



Episode 115: Melancholy Culkin

Release Date: May 18, 2020

Running Time: 44 minutes

Sally: Everybody Hates Rand is a Wheel of Time podcast that will contain spoilers for all 14 books. So if you're anti-spoiler, pause 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. In the context of this podcast, "everybody" refers to us and our cat. You are free to feel however you want about Rand, who is a fictional character. Don't DM us.

(theme song by Glynna MacKenzie plays)

Emily: OK, great, I can edit all that out.

Sally: (laugh)

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

Sally: And I'm Sally Goodger.

Emily: There was, like, a weird pause there between my first and last name.

Sally: I mean, you don't have a middle name, so it's accurate.

Emily: I don't. And I'm sure I've talked about that on the podcast before because it's one of the great disappointments of my life, that my dad is that sexist. Um.

Sally: I've decided that Emily's middle initial is "T."

Emily: Every, uh, friend that I've ever had has pretty much decided on a middle name for me at some point or another.

Sally: OK, well. You should be able to pick.

Emily: "Thaddeus" has been Sally's pick.

Sally: Yeah. I just think it's funny.

Emily: Yeah, I'm, uh --

Sally: You don't have to have a middle name, though.

Emily: I mean, I don't -- it's like -- I don't really feel its loss until someone is like, "What's your middle name?" and I'm like, "I have none. Because Christopher Todd Juchau --"

Sally: Your middle name could be "Todd" after your father.

Emily: No, I don't want to name myself after my father. (laugh)

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: After what he's done to me. Rrrrggghhh.

Sally: (sigh)

Emily: This is a melancholy -- melancholy start to this episode.

Sally: Melancholy -- Melancholy Culkin. (laugh)

Emily: (laugh)

Sally: From Home Alone! (laugh)

Emily: Oh, man.

Sally: Now Tybalt has to eat.

Emily: Yeah, of course.

Sally: Which is a little less invasive.

Emily: I haven't seen Home Alone in, literally, two decades.

Sally: Hey, you're never gonna guess. But I've never seen Home Alone. (laugh)

Emily: Well, I saw Home Alone once, sort of, but I've never been able to watch it again because I know there's a big spider in it.

Sally: Oh, yeah.

Emily: So I stick with Home Alone 2: Lost in New York, which does at least have the advantage of having that cool pigeon lady. And no spiders. I'll take pigeons over spiders any day.

Sally: I mean, I saw a lot more pigeons in New York than I saw spiders.

Emily: Yeah, me too, actually. I don't -- I mean, I don't, like keep a -- a memory bank of all my spider encounters, but -- that I recall.

Sally: At least, the year I lived with you, we didn't have -- I think we -- we didn't have many spiders. We had some other weird bugs.

Emily: Oh, yeah, New York is full of weird, non-spider bugs.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And, y'know, other vermin. Mice. So many mice.

Sally: Me.

Emily: No. Umm. Two not-very-exciting chapters, I'm sorry to announce. Not much in my brain --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: To talk about. It's -- you know. Back to Rando. Randoooo Al'Thor.

Sally: Back to Randall.

Emily: Back to Randall himself, the Dragon Reborn, as he and his posse -- (laugh)

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Like it's some kind of old Western.

Sally: Outlaws.

Emily: Yeah, get to, uh, the pass that will take them through the mountains -- the Spine of the World -- to, uh, Cairhien. Called Jangai Pass?

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Jangai?

Sally: Jenga.

Emily: Jenga Pass. God, if only.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: You have to -- to get through it, you have to play Jenga.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: It's like -- it's like a puzzle in a video game.

Sally: Yeah. But, like, huge Jenga.

Emily: But, like, big Jenga.

Sally: Like, the side -- one of the mountains is just a huge set of Jenga.

Emily: Imagine if the mountains were just Jenga.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Like, a Jenga tower that had fallen.

Sally: Yeah. Oh my God.

Emily: It's -- Ahh!

Sally: Love that so much.

Emily: It would've been so cool.

Sally: Obviously they have Mat with them, so they'd do great.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: 'Cause he'd pull the one --

Emily: 'Cause he's got --

Sally: Big Jenga.

Emily: A plus eighteen to sleight of hand. I had that for a while. (sigh)

Sally: That's nice.

Emily: RIP.

Sally: What happened to it?

Emily: Oh, I just had to give up the magic item that gave me plus five, so now I only have plus thirteen sleight of hand, which is still --

Sally: Oh my fuck -- you'll be fine.

Emily: I know. (laugh)

Sally: Shut up. (laugh) Jesus Christ.

Emily: Rogues are good at two things. That's it. Everything else I am terrible at. Um. Hmm. I'm really struggling.

Sally: Um, so they show up and there's, like, a little -- kind of, like, fort -- outpost. Like a tiny little -- kind of like a little Western town. Um.

Emily: Yeah, it's Cairhien, and it's not the Aiel --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Built into the cliffside, kind of.

Sally: Yeah. And as they kind of come up to it, this whole traveling thing, there's, um, like, nobody in sight except a bunch of dead bodies that have been hung on the outside.

Emily: Strung up on the walls.

Sally: Yeah. And eventually, like, three representatives from the town come out and are like, um, "We're so happy you're here, my lord," to Rand, who isn't dressed like an Aielman, of course, so --

Emily: Yeah, conveniently, the people they come upon are Rand, Lan, Moiraine, and Mat, the --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Quote unquote "Westerners."

Sally: The non-Aiel.

Emily: In the bunch.

Sally: Yeah, our white folks.

Emily: Yeah, so they're like, "Oh, sweet, we're safe," and are like, "Oh my God, you would not believe the atrocities that the quote, insert racist epithet here --"

Sally: Yeah. Yeah.

