



Episode 259: He Doesn't Even Climb the Mountain

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SALLY: Got reflexes like a cat.

EMILY: Yeah, Sally just showed Spiderman-like reflexes, because we're, um, recording in a barren wasteland.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: [laughs].

SALLY: Yeah. Yeah. We are moving, which may have mentioned on the podcast before, but we are kind of in thick of it and everything is

leaving our house [laughing] so.

EMILY: Yeah, all empty bookshelves. This room is basically the couch, Sally's office, which is still like a corner.

SALLY: A little desk.

EMILY: And the microphone [laughs] which will be put away shortly after our recording.

SALLY: After this, we will send the microphone off with *The Gathering Storm*.

EMILY: Yeah, we get to wave farewell to both of them. Farewell forever to *The Gathering Storm*.

SALLY: Yeah, *thank* god.

EMILY: Not farewell forever to ye olde microphone, which is coming with us for the last two books of *Wheely Time*.

SALLY: The last two books. We will have recorded EHR in four different locations. New York City [pitching her voice like Laszlo from *What We Do in the Shadows*] New York City!

EMILY: [doing the same thing] New York City! [laughs]

SALLY: [laughs] Our old place, this place, and our new place. And –

EMILY: And your bedroom.

SALLY: And my bedroom at my mom's house. So five places.

EMILY: Yeah, at that, like, transition period between [like Laszlo] New York City and –

SALLY: The old.

EMILY: Our old place.

SALLY: The old place.

EMILY: Our old, old place now. This is about to be our old place.

SALLY: Our old, old – I can't believe in that weird little apartment during the first six months of the pandemic and didn't murder each other. So.

EMILY: Well. The new place has no dining table space.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And no separate office.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: So recording is going to be interesting, because we're either gonna do it on the sofa or in one of our closets [laughs].

SALLY: Yeah! Maybe we might have some really quality sound.

EMILY: If next time you hear us we have just the most crisp audio quality, then it's because we're in a closet.

SALLY: We're in a closet, baby!

EMILY: Obligatory jokes welcome.

SALLY: Yeah hehehehehe.

EMILY: Har har har.

SALLY: Um, yeah. So, moving is exhausting. I think it's the worst thing that humans do. You put everything you own in a box and you move it to a new place. And then you take everything you own out of a box.

EMILY: I like the taking out of a box part.

SALLY: Yeah, I like the nesting part a lot. Like, I've been slowly hanging up close in my new closet and that's been really comforting and, like, thinking about, like, "Oh, I need to buy a new shower curtain and I can pick a new color palette for my bathroom." And, like, I like those things.

EMILY: We're gonna go ape in target with Becky.

SALLY: [gasps] Rebecca!

EMILY: We've got to find a time to do it with her, because tragically she can't go on a Sunday, because she's religious [laughs].

SALLY: Well, my whole next week is open basically, in the evening. So.

EMILY: Yeah, that's true.

SALLY: Once we're done with the garage sale.

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: Garage sales are also another terrible thing that humans do.

EMILY: We're just doing a lot of terrible things. This podcast is gonna be us complaining, because it's better than us taking about *The Gathering Storm*.

SALLY: Well, *The Gathering Storm* is one of the terrible things [laughing] we are doing.

EMILY: [laughs] Yeah, that's true. I'm really happy to have it off my plate.

SALLY: Yeah, and then we can put this copy away.

EMILY: Although, I was thinking about this last night, we have not, um, like, appreciated and loved *The Gathering Storm* enough for having zero Elayne point of views.

SALLY: Oh! Bestie, you are right!

EMILY: Like.

SALLY: [whispers] Wow.

EMILY: Like, given none of the other point of views were good, but at least none of them were Elayne.

SALLY: But at least they were none of Elayne. And there were also very sparing Perrin points of view, which I also appreciate. Uh, those are two points of view I've been subjected to way too often frequently. Over the last few books.

EMILY: Next book is going to be, um, we're going to ease back quite a bit on Rand stuff.

SALLY: [whispers] God, good.

EMILY: Um, and mostly we'll be getting, we'll be getting some more Elayne unfortunately.

SALLY: Okay.

EMILY: A lot of Perrin.

SALLY: Yikes.

EMILY: Um, I think a moderate amount of Egg.

SALLY: Fine.

EMILY: And also Mat.

SALLY: Also fine.

EMILY: I think those are the four mains in the next one. Well, Mat...

SALLY: Mat is no longer fine, you're right. I take that back. Yikes.

EMILY: [sighs] Mat is no longer fine, but he makes a comeback at the very end of the, um, of *Towers of Midnight* when we get OG Mat back for, um.

SALLY: The Tower of Ghenjei.

EMILY: Robert Jordan flavor. Yeah. At least for a little while. The Egg ones are really bad because it's mostly Gawyn.

SALLY: [groans]

EMILY: Sorry Egg slash Gawyn.

SALLY: [groaning noises]

EMILY: Elayne's of course really bad. So, ironically, the Perrin points of view are some of the –

SALLY: [laughs] Nice.

EMILY: Most, like, soothing in the next book. Because, like, mostly he's just going around in the World of Dreams. And, like, going on trial.

SALLY: That's fun.

EMILY: And Galad's there.

SALLY: Galad is there and he's pretty hot so.

EMILY: And that's, yeah, sort of an upside.

