



Episode 282: R.I.P. Talmanes (PSYCH!)

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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 Glynn MacKenzie plays)

Emily: Okay.

Sally: Well, I feel like I've already forgotten what happened.

Emily: Oh. Are you mad at me that I didn't tell you Talmanes is – was really alive?

Sally: Yeah, I was mad that you let me make an ass of myself last week. (laugh)

Emily: No, I didn't, I wanted to capture your real experience, live on – (laugh)

Sally: No, I'm – I'm very mad at you. (laugh) I do remember what happened now, and I –

Emily: If you'd started, like, waxing poetic about him –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And his life, then I would have stopped you, but you were just like, "Well, too bad Talmanes beefed it."

Sally: "He beefed it."

Emily: And I was like –

Sally: Does he come back? Or is he just, like, off-screen, convalescing, for most of the book?

Emily: No, I think he comes back. I think he maybe has, like, a point of view or two in the Last Battle or something. It's not like he does anything, though, for the rest of the book because there are so many characters who actually have to do things that, like, Talmanes couldn't possibly be one of them. I also didn't tell you because I wanted to live in a world where Talmanes actually did die.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: I'm pretty mad that he –

Sally: Yeah, I –

Emily: Came back.

Sally: I am mad that my points last week now sound a little dumb, but these things happen. Um. I'm not really mad, guys, I sound dumb all the time. Um, but it's just like, why would I go through that whole dramatic masculine nonsense and Talmanes not die, you know?

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: It feels stupid.

Emily: Like, I'd be fine if Talmanes lived if they didn't make such a big fucking deal about him dying.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: If they weren't just, like, trying to do this sort of, like, oh, plot twist, gotcha –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Type transparent thing.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But it's like, so clearly, the prologue ended with what felt like Talmanes's death –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And while I don't agree with, like, just sort of killing characters off randomly, I do think, okay, they were trying to make a point about, like, even fan-favorite characters aren't safe in the –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Apocalypse Last Battle, and it's like, okay, if that's the point you wanna make, fine, but then stay –

Sally: Then he has to die.

Emily: Stay him dead. You know?

Sally: Yeah, he can't just show up and somehow have been the one man in human history to beat two –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Big bad Myrddraal cuts on his body or, like, several; I don't know how many times he got cut by that stupid blade –

Emily: Yeah, and get sucked out of mega-hell by Nynaeve –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Or whatever.

Sally: Yeah, 'cause Nynaeve just comes up at him and drops, like, a nuclear bomb of healing. Egg is like, "Okay."

Emily: Yeah, no one but Nynaeve could have done it, I guess.

Sally: So – no, I'm not mad. I'm not mad at all, don't worry.

Emily: Well, I'm mad that he's alive.

Sally: Yeah, it does feel a little silly.

Emily: Yeah, it just feels like a narrative promise being broken, which we've had enough of already –

Sally: Yeah, like –

Emily: And will continue to have more of.

Sally: At this point, can we just finish – oops. Finish the narrative at some point? Can we just start making decisions? I feel like – I know this is a long book, as all of the books are long, but I feel like we got to the first chapter, and I was like, "Okay, I'm fucking ready. Like, let's talk about the seals on the Dark One's prison breaking," and we're just talking about how we're going to talk about whether or not we should break the seals on the Dark One's prison and when we're going to break the seals on the Dark One's prison. And I just, was like – last night, I was, like, gonna eat through the book, I was so annoyed. I was like, please, can we just do something. (laugh)

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

Sally: And I am not going to eat the book. My name is Sally Goodger.

Emily: Yeah, it would give anyone indigestion. Look at how big it is. Um, yeah, as I was reading it, I was like, God – actually, I was – I was doing the reading schedule; I was like, God, so much of the book is just this one day.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Like, when we open the book, we are still operating in the nighttime of Caemlyn falling.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Which makes the prologue feel kinda weird, you know? That it is sliding right into the actual narrative. So – so chronologically. But, you know, what are you gonna do?

Sally: Yeah, just – not to beat our point over the head, but it's like, at that point, it does not need to be a prologue. Like, prologues are distinct from the main narrative. It's why they are prologue, not chapter one.

Emily: Yeah, for sure.

Sally: So what are we doing? Anyway.

Emily: We open with the classic – that dang wind, just blowing.

Sally: Just blowing. Blowing across the land and across the sea.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Um, we see – it's just showing us that things are bad.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Things are still bad.

Emily: It starts in the same place that we initially saw the wind in Eye of the World, in the, like, Westwood, I think it is, which is the, like, woods in the Two Rivers. It's like, "Taren Ferry got burned to the ground," I think in book four?

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: When those bad things were happening in the Two Rivers? Which at least is fitting because then we get to a conversation – uh, we go to the Fields of Merrilor, and we're getting back to Rand's weird girl era because it's like, "Look how sad and depressing things are. But there's still joy because Rand al'Thor is laughing with his friend in the tent."

Sally: Yeah, and you're like, okay. Okay.

Emily: I'm so happy for him.

Sally: What a tonal shift.

Emily: Yeah, you're just like, what? Hello.

Sally: It's like, people are starving. All – even the animals are starving at this point. But Perrin gave Rand a good laugh, talking about how he couldn't stand after the Trolloc fight and Faile had to –

Emily: Or something?

Sally: Carry him around.

Emily: Anyway, yeah, Rand and Perrin are chatting. It's like, oh, look how – it's trying to capture some of the, like, you know, nostalgia that we have been yearning for –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: In terms of our main characters' relationships with each other. Like, they started out as such a close-knit group of little weirdos.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And now they're all eons apart. And so it's been kind of like, we're wanting to get to the Last Battle and have them all be reunited, just to, like, have those interactions.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Um, so this is, I guess, like a gesture toward that. Um, it, of course, is with Brandon Sanderson's sort of typical flat dialogue, so, um, there's not much actual, like, emotion – emotional weight behind any of this.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: The predominant thing happening is that Rand is like, "Perrin, I just need to reminisce about being a person and how people are inherently good and how life is worth it," and Perrin's like, "Um, I was just trying to tell a funny story, but you made it kind of awkward."

Sally: "You made it kind of – you made it kind of weird. Why'd you have to make it weird?"

Emily: "You made it kind of –" yeah, like, "Could you not elevate my weird makeout story –"

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: "To the 'this is why the world needs saving' level?" Like, eugh. (laugh)

Sally: Yeah. Ahhhh.

Emily: And also, Perrin's just like, "You're so odd."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Like, Perrin, at least, is getting a slightly toned-down version of odd Instagram influencer Rand. But still, he's doing a little – he's a little much.

