



Episode 247: The Hardboy Scale

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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.

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

SALLY: And I'm Sally Goodger.

EMILY: And it's another bad one, guys.

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: It's another – it's another – how many times can we say this? It's another bad one.

SALLY: I was reading this, and I was like, "I cannot even believe that this is what I am reading right now."

EMILY: Yeah, it is real –

SALLY: It comes really out of nowhere, honestly.

EMILY: Real shitty. Yeah.

SALLY: It feels – whatever. We'll get into, but, um, it feels...so obviously constructed. Like, this is one of those where you can see the blueprint.

EMILY: Mm-hmm.

SALLY: To just, like, make Rand be even more of an asshole, because apparently that's important.

EMILY: Yeah, it doesn't help that this is yet another one of those Brandon flavor scenes, where we start out with a long montage of Rand just sort of introspecting about his emotional state and the things he wants and needs.

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: Before we get into any sort of action, but that's just sort of an ongoing issue. Problem. Yeah, we do get sort of like...[sighs], um, hit in the head repeatedly with lines like [in a deep voice], "Duty is heavier than a mountain," [laughs] and.

SALLY: [in a deep voice] "It's not hard enough to be steel."

EMILY: [in a deep voice] "I've got to be harder," which [laughing] how did that –?

SALLY: [laughing] How did that make the cut?

EMILY: [laughing] How did that not get –

SALLY: How did it not get cut?

EMILY: How was not one Tor publisher like, "Oh, Rand needs to be really, really, really *hard*?"

SALLY: Yeah, I feel like someone –

EMILY: So, why? Why does he have to be hard? [laughs]

SALLY: [laughs] Someone at book publishers has to be running the, like, middle school humor read of a book, you know?

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: To be like, "You're gonna get roasted for this."

EMILY: That would be a great job that I could fulfill. If you need someone to find all the jokes that a thirteen-year-old boy –

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: Would find. Emily Juchau, she's your woman.

SALLY: Yeah, instead of a sensitivity read it's a...thirteen-year-old boy read.

EMILY: Thirteen-year-old boy read. Any time you see the word “hard” if it makes sense with an accompanying, like, porn level moan at the end, then that’s bad news, you guys.

SALLY: You gotta cut it.

EMILY: He needs to be [moaning] *hard*.

SALLY: Stop. You’re so annoying.

EMILY: [laughing] Daddy! Well, guys. I don’t know. I wouldn’t want you to be as hard as *cuendillar*, Rand. That seems like it would damage something, and also, I just worry about you, my guy.

SALLY: Um, but we actually open with Semirhage. With a Semirhage point of view, of all –

EMILY: Yeah, we open this –

SALLY: Whack things.

EMILY: A rancid Semirhage prison break. And it’s not rancid because of the prison break, because that’s basically expected.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: It is quite *deus ex machina* to have Morridin send – presumably Morridin.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Or maybe it’s the Dark One rescuing Semirhage. I’ve been unclear and continue to be unclear about the role this creepy Myrddraal, Shadar Haran, is playing.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: He more or less seems to be a messenger of the Dark One. Um, but I don’t believe we’ve really seen him and Morridin interact, so I’m unclear if they are, like, one and the same in sort of tiers.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Or if this is Shadar Haran being like, “I know Morridin said he doesn’t want to rescue Semirhage because she did such a fuck up, but I am going to do that anyway.”

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: For whatever reason, though, Shadar Haran is there and is like, “Don’t worry, Semirhage. I’m here to solve all your problems. At just the moment when you have been quote

‘broken’ unquote in torture, I...have set you free.” It’s, like, frustrating because it’s not even, like, Elza being the mechanism here.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Elza has been such a ticking time bomb, more or less since Book 7 or 8. You know, Verin’s lobotomy tent.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: When we had this sort of idea that of these Aes Sedai who have been literally compelled to serve Rand, one of them has had to do some real mental gymnastics to get there since she’s also Black Ajah.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: So, like, it would be nice if this – I don’t need a bunch of Elza points of view to get there, but I don’t really want Shadar Haran to – it would be nice if it was just Elza opening the door and being like, “Hey, gotta go.” You know?

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: I’m also unclear about how they got the little, um, the male *a’dam*.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: That’s not really explained.

SALLY: Yeah. I have no idea. The whole thing is really deus ex machina TM in the worst possibly way. From Shadar Haran to them just having this.

EMILY: Yeah, doesn’t Elza walk in with them to Semirhage.

SALLY: Yeah. She just like –

EMILY: Because I was like it would make sense if Semirhage –

SALLY: Went and got it or something.

EMILY: Went and got them since she has all her, her, her huge knowledge. But –

SALLY: But Elza just gives it to her.

EMILY: Elza says, “I am to give you this,” so presumably Elza herself didn’t fetch them. Presumably Shadar Haran or someone else high level did, but, like, that’s annoying.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: [laughing] It's like women can't do anything.

