

Episode 300: Q&A Round-up
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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: Okay, hello.

Sally: Hi, everybody.

Emily: It's episode 300.

Sally: It's our 300th episode of this podcast.

Emily: I should have brought air horns.

Sally: (mimics an air horn going off)

Emily: I was at the, um, grocery store the other day, looking at their, like, minuscule party section.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Because I was like, I need to – I need some celebratory items.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And what I wanted was those little things that you get on New Year's Eve –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: That you blow into and they uncurl and make a funny noise.

Sally: Uh-huh.

Emily: But they just had, um, silly string and air horns. (laugh)

Sally: Nice.

Emily: And I was like, I don't know if it's, like, responsible to just sound an air horn in public.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Or in private, really.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: The way we live. In an apartment.

Sally: Um, so no air horns. Just our – our excitement.

Emily: Our pizzazz.

Sally: Our love and, you know, support.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: For you guys? (laugh) Yes, for listening.

Emily: Yeah. For the 300th time –

Sally: 300th time. That's wild.

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

Sally: And I am Sally Goodger.

Emily: And we have curated a selection of your –

Sally: Yes

Emily: Your finest questions. (laugh)

Sally: Yeah, we decided to do –

Emily: Your finest vintage. (laugh)

Sally: Yes, they are – they are vintage, indeed.

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: Um, we decided to do a Q&A episode to chat with you guys and do some reflecting –

Emily: Uh-huh.

Sally: On the series that we are reading, as well as things more broadly. Um, do you have any particular structure that you want to follow?

Emily: No, I figure – we just go where the wind takes us.

Sally: Kay.

Emily: We've got a list in front of us from, uh, various friends and listeners –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And listeners who are friends.

Sally: Yes.

Emily: It's a pretty – that Venn diagram is pretty circular these days. Um, we'll just – we'll just go off the bat, right?

Sally: Sure. We can – yeah, I think that's good. What is this project – podcast if not unstructured?

Emily: (laugh)

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Guaranteed unscripted content –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: For 300 episodes and counting.

Sally: That's right, baby.

Emily: I think the last time we did Q&A was episode 100.

Sally: I know.

Emily: And 200 passed with nary a –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Nary a whimper.

Sally: Yeah, I don't know what was going on with us there.

Emily: We were probably – probably what was happening was we were in the middle of one of the bad ones. (laugh)

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And there was no momentum.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, yeah, let's –

Sally: Okay, let's kick it. We've got a block of – generally separated into Wheel of Time questions, broader book questions, and then: other.

Emily: Mm. Miscellaneous.

Sally: So I'll hit you with a couple rapid-fire Wheely Time questions.

Emily: Sure, sure, sure.

Sally: This comes from Jen D, who is one of our patrons. Thank you, Jen. Love and adore you. Um –

Emily: I'm saluting anytime we mention a patron. I'm saluting.

Sally: Yeah, exactly. We're all saluting. Tybalt's saluting with his wee little paws.

Emily: Braver – braver than any U.S. Marine.

Sally: Um, and Jen asks, “Old callback, but for the entire series, favorite and least favorite character?”

Emily: I was really thinking about this one –

Sally: Me too.

Emily: Last night – last night on my commute home. Uh, the favorite character will surprise no one. Even after the –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Things that Brandon Sanderson put him through, it is and always will be Mat Cauthon.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: He's just – he's just a little guy that intrigues me. You know?

Sally: Yeah, I think Mat is probably my answer as well.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: I think I have a lot of, like, side characters I could pull for a funny bit, you know, but Mat is –

Emily: (laugh) Grady and Neald.

Sally: Grady and Neald –

Emily: Um –

Sally: Gaul –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Setalle Anan.

Emily: Of course. (laugh)

Sally: Duh.

Emily: Who could forget?

Sally: Bela the horse. (laugh)

Emily: (laugh) Bela the horse.

Sally: Um –

Emily: Making a comeback. We forgot to reference that in our last episode.

Sally: Yeah, Olver's riding Bela.

Emily: Olver's riding Bela. Bela's never had a more useless rider –

Sally: Yeah, seriously.

Emily: In her entire career.

Sally: Bela's like, “Are you fucking kidding me right now?”

Emily: Bela's like, “Uh, I'm famous.”

Sally: (laugh) Yeah.

Emily: “Who's this bitch riding me?”

Sally: Um, yeah, Mat is just such a good character. Like, if you are talking about someone that you can just fit so much character into, you know –

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: He's got great archetypes, he's got great plots. He's doing interesting stuff, um, with the military and with the hero's journey. Um, when Robert Jordan was writing him, he was genuinely funny at unexpected moments.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Um, and – yeah, I just think he's a great character. It's been really sad to watch him, um, dissolve before my very eyes.

Emily: Mm. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Sally: Um, that's been really sad, but I think that's –

Emily: Like Kool-Aid in warm water.

Sally: Exactly. Um, I think that's a common Wheel of Time fan experience, that was just watching Brandon Sanderson fumble on that one.

Emily: Just – just a real L.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Yeah, I think the thing about Mat is even at his worst, whether in Brandon Sanderson or Robert Jordan's hands, is he does have a lot of potential –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Just because he's so – you know, his inception came from such an interesting place of archetypes and, um, things that intrigue us. I think I have a whole blog about why the trickster archetype is so fun and intriguing.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So if you're on patron – patron? Patreon, check it out. And in the same vein, my least favorite character is the one who has the least potential to me. Like, even Tuon, whom I hate –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: I think had potential as a character and as something that could have been done. Gawyn, on the other hand –

Sally: Mm.

Emily: I don't think there was anything there. Gawyn's a character who successively gets more and more useless.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: From a plot perspective, from a character perspective, he brings nothing to the table.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So that's my definitive answer.

Sally: That's a very good answer. Um, I was trying to think about least favorite character too, because my immediate gut reaction is Tuon –

Emily: Yeah, she's –

Sally: Which will surprise no one.

Emily: She's objectively the worst person in the series. (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) Yeah. Yeah. I have a very hard time with her, and I have, uh – I think one of the hardest things is, like, seeing the potential that that character could have –

Emily: Mm. Yeah, yeah.

Sally: And them just being like, “No, we're actually just gonna stick with the fascist thing. Um, we're doubling down on that.” So that's kind of the one that I can't really get around, but to try and come up with a more interesting answer ... Gawyn's so good, though. It's really hard to –

Emily: It can be Gawyn also.

Sally: Yeah. No, I think I'm gonna stick with Tuon. I'm gonna stick with my gut.

Emily: That's fine, yeah.

Sally: She and I have a lot of beef, but there are so many bad ones.

Emily: I – yeah. Especially as the series go on – goes on, you're like, “Eugh.”

Sally: Like, Tallanvor; Galad in a lot of instances – a character – another character that I feel like doesn't really have a whole lot of use in the narrative, Gawyn and Galad.

Emily: Yeah, honestly, the whole Trakand House is not –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Doing much for me. I know Elayne is beloved by some, but Elayne also seriously lacks potential in my mind.

Sally: Yeah, you're right. The Trakand Household is a sort of – true. Even Morgase, kind of that whole family.

Emily: Oh, Morgase – Morgase, most of all, perhaps. (laugh)

Sally: Yeah. Um, are really doing not much. Um, yeah.

Emily: Yeah, next question. Uh, Bjørk?

Sally: Bjørk.