Sally: Yeah, there's the point in the book where Perrin's like, "I need to talk to Rand." And Rand is like, "You are talking to Rand," and Perrin is like, "No, I'm not."

Emily: "No, I need to talk to the real Rand."

Sally: "I need to talk to the human man." (laugh) "Rand al'Thor, because I don't know who this is."

Emily: "I don't know who the fuck you are –"

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: (laugh) "Mr. Guru. What cult leader shit is going on here, but could I please speak to my friend?"

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Yeah. Poor Perrin.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: That's all I have to say.

Sally: Yeah, and on the – I don't think there's much more to say about, like, how the nostalgia falls flat and it doesn't really work. Like, you can – there are moments where I'm like, this could be really nice, but I also think it's – I think we talked about this a bit when Mat and Perrin met, is like, one, the characters were pretty close-knit in book one, but it was never like they were – I don't know, they still didn't necessarily read as friends to me. Like, as close as they could have in book one. It was still like, they all lived really far apart and did their farm chores and saw each other occasionally –

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: So it's not like – I dunno. The nostalgia. And also, it just feels weird at this point in time to have our world – all of our characters who are world leaders, like, sit down and reminisce. I don't know. Again, I think I'm just impatient for things to get going.

Emily: Yeah, you kinda want – it almost would've been better if this book started in medias res –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Instead of us having to sort of build up to what is going on. Uh, because, yeah, this sort of, like, characters walking around the Fields of Merrilor, being like, "Oh, we're gonna have a big argument tomorrow," and I'm like, okay, why don't we just get to the big argument?

Sally: Just start fighting.

Emily: Yeah, let's just start talking.

Sally: Um.

Emily: Um, Rand and Perrin go to meet with Balwer, who's been co-opted as Rand's new sort of secretary –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Which is –

Sally: Yeah, Rand never had named secretaries before.

Emily: Hm-mm.

Sally: So it's pretty fascinating now to be like, "And now he has Balwer."

Emily: I know, when the Last Battle's starting tomorrow? It's like, what's – what have you got to do? What do you need a secretary for at this point, man?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Like, the bureaucracy part of the book is sort of over.

Sally: It's sort of done. Tomorrow we're going to be swinging swords.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Yeah, so it is – just feels like one of these last-minute attempts to be like, “Every character is accounted for.” But, like, genuinely, if Rand has not – like, it would be super interesting if Rand had had a secretary the whole series – again, maintaining paperwork and such – but no.

Emily: Uh, speaking of every character needing to be accounted for, Balwer’s big news to Rand is that King Roedran –

Sally: Yeah. (laugh)

Emily: Roedran of Murandy has agreed via Elayne to attend the big meeting tomorrow. But just because he’s the only monarch who hasn’t RSVP’d, and so now he’s like, “Yep, I’m coming, ‘cause I don’t want to be left out.”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And you’re like, relatable. I feel for you, King Roedran of Murandy, because you are, it feels like, the only monarch on this entire continent who never got any screen time.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And now you’re being introduced so late in the game, so –

Sally: Sorry.

Emily: I know that you’re not important, and I’m a little weirded out that Robert Jordan and Brandon Sanderson are trying to make you slightly important now, but here we are.

Sally: Here we are.

Emily: Um, there’s a big earthquake because the world is ending.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Rand’s like, “There will be another Breaking. Storms, earthquakes. The Dark One will grind this world to dust,” and I’m like, okay, promises, promises. You know?

Sally: Yeah, making a tally mark: will the world be ground to dust?

Emily: Will the world be ground to dust? I will keep my eye on that. Meanwhile Rand and Elayne are engaging in some sort of, like, odd distance-flirting via spies, which – I can’t imagine a less interesting heterosexual manifestation.

Sally: Yeah, Rand is also like, “Elayne can’t go back to Andor; that’s so dangerous.” Back to Caemlyn, I mean. “I need to – but I can’t tell her that because she’ll do the exact opposite,” so he writes her this, I don’t know, condescending letter about how she has to go back.

Emily: And Elayne’s like, “He’s so sweet, using the Game of Houses to try – to –”

Sally: “To try and manipulate me.”

Emily: And I’m like, what the fuck are you guys talking about?

Sally: Yeah. She's like, "I'm mad, of course, because he's just telling me what I already know to do, but also, it kind of turns me on." And it's like –

Emily: Is there any situation in the Wheel of Time where a woman can be turned on while not simultaneously being mad at the man involved?

Sally: No.

Emily: Seems to be, like, the – a byproduct of arousal is anger.

Sally: Is anger, or they have to – they have to be angry in order to be horny.

Emily: Yeah. (laugh) Yeah.

Sally: The first –

Emily: The byproduct of anger is arousal.

Sally: Is arousal.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: When you're so mad at a man that you just have to fuck him, you know?

Emily: That you're so horny. It's like, what?

Sally: It – it's also like, you guys. The apocalypse is starting in, like, six minutes.

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: Could you keep it in your pants? Keep it in your pants.

Emily: Rand, by the way, deadbeat dad of the century –

Sally: I know! (laugh)

Emily: (laugh) Has not known this entire time that Elayne is pregnant? Which, like, I'm not fully blaming Rand for. Elayne knew that she was pregnant –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Within three milliseconds of him coming inside her. Like – (laugh)

Sally: Yeah. She was like, "There they are."

Emily: "There they are, my babies."

Sally: "My babies."

Emily: So, like, you could've maybe sent a message to the Dragon Reborn –

Sally: Yeah.



Emily: Being like, “Just by the way, you knocked me up.” But instead she’s just kept that on the downlow, even from the father.

Sally: Yeah, and then she shows up, like six months pregnant or whatever, with –

Emily: Yeah, she’s –

Sally: Twins.

Emily: She’s become three more months pregnant –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: In the last – day. (laugh)

Sally: The last four days. That’s what they make it sound like. Everyone keeps being like, “She’s so swollen with – with child.”

Emily: “She’s so ripe,” and I’m like, shut the fuck up.

Sally: Like, okay? So she’s gonna give birth on the Fields of Merrilor? What’s happening?

Emily: Yeah, again, maximum: could only be five or six months pregnant.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And yet here we are, and everyone’s like, “She’s so fucking fat,” and I’m like – (laugh)

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: You guys are – you guys are nuts.

Sally: But Rand just has this sort of casual thought about how he’s going to have kids.

Emily: He’s like, “Whoa, I’m gonna be a father,” and I’m like, you’re fully expecting to die in the Last Battle, so –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: No you’re not.

