



Episode 279: A Creepily Slow Rendition of “Bad Romance”

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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: I feel like we should have some sort of music playing, like “The Final Countdown” or something.

EMILY: Oh.

BOTH: singing] It’s the final countdown.

SALLY: [vocalizing]

EMILY: You don’t think the, that my usual edition of, um, “Amazing Grace” on the bagpipes [laughs] –

SALLY: [laughs] On the bagpipes. Yeah, for Noal.

EMILY: Yeah, for Noal. RIP.

SALLY: Spoilers!

EMILY: [laughs] Spoilers.

SALLY: [laughing] Spoiler for Noal. Spoilers for forty minutes into this episode.

EMILY: If you’ve just turned on episode 279 –

SALLY: [laughing]

EMILY: Hot 279 for Everybody Hates Rand. Just in case you didn't know this one's about the literal – almost the last three chapters of Towers of Midnight which is the penultimate book. The penultimate section of the penultimate book.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: There's – so, spoilers. Yeah.

SALLY: Spoilers. Noal's dead.

EMILY: And Noal's Jain Farstrider. I think we knew that. I think we've talked about that.

SALLY: Um, Noal's dead. I think mythologically that works but I don't think he *had* to die, is my personal opinion about the matter.

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: I think it was –

EMILY: I am a big proponent of, at this point in the series, cutting out extraneous characters.

SALLY: Sure.

EMILY: I wish he didn't die but I also don't know what I'd – what we would have done with him. I guess he could have fought in the last battle.

SALLY: Noal could have been on the fields, yeah. Whooping ass.

EMILY: But that would have been one more person to keep track of and, boy, in about three months from now [laughs] you're going to be wishing there were fewer people to keep track of.

SALLY: I will be grateful, but I also think they could have unleashed Noal, feral old man, onto the fields and [laughs] –

EMILY: He's actually our secret weapon.

SALLY: [laughing] And we don't need to know what he's doing.

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: We just know he's out there.

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

SALLY: And I am Sally Goodger.

EMILY: And, listen, the Tower of Ghenjei. Super strong conceptually.

SALLY: Yes.

EMILY: Writing wise, it's a big old meh from me.

SALLY: Yeah. There are some moments that absolutely whip ass. Like some lines that, like you were saying, feel like Robert Jordan had his hands on those at least in some way, shape, or form. Like, particularly, the Eelfinn say some really sweet fucking things.

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: Like, "Suddenly the gambler's at the center of it all," or whatever it was.

EMILY: The gambler's at the center of it all! [hissing]

SALLY: Yeah [laughs].

EMILY: [hissing] And you're like, "Okay!"

SALLY: You're like, "I don't really know what's going on, but that was cool."

EMILY: Okay.

SALLY: But yeah, I think there are some, like, it's some fumbles.

EMILY: Yeah, I'll say if it was taken from Robert Jordan's notes, it was taken straight from the notes, absolutely zero edits made.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: The proliferation of typos alone.

SALLY: Oh my god!

EMILY: There were a lot in this section, and I know you think I'm being picky, but I am a copy editor by trade, so if I didn't notice them, I would be a bad copy editor.

SALLY: Also, this book was *published*.

EMILY: I know. It makes me feel insane just how – the quantity of them. And I don't know why this book specifically. I know we had a few typos in *The Gathering Storm*.

SALLY: Sure.

EMILY: But it's been *way* more in this book.

SALLY: Yeah, and, not to harp on this, but I see typos in published books with some frequency. Like, it happens.

EMILY: Sure.

SALLY: Especially in large books where there's just a lot of words it's hard to catch everything, even if you are going through multiple copy edits and using technology and whatever. You're just not going to catch everything. That is fine. But there have been – I don't want to exaggerate but it feels like upwards of fifty plus in this book. If not more. And, yes, this is quite a large book, but that is, like, to me, like, *one* typo in a published book or maybe two or three, I'll let slide. But, like, you published this.

EMILY: Yeah. Single digits.

SALLY: You put this – are you gonna put a movie in theaters with, like, a blooper reel scene in it? That's ridiculous.

EMILY: I mean that's basically what they're doing with *Marvel* movies these days.

SALLY: [laughs] Yeah. That's ridiculous. What are you doing?

EMILY: It reads like when, you know, there was a big fuss about how in the finale of *Game of Thrones* – not, like, the literal finale but in that last season, we kept seeing water bottles in shots.

SALLY: Yeah, yeah. It's just like that.

EMILY: [laughs] It just, like, speaks to the overall quality control that's going on.

SALLY: Yes, thank you. That is the perfect way to kind of pin up what I'm saying. It does not give me a lot of faith, yeah, to kind of segue into this sequence, it does not give me a lot of faith that any type of edits were happening, including large...

EMILY: Macro edits.

SALLY: Yeah, macro edits of things that probably should have been edited, like tightening up this sequence a little bit, because it's *so* fun and it's *so* cool and there are parts of it that are done super well and then it just kind of like what?

EMILY: Yeah. Some flops. Some flops, we'll say.

SALLY: And I think that's probably true for the book as a whole.

EMILY: Yeah, and we've made this complaint before, that the overall editorial oversight of *The Wheel of Time* has been, to put it bluntly, lacking.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Um, so, like, the copy-editing issues don't necessarily speak to that there was a single copy editor who wasn't doing their job.

SALLY: Right.

EMILY: That's not necessarily what's going on here. What that probably means is that, assuming copy editors were used, which, at this point, who knows?

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: They weren't given adequate time to do their job.

SALLY: Yes.

EMILY: Which probably, which speaks to higher up in the ladder, the editors, the content editors, not doing their jobs.

SALLY: Yeah. Um, and obviously Emily and I are both writers by...hobby. I don't want to say by trade.

EMILY: Certainly not by trade. I would have...you know, not a lot of money [laughs], but some money.