Emily: Also a patron, asks, “What are your favorite plots? And, more importantly, your favorite plot holes?” I didn't really reflect on this one. I need to –

Sally: I know, it's such a funny question.

Emily: You have a funny –?

Sally: No, I think it's just such a funny question.

Emily: Oh. Yeah, your favorite plot holes.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: I do like, in terms of plot holes, the late stage one that Brandon Sanderson slid in there with the mysterious desert woman –

Sally: Oh! Yeah.

Emily: Who may or may not be God. And he was just like – (makes “I don't know” noise) And expected us –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: To be like, “That was normal.”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Sure.

Sally: What?

Emily: Sure.

Sally: No big deal.

Emily: What about it?

Sally: Favorite plot holes. I'm really stuck right now just 'cause of where we are in the narrative of the whole thing that's going on with Slayer.

Emily: Mm. Huge plot hole.

Sally: I wouldn't necessarily call that one my favorite, but it is quite glaring.

Emily: Egregious, yeah.

Sally: It's one that I chew on a lot. A lot of holes. We talk about them so much. How can I – suddenly I can't think of a single plot hole.

Emily: I know, and then it's, like, a total blank. My favorite plots are obviously Mat in Book 3.

Sally: Yeah, it's a really good one.

Emily: A real classic. Also, Mat in Book 4 is –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: A truly iconic one. Um, I'm also fond of Egwene's ascent to the Amyrlin Seat and her subsequent, um –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Sort of handling of power.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Although that got very dull and repetitive in the later books, I think overall it's very, um, uh, comforting.

Sally: Yeah. Agreed.

Emily: In an odd way, you know, just to see a character consolidate power in a very competent way. That's fun. Um, what else do I like? I like Rand in Book 3 also.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Him just going off – totally off the deep end. Love that for him. That was fun.

Sally: My favorite plot hole is Who Killed Asmodean –

Emily: Mm.

Sally: Because Robert Jordan was such a douchebag about it –

Emily: Mm.

Sally: When he was like, "Isn't it obvious?" And we're all like –

Emily: Hey, what?

Sally: (laugh) No.

Emily: You fucker. Same vein, my other least favorite plot hole is Mazrim Taim and Demandred.

Sally: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Emily: Robert, we all knew.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Stop it.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: You bastard.

Sally: So stupid. Um, so yeah, I'm sticking with Who Killed Asmodean for the, just, sheer insanity of that one. Um, yeah, agreed. Mat – I mean, all of his, like, Book 3 stuff, the gambling spree in Tar Valon –

Emily: Mm.

Sally: Breaking into the Stone of Tear.

Emily: Mm.

Sally: Everything that happens with Mat in Rhuidean and, um, the Tower of Ghenjei is just, like, totally top tier. I'm very fond of Nynaeve's path to, like, heal gentling.

Emily: Mm.

Sally: I think that's a really interesting plot.

Emily: That is also cool, yeah.

Sally: Like, a very fun thing that's going on with the magic system there. Um, I find the Black Tower plot as a concept quite interesting. I think, again, in the later books, the execution becomes a little rougher, but just the idea of sort of the Black Tower and male channelers taking back a space for themselves is pretty fun, especially when Rand does it at the beginning as, like, a weird cult leader farm boy.

Emily: Yeah, I really like, um, the White Tower breaking.

Sally: Mm, that's a good one.

Emily: Not necessarily the aftermath of it, but in Book 4, um, you know, the sort of slow burn of Min coming in and having all these creepy viewings –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And this sort of slow descent. I will say the execution was obviously not pulled off perfectly because there remains, for the readers, serious questions about why it even happened, but it was such a fun big swing –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: To do that early in the series –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: To have – you have, like, this pinnacle of magic prowess and authority just absolutely beef it. Hey, speaking of beefing it, Tybalt –

Sally: Tybalt just ate shit trying to run across the floor.

Emily: Could you guys not brawl right in front of us?

Sally: Um, yeah, the breaking of the White Tower is a really good one. Um, and sets up so much fun stuff for the rest of the narrative.

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: That's quite exciting. Uh, friend – longtime friend of the podcast, Cambria, has submitted a variety of Fuck, Marry, Kill –

Emily: That are truly difficult.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: I'll say.

Sally: The first one is Mat, Talmanes, and Gaul.

Emily: And it's like, girl, like, are these mutually exclusive? I have to know.

Sally: That's true. Can I fuck all of them?

Emily: Can I fuck all of them?

Sally: If – can I fuck all of them if I kill one of them at the end?

Emily: (laugh) Yeah, if I kill one of them.

Sally: (laugh) Because if that's the case, I would choose to fuck all of them and then unfortunately, I think I would kill Talmanes.

Emily: Mm. Interesting.

Sally: Or, if it was Brandon Sanderson-Mat, I'd probably kill him.

Emily: Yeah, that – that's a real definitive thing. I, too, would also probably have to kill Talmanes.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Fuck Mat, I guess, 'cause you know he fucks nasty.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, definitely not a suitable lifelong partner, though. I – that honor probably goes to Gaul.

Sally: My man.

Emily: He's – yeah, he's loyal. He is brave.

Sally: Yes.

Emily: He is seven feet tall.

Sally: Exactly.

Emily: What else can you ask for? (laugh)

Sally: He can protect you. He can reach things at the grocery store.

Emily: He can open so many jars. And what else could a woman want in a mate?

Sally: What else could a woman want? He's so ride or die, ready to do anything at the drop of the hat.

Emily: And he's funny.

Sally: And he's funny.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: And he's cute.

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: Everyone in your family would love him.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: I think it's –

Emily: Bring him to the barbecue.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: You love to see it.

Sally: Yeah. So those are our definitive answers.

Emily: Mm. Should we get a more –

Sally: Sure. Let's get a more, um, thought-provoking – not that these aren't thought-provoking, but the answers –

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: Are kind of short. I – let's go – start with this one from Sylvia, who's another one of our patrons. Thank you, dear. Um, “Is there an author that you think would have been a better fit to finish the series instead of Sanderson? As a companion to that, what are the things you like/dislike about Brandon Sanderson's approach to the series?”

Emily: Ah. Well, you know, hindsight is 20-20, of course.

Sally: Sure.

Emily: Um, I think it's difficult to say, “Here's an author who could have done better than Sanderson,” because my true opinion is that I think they should have hired a ghost writer whose profession it is to mimic another person's voice.

Sally: Agreed.

Emily: Um, and probably had – would have had to put in a whole ton of work to consolidate the notes and come up with a decent plotline, but, um, that, I think, would probably have alleviated some of the bigger problems with the stylistic differences. Um, that said, I think the reasons they chose Brandon Sanderson were probably valid. Um, A, he's the – we've mentioned this before – he's the only, uh, fantasy writer in the game who finishes things. (laugh)

Sally: Yeah, the only one I was thinking of last night – I was like, who else writes, like, epics like this?

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: It's not really something the publishing industry does anymore, except in a few key instances, like, allowing an author 10-plus books of page space.

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: Doesn't – isn't really something we're seeing a ton of. So I was like, George R.R. Martin, I guess? But like, there's no guarantee that man would do it. Um –

Emily: No. Yeah, they would – by signing on Brandon, they got guaranteed finishes.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: You know, the guy holds to a contract. And they also got, like, you know, some star power with it.

