



Episode 163: Daddy's Little War Criminal

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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, 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)

Sally: OK, let's stop thinking about the sex that's taken place in the Rexburg, Idaho, safari-themed honeymoon suite.

Emily: Let's stop thinking about newlywed marriage logistics and start talking about war crimes.

Sally: 'Kay.

Emily: (laugh)

Sally: Um, with that exceptional segue, this is Everybody Hates Rand -- (laugh) your friendly neighborhood Wheel of Time podcast. I am Sally Goodger.

Emily: I'm Emily Juchau. That'll be an even better segue if I end up cutting out the whole bit about me sleeping on a massage -- (laugh) massage table.

Sally: (laugh) It just starts with, "Let's stop talking about honeymoon logistics," or --

Emily: (laugh) Exactly. Um. So, yeah, homies, we finished book six, uh, Lord of Chaos. Uh, on to book seven. (laugh) Just kidding. Um --

Sally: (laugh) Anyway, that was that.

Emily: So, that was -- I mean, I don't have anything to say about it. It's, uh, just the Dumai's Wells chapters and then, like, a three-page epilogue. We get a lot of points of view for that fairly brief page length --

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: And a lot technically happens. But, um, uh, on a -- I guess we'll go micro level, then macro level. Talk about the chapters themselves, then the book as a whole.

Sally: 'Kay. Sounds good.

Emily: Uh, Dumai's Wells -- the logistics of Dumai's Wells. We first get Gawyn's point of view. He's at the head of the column, uh, with, you know, kind of his guys at the front, then some more of his guys at the back, and then in -- nestled in between are the Aes Sedai wagons. I assume they all have wagons to, like, sleep in, kind of like the circus -- Valan Luca's circus --

Sally: Oh, man.

Emily: Or whatever. Um, and their Warders and their kind of personal servants and whatnot. And then Gawyn knows that Rand is in a cart somewhere -- in a box, in a cart -- it's like, uh, one of those matryoshka dolls. (laugh) Um, Gawyn does not feel bad about that; he feels bad 'cause he feels like he's kind of, you know, finding a loophole in his promise to Egg that he wouldn't harm Rand. He's like, "Well, I'm not harming Rand; I didn't even know they were going to kidnap him. Now he's just here, and I had no control over it."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: "But I'm also definitely not going to help him."

Sally: (sing-song) Gawyn, that's called being complicit. (laugh)

Emily: I know, there's no -- (laugh)

Sally: (sing-song) You are stupid.

Emily: He does very much want to rescue Min, though, who -- he's like, "What the -- is Min doing here?"

Sally: He's like, "Why is Min here?"

Emily: Anyway. Um, one of his scouts comes riding back, about to be dead, very injured, and he's like, "There's a bunch of Aiel. It's a nice day, isn't it," hauntingly --

Sally: I know.

Emily: And then dies. Robert Jordan is pretty good at giving people haunting last death words.

Sally: (whisper) "I'm ready to tell you my secret."

Emily: (whisper) "I'm ready to tell you my secret. I ... see ... dead people." (laugh) I wish he had said that to Gawyn. I want that to be my last words.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: I want my last words to be, "I'm ready to tell you my secret now." (laugh)

Sally: But you don't ever tell anyone your secret.

Emily: But I don't ever tell anyone.

Sally: 'Kay.

Emily: And then they just have to live with that. Whoever it is. Jack, I assume.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: (laugh) My nephew.

Sally: And he'll be like, "OK?"

Emily: He'll be like, "Aw, dang."

Sally: "Dang it, Emmy."

Emily: "She was gonna tell me where the money was buried." Um.

Sally: Pfffft. Surprise, Jack, we have no money. Ha ha ha ha!

Emily: Yeah, like I'm gonna have any money for my nephew to inherit. OK. Uh, Gawyn, of course, rides back to the Aes Sedai and is like, "We've gotta stop; there's a bunch of Aiel coming." Galina's like, "Mm, well, that's 'cause we made an arrangement with Sevanna so we'd have an escort of Aiel." And Gawyn -- who seems semi-aware of the fact that Galina's trying to assassinate him --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: He, like, notes that he has -- she's constantly trying to get him to go out personally on patrol or whatever.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: So he, smartly, is like, "OK, well, not to point out the obvious, you dingus, but Rand al'Thor also has a shit-ton of Aiel, who have a vested interest in rescuing him, so maybe we should play this a little safe."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And she's like, "Alright, fine." Predictably, the Shaido Aiel then attack the -- the little group.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And there are apparently forty thousand of them?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Isn't that what Rhurc says?

Sally: Yeah, Rhurc says forty thousand.

Emily: Which -- we mentioned this last time -- but there is a truly astounding number of Shaido Aiel just, like, out and about.

Sally: Yeah, especially since, like, at least a quarter of them get brutally murdered at this point.

Emily: So many.

Sally: So, like, where are they getting -- (laugh)

Emily: Where do they come from?

Sally: The rest of them?

Emily: It's like they're grown --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: In the Earth.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Like there's some --

Sally: Like Rock Boy.

Emily: Or, yeah -- or, like, you know in the Greek myth, where you would plant a tooth --

Sally: Oh, yeah.

Emily: And then a dragon would come out? It's like that. It's like Sevanna's just scattering teeth.

Sally: Yeah, what would she plant in order to get Shaido?

Emily: Um. Misogyny. (laugh) Um.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: No, uh, some -- some spears or something?

Sally: Yeah, some spears.

Emily: Just, like, little spear points.

Sally: Yeah, she sticks a spearhead in the ground and then a full-grown Shaido comes out.

