

Episode 288: R.I.P. Rand's Hand (But Not Mat's Eye)

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Sally: Everybody Hates Rand is a Wheel of Time podcast that will contain spoilers for all 14 books. So if you're anti-spoiler, stop this, read all 14 books, and come back. We'll be here. Waiting.

Emily: Our title is a joke and is meant to be taken as such. "Everybody," in this context, refers to us and our cats. You are free to feel however you want about Rand. He's a fictional character. Please don't DM us.

(theme song by Glynna MacKenzie plays)

Emily: Yep, you get cream for your –

Sally: Whipped cream.

Emily: Your trials.

Sally: Okay.

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

Sally: And I am Sally Goodger, and I have been working on the transcript – last week's transcript – (laugh) And I keep – we keep talking about things that Rand is saying, so I'll, like, switch to the next person, and instead of writing "Emily" or "Sally," I'll write "Rand," colon –

Emily: Oh. (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) And then whatever the person has said. And I keep having to go back and be like, no, he's not here with us. He's not speaking through us.

Emily: He is – we are not his vessels.

Sally: Oh, Eddie is stuck. (laugh)

Emily: Oh, Ed – okay. And if we were, we'd be pretty unhappy about it.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, yeah, unfortunately there is more Rand in this section, but what are you gonna do? First, we have Perrin in the World of Dreams, physically. Excuse me, "in the flesh," as everyone –

Sally: In the flesh.

Emily: Keeps saying it, which is sort of a horrific –

Sally: Your flesh.

Emily: A horrific way to put it. Um, he and Gaul enter, and Perrin's like, "Man, dude, it's whack in here," 'cause everything's, like, getting sucked into the vortex –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: That is Shayol Ghul. Perrin's like, "I bet it's Rand, so let's just get away from here." So they find – they just go to a different spot and, um, teleport to a different spot, find a place to stash their stuff because they have actually brought food and supplies, which is, you know, smart.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Um, and, uh, Perrin's like, "Gaul, I gotta tell you, man, things here are pretty gnarly, so you're really not equipped to fight anyone here, especially Slayer, 'cause, you know, he's so good, and I've done two weeks of training, so I'm his equal." (laugh)

Sally: Yeah. Mm-hmm. Exactly

Emily: "And he can do crazy, magical things to you." And Gaul's like, "I live in the world, where people can do crazy, magical things to me all the time, so –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: "I'm not too cut up about it, you know?"

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And Perrin's like, "You're so good and sensible, Gaul," such a noble savage, as it were. Um. I just – Perrin – Gaul acting as Perrin's sidekick in this, I think it's supposed to be a little bit buddy cop-ish, but it ends up being –

Sally: Sure.

Emily: Very much Gaul as Perrin's sidekick.

Sally: Yeah, it, uh – the whole thing feels very patronizing, which is unfortunate, 'cause, like, Gaul is just behaving normally. He's like, "This is not a landscape with which I'm familiar, therefore Perrin will take the lead. Of course I'm not –"

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: Like, his perspective of, like, "People do crazy, whack shit around me all the time, so I've got no beef with not fighting Slayer" –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Is pretty funny and, like, very level-headed for a character.

Emily: Gaul is extremely – Gaul is the only character in this entire text who seems to have a functioning brain at times.

Sally: Yeah. And just, like, a healthy understanding of his own limitations.

Emily: Yeah, he's also very, like, focused, which comes out in the World of Dreams in terms of him not, like, changing appearance all the time. We've made fun in the past of how women in the World of Dreams are constantly changing –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Their dresses because their minds are just so hysterical.

Sally: Fleeting.

Emily: Like a flock of moths.

Sally: Yeah, just going around and around in circles in there.

Emily: Um, and Gaul is, I guess, very manly in that he doesn't do that, although I – I wish I could read it more as, like, an Aiel thing of just, like –

Sally: Right.

Emily: He's equipped for, um, combat.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So he is like, “I am focused.” But given that he has sort of mastered the, like, first thing that you need to be in the World of Dreams, which is focused and level-headed, I was kind of expecting when I first read this – uh, Perrin to give him, like, a rundown of like –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: “Here are things you can do. When you dream it, you can make it real.”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Blah, blah, blah. Like I feel like –

Sally: If you build it.

Emily: Gaul would – if you build it, they will come. Exactly. (laugh)

Sally: Yeah. (laugh)

Emily: Like, I feel like Gaul would pick up on things pretty fast –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And it would have been incredibly funny for him to beat Perrin at his own game just immediately. (laugh)

Sally: And just be like, “What, like it’s hard?”

Emily: But he doesn't do that. He just kind of follows Perrin around, like, unquestioningly.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Perrin's like, "We're going to go through this freaky dome thing. Catch me if I fall." And Gaul's like, "Okay." Perrin doesn't fall. So Gaul's like, "Sweet, I can just enter this too," and then faints.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Perrin has to drag him through. And it's like, Gaul, why aren't you being like, "Hey, what's this that we're doing?"

Sally: "Hey, why did I, uh, faint when I walked through this purple dome?"

Emily: Yeah. Just, like, the unswerving loyalty is kind of, like you said, a little patronizing.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Just like, maybe we could have more of an intellectual interaction with the World of Dreams here instead of Gaul just being – riding around in Perrin sidecar, as it were.

