



Episode 277: Babies Channeling

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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.

[theme song by Glynna MacKenzie plays]

SALLY: Bedtime for Ed is all the time.

EMILY: [laughs] Bedtime for Ed is twenty-three seven.

SALLY: [laughing]

EMILY: And it's whenever breakfast time, lunch time, snack time, and dinner time are not happening.

SALLY: Yeah [laughs].

EMILY: It's been a while since we recorded in the morning.

SALLY: I know. We have to record at a weird time because of my flight.

EMILY: In the AM.

SALLY: In the AM.

EMILY: I don't have thoughts in the AM.

SALLY: Yeah, uh, I read this this morning while I was eating breakfast and I was like...

EMILY: [in a British accent] What?

SALLY: I probably shouldn't read *Wheel of Time* at 7:30 in the morning.

EMILY: It does require some...

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: Wakefulness.

SALLY: Yeah. I was like, "I feel like I should be caffeinated for this."

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: But I wasn't.

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

SALLY: And I'm Sally Goodger.

EMILY: And this Aviendha.

SALLY: And this is Aviendha. Oh my gosh –

EMILY: Seeing the future? Question mark [laughs].

SALLY: Yes. Aviendha is seeing the future.

EMILY: Question mark.

SALLY: And it's a bad one.

EMILY: And it's a bad one. It's not good, my friends.

SALLY: And I'm not gonna say that we were right, but who could have predicted this? [laughs]

EMILY: Who could have predicted that the Seanchan wouldn't work out [laughs] overall.

SALLY: Yeah. Who predicted that a truce with this empire would not last?

EMILY: Yeah. We, we've known the whole time. Um, although some of the implications of this little section are that the Seanchan are not the aggressors, which I find obnoxious but, um, we can get into that.

SALLY: Yeah, we'll talk about that. But first, we are under a big tree.

EMILY: Yeah, Aviendha is having a, a Siddhartha moment sitting under the big tree. Last time we were under this big tree, Mat was receiving the world's weirdest CPR.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: The world's weirdest and slightly homoerotic CPR from Rand, so it's good to be back, you know? We're back to our roots.

SALLY: It is good to be back.

EMILY: Um.

SALLY: Um, back, I think, *The Shadow Rising* slash *Fires of Heaven* was the last time I was happy, so.

EMILY: [laughing] In life.

SALLY: Yeah, just in general.

EMILY: It was pre-2020, so.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Um, when we pick up with Aviendha, she has already been through the, uh, *ter'angreal* columns at Rhuidean and has witnessed the downfall of the Aiel from the age of legends to the present day, much as Rand did.

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: And it seems that she has more or less seen the exact same things as Rand, which sort of, uh, uh, displaces the theory that everyone is seeing their own personal lineage, I guess.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: So, she's seen that and now is like, "Well, this doesn't feel like it's going to be super relevant as an experience for people anymore. Like, I already knew this. And everyone who comes here is going to be like, "I already knew this." So, what's the point." She's like, "And it's thematically relevant because I've been worrying about the Aiel's relevance generally."

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: So, she is kind of like, "Hey, I have this newfound capital T Talent to identify *ter'angreal*" which she conveniently had a couple of books ago only after Elayne had been carting around, a [laughs] giant load of *ter'angreal*. Um, but she's like, "Maybe I can use that to go sus out what these *ter'angreal* are doing. I don't know how many people are around now. It's very funny because when we've visited Rhuidean in the past – when we visited it in *Shadow Rising*, it was, like, no one's there, it's an abandoned city surrounded by magic fog.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Very isolated. And then at the beginning of *Fires of Heaven* the Aiel were using it, more or less, as a base of operations while they prepared to cross the mountains and go into the Wetlands. Um, and it seems like people are still, like, living there. This is a major water source now, so you'd think it would become a major urban center. And Aviendha mentions, like, when she showed up there were, like, *gai'shain* cleaning up the courtyard. You know, sweeping and whatnot. Which, mostly I was like, "How do they sweep between the columns?"

SALLY: Yeah, do they –

EMILY: Do they experience the Aiel –

SALLY: Yeah, like, every day are they just like, "Here I go."

EMILY: Here I go through the fucking – I just gotta sweep. Every step I take [laughing] sweep as much as I can.

