



Episode 238: Robert Jordan's School of Fantasy Naming Conventions

Release Date: March 27, 2023

Running Time: 45 minutes

Sally: Everybody Hates Rand is a Wheel of Time podcast that will contain spoilers for all 14 books. So if you're anti-spoiler, stop this, read all 14 books, and come back. We'll be here. Waiting.

Emily: Our title is a joke and is meant to be taken as such. "Everybody," in this context, refers to us and our cats. You are free to feel however you want about Rand. He's a fictional character. Please don't DM us.

(theme song by Glynna MacKenzie plays)

Emily: Okay. (vocalizes an air horn noise) Here we are. The – it's begun.

Sally: Gunshots.

Emily: So – the era of Branderson.

Sally: The dawn of Brando Sando.

Emily: As evidenced by the much –

Sally: Yeah, Jesus.

Emily: Much-shortened prologue. So, if we're keeping track, that's point one in Brandon's column. (laugh)

Sally: Point one: Brandon column. Check.

Emily: Woof. Um, did you read the little opener?

Sally: I did.

Emily: The foreword? About how –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: He's like, "Well, Robert Jordan died, and this is it." I mean, it's much nicer than that. (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) Yeah, he has much more pleasant things to say than, "Here you go."

Emily: "Well, here you go." He's basically like, "Yeah, so, the – this is way too long, so we had to do it into three books."

Sally: Had to do it into three books, yeah, because Robert Jordan was some sort of maniac who was like, "We could do it in one book," and Brandon was like –

Emily: “No, you can’t.”

Sally: “I write very long books, Robert, but I can’t –”

Emily: For a living, yeah.

Sally: “I can’t. I can’t do this.”

Emily: Yeah. He also says that if we like, we can think of this as part one of a part-three – of a three-part –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: “A Memory of Light,” which I will not be doing because I am not a believer in the Marvel Cinematic Universe –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Industrial complex, where everything has to have a part one and part two.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Or whatever kicked that off. Was it Twilight?

Sally: It was Harry Potter. It was the Deathly Hallows.

Emily: Oh, it was Harry Potter, yeah, okay, well.

Sally: Much as I am loathe to speak about Harry Potter on this podcast, it was the Deathly Hallows –

Emily: It’s what happened.

Sally: Who did that first, and then Twilight did it.

Emily: And as with everything with Harry Potter, people were like, “That made money.”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: “Surely we can replicate that somehow,” so, yeah, now we’re – now we’re into parts. So no, Brandon. These are three separate books.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: I will not be doing that. The – the big intel we get is the ways in which Brandon Sanderson is – like, the methods by which he is able to write these books, the information he has.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Um, he – okay, apparently Robert Jordan left “many notes, outlines, completed scenes, and dictated explanations with his wife and assistants.” That part is the most interesting to me.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Like, were they taking notes?

Sally: Do they have them on a little recorder somewhere?

Emily: Yeah, who knows. Or, like, is Harriet just like, “Well, I remember he said something about –” And, like, as we all know, witness statements are highly –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, unreliable, so I like to think that if they weren’t actually dictated on a recorder, you know, the witnesses would just like –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Added their own little spins –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Without really realizing it.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Being like – you know, the way your brain would just be like, “Oh, well, this sounds better, so.” (laugh)

Sally: Yeah, I think that’s – I think that’s right. Um –

Emily: That’s what I think.

Sally: In the world according to Harriet. Yeah.

Emily: Yeah. He assures us that Robert Jordan did in fact write the ending, “and it’s fantastic.” We’ll dispute that two books from now. (laugh)

Sally: I’ll dispute it now.

Emily: I also don’t know what he –

Sally: Sight unseen. (laugh)

Emily: (laugh) I also don’t know what he means by “the ending.” Like, which part, though?

Sally: Yeah, Brandon, the ending of what? This book? The Gathering Storm?

Emily: Yeah, for all I know, he means, like, the last two pages –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Of A Memory of Light. It can’t possibly be, like, the entire Last Battle because that entire section just so – so much reeks of Brandon Sanderson.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: I say “reeks.” That’s such a negative word. It really feels like a Brando –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Book. And as we get into these books, I think a lot of what we’ll be talking about is the distinguishing, uh – the differences between the two writing styles, um, and the ways in which they work or don’t in this series.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Um, we’ll try and stay away from value judgments, although I know we’ve been pretty negative about Brando –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: In the past, so, um, this is our time to redeem ourselves, if you’re a big Brando fan.
(laugh)

Sally: Yeah, we’ll try.

Emily: Um, yeah, like, the caveat is that neither of us is a particular fan of Brandon Sanderson –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But I think it’s worth talking about whether his writing style, which I may not –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: We may not personally like in his other books, but whether it is working in this particular format –

Sally: Yes. Yes. Yes.

Emily: And how he’s using it to, uh, make things work in this format.

Sally: Yes. Yes.

Emily: And number one there is the much-shortened prologue, I think, which is what we read, um –

Sally: Yeah, for this episode. It is so manageable. It’s unbelievable.

Emily: Yeah. It’s only 48 pages. That’s, I think, a – a fifty percent reduction or something.

Sally: Yeah, and I don’t even think it’s the full 48. I think they start page count earlier?