SALLY: Yeah, one hopes we would have more money than we currently do. Um, and, so obviously we – I think we both feel – at least I feel very passionate about it's not a good thing to give a writer carte blanche to do whatever they want, which kind of feels like what was happening with this one. Like, it is good to have editors, and this applies for almost anything in life, but certainly in creative projects, it is good to have people who are giving you feedback, so that you are not creating in a vacuum. For many reasons, but one of them is just, like, quality, like if you are looking at a thousand plus page book over and over and over again, you're just gonna miss – like things are just gonna start to read like white noise, you know?

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: So, like, it's not good. And I think this is true for Robert Jordan's other books. It feels like he did not, he just got to do whatever he wanted. Which, like, nobody should be allowed – allowed sounds a little aggressive. I don't think we should prop up the idea that there are certain writers who just don't require editorial feedback.

EMILY: People need other people to say no to them, occasionally.

SALLY: Yes!

EMILY: It's an intrinsic part of human development. You, undoubtedly, know someone who's only been told yes to.

SALLY: Yes.

EMILY: Or, at least, you're living under their regime.

SALLY: [groans]

EMILY: [laughs]

SALLY: [laughs] Yes. Correct.

EMILY: We're living in a global system where we are ruled by people who have only had other people say yes to them.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: It's not good for anyone. The health of a community, the health of an individual, and apparently not the health of books.

SALLY: Okay, sorry. That's our little editorial sidebar. We will now talk –

EMILY: I'm just on my soapbox. We'll now talk about not just the Tower of Ghenjei. There's a couple other little plots here. First, we have Pevara in the Black Tower. Um, this, at least, does a good job of remind us what the situation is with the Aes Sedai generally in the Black Tower and with Pevara, specifically. Pevara, remember, I think last book decided to come to the Black Tower, um, with a, like, small contingent – I think she says it's only nine people – of other Red Ajah ladies who were White Tower loyalists. They, at this point, do not know that the White Tower has been reunited yet. Um, this includes Tarna Feir, who was the Keeper of the Chronicles under Elaida and is now out of a job, I guess. Then there's – and these people have been legally allowed, "legally" in air quotes, allowed in the Black Tower because Rand went to both segments of the White Tower and was like, "You can go bond some Asha'man. I signed off on it."

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: So, they're there because they can be. Then, there's a big old group of rebel...used to be rebel Aes Sedai who are camped outside of the Black Tower and also are apparently dithering on who to bond as Warders.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: There's not been much Warder bonding between any of these groups of Aes Sedai and the actual Asha'man. Then there are the women from the White Tower originally, also the loyalist contingent, who were attacked and kidnapped by the Asha'man and bonded against their will, who are now living semi-integrated into the Black Tower itself.

SALLY: Yep.

EMILY: So, that's the status. This will be important in the next book. Pevara, specifically, is like, "This is no longer a useful activity because Mazrim Taim is clearly, like, blockading us at every turn."

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Like, they keep being like, "We want to bond full Asha'man," and he's like, "Hmm. Sorry. You can only bond people who are Soldiers or Dedicated, lower down the ladder." We know that this is because Mazrim Taim has only been promoting his special friends, so clearly he doesn't want to give up his special friends to the Aes Sedai.

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: His special boys.

SALLY: His special boys! Never forget Mazrim Taim's special boys.

EMILY: Yep. His special boys. And he, of course, is being rude and insulting to everyone and making veiled threats to them. We open on him escorting Pevara and this other lady around the new, like, perimeter [laughs] security system being like, "See? Nobody can in [whispers] or out." And Pevara's like, "Okay!"

SALLY: Alright.

EMILY: Um.

SALLY: He's just, like, a sleazebag.

EMILY: Pevara's like, "Well, I need a shower after that interaction." And is, like, to the woman she's with, she's like, "Javindhra, I think we should – " Javindhra?

SALLY: Yeah, Javindhra. Nailed it.

EMILY: He he he!

SALLY: Way to go.

EMILY: Javindhra, I think we should just leave. You know? Fuck the sunk cost fallacy. We are clearly in ever growing danger here. I do not trust this guy. Pevara is the only character,

apparently, with common sense, who meets Mazrim Taim and is like, “You know what? I will do anything to get as far away from this man as possible.”

SALLY: [laughs] Yeah, actually, I’m going in the other direction.

EMILY: I need to cut this man from my life.

SALLY: Yep. Yep. Strong sever.

EMILY: [laughing] He’s a toxic presence.

SALLY: He’s a toxic presence, malignant narcissist.

EMILY: Absolutely not. And Javindhra is like, “I don’t think it’s that big of a deal. Like, he’s fine. I want to stay. Even if you leave, I’ll stay.” And Pevara is like, “[gasps] My authority.”

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Gasp.

SALLY: Aes Sedai stupid shit.

EMILY: So she stomps back to her *hut*. [laughs] It’s literally referred to as a hut.

SALLY: I know. She’s like, “I live in a circular hut with Tarna, my roommate.”

EMILY: And I’m like, “What?”

SALLY: [laughs] I, seriously, I know we make this argument every time we talk about Mazrim Taim, but you walk into the Black Tower, Mazrim Taim is like, “Hey, fuck you. You live in this hut.”

EMILY: Here’s a hut!

SALLY: [laughs] And you don’t just leave?

EMILY: What?

SALLY: Actually, I’m not going to live in a hut. I’m gonna leave.

EMILY: No. I’ll pass. And, I mean, at least Pevara is doing that, too. She comes to talk to Tarna. She’s like, “We chatted last night and we’re both in agreement that after this meeting with Mazrim Taim we should basically cut our losses and leave.” Only, she goes to talk to Tarna about this and Tarna is like, “Actually, I’ve had second thoughts. I think we should just stay.” And Pevara’s like, “That’s extremely weird” and gets a good look at Tarna and is like, “Something is...off in a horror movie type way.”