Emily: That'd be kind of sick.

Sally: Yeah, it'd be like -- pfft.

Emily: Cinematic, you know?

Sally: Yeah. Sexy.

Emily: OK, anyway. Zombie -- and then they would be zombie Shaido, which would be cooler, I think. 'Cause right now they're just kind of, like, Aiel.

Sally: Yeah, they're just, like, the faceless horde of bad guys.

Emily: Yeah, which is --

Sally: I think that's literally a trope. The faceless horde.

Emily: The faceless horde of bad guys?

Sally: Or something.

Emily: Well, it's so funny because usually fantasy authors go out of their way to dehumanize the faceless hordes by making them goblins or whatever.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Or orcs.

Sally: Orcs.

Emily: And Robert Jordan has done that with the Trollocs --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Especially applicable in the first few books and in the Last Battle, but now he's like, "Oh, I wanna do, like, inter-continental warfare and whatnot and involve humans," but he has still managed to make them a faceless horde.

Sally: Yeah. (laugh)

Emily: No one has any qualms about killing them. He, like, went out of his way to be like, "Everyone leading the Shaido is a huge asshole." The only Shaido, like -- sort of civilian we ever met was Mat's girlfriend, who turned out to be a Darkfriend, so don't worry, they're all evil.

Sally: They're all evil. All hundred forty billion of them, that we can just grab from the ground whenever we need.

Emily: Yeah. So --

Sally: There's not a single good person among them, so we don't need to feel bad when the Asha'man put them through a magic meat grinder --

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Which is what Rand compares it to.

Emily: Ugh. I don't want -- ew. Somehow, 39 Aes Sedai, plus their Warders and their, what, thousand Younglings are holding off --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: This faceless horde. It makes no sense. I mean, I know that Aes Sedai can do magic good or whatever, but it's weird 'cause we haven't seen it in a sustained -- we don't really have a middle point between this sort of -- (clears throat) the sort of magic duels that we've seen --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Up 'till this point between, like, Moiraine and one of the Forsaken or Nynaeve and one of the Forsaken or whatever, and then we sort of have this sort of vague description of Aes Sedai doing magic, and there's lots of fireballs and lightning -- I guess we had the last book, when Egg and Aviendha --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Threw a lot of fire and lightning, but then suddenly we're, yeah, getting the human meat grinder via the Asha'man --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And it's like -- is the only, like, battle tactic -- technique for, um, Aes Sedai to just, like, throw fire and lightning?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: 'Cause also I don't want to be, like -- I don't want to, like, sound like I'm siding with Mazrim Taim or something, but I feel like that isn't as effective and is ultimately just as painful a death. A -- like, you're getting lit on fire.

Sally: Yeah, well, to draw, like a real-world comparison, it's like, OK, are you throwing -- are you dropping napalm or are you just shooting people with artillery, you know? Like --

Emily: Yeah. Either way, people are dying.

Sally: Either way, people are dying, but there's, like -- there's a reason that chemical weapons were banned in warfare -- not that people follow those, necessarily --

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Like, the, uh, United States police department uses tear gas, which is literally banned in international warfare. Um. Yeah, so it's just -- yeah, it's -- it's really weird and ridiculous and also, like, it's just -- as powerful as they are, if you're giving me a number like forty thousand, that's just not gonna be sustain -- you've got forty thousand versus maybe eleven hundred and just because they're magic -- at some point there's going to be a sheer overwhelming of numbers.

Emily: Well, and it's like, I would buy it, maybe, given that this is a fantasy text, if you had, like, I don't know, interesting terrain --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Like if this was happening on an urban scale where the Aes Sedai or whatever had the advantage of having, like, hiding spots --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And higher ground and could do interesting things with that. But they're literally just surrounded. They've circled the wagons, literally, and are just like, "OK, and we're just throwing our fire and lightning," or whatever. It's just, like, an interesting thing that, um, I feel like Robert Jordan comes really close to exploring in the text but doesn't quite: the sort of ethics of how magic is used in warfare.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Because we see the Aes Sedai, who are not supposed to use magic in warfare but will when it comes to defending themselves, and yet they still shy away from, like, the really gruesome stuff. And it's never specified, like, oh, that's just, like, a universal -- that's just one of the unspoken rules, is you don't go -- you know, you don't suddenly become Jigsaw with the way you're killing people.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, I don't know, but here, the Asha'man come in and shock everyone by how horrifying they are.

Sally: Isn't "circle the wagons," like, an anti-Native American phrase?

Emily: I believe so, which makes it an even more loaded --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Term considering how, um, the Aiel as a group are compared to Native Americans.

Sally: Yeah. Great.

Emily: Yeah, don't you love that? And the -- (laugh) horrifying use of chemical warfare against them.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Chemical warfare parallel.

Sally: Chemical warfare parallel, artillery parallel.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Um. Yeah. The sliding scale of -- to go back to Emily's point -- the, like, sliding scale of ethical use of magic is ... I don't know. It's, like, yeah, Robert Jordan got really close to being like, something interesting is happening here.

Emily: Well, you can tell it's something he's really interested in when he has battle scenes and sequences like this, and that makes sense. I think he was kind of a -- he was a history buff, and he was in Vietnam, and he was kind of a military guy.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So clearly, he's interested in this sort of -- um, these big, moving battle set pieces and how they interact in a fantasy setting.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And he's interested in playing with the tropes involved. But, yeah, just, sometimes he -- sometimes he gets there, and sometimes he doesn't, quite.