SALLY: It's nice to have hot people around, even when they're doing weird things.

EMILY: Even when they're doing extremely odd behaviors.

SALLY: Just nice.

EMILY: So, that's looking ahead and we're about to look back. But, first, this is Everybody Hates Rand, your friendly neighborhood *Wheel of Time* podcast. I'm Emily Juchau.

SALLY: And I'm Sally Goodger

EMILY: Okay, the last three chapters [laughs]. Two chapters plus an epilogue of *The Gathering Storm*. Quite short. It, we've, we've talked a lot about – in sort of knowing that this was going to end with Rand's quote unquote enlightenment, we've talked a lot about the setup and what's worked and what hasn't.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: We've generally talked about how Rand becoming enlightened is, um, uh, also sort of meant to indicate his own, like, redemption arc. We've talked about how redemption for Rand has not been earned.

SALLY: Mm-hmm. [cat screaming in the background]

EMILY: Um, we've also talked to a certain extent for Rand, in the, like, big religious or spiritual sense has not really been earned. And I guess we'll talk about that a little more in depth.

SALLY: Yeah, now that I at least have the sort of textual evidence to support my claims.

EMILY: Fucking enlightenment.

SALLY: We open in Ebou Dar where Rand is like, "Oh man, the Seanchan are good actually."

EMILY: [laughs]

SALLY: Surprise, surprise! Fascism? Colonialism? Excellent!

EMILY: It's fine. It's fine!

SALLY: Ten out of ten stars.

EMILY: For, like, ninety-five percent of people, it's great.

SALLY: He's like, "Real bummer about, like, mass enslavement of people who can channel, but like everyone's *super* happy and well fed."

EMILY: Again, cannot emphasize enough that there is *no*, in our world, historical accuracy in this. Fascism almost always spirals into – not almost, always spirals into bad things for the mass of the population. It just turns into a very huge, like, wealth disparity.

SALLY: Very huge wealth disparity. A lot of [laughs] – Rand, and I feel like the series in general, is really downplaying what totalitarian, fascist groups, the Nazis of Nazi Germany being the biggest example, do to what they consider minority, um, populations. Uh, in case you guys were not aware, the Holocaust was, like, a massive thing. Like, there were camps – there were a ton of camps, there were a ton of people being put through them. So Rand being like, "Only five percent of the population is suffering" is, again, historically inaccurate, like, that's just not the case.

EMILY: Yeah, and as, like, many, many movies have shown us, even the privileged, quote unquote Aryan members of the German population didn't necessarily have it great, either.

SALLY: Yeah, and that's –

EMILY: Partly because it was war time, but up until that point, there was, like, real bad stuff going on.

SALLY: Yeah, like, the terrible things that were happening in Nazi Germany started a long time before, uh, the war even really began. Uh, a lot of that of course in preparation for the war. There were the concentration camps that were attacking multiple members of society, but it's also, like, in order to support an elite, they have to draw resources from somewhere and that will end up eventually end up looking like the masses, you know...

EMILY: Suffering. Especially because we have not talked enough about how the Seanchan continent is in chaos.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: So, where are the resources coming from? It's not like Ebou Dar is getting more and more, um, uh, shipments of food from the Seanchan continent. It's not like there's any sort of help coming from there. Ebou Dar has what it had before the Seanchan invasion, which, um, we hadn't started to deal with the food shortages that are happening in Arad Doman, but food shortages are happening everywhere in this continent, except to Perrin and Mat, of course, because they're magic boys.

SALLY: [sing song] Magic boys.

EMILY: Um [sighs]. So, like, this is not an accurate portrayal and it's a very oddly romanticized portrayal of totalitarian government. I would also say it's, like, an Orientalist portrayal of government.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Because the way the Seanchan have been othered, we've talked about this before, is highly Orientalist. Mostly in their, like, aesthetic values.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: But there seems to be a like, "Well, maybe totalitarian governments have never worked in Western countries, but in Eastern countries, we white people know less about that so we can just assume that they worked great."

SALLY: Yeah, the Japanese Empire was *so* awesome.

EMILY: Awesome! For the Japanese. They loved it [laughs].

SALLY: They *loved* it! Oh, man. They were doing nothing but good things everywhere they went. According to Robert Jordan and Brandon Sanderson's portrayal of Eastern empires.

EMILY: So, it's so weird. Borderline irresponsible.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And just the only thing, the only function that it is serving narratively is to create this sort of, like, moral quagmire for Rand to get stuck in about whether the Seanchan are quote unquote villains or not.

SALLY: Yeah, it's so silly. Like, we – I, in particular, about how, again, borderline irresponsible it is to present [swallows] totalitarian, fascist, authoritarian, colonialist, whatever you want to call the Seanchan. They're, like, all of the above. Um, but what it's really doing in this chapter is that Rands shows up with the intention to just wipe Ebou Dar off the map. Like, he is going to just use the Choedan Kal to just completely level the city, apparently.

EMILY: Mm-hmm.

SALLY: And then he gets there and is like, "Wow, everyone, *even* the Tinkers, who everyone hates [laughs]." He's like, "They're even nice to the Tinkers, that's crazy!"

EMILY: He's like, "They love the Tinkers. They only hate this one minority group. No one else has any problems at all. Everyone's treated so well." And it's, like, I can't emphasize this enough, there are so many moral problems with Rand wanting to eradicate Ebou Dar.