SALLY: Women can't even steal the bands of dominion or whatever Semirhage calls them. Yeah, just – Ed.

EMILY: Yeah, Ed's purring. It just makes such a joke out of Cadsuane's preparations that she made, or, you know, her traps that she set, because it's, like, the only reason you ever see the traps someone set on something is for those traps to later be sprung, or for someone to get around them. Heist style.

SALLY: Yeah. Yeah.

EMILY: So, just having that happen off screen is kind of, like, oh this was so stupid and Cadsuane was so arrogant that it isn't even a big deal.

SALLY: Yeah, this, um...I don't know. I just feel like from a structural point of view, Chekhov's gun went off way too early in this book, you know?

EMILY: Mm. Yeah. I see that.

SALLY: Like, they, like, introduced the male *a'dam*, reintroduced it to us, and Cadsuane is like, "Look at these amazing traps that I've put on it." And it's like that was only 50 pages ago, or something.

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: And we still have, like, we still have a hefty chunk of book to get through. So, like, why would, why would fire this particular plot device so early. I kind of feel that way with Semirhage as well, like, we broke, we quote unquote 'broke' Semirhage just a few chapters ago and all the sudden that is irrelevant, because she has been released from prison and we don't learn anything from her anyway. Both of these things, Semirhage and the male *a'dam*, are set up to be the, like, fall of Cadsuane. This, this section ends with Rand dismissing Cadsuane from his service. Um, so I see how they tie together –

EMILY: They're also meant, I think, to be this sort of apex or rather the – what's the opposite of apex? The abyss [laughs].

SALLY: The abyss.

EMILY: The bottom of the abyss of Rand's emotional state, which will culminate at the end of this book with Rand sort of, you know, looking at the abyss and facing that and coming out with a sense of enlightenment. And we'll talk about that when we get there. Um, but, like, what it makes me think is that we're prioritizing Rand's weird emotional state over the actual plot of the series. Like, Brandon is trying to pace us more appropriately to get to Rand's enlightenment at

the cost of having, like, yeah this Chekhov's gun go off way too early, this scene that feels very much like it should be at the end of the book.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: As a sort of Rand goes crazy after this sort of thing.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Now it's in the middle of the book so we can have another series of bad things Rand does before he gets enlightened. Because...Rand's gonna do some war crimes [laughs]. We still have – we have [laughing] not yet reached the war crimes section of this book.

SALLY: Yay! Super!

EMILY: Which is not great to think about, but it's like...I don't know. It just feels like it's like, "Okay, I've got to make Rand, like, real, even more depressed, somehow, than he was. So that he can do even worse war crimes, so that we're even more relieved when he comes out of that the other side."

SALLY: Sure. I – I – [laughs] I do think it is a bit of cop out as well when people are like, "I have to make my character so emotionally fucked up that it explains why they make bad decisions rather than just being like, 'Rand is a flawed person who we have seen make ethically questionable decisions since Book 4. It is not beyond the realm of possibility that he would just swing really far in that direction.'" He's been doing that since the beginning of the book anyway. I don't really need this sort of, like, cliff to get him there. Like, I would buy pretty much whatever Rand does at this point.

EMILY: I absolutely – I also absolutely fucking hate the mechanic of tracking Rand's – we were making fun of it earlier, obviously.

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: But, like, tracking Rand's emotional state through this sort of, like, leveling logic.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Of being like, first I have to be as [mocking] hard as rock. Then I have to be as hard as steel. Now it's *cuendillar*. And it's just, like, this is the most [laughs], like, no one thinks that way. [pause] Have you ever in your entire life been like, "Everything [laughs] will be fixed as long as I am [gravelly voice] as hard as diamonds."

SALLY: [laughs] I mean, I have personally never thought that way. Maybe there's someone out there who loves to apply –

EMILY: It's, I guess what I'm thinking –

SALLY: Video game logic.

EMILY: Yeah. It's an incredible simplification of complex emotionality.

SALLY: Yeah, I get that. Yeah, yeah. I agree completely.

EMILY: Like, we're defining really deep depression and some other mental issues as just being like here's this little quippy one liner.

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: And it's like, that's so – what it does is it reduces the impact of Rand's emotional state. Like, it's just a huge joke now because it's so juvenile.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And not just because of the hard jokes.

SALLY: Yeah, just because it's, like, this is...

EMILY: Oh, really you found something harder than steel? What are you gonna, what are you gonna get to next, Rand? Stupid.

SALLY: What are you going to get to next? Yeah, no. You're right. It is this intense simplification and it is another really egregious instance of this sort of showing not telling of Rand's...uh, struggles with depression and trauma and mental illness and we're just sort of trying to pack all of that into...[laughs] yeah, there's no other way of putting it than you've leveled up. You've got a little Xbox achievement tag in the corner while you're playing Halo.