SALLY: Yeah. [laughing] I can't tell. Something's off about her.

EMILY: She's slipping [laughs].

SALLY: She's slip – [laughing].

EMILY: Literally. She's like, "There's a crazed look in her eyes."

SALLY: She, too, has cut her own bangs.

EMILY: Yeah, so we're like, "Hey? What's going on now?" Then, adding more ominousness to the scene, Pevara is like, "I'm really freaked out now, you know, the horror music is starting." So, she goes out to, like, the backyard, and tries to travel – no gateways.

SALLY: No gateways.

EMILY: We know what that means. Someone has another dreamspike, I guess.

SALLY: Fucking dreamspike. Or the same one. Oh no. Perrin melted that one.

EMILY: Yeah, Perrin through that in lava. I really hope it's not that one [laughs].

SALLY: It's just like – still works.

EMILY: Though it's extremely funny to imagine Graendal being like, "Now I have to go fishing in lava."

SALLY: For my dreamspike.

EMILY: For my dreamspike that I was entrusted with.

SALLY: Yeah, so this is obviously pointing towards things like compulsion.

EMILY: Mm-hmm.

SALLY: And other nasty, nefarious deeds that we all *know* Mazrim Taim has been doing.

EMILY: But it's clearly coming to a head here because now we have people who are physically trapped. Dun dun dun.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Um, we then switch to a Perrin point of view as he sees off Mat, Thom, and Noal, through a gateway. The logistics of this are that Grady is going to open a gateway at the same spot every day at noon, but basically Perrin is like, "Bye, Mat." And then sends his armies

through gateways into the Fields of Merrilor where significant forces are already gathering. This is where we find out that Perrin is on Rand's side. That's not particularly surprising, but, um, you know, it hadn't been stated up until this point. Faile's like, "So, we're going to back up Elayne, or whatever, about not breaking the seals?" And Perrin's like, "No, I think we should break the seals. It makes sense and also I trust Rand." And I'm like why? The last time you saw him, he yeeted you across the room." I know it was technically your guys' cunning plan.

SALLY: Plan, but.

EMILY: But still.

SALLY: I feel like – I don't know. I wouldn't trust Rand. But –

EMILY: With anything. No, yeah.

SALLY: Um, it is nice, speaking in terms of, like, narrative to have a character that is not actively digging his heels in against what the plot needs to move forward.

EMILY: Yeah, the main issue is that we are very clearly falling on a gender divide.

SALLY: Yeah, that's a good point, Emily.

EMILY: Perrin is on Rand's side. Egwene has gotten the girlies on her side. Nynaeve is a little ambivalent but seems to be on Egwene's side.

SALLY: Nynaeve, gender neutral...

EMILY: Queen.

SALLY: Monarch.

EMILY: Um, and we find out from Perrin that he has been sending out people, like, back to the Two Rivers, to Mayene, to wherever Alliandre is from. I never remember to – Ghealdan, I guess.

SALLY: Ghealdan? Gay-ol-den, as they say in the show.

EMILY: Gay-ol-den!

SALLY: You know...Gay old...town.

EMILY: Gay old den.

SALLY: [laughs] This is my gay old den, my gay old fox den. That's what the Eelfin say to Mat.

EMILY: You've heard of man caves.

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: Now get ready for Gay Old Dens.

SALLY: [laughing] Gay Old Den.

EMILY: I almost said a slur –

SALLY: [laughing]

EMILY: But in my defense, it would have been really funny [laughs]. And I can use it. Shush. So they, too, are recruiting peasants at this point, like, that's the depths to which we have sunk.

SALLY: Yeah, Perrin's like, "I feel kind of bad, but if there's any old man out there who can hold a rock, I'm going to put him in the Last Battle."

EMILY: Yeah, who can throw a rock. We're at Helm's Deep levels of recruitment. It's not good.

SALLY: No good.

EMILY: [in a British accent] Some of these men have seen too many winters!

SALLY: [laughs] Some of them have seen too few.

EMILY: Yeah! Exactly. Then we switch to Mat's point of view.

SALLY: The boys are...

EMILY: [singing] The boys are back in town.

SALLY: They are out of town, actually.

EMILY: They are in the woods.

SALLY: They are at the big spire that nobody really thinks to think about when they're riding past it on the river. They're just like, "Ah, an old thing."

EMILY: They're just like...I'm trying to think of a like our world...

SALLY: Yeah. If I was just –

EMILY: It's like the claw in Draper.

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: Anyway, so the Tower of Ghenjei has been haunting Mat, literally, from Book One.

SALLY: Yes.

EMILY: Which makes it a powerful setting. He's like, "One of the few memories I have retained, or, you know, from the time I had the dagger, was the Tower of Ghenjei on the riverbank." So, it's particularly important to him and of course he has all his memories from being inside through the doorways. Um, they step up to the Tower, they are of course outfitted as described in previous episodes. I like to imagine Thom is just like a one man band, you know?

SALLY: [laughs] Yeah, he's got the fucking drum on his bank.

EMILY: That outfit. Yeah. Um, and, uh –

SALLY: They have their bag of fireworks.

EMILY: Yeah [laughs], they have a bag of fireworks. And Thom tests drawing the symbol in the Tower. It's an upside down triangle with a wavy line in the middle to represent the snakes and foxes. Um, and that opens a hole in the Tower, but Thom didn't draw it very big so he has to draw it bigger and make a doorway. They test going through it and going out of it. It does remain where it was, so they're like, "Okay, we have a back door exit. Goal is to go get Moiraine and make it back to this point, um, at some...point." Um, we're not gonna hit every action point in this sequence, but we'll talk a little bit about the overall vibes. The Tower of Ghenjei sequence is drawing on, um, horror as a genre. Um, there is also, like, not, not just like horror slasher film, though there is an element of, like, getting picked off one by one.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Even though Noal is the only one that gets –

BOTH: Picked off.