SALLY: Yeah! Of course.

EMILY: That the Seanchan Empire might be better than you would think.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Isn't one of them!

SALLY: Yeah, it's wild to show up and Rand, instead of being like –

EMILY: This is an invaded country, most of the population is still just native Ebou Dari.

SALLY: Civilians, yeah.

EMILY: Who had no choice but to assimilate to Seanchan culture. Like, that's a huge problem. Instead of encountering the Tinkers – like, if we just take that at face value and don't assume that the Tinkers are next in line for the death camps, which I think is far to assume.

SALLY: Yeah, which is what I was [laughs] going to say. Like, it starts at one place and then it spirals.

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: So Rand being like, "Only a few people." Is not valid!

EMILY: So, assuming the Tinkers aren't next in line, Rand's like, instead of being like, "Wow, how nice that they finally get to settle down." Rand's not like, "Maybe I should have been helping the Tinkers this entire time."

SALLY: Yeah! Yeah.

EMILY: I've had the power all along.

SALLY: Yeah. To make them feel safe. It's – it's so ridiculous. [laughs] So, Rand shows up and is like, "I don't think I should nuke these people, because the Seanchan are actually doing a pretty good job, which is wild to me. I thought they were super bad. But, like, they're doing a better job than me."

EMILY: And I'm like, okay. Again, just taking everything at face value, Rand. It's not hard to do a better job than you.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: You haven't been doing great. On a personal level and also on, like, a governmental level.



SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: We also, maybe this is just because the narrative has not focused on this, but we never see, almost never see you doing important government work.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Making any efforts at reforms. The most we've seen for you consciously trying to make positive changes in countries and governments is to, like, institute these schools.

SALLY: Uh-huh.

EMILY: Otherwise, you have just been sort of sticking as much as possible to the status quo.

SALLY: Yeah. So, it is –

EMILY: He also mentions tutors for the first time in this section. He's like, "I've learned about government from my tutors." And I'm like, "You're what?"

SALLY: What tutors?

EMILY: Moiraine?

SALLY: Girl.

EMILY: Twelve books ago.

SALLY: Girl, who are you talking about?

EMILY: Yeah, what – I don't believe – AGH.

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: If things are happening off screen.

SALLY: [laughing] Brandon's trying to be like, "Rand has more knowledge than he should. Retcon, retcon, retcon." [laughs]

EMILY: Brandon's like, "It is so wild that this twenty-two-year-old is just in charge of six nations [laughs]. I have to give him tutors."

SALLY: He has tutors by the way.

EMILY: I'm like, "Who are the tutors?"

SALLY: Who are they? Asmodean? That doesn't count.

EMILY: No!

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: Those – and again the last time we saw Rand being tutored was in Book 5.

SALLY: Yeah. So, like with many things that are happening with Rand, in this book in this particular, the setup is just...bonkers. Like, the idea that instead of him being like, "Perhaps there is value, inherent value in human life, regardless of where it is found. Perhaps I should not be committing mass murder because it is convenient." It is, like, the Seanchan – I'm not showing up and – he's, like, not seeing people being beheaded in the streets. Or he's not witnessing death camps or anything like that. And to him that's just, like, mind boggling. And it's just, like, the most confusing framing of this situation. And it was, it was ridiculous to read.

EMILY: Rand is also, he goes to great lengths to tell us, is in a non-fancy cloak.

SALLY: Oh yeah.

EMILY: Or coat, excuse me. And he has, like, a walking stick, to blend into the crowd quote unquote. He's like, "Everyone will notice me because I'm six-foot-five and ginger, but I'll just try to alleviate that by not wearing silk clothes."

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: He also spent the night with the Tinkers, which is, like, wild. But anyway, the point of him being in an old coat and with the walking stick is meant to play into one or two of Min's viewings about Rand being disguised as a beggar type thing. Brandon is very clearly trying to just get that under the wire. It's also playing into, like, archetypes, again, of these sort of religious messiah figures, where they are coming from the lowest before the ascend to the highest.

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: We know the Buddha infamously was raised in great luxury but chose to abandon it all to sort of experience the worst parts of the world, suffering and pain.

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: Jesus came from nothing. Mohammed, um, I actually think Mohammed was, like, a merchant. [laughs] Mohammed was middle class at most [laughs].

SALLY: [laughs] Yeah, a middle-class king for sure [laughs].

EMILY: [laughs] So, rich bitches aren't out here leading religious movements, at least in ancient times.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Now we have Scientology, so. Um.

SALLY: [slowly blowing out air]

EMILY: [laughs]

SALLY: We sure do. Yikes!

EMILY: Um, so that's just, like, archetypal. There's sort of, like, biblical language about, like, strangers. I was a stranger and you let me in. Blah, blah, blah, blah. Just people being – messiah figures being disguised as strangers or poor people. So, that's what's going on with the whole, "I'm not wearing a fancy coat anymore." Although, from a narrative, this series' standpoint, I guess it is also meant to push us back to, like, here we're physically now near to – nearer to Book 1 and 2 Rand, before he started wearing fancy coats because he was forced to.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: So, that's sort of an attempt to set the stage for him emotionally to regress to that point. I don't want to call it regress because it is technically progress [laughs].

SALLY: Yeah, for sure. For sure.