Sally: Yeah, it is very – you are – sidekick is the perfect way to put it. He's not supposed to have, really, any agency. He's supposed to do what Perrin says and he's supposed to just be, like, support –

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: For when Perrin inevitably needs him – an extra set of hands. So.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Bummer.

Emily: Bummerooski. Um, anyway, Perrin – Perrin is like, "Okay, first I want to investigate the Black Tower because I think I know why we haven't been able to Travel there." Again, no one has given us any indication until now that other people have been trying to channel –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Uh, Travel there. But whatever. Uh, to no one's surprise, they go to the vicinity and find a purple dome. Perrin's like, "I got this." They go into the purple dome and are sort of, like, scouting around. Perrin figures out the epicenter is in this, like, building installation, which is the same basement where fucking Androl and the others are being kept.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So he's like, "Slayer's got to be around here somewhere, guarding this thing." But who appears is, wouldn't you know it, Lanfear instead? She's like, "Hey, girl, hey." And Parent's like, "Hello?"

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: “What are you doing here, my good bitch?” And she's like, “I'm just hanging out.” Um, she's like, “I want vengeance.” And he's like, “Against Slayer? Do you even know him?” And she's like, “No, not against Slayer, you fucking ingrate.” (laugh) “Against the person who caused my imprisonment.” So we, the readers, are like, Moridin?

Sally: Yeah, what?

Emily: Maybe? If she's even being honest about wanting vengeance. Um, but before Perrin can question her further, she just disappears. She keeps looking at the sky and then disappearing –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Which seems like a – she tells us, like, “He's watching, and I need to make sure he doesn't see me, spot me down here with you.” But it's a very, like, convenient plot thing to just have Lanfear flitting in and out whenever Perrin has a free moment to talk to someone.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: You know? She's never there when shit gets real.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, but Perrin is like, “Oh, okay, well, that was odd.” Um, and finds out that there are a couple of Asha'man, also physically in the World of Dreams, guarding the – MacGuffin, whatever it is.

Sally: The dream spike.

Emily: The dream spike, yes, thank you. Um, and Perrin's like, “I don't know how to handle these two,” but luckily Lanfear comes back and is like, “Oh, don't worry, I, um –”

Sally: She rooted ‘em.

Emily: She rooted them.

Sally: Forkroot. They got rooted.

Emily: She dosed them with forkroot. This chapter is titled “Doses of Forkroot.”

Sally: It should have been titled “ROOTED.” All caps. (laugh)

Emily: Rooted. I'm going to get zooted. Or – rooted. (laugh)

Sally: Rooted. Gonna get rooted.

Emily: Um, we meanwhile flashback to Androl, still in – still in that fucking basement.

Sally: He's been in that basement a long time.

Emily: He's been in that basement for a year or so, it feels like.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: He's like, "Toveine got Turned super fast." Toveine's the Aes Sedai who was bonded to Logain. He's like, "Toveine got bonded super fast because —" here we're introduced to a brand new mechanic that is not surprising, given the Wheel of Time world, but it's funny that it's getting — um, that we're just being told about it now, that, um, if you're going to Turn a man, then it's easier if you have 13 Myrddraal and 13 women channelers and vice-versa. So, Mazrim Taim, up until this point, has just had access to male channelers, of course, just the evil guys from his evil school, which is why turning people like Logain and Emarin is so difficult.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Um, but now they have Toveine and some of the other people, and also Graendal in her new ugly bitch form has appeared with some more channelers. So God only knows how many fucking evil people are milling around this basement.

Sally: Yeah. Uh.

Emily: But Androl seems to be pretty unsupervised.

Sally: Yeah. It also seems like this basement room is ginormous.

Emily: Yeah. It's just, like, a fucking football stadium down here.

Sally: Yeah. That's what it feels like when Androl starts explaining it to us.

Emily: Yeah. So Androl's being taken away for yet another session. And they're like, "Now we've got women, so he's definitely going to Turn finally." Um, Androl is getting, uh, more and more frantic. He's like, "Pevara is really dosed up on forkroot, but they have not really dosed me because I'm such a low-level channeler that they're just holding a shield on me." Um, so he tricks the little dummy boy who got Turned right away, who's like 14 or whatever — tricks him into attacking another bad guy, and that starts a whole scuffle and his shield gets dropped. So Androl is able to break out of his bonds and also break Pevara and Emarin out of their bonds, but Pevara's dosed on forkroot and Emarin is useless.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Basically catatonic at this point. So it's like, "I know how to solve this problem. I'll throw a Molotov cocktail."

Sally: Yeah. Boom. New problem.

Emily: "Boom. New problem." You know, he doesn't really have a plan here that's going. He keeps falling back on, like, "Well, once I can channel again, I'll just make a gateway." And then being like, surprised Pikachu face when he can't make a gateway.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: He's like, "I'll just — if I just try really hard, then I'll make a gateway because that's what I'm good at, is making gateways." And we're here, like, surely Perrin is just going to remove the dream spike at the opportune moment. Um.