Sally: Yeah, and I -- I -- yeah. It's just really interesting in terms of the Asha'man. 'Cause this, like, keeps happening. Like, the Asha'man keep using these tactics in warfare. Um.

Emily: Presumably because there's no -- this is, like, a brand-new organization of men channeling. There's not a precedent. Like, the Aes Sedai women have hundreds if not thousands of years of being sort of corralled by this --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Pope-ish, um, uh, organization, and so, yeah, of course their group would have rules and even unspoken rules. But here we've just put Mazrim Taim, himself a war criminal, in charge of a bunch of boys, and it's not like Rand and Mazrim Taim sat down at the beginning and were like, "Here's what you can and cannot do. Here's what you can and cannot teach. Here's what's acceptable and unacceptable."

Sally: Yeah, I mean, the only person really capable of holding Mazrim Taim to any sort of standard is Rand.

Emily: And he don't give a fuck.

Sally: And he specifically asks Mazrim Taim to make him weapons and, in this sequence, specifically says, "I asked you to make me weapons. Show me what they can do." And then after this horrifying and grotesque scene, he says, "Good job, magic boys."

Emily: He's like, "Great." And, you know -- (laugh) We'll get there in a minute, I guess. But, um, first we -- we're -- we're kind of seeing this battle on an escalating scale. First we see Perrin, from a very outside-looking-in and then very much internal.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Uh, Perrin and his guys have come upon this, the Shaido attacking the Aes Sedai, and they're all like, "What the?"

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um. The Aes Sedai are like, "There are like 200 women channeling in there," and I'm like, great, so there's 40 Aes Sedai and a hundred and something Wise Ones?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Again, truly astounding numbers.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: It doesn't make sense at all, given that we have, like, five Wise One characters who we're familiar with.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And no, Robert Jordan, this is not me asking for more Wise One characters --

Sally: No.

Emily: I do not want Aes Sedai syndrome here.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: But, like, it has just seemed like there's a very small, niche number of Wise Ones.

Sally: Yeah, I mean, it's like the Wise Ones inside the Shaido are a horde -- a faceless horde all to themselves.

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: It's like, OK.

Emily: And we've specifically only seen Sevanna interact with, like --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Half a dozen of them, so. Whatever. That just continues to be a weird thing --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: In this scene.

Sally: Just odd.

Emily: Perrin, um, gets his guys, they have sort of a game plan, to have, like, the Two Rivers men and their sort of armed, uh -- the -- what are their names? The Mayeners --

Sally: Mm.

Emily: Together with the channeling women sort of cover the, uh, possible retreat while Perrin and the Aiel and the Cairhienin cavalry just sort of charge. Um, he does reference making this battle plan with, uh, Dobraine while Rhuarc is just running at a full tilt --

Sally: I know.

Emily: Between their horses, which I just think is really funny. Um.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: But they're like, "Okey dokey, let's go. We fully think this is a suicide mission, 'cause our only plan is, uh, somehow break through this, find Rand, and get Rand to make a gateway."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Of course, they don't even know the constraints of making gateways.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, but they're like, "OK, let's do it." They charge, Rand is like -- not Rand -- Perrin's like, "Wolves, rise with me --" (laugh)

Sally: Yeah, it's so horrifying.

Emily: And then the wolves are never mentioned again?

Sally: I know.

Emily: Rand isn't like, "What the fuck? There's a shit -- "

Sally: "Why are there one thousand wolves?"

Emily: "Shit-ton of wolves out there." Like, "What?"

Sally: Yeah. And also, like, nobody else comments on it either. (laugh)

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: No one else is like, "Where'd all those wolves come from?"

Emily: Like, you'd think Loial would just be like, "Oh, yeah, that's Perrin's weird shit."

Sally: Perrin and his doggies."

Emily: But it's not like Rhuarc's like, "What the -- fuck -- ?"

Sally: Rhuarc's like --

Emily: (laugh) Just a bunch of wolves --

Sally: Kicks a wolf on accident.

Emily: "Oh, I'm so sorry!"

Sally: (laugh) It's like -- and the image is just that they, like, literally rise out of the underbrush.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: It's very haunting. And everyone's like, "This is chill."

Emily: "It's whatever."

Sally: "This might as well happen."

Emily: Like, we have to assume the wolves affect the course of the battle.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But who knows? We don't know too much in this scene.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um. There's a lot of Perrin just, you know, swinging his axe, being like, "This is horrifying. I'm drenched in blood. I literally cannot think of these people as people, or I will go insane, and I'm pretty sure I'm gonna die."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And it's like, great. Grim. He also notes that the Aes Sedai, of course, did not stay where they were supposed to and are helping to make this sort of spearpoint phalanx to get to Rand.

Sally: Yeah, they're also charging in with their own napalm.

Emily: Yeah. Which, like, to be fair, I don't think it would have got to Rand without them.

Sally: No. (laugh) No.

Emily: But, like, um -- so I don't know why they were sort of sent to stay in the back. Whatever. It doesn't matter. The battle plan doesn't make a ton of sense to me, but whatever.

Sally: The battle plan makes no sense at all. And Perrin kind of mentions that; he's like, "This is the best we could do."

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: But it's like, you could at least make more use of the magic ladies.