EMILY: But to cycle back through that. Um, Rand, yeah, is Ebou Dar and is like, "This sucks! I can't just nuke these people [laughing] scot-free and feel super good about it." [laughs]

SALLY: Yeah, he gets, like, nauseous. He tries to open the Choedan Kal or whatever and he's like, "Oh man! I feel sick!"

EMILY: And it's hard because he doesn't even say, "I'm not gonna do this."

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Just definitively. He's just, like, "Ehh, I don't feel good about this! But!" And tries to Channel. He gets very, very ill. Like, throws up in the street and falls over. Everyone's like, "Uh, buddy. You okay?" And he just kind of, like, panics and Travels away. So, again, not really like a definitive moral stance that he's taking there. Just sort of in his sort of mentally unwell era.

SALLY: Yeah, Rand is really stumbling his way to Enlightenment.

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: Really failing upwards.

EMILY: [laughs] He then Travels, I mean, like, he skims. He opens his gateway on the peak of Dragonmount, you know, the infamous mountain.

SALLY: Sure.

EMILY: Where Lews Therin exploded [laughs].

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: Sorry.

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: Once –

SALLY: Do you think people try to climb Dragonmount like they climb Mount Everest?

EMILY: [high pitched] I was thinking about that when he was like, “The air’s thinner up here.” I was like, “I wonder if there are idiots who are like – [laughing].

SALLY: I’m gonna climb it.

EMILY: I’m gonna climb it because I’m stupid. That would be extremely funny, if Rand’s enlightenment was interrupted by someone –

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: Wheezing their way up the mountain, followed by a train of Sherpas.

SALLY: [laughing] Yeah, some, like, rich asshole. Being like, “Oh, hey, dude.”

EMILY: Check out this thing I’ve achieved. I’m so great!

SALLY: [laughs] Stupid.

EMILY: Again, there’s an archetype of religious figures going to the tops of mountains. Hilariously, they usually climb those mountains.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Rand has sort of [laughs] skipped that step. So, our many complaints about people not Traveling enough, don’t apply here!

SALLY: Don’t apply here when you have to earn something.

EMILY: Yeah, if you're going to, like, you know, sort of, set up all of these tropes and archetypes, then you kind of have to, like, lean into that a little bit.

SALLY: Yeah, like, they're [sighs].

EMILY: You do have very good reasons for Rand not to be channeling right now.

SALLY: Yeah! He doesn't feel good.

EMILY: Yeah, he's so – it's kind of a cop out, I think, to have them be like, "Embracing the source is what makes him sick" and not just, like, channeling afterward, because, I don't know, that would be more interesting.

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: Personally. If he was like, "Ooh, channeling sucks now." But whatever. Rand shortcuts to the top of Dragonmount. He's like, "Here's where we die." [laughs]

SALLY: It is truly, like, the most...

EMILY: And he sits down. Period. To think. Period.

SALLY: Yeah. It's a little dramatic. Uhhh.

EMILY: Rand goes from sixty to zero real fast here.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: The transition from Rand wanting to nuke an entire city slash country to being like, "I just really have to think this through" is extremely weird.

SALLY: Yeah. Yeah!

EMILY: There's, like, okay when you – classically, when you go to the top of a mountain to meditate, to become closer to nature, to the divine, to oneself, it is out of a, um, sort of innate desire to enter the wild and to get away from other people. To find, like, solitude. We'll talk about this a lot more in our upcoming Patreon –

SALLY: Yeah, we will, baby!

EMILY: Episode where we talk about Becky Chambers' *Monk and Robot* series. But that's for another time. The point is that Rand getting away from people is not really a need he has expressed to us.

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: Rand has been really upset about a lot of things, but he hasn't been like, "I'm just surrounded by..." Well, maybe he has a little bit. But he hasn't been like, "I just need to get away from people. I just need to get away from people." So, it's kind of – or even I just need to get away from strange people. I just need to be *alone*, so alone that there is no one around me.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: So, that's kind of coming out of nowhere. Then we get Rand in his little philosophical train of thought where he's just feeling really upset and nihilistic. We've got some, um, mega simplified nihilism going on here. Rand looking to the – into the abyss and the abyss looking back.

SALLY: Sure.

EMILY: Followed by an extremely abrupt turnaround, um, to enlightenment, because for once in his life, or death rather, Lews Therin decides to be helpful.

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: Um, I guess the main thing I want to talk about [laughs] is Ilyena.

SALLY: Oh, girl. This woman cannot catch a fucking break.

EMILY: She's permanent – she's just the most fridged woman that there's ever been.

SALLY: Like, the authors invented entirely new forms of fridging for this poor woman. She like –

EMILY: Everyone sit down right now. Name a single thing about Ilyena besides that she has blonde hair. Do you know anything about her?

SALLY: She died. That's what I know.

EMILY: She – Lews Therin killed her and she has blonde hair.

SALLY: Yeah. Like, it – she might as well –

EMILY: [laughs] Lanfear kept calling her a slut [laughs].

SALLY: [laughs] Yeah, Lanfear had major beef with her.

EMILY: That's it!

SALLY: Blonde.

EMILY: We don't know anything about Ilyena's personality, ambitions, their relationship.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: She's just, like, a cardboard cutout of a dead woman.

SALLY: Truly!

EMILY: This corpse running around in the background.

SALLY: Talk about sexy lamp test.

EMILY: Oh, Christ. Yeah. And so. this whole scene pivoting around Ilyena falls so flat.