Sally: Um, my favorite part of this chapter – I mean, there are many incredibly funny things that happen in the scuffle between Androl and the rest of the Black Tower.

Emily: Literally the entire Black Tower. It's Androl v. everyone.

Sally: Yeah, that's what it – really what it feels like. Like it is, uh – for – something happens and Mazrim Taim, like, sees that Androl's bonds are released.

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: I think it's the murder. Like, the little 14-year-old literally murders somebody. So everyone is like –

Emily: Just out of the blue.

Sally: “Well, that's not normal.” He sees Androl is up and he's like, “I've had such enough of you; you're so annoying.” And so he shoots balefire at Androl. And Androl somehow manages to make a gateway – (laugh) like, the exact size of –

Emily: Like a quarter.

Sally: Like the exact size of the beam of balefire. And that's just, like, how he gets rid of it.

Emily: Evades that, yeah.

Sally: But, like –

Emily: Where did it go?

Sally: (laugh) Yeah. It's really funny to imagine that, like, across the continent – I mean, it's tragic and horrifying, but, like, across the continent, some, like, farmer turns around and his house has been exploded – just, like, wiped off.

Emily: Just, like – and it's like – (laugh) it's like that scene in BBC Sherlock where the guy gets killed by a boomerang.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: And it's, like, the stupidest thing you can fucking imagine.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, it would have been so funny if Androl opened the gateway right behind Mazrim Taim –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Just as he is able to do in a minute.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And balefire – Mazrim Taim balefired himself in the back of the head.

Sally: That would have been really iconic, but no; instead, it just gets sent to God knows where.

Emily: Yeah. God, I would have killed to be in another – we just, like, flip over to –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: I don't know, fucking – (laugh) Fucking Berelain.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Just like –

Sally: Whoa, shit.

Emily: Whoa, hey!

Sally: Whoa, hey!

Emily: Someone's shooting lasers.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um. (laugh) No, so there's this big scuffle. Taim and all his channelers are in the mix. Androl has, like, a moment where he's like, "I've just got to get through. I've just got to open a gateway." Um, and is like, "I'm almost there," and then Taim is like, "I'm going to balefire you." And Androl finally manages to avert that by opening a gateway the exact size, like you said, for the balefire to go away. The problem, of course, is that we are flipping between Androl and Perrin's point of view. So we know Perrin has not yet even touched the dream spike.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So Androl is just able to do this because he's Brandon Sanderson's special boy, I guess.

Sally: Yeah, he's – yeah, exactly. It's really annoying.

Emily: Like, we're just – you know, the – (sigh) the persistence of the human spirit or whatever.

Sally: Yeah, it's more like sheer power of will, which is the sort of running theme of this basement sequence, as we can call it.

Emily: Yeah, willpower trumps everything.

Sally: Yeah. Yeah.

Emily: Which is a very, like, comforting thing that people like to tell themselves, especially in fantasy texts –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: About, like, you can't get turned evil if you have enough willpower. You can hold up under torture if you have enough willpower.

Sally: Mm-hmm.



Emily: You can break through magical barriers if you have enough willpower. So it's, like, a hallmark of the genre.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But it is, um, one of those things that gets annoying when it's repeated often enough –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And when the author so clearly favors a character, like –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: In the case here. Then it just feels like the author doesn't know how to write their way out of the situation that they've concocted. It's especially ironic given that Brandon Sanderson famously is all about, like, magic having rules and those rules having limits that, um, characters should be able to think their way around –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Rather than just sheer powering their way around.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So, a bit of a – bit of a break in character from good old Brandon.

Sally: It's also very annoying because it's, like, in almost the next section, Perrin turns off the dream spike. So it's like, why didn't we just flip those?

Emily: Yeah, why didn't we just swap those?

Sally: And then we're like, okay, it's off. And now we're good to go.

Emily: Yeah. Um, so Androl manages to save himself from Mazrim Taim and also apparently his first – his most recent attempt at a gateway, when he'd been thinking like, “Maybe if I can just Travel to the, like, actual building that's up above us, up above the murder basement –”

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Apparently he actually did manage to open a small gateway, so sound carried through it. So now the guys up there who were conveniently good guys are like, “We'll just rush down to the murder basement.”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Which was in a labyrinth last time I remembered, but –

Sally: That doesn't matter. .

Emily: Whatever.

Sally: Don't worry about – don't worry about the warren of tunnels or the collapse that happened.

Emily: Where are we?

Sally: There's – we're in, apparently, an enormous underground football stadium-sized torture basement where we can just have –

Emily: Some parts – some parts are collapsed –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And that's fine. Some part – there's, like, a break room with a coffee pot.

Sally: Yeah, the coffee pot and sort of, like, a box of donuts.

Emily: And we're directly underneath a bunch of good guys.

Sally: Uh-huh.

Emily: Yeah, just seriously, don't worry about it.

Sally: It – it – the geography does not matter. It's about vibes.

Emily: The geography of the basement is truly unknown to us. Um, so, like, a dozen good guys come downstairs and an all-out melee starts. Um, which is mostly funny because, like, there are still 13 Myrddraal here.

Sally: Imagine you're one of these good guys.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: A gateway opens and you hear that there's creepy murder stuff going on downstairs. You're like, "Well –"

Emily: You charge downstairs because you're such a good guy.

