



Episode 166: Murder Is Bad, Duh

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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)

Emily: Right now I have the haircut of the bard from the Witcher.

Sally: You look great.

Emily: It's very floppy.

Sally: Very floppy.

Emily: I did look into the Witcher anime.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Apparently it's, like, a -- a prequel.

Sally: Oh, that's weird.

Emily: Which is especially confusing considering that the Witcher already has the world's absolute wackest timeline.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Speaking of the Netflix series, not the books or video games. I don't know anything about those. Um. But apparently it's, like, about -- Geralt, who's the main guy, you know, white-haired Henry Cavill?

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Henry Cavill the only time he looks kinda hot, which is when he's grimy. It's like the Aragorn filter, you know? Viggo Mortensen doesn't look good -- all that attractive normally -- (laugh)

Sally: The Aragorn filter. (laugh)

Emily: But when he's covered in dirt, you're like, "Mm. I could get into that."

Sally: No, I get what you're saying. Hundred percent.

Emily: Anyway, apparently it's about Geralt's mentor -- mentor -- mentor, who is also a Witcher.

Sally: (whisper) A Witcher.

Emily: A Witcher.

Sally: Interesting.

Emily: So -- which really just goes to show you that the show "The Witcher" should be called "A Witcher." (laugh)

Sally: "A Witcher," not "The Witcher." I didn't realize there was more than one Witcher.

Emily: Exactly! It's a very confusing article.

Sally: I thought he was THE Witcher.

Emily: He's A Witcher.

Sally: Dumb.

Emily: Um.

Sally: (sing-song) Dumb dumb dumb dumb dumb.

Emily: Hi, this is Everybody -- Everybody Hates Rand. This -- (laugh) This is the second week in a row I've done that. Goddamnit. This is Everybody Hates Rand. I'm Emily Juchau.

Sally: And I'm Sally Goodger.

Emily: We're your friendly neighborhood Wheel of Time podcast. Fuck, I can't fucking -- (laugh)

Sally: Do you want to do it a third time? (laugh)

Emily: No! No, I stick to my guns, and also I want to get through this so I can make my pizza.

Sally: You know, sometimes I think, "Wow, I'm a really bad writer." And then I read --

Emily: (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) And then I read these sorts of chapters, and I think, "Well, at least I don't write horrific, masturbatory chapters, pages upon pages of people just lamenting over fields of dead bodies."

Emily: And also just so much of Perrin's nose.

Sally: (laugh) It's true. Also masturbatory chapters about Perrin's nose.

Emily: Don't -- I don't -- I wish you wouldn't have put Perrin's nose in the same sentence as the word "masturbatory." (laugh) 'Cause now I have to sort of live with that concept. Um. Yeah, I don't really -- I don't really know why every time a character has, like, an extra -- extra sense, you know?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Or hyper, um, hyper-sensory experience, we have to focus particularly on that sense. I wish it was a little better integrated into --

Sally: Yeah, it feels like it just comes and goes as Robert Jordan needs it.

Emily: I just kind of wish that instead of Perrin constantly being like, "This person smells angry. This person looks angry but is actually very calm," we could just sort of gather those things from the dialogue and maybe the occasional hint from Perrin.

Sally: Emily, that would be called good writing.

Emily: I don't -- (laugh)

Sally: And that's not what this is. This is extremely bad writing. And Robert Jordan has to rely on the truly in-your-face mechanism of Perrin sniffing people in order to convey the interpersonal dynamics happening.

Emily: His mood ring of a nose --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: As we've referred to it before. Which, really, I mean, it is.

Sally: I hate these chapters.

Emily: Okay.

Sally: I just am really over people -- particularly, like -- I know Robert Jordan was in a war, so I'll give him that. But particularly, like, middle-aged white men writing about the, quote unquote, horrors of war, which just ends up being these sort of, like, graphic descriptions of how sad everybody is but ultimately connecting it back to a duty that everyone has to do, like, warfare is a duty rather than being, like, if you are truly trying to, like, say something about the horrors of war, perhaps you shouldn't write the horrors of war as a duty into your book. Maybe you should have characters finding ways to not make people die for them.

Emily: Yeah, it's a little -- it's a little -- I didn't think of that. It's a little harder to stomach Perrin being like, "God, I wish I hadn't sent all these men to their deaths," you know, if Perrin ever had the thought, like, "Maybe this was totally preventable."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: "Maybe if we -- there were -- if we had any sort of creative problem-solving or had been able to approach this in any sort of --" And I'm not saying -- and I'm not saying that Dumai's Wells could have been prevented, because the writing did not set it -- set it up to be a preventable problem.