EMILY: You're now as hard as *cuendillar* [laughs].

SALLY: Yeah, um, and it feels – it seems like...we've been dancing around Rand's mental state and this whole sort of stupid, like, the introduction of this mechanic is not a Brando Sando –

EMILY: No.

SALLY: Brainchild. Of course. Robert Jordan's been doing this for eons, it feels like. And we've been dancing around it for so long, but what is maybe, again, just a bad hand that Brandon was dealt, but suddenly he has to, like, speed run all of Rand's, like, processing of his trauma and mental illness and we're just gonna do all of that in a single book?

EMILY: Yeah, like, don't get me wrong, it is a huge relief that Brandon Sanderson does something to put Rand's character in the opposite direction that he's been going at the end of this book. Because Rand, at this point, as he has been for the last few books, I would say, not just tough, but downright miserable to read.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And that's not necessarily a reflection of his emotional state. It can be, to be a little bit, um, glib about, you know, real mental illness and trauma, but you can read about characters with mental illness and trauma and it not be, like, a totally wrenching experience. It can be, by turns, a very comforting experience or very interesting. Um, but Rand just has so much going on all the time that it's like not only is he depressed and emotionally unstable but also he's got all his weird hang-ups with women, all the stuff he's doing is weird and ethically questionable, so it's just, like, yeah there's not much to redeem Rand in those moments.

SALLY: Yeah. Um, I just read *Speak* by, what is it? Laurie?

EMILY: Laurie Halse Anderson.

SALLY: Yeah. Um, which is a book about a character who is very, very depressed and emotionally unstable, and that was a lovely book to read. Like, as you said, like, it, there was something just very comforting about allowing yourself to just be in the space and sort of experiencing it and seeing a character, uh, really sort of find ways to pull themselves – pull themselves – of course with help, like, nobody – not saying you have to pull yourself out of depression yourself, but Melinda, the narrator of that book, is really working hard to try and figure things out, you know? And that was, like, so lovely, but she was also really fucked up throughout all of it. And then you come here and Rand is just, like, horr – like, it is just not a pleasant experience. So, that is just to give a counterpoint if you're interest – if you're, uh, if you're interested in seeing a, a different approach to a character struggling mentally and emotionally.

EMILY: Yeah, or even, like, *Murderbot*.

SALLY: Yeah [laughs].

EMILY: Where Murderbot is incredibly depressed and anxious but is the funniest narrator alive.

SALLY: [laughs] Oh, I love Murderbot.

EMILY: [laughs] It's just that – the fact – the problem is that Rand is wallowing, I think.

SALLY: Yeah, the problem is that Rand is Rand. He's a wallower. He is –

EMILY: Which, like, you love a good wallow for five minutes, maybe one out of the ninety-eight chapters we've had.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Of Rand's point of view, he should be wallowing. But, like, guys.

SALLY: And I, I *really* don't think I, like maybe I'm putting way too much weight on this, but I really don't think I would half the problems I have with Rand as a narrator if it wasn't this stupid fucking thing about women.

EMILY: Yeah, which brings us back to our, the actual plot of this. Which is that Rand gets back from taking Ituralde –

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: [laughing] To the –

SALLY: Speaking of war crimes. Ituralde is like, “Maybe I shouldn't invade Saldaea and Rand's like, “No, you're going to.”

EMILY: Rand's like, “No, this will be better for me actually, because people will kick up less of a fuss...because this won't...” His logic is that he thinks if he sends the Saldaeans back to Saldaea there will be some sort of mass desertion.

SALLY: Yeah of his army.

EMILY: And he thinks that he can't trust Ituralde to be in Arad Doman, bringing order to Arad Doman. Which is, like, the logic of that is so fucked up that, like, it – it – it could be interesting on one level. Like, this could be yet another way to show that Rand is mentally unstable, because this is a thing that doesn't make sense, and even when he explains his logic to us, what that reveals is not anything about what is actually going on, but about Rand's paranoia.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Rand fundamentally does not trust Bashere, who he's been with for, like, seven books.

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: And should trust.

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: And Ituralde, who really has no reason to do anything against him in this instance.

SALLY: Yeah, all Ituralde has been wanting throughout his entire character arc is to bring some stability back to his homeland. So, like –

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: I think you can trust him to do what he is motivated by.

EMILY: So, it's just some, like, megalomania, but it's not being called out as megalomania, we're just being – like, we're not being like, "Ituralde and Bashere exchanged glances like oohh." It's just Rand talking being like, "Yep, and those reasons make perfect sense."

SALLY: Yeah, he doesn't even explain them to Bashere and Ituralde.

EMILY: Yeah, it's just in his head.

SALLY: He's like, "It is beneath me to explain my decisions to anybody," which is how you know the leader is doing a really good job.