SALLY: It's unreal.

EMILY: Because the whole thing is that Rand sort of cycles down into nihilism and he kind of, you know, narrows it all down from "everything in the world sucks, nothing matters, why not just let the Dark One win" to "I'm really upset still because Ilyena's dead" [laughs].

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Because of this trauma that has defined Lews Therin.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And is now defining me because look at all my issues about dead women and blah, blah, blah, blah. And they come back around by being like, "Well, maybe the world is worth living, because Ilyena might live again slash love will always be there. [laughs] We'll always get to fall in love with new sexy women to die." And it's just, like, that doesn't work [claps] because Ilyena is nothing. She's just a name. There is no emotional resonance to this at all.

SALLY: Yeah, um, I agree. I mean, it was so heinous. Like, it's supposed to be this, like, crescendo of a scene when Rand is like, "Why even bother to be alive?" and Lews Therin in the background is like [with mock feeling], "Maybe...if we got reincarnated...Ilyena will get reincarnated." And then Rand is like, "Oh my god! Every time we're reborn, we have a chance to love again." And, like, the scene might have worked a little better if it was, like, love in a more sort of, like, humanity-based context. Like, I was thinking about this. This scene – and maybe this is just, like, these are the constant literary messiahs – literary, um, meaning of course these are religious figures that function in real world religions, but also when you're talking about archetypes and stuff, religious figures and religious texts get kind of slotted into the literary canon. So, that's what I mean by literary figures. Not trying to discredit either the Buddha or Jesus. When you're talking about the literary archetypes of these messiahs, like, um, Buddha's enlightenment comes a lot from a more Eastern spiritual sense about sort of rising above worldly concerns. It is really about, um, transcending things like romantic love and sexual attraction. So, that's...interesting, we're talking about sort of rising above. Whereas, like, you know, Jesus's

sort of whole thing, despite what conservative religious people will tell you, is about loving people and being there for one another and caring for each other. So.

EMILY: Jesus has, like, a very similar moment to the Buddha where he is quote “tempted by the devil” after fasting in the wilderness and he’s tempted by things like power and wealth and, you know, the Bible really tones this down, but sex is maybe on the table there, too.

SALLY: Sure! Of course.

EMILY: And Jesus similarly rejects those things as, like, earthly pleasures that are not as important as spiritual pleasures, but, yeah, for sure. Jesus is like, “I am doing this because I’m on a mission and the mission is saving people.”

SALLY: Yeah! That mission is – yeah, that’s a, that’s a very good point. I’m not trying to say that Jesus was all for, like, earthly, earthly pleasures.

EMILY: Jesus fucked!

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: [laughs]

SALLY: You know what? If he did, good for him?

EMILY: Yeah. Watch *The Da Vinci Code* [laughs].

SALLY: [laughing] Watch *The Da Vinci Code*, starring Tom Hanks.

EMILY: [laughing] Stupid.

SALLY: [laughs] Better than this scene! [laughs]

EMILY: Do yourself a favor, don’t read *The Gathering Storm*, just go watch *The Da Vinci Code*, or better yet, just the scene where it’s Paul Bettany whipping himself, and you’ll pretty much get the emotional vibes of this entire book.

SALLY: Yeah. Um, so we’re working with – they’re not, um, they’re not, like, inherently different in terms of, like, putting your spirit – like the Buddha’s enlightenment and Jesus’ um, uh, crucifixion, ascent to godhood, are not inherently, like, different in, like, a religious sense, but there are some different things going on there. Because, uh, the Western religions and Eastern religions are very differently. Like, Buddha is focused on how do we, um, you know, how do people individually rise above, whereas, like, again, Christianity is, again, all about saving the flock. You know the flock and its shepherd.

EMILY: Yeah.



SALLY: And it feels like we're really trying to, like, smash cut these two things together in a way that doesn't – instead of it being that sort of inherent spiritual core about, um, there being a sort of higher purpose to things, which is what both of those are really getting at. Like, it's not just what happens here in your life on earth, it's about what happens afterwards, in a, in a higher spiritual sense. Instead of getting to that core, it's, like, it's both this sort of reincarnation cycle thing we see going on in Eastern religions about, like, there's a purpose to each of your lives and also this sort of, like, Christian – as someone who's much more of a secular Christian, this is my understanding of it, anyway. When you get to the New Testament and Jesus, there is this sort of emphasis on love for humanity and, like, smash cutting those together. And I feel like maybe they would make sense if it was that – if it was [laughs] not distilled into romantic love, which is antithetical to both of the enlightenments that we are trying to...smash into this one scene. Like, it's so weird to me that instead of Rand being like, "I have this great purpose to help people and to do my best." It's like, "My wife!" I don't know. That's what I was thinking about. I don't know if any of that made sense.

EMILY: No, I agree completely. Like, I think, if we were going to render this scene as sort of, like, a touching montage, you know. I was – [laughs] so, we watched, um, *The Hunger Games* recently.

SALLY: [laughs] Sure.

EMILY: This is going somewhere, I promise.

SALLY: No, go for it.

EMILY: And at the very end of *The Hunger Games*, Katniss is, like, talking to her infant child or whatever and gives this little monologue about how, um, life sucks but [laughs] of course there are moments that are worth it all. And I was sitting there thinking, like, waiting for there to be, like, a montage of all of the really sweet positive things that have happened to her throughout the movies. And I was thinking, "Oh, that would get me so good right now."