Sally: No, it -- it didn't.

Emily: Um. Well, I mean, it did set it up to be a preventable problem, but that would've required Rand to be at all a -- a person who cares about his own safety.

Sally: Yeah, as we discussed at length in season six.

Emily: Yeah, so.

Sally: He's a dumb shit. (laugh)

Emily: But, like, then again, Perrin could've been like, "I wish I hadn't had to send these men to their deaths; I'm genuinely angry at Rand."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Which I feel like would be an -- a kind of interesting take, for that, especially because part of these chapters is to start to set up friction between Perrin and Rand.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: Which, spoiler alert, doesn't really go anywhere. It's set up to go somewhere; later in --

Sally: (inaudible)

Emily: Yeah, later in this book, Perrin leaves Cairhien with his whole coterie, and we find out it's because he and Rand got into a big fight and Perrin's basically been exiled, but then, plot twist within a plot twist, they actually sort of staged the fight.

Sally: Yeah, it's a fake fight.

Emily: So that Perrin wouldn't, you know, be under a ton of suspicion as he goes and does stuff on Rand's behalf. And I just think it would've been more interesting if we -- I think we talk a lot about how we wish that characters in this book were actually allowed to be friends.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: I also wish people in this book who were, um, you know, set up initially as friends were allowed to delve a little deeper into their relationship in uncomfortable ways. That's one of the hardest things I've had to learn as a writer, is the art of leaving a moment uncomfortable.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Like, two characters are allowed to have an argument, and neither of them is necessarily right.

Sally: Yeah, and the argument also doesn't necessarily have to be resolved in some, like --

Emily: Meaningful, hug-it-out moment.

Sally: Meaningful way. Yeah. Like, I have fights with people, and it's just like, well, that was dumb. Or, you know what? We've moved on because it's -- we're no longer the people we were when we had that fight.

Emily: Yeah, it, like, fizzles out.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Maybe you apologize. Hopefully you apologize. Maybe you don't 'cause people are people --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And sometimes they don't apologize. I don't know. I just think it would be interesting if Perrin was like, "Wow, Rand sure made a lot of shitty decisions that led to this absolute bloodbath."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: "And I'm pretty resentful toward him, and I'm resentful of my position here, and I am going to, you know, act at all differently because of that."

Sally: Yeah, I think that's what's killing me, is Perrin laments this -- and Rand does the same thing, particularly with women, which I don't, like, even want to talk about anymore because it's, like, so gross.

Emily: Yeah, we -- this is probably the most egregious --

Sally: (gagging noise)

Emily: Example of it, is Rand systematically going through the battlefield at Dumai's Wells, searching for dead women whose names he can add to his list, which -- only two comments about that, and then I will -- you know, we will move on. And both of my comments are logistic. One is how do they know everybody's names?

Sally: Yeah --

Emily: Are you telling me Amys is a goddamn encyclopedia --

Sally: Yeah, she's just like, "That's this, that's that, that's --" Like --

Emily: For every Maiden in the Waste?

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: They're not wearing dog tags.

Sally: (laugh) Perrin is like, "I listened to Rand cite off a hundred and 51 Maidens."

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: And I -- it's, like, impossible. I'm sorry, but it's -- it's impossible.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Especially with how crazy things would be after the battle. Like, no one's going to be around to be like, "OK, Dragon Reborn, let's feed this specific neurosis of yours."

Emily: Weren't you just talking about how there's, like, a limit of -- number of names you can know?

Sally: I think it is, like, 150 -- like, the number of connections you can have before you start losing meaning, I think, actually, is 150.

Emily: Which is not to say Rand can't, I guess, memorize 150 names. I'm mostly impressed at the speed with which he does it. Although I guess it's supposed to be a symptom of his maybe-madness. I actually have two more logistical comments. One is, uh, how many women is this? 'Cause Perrin says, like, 150, but isn't that before Rand goes out on the battlefield? Looking for -
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Sally: Yeah. Yeah. So there are more.

Emily: So shouldn't there be, like -- especially because of the insane number we were given at the end of book six for how many people there were.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Wouldn't there just be, like, thousands upon thousands? This reminds me of last night when I said that there have probably been a thousand popes. (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) There have not been a thousand popes.