EMILY: [laughs] And he returns to camp, or his little camp, and is like, "Here are some things that are troubling me [laughs]. Let me just run down the list while I'm walking. Numero Uno: what the fuck is up with Morridin?" And we're like, "Yeah, we don't know either, bestie."

SALLY: Maybe you should kiss.

EMILY: [laughs] Yeah.

SALLY: With tongue.

EMILY: Have you considered that? Maybe a little makeout would clarify the situation.

SALLY: Yeah. I don't know. You could try it? It's something you haven't tried yet so you don't know if it's successful [laughs].

EMILY: You have to try everything.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Like come on.

SALLY: You have to give everything equal weight. That's what a good general would do.

EMILY: It's the scientific method [laughs].

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: [laughing] Kissing with tongue is number three on the scientific method.

SALLY: Number one: hypothesis [laughs].

EMILY: Um, he's also been thinking a lot about, um, what – he, like, questions Lews Therin. He's like, "Lews Therin –" Or no, Lews Therin somehow – Lews Therin just pops out with, "Oh, by the way, your hot girlfriend whose name I don't know despite being able to observe your hot girlfriend. Um, she's right about you needing to break the seals for the Dark One's

prison.” And Rand’s like, “Oh worm? Like, yeah, that’s what I thought, but can you explain to me, like, your reasoning?” And Lews Therin’s like, “Nooo.” [laughs] Lews Therin is like, “The reason *saidin* got tainted is because that’s what we used to try to patch up the Dark One’s prison.”

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: And Rand, in a sort of roundabout way, is kind of like, “Okay, what is a way that I can seal the Dark One’s prison without doing that? Like, without putting *saidin* or *saidar* at risk.”

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: And, wouldn’t you know it, the very answer to that question is given to him later in this chapter. When Rand, through his severe emotional trauma, don’t you always love it with this happens, accesses a full new form of power that isn’t *saidin* and isn’t *saidar*. It’s just some other new thing.

SALLY: Yeah, speaking of Chekhov’s gun firing too early.

EMILY: He’s gone full...

SALLY: Dark side.

EMILY: What’s the, um, Phoenix, from X-Men.

SALLY: Oh! Yeah [laughs].

EMILY: [laughs] Yeah, he also has gone full Dark Side. He’s, like, making force lightning balls now. Um, so that’s what’s on Rand’s mind. I’m trying to remember if there’s anything else.

SALLY: It’s so stupid that Lews Therin doesn’t know Min’s name.

EMILY: Yeah, it is really ridiculous. I’m just like, “Oh, great. So, any redeeming qualities Lews Therin might have had, and he was not doing well.”

SALLY: Pretty low, yeah.

EMILY: Not doing well. It’s just like, “Women are like birds, you have to – ”

BOTH: “Put them in a cage.”

EMILY: “And also I don’t know any of their names except Ilyena’s.” [laughs]

SALLY: It’s like...okay.

EMILY: Maybe he’s just really face blind.

SALLY: Yeah, maybe he's just, like, such a wife guy that there's no room –

EMILY: [laughing] The only woman who exists is Ilyena.

SALLY: [laughs] Is his wife. There's no room in his brain for other women.

EMILY: That is such a generous interpretation.

SALLY: Yeah [laughs].

EMILY: For us to give him, that I'm astounded. Anyone who says that we're mean and bullying Robert Jordan and Brandon Sanderson, shut up.

SALLY: [laughing]

EMILY: Look at us. We're giving you all the bandwidth in the world. Lews Therin might just really like his wife, not be a huge misogynist. God.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: So, anyway [laughs], Rand returns to where Min is, like, reading on their bed. There's a serving woman walking around, which is immediately suspicious.

SALLY: Yeah!

EMILY: Because we have literally never seen anyone, like, clean up after Rand and Min before.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Or if we have it's one of the Maidens.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Doing that shit.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: So, it's, like, um...

SALLY: The whole time I was like –

EMILY: And then they're just having this intensely emotional conversation also while this woman is still there. And I'm like, I believe that's something you would do in, like, a *Game of Thrones* world where you're like a noble person whose very – whose grown up surrounded by servants.

SALLY: Yeah, servants are just invisible to you at that point.

EMILY: Yeah, but we're talking about Rand and Min, two peasants more or less, who have only gained this class mobility in the last few years. I think it would really skeeve them out to be like, "And there's just a random woman [laughs] here while we're talking about..."

SALLY: Yeah, our relationship and my mental state and –

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: Everything.

EMILY: So, anyway. Not a great, like, it's a fine disguise for Semirhage, I guess, but for the readers it's a little, like, "Okay, we're not stupid. Could you?"

SALLY: What on earth? Yeah.

EMILY: Do something different? Anyway, Rand walks in to talk to Min. Min's like, "I'm so worried about you, because I'm always worried about you, because you're so fucking depressed!"