Sally: Yeah, I was going to say, there's a big publicity factor. Brandon Sanderson is very, very popular, um, I think probably matched Robert Jordan for popularity in the fantasy game at that point, if not exceeded him.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Um.

Emily: I think Robin Hobb would have been an interesting pull. Um, she can write very long-form in terms of epics. Whether or not she had any interest in the series, of course –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Is a totally other question, but, um, conceptually, you know, that's a fun thought exercise.

Sally: Um, yeah, Robin Hobb is a good pull. I'm really trying to think of, like, other authors that write really long, and, like, the only thing –

Emily: Yeah, you come up dry.

Sally: I'm pulling is, like, smut authors –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Who just write a lot of smut books.

Emily: Yeah, get what's-her-name in the – in the Ice Planet Barbarians.

Sally: Yeah, Ruby Dixon from the Ice Planet Barbarians series.

Emily: (laugh) She –

Sally: I think she would have done some fun stuff.

Emily: Yeah, they, at least, can pull off the gender difference shit.

Sally: Yeah. Um, so I think “probably not” is the answer, I think, given what they had. I think Emily's right that there could have been an – an approach that was more creative, that heavily involved Harriet, perhaps, as an editor and other editors and, you know, friends or whatever, who'd helped Robert Jordan write the series and a ghost writer. But I think given what Tor wanted to do, Sanderson was the best choice if they were going to go with another author. As for the second part of this question, “What are the things you like or dislike about Sanderson's approach to the series?” Excuse me. Um.

Emily: I like that it's finished.

Sally: I do like that it's finished. Um, I like that I think Brandon really took the project seriously, like, understanding that this was something that people felt really passionate about, and he –

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: Wanted to do a good job and give it to people. I think you can see that come out. I like that he was willing to do it. I don't think a lot of people would have. Wheel of Time is quite intimidating. Um, he writes great fight scenes. We talk about that all the time. They're very clear and concise and fun. Not that Robert Jordan didn't, but there's just more of a, like –

Emily: Cinematic quality to them.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So in a way, he was, uh, an appropriate pick for the last few books.

Sally: Yeah. The Last Battle. Um, I think we've talked pretty much at length what we dislike about Brandon Sanderson's writing style. He just doesn't really – I shouldn't say – I shouldn't speak for you.

Emily: No, you can speak for me.

Sally: He doesn't really click with me. Um, there's –

Emily: We have the same beef with him.

Sally: There's just – I – it's almost hard to quantify. I think a lot of it is just, like, taste and preference. I really just don't click with the way he writes dialogue and the way he conceptualizes his characters more as, like, sort of pieces to move across the chessboard. I would

prefer to have stories that are more character-driven rather than action-driven. And that's not typically my experience of a Brandon Sanderson book, is that the characters have a ton of emotional depth. So, um, I think that's hard to bring into the latter part of a series, where we've tried to spend 11 books building out characters with varying degrees of depth. So that's difficult to see some of those truncated 'cause that's just not in Brandon Sanderson's skill set, is that sort of interpersonal dynamic. And then, uh, I think he tends towards the grandiose in a way that I'm not – like, being a little self-serious, I think, is what I'm trying to say, the way many male fantasy authors are. So.

Emily: Yeah, for sure. And self-serious in a way about their comedy, which is –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Uh, difficult, uh, to take in a real person –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And, uh, in writing.

Sally: Yeah, totally. Like, it's hard – it's hard to be funny in writing. I've really had to accept recently that I'm not super funny when I write, um, and just own that.

Emily: Yeah, we can't all be David Sedaris. You know?

Sally: Yeah, sorry. Like, I'm just – I'm a much more serious writer than I think I would prefer to be. But so it goes.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: It's not my skill set. I'll continue to practice, but I'm not going to try and publish a comedy essay. You know?

Emily: Writing comedy, like doing comedy, is a real skill set that takes –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Real practice and just, you know, some talent.

Sally: Yeah, totally.

Emily: Um, it's just not – I don't have it either. So. Ugh.

Sally: Yeah. Um, so those are our thoughts on Brando Sando.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: He really genuinely did the best he could, to end on more of a positive note. I know I say a lot of negative things about Brandon Sanderson's writing. A lot of that, again, is taste. But he did get – have to do a very difficult project and, I think, did the best he could with it, so.

Emily: Yeah. Salute, another salute.

Sally: Salute. Okay, back to some quicker Wheely Time questions. This comes from Anno, another one of our patrons. Thank you. Um, “What character should have gotten more storylines and what would you have liked to see them do?”

Emily: Easy answer. Every single Asha'man that isn't Androl.

Sally: (laugh) Yeah. Yeah.

Emily: Yeah. All the, like, six or core six or seven or eight who got introduced early on should have been our core group in the Black Tower.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Also, and I would have loved to see it, you know?

Sally: Yeah. I think we posited that, like, all the Androl stuff could have been done by Grady or Neald, and it would have been infinitely more interesting.

Emily: More relatable, yeah.

Sally: Is this something that I care about? Yeah, I think the Asha'man is a good answer. Who else? Just to give you two answers since we have two hosts.

Emily: Sure, yeah.

Sally: Um. Oh. Um, my answer is more of a selfish one. I think Emily's answer is very good for the narrative. Selfishly, I would have loved to see more of the Eelfinn and the Aelfinn.

Emily: Mm. Mm.

Sally: I think that's –

Emily: Hell yeah, dude.

Sally: An incredibly interesting world-building thing that Robert Jordan did, to just, like, put these incredibly freaky, interesting trickster riddle guys and gals in this alternate dimension. And only getting a couple of scenes with them is kind of –

Emily: Devastating to me, yeah.

Sally: Yeah. Like, it works really well with, like, the way we're supposed to do light touch. But selfishly, I would have loved to see them play a bit more of a – a key role and have just gotten more time with them to kind of see their whole deal.

Emily: Yeah. Similarly, I think the Portal Stones would have been great to explore more.

Sally: Yes.

Emily: It was such a, like, let-down from early – we had such big hits –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Pre-Traveling –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: In terms of getting places that I think, uh, Robert Jordan really, uh, forsook in the name of – uh, in the name of convenience, which I understand. But.

Sally: Yeah. Uh, Wheely –

Emily: Consider everyone having an existential crisis every time they travel across the continent.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: That would've been iconic and funny.

Sally: Yeah, Wheel of Time is so – the series is so oddly balanced in terms of world-building and mythology.

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: We've got our first sort of four books, up to the Breaking of the Aiel, that are so heavily on the fact that there are other worlds and other lives and all of this stuff.

Emily: Yeah, the, like, alternate dimension shit.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: What the fuck?

Sally: And then you just have, like, this Book 5 through the end of Book 13 are just, like, so heavy on all this, like, weird politics and warfare stuff.

Emily: Uh-huh.

Sally: And then at the end of the – the Tower of Ghenjei, into the Last Battle, we're trying to be like, “Oh, remember – remember all this stuff that's happening?”

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: And I'm like, I really want to, but you made me read Path of Daggers, so.

Emily: (laugh) Or did they?

Sally: (laugh) I'll never tell.

Emily: I'll never tell.

Sally: Okay, uh, our next question, maybe one of my favorites, comes from Megan, again, one of our patrons. “What is the best slash worst Darrell K. Sweet Wheel of Time cover and our favorite and least favorite, if there is a difference” between best and worst and favorite and least favorite?