Emily: I know. They just haven't figured out yet how to use magic people in warfare. It's sort of interesting because, of course, the first time -- besides the Seanchan damane, which essentially function as Asha'man, you know --

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Just these human grenades.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: We mostly get innovations in magic warfare from, of course, Mat.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Who is like, "I have a sense of creativity, unlike every other motherfucker in this book." Um. Anyway. We then cut to Rand -- actually, this is the second time we've cut to Rand, but the first was just a monologue about how miserable he is locked in his box.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And how they, like, stop, and he's like, "Oh my God, are they gonna let me out soon?" But they don't. Um, then we cut to him as he begins to feel that some of the women holding his shield are tying it off. Uh, which, again, Lews Therin was like, "This is our big opportunity." He typically has six people holding his shield; four of them tie it off, leaving just two women with his shield. Rand starts, like, attacking these little knots that form when a woman ties off the shield. Um, and breaks four of them in pretty quick succession. No, three of them, and then a third woman realizes what's going on and comes back to hold the shield, but once he's down to three, he can just sort of break through it.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Um, I don't know what happened to the three women who were holding his shield? Like -

Sally: Yeah, I don't know either.

Emily: What happens when you unravel that? I think it's just -- you're no longer holding it. I guess? We don't really see any negative effects. We do know that when he just breaks the shield, the reverb of that, I think, stills three women.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: So they're just -- woof -- stilled now.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um. None of them are women we know or recognize, not that that means much now. The only women we recognize -- we know in this group, really, are Galina, Katerine, and Erian --

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Who, yes, I recognize her name sounds like the German --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Nazi term. Um, so just cutting off Devin's potential texts to me. Devin sometimes just texts me the, like, what he hears, you know? Like, when I say Berelain's name, he texts me, like, "Bear," like the bear, and then "Elaine," like -- (laugh)

Sally: "Bear-elaine." No, I mean, sometimes, when I'm transcribing and I come across a name I don't know how to spell, I just have to type the phonetic into Google and then add "Wheel of Time" to it --

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: And just hope for the best.

Emily: Yeah. So, uh, this is Erian, spelled E-R-I-A-N. If you can think of a less Nazi way of pronouncing that, I'd love to hear it. Uh-ree-an.

Sally: Uh-reen.

Emily: (laugh) Whatever. Uh. Rand manages to break the box. He has stilled those three women, and I think he ... I don't ... he does something else right away. Oh, I don't know if he stills them immediately or if he just stills them right after breaking through. 'Cause he talks about stilling people actively. I don't --

Sally: Yeah, I'm not sure. It's confusing. 'Cause also, then, like, right after this, he just starts knocking Aes Sedai out, saying that if he does choose to still them, he wants them to know that it was him.

Emily: Yeah, he's intent -- that was sort of what I was saying -- he's pretty intent on Galina, Katerine, and Erian 'cause they were his three primary abusers, although it is noted that even after -- that after the second day of sustained beating of being locked in a box, even Erian kind of backed off.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um. So, Rand -- not to put too fine a point in it -- is in bad shape. He's, like, just covered in bruises; he, of course, has been locked in a box for the last however many days, so when he breaks open the box, he just has to, like, sit there for a minute.

Sally: I know, poor guy.

Emily: I would've loved some verisimilitude of him just not being able to move for, like, a sustained amount of time. You know, like, um, in Kill Bill, when she just has to sit in a car having flashbacks, 'cause she just woke up from a coma --

Sally: Mm.

Emily: So it's like, oh yeah, your muscles wouldn't move yet. You know? Um, but he gets up fairly quick -- oh, 'cause he sees that Min has also apparently been knocked out. She just sort of was crawling toward him from wherever she was trapped. And she's like, "Oh, hey, let's get out of here." And he's like, "Sorry, can't make a gateway under these conditions, but, you know, we'll do what we can." And either before this or right after this, he, yeah, starts -- sees that he is in this circle of wagons and also a circle of Aes Sedai with their backs to him, which is just, you know, kind of funny, 'cause this sort of plot armor thing of no one is like, "Hmm, what was that explosion behind me?"

Sally: "What was that big explosion?"

Emily: "What was that big boom?"

Sally: Like, I know there's a lot of other big booms, but.

Emily: You know. Uh, but yeah, he starts just sort of picking them off one by one. He doesn't still them; he just shields them and then ties them -- oh, he doesn't even tie them up; he just knocks them out with air, which, you know, some of those women, again, in a world with verisimilitude, would die from the head trauma, but this is fantasy, so you can knock people out by knocking them on the head. Um.

Sally: Conveniently, right around this time, the Asha'man show up.

Emily: Conveniently -- yeah. And, actually, Perrin, from his point of view, also saw the Asha'man show up, so there's an overlap here in timelines.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Perrin saw just, like, these groups of black-coated men, he says, appearing out of gateways, and they're just sort of going at it. Um, Mazrim Taim shows up, like, right next to Rand.

Sally: Creep.

Emily: And I just kept thinking, how do they fuckin' know where Rand is?

Sally: I know. Mazrim Taim's like, "I went to visit you in Cairhien and realized you were missing," and I was like, OK, that doesn't explain how you know where he is at this moment.

Emily: Yeah. Like, how did you find him?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Do you have, like, a tracking chip?

Sally: Yeah. He -- have you microchipped him? Like a cat?

Emily: I mean, I just don't know.

Sally: I know. It's --

Emily: I don't know if it's ever explained.

Sally: I don't know if it is that I can recall. It's just like, mm, ta'veren.

Emily: Ta'veren.

Sally: He was like --

Emily: Mazrim Taim was just like, sure.

Sally: "Let's try Dumai's Wells. That seems promising."

Emily: "This seems --" Like, would -- did -- I just want to picture Mazrim Taim sitting in front of a map, trying to calculate the --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Horse distance or whatever.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Like, "Alright, now, how far could they have traveled, da da da da da ..."

Sally: Yeah, is, like, Grady there, like, “This is how far a horse can travel in one day.”