Emily: And Sally immediately called me out. (laugh)

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: There have only been 260, okay?

Sally: (laugh) OK, what were your other logistic questions?

Emily: My other logistical question was -- and this one is gross; I'm sorry if you are triggered by gore; just skip the next 30 seconds -- but considering that there was a human meat grinder --

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: At the end of Dumai's Wells, are there or are there not some bodies that are simply not identifiable?

Sally: Oh, there has to be.

Emily: Isn't that, like, really bothering Rand?

Sally: It -- I mean, you would think, if Robert Jordan was actually committed to the verisimilitude of his human meat grinder.

Emily: Well, I mean, and also the verisimilitude of Rand having what appears to be an obsessive-compulsive disorder --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Regarding these women's names --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And his list specifically. That's a very common obsessive-compulsive thing is having to go through routines, like a list.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um, until -- you know, just, you're compelled to do it from start to finish, and Rand has that, uh, symptom throughout the series, but then, yeah, wouldn't he be like, "Oh my gosh, it's bothering me so much that I don't know some of these women's names."

Sally: Yeah. That's a good point. That's really interesting.

Emily: I would be bothered. OK, anyway, those are my logistical questions, and we've already talked about how dumb and misogynistic it is that Rand has to remember all the dead women. So moving right along.

Sally: Yeah, but just sort of wrapping -- wrapping up my complaint about -- my major complaint about this, is, like, Perrin just goes on and on constantly throughout the series, and Rand does it too -- I'm sure Mat has some vague feelings about it at some point --

Emily: "Vague feelings" is the best way to put it, I think, when it comes to Mat.

Sally: (laugh) Yeah. About just, like, you being the person responsible for asking men, usually, to go to their deaths in a battle.

Emily: Mm-hmm.

Sally: Perrin just, like, is racked with guilt about it. Rand is often racked with guilt about it. And it's like, then change your behavior. Like, you can try and make decisions, like, you -- like -- it just feels like they're never really seeking solutions that aren't warfare-based.

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Like, Perrin is never just like, "Actually, I am just going to send the Two Rivers men home. Because Rand has given me other armies, and I can control that these 200 men go home." Or something like that.

Emily: Yeah, "All my childhood friends. It's really bothering my mental health that I'm specifically sending people that I know and love to their deaths."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Like, that's kind of a thing with being an army general is you have to depersonalize --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: I mean, you shouldn't. War's bad, and you shouldn't ever send people to their deaths. But, like -- that's a fucking given.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But if you're going to be a successful army general, I assume, in the sphere of warfare as men love to write about it, then I'd imagine you kind of have to depersonalize your armed forces.

Sally: Yeah. So it just, again, is this, like, thing with Perrin, which we've talked about, which is just the sort of, like, back and forth between violence and pacifism. This sort of, like, "There are two wolves inside of you." (laugh)

Emily: Yeah. God.

Sally: I think that's always going on with Perrin. And it's like, I'm just so sick of it. Like, make - - if you're so bothered by it, make different decisions. Call Rand out on his shit. Send people home. Don't put yourself in positions where you have to make wartime decisions. Like, you -- you have agency, you rat piece of shit.

Emily: Yeah, it's interesting that Perrin, like you said, is constantly having this back and forth between pacifism and violence, but he never actually explores pacifism as a lifestyle.

Sally: (laugh) Yeah.

Emily: So he's really just sort of, like, thinking longingly about pacifism.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: And not even really thinking longingly about it; just thinking condescendingly about it.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And thinking, like, "Pacifist people are so dumb because they don't understand that sometimes you have to do violence." But then whenever he has to do violence, he's like, "God, I wish I was dead. I'm worthless. I'm the worst person alive."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Oh my God. Just self-flagellating himself.

Sally: Yes.

Emily: Flagellating himself. Not self-flagellating himself, that's a double possessive.

Sally: He's doing it so much that it somehow has become --

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Self-flagellating.

Emily: Um --

Sally: Flagellating, flagellating. (laugh)

Emily: Gross. (laugh) Let's never say the word "flagellating" again. It just makes me think of that scene in The Da Vinci Code, with Paul Bettany.

Sally: Oh, yeah. It makes me think of that guy in fucking Castlevania.

Emily: Oh, yeah! Do we also see his bum?

Sally: I dunno. We see quite a lot of nudity in Castlevania.

Emily: I know, which is surprising. I just think it's so funny that I've seen Paul Bettany's bum so many times.