Emily: They start the page count on page, woof, 17, so you know, it’s a solid 30 pages.

Sally: Yeah, and you’re like, that’s fine.

Emily: Six points of view in thirty pages. Hammer them out.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: They also – our prologue – I think there’s also a difference between the little – we’re still getting the vignettes from non-main character points of view.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: That’s what Robert Jordan has sort of established as the –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, prologue format, more or less, though he breaks from it a few times. Um, but these vignettes – these particular vignettes are doing more work, I would say, to bridge the gap between the last book and this book –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: And to set up major things that will be happening in this book, which I think is something that sometimes gets lost in translation in the Robert Jordan –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Prologues. Like, often those – he often is doing, like, scenes, like, with the Forsaken or whoever – you know, almost every prologue, we get a Forsaken meeting –

Sally: Yeah, unfortunately.

Emily: Including in this one. Um, and usually Robert Jordan is – often he’s setting things up that will not happen in the book to come –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: But will happen later –

Sally: In the series to come.

Emily: Yeah, or he’s just doing sort of, like, a vibe check.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: He’s being like, “Here’s what’s going on with these people.”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Very exposition-heavy.

Sally: Mm-hmm. Yes.

Emily: Um, and Brandon Sanderson, to his credit, gets in there, makes the point he’s trying to make, and gets out, for the most part.

Sally: Yes. Um, before we get into it, can we talk about the cover of this book?

Emily: Oh, Christ, yeah. Darrell K. Sweet is at it again.

Sally: (laugh) Also, this is Everybody Hates Rand.

Emily: Oh, fuck. (laugh) Your friendly neighborhood Wheel of Time – I’m just so ready – I’m just so ready to talk about this.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: It’s – I’m Emily Juchau.

Sally: And I’m Sally Goodger.

Emily: Okay, here are the –

Sally: I can’t even – (laugh) I was losing my mind earlier.

Emily: (laugh) Aviendha – I believe this is Aviendha – looks like a Malibou Barbie who has been dragged behind a pick-up truck for miles.

Sally: Look at her eye make-up.

Emily: I know.

Sally: It is un – it’s just this, like, very big eyelashes.

Emily: Her lower lashes are visible.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: That should not be – she’s wearing the – she’s wearing six pounds of mascara –

Sally: Yeah. Like –

Emily: In Darrell K. Sweet’s vision of this world.

Sally: Yeah. Aviendha is just, like, really doing a full face of make-up – like, a FULL face of make-up – every morning.

Emily: Rand, on the other hand, is flat-out wearing jeans.

Sally: (laugh) I feel like –

Emily: (laugh) Just a pair of Levi’s.

Sally: Rand’s been wearing jeans on a cover before.

Emily: I know; maybe Darrell K. Sweet is just like, “He’s a jeans man.”

Sally: I mean, the way the light is hitting it, it truly looks like it’s got pockets.

Emily: Yeah, there’s, like, some embroidery right by the hips –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Or something, and yeah, it looks exactly like pockets.

Sally: He's just wearing jeans.

Emily: And we have – (laugh) as usual – the most unhinged proportions.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: I can't – Rand is standing in the funniest possible – he's standing in what we in yoga call starfish pose. (laugh)

Sally: Amazing.

Emily: With his legs – they're spread way wider than people normally stand.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, and he's got his right arm up, and – like, he's meant to be, I think, shaking his fist at the sky –

Sally: Sure.

Emily: But he looks like he's sort of doing a power – like, flexing.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And his fist is the size of a golf ball.

Sally: Yeah, his fist is very little.

Emily: His fist is super small.

Sally: He also, like, doesn't have a wrist, really. It's just like –

Emily: Yeah, there's no wrist.

Sally: End of hand.

Emily: Which matches his other hand, which has been – I'd like to say discreetly – covered by his, like, cloak or whatever, except that – I guess it is discreet, because you never know what Darrell K. Sweet is gonna do with proportions –

Sally: Yeah, that's true.

Emily: But in a normal – normal – in a normal book, I'd be like, "Oh, that man's hand is surely missing at some point between the wrist and elbow, because the elbow is right there."

Sally: (laugh) Yeah.

Emily: There's three inches.

Sally: There's three inches; that's true. I also think Darrell K. Sweet is a coward for not showing Rand's amputation on the cover of this book.

Emily: Yeah, do you think that was, like, a caveat? They were like, “We can’t spoil it for people who might see the cover of this before they read Knife of Dreams”?

Sally: Oh, maybe. I don’t know.

Emily: But, like, yeah, I agree: I don’t think his amputation should – his involuntary amputation –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Should be treated like it’s a big spoiler.

Sally: You’ve gotta – yeah, hide it. It’s too unsightly.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Also, Rand’s outfit is so ugly. Like, truly – the Levi’s, the knee-high boots. He’s wearing red.

Emily: The, like, ugly knee-high boots.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: These are, like, rancher boots.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: They’re not, like, classy military-style boots –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: With, like, a nice cuff and a little bit of a heel –

Sally: Yeah.

Sally: And some shiny buckles and whatnot.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: These are just, like, galoshes.

Sally: Yeah. For –

Emily: And then – yeah. He’s wearing a, like, white shirt with a Peter Pan collar and a red – I guess this is meant to be his coat. His red coat with, like – what’s happening with the sleeves slash – it’s like he’s wearing a Snuggie, a little bit.