SALLY: [laughing]

EMILY: Um, I don't know. That's a – who knows? But they all disappeared as soon as Aviendha showed up to give her space. Aviendha's, like, the first person to go through Rhuidean since the events of *Fires of Heaven*, which is funny. Um, but Aviendha doesn't, like, mention "and there are people standing on their front porches like, 'Hey, bestie?'"

SALLY: Watching with their binoculars what she's doing.

EMILY: What's she doing? Uh-oh. Uh-oh!

SALLY: Uh-oh!

EMILY: She's going back! [laughs]

SALLY: Oh no! That's not right!

EMILY: Quick! Give her a broom while she's in there.

SALLY: [laughs] Um, yeah. It is strange to wonder, like, where do they, where do they go? Are there houses? Last time we were here all the houses, like, had their roofs blown off.

EMILY: Yeah. Who knows?

SALLY: It was, like, all in shambles.

EMILY: You think there would be construction work constantly going on in the background. And I know construction workers. They're not going to stop just so one person can have a rite of passage.

SALLY: [laughs] Are you joking?

EMILY: Are you joking? We're on the clock here. Anyway, that's just a funny thing. But Aviendha goes up to the *ter'angreal* columns and is investigating them and is like, "Okay, this is way too big for me." She, like, touches them with the One Power and is like, "Ugh."

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: This is a weird alien entity. The abyss is looking back, as it were.

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: But, um, she kind of turns to go and takes a step and is plunged into what feels to her like the past, because it's a very, like, you know people scrambling around like bugs in the dirt.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: You know, it's a very, like, pre-technology, pre-history it feels like.

SALLY: Yeah, and at the same time there are, like, cars, essentially. So, she's like, "Obviously this is the Age of Legends, because..."

EMILY: There's weird technology.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: They have, they're, they're – this other group of people that are being interacted with are called Lightbringers or something. Um, and she mentions something about [clears throat] they're building a road across the Waste and it's, like, okay that sounds like train tracks, you know, the way it's described. Uh, but the point of view itself is from a young woman who is experiencing starvation along with pretty much everyone in what is apparently the Aiel Waste, and they've been reduced to, like, following caravans of travelers around and digging through their food and kind of stealing from them in order to survive. This young woman has had, like, had three siblings and they have all died of exposure or starvation. Um, and in this very short point of view, the Lightbringers, quote unquote, find her rummaging through the trash, racoon style, and are like, "Absolutely not," and raise their weapons, which sounds like guns to us. Seems like she's been shot. So, she's dying, and the last thing Aviendha hears through her point of view is, like, the Lightbringers being like, "Ah, I hate the filthy Aiel blah, blah, blah." Aviendha's like, "What? What is this? The freaky Age of Legends or something? What could – " I'm interested to know when you exactly pinpointed that this was the future.

SALLY: Oh, almost immediately [laughs].

EMILY: Yeah [laughing]. Good. You weren't, like, following along with Aviendha's – you were like okay.

SALLY: No, I was, like, if you saw the past the first time, it makes sense that you would see the future the second time. Um, and they also say, in this section, something about the Empress of Ravens, and it was, like, we know that's the Seanchan so.

EMILY: Yeah. Um [clears throat], much like how when Rand originally went through the columns, he had a progression in time from the present to the distant past, you know? He was going slowly, as he walked forward, he was going further back in time. Aviendha for, um, some reason, which I can only believe is to keep us suspended in tension, starts in the distant future and moves slowly back toward the present day.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Which, to me, sort of, like, ruins the framing effect, you know? You think the directions should be, should both converge on the present day.

SALLY: Right. Yeah.

EMILY: Um, but, you know, whatever. That's a small complaint. Um, and I'm not going to, like summarize every point of view, but basically Aviendha goes back through several generations of Aiel and it's, like, she goes all the way up to her own children.

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: She apparently has quadruplets with Rand, because, as we've referenced in the past, [laughing] he's just so fertile.

SALLY: His seed is unparalleled.

EMILY: It's incredible [laughs]. Gross.

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: My MEGA SPERM.

SALLY: Yeah [laughs].

EMILY: DRAGON SPERM.

SALLY: [laughing] Oh, gross.

EMILY: Gross.

SALLY: Dragon sperm.

EMILY: So, Aviendha had quadruplets who are all a little Weird, capital W Weird. They're all like, "We have had the One Power, we've been channeling since we were babies." [laughs]

SALLY: Babies.