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And Rand's like [in a moping sort of voice], "Well, I just have to do it. I just have to get the world to the Last Battle and I can't think about anything else, because what else am I gonna do?" [pages flipping] Um, oh yeah [laughs]. Min's like, "Rand, you haven't laughed in *months*." And Rand's like, "What am I supposed to do? Laugh while Trollocs kill *children*?" And you're like, "Bestie. No one – first of all, no one said that."

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Min didn't say, "Hey, I need you to go laugh while atrocious things are happening in front of you."

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Min's saying like, "Hey, you know, bad things are happening in the other parts of the world, because bad things are always happening in other parts of the world. I recognize that you have a lot of – feel a lot of responsibility about it, but, like, you're still a person."

SALLY: Yeah, like, you still have to figure out how to exist in the world and live your life when there are tragedies that happen.

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: We've all had to figure out how to do it, Rand! It's now just your turn.

EMILY: Anyway, she's like, "You just can't – Cadsuane says," which is a mistake, because Rand's like, "Cadsuane says? What's your fucking – Cadsuane's telling you – you're some sort of spy for Cadsuane?" Min's like, "...Hey what the fuck?"

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Um, so, it's like Rand's already being paranoid again and using that to mistreat Min. Like, raising his voice at her and acting a little scary. Um, then Semirhage reveals herself and is like, "Mwahaha my evil plan is – " She literally just, like, walks up behind Rand and clicks it around his neck.

SALLY: I know!

EMILY: And Min is like, "This is fine. This serving woman walking within inches – "

SALLY: Just approaching to Rand's *neck*?

EMILY: Stupid!

SALLY: And also, Rand, where are your, like, master sword boy skills or whatever in this single instance when, like, you might be...cautious of someone approaching you?

EMILY: I know. Again, it all is predicated on the belief that Rand and Min wouldn't care about a servant, but they would.

SALLY: [laughing] Putting her hands around neck.

EMILY: Yeah [laughs].

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: This is fine and normal! [laughs]

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: Servants be servants!

SALLY: [laughs] But yeah, Semirhage has put the Dom – Domin – Domination Band is what I think she calls it.

EMILY: Yeah, something like that.

SALLY: Bands of Dominion or some other D&D level thing.

EMILY: [laughs] Yeah. Min manages to throw a knife at her. Again, this does nothing, but slightly annoy her. So, Min, why the fuck do you even have knives?

SALLY: Why do you even have knives if you can't kill the Forsaken?

EMILY: Yeah. Um, but Min gets tossed off Rin – [laughs] Rand can't do anything immediately with this thing on him. He can, can't channel, can't move. Whatever. Semirhage just sort of evil monologues at him for a while. Elza comes in and reveals herself also. Um, Rand, uh, Semirhage tries to torture Rand by having him hurt himself. Or, you know, choke himself, channel. Whatever, whatever. Um, but he is kind of like, snaps, like, "Oh, you can't do anything else to me. I've already been through so many awful things physically speaking, so I'm just – I am Egg in this moment" [laughs].

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: "I can laugh through the pain whahaha."

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Semirhage is like, "That's what you think, but what you don't know is that I've seen every movie [laughing] from the 1950s to 2023 and I know that the best way to nerf a man is by making something bad happen to a woman close to him. A woman he's fucked, ideally. Or wants to fuck. Um, or his mom. Shoutout to Martha."

SALLY: Ugh!

EMILY: [laughs]

SALLY: UGH! Ugh, I am having a heart attack as we speak.

EMILY: [laughing] Flashbacks. I was thinking about that movie today. I don't even remember why.

SALLY: For those not in the know that's *Bat* – that's a reference to [laughing] *Batman vs Superman*.

EMILY: Yeah, *Batman vs. Superman*, one of the worst movies that exists.

SALLY: [laughing]

EMILY: Speaking of Henry Cavill.

SALLY: [laughing] That movie is so atrocious. Okay, um.

EMILY: It takes fridging to, like, ludicrous new tropes. Because, you know, everyone knows what fridging is. I assume you know what fridging is. Fridging is still a bad, like, the, the

mechanic that makes fridging such a bad and misogynistic thing is still in play even if the woman doesn't die.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Even if we're still like, a woman is harmed and that hurts a man. Or a man is forced to harm a woman and that hurts the man.

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: It's still all about the man.

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: And nowhere is that more apparent than when after this scene ends, after, you know, Rand has to, like, choke out Min, he's on the verge of killing her, wham bam he accesses a new kind of power, what we the readers perhaps know as the True Power. Which is what Morridin wields and makes the little flecks across his eyes grow. Like the Dark One's special power. Rand wields that balefires Semirhage and Elza and then what happens is that Min is like – no, they're, like, laying there, Min's recovering from almost dying and Rand goes [laughing], "This is the worst thing that's ever happened to me."

SALLY: To *me*! While the blood vessels in Min's eyes have burst.