Emily: “Uh, Aiel, inflicted upon us.” And, um, they -- it’s not really, like, shocking. We, as readers, sort of expected Couladin to do terrible things wherever he went. This is just sort of the prelude to what is going to follow in Cairhien, which Rand explicitly says. Um, he’s like, “It’s this -- if it’s this bad here, then it’s going to be worse in Cairhien.” And it is Couladin also, explicitly, leaving a message for Rand because he tells that to the remaining townsfolk. Like, “Hey, this is for a guy who’s going to come after me.”

Sally: Mm-hmm. “He’s got tattoos like me.”

Emily: Yeah. Yeah, ‘cause one of the dudes see Rand’s fancy belt buckle that I’m assuming he never takes off, even to sleep or bathe -- (laugh) anymore --

Sally: No. Gross.

Emily: ‘Cause he loves Aviendha so much. Um, and is like, “Oh, yeah, he had tattoos like that. Dragons.” Um, so it’s like, yeah, got all that. Couladin’s doing --

Sally: Couladin’s a war criminal.

Emily: Yeah. Obviously.

Sally: Like, I just -- yeah.

Emily: They, um -- the people are like, “They took many of the young, healthy people captive. Stripped them in the street and -- to make them gai’shain.” Um, although I don’t think the people explicitly know that’s what it is.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And Rand is like, “Oh, that’s weird,” and says to Rhuarc, “Did you hear that part?” as Rhuarc comes up, terrifying the townsfolk, because, y’know -- racism.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um. But Rhuarc’s, like, uncomfy with the topic.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: ‘Cause he’s like, “He shouldn’t be doing that.” And Mat is like, “You expected him to not do --”

Sally: I know. (laugh)

Emily: “Bad things? Given what we have seen previously?”

Sally: Yeah. Yeah. It’s like -- like, I’m glad that people have, like, a healthy sense of horror at it, but Mat’s the only one who’s like, “Yeah, he’s a bad fucking guy.”

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Like, "We should've been -- not prepared to be OK with it, but, like, prepared for this."

Emily: Yeah. Rhurc is like -- essentially, Rhurc's like, "It's not just a war crime; it's the fact that he's betraying everything about his culture." Which brings up an interesting dynamic to the, um -- oh, I don't know how to say this. Um. War crimes are often committed not by individuals but by groups of individuals in the name of cultures and, um --

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Races, religions, et cetera, et cetera.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Um, and so the idea that you would prioritize your patriotism or cultural allegiances or religious beliefs over your humanity is sort of, um, intrinsic to war crimes, I think? In a lot of ways?

Sally: Yeah. Um. Often, what we think of as war crimes are -- like, often, what we put in those -- in -- under that, kind of, definition, are, um, identity-based persecutions. Genocide, um, mass rapes, mass killings, um, bombing, chemical warfare, those type of things, usually happen along, like, national lines, racial lines, tribal lines, religious lines, et cetera, et cetera. So, yeah. So it is kind of antithetical -- it's just very interesting, yeah, that he's going against his culture.

Emily: Yeah, this isn't something he's doing -- or it's -- there's been such a breakage within the Aiel. Like, this is sort of indicative, I guess, although I don't think it's done very well -- but this is sort of indicative of how the Aiel lines have split down the middle.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Obviously, the issue of the gai'shain is going to continue into, um, the later books. Rhurc tells us, you know, gai'shain, this, like, cultural thing of if you're taken captive in battle in a certain way, then you just provide service for a year and a day or whatever it is --

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: And then everyone just goes about their business.

Sally: Yeah, it's like it didn't even happen.

Emily: He's like, "That's only if you are part of, you know, the racial structure, the culture. To take an outsider into that and force them into it is literally just chattel slavery."

Sally: Yeah. Yeah, and so it -- yeah. So we've got the division between the people who are still following the old Aiel honor code, which I'm not even gonna try and pronounce. Juh -- juh-toe?

Emily: Ji'e'toh.

Sally: Ji'e'toh. Perfect.

Emily: At least -- I don't know.

Sally: Uh, no, that sounds great to me. Um, and so -- 'cause Rhuarc and the other, um, clan chief who come up are like, "He's broken our honor code in multiple ways."

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: Um, and then you have Couladin, who's attempting to form a new Aiel identity, um, and that's happening through these various atrocities that he is committing. Because often, like, war and, um, warfare are great ways to build camaraderie among, um, people, unfortunately.

Emily: Yeah. The more crimes you commit together, the more you're likely to stick with each other?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: I don't know, it's like he's trying to render a new, um, honor code via violence.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Which -- yeah, violence is often the way that we cement relationships. Welcome to hazing in fraternities.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Et cetera.

Sally: And sororities.

Emily: And sororities. Yes.

Sally: It's usually not as violent, but it still happens.

Emily: I don't really know what I'm saying. I'm just saying that it's a really complicated issue, and it is -- like, Mat is being the valid person here, saying, "We should have anticipated this."

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Because -- he doesn't say this -- but, you know, underlying is the idea that Rand did something unprecedented in the last book, and people have been reacting in unprecedented ways.

Sally: Mm-hmm.



Emily: So the idea that someone might break this, um, fully from the honor code is sort of obvious.

Sally: Yeah. And, it's like -- it's very interesting to have Mat paired up with the particular cast of characters who also show up --

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Like, Rand, Moiraine, Lan, Rhuarc, and the other clan chief -- I'm sorry, I don't remember your name, homeboy --

Emily: It's like Dhearic or something?

Sally: Yeah. Um, but it's like, this particular group of people -- all five or six of them -- is really bound to an honor code of some sort --

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Or another. Or some sort of, like, I don't know, personal mission or something.