Sally: Yeah, I don’t understand the cloak to vest to shirt ratio here.

Emily: Yeah, who knows.

Sally: He’s wearing a purple belt –

Emily: A purple sash beneath his belt.

Sally: Oh, yeah, you're right. That isn't even his whole belt.

Emily: Aha. Which is even worse. Yeah, I don't believe Rand would ever in his life put on a sash.

Sally: Yeah, I don't think he's really, like, the type to accessorize.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Um, he's wearing Levi's and dirty cowboy boots.

Emily: Yeah, he looks like a farmer from the waist down –

Sally: Yeah, from – it's two different outfits if you cover – (laugh)

Emily: It's Brokeback Mountain below the waist and up top it's, um, I don't know, the Picture of Dorian Gray.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: I don't know what's happening there.

Sally: He looks – they look – I can't even look at Aviendha.

Emily: Yeah, you can't look at her face. Her outfit is also terrible. She's not wearing what Wise Ones usually wear, which is what she's supposed to be wearing. Instead, she's wearing a bright blue corset –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: And a , like, off-the-shoulder top –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: That is so –

Sally: Very deeply cut.

Emily: So deeply and widely cut that –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: It's like, girl.

Sally: You can see pretty much her full titties.

Emily: Yeah, the nips are about to pop.

Sally: She – she looks like she should be on a romance – the cover of a romance novel.

Emily: Yeah, it's Darrell K. Sweet's –

Sally: Which we've –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Said about Darrell K. Sweet in the past.

Emily: Also, look at the fucking unhinged architecture of this mansion.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Like, what's going on with this tower-thing?

Sally: I don't know.

Emily: Why would anyone build that?

Sally: I don't know. It looks like a wishbone.

Emily: And there are the Saldaean soldiers on the side, all of whom look just kind of weird.

Sally: They look a little bit like the drawings of cavemen you see in –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Museums.

Emily: Like, they look like the Neanderthals in Night at the Museum.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So yeah, that's the Gathering Storm cover.

Sally: It's honestly unbelievable.

Emily: Where it ranks pretty low, I would say –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: On the – on the overall list. It's quite bad.

Sally: Anyway, thank you. I just had to get that out of my system before I would be able to talk about any of the content at all.

Emily: No, I – I feel you. We've then got an epigraph, which is – we – we have the same things to say about that as always. Yeah.

Sally: It doesn't really mean anything.

Emily: Go – go back twelve episodes and listen – (laugh)

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: To our Knife of Dreams rant. Okay, and then we get to the prologue. Dun dun. We've got six points of view here. First up is a random farmer man named Renald, which is just Ronald but with an "e," so Brando either stole that name from the master document or was like, "I'll just do a normal name and add a different vowel. That's the – that's the Robert Jordan way."

Sally: That is the Robert Jordan way. The school –

Emily: The Robert Jordan method™.

Sally: Yeah. Robert Jordan's School of Fantasy Naming Conventions.

Emily: (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) There's your title for you.

Emily: Thanks, yeah. I needed one. Um, and Renald is a total NPC.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: He has big "this character is unimportant" vibes. He is here as a rain gauge for what's going on in the rest of the world outside of our main characters. Um, which – I'm trying to remember if we get anything like that from Robert Jordan points of view.

Sally: Robert Jordan? I feel like we've gotten a few in prologues.

Emily: Yeah, I don't think it's unprecedented.

Sally: I think this is another pretty common Robert Jordan tactic, is to be like, "I'm going to check in with a person we're never going to see again."

Emily: The common folk.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And the common folk aspect of them is emphasized by their use of, like, slang. Um, Renald says "ain't." I don't think, uh, Robert Jordan ever said "ain't," but clearly Brandon Sanderson is trying to get that folksy peasant vibes –

Sally: Sure. Sure, sure, sure.

Emily: Going on in here. And the – the – just, this scene is that, um, Renald's watching this storm, this creepy storm – we're told that he's in farmlands, uh, sort of in that big no-man's-land that is the Borderlands –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: But is not necessarily a citizen of any particular Borderland. Um, he's an old-ass farmer. His children are grown and have their own farms, and as he's sitting on the porch, his neighbor passes with all his family and all his stuff, and they're just like, "We're just heading north to where there will certainly be people gathering to fight in the Last Battle." And Renald is initially sort of shocked and disbelieving but eventually is – starts to feel the same sort of compulsion –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: With a lower “c” –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, that these other people are feeling, that is just, “We need to go confront, um, whatever is going to happen next.” So, um, this is an important scene in that it will, um, help us understand, a couple books from now, when we have the Last Battle happening, why there are so many just random people – you know, why the Last Battle is not one hundred percent composed of soldiers –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: With whom we are already familiar.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: You know, we can pretty much already account for all of the armies on this continent, where they are and what they’re doing. Um, and this section and further things throughout the next few books will insist that, like, there are normal people taking part, um, and the mechanism by which they are taking part is just this sort of, like, feeling that they all have? And I think it’s – if we’re going more with the folksy peasant vibes stuff, it is meant to be, like, an attunement with the Earth –

Sally: Mm.