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Like I would, I would cry.

SALLY: Ball like a baby.

EMILY: Yeah. I love a montage [laughs] that's got all these touching moments. And so I was thinking – obviously *The Hunger Games* fails to do that. And also this book fails to do that, because, um, like, I don't literally need a montage, but when I think about the montage that would have been in this scene, I'm thinking of Rand and his three girlfriends.

SALLY: Mm.

EMILY: And, as we have talked about with Rand's romances in the past, they're very flimsy.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: So, if I were to do a smashcut of all Rand's 'special moments' with his girlfriends, it would be really depressing and really disheartening.

SALLY: Yeah!

EMILY: It would be like one sex scene with Elayne.

SALLY: One sex scene with Aviendha.

EMILY: One sex scene with Aviendha where they were freezing to death in an igloo and it was very...bad.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: A bunch of sex scenes with Min. Almost choking Min to death. Min avoiding you.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Not that every relationship has to be, like, totally positive for it to make it into a montage, but what I'm saying is, these relationships, if they are meant to be, like, the core of Rand's sort of...

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Emotional motivation, then they're not pulling their weight. A montage where Rand just thought more generally about good things that he has done, good things that he has experienced. People that he has loved in the past even if he has failed them now. Like, even if we got flashbacks to...him and Mat on the road way back in Book 1. Him and Perrin razzing Mat also way back in Book 1. These sweet moments with Egg early on in their relationship. Like, if we had those things coming back into play, then it would be much more powerful.

SALLY: Yeah, exactly. His beautiful friendship with Nynaeve.

EMILY: Yeah!

SALLY: His complicated relationship with Moiraine.

EMILY: Tam.

SALLY: Tam! You know, the other people in the village who take care of him. Um.

EMILY: These schools that he's done.

SALLY: Yeah!

EMILY: Like, the actually good things that he has – like, the sort of interesting and incredible moments he's had with the Aiel.

SALLY: Yeah!

EMILY: You know? There are like – you could conceivably make a really beautiful, heart-touching montage of Rand's experiences and his life for the last fourteen books. But, instead, we're relying on the emotional core of, like, romance between a man and three women [laughs].

SALLY: Stupid.

EMILY: Or a man and a woman in Lews Therin and Ilyena's place.

SALLY: And I feel like this is something that media does so frequently. Like, this is in part why fridging is such a big problem in, um, popular media. Is that, like, it seems that...the people who hold power. White men, predominately.

EMILY: Mostly, yeah.

SALLY: White cishet men cannot fathom a motivation for being alive other than romantic love for a woman.

EMILY: Mm-hmm.

SALLY: Usually more sexual desire for a woman. Like, I think calling it romantic love is often putting the most positive spin on it, because, like Ilyena, most women who get fridged, or even, like, exist in the background as the wife you left at home for war, don't have a personality beyond being hot.

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: So, it is most often this sexual desire and possessiveness of a woman, like, I want to get back to a particular woman who I basically own, that motivates people. And it's so disgusting. And, again, back to my original point, this is why fridging is such a problem, because, like, what more could motivate a man than the death of the woman that he wants to fuck? You know? If that's the only reason for being alive. What more could twist your character arc than losing that? And it's just, like, so heinous and disgusting, like, I don't even – I can't even articulate why it's so heinous because, like, it's just so bad. Like, there are so many other reasons and so many other things that make life worth living and make life so happy and positive. So, another part of why this fell so flat for me is that it did feel very much like a white man's rendering of purpose. Like, this idea...of, like, life being really fucking hard and brutal and awful all the time, and how do we find the motivation for living, is something that any single person with any type of marginalized identity has to grapple with every single day. Like, how do I keep going when the police in America are killing Black and brown people at an unbelievable rate? When trans and queer people are being targeted, like, when I'm in danger going out in public with my partner,

you know? Like, people are grappling with this all the time. In extreme poverty, with housing instability, in literal war zones. Like, this seems like such a privileged version of philosophy and enlightenment.

EMILY: Yeah, to just reduce that to just, “Well, everything’s okay and you can deal with all that if you remember that love exists.”

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Feels so fucking condescending.

SALLY: Yeah! Exactly.

EMILY: Especially coming from someone like Rand, who has a lot of power and privilege and the capacity to change things in the world.

SALLY: Yeah, like every other person in one of the war torn countries that you have fucking razed to the ground has had to figure out how to hold on to slices of hope and the people that they love and the things that they enjoy and the small moments of relief. And you get to have this huge fucking...crescendo, yelling at the sky, at the very top of the word, because your feelings are the most important. Like, he’s literally – his feelings are elevated to the very tip top of this planet, as far as we know. And it’s just, like, yeah, duh? Every single other person knows this.

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: And, like, not even knows this because...your rendering of it as romantic sexual desire is so ridiculous. Like [laughs] every other person knows that being in community with other people makes life bearable, you know? Like, it’s so stupid and privileged to me.

EMILY: Yeah. It’s condescending. It’s privileged. Um, it is certainly not earned.

SALLY: [laughs] Yeah, that’s the other thing.

EMILY: Rand makes this entire journey from extreme nihilism to abundant love...in, um, his own head.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: No external factors going on there. We don’t even have a montage to at least tell us what is going on – what he’s remembering, what he’s thinking about. It is just a conversation between him and Lews Therin, which, famously, doesn’t usually work out well.