Emily: Some code of --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Chivalry or however it is.

Sally: Um, yeah, that impacts, like, literally every single one of their decisions. And, like, Mat, who, as we've talked about, is a character who's really, um, really adheres to his, like, own personal moral symbol -- a moral symbol's, like, moral compass. Um, is also the character we see most deftly moving through, like, changes in society? So --

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: It is very interesting to have him be the one who's like, "Yes, of course there are changes happening," whereas these other characters are like, "This is literally, like, breaking my mind, the idea that somebody could just throw their code of conduct away."

Emily: Yeah. Mat is, as always, sort of the most interesting person to look at --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: When -- (laugh) When we have scenes that aren't even from his point of view. Because -- especially because he is, in these couple of chapters, through Rand's point of view, starting to become, um, othered in --

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Rand's mind in interesting ways. Rand starts noticing -- he's like, "Ah, I've always kind of noticed that Mat has been a little different post-Rhuidean."

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: And he's made notes of it, um, in the last book. But here he's start of -- sort of starts seeing the patterns?

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: I guess, in a way. He, um, points out that Mat, um -- what does he call him? He says he's always been "an indifferent rider" --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Which I think is a really interesting way --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: To say that he can sit on a horse, and he's fine at it but not stellar.

Sally: Yeah. Great, yeah.

Emily: But when he's not thinking about it, he's suddenly spectacular.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, and when these townspeople first sort of come up to their group, Mat's the one who says, "Well, why didn't you have sentries?"

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: "Did you not have sentries? You're technically in enemy territory here." Um, which everyone reacts to like it's this big revolutionary statement.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: I -- (laugh) Which I find kind of funny.

Sally: Yeah, Lan is like -- (laugh) "What?"

Emily: Lan's like, "Oh my God." And it's like -- I -- I too would wonder --

Sally: Yeah. It's like -- it's a gradual introduction to, like, the later scene where Mat just, like, perfectly plans out a battle --

Emily: Yes.

Sally: While he's, like, half-distracted.

Emily: An iconic scene. (laugh) Yeah.

Sally: 'Cause he's little ADHD poster child.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Um. But it -- yeah, it is funny, 'cause it's like, that should be literally -- all of these men are of some sort of military bent, and even Moiraine. They should be like, "... Watchmen?"

Emily: Yeah. "Where were the sentries?"

Sally: Yeah. But in a way, it is sort of nice to think about, like, a society where they're, like, not overly concerned -- like, they feel safe enough.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Even in enemy territory.

Emily: I mean, yeah, that would be great. But -- I guess --

Sally: Obviously not the case.

Emily: Yeah, I guess I'm -- I'm so -- I've spent so much time with military-minded Mat that I've forgotten that, until this point, he has literally been outside the boundaries of, um, almost all military encounters.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: The closest he got was in, um, Falme, when he blew the Horn of -- (laugh) Valere.

Sally: What a legend.

Emily: Which -- I don't even think we saw him fighting in that? He just sort of --

Sally: No, he just sort of blows the Horn --

Emily: Blows the Horn of Valere -- yeah.

Sally: And, like, passes out or some shit.

Emily: Does whatever he does.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But -- I mean -- I don't know. I would say he kind of maybe doesn't have the experience to sort of apply rational questions like that, but then again, he has also traveled with the fucking Shienaran army to --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Across the continent. And sort of got used to men making observations like that. I don't know.

Sally: Yeah. It's just, like -- kind of -- it's funny how drastically people react.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Where it, like -- like, it's kind of unusual for Mat to be, like -- kind of voice really any opinion other than just whatever nonsense.

Emily: To be assertively the voice of reason. (laugh)

Sally: Yeah. Like, it's just not really his normal schtick. But it's not like he says, like, very complex military terms.

Emily: Yeah. It's not like he was like, "And now how exactly did they do that? Did they flank you on the --" you know, like --

Sally: (laugh) "Did they attack you?"

Emily: "Did they use phalanx formation?"

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Or something like that.

Sally: Yeah. (laugh)

Emily: (laugh) He's just like, "So were people watching or what?"

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And everyone's like, "Oh my God."

Sally: "He's a genius."

Emily: "He's, like, a child prodigy."

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Lan -- I like to think -- I want to film this scene from Lan's point of view, or maybe the next one, you know, where he's in the tent talking to Lan --

Sally: Perfect.

Emily: And I want to have, like, Mat's voice just kind of fade into the background and, like, zoom in on Lan's face and have his internal monologue be like, "Maybe I chose the wrong boy to mentor." (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) He's like, "I just -- ahh, I'm really regretting my choices."

Emily: It's like, "Oh, no, I did the wrong thing."

Sally: Yeah. But thank God Lan does not get his weird morals on Mat.

Emily: Misogynistic mitts on Mat.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Yeah. Ugh.

Sally: Mat's just like, doo doo doo, capering away. (laugh)

Emily: Mat's like -- (laugh)

Sally: Goes --

Emily: "I'm just here with Thom!"

Sally: Yeah. (laugh) Barf, I don't like Thom anymore.

Emily: Yeah, we're not big fans of Thom anymore, but, you know. Just in terms of --

Sally: It's OK. He gets -- he gets other people. Birgitte.

Emily: I was about to say, it's interesting that Thom is most outside the, uh, quote unquote "palatable" sexual boundaries and so is Mat amongst the three boys, in that he isn't, you know -- he doesn't just find a girl and marry her right off the bat.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But then it's like, OK, but then Lan is also a, what, fifty-something-year-old --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Dating Nynaeve, who's twenty -- who's twice -- who's half his age.

Sally: Yeah. It is barf o'clock. Yeah, everyone who, like -- I feel like this is dangerous territory 'cause everyone loves Lan and Nynaeve -- but everyone who is, like, into that relationship should take a -- a harder look at that one.