Sally: No you’re not. And then – I don’t know, he doesn’t seem to have any further thought about it. (laugh)

Emily: You’re – (laugh) Yeah, your relationship with your unborn children is, “Whoa.”

Sally: “That might be cool.” (laugh)

Emily: “Guess I’ll die now.” (laugh)

Sally: “If only I wasn’t slated to die tomorrow.”

Emily: (singing) “The cat’s in the cradle, and the silver –”

Sally: (singing) “Little boy blue and the man on the moon.”

Emily: “When you coming home, dad?”

Sally: “I don’t know when, but we’ll get together, then.”

Emily: Oh, Rand. (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) “And the cat’s in the cradle –” Ed. Please. (Laugh)

Emily: Um, Egg, meanwhile, is writing a letter, per Oprah’s advice, that she’s not planning to send.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: She’s like, “I just have to get all my feelings in order, in order to talk to Rand tomorrow,” and I’m like, of course, because you’re so emotional that you couldn’t just improv a rational discussion with him.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, Gawyn comes in and is like, “Hey, Elayne wants to see you.” Egg’s like, “Great.” They Travel over there, um, just to talk about how, um – well, Elayne’s, like, waiting outside of her tent. She’s like, “Ah, something’s going on at Caemlyn or something. The messengers I’ve been sending haven’t been coming back, so I’m trying to figure out what’s going on there.” But Egwene’s like, “Look at my sick letter that I wrote,” and Elayne’s like, “Okay, this is a little mean,” and Egg’s like, “Well, I have to be mean because he’s an idiot.” And Elayne’s like, “Okay, well, he’s not actually an idiot. Like, there – he – be cool.” Um, and we learn from Egwene – Egwene’s like, “I don’t actually have any beef with breaking the seals. My – my trouble is with timing.” She’s basically like, “We can’t just break the seals and let the Dark One loose on the world because I’ve been studying and reading the Prophecies and shit and I think that they need to be broken at a very specific time, and since I’m the Amyrlin and I’m the Watcher of the Seals, seems like I should be the one to do it.” And Elayne’s like, “Well, great, that seems like a reasonable argument. Why don’t you just tell Rand that?” and Egwene’s like, “Beause I hate him,” and it’s like, what the fuck?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: We also hear from Rand, talking to Perrin, that he has, like – he’s like, “Yeah, I have a really reasonable argument for breaking the seals in the first place. It’s that, you know, you can’t – it is better to replace something than to mend something that is broken. It makes for, like, stronger material,” and Perrin’s like, “Wow, that’s super reasonable. Why don’t you just phrase it that way to Egwene?” and Rand’s like, “Cause she’s stupid.”

Sally: Yeah, Perrin – Rand makes a blacksmith metaphor about forging new tools –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: And Perrin’s like, “Why didn’t you just say that to Egg?” and Rand’s like, “She’s not a blacksmith, Perrin.” (laugh)

Emily: And I'm like, neither are you, Rand!

Sally: Yeah. And Perrin's like, "I think she'd get it. I don't – I don't think it's –" (laugh)

Emily: (laugh) It's so fucking wild and condescending.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: "She's not a blacksmith, Perrin." Okay, Mr. Man, why don't you use a metaphor her womanly brain will understand, then, like sewing?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: You psycho.

Sally: He – it – it made me so mad when I was reading it. Like, it's just, like, such Wheel of Time bullshit for a man and a woman to be like, "I refuse to find any way to communicate with a member of the, quote unquote, opposite sex."

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: "Rand's too volatile –"

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: "Egg is too stupid," I'm gonna fucking kill you. Moiraine's gonna show up and balefire both of you.

Emily: Yeah, unfortunately, as the first part of this book is all about this meeting between Rand and Egg, the – that whole Wheel of Time schtick is exactly what is being presented here as the main thematic thing going on.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: And, like you said, it's a meeting between a man and a woman, so of course it has to be upsetting and weird, but it's also an argument between The Man and The Woman.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Egwene is our central female character; she has now progressed to the title of the young pope.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: But, excuse me, she's the young woman pope.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: So she's, like, you know, this embodiment of magical womanly-hood.

Sally: Yeah, Egg is the most powerful a woman could be on this continent and therefore is, like, the most Wheel of Time woman possible.

Emily: Yeah, she's the most powerfully magically –

Sally: Uh-huh.

Emily: Politically – although of course Elayne, now, is also somehow, for some reason, being set up as the most powerful ruler –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Amongst the rulers, and I'm like, that's such an insane thing to say –

Sally: I simply –

Emily: But I guess every other country has been involved in civil war in the last two months, so.

Sally: Yeah. Um. And Elayne did just take Cairhien, so I guess in terms of territory, she is the most –

Emily: Yeah, for sure.

Sally: Land-rich. Freaking colonizer. Um, yeah, and then Rand of course is the polar opposite of that, as the most Wheel of Time man, also the most powerful magically is the man of prophecy, the man himself. And it's just – I think you mentioned this at the end of the last book: like, we are not only getting a conversation between two characters who once upon a time had a romantic history and are now meeting on the field as, like, fully self-actualized or what Wheel of Time considers self – I know, he looks so cute. Ed is napping in the sun in the most precious way possible.

Emily: Oh, Ed, you're so cute.

Sally: And it's really distracting. Um. Um, they are what Wheel of Time considers to be fully self-actualized characters, um, in terms of their arcs, so they're, like, these two powerhouse figures, but they are also, as Emily mentioned, in terms of Wheel of Time world, meeting as two archetypes: the archetypical – archetypal man and woman. And therefore it can't just be a rational, normal negotiation between world leaders. It is just fraught with gender dynamics.

Emily: Yeah, we're dealing with the man who comes from Mars and the woman who comes from Venus. Like, that's what's going to happen. Of course, the gender dynamics in Wheel of Time have always been inherently flawed –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: So this meeting between Rand and Egwene is always going to be inherently flawed the second that you look closely at it.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: You're like, "This isn't how normal people would act," the same way, whenever it comes down to gender dynamics in Wheel of Time, you're like, "This is not how normal people would act." This is how Robert Jordan weird – Robert Jordan's weird – weird worldview of genders acts.

Sally: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

Emily: So it's almost, like, not valuable to even treat them like characters –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Anymore because they're not being played like characters. If they were being played like characters, then Rand and Egwene would have a shared history that would probably transcend some of the, like, political messiness between them.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And they'd be able to have a conversation like two adults, because like you said, they have come to the ends of their character arcs.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: They are fully, like, transcended characters.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: So perhaps the end point of that is that they should be able to meet on a level playing field.