Sally: Yeah, you're so good and solid of character.

Emily: You're from the Two Rivers.

Sally: Yeah, exactly.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: You open – you kick open the door. There are 13 Myrddraal.

Emily: There are 13 Myrddraal looking at you, like –

Sally: One's eating a donut.

Emily: "Hey." Yeah. There's 13 Myrddraal, plus the ones who are taking their OSHA-compliant breaks. (laugh)

Sally: Yeah, exactly. We gotta – we gotta stay compliant. Everyone's got to take their 15, you know?

Emily: There are 13 evil women.

Sally: Thirteen evil women. An unknown number of evil men.

Emily: Plus two of the Forsaken.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, Mazrim Taim, you know, who's now been promoted. And Graendal –

Sally: Graendal.

Emily: Who's been demoted.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: By the way, they do bicker, the two of them.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Taim's got, like, a gun to Androl's head –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: You know, the equivalent. And Graendal and he are just taking the time to argue about stuff. And Taim drops for us – e's like, "I've managed to –" (laugh) "I'm daddy's special boy now because I managed to get what he wanted."

Sally: It's like, "Get the keys" or something?

Emily: "I hold the keys in my hands." And she's like, "You actually stole them?" And we're like, oh, no. The seals, perhaps.

Sally: Oh, yeah.

Emily: Since perhaps he was – had a disc-shaped thing he was looking at last time. Um, anyway. Anyway. Uh, we'll get back to that in a minute. First, we go to Perrin, where Lanfear has dosed the guys with forkroot so that Perrin can just walk up and grab the dream spike.

Um, and he's like, "Ah, shit, I don't even know how this fucking thing works." And she's like, "Oh, you just have to push this sequence of buttons." Shows him – literally just shows him how to work it.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So now he's got a new weapon in his tool belt, I guess. And he's like, "This is so great. But again, why in fuck are you here? And why are – what are you doing? Why are you helping me?" Um, and she's like, "Well, I have been –" She keeps being like, "I have been so tormented, so tortured. No one has suffered like I have. Now I'm angry. And so I just want to help you, Perrin, because I like you, I guess."

Sally: Yeah, I mean, it is confusing. It – I think understanding it relies a lot on the context we, the readers, have of her previous conversation with Rand, where he's like, "You could come back to the good side." And now it feels like she's toeing that line a little bit.

Emily: Yeah, we're supposed to feel like maybe Lanfear is on a redemption arc –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Type thing. And that she's doing it in the most, like, weird and self-serving way possible

–

by –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, just sort of stalking Perrin through the World of Dreams.

Sally: Yeah, and Perrin is, uh, like – she's like, "I – woe is me." And Perrin's like, "You literally chose to become evil. I don't –" And she's like, "Did I?" And it's like, uh.

Emily: And he's like, "Yeah?" And she's like, "You wouldn't know. You weren't there." And he's like – (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) "Where are your receipts, Perrin?"

Emily: And he's like, "Okay." (laugh) Like, credit to Perrin, he's not like –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: "Wow, she's so beautiful."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: I simply must take her seriously – no, no mention of her looks, even, really.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Which is good, finally, to have –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Someone mention Lanfear without going on and on about her perfectly shaped bosom or whatever the hell.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, but he's also just like, "Clearly something is – I can't trust this woman."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: The problem is that, um, given enough time, it becomes incredibly boring if, uh, morally ambiguous, as we are supposed to categorize Lanfear now – if she just keeps and keeps and keeps and keeps showing up and Lanfear – uh, Perrin keeps and keeps and keeps and keeps

being like, “I don't trust you, go away.” Eventually, we're going to be like, well, this is just a boring battle of will – like, the world's most boring battle of wills. And I just had to watch Androl in the basement. So –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: I know all about boring battles of wills.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So something has to give, and it's either going to be Lanfear revealing her true colors or, um, another – in some other way proving herself, or Perrin's eventually going to be like, “You've done enough, and so I now trust you on some level.”

Sally: Yeah. I absolve you.

Emily: So that's the sort of edging that we're playing with. (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) Gross. Ew.

Emily: Um, and what's annoying is that we have to get to that sort of finish line in some way. But until then, Lanfear's just going to be hanging around.

Sally: That's fun.

Emily: Isn't it fun? They do have a conversation about Turning, where she's like, “Yeah, listen to this fucked-up shit,” and Perrin's like, “That seems incredibly upsetting and wild. Like, people don't have a choice whether they can channel. So it sucks that they just have this –”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: “Horrific loophole.” And she's like, “Well, they could have chosen to be stilled.” And he's like, “Um.”

Sally: “Hey – hey, bestie.”

Emily: He's like, “I don't really think that's a choice at all.” And she's like, “Well, no one said the choices are good, but you do have choices. Bye.”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And you're like, what? I don't know if this is supposed to be a metaphor for something in real life, but it's fucking depressing.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, Perrin – Slayer hasn't showed up any of this time, so Perrin's like, “Let's just wait around here for a little while, Gaul, see if this draws him out. Um, and if he doesn't, then we'll just go hunting for him.” Meanwhile, in the basement, for some godforsaken reason, Mazrim Taim and all the bad guys flee. I don't know how they've at all been overpowered by 12 Two Rivers guys and Androl.