Sally: I know, Paul Bettany's like, "We should write my bum into this movie," and they're like "Paul."

Emily: Yeah, Paul Bettany walks onto a -- (laugh) Paul -- this isn't a commonly known fact, but Paul Bettany didn't want to sign up onto the MCU 'cause they wouldn't show his bum.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Because it's a PG-13 -- (laugh)

Sally: "We can't show your bum in Iron Man," and he was like, "I'm out, then. Sorry."

Emily: "UGH."

Sally: "I'm -- it's important that the world sees my bum as much as possible."

Emily: Although, did you hear in Age of Ultron, when Vision is introduced, Joss Whedon wanted to go the Doctor Manhattan route and just have -- (laugh) Vision's dick just fully out.

Sally: (laugh) Oh, that's pretty funny.

Emily: That might've been a joke I read on Tumblr, but either way, I think it's a funny thing to say.

Sally: It is very funny. (laugh)

Emily: Um. I had one other thought about warfare and stuff. Um, like you were talking about how Rand and Perrin are always racked with guilt. I think the point Robert Jordan is trying to make -- and I'm not saying it's a good point -- I think the point Robert Jordan is trying to make by having the two of them specifically be so torn up about this every time it happens is that, um, it's part of their coming-of-age in that Perrin and Rand are two very sheltered young men who would never have had to deal with this if their lives had gone the expected courses, which I'm sure Robert Jordan could personally relate to.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And I think Robert Jordan was also probably interested in, um, interrogating the fantasy tropes which, um -- I don't know the exact, you know, chronology of how fantasy books were, but I think Robert Jordan set up Wheel of Time to be a bit of a foil to Lord of the Rings in some ways, and Lord of the Rings takes the very poetic tradition in terms of its warfare in just sort of skimming over the horrors of it, and Robert Jordan wants to be like, "Look how grim and awful it is," and that is -- that point is sort of, uh, tangentially made by having Mat, who, not through his own volition but through magical means, has been completely desensitized to warfare. Mat seems to us to have the healthiest response to what's going on because Mat has technically lived through it hundreds if not thousands of times.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And so he has all the coping mechanisms he probably needs.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: So, like I said, I think that is Robert Jordan's point he's making. I think he is belaboring the point. We are in book six. These boys were in a major battle in book two. The point should've been made then, maybe talked about a little further in book three and four; I think we're far past it by now.

Sally: Yeah, and you make such valid points about, um, just obviously Robert Jordan's personal experiences and, like, the tradition that he's writing, and, like, I -- I feel like what I said about Perrin and Rand could probably be a little, um insensitive to characters who are obviously dealing with pretty extreme PTSD regarding warfare. Um, and so in that vein, I apologize. Um, that's definitely an element to consider with, like, everything that's going on with them. But I do agree from, like, a narrative perspective that it's a little too late. Like, I can see why it's coming up again after Dumai's Wells, because this is a particularly brutal instance of what's -- of this, plus it's also sort of, again, elevating it. Like, Rand, like we've talked about, basically turned boys into nuclear weapons.

Emily: Yeah. Hooo. (laugh)

Sally: Um, which is another reason why it's so frustrating that Perrin is like, "Well, this is sad."

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: He's not like, "Rand literally had a bunch of magic boys completely obliterate people." He's just sort of, like, vaguely uncomfortable by the Asha'man being around.

Emily: Yeah. Yeah, it's like -- he's like, "Ummm, I don't really like the Asha'man," in the same way he doesn't really like the Aes Sedai.

Sally: Yeah. (laugh)

Emily: And I'm like, you're not worried at all about, like -- the Aes Sedai are a long tradition that you can't really do anything about, you know? They're just sort of an element of this world.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But the Asha'man are a brand-new thing, and you're not like, "So where did that come from, bud?"

Sally: Like, maybe, um, your magic boy -- your magic school of war criminal boys is a bad idea.

Emily: Yeah, he sees all these women being afraid of Mazrim Taim, and he's not like, "Maybe they're right. This man trained a bunch of war criminals."

Sally: Maybe they're right!

Emily: Anyway.

Sally: This man is a psycho!

Emily: (laugh)

Sally: A full-blown lunatic in charge of the youth.

Emily: Yeah, I think that what we're -- we're -- we're trying to communicate is that Robert Jordan can write accurately and to his own experiences about PTSD, and that fact can coexist with the narrative reality that this isn't very good or fun writing.