Sally: Yeah, like, what is the point of Rand having gone through literal spiritual enlightenment if he cannot rise above, uh, the – his understanding of gender as he was raised with, you know?

Emily: Yeah, and why can't Egwene also rise above it considering that she's been kidnapped, beaten, abused, like nine separate times –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And apparently is stronger for it.

Sally: Yeah. Like, it's just really annoying to be like, they've done it. They've come to the top. They've both fought their way out of the darkness, out of the abyss. Here are two truly outstanding heroes, and yet, you know, "Men go to Jupiter to get more stupider" is literally Egwene's argument about why she can't have a conversation with Rand.

Emily: "He's such – he's such a man." It's like, oh my God, you guys.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: You guys suck so bad.

Sally: It reads like trying to talk to your grandma about talking to boys.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: She's like, "You know, my husband's never cooked a meal in his life because men can't turn the stove on."

Emily: “And I never had a bank account.”

Sally: Yeah. (laugh)

Emily: And you’re like, okay, Grandma, well, maybe that’s part of the problem.

Sally: Jesus.

Emily: Um. As Egwene and Elayne are having this conversation, we start getting the arrival of refugees from Caemlyn. You know, Elayne learns the news that it has been attacked, and we start getting soldiers, including good old Charlz Guybon and Talmanes, badly wounded, reappearing. People start Healing. Um, Nynaeve comes and joins the Healing group, and that is sort of where we leave, at least, Egwene.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Um, back to Perrin and Rand. Um, they walk to, like, Perrin’s camp because they’re going to meet with some of Faile’s eyes and ears, I guess. Perrin, hilariously, is like, “Just so you know, Faile hates your guts, so don’t expect her to –”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: I don’t know, I’m like, I’m sure Faile is perfectly capable of being polite to the Dragon Reborn. She has in the past.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Despite him being incredibly rude to her, so.

Sally: Yeah, she has every reason to hate Rand, and Rand, to his credit, does basically say that. Like –

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: “Yeah, I would hate me too.” Which is like, he says it an annoying, self-pitying sort of way.

Emily: Yeah. Like –

Sally: But it is –

Emily: “I’m such a sad boy,” and you’re like, shut up. (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) Shut up! Shut up! It is super weird for Perrin to tell his best friend randomly, “Hey, my wife hates you.”

Emily: “Hey. I don’t think she’s a big fan of yours.” And then Rand should’ve been like, “Well, I’m not a big fan of hers, so.”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: “Funnily enough, I think we’ll both survive. We’re not going to be getting together for family dinners after this.”

Sally: Yeah, Rand’s like, “I’m gonna die tomorrow, Perrin.”

Emily: Clearly.

Sally: “They’re gonna put me on my rock bier –”

Emily: Yeah, my Tibetan sky burial.

Sally: “And light me on fire.”

Emily: And do the Midsommar dance –

Sally: Yeah. (laugh)

Emily: Around my corpse, so –

Sally: Or whatever.

Emily: I’m not expecting Faile to throw – be throwing flowers, eulogizing me. Uh, they get to the Two Rivers camp. (laugh) They run into, like, some guys from the Two Rivers, and Rand’s like, “This is so wild, these are guys I looked up to when I was a kid, and now they’re, like, bowing to me,” and they’re like, “Wow, this earthquake is so weird, and we’re so nervous. There’s a big storm coming.” And this is just peak, um, Instagram girlie Rand: “The prophecies have nearly all been fulfilled. This day was seen and our tests are known. We do not walk into them unaware.” And you’re like, okay, Lao Tzu. Like – (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) Okay?

Emily: Okay? If I were Kert or fucking Reed, I’d be like, “Hey.”

Sally: “I’m not marching into battle behind him.”

Emily: “Hey. I know that you have an eighth-grade education, at the most.” (laugh)

Sally: Yeah. Yeah.

Emily: “What are we doing here?”

Sally: Yeah, why are you standing on these, you know –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Fake – fake accolades?

Emily: What the fuck.

Sally: Are you a poet now?

Emily: Yeah. I’d be like, “Okay.”

Sally: I think a more accurate response is if someone you knew from high school suddenly became fantasy Jesus –

Emily: Mm.

Sally: And came back to you and was, like, saying shit like this, don't you think you'd, like, bully them mercilessly? That's what I want out of the Two Rivers guys.

Emily: Yeah, I want them to be like, "Ha, loser."

Sally: Yeah. (laugh) That's what Mat should be doing.

Emily: Yeah, Mat should be in the background, like, "Oh, you think you're profound?"

Sally: Yeah. (laugh)

Emily: "You sound like a fortune cookie, dipshit."

Sally: (laugh) It just –

Emily: Alas.

Sally: Is –

Emily: No one laughs at Rand, and that is one of the great downfalls of this series.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Especially right now, when Rand really deserves to be laughed at.

Sally: When Rand absolutely deserves to be laughed at. And I think we probably made a similar argument when we were talking about Rand hitting rock bottom, about how –

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: People are so delicate around the Dragon Reborn and how nobody, like, pushes on his ego, and one way to do that in a gentler way is to just, like, make fun of people in, like, a sort of friendly –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: "We were lads in school" sort of way. Anyway.

Emily: Yeah, we were really robbed of the court jester that Mat should have been. R.I.P.

Sally: Oh, yeah, that's what we were talking about; we were talking about Rand – how Rand should have a jester. That's exactly what we were talking about, and I forgot that.

Emily: Yeah, we – we love a fool. The only person who's allowed to be honest to –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: The Dragon Reborn, I guess.



Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Which, funnily enough, the Seanchan have, as, like, a standardized position –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: In their, you know, courts –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Is the Truthspeaker position. But unfortunately, all the Truthspeakers are losers who don't have senses of humor.

Sally: Yeah, who aren't like, "Hey, Tuon, you are lame."

Emily: Yeah, it would've been so much funnier if whatever her name is, Selucia or whoever, was like, "I'm the Truthspeaker, which means I have to wear a fun little outfit with little bells –"

Sally: Yeah. (laugh)

Emily: "And do a little caper whenever I mock you to your face."

Sally: (laugh) "I have – I have, like, little balls that I juggle, and –"

Emily: "I do somersaults."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And it's like, wow, cool.

Sally: Amazing!

Emily: Wow, the Seanchan have – are still pretty bad, but you know, they've elevated, like, a point and a half from –

Sally: For having a silly little guy in a silly little outfit.

Emily: Yeah, I love a silly little guy.

Sally: With bells. But alas. Kert and Reed are like, "That –"

Emily: Kert and Reed are like –

Sally: "Really helped me feel a lot better. Thank you, Dragon Reborn."