EMILY: Rand doesn't, like, the normal thing to do is turn to the woman you've just choked against your will and be like, "Oh my god, are you alright?"

SALLY: Yeah. What do you need?

EMILY: What can we get for you? This is bad for both of us, I recognize, but we're partners because we check in on each other.

SALLY: Yeah, and, like, only one of us almost just died. I don't know. Just, just a thought.

EMILY: Yeah, I know this was bad for you, Rand, and I know it's not, like, *fun* to have to hurt your partner, to, like, lose your autonomy that way and to be that close to killing someone you care about. That's very traumatic, but Min is the one with the more phy – pressing physical needs in this moment.

SALLY: Can she breathe? Was her windpipe crushed?

EMILY: Can she breathe? Yeah. Do you need a hospital? Like *oh my god*. But instead, Rand just monologues about how this is the worst thing that's ever happened to him, but now that it's happened at least he is leveled up even farther on his hardboy scale

SALLY: [laughs] Yeah, I mean.

EMILY: And If I were Min I'd be like, "I'm leaving and I need you to know it's not because you almost just killed me, [laughs] it's because you almost just killed me and then were like, 'This is fine.'"

SALLY: This is the worst thing that's ever happened to *meee*. Um, yeah, if I were Min I would leave Rand. Divorce.

EMILY: Yeah, this would be, like, if you haven't had enough million reasons to break up with this dude, this is a really astoundingly good one.

SALLY: Yeah. He says, "This is the last that could be done to me." Or whatever. And Min's like, "Well, I almost just died, which meant that would have been *literally* the last thing that was ever done to me."

EMILY: Yeah, soooo.

SALLY: Maybe, like perspective.

EMILY: "But I guess that doesn't count, because I'm a woman, so I'm not actually a person. I'm just a character in your story."

SALLY: Hmm. Correct.

EMILY: [sighs]

SALLY: Um, so, justice for Min, I guess.

EMILY: Justice for Min. She might be one of the world's most annoying characters, [laughs] but she does deserve justice.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: We then switch over to Cadsuane as she runs up to be like, "What the fuck happened?" Um, she was visiting with Sorilea or something, so she has just heard about it. We found out that of the Aes Sedai who were guarding Semirhage, the other two didn't but it doesn't really matter. If [laughs] they had all died it would have been like, "Okay, whatever."

SALLY: And it actually, it really bothers me because they're like, "The other two were only almost killed, because if they would have died their Warders would have known immediately."

EMILY: But the other one didn't have a Warder, so she just died.

SALLY: She just died. And I'm like, "Okay, so you care about *that* logistical point, but you're not going to explain to me how we got the Bands of Domination?"

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: What the fuck? [laughing] Just really pissed me off.

EMILY: And also, like, what a stupid way to be like, “And they’re the villains, because they went out of their way to kill this one woman, even though it would have just apparently been just as easy to [laughs] to put her under this trance.”

SALLY: To not kill her.

EMILY: Whatever. They get there, basically the first thing that happens – Cadsuane is like, “What the fuck happened?” And basically, the first thing that happens is like, “Hey, Narishma, this is balefire. Use it on the Forsaken if you need to.” And Cadsuane is like, “Balefire is evil! I’ve told you a million times, you insolent wretch.” Or whatever the fuck. And Rand’s like, “First of all, fuck you. Second of all, it’s still what you gotta use for the Forsaken. Third of all, fuck you.” [laughs]

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: He’s like, “Hey, Cadsuane. See this thing that was in your office.” And she’s like, “Oh, shit. Well, what do you want me to do? Apologize?” Which is, like, unhinged behavior.

SALLY: Yes, I do want you to apologize.

EMILY: Yeah, that would be nice. I don’t expect you to, like, fix what just happened. I might not even fully blame you for this. I might recognize that Semirhage is a powerful entity and that, you know, maybe I fucked up in giving you this.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Like, there’s a lot of blame to go around. You might not be the main target, but, like, yeah apologies – apologizing is the first thing humans do...to express concern for other humans and to express, you know, recognition that the blame can be shared on a community level.

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: So, yeah, maybe if you were a human and not some weird alien construct of an old woman from Robert Jordan’s brain, that’s what you would do. But whatever. Anyway, Rand’s like, “So, Cadsuane, despite the fact that, of all the people I shouldn’t be trusting here, probably the other Aes Sedai who swore en masse to me alongside Elza should probably be number one on my list. You’re actually number one on my list, so if I see you again, I will kill you.”

SALLY: And Cadsuane has the funniest response to this, which is not like, “Hey, what the fuck?” She’s like, “Mmm. No. You don’t kill women.”

EMILY: She's like, "Have you noticed, have you noticed, though? I'm a woman, so I have what is not plot armor, but is basically plot armor where you're concerned." And Rand's like, "Yeah, I'm over that." And Cadsuane's like, "Oh, well. Rats."