Emily: It's like Sophie's Choice, you know?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Asking me to pick a favorite child. I don't –

Sally: I know.

Emily: They're all so beautiful and ugly.

Sally: I know.

Emily: All at once.

Sally: Um, I think for –

Emily: The one that I objectively hate the most –

Sally: Mm.

Emily: Like, that actually, I'm like, “Ugh, they should have done literally anything –” Like, I can't even appreciate it ironically –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Is the Gathering Storm. Rand looks so wack on that one –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: In not a fun way.

Sally: Yeah, I have to look at that too.

Emily: And Aviendha's the one with – Aviendha's got the whole bodice ripper –

Sally: Oh, yeah.

Emily: Like, beat face thing going on. So heinous.

Sally: Yeah, that one is pretty nasty. Um, I do love the Dragon Reborn because Perrin or Mat is wearing that, like, weird Mortal Kombat headband.

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: I think that's –

Emily: They both look so funny.

Sally: Incredibly funny. Which one is Rand wearing jeans in? That one's also so good. Crown of Swords is good 'cause Rand's, like, ripped – his bicep has ripped through his tunic.

Emily: Yeah, I think I like Crown of Swords the most just because it's so – yeah, there's – no, that's not jeans.

Sally: It's not jeans. Where are you in the jeans?

Emily: I think it's Gathering Storm that he's in the jeans, actually.

Sally: The Eye of the World is, like, inoffensive, I guess.

Emily: Yeah, it's pretty iconic.

Sally: Yeah. Oh, it actually might be the Dragon Reborn that he's wearing jeans in as well.

Emily: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. He's got, like blue –

Sally: So yeah.

Emily: And there's Ishamael's floating head on the spine.

Sally: Yeah, so I would say The Dragon Reborn is my favorite. Is it the best? No. (laugh)

Emily: No. I'm fond of Lord of Chaos and Crown of Swords for having the most Fabio-type –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Rand covers, and I just get a kick out of them every time. I – I also, when I was reading them, hardback, you know, anytime I've done that in my life, absolutely cringe to bring those ones out in public.

Sally: Oh, yeah.

Emily: I was just like, eugh.

Sally: it's quite embarrassing to read a Darrell K. Sweet Wheel of Time – oh, Knife of Dreams is bad too. Look at Perrin. Who's this man?

Emily: Who is he? He looks 40.

Sally: Yeah. Okay. So those aren't super concrete in terms of best or worst, but that's our quick rapid-fire –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Darrell K. Sweet review.

Emily: And then we got another fuck, marry, kill.

Sally: Another – like, this one's hard, Cambria, because it's bad. (laugh)

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Gareth Bryne, Sivan, or Elaida.

Emily: Ugh.

Sally: Can I kill all of them if I fuck one of them? (laugh)

Emily: Yeah, exactly. It's the mutual exclusivity thing. Okay. I'd kill Elaida.

Sally: Obviously.

Emily: Um, I guess I would fuck Sivan, especially if it's show version Sivan.

Sally: Yeah, she's quite a hottie.

Emily: She's a mega hottie. Um, because Sivan is so annoying that I could only take a small dose of her, you know? Bryne is also annoying, but I'd be holding out on the hope that he'd be so busy with his man stuff that he wouldn't bother me very much.

Sally: Yeah. My answer is the same, but I would be holding out for Bryne's death –

Emily: Mm.

Sally: Because he's an old man.

Emily: Yeah. Just hoping.

Sally: He's probably not even that old, but just, like, fingers crossed: one of these days.

Emily: It'd just be like, we're going to have the coldest –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Most frigid marriage –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: You've ever seen. And hopefully that doesn't get you off because you're such a freak.

Sally: All right. Should we jump to a longer one?

Emily: Sure.

Sally: Okay. All right, this comes – I'm not going to be able to say this. Ailuridae?

Emily: One of our patrons.

Sally: Sorry.

Emily: You know who you are.

Sally: I really fucked that up. I'll blame it on the dyslexia, maybe. Um, okay, the question is, "What are your thoughts on famous fantasy enthusiasts like Henry Cavill putting Wheel of Time on their 'must-read list?' How does your must-read list look like and how do you rank the Witcher books?" I've never read the Witcher books; I'll be honest.

Emily: Yeah, uh, I have not either. I've watched the show, which Sally hasn't. So, uh, we're a Witcher less-friendly household, I guess. Not like it's a bad thing.

Sally: Yeah, whatever.

Emily: It's just not really something we've encountered.

Sally: I just haven't crossed paths with them, yeah.

Emily: Yeah, I've watched the show, watched the show get progressively worse. Uh, will not be watching now that they've recast Henry Cavill.

Sally: Oh, yeah.

Emily: Among other things. The show is just going in a weird direction. Um, haven't read the books, haven't played the games. Um, I guess I, overall, don't like the concept of must-read lists.

Sally: Yeah, I think they're very, um, pretentious and –

Emily: I think they're, like, a way to police who –

Sally: Yeah, “policing” is a better word.

Emily: Who gets to be a nerd.

Sally: Yeah. Yeah, I think – I think there's a couple ways to think of, like, a must-read list. You have, like, “must-read” in terms of, like, the literary canon, which we could talk at length about. I do think there's some value in the way that our, like, society marks books that have cultural relevance. That's an interesting conversation.

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: Like, what is a canon and how do we develop that? In terms of, like, a must-read list in popular culture, especially that comes from, like, the fantasy community or, like, nerd community, I think policing and, like, gatekeeping is the perfect kind of phrase. Like, you can't enter into – like, how many times have you guys had a conversation with someone and them be like, “Oh, I can't believe you haven't read that. How have you not read that?” And it's like –

Emily: Yeah, and have you ever not been annoyed by that person saying that?

Sally: Yeah, like, has it never not made you feel like, okay, well, fuck you.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: You know?

Emily: I'll never read it now.

Sally: Yeah. Now I don't want to read it. So I think they're, yeah, exclusionary, um, and unhelpful, really. Um, I think a must – a must-read list, it can just be kind of whatever you in your life feel like you want to engage with.

Emily: Yeah, I also, I guess, kind of feel like, why do I care what Henry Cavill wants to read?

Sally: Yeah, I am having a particularly bad week in regards to, like, celebrity culture and, like, that – the influence that that holds over us. Um. Well, I will say two things on the matter, one that I hope is more intellectual and one that is just kind of petty. I don't think many people in the public eye who give out must-read lists are particularly well-read or particularly educated on, like, what makes a good book. So usually I look at someone like Henry Cavill's must-read list and I'll be like, no offense, Henry, but this is – I'm glad this works for you.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: It does not work for me.

Emily: Sure.

Sally: Um, so that was kind of mean. Uh, but again, I'm sitting in, like, a bad space with celebrity culture where I think it's just, like, really honestly kind of dangerous to look at anybody and take influence from someone who acts for a living, someone that you don't really know. So.

Emily: Well, I think it's, um, just that, like, Henry Cavill has no authority beyond being famous.

Sally: Yeah, that's a good one.

Emily: It is what you're, um, driving at, which is why a lot of celebrities don't necessarily have, quote unquote, good must-read lists –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Because they're only getting asked because they're famous.

Sally: Yeah. And that's – yeah, you're right. I shouldn't – not be so mean. They don't have to have good must-read lists. Like we've talked about, you can have bad taste. And that's fine. But, yeah, Henry Cavill is not a professor of fantasy literature. He is –

Emily: And even if he was –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: I've known some bad professors of fantasy literature.