EMILY: "We popped out of the womb and were like [vocalizing] Traveling."

SALLY: Balefire [laughs].

EMILY: Balefire with their eyeballs. Like baby Superman.

SALLY: [laughing]

EMILY: [laughing] And everyone was like [screams].

SALLY: Everyone was like, "These kids are, uh, a little much."

EMILY: [laughing]

SALLY: [laughing]

EMILY: [laughing] The idea of everyone panicking because a baby comes out and starts shooting laser beams and then three more babies –

SALLY: [laughing] Also shooting laser beams.

EMILY: WHEN DOES IT END?

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: THERE'S ANOTHER ONE! QUICK! Uh, that gave me a good laugh.

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: Uh, the poor Aiel midwives aren't being paid enough for this shit.

SALLY: No way.

EMILY: Anyway, we see Aviendha's [laughs] children dealing with the immediate aftermath of the Last Battle and what is referred to as the Dragon's Peace, which seems to be some sort of, like, um, treaty that Rand has developed in conjunction, between, like, the continent and the Seanchan. And the Aiel's main complaint is that Rand left them out of it. You know, did not include them as a, as a full, like, country or people to be signed onto in this treaty. Which seems like a major oversight of Rand's.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And, frankly, seems a little out of character.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: That he would just be like [silly noises]. I mean, then again, Rand is the worst emperor.

SALLY: Yeah, and not a very good negotiator if he doesn't have the power *ta'veren* on his side.

EMILY: [laughs] Yeah, he'd just be, like, "[mopey voice] Okay. I'm not very good at this." But the Aiel are like, "That's so weird and we hate it," and we interact with Rhuarc's son, whose name is...Rhuarch Jr. I can't remember. But he's like, "Yeah, I met your dad, and my dad told me that your dad didn't, like, really, he was just mega uncomfortable with the Aiel all the time and just really had a hard time assimilating culturally. So [confused noises]." Um, but there is obviously still major – hey, Tybalt. I'm really worried you're going to...

SALLY: Delete the podcast.

EMILY: Delete the podcast. The Aiel, um, are, like, having, like little battles with the Seanchan, but it seems to be, from this point of view, an Aiel aggressor thing. Like, the Seanchan go to do something and the Aiel are like, "Well, we'll just attack them."

SALLY: Yeah, it also sounds like the Seanchan have been taking Aiel channelers.

EMILY: Yes. So.

SALLY: So...not to go all the way back to a chicken and an egg situation, but it's, like, the Aiel are attacking in large part because, one just because of who they are as people and how much they hate the Seanchan – valid.

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: And two, because their people are being taken.

EMILY: Yeah, the Aiel have plenty of valid reasons to attack the Seanchan. Number one being that they're not part of this fucking peace treaty, so they can attack whoever the fuck they want.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Um, and number two being that the Seanchan are the aggressors in that they are kidnapping Aiel people and, um.

SALLY: Collaring them.

EMILY: Turning them into slaves. Um, but the framing of the narrative and through Aviendha's point of view as she goes to the back – goes all the way from the distant future to the most recent, um, future. Weird. Um, is – she's like, "My children and my children's children are to blame for what happens to the Aiel," as though if her children and her children's children had sort of just rolled over, nothing bad would have happened.

SALLY: Right.

EMILY: So, like, she is framing them as the aggressors, which I find very – which I find services the overall Robert Jordan of the Seanchan as a reasonable invading empire.

SALLY: Yeah, if you just don't attack them...

EMILY: Then, they'll only kidnap the percentage of the population they want to enslave.

SALLY: And they'll leave the rest of you alone.

EMILY: And that's a small price to pay, I guess.

SALLY: *What?* What type of busted logic is this?

EMILY: I know.

SALLY: Um, yeah, because essentially the end of – I can't remember any of the kids' names except Janduin, who's named after Rand's absentee Aiel father.

EMILY: [laughs] Rand's dad he never met.

SALLY: Yeah, why didn't he – is one of Elayne's kids named Tam? [laughs] What's going on?

EMILY: Oh my god. Could you imagine if Rand followed the Harry Potter model and is like, "These are my sons. Ishamael..."

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: "And Belal." [laughing] This is my son, Asmodean.

SALLY: That would be iconic.

EMILY: It would be extremely funny.

SALLY: This is my son Asmo-deen.