Emily: And Mazrim Taim’s like, “Thank you. Shut up, you farmer. You’ve --”

Sally: (laugh) “That was all I needed --”

Emily: “Shut up, peasant.”

Sally: “From you.”

Emily: “I don’t ever want to hear from you again.” Um.

Sally: Yeah, it’s very odd.

Emily: But the Asha’man show up. Actually, I think the first Asha’man who shows up, like, does something --

Sally: Oh, he tries to -- it’s Gedwyn, and he tries to attack Rand.

Emily: Yeah, or something.

Sally: Then Mazrim Taim also knocks him unconscious.

Emily: Yeah. Anyway, we’re already getting this sort of set-up for the schism between Rand’s Asha’man and Mazrim Taim’s Asha’man, which, spoiler alert, is the majority of Asha’man, because they’re being indoctrinated --

Sally: (simultaneously) Being indoctrinated --

Emily: In his weird cult. (laugh)

Sally: Into his magic boy cult.

Emily: But Gedwyn is one of the, like, prime --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Bad Asha’man, as opposed to Flinn and Narishma and our other boys who will be around. Um, but Mazrim Taim, with the other Asha’man, kind of just creates this bubble around the wagons which conveniently also encompasses many of our main characters, like Perrin.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Um, the nine Aes Sedai manage to get through. Rand is like, “Oh, fuck. These fuckin’ Aes Sedai.”

Sally: Yeah. “Fuck these rude-ass ...”

Emily: Perrin walks up and is like, “Uh, it’s bad out there, just so you know.” Perrin’s, like, drenched in blood.

Sally: It’s -- yeah.

Emily: Loial's there. Rand's like, "What the fuck? Is Mat here?" It would've been really funny if Mat was here.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: I know we can't, you know -- lightning can't strike the same location twice, but I would've really liked a, you know, sort of recreation of the book three ending, where everyone is just there.

Sally: Everyone's just like, "What?"

Emily: Like, if Mat was there for totally unrelated reasons. That would've been fun, I think.

Sally: Mat and the Band of the Red Hand.

Emily: He's just like, "What the fuck?"

Sally: It's like, "OK, I guess we're doing this."

Emily: Um. I want to think that Mat wasn't there because Robert Jordan was like, "If I -- if Mat sees the Asha'man doing the things that they do, Mat will fully fuck off and become a pirate."

Sally: Yeah. Mat's like --

Emily: Be like, "I'm not dealing with this."

Sally: "This is the final straw."

Emily: "Nope."

Sally: "That's gonna be a no from me."

Emily: "I'm out. Human meat grinder?" 'Course, then Mat invents cannons. Um, which are not quite to the scale of the Asha'man, I will say, but still.

Sally: Yeah, I mean, if I had to choose between Gedwyn and a cannon, I'd probably choose the cannon.

Emily: (laugh) "If I had to choose between Gedwyn and a cannon." On literally all fronts.

Sally: (laugh) Yeah, like --

Emily: Social situations --

Sally: Yeah. Marriage.

Emily: Sex.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: I'd rather fuck a cannon than --

Sally: (laugh) I too would rather fuck a cannon. Gedwyn is a creepy little sociopath.

Emily: I know. He's -- just literally got pulled out of an episode of Criminal Minds --

Sally: Yeah, and Mazrim Taim's like --

Emily: And stuck into Mazrim Taim's death cult.

Sally: "Perfect. My lieutenant." (laugh)

Emily: "I love him." I don't even know the other ones. Ro--Rochaid?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: However you say his name. I always want to say it with a French accent.

Sally: (bad French accent) Rochaid.

Emily: (worse French accent) Rochaid. OK.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Stupid. Mazrim Taim's like, "Let's peace out," like immediately --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, "And just leave all of the people who are outside of the bubble, which includes some of your own allies."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Perrin's like, "Uh, it does include some of your own allies, including, like, Amys and the other Wise Ones and all the Two Rivers men, all of your childhood friends."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And Rand's like, "Mm. Well, I can't, like, act like I'm concerned about them, 'cause --" Whatever. But he's like, "Mazrim Taim, why don't you just show me what your -- your mean boys can do?" And Mazrim Taim's like, "Cool. Asha'man, raise the bubble." (laugh) He doesn't say, "Raise the bubble," but it would've been really funny if he did. He's like, "Raise the bubble. And just start killing people. Asha'man, kill." And then we get human meat grinder sequence, which is as horrifying as it sounds.

Sally: Yeah. We don't need to talk about it.

Emily: And, um, some -- by some miracle, they are not targeting -- it's not like someone is like, "Now, don't get the people with the red headbands --"

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Or whatever, to indicate who's on what side, but they seem to exclusively kill Shaido. Um. Perrin throws up, obviously. Min is just, like, sobbing into Rand's jacket.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: I think Rhuarc also looks sick.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: I can't remember if Rhuarc's there or --

Sally: Yeah, Nandera and Sulin are there, and they just turn around.

Emily: Yeah, they're just like -- Nandera covers her eyes --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily; 'Cause she's like, "This is so nasty." So all of these hardened warriors are like --

Sally: Yeah

Emily: "This is fucked."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And Rand is like, "Oh my -- OK. OK, that's -- thanks."

Sally: "Enough, magic boys."

Emily: "That was ... really good, you guys." And all the Asha'man are like, "Thanks!"

Sally: Yeah, they all start cheering. And it's like --

Emily: They're like, "Daddy loves us! Finally!"

Sally: It's like, Rand, look at the monsters you have made.

Emily: I know.

Sally: Doctor Frankenstein.