Sally: Yeah, and just, again, like, not to belabor my own point -- (laugh) complaining about Robert Jordan belaboring his point, but, like, narratively, your characters should make decisions that push the story forward, and it feels like Rand and Perrin are incapable of making decisions about their specific problems with warfare, when -- which is so frustrating when Rand is, like, literally in charge of the world. Whatever.

Emily: Yeah. I'd feel a lot differently about this if this marked a turning point --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: For Perrin or Rand or even if just we didn't have to deal with this sort of monologuing --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: About the horrors of war in the future, but we definitely do every time it happens for Perrin --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And, to a lesser extent, for Rand. I mean, yeah, Rand and Perrin both do some pretty fucked-up shit in the future regarding warfare; more fucked up, I would argue, than Mat, who invents cannons.

Sally: Yeah. Mat is just like, "I would like to have some cannons because Ebou Dar has literally been invaded by a fascist regime." (laugh) "Who is also using magic people as really dangerous weapons, so I would like a way to fight back." And it's like, yeah, I don't agree that using cannons is maybe the best thing, but, like, he's trying.

Emily: At least he's problem-solving, you know?

Sally: Yeah, he's like, try -- like -- like, I think that is a pretty reasonable response to the threat. Rand is like, "No, I will literally explode people."

Emily: Yeah, I just think Mat saw a bunch of ladies -- enslaved women -- exploding people --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And was like, "What's a way that I can combat this because it's clearly not going away, and I don't have the expectation of being able to fucking change a fascist regime --"

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: "What's a way I can combat this realistically without traumatizing a bunch of other people?" And he invents cannons, combining his passion for fireworks into that discovery. And Rand is like, "Hmmm. I haven't even witnessed women blowing men up. I'm just going to sort of, in a vacuum, invent men blowing people up and use that for funsies."

Sally: (laugh) Ugh! No -- not, again, to just get on our Mat worship high horse --

Emily: I just love him.

Sally: But I really do think that the invention of cannons is completely reasonable, given what he's dealing with. I think Rand is just completely out in left field with the explosion boys™.

Emily: Yeah, I think it's really funny how much this series is like, "Oh my God, Mat is making this horrendous, world-changing discovery," when they literally have magic people blowing up other magic people.

Sally: Yeah, like, why is it okay when the Asha'man do it, but it's bad when a cannon does it? (laugh)

Emily: Like, in book thirteen or whatever, I feel like Mat does, like, a -- a display for Elayne or something of the cannons. He's like, "Look, they work; you should buy them," basically. And Elayne's like, "Oh my God, this is so, um, cool but also scary. Wow." And it's like, why? Just because non-magic people can use them?

Sally: Wow, a leveling technology?

Emily: You've just been rely -- up until this point, you have just been relying on the fucking honor system for magic people to not blow up people, which clearly does not work over in Seanchan, where there is no honor system.

Sally: Yeah. (laugh)

Emily: And doesn't work for men, for whom there is no honor system, apparently. (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) It also doesn't work for the Aes Sedai, for whom there is no honor system, because Elayne and Nynaeve enslaved a woman.

Emily: I mean, the Aes Sedai are like, "There's an honor system, but we will find all the loopholes." (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) There's the pretense of an honor system.

Emily: Yeah. Serious -- which, by the way, is a really funny argument between Perrin and one of the Aes Sedai ladies. He's like, "Uh, thanks a lot for leaving your fucking station," and she's like, "Uhh, yeah, did you want us to use our powers or not? 'Cause we wouldn't have been able to do anything back where you'd positioned us," and I'm like, why didn't you guys have this fucking conversation --

Sally: The, like, eighteen days you rode over to Dumai's Wells, no one thought --

Emily: It -- yeah, we know that they, like, made a plan and that Kiruna was in on it, and she just didn't say -- pipe up and be like, "Well, that won't work for us."

Sally: I don't know.

Emily: I don't fucking -- whatever. What a dumb argument. Okay.

Sally: Yeah, no, just -- it's fine. Cannons, no. Asha'man, yes.

Emily: Okay, getting into some actual --

Sally: Sorry.

Emily: Synopsis -- no, I think we -- we have covered most of our feelings, I think. It's just Perrin, sitting on the ground, feeling sorry for himself, as is -- as almost every Perrin chapter starts. (laugh)

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: I'm not gonna lie. Just Perrin pitying himself.

Sally: Mm. Woe is Perrin.