EMILY: Asmo-deen, middle name...I can't remember. Asmodoean Moiraine [laughs].

SALLY: [laughs] Yeah, that's a bad bitch [laughs].

EMILY: [laughs] So, I guess I'm not too mad at Rand for naming a child after his absentee father, because at least it's an Aiel name.

SALLY: Right. Yeah.

EMILY: He only knew four Aiel names, I guess. [laughing] Imagine if the children had just been Rhuarc...

SALLY: This is Rhuarc.

EMILY: Janduin and...

SALLY: Gaul?

EMILY: Gaul? [laughs] Female.

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: Gaul, femme. Gaule with an 'e' at the end.

SALLY: Gaulie.

EMILY: Gaulette.

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: [laughing] Has Rand ever met Gaul?

SALLY: [laughing] I don't know.

EMILY: I guess there's Maidens. Sulin.

SALLY: Sulin and...uh, what's the one that died?

EMILY: Oh yeah. Liah.

SALLY: Liah.

EMILY: That would have been very Rand-ish to name his daughters after women he felt responsible for. Anyway.

SALLY: Um, we get through this, like, weird section where all of Rand's incredibly weird, eldritch children are like –

EMILY: Yeah, entitled, also, children are like –

SALLY: They're, like, seventeen or some shit, at this point.

EMILY: Yeah, like, eighteen.

SALLY: And all the Aiel chiefs are deferring to them, which does not feel like something an Aiel chief or Wise One would do, but what do I know? I've only read twelve of these books.

EMILY: I mean, I think the laser eye incident [laughs] probably cowed them significantly.

SALLY: [laughs] That's probably true.

EMILY: [laughing] That I'm making up. That's the only explanation, because otherwise you're right. The Aiel would be like, "Hey you? Fucking stack some rocks like any other Aiel child. We don't give a fuck who your daddy is."

SALLY: Who your loser dad is. Who didn't include us in this treaty. Why would we respect you?

EMILY: Also, like, if Aviendha was at all responsible for parenting these children, she would knock the entitlement right out of them.

SALLY: Totally!

EMILY: She would be like, "Fuck your dad."

SALLY: Yeah. I don't give a – Your dad's who?

EMILY: Your dad's who?

SALLY: Your dad's not here.

EMILY: Your dad died doing his little Satan...you know...

SALLY: Exorcism shit.

EMILY: Exorcism of the world. So calm down.

SALLY: Calm down maybe. I'm in charge.

EMILY: [laughs] Yeah.

SALLY: Um, they're, like, they're essentially just talking about whether or not they should attack the Seanchan.

EMILY: Mm-hmm.

SALLY: Like, go more on the aggressive. And eventually Aviendha's kids are like, "Fuck yeah."

EMILY: Fuck yeah, let's kill the Seanchan. And everyone is like, "Okay."

SALLY: And, again, this is framed as a bad thing.

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: Versus it being like –

EMILY: Yeah, we're supposed to be like, "Dun, dun dun. This is so clearly, like, the beginning of the end."

SALLY: The beginning of the end, for the Aiel, is to go on the aggressive against the Seanchan. Um, and it is kind of weird, I know I joked earlier about how the Aiel as a people are very militaristic, but one of the reasons presented is that one of Aviendha's daughters is like, "This is what the Aiel do. Like, what are we if we're not warriors." Which plays into this whole crisis Aviendha is having about what's the central identity of her people. Um, but, yeah, there's also, like, this running thread throughout each of them with Aviendha being like, "The Aiel have lost honor." In every single one of these snippets of these future, she's like, "These people are dishonorable. These people disgust me." And, again, we are seeing people who are living under extreme starvation in the desert, like, getting scraps of trash or begging to trade with people because all their children have died of starvation. And she's like, "These people have no honor. They're despicable."

EMILY: Yeah, Aviendha is very clearly supposed to come away from this experience being like, "Well, clearly, what I can do is help the Aiel to not lose their way, because what has happened is they have lost sight of what's important in our culture and opted to just, you know, the beginning of the end was them misunderstanding our whole purpose and thinking that we're just a militaristic people." Um, which I do, I think if that was the project, then having the future, you know, having Aviendha's future telling go to as close as her own children was a big mistake.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Because there are so many questions there that beg to be answered. Like, if Aviendha's children are only...in their late teens, early twenties, where the fuck is Aviendha herself?