Emily: Yeah, it's not a, uhhhh, great one.

Sally: I just think that women shouldn't have to date men super older than them.

Emily: Yeah. I'm, like, all for -- it's the classic -- the classic conundrum. I am all for female agency, but I think that agency is being impacted by forces outside of the woman coming in, patriarchal forces, telling her --

Sally: Yeah. It's like we talked about with Elayne. It's like, your desires do not exist in a vacuum.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Like, you are in -- like, the way that you're -- your sexuality is shaped is so much shaped by your culture.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Unfortunately. Like, you can't just -- like, it'd be great if that wasn't true. (laugh)

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: But -- yeah. Sorry I interrupted you.

Emily: No, that's it. I just -- every time I think about things like this, I'm reminded of how when I was in high school, many of my friends dated men who were outside of their teens, and I --

Sally: Ughhh.

Emily: Am now troubled by that and angry that I wasn't necessarily troubled by it as a teen.

Sally: Yeah. It's just, like -- I was thinking today -- not in quite the same context -- but I -- something about, um -- I can't even remember the author. Some, like, dude-bro author came up in something I was reading, and I remember very vividly this, like, boy in my English student advisory in college who was like, "This is my favorite author 'cause he's so philosophic," and I was like, OK, whatever. But I remember being like, well, he's the only cute boy in English student advisory -- (laugh) so I will, like, continue to talk to him. And it's just, like, fascinating the way that, like, the female mind is shaped to view what is accessible to them --

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Sexually. It's -- it was just, like -- and it's not a completely coherent thought yet, but I just remember that, and I was like, barf at sophomore year Sally year or whatever.

Emily: I know, yeah, as a 26-year-old, I'm -- I don't really have any of the patience for things that I had patience for --

Sally: Yeah, I know, and then I --

Emily: As a much younger person.

Sally: Think about the ways that -- yeah. It's just, like -- yeah. It's one of the nice things about getting older, is that my, like, tolerance for bullshit is really decreasing.

Emily: Oh, yeah.

Sally: And I'm very grateful for that.

Emily: (laugh)

Sally: Just 'cause, like, I had -- like, it's a huge problem of mine. Particularly --

Emily: Oh, yeah.

Sally: With, like, men and, like, appeasing men's fucking nonsense, which women are trained to do from literally infancy. It's like, "Behave for your dad while mom goes out to the car."

Emily: While mom leaves for two seconds.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Have I told -- (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) Uh-oh.

Emily: There's a really good piece of family --

Sally: Uh-oh.

Emily: Juchau family lore that my dad -- (laugh)

Sally: Uh-oh.

Emily: I don't remember -- I don't -- I don't know if I was there. This all comes from Anne, my younger sister. She's younger by three years. So she claims --

Sally: (laugh) This story.

Emily: Yeah, she claims, when she was really young, I dunno, like, kindergarten, first grade age -- six or seven -- she was with my dad at our house. I don't know where the rest of us were. My mom was definitely out, though. And I assume Sarah and I were also, because, um, otherwise this would have gone back to us. But, uh, he was, like, eating tortilla chips and got a chip, like, lodged in his throat or something? So he's, like, not choking, but he kind of lays down and says

to Anne, "I'm going to take a nap, but if I stop breathing --" (wheeze, laugh) He tells her how to call 9-1-1 and, like, writes down our address for her.

Sally: For a kindergartner? Could she even read?!

Emily: (laugh) She might've been a little older than that. Every story Anne tells about herself --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: She sounds a little bit younger than she probably actually was, because --

Sally: It's Anne.

Emily: It's Anne. (laugh)

Sally: Yeah. (laugh) "And then I found five dollars."

Emily: "And then I found five dollars." Um --

Sally: Oh, Chris. "I'm just gonna go to sleep." (laugh)

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: "And leave my five, six, seven-year-old --"

Emily: "If I stop breathing --" (laugh)

Sally: For fuck's sake, Chris. Jesus Christ.

Emily: He's like, "That did NOT happen," and Anne's like, "Stop gaslighting me." (laugh) "I know it happened."

Sally: Yeah. I have heard Anne tell this story, and it is --

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Like, yeah. Chris, she -- the details are the same every time.

Emily: Yeah, she tells it -- Anne -- I mean, we all have stories like that, and my dad and mom claim that they did not happen, but --

Sally: Oh, yeah, parents are like, "No."

Emily: Classic gaslighting.

Sally: "I never did anything wrong. I'm a perfect parent."

Emily: "I've never done anything wrong in my life." (laugh)



Sally: And you're like, it's OK, everyone's just, like, trying their best.

Emily: Well, I'm like, I'm not, like -- I'm not, like, calling child services on you, Dad.

Sally: Yeah. (laugh)

Emily: I'm telling a funny story at dinner.

Sally: You can't call child line --

Emily: About your parenting faux -- yeah, you can't call child line -- (laugh)

Sally: Every time your mom threatens to kill you. (laugh)

Emily: Classic Derry Girls quote.

Sally: Yeah. But yeah, it's like, every parent makes those mistakes.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: It's just people trying their best. But, like, as a child, it is your God-given right to mock them for it. (laugh)

Emily: Yeah. Um. Uh, whatever we were talking about. Anyway, so Rand and company are like, "Alright, we're camping here for the night."

Sally: "Bury the bodies."

Emily: "Please bury the bodies." Yeah, let's take down the dead -- the Aiel are just, like, shooting the birds of prey --

Sally: About -- also, if I could make a comment about the birds of prey.