Sally: Yeah, Androl is using his – Androl uses Emily's idea to – the channelers start firing – firing at these guys, and Androl opens up a gateway in front of them and a gateway behind them so they all beef it through their own attacks.

Emily: Yeah, and then he starts, like, opening gateways under them –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So that they just fall away. So they didn't flee, I shouldn't say that. But –

Sally: But –

Emily: Well, Graendal did flee, but.

Sally: Yeah, Graendal's like, "No."

Emily: Graendal's like, "Bye, bitch."

Sally: But, yeah, it is just – like, to your point, like, that is sort of me needlessly harping on logistics, but, like, to your point, it's more fantasy and specifically kind of male fantasy fulfillment here that, like, Androl, he has overcome his battle of wills, he has used his gateways to get support, and now there's this moment that made me, like, laugh out loud earlier where he's like – like, "Androl looked at Mazrim Taim and was overcome with fury 'cause the Black Tower doesn't belong to Mazrim Taim, it belongs to we the people." So it's, like, got this, like, weird revolutionary workers united.

Emily: It's like, "We're taking it back from you." And it's like –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: It never belonged to anyone but him.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: You can't take it back.

Sally: Like, it just – I'm all for a workers' revolution, you know, but just the vibe is very much like, "We did it. We the few defeated the many and the powerful through not only this well-timed, you know, rescue, but also specifically through Androl's incredibly overpowered skill." I know everyone keeps being like, "Androl can't do anything," and it's like, using gateways this way, this effectively, this powerfully, is incredibly useful and, like, a little OP

Emily: Yeah, like, in gaming mechanics, it's like if Androl only had access to a couple of seventh or eighth level spells –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: You would still be pretty fucking –

Sally: Yeah, dangerous.

Emily: Dangerous. That's incredibly OP. Notably, Androl gets out of all of this without any of – any assistance from Pevara.

Sally: Yeah. Ugh. That's the other thing.

Emily: So we've, like – yeah, we've set up their whole bond to be like, “Well, of course, now together, they're going to be stronger,” but Androl doesn't need Pevara except to sort of, like, mutter at each other telepathically. He has to rescue her, still.

Sally: Yeah, of course.

Emily: So boring.

Sally: But we're out – we're out of the basement, and Mazrim Taim is –

Emily: We're out of the basement. The Black Tower is liberated from its oppressors, I guess, because Mazrim Taim has now been sent hurtling into the stratosphere. I don't know.

Sally: It – again, it pushes against belief quite a lot to know that there are potentially 13 to 26 Myrddraal in here, if we have two working groups, and then they were all just like, “It's fine to leave.”

Emily: They were just like – (makes “I don't know” noise)

Sally: Mazrim Taim is like, “This is not a salvageable situation.” When it's like, kill Androl, and the situation becomes incredibly salvageable. I don't understand the – cut and run tactic here. I mean, I do. It's plot stuff. We can't kill Mazrim Taim just yet.

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: Um.

Emily: It's just silly – silly fighting, you know, where no one can actually die –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Because the characters involved here are too important.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Mazrim Taim, Graendal, Androl for some reason.

Sally: Again, I know I keep saying this, but it would have been actually so funny if Androl got balefired by Mazrim Taim.

Emily: I know. Just died.

Sally: If Mazrim Taim was just like, “I've had enough of this.”

Emily: “I've had enough.” Pew.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: And you're like, "Byeeee."

Sally: "Bye." Okay. Anyway, that's enough of Androl.

Emily: Sadly, we have to go to Mat. Um, and Rand, sort of. We catch up with Mat as he is literally scaling the walls of the palace in Ebou Dar. He's intent on making his way up to, uh, Tylin's old bedroom 'cause he's like, "That's the fanciest bedroom in the place. So surely that's where Tuon will be." Just a whole lot of him climbing, making jokes, stuff like that.

Sally: Um, I just want to kick off this chapter by saying the Rand section is almost predominantly about him coming to terms with losing a hand, which is funny that we're still doing this. Not once does Mat suffer any type of consequence by having limited depth perception by only having one eye. So the –

Emily: He's free climbing – free climbs –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Four stories.

Sally: Four stories with a staff strapped to his back and a single eye. And not once does he mention that this is extra difficult because he only has one eye.

Emily: Nope.

Sally: So, uh, this chapter, if I could put it in the kindest terms, is working on incredibly unbalanced scales in terms of disability politics between the two point of view characters. So.

Emily: (sigh) Yeah, Mat does keep getting his missing eye referenced by people.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: They keep being like, "Hey, what happened to your face?"

Sally: Yeah. "What?"

Emily: And he's like, "Well, stop calling me out for having a different face."

Sally: Which is a fair point.

Emily: And they're just like – it's just like – it's only cosmetic.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: What has happened to Mat, which ultimately makes his sacrifice meaningless.

Sally: Exactly.

Emily: As we've said before. Um, yeah, he scales the building, makes it up to this bedroom and almost gets shot by Selucia, who of course is like, "Yeah, Tuon never sleeps here because you're – you think you're so smart. Every assassin also knows that this is where she would sleep. So I'm just here, camped out, waiting for killers to come." I'm like, when do you sleep, Selucia?



