



Episode 283: R.I.P. Those “Unconscious”
Asha’man

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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: One of the things I enjoy about this book, and I’ll admit, there’s not many, is that Rand and Moridin have a lot more sexual tension than Rand and any of his girlfriends.

SALLY: Duuuude!

EMILY: I know.

SALLY: There’s a moment when Rand’s like, “We’re the same height.” And I’m like, “Oh, are you?!”

EMILY: Perfect for kissing!

SALLY: What a fascinating thing to know about your mortal enemy.

EMILY: Interesting!

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: [in a gravelly voice] Enemies to lovers. [laughing] Speaking of enemies to lovers.

SALLY: Yeah. It really does feel like they’re gonna just start kissing with tongue at any moment.

EMILY: Yeah. They’re like, “So we meet again in the world of dreams.” And you’re like, “Okay, to do what?” [laughs]

SALLY: Yeah, why?

EMILY: Imagine if it was just, um, Rand appeared in World of Dreams, like he like he did in his post-coital days.

SALLY: Uh-huh.

EMILY: After fucking Avienda, which the narrative goes out of its way to assure us that they have been having marathon level sex.

SALLY: Yeah. Herculean, in fact.

EMILY: Like “Avienda's finally letting me sleep. She's insatiable, essentially.” And I'm like if I could never hear about any of this ever again that would be ideal. Anyway, um, yeah, he'd appeared – what if he'd appeared and just been on that fucking dominatrix wheel that Lanfear had set up in season two of *Wheely Time*.

SALLY: Yeah, the TV show. One thing the *Wheel of Time* TV show is doing really well is capturing that all the Forsaken just have, like, a psychosexual obsession with one, Rand and two, each other.

EMILY: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

SALLY: And it's just, like, I really appreciate that scene, especially where Mat [laughing] is talking to Ishamael and he's like, “Is this like a murder thing or a sex thing?”

EMILY: [laughing] That's the vibes, yeah.

SALLY: That was, like, perfect. They really nailed that.

EMILY: Yeah, the only – and it's so sad because Robert Jordan had so many chances to lean into that and didn't. Like, the vibes the Forsaken bring when they're together are generally so rancid.

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: And it's like we could have taken that in a rancid way of, like, these are all coworkers who hate each other, but *also* have *all* fucked in the same orgy when they were drunk on a work trip.

SALLY: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Sure.

EMILY: Like, we could have had that, but instead it was just like people making petty comments about each other's appearances, like everyone does in *Wheel of Time*.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Like, I think the Forsaken scenes would have been so much more refreshing if every other person in the book wasn't also kind of like that.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: When they're with people.

SALLY: Yeah. Our villains don't feel particularly nasty in *The Wheel of Time* books because they're behaving just like how everyone behaves, which is sort of a baseline level of nasty to other...

EMILY: Yeah. Like, I want Ishamael to be king bitch.

SALLY: Yeah!

EMILY: Not just sort of *a* bitch in a world of bitches.

SALLY: Yeah, he absolutely –

EMILY: Who's currently bitchless [laughs].

SALLY: Well, if he doesn't start kissing Rand on the mouth soon.

EMILY: I know, you're losing opportunities like crazy, Moridin.

SALLY: Rand's already got three girlfriends in the roster.

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: He doesn't have many slots left.

EMILY: [laughs]

SALLY: He's filling out his whole basketball team. Um [laughs].

EMILY: [laughing] The idea that you, in your polyamorous relationship, decide to construct it like a sports team. You're the point guard.

SALLY: You're the point guard.

EMILY: You're the – oh wait, Pitcher and Catcher are already sports analogies for top and bottom.

SALLY: Yeah, which is really annoying.

EMILY: Yeah. How dare they?

SALLY: Anyway, yes, Rand and Moridin. Rand slash Moridin, Rand x Moridin.

EMILY: Yeah, where's the fan fics? Um, this is Everybody Hates Rand, your friendly neighborhood *Wheel of Time* podcast. I'm Emily Juchau.

SALLY: And I am Sally Goodger

EMILY: Um, and there's not too much happening in these two chapters. We might have a reasonable length episode for once. Um, but I had to...you know, we couldn't read three chapters because the next chapter coming up is where we will embark upon the little – people will finally start actually meeting to talk about...

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Um.

SALLY: To talk about talking about the Last Battle?

EMILY: Yeah, to talk about the Last Battle and breaking the seals on the Dark One's Prison or whatever. And that's, like, enough of a subplot that we couldn't break away from the other stuff. So, essentially all we're getting in these two chapters is an extension of the Black Tower subplot vacillating between Andral and Pavara's viewpoints, and we get two Rand points of view. And the first Rand point of view is not a substantive in any way. It's just Avienda arriving at his tent and them being like, "So, we sex now?"

SALLY: Yeah, they act like they've never fucked before, which is very annoying, considering it was quite an event.

EMILY: Oh, it was.

SALLY: The first time it happened.

EMILY: [laughs] An event, yeah.

SALLY: And they're both just like – like I get it. Lots has happened and you can be sort of awkward and silly about sex whenever you want to, no matter your past experiences. But there's just like...I don't understand, like it's just a little silly, but.