Emily: And with the land itself, which, as we know, is falling apart.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, so while I don’t personally care for Renald or care about him or his family, and I don’t personally find this little sequence exciting or interesting, it is working, I think, in the text.

Sally: Yeah, I think it was a smart move on, um, Brando’s behalf, assuming this was his decision – I’ll just keep saying it as though he is the one making all these authoring decisions –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: To start both the Gathering Storm with this and also his alleged three-part epic, because, again, it’s, um, like Emily mentioned, it’s grounding us in what is the end goal of these three books, which is getting to the Last Battle before we dive into the rest of Wheel of Time bullshit, which is, like, nine hundred different plots.

Emily: Yeah, the minutiae of getting –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Our major players to the Last Battle.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: It is important that there will actually be NPCs there to fight.

Sally: And make swords, apparently.

Emily: Yeah, and make swords out of their farm implements and stuff. Um, but yeah, I – I think it's a little bit interesting that there are people voluntarily going to do this, um, and that they aren't being – it's, A, a sort of neat way of sidestepping what I think the alternative reality would end up being, which is that people would be forced to enlist in these armies –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And that's a nice way of making sure that our good guys remain good, you know?

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: People aren't mass-enlisting –

Sally: Yeah, old farmers.

Emily: Random old farmers. Everyone there is more or less a volunteer on the side of the Light or the Dark, as the case may be.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, so that's a – a nice little way of making sure we don't see those particular war crimes, but as we're going to be talking about, this is the war crime book, so.

Sally: Yeah, I mean, as we dive right into the next point of view.

Emily: (laugh) Yeah, we have the sul'dam and damane, uh – we're catching up immediately after what happened with Rand and company at the end of Knife of Dreams. The sul'dam and damane are being told, like, here are your instructions; here's the message you're supposed to bring back to the actual Daughter of the Nine Moons. Rand's like, "Yeah, tell her I'm still interested in a meeting, and we have to sort this out," and, blah, it's a show of good faith, blah blah blah. Nynaeve, our somehow-conscience, is like, "It is not right for us to be sending them back," and, um, Rand is like, "Yeah, well, it's – it's too bad."

Sally: Yeah, Rand's got the, like, spineless excuse that I think a lot of people make when we're talking about, like, geopolitical events on a very large global scale, where he's like, "It was easy to decide what was right and wrong when I was just, like, tending sheep as a teenager."

Emily: Yeah. A naïve ingenue.

Sally: He's like – yeah. He's like, "If I just am dealing with my small corner of the world, I get to – I can, you know, easily decide what's right and wrong, but when there's – when I'm working on a much bigger scale, when there are so many more things happening, like, right and wrong becomes more complicated." And I think to some degree that's true. Like, the bigger the scale, the more complexities there are. Doesn't necessarily mean that, like, morals and ethics fade away, you know?

Emily: Yeah. He says, "Right was easy to find." And it's like, right is still right in front of you.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: We still know what's right and what's wrong in this situation, as is apparent because Nynaeve is telling you. Nynaeve has also experienced a massive degree of, um, like, change in influence in the world, stuff like that, so clearly it's not just about that.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Um, and yeah, like, what's Rand's doing here, clearly, is like, "I can't just hold back the damane because then that will make the Daughter of the Nine Moons, who I'm about to negotiate with, mad, probably."

Sally: Yeah, that's exactly what I was going to say too, is it – when you get to that scale, it's more about, uh, basically the power that you're willing to sacrifice in order to make the right decision or the consequences that you are willing to face when you're forced to make the right decision, and very often, like, world leaders will put their own interests' above. And they often claim it's the interests of their own people versus the interests of other people, and I don't know, I don't really buy that argument.

Emily: Yeah, like, what Rand is saying here in microcosm is, "I am willing to negotiate on the war crime that you – your entire people –"

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: "Are, uh, perpetrating –"

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: "Against women who can channel." Um, which might seem like the better thing for him to do in the moment because he's so concerned about the Seanchan getting on board with this plan. He can't really afford, he thinks, to make this a big deal. But it's like, as we've said before, it's just morally bankrupt.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Um. This segment is just defamiliarization. We're seeing Rand and Nynaeve through the eyes of a random sul'dam, who's like, "Oh my God, they're so scary and cold, and I hate the Power, and I hate being touched with it," blah blah blah blah. Nothing too exciting. We see Semirhage get taken away and everyone disperse.

Sally: Bye, Semirhage.

Emily: We then switch over to Tylee, several weeks post-Malden, we are told, um, as she's talking to her right-hand guy, Mishima. Um, and Tylee's just like, "Wow, I sure would hate to fight Perrin, 'cause he's so OP." (laugh) Um, "And I like him." And it's like, shut up. We already – we already talked about them – their relationship.

Sally: Yeah, she's got some line where she's like, "We can't be afford – we can't afford to be fighting these people."

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Um, and that – and she’s like, “That’s just, like, a treasonous thing to even be thinking.” She’s like, “We need to be making, uh, I don’t know, gestures of friendship and alliance or whatever,” so, I mean, I, uh, am back to reading *Wheel of Time* raw, first – first time through the *Gathering Storm*, but I assume this positions Tylee as, like, our sympathetic figure in the Seanchan.

Emily: Yeah –

Sally: Or one of them.