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Where the fuck are all of the Aiel we know?

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Like, Aviendha had to give birth to these people. Did she die in childbirth. Did every other Aiel that we know – where's Rhuarc? Where's Amys? Where are all these other people

who we know wouldn't be like, "Yeah, fucking, do whatever you want. The Dragon's children are in charge now, for some reason."

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: It's incredibly bizarre to be like yeah within a single generation this much changes. Um, and obviously what the writers were trying to do was have their cake and eat it too. Like, ooooh boy! It goes all the way up to Aviendha's own children with Rand. Like, look how freaky that is. We're following her *own* descendants, but you can't do that and also be like and everything – it just doesn't make sense.

SALLY: Yeah, especially if Aviendha is the one thinking about...this whole thing. About how do we build a new identity for the Aiel. It is like is this showing us what she does, what happens if she absolutely takes no action at all? I thought this was –

EMILY: Yeah, if she just lays down and fucking...

SALLY: Just, again, perishes somewhere? Which is not what I have heard happens to her, as far as I know. So, yeah, it's really strange. It's really strange and I also think, yeah, just like Emily said not super effective to the project of being like the Aiel are losing their identity. I think we've seen that since Book 4. Obviously, with all the splintering, um, but I also think, like, there are really strong groups of, like, central characters who have adapted and still been able to hold to their honor code and understand that it is an internal thing about how they behave with the world, not necessarily some project handed down from the past in order to define their entire people and if that's gone, they have nothing, you know?

EMILY: Yeah, I almost think this whole section, this whole scene would have been better placed way back in Book 5 or 6.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: When it felt like more of a crisis that the Aiel were losing their identity.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: That would also have, you know, given Aviendha a journey instead of her just tagging along with Elayne or whoever and being like, "I gotta fucking make nice with my sister wives in order to..."

SALLY: Bear Rand's quadruplets.

EMILY: Yeah. Like, Aviendha hasn't been doing shit this entire time. So, it would have been great if, way back when she got the shit scared out of her and was like, "I, personally, need to ensure that the Aiel hold true to their cultural identity."

SALLY: Yeah, and that we understand what that is in the face of, you know, mass world-changing events.

EMILY: Yeah, but taking this now for what it is. Um, Aviendha also witnesses her own grandchildren then interacting with Elayne's descendants who are holding the throne of Andor, still. And Aviendha's, uh, granddaughter or whoever has, like, raided the Seanchan palace in Ebou Dar and has stolen some contingency plans for what to do if the Dragon's Peace is ever broken by the other countries. And they present this to the Queen of Andor as though it is an imminent plan rather than a contingency plan. And Aviendha's like, "Oh my god, they're lying. They have no honor blah, blah, blah." Again, in warfare, the question of morality is a little bit different.

SALLY: Yeah, a little bit different. And I was chewing on this a lot this morning, because at first I was like, "Yeah, that kind of sucks to drag an entire nation into a war, um, based off of a lie." But it's also, like, okay but they *do* have those contingency plans, which means they are ready to use them at basically any slight transgression from Andor. So it is, like, you juggle with is it good to be on the defensive versus being on the offensive, and you also just, again, I cannot get away from the core ethical issue here which is, like, nobody on this continent should be letting the Seanchan operate the way they operate, Dragon's Peace or not. Like, fuck Rand and that stupid fucking treaty. Like.

EMILY: Yeah, we also get a hilarious line, I think from Aviendha's granddaughter, who's like, "The Seanchan monarchs aren't very nice, *unlike* the..."

SALLY: Unlike Tuon.

EMILY: "Unlike Tuon, the original empress who brokered this entire peace with Rand. She was reasonable and could have changed things." And it's, like, okay, well then why aren't we watching Tuon's descendants fuck up?"

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Like, why is this on Aviendha's kids to –

SALLY: Yeah, why is it on Aviendha –

EMILY: Save the fucking world from the Seanchan?

SALLY: And also just, like, Robert Jordan slash Brandon Sanderson's *undying* commitment to try and tell me that Tuon is a good empress is – I'm gonna go to Brandon Sanderson's house and throw this book through his front window.

EMILY: [laughing]

SALLY: Like, are you fucking kidding me? [laughs]. [stuttering]

EMILY: Are we reading the same book?!

SALLY: One of the last points of view was Tuon enslaving and torturing women. What do you mean she's a good person?