EMILY: Yeah, their awkwardness is compounded by the fact that Rand knows that Avienda, like, literally five minutes ago was talking to Min and Elayne.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Which, like, the whole like dynamic between the four of them is mostly annoying at this point, because Rand seems to be the only one who hasn't, like, fully got on board with it.

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: Like the women have been over it for books now. They've just been kind of like, "Yeah, we have accepted that it's going to be the three of us and him." And so, we, the readers have more or less accepted that. But Rand's the only one who's still kind of, like, flagellating himself about it and being like, "I'm such a lecher. I'm so gross. I'm a morally bankrupt. Everything bad should happen to me." And we're like, "It's so interesting that you have this shame complex about all of it, considering that the women involved, of course, have all given their consent." Not that women's agency means anything to Rand.

SALLY: Yeah, seriously.

EMILY: But I was thinking about how no one is ever, like, rude to Rand about this.

SALLY: Yeah!

EMILY: He very transparently is in a relationship with three women at once, and it's not like King Darlin is ever like, "So?"

SALLY: Whore! [laughs]

EMILY: [laughs] Yeah, hey slut. King Slut.

SALLY: Yeah, like, come on.

EMILY: You, what, you know?

SALLY: Yeah. Uh, that's a really good point. Like, it makes you wonder. Like, obviously there's a lot of purity culture built into *The Wheel of Time*. So, you understand where it's coming from with Rand, but it is at this point, just something he is self-enforcing.

EMILY: Yeah, like, I think we do occasionally get other characters' points of view. Like, Nynaeve will say in her own head, be like, "That Rand won't make an honest woman out of any of them. He's such a whore." You know?

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: They won't make an honest *man* out of him [laughs].

SALLY: My friend this *skank* over here with his three girlfriends.

EMILY: The fucking skank Dragon –Frankenskank. That's a line from *Beastly*, and I'm sorry I just quoted it, but I just watched the Jenny Nicholson video.

SALLY: *Beastly*?

EMILY: In the...

SALLY: Why do I know this? What is this?

EMILY: It's a – uh, it's a movie. It's a *very bad* movie. Um, Alex Pettyfer.

SALLY: Oh! Yep. I'm here. I'm there. I'm present.

EMILY: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

SALLY: Fascinating that they would go with Frankenskank instead of Skankenstein, which is just... [laughing].

EMILY: That's *exactly* what Devin said!

SALLY: [laughing]

EMILY: You guys are *on* the same wavelength.

SALLY: I just think it's... Skankenstein is pretty low-hanging fruit.

EMILY: That's what he said!

SALLY: [laughing]

EMILY: [laughing] He's like, "Skankenstein was right there."

SALLY: [laughing]

EMILY: This, to be clear, was not us watching the *movie*. It was just us watching the essay about the movie.

SALLY: Sure. Why would you ever watch *Beastly*?

EMILY: Where Jenny Nicholson was constantly sliding that scene in there. Anyway, I have no idea where Frankenskank came from. Oh, [laughs] that's what they're calling Rand.

SALLY: Yeah. We're all just making fun of Rand. Um. Yeah, it is also, again, like we're in Book 14. It's time for these plots to start [snaps] coming to an end, so I would like Rand to just get on board with the fact that everyone involved seems okay with it. However, on the other end, it is, again, just a very frustrating, um, example of polygamy, where, like, there's the sort of implication, and from what we got from Elayne in the last point of view, that all women have agreed that tonight Avienda will go have sex with him. Which is kind of like...like Rand

specifically says, like, “Will I ever get to choose who I have sex with?” Basically. And Avienda is like, “Naur.” Which is weird.

EMILY: Avienda is like, “We'll be making those decisions.” And the vibe I get is that the authors are trying to be like, “Look, they have power in the relationship. This isn't some exploitative thing where it's a man who gets a harem of women. They get to exert agency within the relationship.” but it still feels icky.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And that's partly because no single entity in a relationship should one-sidedly get to decide who has sex with who and when.

SALLY: Yeah. Yeah, exactly.

EMILY: You know, that's not fair to Rand, either.

SALLY: Yeah!

EMILY: But also, it is very much Rand's personal harem of women, and we all know that. The only people at this point who aren't on board are Robert Jordan and Brandon Sanderson, which is ironic.

SALLY: Yeah, they're very obviously like, like, “I didn't write that” looking the other way. And it's like you did write that. So...

EMILY: Own it.

SALLY: Own it and be intentional about it, I guess.

EMILY: Yeah, there's no like there's no way for any of us, any modern readers to just look at this and be like, “Yeah, this is fine and normal.”

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: So, you know, you don't have to write every – you don't have to write your main good characters to be good people one hundred percent of the time.

SALLY: Yeah, like.

EMILY: You just have to recognize what's going on, at least, and have some intentionality.

SALLY: Yeah, like again, all three women have consented, so for Rand to just be like, “Yeah, I guess I'm just going to forever be in relationship with three women, and it is my harem of women.” And in part, people are not saying anything because he is the...Dragon Reborn, and it's kind of expected of people at his level, you know.

EMILY: Yeah, yeah, yeah. There's also an ongoing, like, thing where I think Rand and Elayne will have sex later maybe at some point.