Sally: Yeah, that's a good point. It's a good point. You're right. He's got really no authority to tell me what is good and what is good enough and valuable enough to be a must.

Emily: Yeah, I think it's, like, funny, the concept of Henry Cavill obsessively reading the Witcher books and then getting cast as the Witcher.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Like, that's cute.

Sally: Sure.

Emily: Um, I'm – I'm glad for him. I also think we probably don't know the full story of Henry Cavill's life choices, acting choices, how he got involved in the Witcher, how he got uninvolved in the Witcher.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: You know? It's just kind of like, whatever, man. He's a weird beefy guy. I'm glad he likes to read.

Sally: Yeah, I'm glad – I am sorry for being negative and saying a quasi-mean thing about Henry Cavill and other actors who just want to be little nerds. Again, I'm not in a good space with these types of people right now.

Emily: No, we've been talking a lot about how celebrities tend to let you down –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: In terms of their personal behavior –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: As well as their public behavior. So.

Sally: Yeah. Um.

Emily: Not a good place.

Sally: So not a good place. But generally, a – one positive thing I will say about someone like Henry Cavill being the Witcher and being excited about that: it is nice – it is nice in those ways to see, like, what we consider a conventionally attractive, cool guy be like, “I'm actually just a freak nerd,” and all of us can be like –

Emily: Yeah, who plays the Witcher video games or whatever.

Sally: Good for you, Henry.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: That makes me delighted. It's nice that you don't have to pretend that you're not a freak nerd in order to remain famous. You do love to see those types of things, like, um, the fact that John Cena is a very big BTS fan. I don't know if I've told any of this. And he'll just –

Emily: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, John Cena. He's quite funny, too, with it.

Sally: (laugh) Just talk about –

Emily: Talk about it.

Sally: And you're just like, I love that for you guys. You guys are so –

Emily: Yeah, you guys deserve to have your weird, niche interest too.

Sally: Yeah, good for you. Um, okay, this comes from Matt – this is from Instagram, so I'm probably going to butcher your handle as well. But Maxdwywyatt: “What is your favorite storytelling scene in Jordan's books? (1–11).” (laugh)

Emily: (laugh) Jordan's books. Capitalize.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Pretty similar answers to what we've already talked about.

Sally: Yeah, I would say the Rhuidean sequence in general –

Emily: Mm.

Sally: Um, both for – for all of the characters involved, but particularly for Mat: that scene where Mat is hanging from the tree and Rand has to pull him down. That's very good scene. Um.

Emily: The whole entrance into the Stone of Tear –

Sally: Ugh.

Emily: At the end of Book 3 is so iconic.

Sally: Unbelievable.

Emily: And – also talked about this one in the past – the Portal Stone sequence at the end of Great Hunt.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: “I win again, Lews Thern.” That's –

Sally: So good.

Emily: So good.

Sally: Um, uh, a lot of the World of Dreams stuff's when, like, Brigitte is coming in to play with Moghedien. I think those are kind of fun.

Emily: Mm. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Those are fun.

Sally: World of Dreams is another one that kind of loses –

Emily: Yeah. Potency.

Sally: Potency.

Emily: As the series goes on.

Sally: So. Horn of Valere stuff.

Emily: Remember when Nynaeve just kicks Moghedien's ass?

Sally: Oh, that's a good one.

Emily: That was so, so iconic.

Sally: Multiple times.

Emily: Multiple times.

Sally: Yeah, those I would put at the top of the list as well.

Emily: She's so cool.

Sally: That scene when they're just standing in the palace in Tanchico, just staring at each other.

Emily: Yeah. The weird museum.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And everyone's like, what?

Sally: Hey, girlies.

Emily: And Nynaeve's like, you don't understand. We're both harnessing nuclear levels of energy right now.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And I'm about to beat her.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And you're like – (screams)

Sally: Yeah, that's a really good one.

Emily: Hell yeah, girl.

Sally: That's a really, really good one. Okay. Another truly bad fuck-marry-kill. (laugh) Tuon, Tallanvor, and Dain Bornhald. (laugh)

Emily: Okay. Kill Tuon is the only ethical answer.

Sally: Yes. (laugh) It's for the public.

Emily: And then it comes down to who would I rather fuck and who would I rather marry between Tallanvor and Bornhald. Uh, I'm going to go fuck Tallanvor in the hopes that his sort of weird devotion complex –

Sally: Mm.

Emily: To women would make him good at sex, however briefly.

Sally: Sure.

Emily: And I'm going to marry Bornhald because I think I could fix him.

Sally: Oh, that's nice, Emily.

Emily: Well, he's just sort of, you know, in a cult.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And maybe just some TLC would help.

Sally: Yeah, I would also fuck Tallanvor just 'cause that's, like, the easiest way to spend the least amount of time with him.

Emily: Yeah. One and done, baby.

Sally: And I cannot. And with Bornhald, you always have the opportunity of a sexless marriage, right?

Emily: Exactly.

Sally: You don't have to have sex with your spouse.

Emily: And just be like, bye, I'm leaving.

Sally: Um, and you're right, maybe he just needs a presence in his life that isn't the Whitecloaks, and he'll become deprogrammed.

Emily: Yeah, he does have, like, an actual in-the-books redemption arc.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So I guess there's some potential there, yeah.

Sally: Yeah. Um, this comes from Gunsdatter on, um, Instagram. Said, “Congrats!” Thank you very much. “Which Wheel of Time character would you take to a wedding?” I think it'd be very funny to take Davram Bashere to a wedding.

Emily: Oh my god.

Sally: Like, this is my old man date. (laugh)

Emily: Yeah. What are my wedding goals?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Is it to be inoffensive?

Sally: You're right.

Emily: Polite, lovely? Then it's Egwene.

Sally: Oh, yeah, you're right. And she's also –

Emily: Of course. The consummate politician. So good at just interacting with people.

Sally: Right.

Emily: But am I there to cause a bit of a ruckus? (laugh)

Sally: Then you'd bring Mat, probably.

Emily: Then you'd bring Davram Bashere.

Sally: Yeah. (laugh)

Emily: A married man. (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) Yeah, a married man. And you're just like, I don't know. He's just – he just compels me.

Emily: He's the DILF.

Sally: I would bring Davram Bashere and his wife. (laugh)

Emily: Yeah, I'd be like, what about it?

Sally: What about it?

Emily: Don't worry about it.

Sally: Don't worry about it. Okay –

Emily: What does this mean?

Sally: Okay, this comes from –

Emily: What's it mean?

Sally: This comes from my friend Brianna, who asked, “Who is your Wheely Time bias?” Bias is a king – a thing that happens in K-pop, where, like, you will have a K-pop group with multiple members –

Emily: Uh-huh.

Sally: And your bias is kind of like your favorite member. So, like, that's like if you – it's just that –

Emily: Like, for your mom, it's Jimin.

Sally: Yeah. Even though she won't admit it, it's definitely Jimin. (laugh) That's irrelevant, but.

Emily: Well, a classic bias, then –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: In the traditional sense of the world. Word.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: We can't admit it when we have it.

Sally: Yeah. Yeah, exactly.

Emily: Okay.

Sally: So who's your –

Emily: Jimin is also your niece Zoe's bias. (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) That's true. Zoe is obsessed with –

Emily: It's all making sense.