EMILY: It's fine, though, because those are just women.

SALLY: [sighs]

EMILY: Forget about it. Like, in these early points of view, or rather, you know, late points of view, Aviendha – Aviendha's kids and whatever are like, "The White Tower is falling, the Black Tower's fallen, so they're clearly still aggressing against channelers."

SALLY: Yeah, and it's, like, are you guys just gonna let that stand?

EMILY: Yeah, but it's fine. It is hilarious to think of the Asha'man being like, "The Black Tower's fallen but we are still guerilla warfaring."

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And I'm like okay tell me more about that.

SALLY: Yeah. Slay. Who's – who's doing that?

EMILY: Who's in charge? Or are they just, like, Grady and Neald's descendants [laughs].

SALLY: Grady and Neald's descendants, adopted children.

EMILY: Grady's ugly ass son.

SALLY: [laughs] I love my ugly son. He's doing guerilla warfare against the Seanchan.

EMILY: Against the Seanchan. Anyway, we slowly see the Aiel pushed out of the Wetlands and back into the Waste and reduced to, because the Seanchan are like, "We have defeated you militarily, very effectively, um and now we're making it impossible for anyone else to trade with you." They're, you know, becoming a – the Seanchan win, clearly, and then take it out on the Aiel by being like, "And you and your children's children and your children's children's children's are never going to be able to, like we're going to completely ostracize you as a people."

SALLY: Yeah, which is effectively –

EMILY: Long-term genocide.

SALLY: Yep, exactly.

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: And, again, everyone in the Wetlands, lacking their spine, just lets this happen.

EMILY: Just goes along with this. Yeah. Aviendha – like, one of Aviendha’s descendants is like, “The Big Bad was when the other countries entered this fight against the Seanchan.” And I’m like, “In what way?”

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Like, that isn’t explained to us at all.

SALLY: No, it’s just this, like, passing – it’s like the understanding a child would have of World War II, you know? Like, I don’t know, Japan entered it and then the world exploded and it’s like that’s not quite what happened.

EMILY: Yeah, you’re like, “What are you talking about?”

SALLY: [laughs] Yeah. So, it’s just, like, yeah, it’s not explained to us, we’re just given to understand, again, that Aviendha’s grandchild absolutely just screwed the pooch when she brought Elayne’s kids into it, or grandkids or whatever.

EMILY: And you’re like, “Okay.”

SALLY: How does that make any sense?

EMILY: It doesn’t.

SALLY: Like, sure, it probably escalated things, but it sounded like a situation that was escalating anyway, so stop trying to place all the blame on the Aiel for trying to protect themselves against an enslaving, totalitarian empire! What the fuck is section?

EMILY: [sighs] Yeah. So, overall, this section, we could just talk about plot holes all day, because it’s riddled with them.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And this section is very much biased in the favor of the Seanchan.

SALLY: [laughing] Totally.

EMILY: To, as always, making them seem like a reasonable group of people who are just, you know, they’re scary because they’re the big dragon that you don’t want to poke and the Aiel are just so fucking stupid for poking them. Of course they’re going to committed genocide against your people, because you started a war against them. “Started a war.”

SALLY: “Started a war.”

EMILY: Quote unquote.

SALLY: By trying to rescue the people who had been captured.

EMILY: Yeah. But the authors, in their sleight of hand way, don’t want us to think about the overarching geopolitical problems here of the Seanchan versus the Aiel blah, blah, blah, blah. What they want us to think about, and this is why they are bringing Aviendha and Rand’s kids into it, is okay, clearly Aviendha and Rand specifically need to do something to avert this disaster.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And so, this now, instead of becoming a geopolitical problem, is becoming a personal character problem.

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: Um, which, you know, just feeds into one of *The Wheel of Time*’s projects, which is that individuals make choices and that, you know, the shake of a butterfly’s wings or whatever the fuck changes the future.

SALLY: Sure.

EMILY: Um, so, this is all, like, meant to steel Aviendha’s resolve to change things somehow. And now she has some crucial information, like, clearly Rand is going to come up with something called The Dragon’s Peace and I have to make sure the Aiel are involved in it in a better way.

SALLY: Yeah [clears throat].

EMILY: So.

SALLY: Dumb.

EMILY: Yeah, that’s, like, the section [laughs]. I guess.