Emily: The -- yeah. Are they carrion birds --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Or birds of prey? What's the --

Sally: They're -- they're carrion birds. Birds of prey are, like, raptors, which is hawks, owls, eagles, falcons, all those things. Carrion birds are birds that eat things that are already dead. So birds of prey actively hunt. Carrion birds eat, um, things that are already dead. Um, so, like, vultures and ravens, in this case, are two carrion birds. Um -- um, and it would actually probably be better for the ecosystem if they let the carrion birds eat the people rather than burying them in the dirt because, like, the whole purpose, particularly -- not the whole purpose -- but a function of vultures in ecosystems is to be, like, the natural clean-up crew, because a vulture's stomach can digest all sorts of, like, diseases, such as, like, I think ebola might be one of them? And, like,

they can digest anthrax. They've just got, like, amazing stomach acid. So when they eat all of these things that might be living in the corpses, they prevent them from going into, like, the watershed or the earth and then coming up with the plants. So. Though it smells nasty, it would probably be healthier if they just let the people get eaten. I know that's a little morbid.

Emily: Do ravens even belong in this particular ecosystem?

Sally: I don't think so. I don't think ravens live in the desert.

Emily: Like, by all rights, it should be vultures, right?

Sally: Yeah, it should be vultures. Various -- of various kinds.

Emily: I mean, of course they're like, "We're shooting the ravens because they are spies of the Dark One."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Which I think is a mean discrimination against --

Sally: Yeah. No, I was literally like, I'm --

Emily: Carrion birds.

Sally: Going to have a conversation about vultures, but I don't want to be a freak who's like, "Be better to vultures, Robert Jordan," but here I am being a freak who's like, "Be better to vultures, Robert Jordan." Where do ravens live? Wikipedia, tell me.

Emily: Temperate climates, I imagine.

Sally: Yeah. Yeah, the Northern Hemisphere, where there is some, um, deserts ...

Emily: Yeah, but you don't really see them in the deserts, you see them in the --

Sally: Yeah, you seem them in, like --

Emily: Continental regions.

Sally: Yeah. Mostly forests and, like, urban areas. Distribution and habitat. Temperate habitats.

Emily: Ah ha ha, I knew the word "temperate" 'cause of all of the reading about geography and regions I have to do for my job, which is written, you know, for -- so kindergartners can understand.

Sally: "Most common ravens prefer wooded areas with large expanses of open land nearby or coastal regions for their nesting sites and feeding grounds."

Emily: So this is a, you know, flock of ravens that got really --

Sally: Yeah. And of course, there is the concept in the Wheel of Time that ravens -- these ravens are not just ravens; they are something evil and heinous.

Emily: I just like to think that there was this flock of ravens out here --

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: And they elected a leader or --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: However ravens, you know, do government.

Sally: Mm-hmm. Yeah, of course.

Emily: And they -- they're all obviously evil, but the one they elected leader is not --

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Just because luck of the draw. Um, and he's just, like, a himbo. A himbo raven. He's, like, just doing his thing. And then he -- (laugh) He veers them toward the desert, and all the evil ravens are like, "Aw, sweet, something -- something must be going on here," but he gets there and he's like, "Where the fuck are the trees?!"

Sally: (laugh) "This is not what -- I took a wrong turn somewhere."

Emily: Thus quoth the raven. "I got lost."

Sally: There was a huge-ass fucking raven in our parking lot today --

Emily: Oh, really?

Sally: When I was driving home. Yeah. Ravens are big. They're, like, this big. You guys can't see this, but Emily's getting an excellent visual.

Emily: It's, like, torso-sized. (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) They're big, and they're, like, really -- and they're, like, hefty.

Emily: Makes me think about, um, in the Raven Boys, how he has --

Sally: Yeah. Like, Chainsaw is fucking gigantic.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Just, like, on his shoulder. Like, they're not, like, dainty little birds. They are, like, built.

Emily: Sarah, my sister, texts me every once in a while just to remind me of that scene in the Raven Cycle where Ronan is like, “I’m leaving Chainsaw at home because I don’t want her to learn any bad language at the --” (laugh)

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: “When I’m meeting up with this creepy Russian mobster teenage boy.”

Sally: Kavinsky is a good character, though.

Emily: Kavinsky’s a great character.

Sally: Um, yeah, ‘cause ravens can mimic human speech.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: That is a bird fact that my niece learned this week for urban bird bingo and texted me --

Emily: Aw, good for her.

Sally: I mean, her mom texted it to me -- Liz can’t type or read yet. One day, though.

Emily: (singing) One day more ...

Sally: And then the world will go up in flames.

Emily: Will truly know her wrath.

Sally: (laugh) Um, so anyway, there’s your bird sidebar, but vultures are really amazing birds. Um, carrion, um -- the carrion crew, as they are fondly referred to at the Aviary -- are really excellent creatures, and they’ve often been persecuted because of, like, prevailing attitudes such as this that they are dirty, that they are evil. Um, so a lot of them are struggling. Like, there was a type of vulture that lived in India that’s pretty much extinct because they thought they were evil and bad.

Emily: That’s sad.

Sally: So anyway, Robert Jordan hates vultures. Pass it along.

Emily: (laugh)

Sally: Hashtag vulture hate. Stop vulture hate 2k20.

Emily: Hashtag vulture hate?

Sally: (laugh) No, hashtag stop vulture hate!

Emily: (laugh) I know, I just think it’s funny.

Sally: It is -- this chapter is evidence of hashtag vulture hate. (laugh)

Emily: So, uh, they go on. They're setting up camp. Rand is making his way to his campsite. Again, he sees Mat crouched there, surveying --

Sally: I know.

Emily: The landscape, and he's like, "Mat is getting real weird." (laugh)

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: "These days."