Sally: Jimin.

Emily: Who's my BTS bias? BTS is the only K-pop group I know well enough to list the members.

Sally: That's okay. That's probably for the best. Um, who is my Wheely Time bias? I think the obvious answer is Mat.

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: Uh, like we talked about with favorite characters. If I was going to go, um – so, primary characters, I would probably say Mat. Secondary characters, um, maybe I would say Loial. I always like when he's on screen.

Emily: Mm.

Sally: Tertiary characters: Gaul, obviously. (laugh)

Emily: Yeah. Yeah, I guess these are the characters that I get, like, hyped when they're on screen.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And it was, yeah, just always Mat. I would always be skimming through the book.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Like, where's the next Mat point of view?

Sally: Where is Mat?

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Bestie? Ituralde –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: If we're going to go with who is my general bias.

Emily: Mm. Oof, between Ituralde and Bashere, it's tough.

Sally: I know, it's tough to decide. So, yeah, Mat. Uh, we're pretty – pretty transparent. Okay, fuck, marry, kill: Ishamael, Moghedien, Asmodean.

Emily: Oh, I thought – I first initially read this as Ishamael, Moghedien, and Lanfear. And I was like, ooh, I'm going to have some crazy sex with Lanfear. Um, so this is disappointing.

Sally: Lanfear might be on here.

Emily: No.

Sally: Oh, okay.

Emily: I'll still have crazy sex with Asmodean.

Sally: Oh, yeah, I think Asmodean is a certified freak.

Emily: He fucks, yeah.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, I guess I'd kill Moghedien.

Sally: Oh, interesting.

Emily: I think I could also fix Ishamael. (laugh)

Sally: Emily. (laugh) Um –

Emily: (laugh) Get him on some antidepressants.

Sally: Go to talk therapy. You're fine, actually. The world's not that bad. Um, I would marry Asmodean because I would love and cherish him.

Emily: Mm. Yeah, so true.

Sally: Um, I would fuck Moghedien because I would love to see what that's all about.

Emily: She's the spider.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: What does that mean?

Sally: What does it mean? Tell me more.

Emily: Titillating.

Sally: And then I would kill Ishamael because I just – I can't.

Emily: And he's a war criminal, sure. (laugh)

Sally: Yeah, I just.

Emily: I understand.

Sally: (laugh) I can't with that. Um, I can't with that. Okay.

Emily: Getting some open questions about –

Sally: Yes.

Emily: The podcast generally.

Sally: About the podcast. Uh, do you have a desired place to start?

Emily: Uh, no, we can just run through these real quick.

Sally: Okay. Rune, one of our patrons asks, “How did the two of you meet?”

Emily: Yeah, I think we've talked about this before. We met on a study abroad in London.

Sally: Mm-hmm. We sure did.

Emily: Via our university, the University of Utah.

Sally: Yep.

Emily: And history from there.

Sally: And Emily's life went downhill. (laugh)

Emily: Stop. (laugh) Objectively, the opposite happened.

Sally: Um, Sarah McClintock – fan of the podcast, guest on the podcast many years ago, probably one of our best episodes – um, and Amanda, another long-time friend of the podcast, asked kind of the same question, so we'll answer them as one. Uh, “What does the world look like for you if EHR didn't exist? Where might you be if not for this podcast?”

Emily: Um, I'm not able to do much sort of hindsight reflection in terms of my own life –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Which is a – a personal failing, I guess. So, um, I – I also don't think the podcast has disrupted our life in a – in a bad way for the most part.

Sally: Yeah, I think if the podcast didn't exist, like, my life would be worse. Like, not – like, I don't think it would be worse, like, as in a bad thing would have happened. But there's a lot of positive things that the podcast has brought into my life. I think internally it has made me a better, like, reader and critic. Like, I think because, uh, obviously with literary training in the university setting, you're kind of asked to form concrete opinions and arguments in short form over an essay and you have to defend it. That's really how I was used to thinking about literature. Kind of going over it in this long form, it's allowed me to just, like, I think, be a bit more of a flexible thinker and, like, change my mind and chew on things a little bit more, which I think is something that I really need. I definitely don't think I'm perfect at this. Like, I still listen to the podcast when I do transcripts and think I'm a little too, like, narrow-minded or like my criticism

or my complaints about the series are a little, like, boxed in and I don't – so I still have some growing to do there, but the podcast has definitely helped me be a more critical thinker. Um.

Emily: Yeah, this is very similar also to another question from our Instagram follower, Geometry Failure, who asked about the best/worst parts of doing the podcast and anything that surprised us. So, uh, kind of along all those lines, I think without the podcast, my life would have had more free time in it in a – both a bad way and a good way. I think back to the early days of the pandemic, when a lot of what kept me sane, at least, was having structure in my life, including, um, the podcast and being able to, like, think about that and interact with people in a, like, virtual setting.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: It's been great to have a community, um, however small. You know, we're not big time podcasters, but it's been great to get to know people on the internet, which is lovely.

Sally: Totally. We've met so many cool people and have had so many wonderful interactions and, I think, formed some really genuine friendships with people, which is really exciting. So I think my world would look a lot smaller. I think not only would I not have this specific community, but I wouldn't really understand what it's like to be in a community on the internet. That's not something I've ever really got to experience before –

Emily: Yeah. Yeah.

Sally: Which was really exciting, um, and really fun, and just been really delighted by the amount of support that we've gotten. And where might I be if not? It's hard to say. Like Emily kind of mentioned: a lot more free time, the podcast kind of – jumping to anything that surprised us, we obviously have a very independent podcast, not a lot of – like, I mean, quite a few of you listen, and it's always wonderful and delightful and a bit surprising still that that many people listen to the podcast, but it's by no means big.

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: Um, and it's kind of surprised me that even maintaining quite a small podcast is quite a lot of work. Like, it does take –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Uh, quite a few hours out of our week, every week. Um, and more so when I was hitting the social media harder, but what – kind of the worst part for me was just, like, social media can be really draining. And I feel like I never figured out how to be really good at it. Um, and I feel like I've never really found a way to promote the podcast that was super successful. So thank you to everyone who has found us over the years in a variety of ways and continues to engage with our socials. That has been the worst part, not so much that it's like a truly awful task, but I find it kind of debilitating for whatever reason, doing the social media for the podcast. And I really backed off of it a few years ago, when there was a lot of personal stuff going on, and I never really got back to it. So I feel that's one of my podcast regrets, perhaps, that I never really

continued with that high level of promotion that we were getting. Um, best part remains the community, I think, and the people that we've gained.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Um, as well as, uh, for me – I was thinking about this a lot today – it really – this podcast has been a lot for me to help me understand, like really understand, the value of people who create independent media –

Emily: Mm.

Sally: Like, people who are not subject to sponsorships, um, who either are not big enough to be subject to sponsorships or have made the active choice to decline sponsorship money. Um, so that's very specific to podcasts, but even, like, independent authors and independent artists, it's really helped me understand. Um, like, I always would say that I wanted to support them, but now, having been someone creating independent media, I can just, like, have more of a look into, um, the value of the small communities that you create and the value of, like – I'm honestly delighted that we've never had to have a sponsor or deal with any of that, or, like, have somebody tell us that we can't say anything that we want to say – you know, stuff like that.

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: So that's been another sort of surprise and best part for me. But that was – that was a lot. You take the reins.