SALLY: Yeah. There's things lurking in the shadows. They're there – you think you see them but they're not there when you turn around, that type of thing.

EMILY: You feel like you're being watched constantly. You know, this would be a filmmakers dream in terms of, like, jump scares.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: There's also an element of psychological horror where everything is off kilter. All of the angles are, like, not the wrong – not the right angles.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Weird shapes, you know? Rooms are shaped like stars, rooms are shaped like – you know, absolutely wild things.

SALLY: Yeah. Um, not – I think, I know I mentioned this in our previous episodes on the Tower – about the Tower of Ghenjei, but it very much gives, I always think specifically of the *Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, which is an old, black and white film, from the old German Expressionist film era. Which, like, part of the psychological horror of that film comes from the fact that nothing is quite the right shape or size. Like, it just feels really disconcerting to be in that space. So, I remember reading it and they walk into the room and they're like, "It's not a perfect square," and I was like, "I would immediately have a mental breakdown."

EMILY: [laughs]

SALLY: [laughing] I would be so upset.

EMILY: Sobbing in a corner.

SALLY: [laughs] Yeah.

EMILY: AHHH!

SALLY: It's not straight!!

EMILY: Yeah, that's something that upsets the human mind in a way you can't quite conceive of until you are, like, in it.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Basically, until you are in a funhouse, which this is also calling back to. At one point Noal says, "They're using mirrors to trick us."

SALLY: Yes.

EMILY: And Mat's like, "I'm a dummy. I have no idea what that means." But, you know, it's all allusions and mirrors and any time you've gone through a mirror maze in a carnival it's, like, Jesus Christ this is...

SALLY: Yeah. Upsetting.

EMILY: Upsetting on a sort of, like, visceral level. We're, of course, also dealing with labyrinth callbacks [clears throat].

SALLY: Of course.

EMILY: The idea that you not only have to make it to the center and defeat whatever is there, but then make it back out.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Is intrinsic to that.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Um, we're not dealing with a Minotaur, but we are dealing with these sort of human-animal hybrid things that are very creepy and off-putting.

SALLY: Listen. I have to speak my truth.

EMILY: That you love the Minotaur?

SALLY: [laughs] No. I mean, yes [laughs].

EMILY: I was like, "I do too, bestie."

SALLY: Yeah, the Minotaur is a fascinating character. I think the Eelfinn and the Aelfinn are [laughing slightly] serving a level of cunt that the rest of *The Wheel of Time* books wish they could.

EMILY: You're right.

SALLY: [laughing] I think they're so fun and weird.

EMILY: They're, like, doing weird body movements, you know? They have weird hairdos. They're wearing what's strongly implied to be human skin.

SALLY: [laughs] And, like, black leather kilts.

EMILY: Yeah, Mazrim Taim could never.

SALLY: Yeah, Mazrim Taim is like, "I wish I could be this much of an It Girl."

EMILY: Yeah, they're wearing little skirts, like, fucking Jared Leto.

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: [laughing] On the red carpet.

SALLY: Yeah, they've got their weird eyes and their pointy little elf ears. And they're just like –

EMILY: And they're all gingers. At least all the fox ones.

SALLY: Yeah. The snakes have their, like, weird, long black hair. Um, yeah, I just, they're just, like, fun. I know they're supposed to be haunting – and they are, for sure, when they keep

showing up being like, “Hey, wanna make a deal?” Um, yeah, but that’s the Eelfinn that show up periodically. I think we meet one or two of them before we get confronted with the...um.

EMILY: Yeah, the boys are initially just like, “We’re just going straight. We’re treating this like an actual maze.” At some point, Noal’s like, “Okay, I’m going to plot the route that we’ve been taking.” But Mat’s like, “Hold up” and makes them retrace their steps and wouldn’t you know it? They don’t arrive back at the door through which they came. So Mat’s like, “They are tricking us. This space is not natural.”

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: So, that’s when they’re confronted by the first Eelfinn who’s like [singsong], “You’re not keeping the bargain.” [laughs] You have to imagine there’s haunting children’s music – [crosstalk].

SALLY: A jack in the box [laughs].

EMILY: Oh my god. Especially because Mat’s like, “Quick, Thom. Play the music.”

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Thom, play “Despacito” [laughs].

SALLY: Thom, quick, Thom play Despacito. Thom starts playing “Bad Romance” by Lady Gaga on the flute [laughs].

EMILY: [vocalizing the tune of “Bad Romance”]

SALLY: Why aren’t we in charge of *The Wheel of Time* adaptation?

EMILY: [laughs] I know.

SALLY: This scene would be so funny [laughs] and horrifying.

EMILY: Probably that’s why, [laughing] because it’s not supposed to be funny. We’d be like, “This could be infinitely more funny if you just added Lady Gaga.” And they’d be like...

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: Okay, you have an intrinsic misunderstanding of the levity of this scene [laughs].

SALLY: Um, no I understand it perfectly. You’re incredibly wrong. All the Eelfinn would be dressed like they’re in the “Alejandro” music video, um.

EMILY: I do think there’s nothing creepier than a Lady Gaga, um, song that is, like, way slower.

SALLY: Yes, that's true.

EMILY: [vocalizing "Bad Romance" very slowly]

SALLY: [laughing]

EMILY: [laughs] So, anyway, the Eelfinn's, like, hypnotizing them so Mat's like, "Quick, Thom. Play the music." Um, and is just, like, "Listen, I'm not here to bargain with you. I'm not going to bargain until we get to this specific room." And the Eelfinn's like, "But maybe you should just follow me into this creepy trap abyss."

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: Um, and Mat starts singing at him, which is the funniest power move, but it makes him fall asleep.

SALLY: Yeah. It just puts him right to sleep.