Emily: Yeah, I think she’s for sure meant to, um – if we’re going to put, like, a political scale on the Seanchan, she’s meant to represent the more, like, liberal end of the scale.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: And I think she, along with our other few Seanchan characters, are meant to represent, like, there is multiplicity within this people; there are different opinions. But it’s like, the mechanism of empire and fascism being what it is, Tylee has these opinions but is not acting upon them –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: In any way.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And the mechanism of empire would prevent her from acting on them in any way.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: So what use are political opinions if you don’t have political action?

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Um, and yeah, Tylee also doesn’t say anything like, “We can’t afford to be making these people mad.”

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Or, “We can’t afford to be putting these peoples in chains –”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: “And enslaving them en masse.” What she says is, “We can’t afford to be fighting these people.”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And it’s like, yeah, that’s a pretty different thing. So, like, even for being on what is to us the left of the spectrum – I guess Egeanin would represent the far, far left?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But even for being left of center, Tylee's still, like, far-right on any other scale.

Sally: Yeah, it's like – it's like – it's almost like you zoom – we've zoomed in really close on the Seanchan –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Political spectrum, and she seems really far left, and you then just keep zooming out –

Emily: It's quite bad. (laugh)

Sally: And she's, like, a millimeter left of center. (laugh)

Emily: Um, and she and Mishima are mostly just talking about how weird things are afoot; that's the overall vibes we're gonna be getting from these next few books: ghosts. People are disappearing. Food rotting.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: More of the same, but more.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Um, and as they're sitting there, Mishima gets an arrow through his neck, so RIP, I guess. But he falls and they are attacked, ambushed, I guess, by Trollocs, which Tylee has never seen before. And which is a fun reminder to us, the readers, that they even exist, because –

Sally: Yeah. (laugh)

Emily: We haven't really seen any Trollocs in, like, eight books. (laugh)

Sally: Brandon was like, "Robert. If there's going to be big, scary monsters at the Last Battle –" the Last Battle; I almost called it the Final Battle – "We need to remember they exist."

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: So here they are in Ebou Dar.

Emily: Here they are. Doo ba doo. And Tylee's like, "How'd they get here?" And we, the readers, are like – ("I don't know" noise)

Sally: Is it the fucking gateways again?

Emily: The fucking Waygates?

Sally: Waygates.

Emily: Which ones have been accounted for? We don't know.

Sally: Rand let that just vanish into thin air –

Emily: Just slide, yeah.

Sally: So who knows what the Trollocs are doing.

Emily: Woof. We then get a long section from Graendal's point of view. Long, I guess relatively; it's not actually that long. In which she is summoned to a meeting by Moridin. She shows up and is in this, like, weird fortress somewhere in the Blight. She's like, "What the fuck is happening with Moridin?"

Sally: Yeah, Moridin's really being a creep up there.

Emily: Um, Demandred and Mesaana show up and are surprised to see Graendal there. Um, then Moridin comes in and Mesaana and Demandred, who Graendal knows have an alliance with Semirhage, immediately are like, "Semirhage has been captured; you have to go let us rescue her," which is way more, like, interest in each other –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Than the Forsaken have chosen thus – have –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Demonstrated thus far –

Sally: Seriously.

Emily: So that's sort of wack. Like, why do they care?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Isn't that just, like, more power for them? I don't know.

Sally: That's the way they've been acting so far.

Emily: Yeah. Pfft. Who knows. And Moridin is basically like, "No, you can't go get Semirhage. She fucked up. Like, just like all of you fucked up." And it's like, I can see why Moridin, who's in charge of the Forsaken at this point, would have an interest in rescuing Semirhage, because he, technically, needs as many underlings as he can get, right? Especially the powerful ones. But no, he's mad about this because he and Rand are experiencing this, like, mirroring effect, so Rand losing his hand has made Moridin's hand feel ouchie. I think it would've been more interesting if his hand had just spontaneously fallen off.

Sally: Like, fallen off? Yeah, that would be interesting.

Emily: Yeah, and way less easy to hide.

Sally: Yeah. Is – yeah, I didn't pick up on that, so that's what's –

Emily: I – there's just a little thing where Graendal's like – he, like, flexes his hand or something.

Sally: Oh. Interesting.

Emily: Um, and I think that's the only reason why he would be that mad about it.

Sally: Yeah, he's got his whole dumb, like, only – you – no one can hurt Rand ever, at all. Until.

Emily: Yeah, which I think 'cause of the mirroring is meant to show us that he's, like, freaked out that if someone kills Rand, Moridin himself will die?

Sally: Mm. Interesting.

Emily: But again, this is all, like, subtext that I'm only now really picking up on my, what, third read-through?

Sally: Sure.

Emily: I didn't really get that the first time, or the second time, apparently. So, um, I think Brandon Sanderson is doing his best to make that, like, more of a –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: An issue, especially considering, like, that it will be, uh, more integral in A Memory of Light, that whole Moridin-Rand mirroring thing. Um, so I guess let's put a pin in that and see how it tracks for the rest of the book –

Sally: 'Kay.

Emily: To see if he keeps sort of hitting that nail on the head.

Sally: We should put a bulletin board up there –

Emily: God.

Sally: And, just – that could be everything – “We'll see if this comes back in A Memory of Light.”