SALLY: He does, literally while Semirhage is trying to torture both him and men, Lews Therin is like, "Oh my god, kill her!" And Rand's like, "I don't kill women."

EMILY: laughs] And I'm like, "Oh. Now you do. It's just fine."

SALLY: Okay, whatever.

EMILY: It's also so annoying that Rand getting over his I – his killing women thing is framed as this absolutely cataclysmic sign of his mental and emotional decline, rather than, like, woohoo! Finally!

SALLY: Yeah, sometimes it's a win for feminism.

EMILY: Yeah [laughs].

SALLY: [laughs] Somehow, instead of being an "Oh, shit!" moment, this is a win for feminism.

EMILY: Feminist victory! Man who almost killed his girlfriend and then didn't check up on her, now feels confident about killing women.

SALLY: Yay!

EMILY: Woohoo!

SALLY: Call Oprah!

EMILY: Yeah. Wow, I'd love to see what Oprah did with this situation [laughs].

SALLY: Yeah, so he's like, "If I ever fucking see you again, I'll kill. So, leave."

EMILY: And it's so tragic, because there's a very obvious loophole put into this instruction to Cadsuane, which is he's like, "If I see your face." And it's, like, okay, so Cadsuane can just hide her face and still maybe get around that.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Depending on the mood Rand is in. But, like, I wish, god I wish this had just been like Cadsuane [laughs] being like, "Okay, goodbye!" [laughing] And she just leaves.

SALLY: And she just wasn't in the story anymore.

EMILY: She just wasn't – she was like, "Well, I fucked up big time."

SALLY: That would be so good. Or even better, Rand did kill her.

EMILY: Yeah. Rand just executed Cadsuane. I also think that would have been an interesting way to shorten the emotional plot here.

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: You know? We obviously don't agree with Rand's whole shit about killing women, but deliberately killing Cadsuane, who is his ally –

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: As a form of, like, justice in his warped sense of it would be a far more interesting way to express, like, well now he really needs to go on an enlightenment journey, rather than just being like and now Rand's just gonna keep doing sort of the same things he's doing.

SALLY: Yeah, it would be good plot – it would be good story shorthand for a lot of things, and it would get rid of the worst character.

EMILY: Yeah, and it would get rid of Cadsuane, which is the *crucial* point that I –

SALLY: Yeah, which is really what we need to happen.

EMILY: So important. I want her gone so badly.

SALLY: [sighs]

EMILY: I want her gone so badly. Tragic.

SALLY: It would have been really iconic.

EMILY: I know. And if everyone was like, "Let's all watch Cadsuane –" [laughs]

SALLY: Everyone was like, "Ooh!"

EMILY: Like, remember when that one Aiel guy was like, "Rand, I did a murder and therefore I have to be hanged." And Rand was like, "Okay, see you later."

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: I think that would have been cool.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Except Cadsuane has no honor [whispers] unlike the Aiel.

SALLY: You're right. Unlike the Aiel. Um.

EMILY: So, guys.

SALLY: So, guys. I also like, I have a point against Brandon Sanderson's logistical, um, emphases for the not killing those two Aes Sedai, but I do appreciate him bringing back the fact that Verin put a bunch of compulsion on these women, because I had totally forgotten that.

EMILY: [laughs]

SALLY: [laughing] Because it had not been mentioned in a really long time.

EMILY: Fair enough, fair enough.

SALLY: So, when she was like, "Compulsion." I was like, "What the fuck? Oh. It was the lobotomy."

EMILY: Um [pages turning], so that's where we leave all our beloved [laughs] characters.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Um, they are going to, um, Rand's plan will next take them to the capital city of Arad Doman, Bandar Eban, so, um, the Arad Doman plot that's been threatening to happen for 23 chapters will finally get going in the latter half of this book.

SALLY: Oh, the plot to kidnap all the national leaders?

EMILY: Sort of.

SALLY: And put them in a room and force them to make a decision.

EMILY: Yeah, world's best decision ever. We're about halfway through the book. The downhill slope continues somehow, past the point of no return, because the next chapter is a good old long Gawyn one. I know. Grim. Then we'll get a very brief, um, Sheriam and Egg point of view, and, depending on how I personally am feeling, we might read another one, because we just have – on our reading schedule it's these next two and then we have a series of three that's Aviendha and two Mats. And I might rather just do both Mats.

SALLY: Hmm.

EMILY: There's not a lot plot wise to talk about there, but if we need, um, more time to mourn, then that will be the venue. So, yeeeeaaaah! Guys! Isn't it so fun to talk to us these days?
[laughs]

SALLY: We should write a eulogy for Mat.

EMILY: We should write a eulogy for Mat. One of these days, maybe, this book will be funnier. Nice again. But I don't know you guys. We might just be down here in the depths until the Tower of Ghenjei.

SALLY: Well, at least Ed's happy.

