, like me, a man who has to just, like, make his own decisions," and it's like, the rules do not apply because you have not been ostracized from your own community. In fact, your entire community that you grew up in now basically worships you, so.

Emily: Yeah, Aram is only a foil to Perrin on, like, the – the shallowest of surface levels.

Sally: Yes. Yeah.

Emily: You know, I get it, Perrin's entire family's dead; Aram's family has been killed or has rejected him.

Sally: Right.

Emily: But being rejected by your family is very different from having your family martyred in the service of your heroism.

Sally: Right.

Emily: Um. And I don't know, Aram is a figure who continues to annoy me because I feel like he is a figure in which cults and religion are conflated –

Sally: Mm. Mm, mm, mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

Emily: Highly. I don't think there's anything wrong with the Tinkers as a group –

Sally: Me either.

Emily: Uh, specifically as a religious-coded group.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Um, and I think the way that Robert Jordan comes at them as though they are a cult from which people need to escape –

Sally: Yes.

Emily: Or against which the Aiel have to have this major pushback, and it all sparks this giant cultural crisis – I think that reeks of, you know, a fourteen-year-old atheist boy reading the Bible in a condescending voice, you know?

Sally: Right. (laugh)

Emily: Like, it's a little more nuanced than that, Ed Elric.

Sally: Right, yeah. (laugh)

Emily: Um, and I don't – I don't know. Aram leaving his religious group or his – or, as Robert Jordan would have us, uh, view it, as his cult – does require a lot of external support –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But he's basically the only person who we're getting in this huge sweeping fourteen-year – fourteen-book narrative who is representing this experience, and having him be the one who goes crazy and starts murdering people is a little –

Sally: A little much.



Emily: A little much, and as an ex-Mormon, it doesn't feel good.

Sally: No, that's – that is so, so good. Mormonism is also a religion that is often conflated with being a cult, which is very upsetting.

Emily: Yeah, but –

Sally: Learn the difference, guys. Um, but yeah, it's that idea of, like – no, I'm not gonna add anything. You said it perfectly. You said it perfectly.

Emily: You said it perfectly. That's so interesting. I haven't ever thought of Aram's – and, I guess, 'cause I haven't reread it recently and we're not quite there yet – but Aram being drawn to Masema in terms of, like, this being a – a really obvious thing –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: In terms of Aram being a – an extremely disenfranchised young man who is suddenly being offered a franchise.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: It's like, oh, sweet.

Sally: Aram would have power inside this cult – this – well, Masema, I think, we can strongly call a cult –

Emily: Oh, yeah. We can definitely call that a cult.

Sally: We can call that one a cult. Um, but inside there, he would have power, he would have access to resources; everyone would be like, "Yes, Aram, our brother in arms." He would literally have everything he lacks.

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: But Perrin is like, "I can't believe – I can't believe Aram would be interested in what's happening over with Masema," and it's like, get your head out of your ass for three seconds.

Emily: Yeah. And if you want, by the way, to hear my theory of cults versus religion, it is: follow the power.

Sally: Mm.

Emily: Who ends up with all the power? Is it a single person, as in Masema's case? Um, or is it a group of people, as in the Tinkers' case, where power is spread out through the entire community?

Sally: Right.

Emily: No one alone is making decisions. That's why Mormonism, as an example that is often called upon, is frequently conflated with cults, because it is very easy to argue that power resides in basically an oligarchy, but you can also argue against that –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: With very intelligent arguments that I'm not going to get into, but, you know. Just – if we really want to dissect that quickly. Um.

Sally: Yeah. Perfect.

Emily: But bringing us to Masema, the other main –

Sally: (laugh, gagging noise)

Emily: The other main issue that Perrin is ignoring. Jesus Christ.

Sally: He just is like, "I just feel like crimes against humanity happening next door to me are literally not my problem." And, I mean, I can't say that Perrin is alone in this. Many people –

Emily: Oh, yeah, everyone; I just, like –

Sally: In the United States of America are just like, "Couldn't be my problem."