Sally: Seriously.

Emily: Um, they have a long, annoying conversation, but eventually Mat gets from her that Tuon is down, like, in the gardens or something. Um, and Selucia, just like every other Seanchan he's talked to, is like, "Yeah, you don't need to take it seriously that this one guy's trying to kill her.

He doesn't mean it."

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: And Mat's like, "Shut up. I know my business."

Sally: Okay, girl.

Emily: "I must rescue her."

Sally: Whatever.

Emily: And Selucia's like, "Okay, whatever. Here, there's a secret passage down to ground level conveniently." And he's like, "Oh. Word?"

Sally: Sweet.

Emily: Yeah. Why yes.

Sally: Why yes.

Emily: Then we flip over to Rand as he goes to visit Tam and is like, "Here, dad, I got you this sword." I don't remember where this sword fucking came from. Is it the one Aviendha gave to him?

Sally: I can't remember. I couldn't – I – I have no idea. It could be the one Aviendha gave to him.

It does reference it being, like, a black sword or a black sword holder. Sheath is what that's called. (laugh)

Emily: (laugh) Black sword holder.

Sally: Um, which I thought was different colors than the one Aviendha gave him, but I'm terrible with details, as we know. So.

Emily: No, I can't keep track of Rand's weapons, especially because the fact that he carries a sword has been meaningless for –

Sally: Books.

Emily: Books. Not even before he lost his hand.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: It wasn't really relevant that he could use the sword because he just channeled. Um, which is what he says to Tam. He's like, "I don't need a sword, obviously. I'm a channeling boy, so – but here, you should have one because your old one beefed it."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And Tam's like, "That's so sweet, but I also never use a sword. Not really my thing anymore." And Rand's like, "Take it, papa, as a token of my love for you."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And Tam's like, "Okay. Dramatic-ass bitch."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Tam's like, "You're clearly going through something, so why don't we go out and, like, work out our problems, man-style, by working out?"

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: And Rand's like, "I'd love that, papa." So – "Papa!"

Sally: "Papa."

Emily: Um, so they go out to the sparring grounds. Um, and first, Tam, like, shows us that he's still good with swords by moving through the sword forms.

Sally: Forms.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Classic.

Emily: With his fancy new sword. Then he's like, "Hey, why don't you join me?" and tosses Rand a practice sword. And Rand's like, "I don't know if you know this, but I only have one hand." And Tam's like, "Yeah, you can still use a sword with only one hand." And Rand's like, "I'll try, I guess, papa." So they start sparring. Rand's like, "Oh, this is actually quite difficult because I've trained myself how to use a sword with two hands. And so reflexively, I want to use my missing hand –"

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: "For the sword. But what do you know it, Tam's not having any trouble. He must have practiced using just one hand."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And Rand iconically is like, "Well, I'm not going to, like, get all the practice of using just one hand in one session. I'm not going to master this ability –"

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: “In one night.” And then he promptly masters –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: The ability. (laugh)

Sally: In one night.

Emily: He’s like, “Wow, I get so much better as soon as I just, like, willpower my way through my self-pity and –”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: “Sort of feeling upset and frustrated about not having a hand.” So wouldn't you know it?

Sally: Willpower is the winner of the day.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: You can willpower your way out of any type of disability. If only you have a comforting father figure there to lead you through it via the power of swords.

Emily: He's like, “I'm not even a son with his father. I'm a student with the master.” Notice me, senpai. (laugh)

Sally: Yeah, literally.

Emily: He's just like, “This is just this transcendent moment of men using swords. Isn't it so beautiful?”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: It's very – it's silly. It's a silly little ...

Sally: Like, I'm so happy for Rand. Everyone needs to work through – becoming disabled is obviously an incredibly difficult thing, um, and is something that deserves attention and the ability to grieve it and work through it. It – I'm glad that there is a scene to that effect in the book at all, but because it is done in such a, like, ridiculously capital-M Man way, it's just like, what if you, like, went to therapy?

Emily: Yeah. Rand mentions, like, “Well, I've mastered all of the other things that I would normally do with two hands, and now I just manage with one hand and sword fighting is the only hobby that I've had to let go because I now only have one hand.” And I'm like, that's so – it's so frustrating, though, that we just, like, skipped over –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: The things that would be really hard to do with one hand. Frankly, I don't care if Rand can never sword fight again.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: As –

Sally: He doesn't in general.

Emily: Yeah, as we just said, Rand sword fighting has not been, like, a relevant thing for books before he lost his hand. So it doesn't feel like a casualty of his disability. It just feels like a casualty of the plot.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: You know, it was no longer relevant. So they stopped doing it. Um, so it feels like trying to overcorrect for something that Brandon Sanderson recognized was clearly missing. You can't just chop off a – character's hand and then have them –

Sally: Be fine.

Emily: Be fine, which Rand seemed to be. Um. But also – yeah, because it's too little, too late, in my opinion..

Sally: Yeah. And again, not to beat a dead horse, but it's like, apparently Mat can have his eye ripped out and we don't need to talk about it at all.

Emily: Absolutely nothing.