SALLY: Girl, when? Get on the fields! My god.

EMILY: [laughs] Okay!

SALLY: What are they doing?

EMILY: [laughing]

SALLY: The Last Battle is happening! Stop fucking! [laughing] Stop it!

EMILY: She's already pregnant!

SALLY: Yeah, what are you doing?

EMILY: I mean, this sex scene is almost explicitly, like, transparently so Aviendha can get pregnant with her quadruplets as foreseen in her visions, you know?

SALLY: Ew. What is happening?

EMILY: Because there's limited time available. Like Aviendha and Rand are talking –

SALLY: Oh, you mean this sex scene. I thought you meant the Elayne sex scene. I was like, does he – is magic involved?

EMILY: No, no no. This sex scene.

SALLY: Yeah, this sex scene is just for Aviendha to get pregnant.

EMILY: Because we have limited time here and it's the elephant in the room that feels like it's the elephant in the book, but not in the actual room that Rand and Aviendha are inhabiting, because neither of them seems to be thinking about it. That Rand is supposed to die.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And even if, like, Rand has some sort of – like if I, any normal partner in a relationship with this guy who's supposed, who's prophesied to go out would be like, “So we should probably talk about *that*.”

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Like, are you, how confident are you of getting out of that? What are the expectations here? What should my expectations be here? I can't – can I do anything? You know?

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: But instead they're just like, "Let's fuck. Like it's the end of the world." And it's like, hey guys.

SALLY: And that is fine. I don't want to sound like a naysayer. If Elayne and Rand want to have sex at the apocalypse or whatever, who am I to say no? I do think you could be doing more productive things, but again, not my business.

EMILY: Yeah, for sure.

SALLY: I just seriously don't know how we have time for that. Like, can you people please – Whatever. Um, but I do get it. There's this, like, sense of there's always – you know, sex and death are always sort of...thrown together. The idea that, you know, live while you can.

EMILY: Hmm. Dualities.

SALLY: Um, so I get it. But like, yeah. Like also, I mean, Aviendha was supposed to come in here and do something with Rand to make him not fuck the Aiel over, and now she's just snoozing. So, like?

Emily: Yeah, we'll get to that.

SALLY: Are you going to do your assigned task?

EMILY: She will wake up and talk to him about it, I guess, in the next chapter. But it is very weird.

SALLY: Couldn't have done that first?

EMILY: [laughs] Yeah, you would think that would be the priority.

SALLY: [laughs] I'm just saying.

EMILY: For real. But she's just so horny.

SALLY: Eh, well.

EMILY: They all are.

SALLY: They just love that man so much.

EMILY: Um, we get a tidbit about how Rand had the world's most awkward dinner with Tam earlier in the evening. And he's like, "It's because I'm the Dragon Reborn and, like, now we have

such a power differential.” And I'm like [laughing] no, Rand, that's just what being an adult and having a meal with your dad is like.

SALLY: If your dad is like – he's going to crack a joke, he's going to be weird.

EMILY: Yeah, and you're going to be like, “Okay, go to therapy, boomer.”

SALLY: Yeah, please.

EMILY: Please. I'm begging you.

SALLY: I'll pay for it at this point.

EMILY: But Rand and Aviendha fuck like crazy, I guess. And then Rand wakes up in, uhhh, what he describes as not totally *tel'aran'rhiod*. And we're now getting the phrase ‘dream shard’ being flung about in this book. And everyone's like, “Yeah, dream shards.” And I'm like, “What the?” We've had fourteen books to establish lore, and we're now learning that this is a thing.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: This is another, you know, bullet point on Brandon Sanderson's to-do list of explain loose ends from the series, such as, as is gestured to in this little section, what the fuck was up with Rand's weird dreams of Ishamael in Book One? Was that him getting yanked into *tel'aran'rhiod*? We've never known that to be a thing that can totally happen. Was Rand himself entering *tel'aran'rhiod*? What's going on? So here, and I guess, you know, in the first half of this book, generally, we're learning, well, the Forsaken, or maybe just Ishamael, because he's the only one who seems to be doing it, can make something called a dream shard. And that's just his little elaborate set piece for a dream. And I guess he *can* yank people into it. Except he didn't yank Rand into this one. Rand just sort of naturally entered it, because they are so closely linked.

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: [laughs] By desire.

SALLY: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

EMILY: By gay love.

SALLY: By gay love.

EMILY: No, it's because of their whole balefire touching thing, which, you know.

SALLY: Wink, wink [laughs].

EMILY: Is a metaphor for dicks touching, yeah. For sure.

SALLY: When their swords crossed, so to speak [laughs].

EMILY: [laughs] The layers.

BOTH: The layers. Yeah.

SALLY: The gay stuff's always there if you read hard enough.

EMILY: [laughs] If you look hard enough, you'll find it.

SALLY: Yeah [laughs].

EMILY: Um.

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: [laughs] Anyway, Rand says some of the creepiest shit here. Elan, Elan.

SALLY: His name is Ela – Moridin's name would be Elon.

EMILY: Yeah, Elon Musk.

SALLY: Or Ellen [laughs].

EMILY: Which is funnier. I feel like we've made this joke before.

SALLY: [laughing] I think so, too.