Emily: We'll see – we'll see if they manage to pull that one back together. (laugh)

Sally: Yeah. (laugh)

Emily: Yikes. Um, but Demandred and Mesaana, after getting yelled at, leave, and Moridin is like, “Graendal, I let you come and get some information from that as, like, a favor,” and she's like, “Okay. Worm.” And he's like, “Just so you know, Rand is going to come to your dominion, Arad Doman, um, and I want you to fuck up his entire day as much as you possibly can.” He says, “The end is near. The Wheel has groaned its final rotation. The clock has lost its spring. The serpent heaves its final gasps,” all references to worldviews in which time is cyclical –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: You know, we've got the wheel of time, obviously, the world serpent. Um, I don't know the clock one, but I assume that's just a thing. Um, “He must know pain of heart. He must know frustration, and he must know anguish. Bring these to him, and you will be rewarded.” Which brings up the point of, like, why? (laugh)

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Why does he need to know these things? Um, and it's like – again, I think this thread probably isn't tracked well enough, but we're at this stage where Moridin's interest in Rand is still not, um – Moridin slash Ishamael, who I think is meant to, per the Ba'alzamon confusion in the early books, meant to, as much as anyone can, actually symbolize the Dark One and the Dark One's desires, et cetera.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Like, I think the idea is that the Dark One slash Moridin don't want Rand to just, like, die, even though that would be way easier. But they want him to, like, come over to the dark side.

Sally: Mm.

Emily: Um. Which is a sort of classic, though extremely cliché, hero's journey – aspect of the hero's journey.

Sally: Sure.

Emily: The hero can't just die because that's too convenient – the hero is always unkillable: we know this from these classic light versus dark fantasy series, Star Wars, et cetera, and notably, Rand, like Luke Skywalker, has lost a hand in his big moment of darkness –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And revelation. Um, instead, the idea is that the dark just desperately wants them to give into the darkness, instead of –

Sally: Sure.

Emily: Be – represent – being this champion of the light. Um. And that's more of, like, a philosophical quandary than any sort of, like, effective logistic quandary. Like, on a logistical level, just kill them, you know?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Like, am I – am – I don't know if I'm being clear. Like, obviously to solve the problem most efficiently, you just kill the good guy.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But for some reason these bad guys are all caught up in the philosophy of it all, which is that, like, the much more effective, though less efficient, victory would be to, uh, win the war of, you know, ideals. To prove that, oh, actually, my way is the better way.

Sally: Sure. Yeah, I think – I mean, again, I don't have the gift of foresight in these books anymore, but I am on board that it doesn't make a lot of logistical sense. I do think a lot of it lies – excuse me – in the philosophical sense. There's also a lot of, like, symbolism to it. Rand is our Jesus figure; you cannot just achieve apotheosis. There has to be some intense level of suffering that comes before the apotheosis akin to the crucifixion. I think we've got a lot of that with Rand already, but I do think there's sort of an element of, like –

Emily: Yeah, he's even got the stigmata.

Sally: Yeah. Is that what those are called?

Emily: Yeah, the marks.

Sally: That's cool.

Emily: Um. I guess it's technically any wound, but he both has the crucifixion marks in his hands –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And he has the wound in his side from the spear.

Sally: Yeah, that's right. So –

Emily: Not from the spear in Rand's case, but –

Sally: But, um, so I think there's some symbolism stuff going on there. Um, it also, like – I would buy this. I would buy the – I would honestly buy the whole, like, "Let's not kill Rand" shit if it was from Demandred, who's, like, a petty little bastard.

Emily: (laugh) Yeah.

Sally: And the whole, like, "He needs to suffer as much as I have suffered" type nonsense. From Ishamael, it doesn't make a lot of sense to me, but whatever.

Emily: Yeah, Brandon is gonna be really trying to get back to the roots of Ishamael in the next few books, which is that, uh, his backstory is that he was a philosopher, and he is meant to represent this sort of Nietzschean figure.

Sally: Mm.

Emily: Um, this nihilism, this, uh, power is might, power is right –

Sally: Sure. Yeah, right to – right to power –

Emily: I guess.

Sally: Or whatever it is.

Emily: Um, yeah, which – through that philosophy justifies, um, any action that someone might take, which for whatever reason, turns out to be evil. Like, you know, it's like people read Nietzsche and are like, "Oh, well, if I'm an uber-mensch, then I can do the most deranged shit imaginable, and it's fine." And it's like, why don't you solve world hunger if you're such an uber-mensch?

Sally: Cough, cough. Elon Musk.

Emily: (laugh) Yeah, or fucking Raskolnikov in Crime and Punishment.

Sally: Yeah. Yeah, fair enough.

Emily: You know, if you're the world's smartest man, like –

Sally: Yeah, put that to good use. Why does it always have to be, like – I don't know, I mean, this is gonna not surprise anybody: I don't take a whole lot of stock with nihilism and existentialism –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: And generally with men who philosophize in general. (laugh) Um, I mean, like, philosophy just – much of it that I have encountered – just lacks so much compassion and empathy for the way that the world actually exists and the way that people actually function in the world, so, like, yeah, I mean, I think it's a great philosophy to give Ishamael, our number one baddie, but, like, yeah, Raskolnikov, if you are a genius ...