Emily: "Thank you, Jesus. Thank you, daddy." Um, Perrin gets the message that, uh, Caemlyn has fallen 'cause of the Trollocs. Rand's like, "Ah, it must have been that stupid Waygate." And, um, it's like, yeah, I sure would like to know what happened to the fucking Waygate. But, yeah, Rand's like, "We can't let Elayne leave because I really need her to be at this meeting tomorrow." And Perrin's like, "Why? She's on Egg's side." And Rand's like, "Well, I like her." He's like, "She's so influential. If I can sway her," basically, "then that's a big deal."

Sally: Rand also says the dumb thing. He's like, "There aren't any sides anymore, Perrin. We're all on the same side."

Emily: And it's like, okay, there's clearly sides going on here. Let's not –

Sally: You have – yeah.

Emily: Let's accept reality a bit.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, Rand is also setting up something here where he references, like, Demandred as someone who is the Shadow's general.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: You know, he's like, "I'm – was – I was expecting something like this. And I – Demandred's probably behind it because he's so into war. He's like Sun Tzu Bad or something."

Sally: (laugh) Sun Tzu, parentheses, evil.

Emily: Derogatory.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: He's like, "It's so wild 'cause in the utopia before the world broke down, we would just, like, read about war in books, you know, like Sun Tzu."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: "Like the Art of War, and we were just like, 'Oh, teehee.' But then Demandred and I actually went to battle and we had to start actually using those theories." And I'm like, that's cool. Sounds interesting. Too bad Demandred is such a weird character in this book.

Sally: Yeah, too bad Demandred is a loser.

Emily: Yeah, like –

Sally: Capital L.

Emily: Like, Demandred should have been doing things strategically this entire time and sort of setting himself up that way.

Sally: (cough) Demandred should have been Mazrim Taim.

Emily: Demandred should have been Mazrim Taim. (clears throat)

Sally: Robert, you freaking coward. I think Rand also mentions, or Lews – as Lews Therin, Rand – Lews Therin, exclamation point, Rand –

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: Is like, “Maybe if I hadn't been such a douchebag, Demandred wouldn't have turned evil.” And it's like, that's not really your responsibility.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: But also, maybe you shouldn't have been a douchebag to him. Both of those things can be true.

Emily: Yeah, like, Demandred is an adult man –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Who's responsible for his own actions and whether or not he turns completely evil.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Like, it's not like Demandred just turned a little bit evil.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: It's not like he just was like, “Man, that guy was bullying me. So I'm gonna key his car.”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: It was like, “That guy bullied me a little bit. So I'm going to do heinous war crimes –”

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: “For the rest of eternity.”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And it's like, okay, Demandred, that's on you.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But yeah, Rand, maybe you should have been a nicer person.

Sally: He's like, “Maybe I shouldn't have, like, you know, made fun of him or whatever.” And you're like, you shouldn't have been a bully. But, again, Demandred is ...

Emily: Like, okay, Demandred is evil because he's evil. And he made that choice. Uh, but yeah, he would probably be a little less psychosexually obsessed with you –

Sally: Yeah. (laugh)

Emily: If you hadn't made fun of him and his nose or whatever. You probably could have prevented that one. (laugh)

Sally: You probably could have, yeah, made him be, like, a little bit more manageable –

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: In terms of bad guys. But.

Emily: Um, we also – I think I skimmed over this, but Rand and Perrin talk about Rand's manifestation of insanity.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: And Rand frames it as, “My insanity was the fact that the barriers between my past life broke down,” essentially.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Like, “That was the manifestation of my insanity. And I'm still insane, but basically, I've got it on lock now because I've managed to keep the two separate better.”

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: He's like, “So, in a way, the taint on saidin is what's going to actually kill the Dark One, ‘cause now I have Lews Therin’s memories.” Anyway, I just wanted to point that out because, um, we have gone back and forth as we talked through this series about the question of whether Rand is insane –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: And the question of, like, what's going on with Lews Therin. Is that a symptom of his insanity or is that just sort of, like, something that would happen to the Dragon Reborn?

Sally Mm-hmm.

Emily: Et cetera, et cetera. And it's very frustrating that we have, um, at least an answer for that in that Lews Therin was not just a hallucination, but was, like, a real thing happening to Rand, but that was still madness –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: You know? Like, that's an interesting blending of the two sort of possibilities there, and it's nice to have those synced up. But again, we are in Book 14, so it's sort of like, I can't really now go back and fix my ongoing confusion and frustration from the last thirteen books in retrospect –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Especially when it's cast as such, like, an aside here.

Sally: Yeah, and, um –

Emily: Like, if that was the answer, I needed to understand that a long time ago.

Sally: Yeah, if we were going to be given a concrete answer, which obviously the decision by the authors in this book is to give us a concrete answer, in one of those throwaway comments, that feels like it's just a checkbox on the Unresolved Plots checklist.

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: So if we – if we were going to be given an answer, it probably should have been done before this point. Um, I think it's interesting that we're presenting, um, in this world that, um, insanity has taken the form of this specific barrier of current life and past life breaking down. So the two are blending together. That's, like, an interesting worldbuilding thing and an interesting take on the different ways that insanity can – um, is viewed in different cultural contexts –

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: Like what we consider in – quote unquote, insanity is so much influenced by our understanding of the world and what is, quote, normal. I think at this point, it probably would have been better to just leave the question up in the air. There's something on that hesitation. We've talked before about how the fantastic as one version of, um, speculative fiction hinges on whether or not we can believe something is true or not, like that kind of moment of deciding, oh, is it a real thing? Like, is Lews Therin just, like, a real person in his head? And that's just prophecy stuff, or is Lews Therin a hallucination? And that moves us more into the realm of the taint on saidin and how that might be impacting the Dragon Reborn's sanity. Like, moving back and forth between those two, I think, was more interesting. So if we were going to settle into a new reality, we should have done it two books ago.

Emily: Yeah, my sense that I get is that Brandon Sanderson, in his sort of desperation to close up all plot holes and plot points in order to – you know, Brandon Sanderson was given the thankless job of finishing –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: An immense series. And I think one of the things readers expected from the series ending was to have any outstanding questions –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Answered. So I think in his sort of, like, desire to do that, he was trying to kind of give us, like, an almost clinical perspective on Rand's sort of –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Ongoing struggles with madness. Like, we had the whole fucking CT scan that he got via Nynaeve in the last book –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: That was just added confusion.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And now we get this.