Emily: "Not my problem."

Sally: Um –

Emily: "It's not affecting me personally."

Sally: Perrin's like, "He's not killing me, so I guess it's fine."

Emily: And Aram's like, "Oh, but he is killing you through me," and Perrin's like, "Oh, it's suddenly my problem. Oh my God."

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: "You should have voted better."

Sally: Aram, I can't believe you did this.

Emily: Anyway –

Sally: I can't believe you've done this.

Emily: "I can't believe you've done this," as Aram's, like, about to hack Perrin's head off. (laugh)

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Okay. Uh, where we pick up for these two chapters, Perrin is waking up in his camp. It has been 21 or 22 days since Faile kidnapped – was kidnapped; Perrin tells us that that time has been spent with them jumping through gateways, trying to follow this trail; eventually they realize that the Shaido have switched direction, which means Perrin and company have been going in the wrong direction. That's Robert Jordan's shorthand explanation for why it's been three weeks and Faile has not been rescued yet.

Sally: Right.

Emily: Uh, but, you know, Robert Jordan, you might as well have just said, “I don’t want her to be rescued yet, so I’m not gonna have her be rescued yet.”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: It’s fine. Uh, Perrin now feels that they are very close to having concrete evidence of, like, the Shaido –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: You know, his scouts actually laying eyes on them, as opposed to just tracks and things like that. So he’s anticipating that later in the day. He wakes up in the very early morning and immediately goes to get a report from Balwer and – and Selande –

Sally: Sure, yeah.

Emily: Perrin has sort of adopted Faile’s hangers-on – Cha Faile –

Sally: Oh, boy.

Emily: You know, her group of twenty-something miscreants who are really deep in the cultural appropriation sauce.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, and Balwer’s like, “They’re not great, but I can craft them into a reasonable spy ring.”

Sally: Right.

Emily: And Perrin’s like, “Whatever the fuck, man. Do what you’re gonna do.”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Anyway, most of what we get in this first chapter is Balwer and Perrin’s conversation as they are moving through the camp. Um, and the only, really, thing of substance that we get from them is that, um, the members of Cha Faile have spotted Masuri, one of the Aes Sedai, and Annoura, also an Aes Sedai but Berelain’s personal advisor, going to Masema’s camp and meeting with them.

Sally: Right.

Emily: Meeting with Masema, specifically. And Perrin’s like, “Well, that doesn’t make sense, really, because before I even met Masema, Masuri was like, ‘You should kill him.’”

Sally: She’s right.

Emily: And she was right. Um, and so there’s a lot of, like: “What could they possibly be thinking? What’s going on here? Are they betraying us? What is the –” And, ultimately, it doesn’t matter. I don’t know what they’re doing; I can’t remember what they’re doing. I think

it's probably just something like they're trying to keep a handle on the situation because Perrin won't.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, which is a reasonable enough explanation for me. They're not being, um, as Aram later is, um – what's that word for when you – it's not brainwashing, but when you're, like – when you get taken into an extremist group? I can't think of it now.

Sally: Oh, I can't think of it either. Programming, as opposed to deprogramming. (laugh) I don't know; I know what you're talking about, though.

Emily: Um, yeah, they're – that's not happening, I don't believe, and Masuri – Masuri and Annoura are not going to turn on Perrin suddenly. And that's what's frustrating, is you have a lot of factions going on here and a lot of different characters representing different, um, belief systems and different ambitions and different interests, so what you could be doing here and what Robert Jordan seems to be sort of vaguely gesturing toward is the fact that there could be some, like, serious, like, intrigue plots going on here.

Sally: Right.

Emily: You know, political intrigue, these mysteries that need to be uncovered. But ultimately none of these mysteries come to any sort of satisfying conclusion because they are exactly what is obvious from the get-go. Very obviously, Masema is going to betray Perrin eventually.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Very obviously that's going to happen.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: What –

Sally: What else could happen?

Emily: What else could happen?