EMILY: Elon or Ellen? Um.

SALLY: I think that's the title of one of our episodes [laughs].

EMILY: Probably.

SALLY: We have such good memories. Okay. Sorry.

EMILY: He says something about how he still wore his newest body. Quote unquote. And I'm like, could we not do it like that?

SALLY: Don't say it that way.

EMILY: Can we think before we speak?

SALLY: Yeah. No. Not if you're Rand.

EMILY: [laughs] Anyway, all they do is have a little sort of back and forth about so what are your evil plans? Nothing! So, what are your good plans? Rand's like, so I hear Lanfear's out and about, and Moridin's like, "Don't bring up that skank in my presence." [laughs]

SALLY: That Frankenskank [laughs].

EMILY: [laughing] That Frankenskank in my presence. And Rand's like, "So what was the deal with your psychosexual obsession with me for the first three books of this series?" And Moridin's like, "None of your business."

SALLY: [laughs] It's my psychosexual obsession with you.

EMILY: [laughs] Yeah, that's between me and my therapist, Graendal [laughs].

SALLY: Jesus. Graendal, the therapist encouraging the psychosexual obsession with the Dragon Reborn.

EMILY: Yeah, and Rand is like, "Well, I'm going to psychoanalyze you a bit here and be like I can just tell that you have so much self-loathing and it's really destroying you. And the only reason you're still fighting for the Dark One is because it's the only way you will ever get out of this trap, essentially. You swore your soul to him." And so...

SALLY: And you're like that's *boring*.

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: You could consider working on yourself and overcoming that self-loathing rather than just being like, "I need total annihilation of all living worlds."

EMILY: Yeah. Moridin does the classic villain speech of like all the women you love, I'm going to murder horribly. And to Rand's credit, for the first time in his life, he's like, "Nah."

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: I don't really, yeah. I get that that's just a thing villains say. And so I'm not too cut up about it. Anyway, Rand does his most weird cult leader shit yet, and makes flowers bloom in this gloomy dream shard. Nihilist dream shard that Moridin has conjured.

SALLY: [laughs] Welcome to my nihilist dream shard.

EMILY: Welcome to my nihilist – Welcome to the Black Parade or something.

SALLY: [singing] When I was...

EMILY: Rand's like, [gently yelling] "Tell your master I'm coming!"

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And Moridin's like, "Okay." Skedaddles.

SALLY: He's like, "Okay, that was weird." Yeah, and it's, like, the dramatic effect – again, I get what's happening here. We're going back to Rand as the sort of savior of the land, having, you know, connection to the land, being able to make flowers bloom. But his sort of, like, intimidate – you know it's supposed to be intimidating, but –

EMILY: You're surrounded by flowers.

SALLY: You're, like, surrounded by like daisies being like, [intense and gravelly] "Tell your boss, I'm coming down the line." And you're like, okay, "You're wearing like a little flower crown."

EMILY: Yeah, it's just, yeah, it's not terribly intimidating. It was kind of laughable.

SALLY: Yeah, I was like, "He he he he he."

EMILY: Imagine if you've got a little flower crown.

SALLY: Yeah, a little flower crown, and there's like a little bird on his shoulder.

EMILY: It's like intimidating the way Disney princesses are intimidating, yeah.

SALLY: And you're like, "I get what you're trying to do here with the imagery, but Moridin has had like cool volcano eyes, and like..."

EMILY: A face that was on fire. That was sick.

SALLY: A face that was on fire, and that's like pretty intimidating. So, you and your, like, Snow White collection of forest animals is little, like the Dark One's probably like, "[laughs] Nerd."

EMILY: Uh-huh. Yeah, the Dark One's like, "O-kay! [laughs]." [signing] Flower gleam and glow. Rand just started singing –

SALLY: [laughs] The *Tangled* song.

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: That would be pretty good.

EMILY: So, that's what's going on with Rand. Meanwhile, back at the Black Tower. I know. There's so much of it. We see Androl and Pevara observing this guy at, like, a tavern, who's like, "Yep, Logain and Mazrim Taim have agreed that fighting's gotta stop. We've got to focus on the Last Battle." This is one of the guys who's been turned. So, of course, everyone's really wiggled

out by it. Um, essentially, Androl goes to leave, and some more bad Asha'man come in, and they do more or less a little, you know, setting up for a rumble. Everyone squares up.

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: Androl almost loses his temper and is, like, ready to try and kill these guys with his extremely inadequate power.

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: And the only thing that stops him is that he can't do anything. You know?

SALLY: Yeah [laughs].

EMILY: Then he and Pevara go to set up a weird trap for one of the Asha'man who's been turned, operating under the assumption that the old lore, whatever that is, tells you that when someone gets turned – so if you view, you know, the dark-light spectrum as, you know, a literal spectrum on a straight line with the middle point being your [laughs] gray morality.

SALLY: Totally neutral. Yeah.

EMILY: Wherever you were on one side of the spectrum is, you will be equidistant on the other side of the spectrum.

SALLY: It's like a mirror image.

EMILY: So, if you were super good, now you'll be super evil. This does beg the question can you turn someone good? But they're...

SALLY: Oooh!