Sally: It's like, "You're one to fuckin' talk, bud."

Emily: Um. Mat's girlfriend, Melindhra, is off sort of surveying Mat --

Sally: I know, it's very funny. (laugh)

Emily: As he surveys the landscape.

Sally: She's like, "What is my boyfriend doing?"

Emily: She's like, "What the fuck?" And Mat's -- and Rand's like, "This is just a whole weird relationship. I don't know what to --"

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: "Do with it or why the Maidens keep bringing up that she's gonna teach Mat how to sing."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Which, for a while, before I remembered that there is an explanation for what that means at the end of this chapter, I was, like, trying to parse what, like, sex thing that could mean.

Sally: Me too. I was like, does it mean getting pegged?

Emily: Exactly!

Sally: (laugh) Yeah.

Emily: I was like, it can only mean pegging.

Sally: (laugh) Literally, that's what I thought today. And -- 'cause I also forgot that three pages later, Aviendha's like, "No, it's this complicated bullshit thing about masculinity."

Emily: Aviendha's like, "It's this cultural thing." And I'm like, alright, but I'm going to delete that and accept that it means getting pegged. (laugh)

Sally: Good for you.

Emily: Yeah. And I say, good for you.

Sally: Yeah. Destigmatize butt stuff, 2020.

Emily: (laugh) Hashtag vulture hate. Hashtag destigmatize butt stuff.

Sally: Those are my two platforms. (laugh) Elect me to the presidency.

Emily: I'll be running for governor on the dual platforms --

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Of vulture hate and destigmatize butt stuff. (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) I would do so good in Utah, a state that hates gay people and loves guns.

Emily: And probably hates vultures too.

Sally: (laugh) Yeah.

Emily: Just because -- Utah. Um.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: So Rand goes up, uh, to his tent. Y'know, has some little side comments about various characters. As they were riding in, Moiraine was lecturing him about politics in Cairhien --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And Mat -- Rand was like, "I'm busy right now." They -- their relationship has progressed to, at least, being polite to each other.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um. Although I don't know if we can call it, really, progression since Rand is still exercising his newfound authority a little too --

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Uh, grossly.

Sally: Liberally.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: He also talks to Asmodean briefly.

Emily: Yeah, on his way up, as -- as he -- as he's surveying Melindhra surveying Mat surveying the landscape --

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Asmodean comes up and is like, "I wish you wouldn't make me carry your banner."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And Rand does some, like, pun about how Asmodean was one of the Chosen --

Sally: Uh-huh.

Emily: Quote unquote. Um. And Asmodean's like, "OK, well, you don't have to be rude about it." (laugh)

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: And Rand's like, "Look, there's no one else to carry the goddamn banner. It's just you, my guy. You're the only one who's technically important enough to be in my train --"

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: "But also, I don't like you, so --"

Sally: "Ha ha!"

Emily: "This is where we're at." There's also, oddly, up at the, um -- Rand notes that near the snowline in these mountains that they've come across, which I'm imagining a bit like the Rocky Mountains --

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: In terms of height. Um, Rand says he can see this, like, little structure hanging out that looks like ruins, including sort of a jutting out, like, dock.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: And he's like, "Oh, that's weird. It must be from before the time of the Breaking, and perhaps there was, like, some sort of port town up there, and the Aiel Waste itself used to be the bed of an ocean."

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Which is relatable to us because we're from Utah, which was once the bed of, um, a sea.

Sally: Yeah, Lake Bonneville, baby.

Emily: Lake Bonneville. Um, but is now a vast desert.

Sally: Yeah. With mountains on either side.

Emily: With big -- yeah, with the big mountains. So Aiel Waste is Utah. Heard it here, folks.

Sally: Yeah. I mean, I do -- I do maintain they should film these scenes in the red rock of southern Utah.

Emily: Yeah, that would be cool.

Sally: Like, film it down in Moab.

Emily: But Rand asks Asmodean about that. He's like, "What do you suppose -- do you know what that is?" And Asmodean's like, "Listen, I don't know jack about your -- this fuckin' place's geography. For all I know, it was where I grew up."

Sally: (laugh) Baby Asmodean.

Emily: Baby Asmodean.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Just, you know, making up little tunes and plucking the wings off flies, I imagine. Sociopath.

Sally: His two favorite things.

Emily: His two favorite things.

Sally: He would with -- would play the harp with the flies' wings.

Emily: He'd play, the, um -- he'd use them as guitar picks.

Sally: Yeah. And just, like, rock the fuck out.

Emily: And everyone would be like, "Aw, you're so creepy but so good at music."

Sally: Yeah. He invented the electric guitar.

Emily: And he'd be like, "That's 'cause I'm a rockstar, baby. Sid Vicious." No, he's not a Sid Vicious type. He was, you know, a partier. Hard drugs.

Sally: I don't think Asmodean parties.

Emily: No. Like --



Sally: Which one of the Forsaken parties? Graendal, obviously.

Emily: Graendal, obviously. And, um, Rahvin, I guess.

Sally: Gross.

Emily: Exactly.

Sally: Rahvin does, like -- Graendal does the, like, at least, kind of fun partying. Rahvin does the, like, gross frat boy partying.

Emily: Asmodean would be at the party but just to, like, play his guitar.

Sally: Yeah, he's the DJ at the party.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Who really doesn't want to be there, but he needs the cash.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: To buy his textbooks.

Emily: Uh-huh. I can't remember any of the other male Forsaken. There's that one who's really horny. I guess. Who's dead now, but he won't be for long. Balthamel. For all we know, Be'lal liked to party.

Sally: That's true.

Emily: But we'll never know. (laugh) Sadly, we'll never get to know Be'lal, because he was balefired so immediately by Moiraine.