EMILY: You'd like the music would be, like, discordant, you know? They'd react like, "Ah, it hurts us, precious." But instead they're like, "Hmm. Snoozle."

SALLY: Snooze time!

EMILY: Which I think is very funny because it's very, like, I don't know fey and animal of them, which is very much what they're supposed to be. It's unexpected in the best way.

SALLY: Yeah, it was really fun when it happened.

EMILY: Yeah, you're like, "Ooh." We also get the classic Noal being like, "Good Old Tongue, Mat." And Mat being like [softly and strained], "Oh my god. I didn't realize I was speaking Old Tongue!"

SALLY: Mat, you gotta – flicking himself.

EMILY: Fucking, fucking –

SALLY: You gotta stop doing it!

EMILY: Oh my god. Um, then Mat is like – [laughing] while this snoozing Eelfinn is in the corner – Mat's like, "Okay, we've got to come up with a different plan. I'm going to roll the dice and that will tell us which way we're going to go." Noal's like, "That's statically impossible. You can't roll a one on two sets of dice." And Mat's like, "Fuck you."

SALLY: Watch me.

EMILY: Fuck you, bitch.

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: Mat says, “Odds? What I do care for odds?”

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And you’re like [whispers], “Hell yeah, dude.”

SALLY: Hell yeah.

EMILY: Hell yeah! That’s my boy.

SALLY: *That’s* my boy.

EMILY: That’s my son of battles, which he gets called a lot here.

SALLY: Welcome, son of battles. Yeah.

EMILY: Um, so the dice direct them to go back the way they came. And back and forth and back and forth.

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: Which, despite being logically...

SALLY: Ridiculous.

EMILY: Ridiculous, actually gets them to where they need to go. Um, first they emerge into a room that Mat recognizes. It is the room that he was in when he went through the doorway in Rhuidean. And quickly he and Noal and Thom find that the remains of the doorway are still in the room. Just, like, this heap of slag. You know, like, melted glass and stuff. Really freaky. That is when the Aelfinn kind of converge on them and so they kind of have to circle up and defend themselves. Mat can no longer throw the dice because they snatch the dice before they can really land, which is reminiscent of Birgitte trying to leave a trail of breadcrumbs and having the – I think it was something different not...

SALLY: Literal breadcrumbs, but.

EMILY: But having them be blown away behind. Um, there’s a sick moment where the Aelfinn are like, “Why are you antagonizing us? We have done nothing to earn this.” And Mat pulls the scarf down and says, “Nothing?” And you’re like –

SALLY: They’re like, “Mmmm.”

EMILY: They’re like, “Mmmm. Sowwy not sowwy.”

SALLY: “Sowwy, daddy.”

EMILY: Um, so they’re, like, using their iron weapons, playing music, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. Mat, finally, is like, “I am going to do my classic move, which is close my eyes, spin around in a circle, and that’s where we need to go.” And Noal’s like, “WHAT THE – ” [laughs].

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: But Mat’s like, “It’ll work! Trust me!” He does this and instead of going to any of the passages that are available to them, it directs them to what appears to be a wall. Just a shrouded wall. Oh, there’s also creepy vapor and mist throughout here that kind of float away from the fire, so just adding to the ambiance. Um, so they run into the darkness. It turns out, of course, to be a secret passageway they can use, and they run smack into David Bowie [laughs].

SALLY: [laughs] Yeah. The Goblin King.

EMILY: Um, they don’t actually run into David Bowie, obviously, although this would all be better if David Bowie was here. I would have David Bowie, if he were still alive, play all of the Eelfinn.

SALLY: Oh my god! That would be *amazing*!

EMILY: It would be so good.

SALLY: All of them. I do think – my major beef with the Aelfinn and the Eelfinn is I don’t think they should have what is reminiscent of human gender.

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: It really bothers me that Mat’s always like, “The women have their freaky flesh straps across their tits,” and it’s like –

EMILY: No, they shouldn’t have gender.

SALLY: Yeah, we don’t need to have male Aelfinn and Eelfinn and female Aelfinn and Eelfinn.

EMILY: Yeah, it should just be...

SALLY: You know.

EMILY: David Bowie, gender ambiguous.

SALLY: [laughing] Gender is David Bowie.

EMILY: Gender is David Bowie.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Um, they get from the secret passageway into the bargaining chamber, where Moiraine is floating in a creepy mist and, wouldn't you know it guys, she's naked. I know you didn't see this coming.

SALLY: Who could have predicted that there would be a naked woman in *The Wheel of Time*?

EMILY: A woman in captivity? Naked?

SALLY: Better if she's naked.

EMILY: I've never seen it before.

SALLY: Yeah, it's actually quite groundbreaking.

EMILY: Mind boggling.

SALLY: We're gonna have to write an essay on the seminal nature of this.

EMILY: Um, Mat goes to try and yank her out, but the mist, like, burns his hands. So, Thom, of course, because he's in *love* just bears the pain and draws her out of the mist anyway. And it's, like, okay.

SALLY: Does it actually, like, physically burn his hands or is just, like, the experience of pain like the box in *Dune*?

EMILY: I don't know. I don't – I didn't see it mentioned that his hands are burned and he seems to be –

SALLY: He still plays his flute later.

EMILY: Yeah, you would think he wouldn't be able to play instruments if his hands were actually burned.

SALLY: So it must be the *Dune* box.

EMILY: So it's like the *Dune* box [laughs].

SALLY: [laughing]

EMILY: What a reference.

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: Um, the Eelfinn then arrive and start bargaining with Mat. Mat is like, “I, we’re taking her and we want you to give us free passage back to the doorway that we came in through. We want it to be a straight shot and no harassment or attempting to stop us from you guys. You fox people.” They’re like, “Sure, great, but you need to pay us.” And Mat’s like, “Yep. I got you. Half the light of the world.” And they’re like, “Fuck yeah [hisses].”