Sally: So, yeah, it's like – it's just back to this sort of, like, verisimilitude of if you are going to have a character with a disability, disability affects people's lives every single day in a variety of ways. For some people, it affects every single thing that they do and every single decision that they make. If you're going to commit to that, commit to that and just have it come out in the writing of what that character is doing, day-to-day stuff, like Rand picking up a cup with one hand or –

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: Having to have people help him carry things around. Like, it – it – we can't just have this scene and, like, check box: okay, it's fine. Rand has one hand.

Emily: Okay, we have acknowledged –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Rand's one-handedness.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Yeah, it's annoying. Uh, back to Mat as he locates Tuon in the gardens, where she's just, like, moving through her own sword forms, her Tai Chi – Tai Chi type thing.

Sally: Tai Chi stuff, yeah.

Emily: Um, and, you know, she's surrounded by bodyguards, but Mat notices that a Gray Man is approaching – you know, the classic, “Oh, there's a guy. Wait, no, there isn't a guy. Wait, there is

a guy.” Um, and he's like, “I’m – I'll just throw a knife at this guy.” So he, um, goes to throw a knife but, like, breaks a twig or something. So Tuon hears him and, like, whips around, sees him throwing a knife apparently at her, but, uh, just turns around to see who's behind her. Uh, and Mat doesn't hit him dead on, so he escapes eventually. Um, it's, I will say, in my opinion, I think, a cute romantic moment. It is somewhat negated by the fact that Mat then goes out of his way to tell us why it's romantic.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: You know, we couldn't just, like, let the subtlety of that speak for itself.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, but then, of course, Mat and Tuon actually talk and are annoying as usual.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Like, Mat comes trotting up and is like, “I'm just here to rescue you,” you know. She's like, “Don't need to be rescued, but thanks. I'll have you teach my bodyguards how to fight these creepy monster things.” Um, and it's just their classic, like – she's like, “Are you going to – are you back to be the prince now?” And he's like, “I don't want to be a fucking prince.” And she's like, “Too bad.”

Sally: “You are.”

Emily: “We got married,” yeah.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And he's like, “Do you even love –” he's been – this whole time, been like, “Do I love her?” And he's like, “Do you love me?” And she's like, “No.” She's like, “Maybe I could. Maybe I'm glad you're back.” And that's supposed to be this big concession for their romance of maybe she will – maybe she has feelings for him that she's not telling him. Maybe they will – she will grow to love him, blah blah blah blah blah. And Mat's just like, “Yeah, that's fine.” And they have sex in this garden.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Sort of in public.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: It's – it's obviously fade to black, but that is the implication.

Sally: Yeah, Tuon starts taking her clothes off randomly – not randomly; Mat says, like, “I'm going to kiss you,” or whatever. And she's like, “Here I am, naked.” And it's like, why did you take – why did you get fully nude?” It's – (laugh) Ow, my stomach hurts really bad. Why did you get fully nude? What are you doing? (laugh)

Emily: Yeah, like, what?

Sally: Um. So silly. I agree. I think, in general, the scene is really cute, where she looks behind to be like, “Mat would never throw a knife at me. What's going on?”

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: That's really charming. And under entirely different contexts, with, like, Tuon being an almost entirely different character, I would be like – romance. I love this. It's really cute.

Emily: Yeah, how sweet.

Sally: But yeah, they're just so annoying to each other immediately after. And it's like, could one or both of you just get over yourselves already –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: And admit that you are in a relationship with someone that you care about? Mat does – makes gestures toward that, but it's just, like, full of jokes again.

Emily: Yeah, Tuon is like, “I'm only with you because of the omens and also because I need to have an heir.” And so – and then immediately has sex with him, so we can assume that perhaps she will conceive based on this one union. That's – (sing-song) Don't it always seem to go? Um –

Sally: Women always get pregnant on the first time.

Emily: You sure do. Yeah, this is them consummating their marriage, I guess. That's another sort of, like, checkbox thing, I think, that people had before this book came out, was, like, it would be weird if Mat and Tuon got married, parted, and then didn't see each other again to have any sort of like, “Hey, uh –” What's that word? Where you sort of clarify the situationship?

Sally: Oh, uh, a DTR. Define the relationship.

Emily: Yeah, a DTR. Um, like, we were like, we need them to DTR, and this is as close as we're getting, is Mat being like – neither of them really admitting that they have feelings for each other. But they clearly do. And clearly, the fact that Tuon is the Empress of a fascist empire is irrelevant.

Sally: Of course it's irrelevant, and we're supposed to forget it consistently.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Just be like, Tuon is not a dangerous, um, criminal against humanity. I don't know what you would call that. Uh, she's not that at all. She's just a girl.

Emily: (laugh) Standing in front of a boy.

Sally: Yeah. She's just a girlboss standing in front of a boy.

Emily: A one-eyed boy, being like –

Sally: “Do you want to have sex publicly in this garden –”

Emily: (laugh) “Do you want to have public sex?”

Sally: “While all my bodyguards watch?” (laugh)

Emily: They can hear. Mat's like, “I'm not shy.” And I'm like, you should be.