Sally: Oh, yeah. I forgot about that. (laugh)

Emily: Yeah, and so it's just him trying to be like, “Ah, no, look, there are answers.”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Even though Robert Jordan didn't give us any and perhaps didn't need there to be any.

Sally: Yeah. Yeah. I don't mean that to be a dunk on Brandon, necessarily. I get the desire at this point, especially since the idea that Lews Therin's knowledge is playing a huge role as we go into this fight. It makes sense to be like, "Lews Therin is here for real. Rand is not crazy." But I – I don't know. I always found it pretty compelling to be like, we don't actually know if our figure of prophecy is, you know, functioning –

Emily: Mentally well, yeah.

Sally: In the same reality as the rest of us. Yeah.

Emily: And it's not like we have – ever had, really, any reason to suspect Lews Therin's information –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Of being bad, regardless of whether he was a hallucination or not. Like, the few times Rand has acted on Lews Therin's sort of advice –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: It's been good.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Regardless of whether that's a hallucination – you know, before –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: This question was answered.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So it wasn't like I was like, oh, no, Rand's going to do this thing. And then it's going to turn out to be the exact wrong thing 'cause Lews Therin wasn't real.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Like, that wasn't something I was worried about, you know?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, we also get Avienda going to – sneaking into Elayne's tent while she's in the middle of, like, some sort of meeting with some of the Cairhien – uh, the Caemlyn –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: The fucking Andoran noblepeople about whether or not they should retake – retake Caemlyn. The, uh, consensus is that no, we're just going to try and mount sort of rescue

operations for any refugees still trapped within the walls. But ultimately, it's a huge waste of energy to try and take back a city that is, you know, very difficult to take.

Sally Mm-hmm.

Emily: Uh, we do get a little bit more about the Waygate, them talking about like, “Well, it was guarded, it was bricked up, blah blah blah blah blah. But apparently, we just got betrayed by some Darkfriends.” And it's like, okay, well, then what are you going to do?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And I don't mean that in a good way. Like, that absolves Elayne, but it doesn't absolve the authors of –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Having this plot point to begin with. Meanwhile, Avienda is like, “I need to talk to Rand,” essentially. Elayne gets that letter from Rand that's like, “Don't go to Caemlyn.” But actually, it's like, “Go to Caemlyn,” whatever, whatever.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Avienda is like, “Yeah, I need to talk to him. And Elayne's like, “Oh, have you talked to Min?” And Avienda is like, “Like in passing, but not really.” And Elayne's like, “Well, you have my blessing,” she says. “Go fuck that man.”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And it's like, okay. You guys have a pretty weird relationship, but whatever.

Sally: Yeah. Whatever works, girlies.

Emily: Um, meanwhile, back in the Black Tower.

Sally: (sigh)

Emily: (laugh)

Sally: Just when you think it couldn't get worse there.

Emily: Yeah. Androl and Pevara are hanging out alone together for some – I think they're, like, waiting for news or something, but it's unclear what they're doing. Androl's still making his fucking saddle.

Sally: I – if he just, like, all book long, is making this saddle –

Emily: Every time we see him, he's crafting a more elaborate saddle. (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) A more elaborate saddle.

Emily: Um, and Pevara and Androl, speaking of the whole “Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus” thing, are just having this, “Wow, how are we so – supposed to find any common ground? The two of us, we’re so different.” She’s an Aes Sedai.

Sally: She’s Red Ajah, and he’s a man that can channel.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Again –

Emily: The ultimate – the ultimate enemies to lovers. And it’s like, that’s patently untrue. Pevara has been set up very much as, like, one of the more liberal Red Ajah. She’s constantly telling us, “I don’t hate men. I think men are fine.”

Sally: Yeah, “I’m worried about Darkfriends and people who are killing other people in cruel and horrible ways.”

Emily: Yeah, and Androl is not exactly, you know, Mazrim Taim, or any other sort of, like, weird Asha’man –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Who’s been, I don’t know, conditioned to just be a human weapon or something like that. Androl is very, we are asked to believe, reasonable and good-natured and, you know, they have no actual reason to not get along perfectly fine, at least as colleagues.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, so the book is, like, making something out of nothing here, just having them, like, talk about how, well, the Red Ajah can’t possibly relate to any of the Asha’man. “Your Ajah is going to be extinct.” And Pevara’s like, “Meh, I don’t think so.”

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: You know.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: “It seems like this is a good way for us to segue into the new world.” And Androl’s like, “Well, I hate you anyway.”

Sally: And you’re like, cool, very open-minded of you, the most open-minded –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Jack-of-all-trades sort of guy I’m expected to meet.

Emily: He’s like, “I know that you find us repulsive.” And she’s like, “You make me uncomfortable. Like, I will own that.” Like, “Men who can channel, I have – I have been conditioned –”

Sally: Mm-hmm.



Emily: “To believe are going to nuke me.” So. And it’s like, yeah, Pevara, that’s something you need to work on. But probably Androl can’t expect you to get over it in the five minutes you’ve been here, especially considering that most of the Asha’man you’ve interacted with now have been Mazrim Taim’s special boys, which don’t exactly inspire trust in men who can channel.

Sally: Yeah, trust, confidence, and a – a sense of positive community building.

Emily: Yeah, yeah. Um.

Sally: (laugh) It’s like a propaganda poster for the Black Tower. “We build trust and confidence.” And it’s like those – the Soviet posters of the Russian man and the Chinese man who appear to be – have you seen these? I’ll have to show you – yeah.

Emily: Yeah, I do, I do.

Sally: They’re – there’s, like – look like a little gay couple. That’s – it’s Mazrim Taim’s school for special boys.

Emily: Yeah, they do look like a little gay couple. Um. (laugh) Mazrim Taim’s school for special boys. “Trust us.”

Sally: “Trust us!”

Emily: “We won’t do meat grinders anymore.”

Sally: “No more meat grinders. That’s our goal for this quarter.”

Emily: “That’s our past. That’s in the past.” Um, Androl and Pevara both separately humble-brag about their unique backgrounds. Cliff diving. Whole family murdered by Darkfriends.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Et cetera.

Sally: Cliff diving, like Bella Swan, in fact.

Emily: Yeah, just like Bella Swan.

Sally: In New Moon. (laugh)

Emily: And Androl also hallucinates. So that’s two things he and Bella Swan have in common.

Sally: Surprise, Androl is –

Emily: Bella Swan.

Sally: Bella Swan.

Emily: Manic Pixie Dream Fuck.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Also Bella Swan.

Sally: Manic Pixie Dream Fuck.

Emily: It's the gender neutral version.

Sally: Yeah, yeah, yeah, I like that.