SALLY: [hisses] Yeah.

EMILY: [laughs] And Thom and Noal are like, “Mat?” You have to remember that this entire conversation is being conducted in the Old Tongue, so they’re like, “Hey, what?”

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: As all these guys, like, swarm around Mat, creepily.

SALLY: And then rip out his eyeball!

EMILY: Yeah, they just yank out his eyeball. If you’ve got eyeball stuff, this ain’t a great chapter for you, but. Then Mat’s just screaming for, like, way longer than is necessary, no offense.

SALLY: I do, too. It got a little cheesy.

EMILY: It got a little [screaming dramatically].

SALLY: Yeah, there’s also, like, kind of this weird orgasmic thing going on with all the Eelfinn.

EMILY: Yeah. Oh.

SALLY: Being like, “This is delicious.”

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: And then they all kind of pass out. [laughing] It’s, like, heeey. Hey now. What just happened?

EMILY: We’re like, “Okay. This got…” [laughs]

SALLY: [laughing]

EMILY: Again, [laughing] it’s like that monkey meme, you know? Side eye.

SALLY: [laughs] I just, there’s – it works, enough, I guess in the context of being like, “We need to kind of take these guys out.

EMILY: Yeah, we do – I think what we’re trying to say is, uh, one of the pit, uh, one of the ways in which the writing in this sequence fails is when it veers way too close to melodrama.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Rather than actual, regular drama.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: For example, there's the line that made me laugh out loud when Thom yanks Moiraine out of the mist and it says, um, "Her weight sank into his arms, but his aging limbs were strong."

SALLY: [snorts, laughs]

EMILY: Like what?

SALLY: [laughing]

EMILY: Oh my god.

SALLY: His aging limbs.

EMILY: Yeah, was, like, Robert Jordan being like, "Yes, Thom."

SALLY: Yas, Thom! Okay, daddy!

EMILY: Yeah and then Mat screaming six times in a row while all of the Eelfinn convulse in post orgasmic bliss – orgasmic bliss, I guess. Like, I could do the orgasmic bliss without the screaming or vice versa.

SALLY: [laughing] Yeah, same.

EMILY: But both of them combined is a little, a little much.

SALLY: [laughing] Sorry. This is my episode to have a laughing fit, but just, like, the imagine that this conjures, visually.

EMILY: Mat's, like, on his knees. He's like Anakin in the fucking sand desert, you know?

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: I just also think, like, [laughs] I promise I'm not gonna harp on this forever. It's just not Mat's character.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: We have been explicitly told on several occasions when Mat is experiencing real pain, he shuts up about it. As opposed to when he is experiencing small discomforts and complains loudly.

SALLY: Right. Like, there's an element where, like, the first rip it out and he just, like, screams. It's, like, your body's response. I was like, "Oh, yeah. That, this tracks." And then, he, like, falls to his knees and –

EMILY: And just keeps screaming.

SALLY: And just keeps wailing in sort of, like, a Greek tragedy sort of vibe. And I was like, "Hey now. I know this is incredibly painful, but."

EMILY: But what?

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Anyway, Mat now has just one eye. Thom's like, "I can't believe you've done that." And Mat's like, "They told me I would eventually, which is fucking sick and disgusting of them, but I've known this was coming since I read the letter, basically. Uh, give up half the light of the world to save the world." And Thom's like, "To save the world?" And Mat's like, "She has to do something still." So, keep an eye on that in *A Memory of Light*. Does Moiraine's actions slash presence in *A Memory of Light* amount to saving the world?

SALLY: The way the question is posited makes me think the answer is no.

EMILY: Um, I think you could argue either way.

SALLY: Okay.

EMILY: I do – I just think that's a big narrative promise.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And I need it to be fulfilled in a big way in order to feel like it's proper payoff. But I am also sort of miffed by Mat's sort of lack of presence in *A Memory of Light* alongside Moiraine, but we will get to that when we get to that. For now, just, like, that's a big narrative promise. Um, they are like – they, they leave. Thom is just carrying Moiraine, who's unconscious of course. Um, and they head out and then have another dawning horror moment when they realize that Mat forgot to bargain for not getting attacked by the *Aelfinn*, the snake people. So the *Eelfinn* are off limits but not the *Aelfinn*.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: So, we get a sequence of just them running, running, running. Now they can't do anything. You know, they have to deviate from their path, so they're no longer going toward the

proper direction. Um, they're using all their fireworks, they're no longer able to use their music. They're, you know, it's just hand to hand combat at this point and there's too many of them. So, uh, this is when Noal is like, "Okay, I'll just sacrifice myself so you guys can get away and do your whole running back and forth along the corridors trick." Um, Thom is like, "No, we can't do that." And Mat's like, "Yeah, we can probably do that. [laughs] Bye, Noal!"

SALLY: [laughs] Yeah. It's a little silly, but.

EMILY: [laughs] Um, Noal is like salute. He says, "If you ever meet a Malkieri, you tell them Jain Farstrider died clean." Mat's like, "Oh, yeah. Yeah. I will, Jain. We've known this the whole time." Um, and that, like, little statement isn't ever explained adequately. I think we talked in a further episode – in an episode when we were first introduced to Noal, maybe, about the fact that he was basically involved in the downfall of Malkier because he was under some sort of compulsion by Ishamael. But clearly that's weighing on him still, so RIP Noal. He gets them, um, out of there. And it's, like, they get back to the room – oh, at this point, they're like, "Maybe we just need to find the doorway that goes back to the basement in Tear." But they finally get to that room and they find that the doorway has been destroyed.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Which seems like quite the sunk cost fallacy. Which seems like not great reasoning on the part of the Eelfinn and Aelfinn. Like –

SALLY: Yeah, like where are all your snacks going to come from, then?