Emily But, I mean, it would be pretty -- not to make light of this horrible situation, but, like, it would be pretty socially awkward of Rand to be like, "What the fuck have you done?" right in front of them, you know?

Sally: Yeah, I mean ... I feel like it was the correct response.

Emily: I mean, I do -- morally correct, but --

Sally: But Rand -- I mean, yeah, then they would have turned on him at that exact moment.

Emily: Then they would've been like, "Ah, dang. Dad doesn't love us."

Sally: "Daddy doesn't love us."

Emily: "Daddy doesn't love us."

Sally: And they would --

Emily: They would've become little Frankensteins, you know?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Being like, "Papa has rejected us."

Sally: "Papa has forsaken me."

Emily: Little monsters of Frankenstein; I misspoke.

Sally: Oh, who cares?

Emily: "Papa -- Papa has forsaken us."

Sally: "Forsook me. I've been forsook."

Emily: "I must go on a murder rampage, killing everyone he loves."

Sally: Yeah, around Lake Geneva.

Emily: Exactly.

Sally: And we'll -- he'll chase me all the way to the Arctic.

Emily: Framing maids for murder and whatnot. OK.

Sally: He's just like, "Nope, instead, these are just my forty little murder boys."

Emily: He's like, "OK."

Sally: "Forty little war criminals. Daddy's little war criminals."

Emily: Daddy's little -- like the Harley Quinn shirt.

Sally: Yeah. (laugh) It says "Daddy's Little War Criminal."

Emily: (laugh, simultaneously) "Daddy's Little War Criminal."

Sally: After they get their -- their sword and their dragon collar, then they get a T-shirt that says "Daddy's Little War Criminal." (laugh)

Emily: Can you just imagine -- Damer -- Damer Flinn --

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Who's, like, seventy -- (laugh)

Sally: Yeah, he's cut it so it's cropped. (laugh)

Emily: Yeah, just walking around exclusively in that. That's his only symptom of insanity.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Everyone's like, "He's totally normal, except for he dresses like Harley Quinn."

Sally: He's got cut-off booty shorts and "Daddy's Little War Criminal." Oh, what a good image.

Emily: I would love fanart of that. I don't wanna -- I just wanna tell you guys that.

Sally: So. Yeah, we'll -- we won't demand, but we would request. (laugh)

Emily: OK. (laugh) So everyone's like, "Well, after that sickening display ..." The Aes Sedai then have --

Sally: (cough) Excuse me.

Emily: It's fine.

Sally: (cough)

Emily: The Aes Sedai then have the audacity to approach Rand and be like, "Here we are. We came to rescue you." There's literally a pile of other Aes Sedai -- they've captured, we're told, um, 23 Aes Sedai, who have all either been stilled or are unconscious or shielded --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: By Asha'man. That's so many Aes Sedai. But these nine are like, "Hey, well, we're different," and Rand's like, "I told you to send seven, and here there are nine of you."

Sally: He told them to send six, and there are nine.

Emily: Oh, he told them to send six, "And there are nine of you, so guess what? You're in the same fucking boat. Just 'cause you didn't put me in a box, I'm traumatized now." And they're all like, "Dang."

Sally: They're all like, "Maybe we misjudged the situation."

Emily: And so he's like, "I want you to swear fealty to me," and they're like, "Uhhh." And Mazrim Taim has his iconic, "Kneel, Aes Sedai, or you will be knelt."

Sally: Yeah. (Appalachian accent) "Kneel, Aes Sedai, or you will be knelt."

Emily: (simultaneously) "Kneel, Aes Sedai, or you will be knelt." And they're all like, "Aw, dunk." And it doesn't, like, describe them, except for the book does.

Sally: Yeah, and its classic, like, "On the winds of time, the rumors spread."

Emily: "The rumors spread of Aes --" And it's like, but no one really knows what happened. I think Mazrim Taim should've been on this cover with Rand.

Sally: Instead of that lady?

Emily: No, I think he should've been, like, awkwardly, the devil --

Sally: Oh.

Emily: On Rand's shoulder.

Sally: (laugh) In the background, just like, “Hee hee hee hee.”

Emily: Um, we then get the epilogue, which is titled “The Answer.” Is the prologue titled “The Question”?

Sally: It’s called “The First Message.”

Emily: “The First Message.” I don’t know. We don’t know what the question was. Oh, wait, I know what the question was. Um, first we see one of the Black Ajah in Ebou Dar, and all we get is that one of the Black Ajah is in Ebou Dar, and she’s aware that Elayne and Nynaeve are there.

Sally: Yep.

Emily: And she’s like, “Can’t wait to do a murder.” We do see Herid Fel get murdered by the gholam --

Sally: I know.

Emily: Horribly.

Sally: RIP.

Emily: Um. Then we see the Seanchan guy who did a spit take when Rand -- when Mat brought up the Daughters of the Nine Moon. He’s now, like, surveying Ebou Dar and being like, “Ah, yes, this land is ripe for conquest,” or whatever, and --

Sally: It’s disgusting.

Emily: It’s like, OK, don’t be weird about it. Then we see Moghedien as she’s just, like, sleeping -- snoozing in her tent. And, um, Aran’gar comes in and is like, “Psst,” and Moghedien’s like, “Ahh!” And Aran’gar’s like, “It’s me, Aran’gar,” and Moghedien’s like, “Exsqueeze me?”

Sally: “Whomst?”