Emily: Um, Meanwhile, Androl's like, well, the taint on saidin is gone. Pevara is like, "Prove it." So they, uh, start a circle. They link so that Pevara can experience saidin firsthand, I guess. For some godforsaken reason, a.k.a. Robert Jordan's pervert gender dynamics, when a man and a woman are in a circle, only the man has control.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: You know? Which is extremely freaky.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Like –

Sally: It's –

Emily: But also, Pevara should have known that going in.

Sally: I think she says it at the beginning.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: She's like, "You'll be in control. So give me control back when I ask for it."

Emily: And then she just panics because he does not give back control.

Sally: When she asks for it, which I think is a reasonable – there's so much of this that is reasonable. One, let's do a circle so we can convince Pevara that the taint on saidin is gone.

Emily: Yeah, great.

Sally: Two, Pevara sets the ground rule of, "Give me control of the circle back when I ask for it."

Emily: Yeah, boundaries. Uh-huh.

Sally: Three, Pevara asks for control of the circle back, and Androl does not give it to her, and therefore she panics. Reasonable. We then reach the end of the road, the cul-de-sac of reasonable, if we will.

Emily: "The cul-de-sac of reasonable." (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) And then – (sigh)

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: And then they both decide to do the most asinine thing they can think of, which is bonding each other. Pevara freaks out and just decides she'll bond Androl so she can be in control of him.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: And then Androl is like, “Uno reverse.” (laugh)

Emily: (laugh) “Well, I’ll bond you.” Uno reverse bonding. And we’re like, this has made the situation so much better, not escalated it at all.

Sally: Both of these are non-consensual, you know. Pevara is like, “Bonded against your consent.”

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Androl’s like, “Yep, Uno reverse, bonded you against your consent.” And –

Emily: “Now we’re even.”

Sally: And then they’re just standing there, staring at each other, being like, “What?” And Androl’s like, “I’ve seen some people do it to their wives.” And I’m like, oh, that’s a super normal thing you will then do to a woman.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Ugh.

Emily: The fact that that’s the bond Pevara reflexively reaches for

Sally: Yeah. Her –

Emily: She’s like, “I’ll never lose control over this particular dynamic again, and I will bond him as a Warder.”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And it’s like, that’s such an insane leap of logic. And we have never seen the Warder bond used offensively in that way.

Sally: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

Emily: So it, again, makes no sense. It would have been one thing if Pevara, like – you know, um, he eventually is like, “Oh, she’s freaking out,” and lets go of control, which is how Pevara then has the power to bond him. It would have made sense if Pevara was like, “I’ll bind him in air or whatever.” The way Aes Sedai –

Sally: Yeah, that’s what I thought happened at first, yeah.

Emily: Yeah, Aes Sedai always do that, whenever they’re upset. But no, bonded as a Warder.

Sally: Bonded as a Warder. Um, I – I have not watched the full essay, so I’m going to likely – you have. So you can probably fully quote me on this. ContraPoints, who is a YouTube, um, video essayist, really good, just did a video essay about Twilight. And I saw a clip on it where she was talking about, uh, fantasy romance tropes in general and how one of those is disavowal,

which, basically – I'm going to misquote it – but is like, women in particular are, like, stripped of their lack of choice and therefore they don't have to be, quote unquote, bad, you know?

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: And that's not exactly what's happening here. It's not like it would have been a little bit different, I guess, if Androl had bonded Pevara first. That might be a little bit more in line with that. But this scene really made me think of that because what we're doing with this Warder bond, this mutually assured destruction sort of Warder bond, is really escalating the romantic tension between Androl and Pevara in a nonconsensual way. Um, and it was making me think a lot, um, about romance tropes in general, which – last time I made a joke – last episode, I made a joke about fantasy literature, romance – romantasy, and how enemies-to-lovers is so prolific. And – and some of those – the dynamics are really problematic. And I've been reflecting a lot on that stance that I have, which I think can be true. Like, I do maintain that, um, what we see in media does tend to reflect into our brain and what we consider acceptable. But so many people turn to romantasy and romance as fantasy, to see, and it does not necessarily reflect true desires or anything like that. Um, so I've just been thinking a whole lot about this enemies-to-lovers dynamic and how it's showing up in Androl and Pevara. And this decision to have them mutually, nonconsensually bond each other is bad, I think, but it's sort of standing on the backs of every bad consent decision that Robert Jordan has made in these books. And I just – I don't really have a concrete thing here. These are the things I've just been thinking about to try and have a more nuanced understanding of these types of tropes. But these tropes that sort of force people to be in close proximity to each other – not to make another Twilight joke, but the idea in Twilight that Edward can read everybody's minds and is always in other people's business and, like, can't read Bella's mind, of course. But just this idea of forced, close proximity between these two, as if being in a life-or-death situation wasn't close proximity enough. I don't know, the whole thing and just having Pevara feel like she didn't do a bad thing necessarily because Androl was doing the bad thing –

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: You know, but then it's still like, she did do a bad – I don't know. I don't have a concrete thought here. These are just the things I've been thinking about with these two.

Emily: Um. Yeah, a – a few things. First of all, from, like, an actual scene perspective, as we've been alluding to –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Like you're saying, it doesn't make sense. Pevara escalates the situation wildly quickly.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Uh, it actually also doesn't make sense, really, that Androl would previously escalate the situation –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: By being so, like, “The power, the power!”

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Like that is not the sort of dynamic that we have given Androl, that the narrative has led us to believe Androl has –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: With the Power. Generally.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So it's a little weird that that happens. Um, and you're right. It's happening so fast and it is definitely, like, supposed to be this, like, hike up in their romantic tension and their storyline as – um, their storyline generally. Basically, the result of this sort of double bonding is that they're more or less telepathically linked.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: I think they can actually, like, think at each other verbally within a chapter or two. And so it feels like a few things are going on here. A, it feels like Brandon Sanderson was like, “I'm really curious what would happen if two people bonded each other. Like, what would that look like?”

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: And was like, “I'll just do it.” (laugh)

Sally: Yeah, no reason for them to talk about it.