Sally: (laugh) Yeah, Moiraine's like, "NO!"

Emily: The great tragedy of my life, that I never got to uncover Be'lal's personality.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: For all we know, he was a legend.

Sally: Yeah. Maybe Demandred likes to party.

Emily: Um --

Sally: No.

Emily: Demandred does not -- does -- definitively does not like to party. I've come to the conclusion that Demandred's a huge idiot. Read my blog.

Sally: Good for him.

Emily: Um. (laugh)

Sally: I think it's underrated when people are idiots. Like, there's a -- a --

Emily: I think he's an idiot in a bad way.

Sally: Oh, no.

Emily: In, like, a narrative plot hole way.

Sally: Oh, well, that's --

Emily: Sad.

Sally: Branderson's fault.

Emily: No, it could've been both their faults.

Sally: It's --

Emily: I've been trying to exercise some leniency for Brandon Sanderson and be like, I have no idea whether this was done under the instructions of Robert Jordan or if he was just, you know, winging it.

Sally: Yeah. We can call them Brandbert.

Emily: Brand -- (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) That's the collective hive mind that is --

Emily: The Treaty of Brandbert.

Sally: The final -- (laugh)

Emily: Sounds like it ended a war. The War of the Roses.

Sally: It's the final, uh --

Emily: Countdown?

Sally: Yeah, it's the final countdown --

Emily: (singing) It's the final countdown ...

Sally: Of the Wheel of Time. That's the collective hive mind that sort of glued it all together, was Brandbert.

Emily: Brandbert.

Sally: Yeah. (laugh)

Emily: Um. Jorderson. (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) That's, like, impossible to say. Jorerson.

Emily: Jor-Jorderson.

Sally: Jor-Jorderson.

Emily: That's terrible. It's an abomination. Just like "Brandbert." (laugh)

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: So -- I forgot what I was even saying.

Sally: Anyway --

Emily: Something about the Forsaken liking to party. Rand's like, "I don't want to talk to you tonight. Go away," to Asmodean.

Sally: He's like, "Fucking fine."

Emily: Asmodean's like, "Fine. You're not even gonna channel at me to keep me in my tent?" and Rand's like, "Listen, buddy, I trust you until the day you betray me, and then I will murder you." (laugh) And it's like -- I mean, I guess that's how I feel about all people.

Sally: (laugh) Yeah, I guess.

Emily: I trust people until they betray me.

Sally: See, I don't trust people until they prove they aren't going to betray me.

Emily: Ah, I see.

Sally: And then the trust is still thin.

Emily: Ah. I forgot what I was saying.

Sally: It's that -- it's that trauma, baby.

Emily: It's that trauma, baby.

Sally: But yeah, Asmodean's like, "OK, fuck you," and Rand's like, "Fuck YOU."

Emily: And Mat's like, "I can hear you guys." (laugh)

Sally: Yeah. And Mat's like, "So we're supposed to pretend we don't know he's Asmodean? What's the deal here?"

Emily: Yeah, come on. Mat's like, "I know. I'm not stupid. Anymore."

Sally: (laugh) "I got smart."

Emily: "I got smart."

Sally: "In Rhuidean."

Emily: "In Rhuidean," and Rand's like, "It's pronounced Rhuidean," and Mat's like, "Fuck you."

Sally: He's like, "Rhuidean!"

Emily: "Not in MY memories!"

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Um, Rand goes up to his tent. Aviendha's like, "Look, I killed a snake," and Rand, for some reason, is not impressed and horny because of this.

Sally: That's what I would -- I mean, she, like, killed it with a knife.

Emily: I know.

Sally: That's a big fucking snake.

Emily: Rand's like, "It could have bit you," and Aviendha's like, "Snakes could bite all of us at any time, Rand. I'm not special." (laugh) "What are you talking about?"

Sally: Yeah, but he, like, freaks out, 'cause he's like, "Have some sense of security or value for your own life."

Emily: Yeah, he's like, "Don't be so reckless," and Aviendha's like, "You're the queen of recklessness. What are you talking about?" Rand goes into his tent. Um, and Aviendha follows him, and they proceed to have the one and only reasonably amicable chat that they have in their entire relationship, as far as I remember. Aviendha hands -- gives Rand this wrapped bundle, which turns out to be an extremely ornate, like, parade sword, practically.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Although once Rand unsheathes it, he sees that the blade itself is, um, a blademaker's and therefore probably, like, Power-wrought, which means it won't rust or --

Sally: Break or anything.

Emily: Dull or anything like that. So he's like, "Ah, good blade. I still will never use it again because I can make fire from my hands, but thanks, Aviendha." So she's like, "This will erase the debt between us," and he's like, "You can have the, um, sheath back as well as the hilt," and Aviendha's like, "Alright, so I made a huge profit off of it."

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: It's fine -- it's kind of a charming scene because Rand is like, "Where'd you even get this?" and Aviendha's like, "Oh, it's legitimately Laman --"

Sally: (laugh) Yeah.

Emily: "Laman's cursed sword --"

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: "That's been just, like, passed from teen to teen --"

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Like, "Ha, look what I have."

Sally: Yeah. (laugh)

Emily: "This fancy sword. But we are NOT allowed to touch swords."

Sally: Yeah. (laugh)

Emily: Aviendha's like, "Bain said -- Bair said it would be fine if I came -- if I wrapped it in a bunch of towels first."

Sally: (laugh) Yeah. Bunch of nasty rags.

Emily: And Rand's like, "You guys are buck wild."

Sally: I love them.