Emily: “Oh, you’re Halima. Oh, no, but you can channel like man!” And Arangar’s like, “Ha ha ha ha ha! Maniacal laugh, maniacal laugh.” She’s like, “You’ve been summoned to see the Dark One, so I’m letting you escape,” and Moghedien’s like, “OK, I guess.”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: “I mean, I don’t want to be in this collar, but I also don’t really want to go to the Dark One, who’s probably not too happy with me.” But Halima lets her out, and then we see Egg, seeing, like, the tent, where it’s -- Moghedien’s gone. And she’s like, “Ooh, I guess she escaped.” She does know from her connection to Moghedien’s collar that a man who channel -- that a person using saidin, um, helped her escape, so she’s like, “What the fuck? Is Logain my prime suspect here?”

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But that’ll also lead to stuff in the next book. And finally, we see Demandred kneeling in the Pit of Doom or whatever and being like, “Didn’t I do a good job, Dark -- Daddy?” (laugh)

Sally: "Daddy Dark One."

Emily: Daddy -- shut up.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Daddy Dark One. (laugh) The amount of times we've used "daddy" in this episode makes me want to die. Um. And the Dark One -- I guess that was the question, and the Dark One's answer is maniacal laughter. He's like, "Mwa ha ha." So that was a micro-level. It is 45 minutes in, so we're gonna be pretty quick about the book overall.

Sally: Mm.

Emily: First of all, as we referenced early in this season, that very last point of view with Demandred frames the entire book to be as though it was set up by Demandred.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: That sort of makes sense if Demandred is Mazrim Taim.

Sally: Mm. Yeah.

Emily: Where be -- we can be like, "Oh, yeah, he's directly influenced events." Since Demandred is not Mazrim Taim, because Robert Jordan chickened out, um, I have no clue what Demandred did in any of this. As far as I know, all of this just kind of happened, you know?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Sure, Mazrim Taim was a bad influence on what happens, but it seemed like everything, you know, just kind of followed from the events of book five pretty logically.

Sally: Yeah. Like, in terms of, like, structure, everything makes sense.

Emily: Yeah, like, this book is set up --

Sally: (cough) Excuse me.

Emily: To be as though, like, Demandred's hands are at the top of the frame, you know, with the little puppeteer strings dangling down, but that is not at all the vibe we get from the book itself.

Sally: No, that literally only makes sense if Mazrim Taim is Demandred, but.

Emily: Yep.

Sally: No.

Emily: He's not.

Sally: As far as we know, Demandred's fuck knows where, doing fuck knows what.

Emily: Yeah, so that's pretty disappointing. Um. That aside, this is a pretty good book. It had a really long slog, but the ending is really good, despite the human meat grinder. That does sort -- it -- like, it -- like, we had a very Chekhov's gun situation --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Here, where at the beginning of the book, Rand was like, "Make me weapons," and then Robert Jordan was like, "Oh, he's gonna make weapons," and came back around and was like, "I'm gonna horrify all of us --

Sally: "Yeah.

Emily: "By how bad this is." And that gives Rand another thing to deal with and everyone another thing to deal with as we try to, like, domesticate some of the Asha'man -- like Perrin does with Grady and Neald -- or, you know, sort of de, um -- what's the word?

Sally: Deprogram?

Emily: Deprogram them. Or, you know, just sort of leave them in their own little weird cult.

Sally: Yeah. The Asha'man are such an interesting consequence for Rand to have to deal with. Um, because, yeah, he does just make a little band of war criminals --

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: And sociopaths.

Emily: And they are sort of, like, the direct embodiment of Rand's inattention --

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Which is exactly the symptom that has been plaguing him this entire book, is Rand dealing with things but not at all dealing with things.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: What has Rand actually done in this book?

Sally: Nothing.

Emily: Besides start the Black Tower and give them some neat, you know, Girl Scout badges?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: He hasn't done anything. He's dealt with Min and Aviendha. He sort of -- he sent Mat somewhere for Mat to get totally sidetracked. He hasn't done shit.

Sally: Yeah, he just bounces back and forth between Caemlyn and Cairhien for nine hundred pages.

Emily: Yeah, so in a way, it is kind of fitting that this is his, like, weird punishment for that. Is, like, the plot is being like, "Oh, you're just gonna ignore your problems? Great, well, you're just gonna end up with new problems."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And obviously in the series itself, that will play out, mm, mostly not great. You know? This book can be so hard to read because we don't get a lot of pay-off for it later in the series.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But on a, you know, singular book level, it does pretty well. I also admire book six for being one of what I would say is, um, one of -- you know, books one, two, and three are really good and function as a trilogy. Books five, six, and seven also sort of function as this sort of trilogy of really solid endings, if that makes sense.

Sally: Do you mean four, five, and six? We skipped four.

Emily: I did skip four, but I do mean five, six, and seven.

Sally: OK. OK, I just wanted to make sure I'm following.

Emily: I just mean, like -- I just kept thinking, like, you know, five's a pretty good book.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Seven's a really good book.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And six has this killer ending.

Sally: Yeah. (laugh)

Emily: So -- I mean. (laugh) No pun intended.

Sally: No, I mean, I -- like I have with most of the books as we've reread them, gained, like, a deeper appreciation for Lord of Chaos. I wouldn't say, necessarily, that it is one of the Wheel of Time books that I really enjoy -- like, I think it's really well-written and plotted, um, except for a few little weird Robert Jordan things, like never figuring out who stabbed that Aes Sedai in the alley.

Emily: Yeah, seriously.

Sally: Like, the first half of it is definitely a big slog, but I think the Black Tower is one of the more interesting plotlines in the Wheel of Time series in general? Like, I just think even though it's -- the culty side of it is interesting and weird, but, like -- and troubling -- like, it's a really interesting plotline, so to kind of see that come about in this book in a really well-written way is fun.