Emily: Yeah. Just, like, the philosophical undercurrents here aren't going to be very meaningful to us –

Sally: Yeah. Yeah.

Emily: I think, because philosophy as a field in practice, I think, is so much about, like, attempting to discover meaning or attempting to quantify or –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Render meaning void, and it's just, like, okay, but touch some grass. Have you lived in the world?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Like, most of us don't have the luxury of dissecting meaning.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: It – the – it's not super relevant to the lives of most people.

Sally: Yeah, and also, like, I think – I think – and I think Ishamael, as we get into it, could potentially be, like, an interesting dissection of this, but I think the further you get into philosophy, actually, the farther you often get away from meaning. Like, meaning – not to be, like, woo-woo or anything – I take that back. I do want to be woo-woo.

Emily: Yeah, go for it. Where else?

Sally: Like, meaning – yeah, meaning is all around you in life. Like, there's so much joy in the small things; there's so many reasons to enjoy and be good to one another and just, like, live and do your thing. Like, it – I think the meaning is there. You don't have to go deep into the void or whatever Nietzsche said to find it. But who am I to say?

Emily: Yeah, I – I think you're right, and that will be playing more into the mad philosopher –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Sort of trope of, like, philosophy itself drives you mad –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And it's just like, that's not a very compelling trope because it's like –

Sally: Then go outside.

Emily: Yeah. You can get out of it at any time. (laugh)

Sally: You can actually just go for a walk in the sun and you might feel better.

Emily: You know, like, it's not like Frankenstein, where the search for meaning via science actually leads to, like, a person standing there –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: You know?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Who you have to deal with.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: It's like, you can just not think about that anymore.

Sally: Yeah, you can just be – (laugh) Yeah, it's not like ideas actually often manifest in front of you as, like, a consequence of your own –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: God complex.

Emily: Like, look into the abyss. Okay, now look away from the abyss.

Sally: Now go – just go – go watch some TV.

Emily: Yeah, it's fine.

Sally: Ishamael. You lived in a time of TVs, right? I don't understand the Age of Legends.

Emily: I don't know with the Age of Legends. Goddamnit.

Sally: But you're right. Just be like, "Wow, I can't believe that I got to get an ice cream cone today. That was nice."

Emily: Pffft. Well, on the cheerful side of things, we then switch to zaddy Ituralde, who –

Sally: I love him.

Emily: I know. Um, in about two pages manages to update us on the overall campaign in Arad Doman and Tarabon and this sort of miniature microcosm battle, which would have taken Robert Jordan –

Sally: About –

Emily: Approximately six hundred pages.

Sally: Yeah. He'd be like, this is actually all of the Gathering Storm.

Emily: Yeah. Thank you, Brandon.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, and Ituralde tells us that what he has done is relied upon the Seanchan's information gathering through these, like, airborne scouts, um, to do all these sort of illusions –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Illusion magic.

Sally: He's a – he's a – he's a magician now.

Emily: Yeah, like, by the simple – by the simple expedient of, like, we're no longer wearing uniforms; we're just wearing normal people clothes –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So how are they meant to identify us?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And if we're not moving in large bodies – if we're already sort of in this, like, guerilla warfare where we're just moving around.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, so that works with, like, this particular thing that's laid out in front of them: the Seanchan think this city ahead of them is, uh, just a normal civilian city and they're going to take it, but Ituralde and his men have already got there, and have also, like, stationed all these people, play-acting as farmers. It's this incredibly, like –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Intricate little play that Ituralde – you imagine Ituralde as, like, a wack stage mom.

Sally: Yeah, he's just, like, directing.

Emily: Yeha, he is, like –

Sally: He held rehearsals.

Emily: Yeah, amateur Broadway director. Um, super into it. But this manages to, like, flank the Seanchan and –

Sally: Mm-mm.

Emily: Presumably win the day, but we will see.

Sally: Yeah, Ituralde has this hilarious line where he's like, "The Seanchan are good at fighting, and that excites me."

Emily: "And I like that."

Sally: "Because I get to destroy their hopes and dreams." (laugh)

Emily: (laugh) He's so unhinged.

Sally: Like, you little maniac. What's up with all these military boys just being –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Little freaks?

Emily: Um, and then finally we move over to Masema biting it.

Sally: Yeah, this was an extremely –

Emily: Getting fucking murdered by Faile.

Sally: This was an extremely satisfying point of view –

Emily: I know.

Sally: For me specifically.

Emily: Masema's, like, running away from Perrin's camp or something – it's a little unclear what – you know –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: From Tylee, we know that it's been two weeks since the battle of Malden, so, like –

Sally: Yeah, what's –

Emily: Has Masema just been hanging out in that time?

Sally: Who knows.

Emily: He only has a few followers, few enough that, um, Faile and her very small contingent of people are able to corner and kill them, and Faile herself manages to kill Masema by stabbing him.

Sally: Stabbing him in the heart.

Emily: In the chest.

Sally: Pretty brutal way to go.

Emily: Um, and he just dies. You know?

Sally: Yeah, this is the one instance – Faile often has her sort of little recurring catchphrase that “sometimes the wife must do what the husband can’t” or whatever, and this is one instance in which I’m like, you’re right.