Sally: And also, like, Mat is, is another thing.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: It's just like – it feels a little out of character for Mat to be like, “It's fine that Tuon's 97 bodyguards could hear us fucking in this garden, where almost anybody who in the side of the palace could look out and see us.” But –

Emily: Yeah, Mat was famously traumatized by how many people knew about his and Tylin's relationship.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And they weren't even, like, witnesses to it necessarily.

Sally: So it's just like, what – what is this now?

Emily: Yeah, just totally out of character for Mat, totally skimming over the more, uh, virulent parts of Tuon's character –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: For the sake of romance. And that's just sort of where it is with the, like, Mat and Tuon aspect of the Seanchan Empire, is that their relationship is supposed to be so cute and so romantic to us that we can skim over the realities of what the Seanchan are doing. We're just supposed to be like, Mat is representing this union of the Seanchan Empire. We can overcome our differences, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. So it's putting a lot of narrative weight on the shoulders of a character who is not equipped, especially under Brandon Sanderson's direction –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: To handle that.

Sally: Yeah. Yes.

Emily: Like, Mat doesn't take it seriously. Mat doesn't take anything seriously at this point. He should be taking the Last Battle seriously, but for some reason, he's ditched all his character development to come here.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, yeah, I don't really know what else to say about it.

Sally: Yeah, I mean, I think that pretty much covers it. It's just bad. It feels really hollow. Um, the two of them ring really hollow, at least to me and my experience of reading them. And it's just – I don't care about this romance, and I especially don't care about it about a third of the way

into the last book. Like, I want Mat on the battlefield. There is a – finally a reference to the fact that the Prince of the Ravens is typically the commander in chief of the Seanchan army. So we start getting gestures toward Mat creating his own significant force to bring to the table.

Emily: Yeah, presumably now Mat is going to have his own army –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: To bring to the Last Battle in the form of the Seanchan, again signifying that sort of union between Seanchan and the rest of the world.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, so you're right, it does gesture toward that, but again, we're fully a third of the way into the book. Pretty wild.

Sally: Yeah, and it's just, like, still the Last Battle isn't really happening. Like, I know we've got four separate fronts that we are fighting on, but, like, those are not the last – I mean, I know the whole thing is the Last Battle, but the Last Battle, as promised, is Rand versus the Dark One –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: And the fact that we're just like, “Did you remember that Rand lost a hand?” I'm like, yes, I remember that Rand lost a hand.

Emily: Can we fucking get to the – (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) Can we go? I'm Moiraine. Can we go to Shayol Ghul?

Emily: Yeah, Moiraine's like, “Please.”

Sally: Expeditiously.

Emily: “Oh my god.” Yeah, Rand keeps being like, “I wish all these people didn't have to die,” and Moiraine's like, “Maybe fewer people would die if you would just go fight the Dark One.”

Sally: Yeah, he's like, “Some of you may die while I linger and lament all of my feelings about you dying, but that is a risk I'm willing to take.”

Emily: “My dad issues –”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: “And whatever the hell –” Yeah, we're having a lot of characters just sort of taking care of their own personal shit –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: While the world is at stake. Okay. Wild. Uh, next time we'll read another couple chapters, of course. Um, in those next two chapters, we will have Rand finally do one of the things he promised to the world leaders, which is go and meet with the Seanchan. Of course, Mat will be present –



Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: So that will maybe change things slightly. But the long-awaited second meeting between Rand and Tuon, I guess.

Sally: Long-awaited –

Emily: Yeehaw.

Sally: Yet not desired.

Emily: Let's skip it. Um, that's what's on the docket, though.

Sally: Barf.

Emily: Thanks for listening. Thanks to Glynna MacKenzie for our theme song. Thanks to our patrons on Patreon and our followers on social media.

Sally: Yes. Um, you guys are the best. Thank you so much. Um, I'm trying to think of a sign-off real fast.

Emily: Yeah, do you have one?

Sally: Give me – give me a minute, give me a minute. What's a fun Bridgerton fact we can share? I mean, the whole show is insane. There are so many plot points in Bridgerton, depending on what Emily cuts out. We are watching Bridgerton, um, predominantly for, uh, Nicola Coughlin, I believe is her name, the wonderful actress from, uh, Derry Girls.

Emily: Yeah, we love Derry Girls.

Sally: Uh, we love Derry Girls and Nicola, uh, is, uh, has been very public and very vocal about her support for Palestine and continuously wears her Artists for Ceasefire pin at all of her events while she's promoting Bridgerton, which I think is incredibly cool. Um, so we're showing her a little bit of love, but the show is, uh, objectively insane. It is like regency-era courting, but, like, many of the plot points, at least in the first season, revolve around the fact that, like, women are not given sex education, like literally at all –

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: Uh, to the point where the main female character does not understand the mechanics of what it takes to conceive a child and for a long time, therefore, considers her husband barren when he is in fact just using the withdrawal method consistently, and they are having a lot of sex. So.

Emily: I find it really heartwarming how they always achieve climax simultaneously.

Sally: Yes, of course. After, like, three minutes.

Emily: In missionary. In missionary-style.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Okay. Thanks, everyone. (laugh)

Sally: Okay, cut out as much of that as you need to.

Emily: Goodbye.

Sally: Bye.