Emily: Yeah, and, like, um, I guess I just feel like book four is kind of this transition book, where for the most part everyone is kind of not doing --

Sally: Yeah, no, that is totally fair.

Emily: Anything towards the greater plot. Like, Rand and Mat and Egg are just sort of in the Aiel Waste. And they're setting up to, like, gather Rand an Aiel army, but that is just sort of happening. They're all getting out of the Stone of Tear and setting up in new positions. Da da da da da. Perrin's getting married.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So it's like books five, six, and seven, if we're dealing specifically with, like, the Rand plot, has a lot to do with, like, Rand bringing the Aiel into Cairhien and sort of the direct consequences of that.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Plus, the direct consequences of the White Tower split that happened in book four, and just ... da da da da da. So book six as kind of the, like, center book in that trilogy, if you want to call it a trilogy, is, I would say, the weakest of the three, but it's setting up a lot of good stuff, and it's following up on a lot of stuff from book five.

Sally: Yeah, I mean, even in terms of trilogies -- they call it, like, the curse of the second book or whatever, you know --

Emily: Yes.

Sally: Like, there's so much work that the second book has to do, and, like, it isn't -- I think we even talked about this in the series -- like, the first book is always supported by being able to set things up, and the third book is always supported by being able to wrap things up, and the second book just has to sort of sustain and escalate things. Um. So, yeah, I would agree that out of five, six, and seven, six is the weakest, but I also think in terms of doing its job of sustaining and escalating the conflict, it does a good job.

Emily: Yeah, it's -- yeah. Um. But I'm really looking forward to book seven.

Sally: Me too.

Emily: I think we all are. I'm partly looking forward to the very beginning of book seven. I don't think I have -- in my reading experience, ever -- slid directly from book six into book seven.

Sally: Mm.

Emily: I think there's always been kind of a pause for me, which is odd because I know the beginning of book seven deals directly with the aftermath of Dumai's Wells, which is sort of an interesting plot thing. Usually we get, uh, what's called a denouement --

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: At the end of a book, where we are kind of on a come-down from the major escalation. And we don't get that, obviously, at the end of Lord of Chaos. But Robert Jordan, I think, understands that we still need it --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: After such a major event --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So he gives it to us at the end of book -- at the beginning of book seven, even though that's kind of weird. Um, but I'm interested in that. I'm obviously very interested in whatever's going on in Ebou Dar. And, I dunno, there's a lot of interesting things to look forward to in book seven.

Sally: Yeah, book seven's neat.

Emily: Um, we're obviously gonna have a break, as is typical for us. We're gonna take a week off, so next Monday, don't expect us to be in your podcast players. Uh, we then might slide directly into book seven or do a kind of special episode, depending on, uh, what the vibe is. We haven't been able to do guests for the last year because of Covid, and we're not very good at recording remotely, but who knows. Maybe we'll get someone in. Uh, text us if you have anything you want to see. I think we do this --

Sally: Text us.

Emily: Text us! Ha!

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: DM us if you want to make any requests of things you'd like to see in a special episode, if you want us to talk about something other than Wheel of Time or if there's something specifically about Wheel of Time you want to talk about. Our special episode after book seven might just be a retrospective, 'cause that's the midway point.

Sally: That'd be fun.

Emily: Yeah, just be like, "Hey, here's what --"

Sally: "Here are the highlights and the ABBA songs I would pair them with."

Emily: Wow, that's a nice -- that's a good --

Sally: (laugh) I guess I should say pop songs in general. I don't know if all of them would have ABBA song correlations.

Emily: Mm. That -- that's fair. OK. Well, thanks for listening to Episode 163: Daddy's Little War Criminal. I already know what I'm titling it.

Sally: (laugh) It's so good.

Emily: The finale of, uh, Lord of Chaos. Um. Thanks for sticking with us. Uh, thanks for our supporters on Patreon. Thanks to Glynna MacKenzie for our theme song and for our followers on social media. Um, do you have a sign-off?

Sally: Um. Yeah, this isn't at all that exciting. But this -- I've been having a hard time sleeping lately. I've just been, like, waking up a lot. Um, and so this morning at, like, six a.m., both of the

cats jumped up on my bed, and I was, like, already kind of awake, but they were both just like, “We need attention.” And we’re trying to put the cats on a feeding schedule, so I’m sure they were kind of like, “Mom?”

Emily: “Where’s the food?”

Sally: “Where’s the food?” But neither of them were, like, aggressive. Ed just sort of, like, curled up next to my hip. But Tybalt starts at my feet, climbs all the way up my body, and then just lays himself ‘cross my neck like a scarf. (laugh) Just --

Emily: Like the scarf from hell.

Sally: Yeah, just, like, hot and sweaty and just, like, putting all of his weight on my windpipe. And I was just like, Tybalt, it is six in the morning.

Emily: And I’m -- he’s actively --

Sally: And I’m gonna kill you.

Emily: He’s actively trying to murder you.

Sally: Yeah. (laugh) So anyway, I have a very funny picture of the two of us.

Emily: Yeah, it’s actually a very --

Sally: I look really atrocious in it. (laugh)

Emily: (laugh) It’s really funny. Tybalt’s just like, “Why are you taking a picture of me?”

Sally: Yeah. So anyway, that was my -- the beginning of my day, and now I have a heating pad on my shoulder, so.

Emily: Foreshadowing.

Sally: Maybe it’s Tybalt’s fault.

Emily: Yeah. Alright, everyone. Have a good couple of weeks.

Sally: Bye bye!

Emily: Bye!