Emily: No, I – I agree wholeheartedly with all of that. The, uh, community has been very valuable as has just, you know, being able to talk to you every week about –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Books. Uh, probably the worst part for me is that I'll never read Wheel of Time again.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: That, like, this project has effectively killed – (laugh) any nostalgia I had for the series. Um. Not totally. I can – I can still enjoy, so much, the really good aspects of it. But, like, this part – podcast partly got started because I reread the series when I was dealing with an insane eye infection while living in New York City. That was just, like, the books that I had my mom ship me –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Because all I could do was sit around and read. So it was just like, yeah, I might as well kill these long-ass books. And then I sort of nagged Sally to read them until she did. (laugh) And luckily, the first books are the best books.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So, uh, we got interested in them. And, you know, I was able to just, like, turn my brain off and enjoy what I had enjoyed as a teenager. And, in many ways, I don't regret losing that ability because I think it's made me a better person and a better reader overall. But, you know, there's always – like anything with growing up –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: You lose something.

Sally: Sure. Well, I'm sorry. That, um, stinks. I was thinking also today about how I think I've lost just some ability to, like, enjoy Wheel of Time.

Emily: Yeah, you lose a little innocence.

Sally: Yeah, like – which, I'm sorry that the project has ruined some of that nostalgia for you. I'm sure I've played a big role in that in being, like, a mega hater about a lot of stuff. (laugh)

Emily: I've also been a mega hater right along with you.

Sally: Um. Um, but yeah, it's hard, um, when you really engage with, um, any type of media to then feel – like, there's a certain – there's a real value to what you say of, like, sometimes you just want to, like, turn your brain off and be like, “This is – this is what it is, and I enjoy the parts of it that I enjoy.”

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: And a long form analysis podcast does not give you the room to do that.

Emily: That's been just, like, a huge thing for me is like, if I really enjoy a book, I don't have to just, like, dig into it.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: You know? And I've learned to do that. And now I just have books that I really enjoy that are not necessarily free of sin.

Sally: Yeah, totally.

Emily: And that's totally fine. And I'm just not going to start a podcast about them.

Sally: Yeah, I – there's lots of value in that, too. I think the podcast has sort of primed me – like, I want to say something interesting on the podcast every week, and I want to be analytical. And, like, one of the easiest things to do is sort of pick at the pieces that are really glaring.

Emily: Sure.

Sally: Um, and I think that has kind of primed me in other ways in my life to be like, well, this book said this thing, which is bad. And I have to – I've had to make a conscious effort to be more of a – both more of a critical reader in some ways and less critical in the other.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: That, like, books can be bad in a variety of ways. Like, they don't always have to be 100 percent moral in order for there to be value there. And I think that's something that I have struggled with for a variety of reasons. Again, I want to be a more, like, flexible and comprehensive reader and thinker. But on Wheel of Time, I sit down every week and I'm like, "Let's analyze what this is doing." And a lot of it is –

Emily: Bad.

Sally: Bad.

Emily: Bad.

Sally: Doing some bad stuff, so.

Emily: Yeah, for sure.

Sally: Um, I think we're kind of running up on time, so let's do a couple, quick, more. I think this question is really funny and so I want to make sure that we answer it. (laugh) This comes from Matt, another one of our patrons, who asks, "What's something this foreigner might not know about life in Utah or Salt Lake City?" Um, I was thinking about this today, and I have a negative one and a positive one.

Emily: Great.

Sally: A negative one is that the air quality is really bad –

Emily: Mm.

Sally: In a way that is, I think, genuinely hard to convey to people if they do not live in the Salt Lake Valley itself. There's a variety of, like, scientific reasons why pollution is bad in the Salt Lake Valley in general. It is, of course, predominantly due to the fact that our legislature is allergic to public transportation and will not give us any other option except driving along one north-south corridor, but that's a different conversation. Um, it has to do with, like, the geography of the valley and drought and stuff, but the air is truly quite bad.

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: Um, and that's a surprising thing, I think. I think the positive thing is that I think Utah gets a particularly bad rap for being very, very conservative, which is true. Um, which is very true, but the bad rap, I think, is, uh, sometimes unjustified. I think there's a very – not "I think"; I have experienced very strong, um, community, queer community in particular, in Salt Lake, in large

part because when the world is dangerous around you, you have to form stronger bonds with the people that are going to protect you. So maybe not, like, 100 percent positive, because a lot of that has to be reactionary to the hate that we're receiving as queer people. But there's also a lot of people of color and really cool activists who fight really hard to make the world a better place. And that's a really hard thing to do in a very conservative right-wing state. And they're really, um, doing a lot of really amazing things. So.

Emily: Yeah, Salt Lake City itself is a very different animal than the rest of Utah. So my answers to them are very different. Um, Salt Lake City is great. It's like any –

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Cute city that you're going to go to. There's going to be cute restaurants. There's going to be cute independent bookstores.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: You're going to see a lot of gay pride flags in the windows. Um, and that's great. You know, it doesn't really, um – it's not really connected to the rest of Utah's bad reputation. Uh, in the rest of Utah, here are things you gotta know: whole thing looks like a strip mall.

Sally: Oh, yeah.

Emily: Whole valley. Total strip mall. Except for when you come around the point of the mountain on I-15, which is the aforementioned north-south corridor, you can look out over Utah Valley and count church steeples –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And swiftly reach triple digits.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And that's pretty funny. Um, also a thing unique to Utah is soda stores.

Sally: Oh, that's such a good one.

Emily: You can go through a drive-thru, get a soda that has multiple flavors in it.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: It's like snow cones –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Of sodas. People don't drink as much coffee in Utah, uh, and they drink a lot of soda as sort of a caffeine substitute.

Sally: Mm.

Emily: Um, and, uh, that gets made fun of a lot, but I think they're really funny.

Sally: It does get made fun of a lot. Again, the sort of, like, everyone loves to shit on Utah for a variety of things –

Emily: Sure.

Sally: And everyone's like, why don't you just drink coffee? And I'm like, there's a variety of doctrine reasons, and also personal choice reasons. Like, I don't drink coffee because I think it tastes like battery acid.

Emily: Sure.

Sally: Um, so I love – I – no shame. I don't care if it's cringe, and I don't care if you hate it. I love pulling up to the Swig drive-thru –

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Getting my Diet Coke with sugar-free coconut in it, and you will pry that from my cold dead hands.

Emily: Yeah. The hottest –

Sally: We might have to go to Swig after this.

Emily: The hottest place in Utah Valley –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Is, number one, the Swig. Number two, Target.

Sally: Yeah. Uh, yeah.

Emily: And that's where you're going to get all of the nightlife.

Sally: All the poppin' nightlife. Yeah, Utah is very suburban, obviously, um, outside of Salt Lake for sure, so.

Emily: Yeah, my quip is that this place is just – you know, it's a Baby Gap.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: The air is poison and there are more children than you would expect running around.

Sally: Even –

Emily: If you're going to deal with those things, then you're set.

Sally: Yeah, even – think of as many children as you would think in a state with a lot of Mormon families and then, like –

Emily: It's more.

Sally: Triple it.

Emily: It's more than that.

Sally: There's a lot of kids.

Emily: Don't go into a fast food – don't go into a Chick-fil-A.

Sally: Yeah, don't. Utah loves their Chick-fil-A, man. Okay, we're nearing, uh, the end of the hour, and I think we should end on this very wonderful question.