SALLY: Yeah, like, it really is not earned. Even if he had just climbed the stupid fucking mountain, I would not have so much beef with it. Like, if he’s moving and doing this hard physical labor and thinking, like, at least that was something. But he literally is just like – and it’s not even – at the end of the book it’s like, “Lews Therin is gone because we were never two

people at all,” or whatever. Like, it’s not even Rand who comes to this conclusion, it’s the man who lives in his head.

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: You know?

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: So, sorry that is all really negative. I know there are a lot of people who have positive feelings about this scene, and of course you are entitled to them. Obviously. Um, it just really fell flat for me and felt, um, really frustrating and kind of silly. So.

EMILY: Yeah, we’ll talk about it more in *Towers of Midnight*, in the occasional Rand scene. There is more in terms of, like, philosophy and we’ll get sort of, like, that touching montage of Rand thinking about more people that just women he’s fucked, but, like, actual people who are meaningful to him. We’ll get more of that in *A Memory of Light*, so there is...um still a – a – it’s still not entirely satisfying, I will argue when we get there, but it does do more. But we will talk more about it in *Towers of Midnight* in terms of, like, Rand is now making an about face in personality as well. In *Towers of Midnight*, he’s going to very much be this enlightened demigod figure and, um, that, you know, character turn hinges on this scene not the scenes in *A Memory of Light*. So.

SALLY: Sure, sure, sure. Um, and it –

EMILY: That’s what makes it worth talking discussing, I guess.

SALLY: Yeah, absolutely. I mean, it’s an important scene and at the bare minimum I will say it is, like, a huge relief to read it. It’s just like a –

EMILY: Woof.

SALLY: Rand is not going to commit atrocities upon the people.

EMILY: Yeah, Rand destroys the Choedan Kal.

SALLY: Yay.

EMILY: Yay. He no longer has –

SALLY: I threw my nukes into the volcano.

EMILY: Yeah, he no longer has the power to nuke anyone he wants, unless he uses Callandor with two women, I guess.

SALLY: Um, so. Again, sorry to get so negative, but those – that’s how I feel.

EMILY: Yeah, those are my real feelings. The epilogue is Egg in her office and, um, being like, “Dang it. Some of the Black Ajah got away.” Actually a lot of the Black Ajah got away.

SALLY: Sixty of them.

EMILY: Like, sixty of them. And I’m like, “How many do you fucking execute?”

SALLY: That’s, like, every woman in the White Tower. Sixty of them.

EMILY: I know. For the love of god.

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: I think we’ve been told there are a thousand Aes Sedai. Assuming that sixty was, like, the smaller number compared to the Black Ajah who got, um, executed. Let’s say there were two hundred Black Ajah, that still means that fully one-fifth of the White Tower.

SALLY: Twenty percent of the White Tower is evil.

EMILY: Such, such a weird percentage. It should have been five percent max.

SALLY: Yeah, like it’s really wild. Or if there is, like, something to be said about the corrosive nature of evil, it’s eating up the White Tower, that should have been more intentional, rather than just being like, “I don’t know! There’s a lot of them!” And now Brandon’s trying to do the math.

EMILY: Brandon’s like, “Hng! Gosh, it sure seems like in Robert’s word document, a lot of women are listed as Black Ajah.”

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: “Ooh, I don’t know man.”

SALLY: You’re doing your best, Brando.

EMILY: Yeah. Um, but Egg is like, “Well, you win some, you lose some [laughs].” And Silviana comes in and is like, “Hey, come check this out.” So she goes and looks through the hole in the big throne room or whatever. And is like, “Wow, there is a light shining down on Dragonmount.” She’s like, “Great, there’s hope.”

SALLY: Yeah, light is, of course, the symbol of enlightenment.

EMILY: And also Rand himself. Just, like, one other quick thing. Like, going back all the way to the beginning of this series when we were complaining about how for a spiritual text there’s, like, absolutely no religion in this series. This is a series all about defeating the Dark One, but we

are given very little of the opposite side. If Rand is the Creator's champion, then where is his relationship with the Creator, or divinity more, you know, obliquely.

SALLY: Broadly, yeah.

EMILY: Um, so...yeah. Like, that's just a failure of the series generally. Like, I think if you're going to have a light versus evil, I think you have to – good versus evil than you have to explore the nature of good as well as the nature of evil.

SALLY: Yeah, and that's such a good point. The nature of good is, I think, a much more interesting conversation than the nature of evil. Um...for many people I think it's harder to define, so that, I think, is interesting to see different texts, um, takes on that. Um, and it is, like, in this scene, Rand is yelling at the sky. You know, local man yells at the sky. So, you assume he's yelling at the Creator, but it's, like, I don't even think he calls the Creator by name or anything. Like, I think he's generally – we're supposed to –

EMILY: Yeah, I don't think there's a single mention of the Creator.

SALLY: Yeah. He's just like, "Why would I do this? Duh, duh, duh, duh, duh." Um, yeah, and it's really strange. And to sort of have Rand function as this demigod figure in the next book, like, what does it mean to be semidivine if we don't know what it means to be...

EMILY: Divine.

SALLY: Divine. Yeah. So, an overall very strange scene. But Rand is happy now.

EMILY: Yeah. Whatever.