SALLY: It’s just, um, silly. Nonsense.

EMILY: Yeah. It’s hard because it’s clearly trying to, like, recapture the magic of what was happening in *The Shadow Rising* when Rand originally went through the columns.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Which I maintain was one of the most interesting sequences in the series at large.

SALLY: Sure.

EMILY: Um, and this one does not pack the same punch at all, despite, like, following the same, you know, dancing the same steps. It does not have the pizzazz [laughs] that the original had.

SALLY: No [clears throat]. No, um, yeah. I'm trying to think of a thought to kind of wrap up what I had to say, but I don't think I have anything else to say. It doesn't really work. Um, and it's leading us to what I'm sure will be a plot that I *hate*, which is Rand brokering treaties.

EMILY: With the Seanchan.

SALLY: Love that! *Love* that.

EMILY: Yeah, okay, well this can just be a short episode because I don't know. I don't feel great about it. I do think it is interesting to watch the authors absolutely flail with the problem that they've created for themselves.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And also to try and recapture the magic of one of the series' most powerful sequences.

SALLY: Right.

EMILY: And fail [laughs].

SALLY: Yeah, fail quite miserably.

EMILY: And you know, of course this being a sort of, like, oracular vision begs the question of, like, is this set in stone, is there something our protagonist can do to make it different? Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.

SALLY: Yeah, or is it very, you know, Greek tragedy in that whatever Aviendha ultimately does will just...

EMILY: Feed into it.

SALLY: Make this happen. Yeah.

EMILY: Self-fulfilling prophecy. And, of course, because we didn't see Aviendha in that at all, we don't get any indication of what she has done. We're supposed to be like, "Oooh!"

SALLY: Oh no! I guess my final thought is I don't really know why the authors feel like they have to address this problem so intensely.

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: This problem of the Aiel and the cultural identity. I think it – I mean, a lot of it makes sense. The Aiel have been an incredibly important cultural group and presence in the book so we, of course, wonder what happen to them in the future, but, maybe we said this last time, that's an okay problem to leave up in the open. Like, what is going to happen to this group of people. I – yeah, just to Emily's point. This plot would have worked if it was introduced in Book 5. I don't really see the point of it now. We're addressing, we're really making a mountain out of a molehill with a problem that doesn't really feel like a problem to me, the reader.

EMILY: Yeah, I think they're a little bit at the finish line and I think it's partly a thing where they're like, "Oh, we've made Aviendha one of our main characters and she actually has nothing to do."

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: "She's incredibly irrelevant. She's basically like one of Rand's girlfriends and that's basically her entire plot." Um, which, maybe to Brandon Sanderson's credit, he was like, "Oh, that's fucking..."

SALLY: Yeah, that doesn't. That sucks.

EMILY: That's sexist and gross.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Like, we need to give her something to do that's more important and not...is tangentially, but not directly tied to her relationship with Rand, but is more to do with her relationship with her people and her culture. So, like, okay, yeah, I get that you are backed into a corner there, but at a certain point you just have to throw in the towel and be like, "Not every character in this series is going to be doing important things."

SALLY: Yeah!

EMILY: Aviendha's a major channeler. She's now a Wise One. She is going to be, like, doing things in the Last Battle regardless. So, okay, that's fine if it's just to have an Aiel point of view in the Last Battle. Okay.

SALLY: Okay. Like, I guess I would feel more passionately about that, but Aviendha got nerfed so long ago as like...

EMILY: Yeah, way back in Book 6 and 7.

SALLY: Yeah, when she just started following Elayne around like a lost little puppy. And, like, I would love...I would love if that was different and she'd been doing stuff all along, but at this point I'm like, exactly, Aviendha is there to tell me what the Aiel are thinking and doing and...

EMILY: Yeah, you can't un-fuck this narrative at this point, like, it's a little late. So –

SALLY: I forgot to bring out our mood tracker, but I would say my mood is quite mad.

EMILY: Mine is sad.

SALLY: Mm.

EMILY: I'm just like, "What..."

SALLY: Yeah, that was not good.

EMILY: Yeah. I'm not, like, sad for the Aiel or whatever. I don't give a shit [laughs]. It's just, like, I'm sad that it came down to this, you know? Because this is paralleled so strongly with such an iconic sequence, I'm just like, wow, the downhill battle.