Emily: Prescient –

Sally: Um –

Emily: Question.

Sally: Susan – I didn't highlight you, Susan, but I also believe you are one of our patrons – um, who asks, “What is next for the EHR podcaster heroes and their cats?” Probably more importantly.

Emily: Ooh, yeah.

Sally: I can answer for the cats quite easily.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: What's next for Ed? He will continue to spend his days sleeping, eating, and yelling at us when neither of those things are possible.

Emily: He's currently sitting next to me, staring, which is his signal that he wants me to go supervise while he eats.

Sally: Yeah, Ed is a freak. For Tybalt, he will continue his neuroses. He is incurable. Uh, he's a medical marvel. The most neuroses per, um, cubic centimeter –

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: Ah, in the space-time continuum. So that's what's next for the cats.

Emily: Yep, they're both in good health as of this recording.

Sally: Um –

Emily: We hope to have them a long time.

Sally: Yes, we sure do, despite all our complaints. Um, what's next for us? Uh, good question. As of right now, there are no plans to do any additional podcasts. I think we both very much need a break. As mentioned, it's quite a lot of work and can do some interesting things to the brain when you are asked to think this much about any particular piece of media. Um, I think we're both looking forward to having a break from long-form projects, like – from a long-form project like this, and also having some time to focus more on, uh, other creative projects. As we've mentioned many times, both of us like to write. Not like – we do write, we like to write, but we are also both writing projects of our own. Um. Um, we are thinking, however, um, that we will set up, uh, a type of newsletter, perhaps a Substack or something like that, that you guys can subscribe to, and we'll periodically give you updates of other creative projects that we're engaging in. Um, if we choose to do any other audio format, that will be announced through there. Um, we will – if we choose to start publishing or have anything up for purchase or anything like that, you will also be able to access those projects through that newsletter. It is currently not up and going. I will work on getting that set up soon so that as the podcast winds down, you guys can start connecting with us in that format. Um, we are – what's the plan for Patreon? Close it? Here's what I'm going to say the plan for Patreon is. Um, we likely will not continue to post content on our Patreon. Um, however, as previously mentioned, both Emily and I are engaging in creative projects of other sorts. And if you happen to have any investment in those without having ever laid eyes on them, you can continue to give money to the Patreon. And that will help us continue to pursue those creative pursuits. You will not, however, get any content for that. So I would encourage you guys to spend your money somewhere else, to creators that are giving you content and perhaps more marginalized creators: queer, trans, people of color. Um.

Emily: But we're not going to just shut it down instantly.

Sally: Yeah, we're not going to shut it down. And I know some of you are so kind and really want to give us that support. And, uh, if you want to and that makes you happy, we promise we will try to put it to good use. So. Um, anything to add? What's next for you? What else?

Emily: Oh, I'm looking forward to getting into gaming.

Sally: Yeah, there you go.

Emily: Yeah. I want to play video games in my –

Sally: Slay, bestie.

Emily: Hours of free time in the week. Which is something I have a lot of guilt about due to the way I was raised. Um, so I will hope to unlearn that and just play video games to my heart's content.

Sally: Play – play video games to your heart's content. You can always become a Twitch streamer if you get really bored.

Emily: If I start streaming, you guys, you will be the first to know. (laugh)

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: I think we all remember the early pandemic days of me frantically streaming – not even streaming.

Sally: Wind Waker.

Emily: That wack-ass setup of Wind Waker. Yeah, if you guys enjoyed that, let me know and I'll try and figure out Twitch one last time.

Sally: That would be so funny. Here's Emily playing – uh, what is it? Dragon – no, what's the D&D one that everyone was obsessed with?

Emily: Oh, Baldur's Gate.

Sally: Baldur's Gate.

Emily: Yeah, I'd have to get into PC gaming, which I think is also how most people stream. So yeah, you'd have to, A, send me money to get a PC setup.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And, um, then, yeah, I'll be there –

Sally: And then –

Emily: With Baldur's Gate 3, fully –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Two to three years after it was –

Sally: You can't stop her. If this is what you guys want, you can Venmo us at – (laugh)

Emily: This is my classic content consumption method. You all were horny for Astarion nine months ago.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: I will be there nine months from now.

Sally: Yeah, that's a big household thing.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Like, recently, I've been like, should I watch The Bear? (laugh)

Emily: (laugh) No.

Sally: Yeah. Emily's also told me due to my personal cocktail of mental illness that it's probably not a good show for me to watch.

Emily: Absolutely not. But yeah, I annoyed everyone when last year, I was like, have you guys heard of Squid Game?

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: And they were like, you suck. (laugh)

Sally: So that's one thing EHR will try to do in the future, maybe be a little bit more on, uh, the pop cultural pulse. Probably not. Um, so yeah, look for our next creative projects, our next creative endeavor, whatever that looks like. Look – send Emily money so she can become a Twitch streamer. Um, and I don't know, I will read the Demon Slayer manga. That's my project of the moment.

Emily: Ooh. Ooh. And what a good one it is.

Sally: It's very funny so far. So, yeah, thank you guys so much. I am glad we took a – a pause here to just kind of reflect, um, for a second. I'm having a lot of – I'm having a hard time processing the fact that the podcast is ending, as much as I am in many ways looking forward to some free time and, like, the next stage of my life and whatever that looks like. I think, as we've talked about many times on the podcast, there's value in knowing when something needs to end. Um, luckily, Wheel of Time gives us –

Emily: Robert.

Sally: (cough) Robert. Brandon. Um, so it's nice that, kind of, the structure of having a book series end gives us an end point as well. I'm having just a hard time processing the fact that it is going to end. I don't handle, like, change super well. I'm also not really great at processing grief, and I'm feeling a lot of grief just as the project ends. It's a normal thing to grieve it and the place it's held in my life for a really long time. So, uh, just sort of saying that now, if I start to get weird on the podcast or, like, emotional –

Emily: More weird.

Sally: You're right. More weird.

Emily: For both of us. (laugh)

Sally: Please know that's probably just, like, kind of a weird – one, it might be the Last Battle madness sinking in as Brandon changes point of view –

Emily: It's like space madness.

Sally: Every three sentences. Yeah.

Emily: Yeah. Yeah.

Sally: Um, the timeline sickness or whatever they call it in the Umbrella Academy. Homicidal rage. Um, and yeah, so just a – a plug here to just say thank you for all the support you've given us over the years. We'll say this again at the end of the podcast. But it's been – when we started this at that kitchen table at our shitty apartment in New York City, we genuinely never thought anybody would listen to it, much less the fact that we've met some really cool, really smart people who I hope we will continue to be able to connect with for many, many years to come. So.

Emily: Yeah, I think that's a perfect way to end it. We'll just add: thanks to Glynn MacKenzie –

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: For the sign – for, uh, the music.

Sally: Yes, for the music. We'll –

Emily: You know, our theme song.

Sally: We'll pop our theme song into the beginning. It's such a banger.

Emily: And thanks for, uh, all of your support.

Sally: Thanks for your support and thanks for your questions.

Emily: Yeah, we got some good ones. We didn't get to all of them.

Sally: We didn't get to all of them.

Emily: Um, so if we do another Q&A after the podcast, then we'll be sure to recycle those.

Sally: Yeah. Okay, we love you guys. Take good care.

Emily: Thank you all. Goodbye!

Sally: Godspeed.