EMILY: I don't think there are any Myrddraal equivalent.

SALLY: Yeah, that'd be fun. It's the...

EMILY: Good guys. It's like the angels.

BOTH: The Ogier?

EMILY: [laughs]

SALLY: And you need a thirteen Ogier singing a beautiful song.

EMILY: Honestly, that would slap.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Yeah, if we could have redeemed one of the Forsaken. Moridin suddenly is, like, “Now I’m the Disney princess” [laughs].

SALLY: Now, *I’m* the Light’s... I’m God’s most specialist, favoritest boy.

EMILY: Tee hee hee! That would have slapped, honestly.

SALLY: Yeah, *I’m* the Dragon Reborn.

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: Now.

EMILY: Sick.

SALLY: Hey, Ed. I need less of this.

EMILY: Sorry if you’re hearing Ed grooming himself. He really goes at it really loud.

SALLY: [laughing] He’s such a disgusting little old man.

EMILY: Anyway, so the trap they’ve concocted is for a guy [laughs] who I guess just, like, wasn’t super good to begin with.

SALLY: He was just like, you’re in the middle and he’s, like, uh, one click to the good.

EMILY: [laughing] They’re like, “So he’ll be susceptible to bribery and intimidation.” Which is funny. Um, the trap goes off, they capture him, but then a couple of bad guys, they weren’t expecting, walk in, and luckily, Pevara is very good at fighting. And Androl also knocks them over the head with a broomstick, basically [laughs].

SALLY: Yeah. And like, not to get too hyper realistic here, but he keeps being like, “I need to make sure they don’t wake up, so I hit them really hard.” And I’m like, “If you hit someone so hard that they don’t wake up after an extended period of time, you have killed them.”

EMILY: That’s dead.

SALLY: People – you don’t actually hit people over the head, and they go unconscious for long periods of time.

EMILY: Yeah, I know we’re all thinking, like, we all have accepted that that’s a fantasy thing that just happens. But again, guys, if you get knocked out and don’t wake up within a minute...

SALLY: You’re in a coma.

EMILY: You're in a coma.

SALLY: So, not to harp on the hyperrealism there, you're right. It's totally, like, a fantasy trope. But the whole time he was like, "I just need to make sure they stay knocked out." And I'm like, "Like three pages from now, you guys do just straight up murder two dudes. So why didn't you just kill these guys?"

EMILY: Exactly.

SALLY: I don't understand.

EMILY: Now we care about bodies being discovered. Um, yeah, these guys are so dead. But whatever. As they're lying there *dead or dying*, Pevara and Andral bond.

SALLY: Yeah, they trauma dump.

EMILY: Yeah. And thank God we don't have to fucking sit through it.

SALLY: Yeah, thanks, Brandon. That was a good call.

EMILY: We got a chapter cut. It's like start at a story. Next chapter begins and Pevara is ending the tragic tale of...

SALLY: Her family being murdered.

EMILY: Her family being murdered by dark friends. Yeah, what we're doing is hitting – and I've been thinking about this a lot since you brought it up last week – is hitting all of the classic tropes that one must fulfill for a romance. This is so Brandon Sanderson.

SALLY: Mm. Yeah.

EMILY: This is so classic Brandon Sanderson, who tends to deal with his characters as though, um, character arcs and personalities are just things he can check on a box or a chart.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: You know, a character's personality is built by having two pieces of background that we know about them and three personality traits and two interests, you know? Voila, you've got a character. And a character arc is designed by like, ooh, one traumatic moment, one this moment here, this moment here. So, he's building a romance in the exact same way.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: First, we have to get them into a telepathic bond, which, by the way, is being developed over the course of this section.

SALLY: Yeah, we'll talk about that in a second.

EMILY: Uh, and then they have to have some time to just sit and chat, presumably because he knows if Androl and Pevara suddenly started talking, the more twenty-first century of the readers will be like, "Oh, it's weird that they just are in love now."

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: They have to share some trauma. They have to *admire* things about each other. They have to spend a whole lot of time thinking about how the other one is super complicated and difficult to understand.

SALLY: [laughs] Yeah.

EMILY: I love when Pevara goes on and on about how difficult Androl, the simplest man I've ever met [laughs] is.

SALLY: She's like, "He's got such hidden depths." And I'm like, "Not really."

EMILY: Nope.

SALLY: Like his, his whole thing is that he's a jack of all trades with, like, an impotence problem.

EMILY: Yeah, he's extremely shallow.

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: He's a pond.

SALLY: Yeah. Sorry to make a dumb impotence joke. I was just thinking about that with everyone when he was in his man fight.

EMILY: Yeah. No, that was very, like, impotence coded.

SALLY: Yeah. And you're just, like, oh, he's being, you know, emasculated.

EMILY: Yeah. At one point, Pevara is like, "Wow, it would be really tough to make Androl lose his temper." And I'm like, "He just lost his temper for almost no reason three pages ago."

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: After, you know, being bullied the way he has presumably been bullied for the entire time he's been at the Black Tower.

SALLY: Anyway, sidebar. But yes, you're so right that we are hitting key romance highlights. You typically share your traumatic story with one another when you're, like, trapped in an inn and it's rainy and cold outside and there's nothing else you can do and they're waiting.