Emily: Woe is Perrin. Woe is Perrin. Perrin's sitting with Aram -- Aram -- whose name I can never fucking decide how to pronounce -- and he's just sort of, um --

Sally: (laugh) A-Aram.

Emily: A-Aram! Hey! A-Aram! (laugh) Um. He's just sort of observing the goings-on of this little camp. It's confusing 'cause he talks about being surrounded by wagons, which make -- initially makes you think that they're on the hill --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: That Dumai's Wells sort of --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Was the epicenter of.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But actually they're about a mile away from that, sort of where their supply wagons, I guess, were when they entered the battle.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Perrin is noticing a lot of simmering tensions, which I think we talked about at the end of last book as he led this same group of people into battle, and -- spoiler alert -- he's going to be with this same group of people in the future, so it's not going away. But he's like, aw, dang, the Aiel and the Cairhienin really hate each other, and the Mayeners don't really care, but they would probably side with the Cairhienin if it came to it, and so would the Two Rivers guys, 'cause, you know, the Aiel are heavily racialized, I guess.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: And there's an element of Western European if not white supremacy at work here. Um. Which is super fun. Meanwhile the Asha'man are all standing around like a bunch of creeps.

Sally: I know.

Emily: There are a bunch of Shaido captives who have been taken gai'shain, and they're all naked, and it's making most of the people who have not been exposed to a lot of nudity uncomfortable, and the Aiel think that's really funny and instead of respecting people's boundaries are just like, "Hey, let me put my tits in your face," or whatever.

Sally: Yeah

Emily: And Robert Jordan's like, "Isn't that hilarious?" And I'm like, not really.

Sally: I mean, none of it is funny. These people have been enslaved. (laugh)

Emily: Yeah, that's -- they're just --

Sally: I know it's part of their culture, but.

Emily: I dunno.

Sally: I don't know if that makes it okay.

Emily: Voluntary indentured servitude. I don't know. We haven't really talked about the ethics of the gai'shain system. (laugh) It's sort of something I'm afraid to touch. Um.

Sally: (laugh) Ugh, it's just all so bad.

Emily: It's just all so not -- not fun to think about. Um. But, meanwhile, the sort of, uh, elephant in the room is the group of White Tower Aes Sedai -- for the sake of distinguishing them -- all of the women who have been taken captive. These are not the women who swore fealty to Rand. They're all being guarded by Asha'man. Three of them were stilled, um, in the fight, and they are sort of a fuckin' downer for everyone around them. Perrin looks at them and is like, "Wow, that's just a huge bummer. Just three depressed women who can never use magic again."

Sally: "That sucks."

Emily: "Dang." Uh, the Warders are off in their own separate little, um, group, being watched by the Asha'man. Apparently they've made a couple of rescue slash escape attempts to no avail, until finally the Aes Sedai were like, "Stop trying to rescue us." And they're like, "Fine, whatever." Um, Perrin does give us an approximate list of -- oh, I opened right to it -- (clears throat) Perrin does give us an approximate list of the women who will be relevant. (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) This was so funny to me. I was like, nobody one thinks this way.

Emily: He says, "He had caught a double-handful of names," and I'm like, you caught all their first names and their last names and remembered them?

Sally: (laugh) That's -- that's not a double handful of names.

Emily: And they just happened to be all the names that will be sort of significant? That's nice.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: So basically these are all the women who are gonna go through Verin's brainwashing -- lobotomy tent.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: And come out the other side, more or less. Uh, we've got Nesune, Erian, who was one of -- yes, we know her name sounds like Aryan, like the Nazi thing --

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: She's one of the ones who tortured Rand -- uh, Katherine, who is Red Ajah and, I believe, will escape a little bit later. Coiren, who was sort of, I think, the head of their little embassy in, uh, name if not in reality.

Sally: Mm-hmm.

Emily: 'Cause she's, like, a Gray sister. Uh, Sarene, whose one defining characteristic is that she's very pretty. Elza, who is -- spoiler alert -- Black Ajah, so you can guess how well Verin's lobotomy is gonna work on her.

Sally: Jesus.

Emily: Uh, then Janine, Beldeine, and Marith. I don't remember Janine and Marith. I know -- fuckin' Janine.

Sally: (laugh) Janine.

Emily: It's probably spelled -- it's probably pronounced Ja-neen-uh.

Sally: Janine.

Emily: I remember Beldeine being relevant but not Marith or Janine, so. (clears throat) Just sort of helpfully, now we have some names.