EMILY: But at least Ed's happy or incredibly angry. It's sort of impossible to tell with him. He's purrs.

SALLY: He's purring, but he's also glaring at us.

EMILY: Yeah, he purrs [purring in the background] but he looks at you like, "I want to eat your flesh."

SALLY: [vampire voice] I want to eat your flesh.

EMILY: [vampire voice] I want to such your blood.

SALLY: So, I mean [purring], upside. Narishma has balefire now and I think he should get every weapon plausible.

EMILY: Narishma's also the only person who asks Min how she's doing, so.

SALLY: Yeah. You're so right!

EMILY: Narishma, that's my husband.

SALLY: Maybe, Min, you should just date Narishma instead.

EMILY: Yeah, imagine if Min left Rand for Narishma. That would be the funniest possible thing that could happen.

SALLY: Yeah, and then you're just, like, the guy who stole the Dragon Rebwo – Reborn's girlfriend.

EMILY: [laughs]

SALLY: And everyone's like, "I mean, Rand, look at him. You let a man that hot around your girlfriend."

EMILY: Yeah. And also, you were a total dick to your girlfriend. Yeah.

SALLY: [laughs] I don't know. Maybe you shouldn't have been a dick to your girlfriend.

EMILY: Maybe you should have made better decisions.

SALLY: Oh, Narishma, my beloved. Rand is also like, “I don’t even know if I can trust Narishma, like, what if he’s loyal to his friends?”

EMILY: I’m like, “Okay. Yeah.”

SALLY: Most people are! I don’t –

EMILY: Yeah, I don’t know how to unpack that for you, Rand.

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: Just because you have no loyalty whatsoever for Mat and Perrin.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Doesn’t mean other people aren’t the same.

SALLY: So, we did it. Another two chapters down the hatch.

EMILY: We did it. Thanks for joining us. Thanks for listening. Thanks to Glynna MacKenzie for our theme song. Thanks to our Patrons on Patreon and our followers on social media. Um.

SALLY: Yeah, thanks so much you guys!

EMILY: Do you have anything to add?

SALLY: No!

EMILY: Okay, do you have a sign off?

SALLY: I’m trying – you guys, okay. Um, when we were in Istanbul, Emily’s family was, like, some of them were playing a card game. Me and Emily’s sister Sarah were reading on the couch and Emily was the only one out of the room. And she comes in very seriously and is like, “Anne, I need you to come with me.”

EMILY: First, Sarah had said, “Someone come look at this.”

SALLY: Oh [laughs].

EMILY: So, I’d gone to look. And then I came back and said, “Anne, come look.” Sarah and I had decided, we were like, “We’re going to send everyone in one by one to look at this.” So, yeah [laughs].

SALLY: And I was like, “Oh my god.” Emily, of course, has a very deadpan, so I was like, “Oh my god. Something’s wrong.” And then she comes back – and Anne, like, wasn’t laughing or anything.

EMILY: [laughing] We’re all pretty good with a poker face.

SALLY: And she was like, “Adam, I need you to come here.” [laughing] And I was seriously like what the fuck is going on? And finally she pulls me back there to show me [laughing hard], like, loose in the, like not even in a bag, just, like, lose in the bottom of this wardrobe in our Airbnb in Istanbul was, like, two pounds of [laughing] Werther’s caramels.

EMILY: Let me be clear. These were not left by the Airbnb host. These were my dad’s Werther’s [laughing] that he brought with him.

SALLY: I have never –

EMILY: And had just sort of [laughing] piled there. Like an offering.

SALLY: [laughs] I have never seen this many Werther’s caramels in my entire life, like, collectively.

EMILY: And then when we came back and were like, “Dad, that’s an inhuman amount of Werther’s.” He was like, “I don’t know if it’s gonna be enough.”

SALLY: [laughing]

EMILY: And he winnowed them down quite a bit. I would occasionally go check on his pile.

SALLY: [laughing] What?

EMILY: He had a different one in Greece and he, yeah. That man eats so many Werther’s.

SALLY: It was so funny to me. And I, like, he’s just like really good at hiding it. Because I never noticed that he was eating one or had one in his mouth.

EMILY: Yeah, he’s never like [sucking noises]. Slurping on his Werther’s. He just somehow knocks them back twelve at a time or something.

SALLY: You guys. It was so many.

EMILY: He’s so haunting.

SALLY: It was so funny.

EMILY: I hope [laughing] someone took a picture.

SALLY: I think I might have. It was a big pile. I'm not joking, you guys. I don't – two pounds might not even be a high enough estimate.

EMILY: Yeah, he gets them in bulk. Okay, everyone.

SALLY: And then he bought more while we were there.

EMILY: Oh, yeah, he was so excited that he found Werther's in Greece.

SALLY: In the bus station.

EMILY: Have a good week everyone!

SALLY: Bye! Oh, happy Pride by the way, I guess.

EMILY: Oh yeah.