EMILY: And the next thing we know, there will be only one bed.

SALLY: Only one bed.

EMILY: And they have to share it.

SALLY: Um, while we're waiting for this guy to come in and start the interrogation, they're like, "Well, we have nothing else to do, I guess." But.

EMILY: We can interrogate him. We have to wait for Emarin to come in and do it.

SALLY: Because he's incredibly good at it, *apparently*. And all he does is use, like, basic cop manipulation. But I guess I wouldn't be trained in basic cop manipulation. You got to have a...

EMILY: Well, neither would Emarin! To be fair [laughs].

SALLY: That's true. Emarin's what, a rich boy? [laughs]

EMILY: [laughs] Yeah! He's like, "No worries, I can totally do interrogations."

SALLY: And you're like...what?

EMILY: With what experience, bestie? Who trained you?

SALLY: Charisma!

EMILY: Like, it would have been so funny if he came in here and seduced this guy, because he's our one main –

SALLY: Gay character, yeah.

EMILY: Imagine what an outing that would have been. I would have been like, "Brandon Sanderson [laughs], gay ally."

SALLY: [laughs] Brandon Sanderson, ally!

EMILY: This old man walks in and is like, "Hello!"

SALLY: "Hello, it's me!" And this guy who's been sufficiently turned to the Dark Side – well, not sufficiently, like, a couple clicks turned to the Dark Side, is like, "Oh, I'm learning something about myself."

EMILY: I love flattery, and the charm person's spell that is essentially being cast here [laughs].

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Yeah, Emarin does come in, successfully gets this guy to spill where Logain is being held in some sort of, like, structure that's being built, you know, very classic.

SALLY: Yeah, and again, like, none of these are surprises to us. They're like, "Mazrim Taim has a set of secret rooms," and I'm like, "No way."

EMILY: "I'm like, oh my god. That's so crazy."

SALLY: That's crazy, dog.

EMILY: Next thing you'll tell me, he has a break room for [laughs] his thirteen Myrddraal. Duh!

SALLY: Come on. But yeah, apparently, if you're, like, super good, like Logain is, *apparently?* It takes a couple days to, quote unquote, or capital T, Turn you to the Dark Side, so.

EMILY: Yeah, they're like, "It's all about willpower." Which people in fantasy love to talk about willpower as, like, one of the predominant, one of the dominant *skills* you can have.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And the fact that you can avert disaster simply by having the *will* to do it, or that you can hold up under torture through sheer willpower. That's another example of a male fantasy.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Men love to think that they would not give under pressure.

SALLY: Sure. Under extreme torture, horrible conditions.

EMILY: Yeah, when the reality is that no one knows how they would react under those circumstances.

SALLY: Yeah, so they interrogate this guy and go to rescue Logain, and, uh, we can get into all of that a little bit more. But I will say this was like a Black Tower sequence I didn't mind all that much. Like there's some silly stuff, like Emarin being a master negotiator, but he's, like, he's probably bribed people before. I don't know. It's, like, fine. But we're entering slightly into territory that I think Brandon Sanderson is more comfortable in, which is effectively a sort of, like, heist-like rescue mission, which is the type of –

EMILY: Actual people taking action.

SALLY: Yeah! Like an action scene where there's some, like, plotting and he can have set pieces and characters he's moving around the map towards a specific goal. Um, and I think he does those really well. All the Brandon Sanderson that I've read, once we get into the action sequence itself, like it flows really nicely. It's fun. He's setting up all the right things for us to be, like, excited about. So, it was nice to be in the Black Tower and be like [claps] a thing is happening. Brandon feels comfortable on this footing. I'm having a good time, even if we're hitting some silly stuff. [cat meows] And it's nice, yeah, to finally start knocking down the Mazrim Taim plot a little bit. So didn't mind it.

EMILY: Yeah. Yeah. No complaints about them just having an action sequence where they enter this sort of abandoned building, underground tunnel slash weird thing. They, of course, find a creepy room that's full of cages.

SALLY: Yeah, because –

EMILY: Like classic villain shit.

SALLY: Like, Mazrim Taim couldn't think of any other way to do that.

EMILY: Mazrim Taim is, and this is the thing about him that really is the sticking point, not subtle.

SALLY: Yeah!

EMILY: [laughs]

SALLY: Like from the day we've met him, everyone, every normal person, has been like, “Straight up evil.”

EMILY: So evil.

SALLY: *Evil*. He's got, [laughs] you know how people say you can have gay face? He has evil face.

EMILY: [laughing] So true!

SALLY: He's just got evil face. You look at him and you're like, “Ugh!”

EMILY: Everyone who has any power to do anything about it, Rand, is like, “Seems fine to me.”

SALLY: Uh, I want to back that up a second. Last time we did talk about how they keep talking about how Mazrim Taim has a big nose, which is anti-Semitic rhetoric. So, I should *not* say that he has evil face. That was a bad joke.

EMILY: No, but he has an evil aura.

SALLY: He has evil vibes.

EMILY: That he is giving off.

SALLY: Just sort of sleazy. And so they walk into this room full of cages, and everyone is like, “Oh, my God, what could...” [laughs]

EMILY: Yeah, if they had like fucking torture instruments hanging on the walls, it would have been like, what were you guys fucking expecting?