EMILY: Yeah, now you just have three snacks as opposed to...

SALLY: As opposed to potentially an infinite number of snacks.

EMILY: Yeah, maybe they're just like, "Well, Mat's the biggest snack of them all." And it's, like, I agree with you on a fundamental level.

SALLY: I do.

EMILY: I guess he is, like, *ta'veren*, one of the main...

SALLY: One of the main snacks.

EMILY: One of the main, one of the big boy snacks. But.

SALLY: Snacks for big kids.

EMILY: [laughs, singing] I'm a big kid now. Um, Moiraine kind of wakes up and is like [in a wispy voice], "Don't come for me." Thom's like, "Hush, sweet, sweet woman."

SALLY: There's also at least one instance of them being like, "It's a good thing that Moiraine is so petite so that we can carry her around the labyrinth."

EMILY: She's so small and frail. I forgot how small she was.

SALLY: And also naked. She's in Thom's cloak.

EMILY: She's so tiny! Yeah, that's obnoxious. So, like, the Aelfinn are converging on them and Thom's like, "Mat, think of something." And Mat's like, "I don't know, bestie." Thom's like, "Fine," just playing his song. And Mat, like, kind of goes over the bargains he made and the questions he asked for and eventually he comes to the conclusion that he asked for a way out of Rhuidean, never remembered how he got out, but the Aelfinn gave him the *ashandarei*, his spear, which had nothing to do with any of the bargains. You know, it doesn't protect him against the one power, doesn't fill his memories, so it must have been his way out.

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: Which, my first reading this that was a total shocker for me. I was like – it's fun to get surprised by that. It was like, "Oh! Duh! It is a key."

SALLY: Yeah. Same.

EMILY: So, he uses that to break through to the outer world and they escape.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: It's a little bit melodramatic again at the end there.

SALLY: Yeah, with Thom holding Moiraine, singing to her.

EMILY: While singing a funeral dirge. And we have to hear the lyrics of the cheesy song he's playing while Mat is literally standing there talking to himself. So, that's a little cheesy, but it is a cathartic moment overall, especially when Mat, like, re-reads the script that's on the *ashandarei* and is like, "Oh, sick."

SALLY: Yeah. A key.

EMILY: They gave me the key to begin with. And it's just, like, overall a cathartic character moment in terms of Mat finally having some sort of closure on this, again, thing that's been haunting him for the entire series and having an interacting with the Eelfinn and the Aelfinn that he walks away from without being like, "Well, that was, you know, I won, on some level."

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: I played the game and I won.

SALLY: Yeah. Cheated. Cheater.

EMILY: I mean, he did lose Noal and an eyeball, but.

SALLY: Yeah! He sure did!

EMILY: [laughs] He sure did.

SALLY: Um, I think – I'm really struggling with, uh, sort of contradictory feelings where, like, um, as we've mentioned the kind of archetypes, mythologies we're playing with here are, like, labyrinth, fey world, um, bargaining. The idea of making bargains, which of course we've been playing with the Eelfinn and the Aelfinn for a really long time. And so, um, when Mat makes his third bargain? Second bargain? Whatever, this sort of 'we're getting out and we're taking all these people with us.' And he makes a mistake by saying specifically from the Eelfinn not the Aelfinn, that is really in line with the mythology of trying to make a bargain with a fey creature and how it will often be down to the very finest of details whether or not they're going to...whether or not your bargain is going to succeed versus, um, uh them being able to get one up on you again. So, that is, like, very in line and maybe I wouldn't have such a problem with this if there wasn't this moment of Mat, like, gloating about it.

EMILY: Oh, yeah.

SALLY: Because I was like, "Oh, yeah. That's great. We made a bargain and we're going to get out. Um, cool." And then Mat gloats about it and then they're like, "Oh, yeah. By the way, we fucked that up." So, it feels fine mythologically, like, I – I personally found it unsatisfying that Mat's bargain was not successful. And maybe it really was just the gloating that got to me. I don't know, but it was just kind of, like, I don't know – again, I don't really have a reason. I just found it not particularly satisfying that it all hinges on Mat using the wrong word. I know works, in terms of mythology, but I didn't – I don't know.

EMILY: It does feel like if you knew this was coming you'd spend quite a while nailing down the perfect wording for your bargain.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: In advance.

SALLY: Yeah, maybe that's what's peeving me. He's like, "I thought about this so hard," and it's, like, so is Mat – you're just telling us that Mat is dumb?

EMILY: Yeah. Either he's stupid or like – I agree. That's probably the, like, weakest narrative point of this is that it hinges on Mat, on his third go through on here, where he's now fully cognizant of the rules as opposed to the last two times.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And, you know, this is sort of his moment to be like, “I have learned. I have grown.” Um, like, it would have been more satisfying if either they broke the rules in some way. Um, or if Mat just, you know, I don’t know. I think the only way it would have worked is if he was ready and they broke the rules on him.

SALLY: Yeah, or if there was some other like...

EMILY: Tiny detail.

SALLY: Tiny detail.

EMILY: That didn’t account for.

SALLY: It’s like they have to keep – you know, very, like, Persephone. They have to keep on a straight line and someone steps off the path or something.

EMILY: Yeah, Orpheus and Eurydice.

SALLY: You know, like, yeah! Exactly. They look back or somebody eats something they’re not – not that there’s food hanging around, you know, but something that felt a little bit more like Orpheus and Eurydice, like a sort of intentional, misguided thing.

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: Versus – on the part of our hero versus Mat just not getting it right. Or, the Eelfinn and the Aelfinn breaking the rules would have been really interesting because, um, the whole idea of Snakes and Foxes is that everyone is supposed to be cheating, you know?

EMILY: Mm-hmm.

SALLY: So, one of those two would have been more satisfying to me.