Sally: There can be no type of, like, reconciliation between, like, religious extremism of this sort and Perrin's sort of neutral Dragon Reborn territory.

Emily: Especially because Perrin refuses to take any action whatsoever.

Sally: Right.

Emily: Like, literally no response to anything that Masema is doing –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Anything that Masema could be doing in the background; Perrin is just like, "I will just continue to let them do whatever they're going to do, which, yes, involves raiding the countryside, random villages, meeting with the Seanchan –"

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: “All behind my back.”

Sally: Yeah. He’s truly – Perrin says something; he’s like, “It is a problem. But it’s not currently my problem.”

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Or something to that effect. He’s like, “My only concern or focus is rescuing Faile,” which, a brief note on that: we might have said something similar in previous episodes, so I apologize if this is repetitive, but I was thinking about this, um, today, um, or yesterday. Whatever. I was thinking about it. There’s this, like, trope – oh, I was thinking about it because, like, Fullmetal Alchemist does a really interesting thing with this where, like, the powerful man, his love interest is in danger –

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: And so they’re like –

Emily: I was thinking about this too. (laugh)

Sally: Yeah. So you can either save her and do this truly horrific thing, or she dies.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: And in Fullmetal Alchemist, spoiler, Roy Mustang is like, “No. She has asked me to not do it, and so it’s her life and I’m going to abide by her wishes.”

Emily: Yeah. She still has agency in this moment –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: As much as I will grieve her –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: That is secondary to what she wants.

Sally: That is – absolutely. And you’re like, Roy Mustang!

Emily: Roy Mustang, a feminist?

Sally: A – (laugh)

Emily: Who could have predicted this? You know? (laugh)

Sally: Roy Mustang, colon, a feminist. Um –

Emily: Question mark, question mark, question mark.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Fuhrer Roy Mustang? Future Fuhrer Roy Mustang?

Sally: Fuhrer Roy Mustang, a feminist?

Emily: A feminist?

Sally: Um –

Emily: It's more likely than you think.

Sally: Surprise – surprisingly, it is much more likely than you think. Um –

Emily: Yeah, we were watching that scene and then I was reading these chapters, and I was like, it would be a really interesting project for someone to eventually take the woman's point of view, the woman who –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: For whom the world has been sacrificed because Perrin also says something very similar, where he's like, "The world can go to Tarmon Gai'don –"

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: "And it can face it without me if Faile's still missing." Like –

Sally: Right.

Emily: "Fuck – fuck the world," essentially.

Sally: Right.

Emily: And he says that multiple times, and it's meant, I believe, to be part of his character arc that he eventually grows beyond that and leaves Faile to her own devices –

Sally: Right.

Emily: During the Last Battle. Um, but, like, yeah, it would be such an interesting project, I think, to be the woman who – like, a man is like, "But I destroyed the world for you; don't you love me back?"

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And for her to be like, "That's the worst possible thing you could do."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: "Any romantic history we might have had just, like, went in the toilet –"

Sally: Right.

Emily: "As soon as you did that. You didn't respect me at all –"

Sally: Right.

Emily: “You didn’t respect my wishes, and furthermore, do you think I want to be, like, you know, the pedestal for which the world burned?”

Sally: Yes. Um, yeah, ‘cause I was like, I wonder what Faile would be thinking if she could see Perrin say, “Masema murdering all these people is not my problem,” and Faile, for all her faults, is, like, very concerned with what’s going on in the world around her, unlike her husband –

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: And I think she would be truly quite furious about this.

Emily: Yeah, tellingly, uh, as soon as, uh, everything gets to a head and Faile is rescued, the first thing she does is murder Masema.

Sally: I didn’t know she did that! That’s so fucking rad.

Emily: I’m not sure if it’s, like, with her own hands, but she has him killed.

Sally: Good for her.

Emily: Very quickly. (laugh)

Sally: She’s like, “God, my good-for-nothing husband won’t deal with this issue, but I, Davram Bashere’s daughter, knows how to deal with a problem. Bang, bang.” (laugh)

Emily: Bang, bang, you kill the motherfucker.