SALLY: Yeah, the downhill battle and just, like, the presentation of, like, well if only those savages have behaved none of this would have happened.

EMILY: Yeah, pretty dark.

SALLY: Sorry to use that word, but it feels very much like what's being presented.

EMILY: Um, I will say the very first thing that Aviendha sees is with the, like, train being built across the Waste is very much meant to evoke, um, Native Americans in the, in America during the Industrial Revolution.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And that's not great, either [laughs].

SALLY: It's not great. Of just, like, it, yeah. Again, the equation of the Aiel to Indigenous peoples and the way that they are despicable and dishonorable and scavenging through your trash and how dare they want to eat something and they're just totally isolated and ostracized.

EMILY: Yeah, what we're saying is, what we are presented as the reality of the Aiel is what the white perception of Native Americans of that time was, so we're playing into stereotypes in a very upsetting way.

SALLY: Yes, yeah. Thank you for, thank you for clarifying.

EMILY: No, I needed to clarify to [laughs] myself.

SALLY: Of course none of these things are true. These are people who've been starved and are just trying to survive, but these, quote unquote, "Lightbringers" who give off very like [exaggerated cowboy voice] cowboy! In like the movies energy. I just think they're inhuman, so.

EMILY: Yeah. Dark, dark.

SALLY: [laughs] Dark.

EMILY: And it's not going uphill from here, my friends, because the next section will deal with Elayne taking the throne of Cairhien, a thing that I care even less about than the Aiel's cultural [laughs].

SALLY: Cultural problems. Can you just leave France alone?

EMILY: Yeah, let France be France. How dare you? It will not just deal with Elayne taking over the throne of Cairhien, it will also deal with the long awaited, you know, last referenced about 600 pages ago, meeting between Rand and the Borderlander leaders.

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: Like, the last time we saw Rand he was like, "This afternoon I'm going to go visit the Borderland leaders" and that was, like, 500 pages ago.

SALLY: All of this has happened in one afternoon?

EMILY: In a day! It's insane. All the Perrin stuff.

SALLY: Yeah, Perrin's lived several days in one afternoon.

EMILY: I don't –

SALLY: [laughing]

EMILY: I can't keep doing this. I'm so tired.

SALLY: [laughs] Oops. Sorry.

EMILY: It's okay. So, that's what we'll be [laughs] doing next time.

SALLY: That's what – we'll be here, next week.

EMILY: We're sad and mad, but thanks to Glynna MacKenzie for our theme song, thanks to our Patrons on Patreon and our followers on social media.

SALLY: Yeah! We love you guys! Thanks for supporting us and helping to feed Ed.

EMILY: Yeah, I'm just jiggling Ed right now.

SALLY: He kind of loves it.

EMILY: Oh, he's so mad. He's so mad.

SALLY: I guess he doesn't like to be jiggled as much as he likes to be patted. I think we talked about that in We Don't Watch Outlander.

EMILY: He's also falling off the couch, mid-fall right now. Anyway, what's your – tell me what your sign off is?

SALLY: [laughs] Oh my gosh. So, I have to be in, um, speech therapy, essentially. I'm working with a speech pathologist, because of my many musculoskeletal issues, um, I've been having difficult swallowing and, like, pain with swallowing. Um, so I've been working with a speech pathologist on that and he, um, last time I saw him last week he was like, "I also want to do some work on your voice." He's like, "Because I've noticed your voice gets really strained." And I was like, "Oh! Okay." He was like, "If we take the strain off your voice box, it will help you swallow." And I was like, "Oh, that's crazy." And he was like, "Yeah, essentially you have really bad vocal fry." [laughing] And so I had to do a ton of exercises where he was try to teach me how to project my voice forward in my mouth and throat so it didn't get in that thing. And I was like, "This is the story of my life."

EMILY: I didn't come here to have my podcast reviewed.

SALLY: Yeah [laughing].

EMILY: [laughing] One star. Vocal fry.

SALLY: [laughing] I know. I was like, "Okay! Sure!"

EMILY: Absolutely brutal.

SALLY: Yeah, just another person in the world telling me.

EMILY: Your vocal fry is bad.

SALLY: Your vocal fry is bad.

EMILY: Bastard.

SALLY: I know. I was like, "Well, it's not my fault! Apparently!"

EMILY: [laughs] Alright, everyone, have a good week.

SALLY: Bye!

EMILY: Bye.