Emily: You’re right. Sometimes –

Sally: Your husband’s a coward. (laugh)

Emily: (laugh) Faile should’ve stabbed Masema in the heart and is like, “This is because Perrin’s a pussy.”

Sally: (laugh) “My husband’s useless.”

Emily: “But I’m fucking not.”

Sally: “He should’ve done this eight months ago.”

Emily: “But I’m not, bitch.”

Sally: Yeah. Faile’s been released from Malden, released from captivity. In fourteen days, she’s like, “Here’s my to-do list, my first hundred days in office.”

Emily: Yeah. Faile is out of her cage. Yes. Yes.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: (laugh)

Sally: Masema is dead.

Emily: Yeah, it is pretty funny that we are getting a sort of literal enactment of the reality that once Faile is out of captivity, things can start happening –

Sally: Yes.

Emily: In Perrin’s plot again.

Sally: Yes.

Emily: Problems can start being solved. Um, unfortunately, that won’t really be enacted throughout the next few books because at this point, Perrin doesn’t have very many problems left to solve. And –

Sally: Well, Faile solved all of them in two weeks.

Emily: Yeah, exactly. Masema’s dead; that’s it, baby.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: (laugh) But, like, yeah, it's sort of, I think Brandon or Robert or whoever being like, "Yeah, that's done now."

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: "We're not gonna be doing that anymore —"

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: "So you no longer have to agonize —"

Sally: Suffer.

Emily: "Whenever you get to a Perrin point of view." Um, so overall, in the prologue, through our six check-ins, and this goes back to how the prologue is working, what we're getting is a check-in with the normal people: that's good because that is a theme of this book. We get a, um, what's the second one?

Sally: It's the sul'dam.

Emily: Oh. We get the ongoing will-they-won't-they with Rand and the Daughter of the Nine Moons negotiating. That is actually going to happen in this book, so thank you, prologue, for setting that up. We get, um, Tylee — I'd say is the least relevant of the six points of view in this plot, but hey, we're at least checking in with Trollocs appearing now in the countryside.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: We get Graendal; Rand is going to be spending a lot of time in Arad Domon in this book, so Graendal's gonna be super relevant. Ituralde is about to jump up to the major players list.

Sally: Good for him.

Emily: Um, and yeah, just as we've said with Masema, we're now rounding out that Perrin point of view and moving on to the next one. So.

Sally: Thank God.

Emily: Overall an effective prologue —

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: I would say.

Sally: I would give it an A. Give it a solid A.

Emily: Yeah. Yeah.

Sally: Not an A plus, just because ... (sigh) I did have to see the Forsaken.

Emily: Yeah, I did have to suffer through – just because I don't really like any of the characters besides Ituralde anymore.

Sally: Yeah, besides Ituralde. Yeah. They're all a little rough.

Emily: Yeah. Like, Faile killing Masema did do a lot for me, but –

Sally: Yeah, that was really good, but.

Emily: It was a little too late, you know?

Sally: Yeah, it's one of those things that, like, it is really satisfying, but I shouldn't have had to get through, like –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Six books to get there.

Emily: Yeah. Like, it wasn't satisfying in the slow-burn way. It was satisfying in a, like, "Thank God –"

Sally: Yeah, finally.

Emily: "I no longer have to deal with this" sort of way. Um, but that's that. Thanks, you all, for listening.

Sally: Thanks for listening. Thanks for joining us in the dawn of Branderson.

Emily: Yeah. (vocalizing)

Sally: The storm has begun to gather, allegedly.

Emily: The storm has been gathering fully for, like, eight books.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Every single time we see Nynaeve, she's like, "There's a storm coming." But, uh, here we are.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, thanks to Glynn MacKenzie for our theme song. Thanks to our patrons on Patreon and our followers on social media. Um, if you want, you can look on our website: the Gathering Storm reading schedule is now up there. Um, you could check that out and read along with us if you would like. Um.

Sally: Yeah, you sure can.

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

Sally: Um. No.

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

Sally: Um. Oh, last night I had to go a work event. And I – it was to tour a house that we'd opened as part of our work, and I got there late, like after the fact; I was kind of wandering around, looking at the house, and I had my name badge on, so this, like, guy comes up to me and he's like, "Hey, you work at what's-it-called?" And I was like, "My company?" and he's like, "Yeah. I did a project with them, but, like, I haven't been involved in any of them since. Like, who do I talk to about that?" And I was like, "Not me, sir," and he's like, "Well, I'm gonna give you my business card. Will you pass it up the line?" And, like, the way that this whole conversation went, I was like, you are not being called because you did a bad job.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: And I was like, okay. So I just took his card and, like, threw it away, you know?

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: But it was one of those things where, like, everyone around us had to listen to me make fake promises for twenty minutes.

Emily: Networking should be illegal.

Sally: Networking should be illegal. Especially while I'm wandering around a house by myself, eating a coconut brownie.

Emily: Ooh.

Sally: Yeah, they were actually really good.

Emily: Coconut brownie, yeah. That sounds fucking nice.

Sally: They were pretty little, so I had, like, three of them, but.

Emily: Ahh.

Sally: I earned it.

Emily: Okay, well. Yeah, you did, by having to deal with that man. Okay.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Goodbye, everyone!

Sally: Don't network. Go forth and don't network!