SALLY: Yeah. He's got all this medieval torture elements, like, the elephant or whatever they put people in, they light it on fire.

EMILY: [gags, laughs] Yeah, you'd be like, “Okay.”

SALLY: That seems, that seems right for this guy.

EMILY: I can't imagine – I feel like I would enter this room and just start laughing. Be like, yeah.

SALLY: Of course he has a room full of cages.

EMILY: Of course, that Mazrim Taim has a tortured dungeon.

SALLY: Whatever.

EMILY: Anyway, they find Logain. He's so weak. He can't do anything. They have killed a couple of guards to get to this point. And so, at some point someone discovers the guards and now there's a commotion being raised. And, um, we end this section with some sort of big commotion. You know, the doors...they're having to stand in front of the door holding off attackers. And then, as Androl is trying, trying, trying to just make a gateway, even though there's a *ter'angreal* that's stopping him, um, there seems to be some sort of like cave-in or an explosion. So we leave on that moderate cliffhanger of, oh no, what's happening to everyone? Our good guys in the Black Tower.

SALLY: Well, I don't believe they'll kill Androl because...

EMILY: Yeah, imagine investing all this time and effort into Androl in the last two hundred pages, and then just be like, and he beefs it.

SALLY: [laughs] And he fucking beefs it, that telepathic bond – oh, the one thing I want to say about the telepathic bond is it's an interesting enough mechanic to be like what is the escalation of this type of magic? Um, but it's done super awkward, like Androl and Pevara – Androl can seem to think complete thoughts, because of course men are better at this than women, naturally.

EMILY: Thinking, yeah.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Rational.

SALLY: Yeah, but Pevara, like, can't *think* a sentence. It has to be, like, choppy and weird.

EMILY: Because women's minds are so labyrinthine.

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: Like their, like their piss. [laughs] What's that quote?

SALLY: [laughing] I know what you're talking about. What is it?

EMILY: It's like there's someone, someone always publishes the like worst examples of women written by men. And there was one a few years back that was like woman character sits down to pee and has some insane comment about how it takes a minute to pee because the urine has to work its way through her fucking [laughs] maze-like insides.

SALLY: Yeah, but – I don't know if I want to read the whole thing. “Men, they were able to conjure it up immediately. That was one of their powers, that thunderous splashing as they stood lordly above the bowl. Everything about them was more direct. Their insides weren't the maze women's were for the pee to find its way through.” [laughing]

EMILY: That's almost verbatim what's happening with Androl and Pevara. He's so direct. And of course, he has an inbuilt way of being able to shield his mind from her. Again, Bella Swan. The comparisons just keep on coming.

SALLY: They keep building, baby.

EMILY: In that Androl is capable of grasping the void, you know, that meditation technique that Rand, um, and his dad use, and that men who channel seem to use as sort of their go-to point. Um, yeah. And yeah, Pevara just doesn't have the same tools, so she is reduced to caveman speech at him. You go door.

SALLY: Yeah. And you're like...okay.

EMILY: We didn't need to do this.

SALLY: Um, I don't think people *always* think in one hundred percent complete sentences, but nobody thinks that way.

EMILY: Yeah, either, like, have them both on the same learning curve in terms of, like, first, we're just getting images from each other and we're figuring this out. And, you know, up until

they're able to think full sentences or whatever. Or just don't have telepathy because it is wild to have gender differences built even into this.

SALLY: Even into telepathy.

EMILY: Expected. but bizarre.

SALLY: We can't – women can't have anything. Not even telepathic powers.

EMILY: Sure can't. Fuck that Jean Grey, you know?

SALLY: [laughs] Fuck her. Who did she think she was?

EMILY: [buzzes lips] Um, anything else we got to talk about?

SALLY: No, I think I hit it. I think I hit it all.

EMILY: Yeah, okay. This was mostly about progressing the Black Tower subplot and leaving us on a cliffhanger and having sort of the, like, Logain be located because that's been so up in the air. Uh, and then we will, we're going to leave the Black Tower for at least the next few chapters while we deal with Fields of Merrilor, actually setting up the Last Battle.

SALLY: I keep saying, I keep referring to the Last Battle as like 'get on the fields.' I realized I've said that several times in the last episode, and it's because we are at the Fields of Merrilor that I keep being like, "Of course, the Last Battle is taking place in a bunch of fields." [laughs] So, I apologize that I keep saying that. That's just how my brain is conceptualizing where we are fighting the Last Battle.

EMILY: Fields of Merrilor. Um, I realized that this is, you know, I did my sort of 'Talmanes is dead' psychological experiment, and I should be doing more of that with less gaslighting you.

SALLY: [laughs] You can gaslight me. I don't care.

EMILY: By I just sort of asking you what your expectations are for, you know, I'm giving you a loose outline and saying, "Here's what's going to be happening." Are you expecting – who are you expecting to be there? Are you expecting anyone to show up?

SALLY: At the Fields of Merillor? At the Black Tower?

EMILY: You know that the next thing that's happening is the conversation more or less between – the next big sequence is going to be the conversation with the world leaders about breaking the seals.