Sally: Yeah. Ugh.

Emily: Yeah, you’re right, you’re right – Faile would be very upset by this, but –

Sally: She would.

Emily: That doesn’t – and that isn’t a plot point that is – we later circle back around to, you know?

Sally: No, it’s not a plot point, and Perrin, like, doesn’t even really consider it. He’s like, “I –”

Emily: Actually, I believe they do have a conversation in which they’re both like, “In our separation, we both did horrible things,” somehow equating Faile being sexually harassed and developing a moderate degree of Stockholm syndrome for this guy who protects her a couple of times from sexual harassment while sexually harassing her –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: You know, that is somehow equated to Perrin letting Masema do crimes against humanity.

Sally: Listen, it’s –

Emily: And allying with the Seanchan.

Sally: Yeah. Um. bell hooks now has the steel chair. (laugh)

Emily: (laugh)

Sally: Um, Robert Jordan is truly so vile. Um, blegh. I wanna, like, yak.

Emily: I know, it's really gross.

Sally: It's so gross. But, yeah, Perrin is, like, not even considering it. And I'm so glad you used the word "agency" in our Fullmetal Alchemist, because that's exactly what – what's happening . Like, this is another way, in terms of, like, male-female relationships, that women are stripped of their agency. Like, men get to decide on what terms the woman's life rests –

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: Basically. Um, and it's another way of putting them on a pedestal, which is the number one way to strip someone of agency is to put them on a pedestal and say, like, there's nothing that they can do that is incorrect or that I wouldn't do for them, you know? Um, and I think, one, this is just, like, a really frustrating trope to read about in literature, because it's like, at what point will women have agency? This is still a trope that we see. Um, but I also think it has some, like, really dangerous real-world consequences of, like, men doing really horrible things to women and around women and to women's families because they claim that they just love them so much.

Emily: Yes.

Sally: So we just, like, excuse so much violence from men in the name of, like, protecting the women that they love, and we never make them face any consequences, and if you're, like, raised upon this type of view of loving a woman, it's going to become, like, more ingrained in you if you are a man that you can basically do whatever you want if it's in the name of loving a woman.

Emily: Yeah. Yeah, it's fascinating in a bad way how many real-world crimes of men specifically doing horrifically heinous, violent things, not even directed specifically at women –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: But just violent things, mass shootings –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, stalking women, killing women, killing their families –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Killing women's partners, et cetera, et cetera. It's so interesting because the media and the police, because the media and the police are interested in serving –

Sally: Hm.

Emily: The media and the police –



Sally: Hm.

Emily: Will always be like, “Now, what mentally ill –”

Sally: Yes.

Emily: “Tragedy occurred in this man’s life – how – what – let’s diagnose his various psychoses –”

Sally: If he’s white.

Emily: Yeah, if he’s white, of course. Um, and the men themselves almost one hundred percent of the time will be like, “I did it ‘cause I hate women.”

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Or “I did it because I want – I love this woman so much” –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Which is just another form of misogyny.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But no one is willing to call it misogyny because then what does that mean for all of the normal men who love women so much that if anything bad happened to their woman, they would do terrible things.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And they view that as a form of romance.

Sally: Yeah. No, and I mean, I think, really, truly, the argument can be made, being like, “I love a woman so much I would do anything for her” is just another way to hate that woman.

Emily: Yep.

Sally: It’s all circular. Um.

Emily: Wow, we’ve gone to some really deep abysses –

Sally: I know.

Emily: Nietzsche would be so happy with us.

Sally: Nietzsche’s down in hell with his steel chair, like, “Yeah.”

Emily: “Woohoo!” Just beating Robert Jordan over –

Sally: (laugh) The abyss has stared back this episode, and here we said we weren’t going to talk about Wheel of Time.

Emily: I know, we were like, “We’re not gonna talk about the Wheel of Time. Let’s talk about Aram for 33 minutes.” Anyway, we don’t have time for, like, more, you know, delving –

Sally: Right, yeah.