Emily: Like, what is happening?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So it -- that's very amusing. But Rand's like, "Thanks." And then they, uh, get ready for bed and, again, proceed to have one of the only scenes in their relationship that I think actually involves some level of sexual tension. In that Rand has his back turned to Aviendha and she's, like, changing under her covers for bed, and it's like, yeah, that is sort of a sexaully wrought --

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Um -- fraught, excuse me. A sexually fraught, uh, situation to be in if you're attracted to the other person.

Sally: They're getting naked.

Emily: They're getting naked. He's like -- it's like, there's a part where she's talking and her voice is muffled for a minute, and he's like, "Oh my God, she just took her shirt off. Oh my God." (laugh)

Sally: Sexy.

Emily: Um, but you know. One scene of vaguely healthy tension doesn't really erase the millions of other scenes of incredibly unhealthy non-tension.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Or tension in the, uh, opposite direction.

Sally: Bad way. The unsexual tension.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: The unsexual tension. It's just called not liking each other. (laugh)

Sally: Unsexual tension.

Emily: Unsexual tension. Normalize unsexual attention -- unsexual attention? I mean, normalize that too.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Normalize unsexual tension, the third of our -- of our running platforms. (laugh)

Sally: Utah will maybe be on board with that one.

Emily: Maybe that one, yeah.

Sally: Except Utah's --

Emily: Just put a Book of Mormon between you and --

Sally: Weirdly horny.

Emily: I know.

Sally: It's 'cause they're repressed.

Emily: Yeah, it's incredible.

Sally: But also, it's like, it's OK to not be sexually attracted to anyone. That's fine.

Emily: (sigh) Um --

Sally: Anyway, this is sex ed with EHR.

Emily: As usual. We always get here eventually.

Sally: It's because the Wheel of Time is, like --

Emily: So unhealthy.

Sally: Literally the poster child for what your sexuality should not entail. (laugh)

Emily: Yeah. Do not do anything that is in the Wheel of Time. It's all gonna be bad. Um, they just have a little convo --

Sally: And they go to sleepy time.

Emily: About swords. Rand's like, "What does it mean to teach a man how to sing?" Aviendha is like, "Ah ha! Are you thinking about Mat?" and Rand's like, "Maybe," and Aviendha's like, "It just means he'll be whipped," quote unquote.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Which is a dumb term anyway.

Sally: I know. It's like, so what? You like somebody. I don't --

Emily: A man caring about a woman in a way that is visible to others?!

Sally: I don't understand! (laugh)

Emily: Ahhh!

Sally: Ahhh. It's the big -- worst thing he could possibly do.

Emily: Taboo. Terrible.

Sally: Is have -- is legitimately care in a tender way for his female partner.

Emily: yeah. Publicize your feelings for another person? The horror.

Sally: Yeah. Barf.

Emily: God. Yeah.

Sally: I just think it's nice when people are tender with each other.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: It's this toxic monogamy bullshit, where it's like, "It's funny when you don't like your partner."

Emily: Blegh.

Sally: It's like, excuse me?

Emily: It's -- you know what's nice? When you like your partner.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Dur dur dur.

Sally: It's nice being around people that you enjoy.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: (laugh) I really don't understand why that's such a difficult concept for society, but --

Emily: And for Robert Jordan specifically --

Sally: The --

Emily: To grasp.

Sally: The heteros --

Emily: As we talked about recently.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: No one in Wheel of Time likes each other.

Sally: It's really weird.

Emily: Troubling. Uhh, I don't -- can't remember anything else relevant that happens --

Sally: That's basically the end. Yeah.

Emily: So that's those chapters. The next chapters will involve a brief Mat point of view when their camp, predictably, gets attacked.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Someone should ask Mat whether they put up sentries. (laugh)



Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Oh, Rand does, like, a fancy, um, laser system to keep out intruders --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Intruders or something.

Sally: Yeah. Darkfriends.

Emily: Mad Trollocs. Myrddraal. Shadowspawn. Uh, but, um, and then I think they go through the pass and get to Cairhien.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Is essentially the content of the next two chapters. So we'll be back with that. Phew. Do you have any housekeeping before you get to your dinner?

Sally: I don't think so. Usual stuff. Emily's still doing her weekly livestream of Windwaker. Um, as always, um, our Patreon is up with lots of content on it if you seek more EHR. Um, otherwise not really.

Emily: Yeah. Enjoy.

Sally: Just take care. Survive the world that is intent on not surviving.

Emily: Yep. I can't -- it's terrible.

Sally: Yeah. Let's not talk about it. This episode has had a lot of Melancholy Culkin in it.

Emily: (laugh) Melancholy Culkin.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: That's gonna be the title of the episode. I think I already know.

Sally: But there are so many good ones. (laugh)

Emily: (laugh) Hashtag --

Sally: (laugh) Brandbert.

Emily: Um. Alright, do you have a sign-off?

Sally: I actually do not have a sign-off. Do you have anything?

Emily: Ahhhh. Dang it, no. I can't. I don't know.

Sally: Should we just get Tybalt and see if he'll scream into the microphone?

Emily: We could try.

Sally: If not, I can pretend to be Tybalt screaming into the microphone. (laugh)

Emily: That's terrible. (laugh) I'll go get him.

Sally: 'Kay, we're gonna try and get Tybalt to scream into the microphone, but he doesn't usually, um, do things on command. (laugh)

Emily: (laugh)

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Tybalt! Make some noise! Any time -- the one time we want you to make noise, and you're like, "Fuck you."

Sally: Meow. (laugh) You are literally the worst animal.

Emily: (laugh) Ahhhhhh! He's too sleepy.

Sally: Yeah, we woke him up from a nap and now he's just sort of drugged.

Emily: Awww. Too --

Sally: Anyway. Don't do war crimes.

Emily: Yeah. Have a good week. Goodbye!

Sally: (simultaneously) Goodbye!