Emily: It also feels like we are spending so much time with Androl and Pevara in an effort to bring the Black Tower subplot to a reasonable conclusion. But we're doing it all so much in this last book that everything, of course, is going to feel like it's going way too fast –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Because the pace in the Wheel of Time books up until this point has been: somebody does something in book three and someone responds to that in book four.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: You know? It's like slow motion. And now suddenly we're in hyper speed.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: I mean, literally, this is all happening within a day or two –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Everything that's going on in the Black Tower. But because we're getting it all in the front half of Memory of Light, it's really feeling –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Like it's happening all at once. So just from a narrative standpoint, this isn't really working. We have no reason to be invested in Androl and Pevara's relationship. We are invested in what's happening in the Black Tower, but we don't need Androl and Pevara to have this sort of relationship to embody that.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: So what we're doing here, then, and going back to your point, is we're just examining heterosexual gender roles again. The other point of having them double-bond each other is that now they're telepathically linked, be – so they can see that men and women aren't so different after all. Or, men and women are very different, but they need each other's differences, and they both bring value via their differences to the heterosexual partnership. And it's like, this is something that every other character in the book has had to fight tooth and nail to achieve that level of actualization, and they still haven't –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: A la Rand and Egwene. But Pevara and Androl get to speed-run it because Brandon Sanderson has some weird investment in their romantic relationship.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Um, and yeah, it's very enemies-to-lovers, them starting out from a place of, “We're having this non-consensual, intimate –” You know, bonding has been alluded to – forced bonding has been alluded to as rape –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Throughout the series. So having that be the starting place of their relationship might be appropriate in a romantic fantasy novel, where that is an expected trope –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: More or less, because consensual, non-consent is essentially the – sort of roleplay that's happening there –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: For people who are engaging with that reading experience. Um, but having it in fantasy, straight fantasy, not romantasy, is wild and makes it seem more problematic, I think –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Because this isn't really the sort of thing we signed up for.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: You can expect to see characters like, quote unquote, playing with consent –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: In a fantasy book, but in, you know, the Last Battle? It's just like, okay.

Sally: Yeah, that – thank you. That was a really nice way to sort of pin up my point and the things I've been thinking about, of just, like, not the genre for it. Like there are genre expectations in different novels where I would be like, personally, not my bag –

Emily: Sure.

Sally: But makes sense in the genre that we're playing with – playing – “playing” is a great word in terms of, like, the kink sense of playing –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: You know, and having a scene and playing. Um, but yeah, here you're just like, it lends itself to the idea of just like, well, anything in the time of war, you know, and you're like, no, no. (laugh)

Emily: Yeah. (laugh)

Sally: Spray bottle.

Emily: Like, I'm not – I don't want to make this so blue, but we have been told multiple times that forced bonding is akin to rape.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So what has just happened here in a metaphorical standpoint, is that, I don't know, Androl spooked Pevara by – let's say, going with these sort of sexual metaphors, uh, touching her unconsensually –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: You know, patting her bum or something. So she rapes him and then he rapes her back.

And we're like, that's fine.

Sally: Yep. And we're like, that's going to be good because it's going to teach us more about the Warder bond.

Emily: And men and women.

Sally: And men and women, which is so important. It's so important that we need an entire plot about, um, mutually assured non-consensual Warder bonding in order for us to understand that when we are in community with any other person, that other person will have things about them that are different than me, including their thought processes and their life experience.

Emily: And just to really nail it in, I can't emphasize enough that no characters in the Wheel of Time have chemistry, but especially characters written by Brandon Sanderson have, like, a dearth of sexual chemistry –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: That is a sight to behold.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Androl and Pevara are black holes of sexuality.

Sally: I couldn't be less attracted to a character than I am to Androl, I'm – (laugh) I gotta say. And same to – at least Pevara had a little bit of sort of, like, "I'm a rebel within the side, the Red Ajah" –

Emily: Yeah. Like, okay, cool.

Sally: Sort of thing going for her. But now I'm just like, you have – you – you're nothing.

Emily: Yeah, now you're – you've been Manic Pixie Dream Fuck-ified.

Sally: (laugh) I wish that could be the title of this episode.

Emily: To fit – (laugh) to fit this strange, strange need of the narrative.

Sally: Yeah. So that happened. Um, but then the big – they do this and they're just sort of, like, on the floor, looking at each other.

Emily: They're like, "Oh, that was wild." And then someone runs in and is like, "Oh my gosh, this guy who was with Logain, um, has been sighted, has been turned by Mazrim Taim, which means certainly that Logain is also being held by Mazrim Taim and will be turned."

Sally: Yeah, the guy mentioned – he's, like – mentioned something about Logain and Mazrim Taim talking, and they seem to have come to an agreement. So everyone was like, oh my God, has Logain been turned?

Emily: Yeah. Ahhh.

Sally: Is Logain on the Myrddraal table?

Emily: So they're like, "We've got to do something," and, um, that's where we end with them. We're going to be coming back so much more to Pevara and Androl for the first half of this book. So just brace yourself for that. So – gross. Thanks for listening, though, I guess? (laugh)

Sally: Yeah, let's have a classic Wheel of Time tonal shift here.

Emily: Yeah, sorry to end on two rapes.

Sally: Have a good week! (laugh)

Emily: (laugh) We're in the last season, baby. Hope you have a great week. I'm so hot from sitting in the stupid sun.

Sally: Yeah, we've got –

Emily: So we have to end this. Thanks for listening. Thanks to Glynn MacKenzie for our theme song. Thanks to our patrons on Patreon and our followers on social media.



Sally: Yeah, we love you guys.

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

Sally: Um, I have a niece who is 18 months old who isn't sure about me yet 'cause I don't see her very often.

Emily: Classic 18-month-old, yeah.

Sally: Yeah. So she's just kind of like, "I feel like my memory almost can pull you out of the depths, but I don't know who you are." But she loves Ed. She –

Emily: Oh.

Sally: Ed is, like, everything to her. Ed, our cat, is what I mean.

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: So when I need to win her affections, we just sit on the floor and I show her pictures of Ed. And she would do this for four hours on end, if I let her. I'll, like – she'll look distracted. So I'll pull my phone back and she'll turn around and be like, "Meow?" Which means she wants to see Ed. So I've just – on Saturday, I saw her and was just sitting on the floor for, like, 25 minutes, pulling up pictures of Ed. And it's not like I have an album of just Ed photos.

Emily: Yeah, but –

Sally: So I would have to scroll through all my pictures. Tybalt is okay. Tybalt does not spark joy in her the same way that Ed does.

Emily: To be fair, Ed is very photogenic –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: In the weirdest way. We catch him in the most compromising positions.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Just flat on his back.

Sally: Yeah. Belly out. (laugh)

Emily: Belly out. God. "Meow?"

Sally: Uh, so that's your toddler update about Emery and her obsession with Ed. That's all I could think of.

Emily: I love that. I love that.

Sally: I love that.

Emily: Goodbye, Tybalt.

Sally: Goodbye, everybody.

Emily: Bye, everyone.