Emily: As it were, but we are going to be with Perrin in this particular arc, and like we referred to earlier, not a lot is going to be psychically happening, so we’re gonna be circling back to anything that we didn’t really cover.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: In terms of plot, um, Perrin and Balwer come to an agreement about how Balwer is going to approach spying on Masema; it strengthens Balwer’s and Perrin’s, um, professional relationship, I guess one might say: Balwer respects Perrin more now as an employer, and Perrin’s just like, “I don’t know what to do with this weird little dude.” Meanwhile Perrin goes out into the woods, realizes that Darkhounds have been circling the camp; again, this is something that seems to indicate that something exciting will happen. Nothing comes of this, so don’t worry too much about it. Uh, Perrin encounters Berelain with a large group of people behind her, but he only has a conversation with Berelain, thus far, where we are, where Berelain further offers evidence of Masema’s, um, communications with the Seanchan, and that’s it.

Sally: Yeah, and, like, Berelain’s thief-catchers, who we presume have been in her employ for a long time, like, literally died to get this information.

Emily: Yeah, they brought back this information to Berelain –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And Perrin’s like, “Well, let’s just talk – they can be witnesses against Masema,” and Berelain’s like, “Oh, they’re super dead; they’ve disappeared.”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: You know?

Sally: And he’s like – (sigh)

Emily: Uh, but that’s those two chapters of Crossroads of Twilight, the first two chapters of Perrin in this particular book, and we’ll be with him quite a bit more throughout, so –

Sally: Yes.

Emily: Brace yourselves.

Sally: Brace – brace.

Emily: Brace yourselves. Do you have anything else to add?

Sally: No, I – for – I truly have said enough. (laugh)

Emily: Hi, Ed.

Sally: Hi, Eddie, do you want to come say goodbye to the people?

Emily: Yeah, do you want to come say goodbye?

Sally: Come on.

Emily: Hey, thanks for listening; thanks to Glynnna MAcKenzie for our theme song; thanks to our patrons on Patreon and our followers on social media. Uh, there will not be a new episode next week; Sally's on her annual lake trip with her family, uh, so, as in summers past, we're just taking a week off. That also means I will have been and will continue to be the primary voice on social media for about a week, so you can look forward to harassing me if you haven't already. Um –

Sally: It's always very fun when you take the reins.

Emily: Yeah, I'll just do AMAs with Devin. Anyway, um, do you have a sign-off?

Sally: I'm trying to think. Surely something has happened. The barf bag one last week –

Emily: Yeah, we already got the barf bag incident.

Sally: Was really just, like, such a – such a – a – a rock star one.

Emily: (talking to the cats) Have you guys done anything else funny recently?

Sally: You guys have mostly been in a bit of distress.

Tybalt: (meows)

Emily: Oh, dear.

Sally: Uh, this is a story about my nephew, so more, like, cute than traumatic. But we are going on the aforementioned lake vacation; we're taking two cars. The car that my mom and I will be driving will have, like, all the suitcases and stuff in it because my brother's car will have a car seat for my nephew. So my mom came to pick up my car, and my nephew, in the child-like way of, like, associating objects to certain people, like, knows that it's my car.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: And was like –

Emily: My nephews are the same.

Sally: Was like, "Sally's car is here," and they were like, "Yeah, we're gonna go on vacation with her, and we're gonna take her car," and he 's like, "Oh, I'll ride with Sally." And they had to be like, "No, you're gonna ride with us," and he was like, "No, I'm gonna ride with Sally." (laugh) Um, so a little attitude towards his parents. He was just like, "Mm. I'm gonna ride with Sally."

Emily: Yeah, kids will see an aunt's car and be like, "That's where I live now."

Sally: "That's where I live."

Emily: “That’s where I live now.”

Sally: “I don’t give a fuck about the parents who drive me around safely every day, to and from things like doctor’s appointments —”

Emily: (laugh) “It’s all about my aunt.”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Alright, everyone. Have a good week!

Sally: Bye!