SALLY: He worked really hard for it. He only nuked a couple people, so.

EMILY: Yeah. And he felt kind of bad about it for, like, a minute.

SALLY: He felt kind of bad about it and he threw up once. I assume Robert J. Oppenheimer – is that his name? Robert? [laughs] Did I make that up?

EMILY: I don't know! [laughs] Do you think *I* saw *Oppenheimer*?

SALLY: [laughing] I don't know!

EMILY: Do you think I care about the guy who made the atom bomb?

SALLY: The atom bomb. I assume Oppenheimer did the same thing. I assume he felt bad and threw up and then went to the top of a mountain that he didn't climb. So.

EMILY: Okay, everyone. Well, we did it.

SALLY: Yeehaw!

EMILY: Much like Rand we did it.

SALLY: We did it.

EMILY: Actually –

SALLY: We actually climbed this mountain.

EMILY: Yeah, we did more work than Rand, I would say.

SALLY: And what do I get in payment?

EMILY: Nothing!

SALLY: Nothing! I might go to McDonald's.

EMILY: [laughs]

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: So, um, thanks for listening [laughs].

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: Through season...eleven.

SALLY: The other day my friend asked me –

EMILY: Twelve. No, eleven.

SALLY: How the podcast was going. Yeah, I always lose count. The other day, my friend asked me, "How's the podcast going?" And I'm like, "Genuinely a miracle to me that people still listen, [laughing] because we sit down every week and we're like, 'Well, I've got – oh no – I've got a lot of complaints.'" So.

EMILY: [laughs]

SALLY: So, [laughs] thanks for listening. Um, I think we should do, uh, least favorite, most favorite character for the whole book. Which is hard, because there's only like six characters [laughing] in the whole book.

EMILY: I can't think of a most favorite character, genuinely.

SALLY: Um, Ituralde is there a little bit. So, he's on the table.



EMILY: Yeah, Ituralde is good. Ummmmm. Mm probably Nynaeve.

SALLY: Oh yeah.

EMILY: She only had a few points of view, but they tended to be less offensive than...

SALLY: Yeah, that's good.

EMILY: Everyone else's points of view.

SALLY: That's good.

EMILY: Yeah. Lease favorite character. Hard to beat Rand.

SALLY: Yeah, it really is. Rand is really showing his ass this book.

EMILY: But, you know, Mat is also way down there for what Brandon did to him.

SALLY: [sighs] You can say Rand and I'll say Mat.

EMILY: Okay, yeah. Then we'll get them both on the board.

SALLY: Maybe my favorite character would be Silviana for having a spine.

EMILY: Mm.

SALLY: Depsite all the beating, um, at least she did something.

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: So, wow, that was *slim pickings*.

EMILY: Slim pickings indeed. Okay, everyone. Thank you, again, for listening. Thanks to Glynnna Mackenzie for our theme song. Thanks to our Patrons on Patreon and our followers on social media. As usual, between seasons, we're going to be taking a break. Also due to the aforementioned move the transcript will probably be out a little bit later than usual, but just because we're going to be busy. I believe we are taking a two week break.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Until the next episode.

SALLY: Yep.

EMILY: As usual, prior to the first episode's release, you will be able to find the reading schedule for *Towers of Midnight* on our website, but those are the important bits.

SALLY: Yeah. If you want to follow along, check out the reading schedule. We keep it updated every week, though we haven't really been deviating from it much in these last few books, because, uh, Brandon is doing a better job at lumping points of view together. So, ummm, yeah. Thanks so much – really, thanks so much for still listening. I – we'll...we'll get through it together, team.

EMILY: Do you have a sign off?

SALLY: I do. Um, last weekend I had to get gas, which of course cost like nine thousand fucking dollars, but that's not the bit. Uh, you know when you do the automatic holding thing and it will, like, click off when your tank is full of gas? It didn't click off.

EMILY: Oh no!

SALLY: So, gas just started pouring out of my car. And then I, like, ripped it out of the tank and it wouldn't – like, the button wouldn't go down, so it just –

EMILY: [gasps]

SALLY: [laughing] So, it's just, like, spraying gasoline *everywhere*. Like, it got all over me. It got all over the concrete, and I finally got it to shut off. Um, and my mom was with me, so she, like, ran inside to tell the person. And I was just, like, standing there covered in gasoline. That's how I cut my finger so badly.

EMILY: Oh, I'm sorry..

SALLY: Pulling it out of the tank. It was, like, fucking everywhere. This was right before my niece's first birthday, so I, like, reeked of gasoline. My car reeked of gasoline. And the, like, lady comes out of the gas station and she's like, "[clicks tongue] Happens all the time." And I was like –

EMILY: Then fix it!!

SALLY: "And you haven't fixed the pump?!" [laughing] "What the fuck are you doing?" Like, that is dangerous. Gasoline is *dangerous*.

EMILY: Yeah, that's almost on the bottom of the list you want to hear from the attendant.

SALLY: Yeah, I was like that's kind – I was, like, really upset and super embarrassed, you know? Like, it was such a mess and it was so scary, because gasoline is terrifying. So, on one hand, it was, like, nice for her to be like, "Not a big deal." But on the other hand, "I was like fix your fucking gasoline pump!"

EMILY: Alright, everyone.

SALLY: Bye!

EMILY: Have a good couple weeks. Goodbye!