EMILY: Yeah, I agree. It would have been really strong to have more of a callback to Orpheus and Eurydice, especially because we have Thom fulfilling this Orpheus role and Moiraine being Eurydice in this moment. That also would have been a better reason for Noal to die.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Um, instead of just, you know, being valiant soldier man. Is if they were set up in this way. It’s also, like, the bargaining scene itself is kind of frustrating because Mat is just allowed to set the terms. There’s no pushback from the Eelfinn. They’re just like, “Yeah, you can have whatever you want, you just have to give us a price. You just have to make a sacrifice.” And it’s, like, I don’t think that’s really how it should work.

SALLY: Yeah. Um.

EMILY: It feels like that's how it worked the last two times, but only because Mat was just blurting out shit. You know, Mat came in there, asked three questions, were basically the first three things out of his mouth, and so the Aelfinn are like, "Yeah, okay."

SALLY: Sure, I guess.

EMILY: Whatever, but it feels like there should have been a more...

SALLY: Yeah, especially because, like, it doesn't really feel like there's much reason to Mat losing his eyeball except for the sort of, like, trickster-like glee the Eelfinn and Aelfinn get by making him make this fucked up little bargain.

EMILY: That they themselves prophesied.

SALLY: Yeah! Which is, like, fine, that particularly doesn't bother me, despite my laughing fit over the melodrama scene. That's fine, it works out enough, but yeah, unless there is more of a reason for that the fact that they're just like, "Yeah, that's fine. We're satisfied with your single eyeball."

EMILY: Yeah, like, I don't know. If, like, giving the eye and then the way back changed in such a way that Mat's new lack of depth of perception was fucking him up or something like that, you know? I don't know. You're right, this whole sequence is satisfying *enough* but could have been a lot better if there was any editorial oversight.

SALLY: Yeah, any, *any* sort of editorial oversight to be like – even just to be like some readers being like, "Well, that sucked. Why did that have to happen?" You know. I also really thought the Tower of Ghenjei sequence was going to be longer.

EMILY: Oh.

SALLY: I guess in my mind, I was – I think what happened is I was so excited for it, because it feels like such a – again, I think the Eelfinn and Aelfinn are one of the more fun and exciting and weird parts of this series that actually gets us to what of the most interesting worldbuilding aspects which is, like, this is just one weird world connected to other weird worlds that we can portal to or the Ogier can magic themselves away to. So I think I was just really excited for it and I kind of built it up in my mind that it would be a bit more, like, Stone of Tear level of, like, this is the climax of the book.

EMILY: Sure.

SALLY: This thing that we've been building to since Book One and getting three relatively short chapters bummed me out a little bit. But I would read an entire book about the Eelfinn and Aelfinn, so that might just be a me thing. I think in terms of where we are in the series length is totally fine, but.

EMILY: It is funny that Birgitte is like, “Yeah, I spent three years in the Tower of Ghenjei” and Mat’s out of there in two hours flat. [laughs] Like.

SALLY: Yeah [laughs], really speedruns the Tower of Ghenjei [laughs].

EMILY: Okay. Next –

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: [laughs] The next episode will be the end of the book and we’ll just bounce around between a lot of points of view the way we do in prologues and the end of books, just to get us nice and set up for *A Memory of Light* to start, so I won’t bore you with each and every...

SALLY: We’ll bore you next week with each and every point of view. Starting with Gawyn, which is...

EMILY: I think it’s Egwene.

SALLY: Oh, well. [crosstalk] Trigger warning for Gawyn all the same. Yeah [laughs].

EMILY: Yeah, *Towers of Midnight* ending next week.

SALLY: What! That’s crazy!

EMILY: Then we will of course be taking our usual one or two week break before we kick off –

SALLY: To get ready.

EMILY: Yeah, it’s going to take me quite a while to figure out a reading schedule for *A Memory of Light*.

SALLY: Yeah, we might see you guys in 2025 as we prepare mentally for going through The Last Battle itself. How are we even going to do that?

EMILY: Thank you for listening, thanks to Glynn Mackenzie for our theme song and thanks to our patrons on Patreon and our followers on social media.

SALLY: Yes, thank you all so much.

EMILY: Do you have a sign off?

SALLY: I do. Um, one I have to go to the pharmacy. Boo.

EMILY: Oh, I’m sorry.

SALLY: Farts. Yeah, there's a man who works at the pharmacy who I had to work with in my real job, who *hates* me, which is very valid. I would hate me too if I had to work with the man – if I was him and I had to work with me in the context that I had to work with him. He should be like *poisoning* my medicine. Um, two, as you guys know, I am, like, number one queen of tummy troubles. Um, and I have a food sensitivity to peanuts. Like, a low grade sort of allergy. But I love to put peanut butter in my oatmeal. It's, like, one of my favorite foods in the entire world is, like, oatmeal with peanut butter and bananas. But I'm trying to cut out as much as peanuts as possible for the sake of my stomach, so I bought almond butter. Which was *eleven dollars* for a jar of almond butter.

EMILY: Oh my god!

SALLY: It is, like, I could go on my whole economic soapbox about how expensive it is to have food restrictions. But almond butter doesn't cream the same way peanut butter does, at least the one I bought is super grainy. So, anyway, my oatmeal has been incredibly disgusting the past two times and I'm going to have to revisit whether or not I'm willing to revisit just suffering through putting peanut butter in my oatmeal.

EMILY: [laughs]

SALLY: [laughs] There you go. That was a fun one. Everyone is going to relate to that [laughs].

EMILY: Probably they will. Everyone has tummy troubles.

SALLY: That's true.

EMILY: Not as severe as yours, but.

SALLY: No, it's true. We're all really going through it in this day and age. In late stage capitalism.

EMILY: And everyone knows how expensive groceries are.

SALLY: Yeah, Jesus Christ.

EMILY: Alright everyone. Have a good week!

SALLY: Bye!