SALLY: Um, I'm guessing it will go badly at first, because Egg and Rand are very determined to misunderstand each other. So, I'm sure we're going to get a lot of super fun, uh, *Wheel of Time*-like negotiation in loose phrases is what I'm expecting. I guess, uh, I've expected all of the world

leaders to be there since they've all agreed to. And Brandon has gone out of his way to be like, "This – even this even this guy is coming." In terms of other people showing up. I didn't think about that. Um.

EMILY: Do you feel anyone is missing?

SALLY: [pause] Now I feel like I should feel like someone is missing.

EMILY: No. I just – I don't.

SALLY: Um. Maybe the Seanchan. Maybe surprise Seanchan appearance. I guess they're the big ones that are technically missing if we're talking about world leaders.

EMILY: Yeah, yeah, yeah in terms of, like, representing the world.

SALLY: But I'm trying to think of other important characters that maybe we haven't – maybe Mat will show up. Mat's currently –I

EMILY: It would be very like Mat –

SALLY: Or Moiraine, I guess.

EMILY: To make a late entrance to the gathering of world leaders.

SALLY: [quote Kesha] The party don't start.

EMILY: It also hasn't been mentioned up to this point, but we ended the last book on a cliffhanger in terms of Lan leading an army.

SALLY: Oh, yeah.

EMILY: And we have yet to readdress that, or to be with any character, aka Nynaeve, I guess, who would be thinking about it. So, I remember the first time I was reading this being like, "Okay, is someone going to finally be like, 'Hey, is Lan dead?'"

SALLY: What's going on with him? How's that going up there?

EMILY: And I don't remember if they do address that in the next section, but that's just something to keep on the back burner as we're going forward.

SALLY: Yeah, sorry, I haven't thought too much about my expectations, but I'll start to do that more.

EMILY: That was great.

SALLY: Um. Maybe the Aiel.

EMILY: I'll vindicate you.

SALLY: Vindicate me?

EMILY: Yeah, because you'll be right so often, [laughs] because this book is very predictable.

SALLY: [laughs] I don't know, we'll see about that.

EMILY: All right.

SALLY: [quoting Kesha again] The party don't start.

BOTH: Till I walk in.

SALLY: It's Mat with one eye missing.

EMILY: God. Can you imagine?

SALLY: Just absolutely dirty and bloody, so rowdy.

EMILY: Obviously, that would be the song playing. Yeah. Dirty, rowdy, one-eyed boy.

SALLY: And he's like, "Here's Moiraine."

EMILY: Here's Moiraine *yeet*.

SALLY: She's probably still naked.

EMILY: She's probably still naked because, yeah, that's what we want from her, is to be naked and vulnerable. Um, thanks, everyone, for listening. Thanks to Glynn MacKenzie for our theme song. Thanks to our patrons on Patreon and our followers on social media.

SALLY: Yeah, check out our Patreon if you haven't. We haven't given that a shout out in a while, but we do blogs on various patron-voted topics. We have another podcast where we read other books that are not *Wheel of Time* and watch movies and talk about those in a similar format. Uh, that one's super fun. So, you can go check that out if any of that interests you. We – the last full book we did was *An Unkindness of Ghosts* by Rivers Solomon, and the last movie that we did was *Speed Racer*? That right?

EMILY: Yep, by the Wachowskis.

SALLY: By the Wachowskis, which I actually loved.

EMILY: Yeah, it was quite good.

SALLY: So, if you're curious about my obsession with *Speed Racer* by the Wachowskis, go, uh, go forth and listen.

EMILY: Do you have a sign off?

SALLY: Um, this is more of a positive one than a bad thing that happened, but I have a five-year-old nephew who is playing soccer, and I got to go to his first soccer game yesterday, and, uh, there's nothing funnier on the planet than watching toddlers attempt to play soccer. The way they just move around the field as sort of one entity.

EMILY: [laughs] Ah! Bobby's going over there, I better follow him.

SALLY: Yeah. The teams kept kicking the ball in the wrong direction. They'd be going towards their own goal, and the coaches were like [laughing], "That's the wrong way, you have to turn around." One girl cried, of course, because she's four. Um, her family was sitting next to me, and she runs off the field, and she's just weeping, and her parents are like, "Oh my god, what happened?" And she's like, "The ball hit my finger."

EMILY: [laughs]

SALLY: [laughs] And, you know, her finger's fine. Anyway, kids are the best, and I love watching him play soccer so much.

EMILY: Kids are the best.

SALLY: He scored three goals, I think. So, he did a good job.

EMILY: Baby soccer is the best thing on this planet.

SALLY: Super fun. None of the jerseys fit the kids at all. They just look, they just look a mess out there, and I love it.

EMILY: Forget about the World Cup. Show me five-year-olds competing.

SALLY: Put them in a big stadium. Oh my gosh.

EMILY: Fucking, like, Brazil would still dominate, but it would be fun.

SALLY: [laughs] All the Brazilian five-year-olds are like, "We're in formation!"

EMILY: Yeah. We know how to do this.

SALLY: Yeah, other countries probably, they do start teaching them soccer at such young, fun ages.

EMILY: All right, everyone, hope you have a good week.

SALLY: Bye!