Sally: Very helpfully, Perrin has caught all those names and provided them to us.

Emily: Anyway, Perrin's all worried because everyone is kinda like, "We wanna do something about these Aes Sedai." And sort of the prevailing sentiment, at least according to Aram --

Aram's like, "Maybe we should just murder the Aes Sedai, and that would, you know, take care of the problem." And Perrin's like, "I mean, it would certainly take care of that problem. It would create a whole new set of problems, though."

Sally: Throw a Molotov cocktail, boom, different problem.

Emily: (simultaneously) Different problem. (laugh)

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Anyway, Perrin's like, "Uh, no, we shouldn't do that ... they're women, Aram! They're helpless women! Who have never learned to defend themselves without magic." And I'm like, I think murder's bad no matter who you're doing it to. (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) Yeah, Perrin's, like, missed the point completely.

Emily: Regardless of what genitals you have, murder is bad. I want that to be our PSA for the episode. (laugh)

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Okay? Duh. Fucking duh.

Sally: Get it through your heads, kids.

Emily: Ugh.

Sally: You can't murder --

Emily: It's a new episode -- it's a new Arthur episode.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: You can't murder people, duh.

Sally: Duh.

Emily: So then Perrin gets all nervous about how other people might want to murder the Aes Sedai. He's like, "Damn, anyone in this fuckin' group could just fuckin' nerf the Aes Sedai."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: "And it could cause a whole lot of chaos." And it's like, bud, I don't think it's -- I mean, I think you're -- I don't think it's that big of a deal.

Sally: I know, like, his little psychopath friend is like, "Maybe we should kill the Aes Sedai," and then Perrin is like, "Oh my God, everyone is thinking the same thing that Aram is thinking."

Emily: Well, he's like, "Oh my God, it smells foul with how much people don't like each other." And I'm like, most of the time people manage to not like each other yet coexist without murdering each other. I do it every day at work, you know?

Sally: God, seriously. I've done it all throughout the pandemic without just smacking an anti-vaxxer.

Emily: Yeah. As much as I want to.

Sally: Yeah, as much as I would love to just dunk their heads in the toilet.

Emily: I'm not saying a set of circumstances doesn't exist where I wouldn't, but in -- I also think if I knew it would lead to armed conflict where a bunch of people would get killed, I probably wouldn't.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Um. Anyway. Perrin gets all nervous and then is like, "I'm gonna go talk to Rand." Too bad Rand is on the battlefield, lamenting dead women. But he goes out there and is like, "Blah blah blah blah, lots of dead bodies." He reminds us of some of the key characters, including Dobraine, who's in charge of the Cairhienin contingent. A guy named, uh, Nurelle? Nurelle?

Sally: Sure.

Emily: Who's in charge of the Mayener contingent, who's had kind of a sad arc in the last 48 hours where he was all gung ho to do violence, and now he's like, "I'm ten years older, and violence is bad." (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) Yeah.

Emily: Um, Rand's out there with a bunch of the Wise Ones. Uh, and also his two main Maiden bodyguards, Sulin and Nandera, and of course he has Min. Every description of Rand and Min is nauseating in this, particularly because they're acting like they're on a walkabout date --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: When they're literally investing -- investigating dead bodies. Like, Perrin's like, "Min is hanging onto Rand's arm, and occasionally they, like, talk and laugh."

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And I'm like, what?

Sally: How could -- how can you laugh?

Emily: How can you laugh? I mean --

Sally: When you're walking around with your quasi-boyfriend while he investigates dead women to add to his lamentation?

Emily: Perrin's like, "I don't really know why Min is out there. I guess it's possible that being with Rand is the only place she feels safe after she got kidnapped and he sort of rescued her," and I'm like, well, that would be true and totally valid if there weren't some logical fallacies there. Number one is that Rand did not rescue Min; Min, I believe, just sort of got out in all the fighting --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And went to find Rand. Number two is that we know for a fact that Min is a, um, extremely weirdly written cool girl whore who --

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Will do anything to get next to Rand. (laugh)

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Including wear VERY tight pants and walk through death fields. So.

Sally: (laugh) Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death ... I will see my boyfriend.

Emily: (gagging noise) Um. Whatever. Rand and them turn around, having successfully compiled Rand's dead women list. Um -- oh, Mazrim Taim's out there too.

Sally: Like, if it could not get any worse. (laugh)

Emily: Yeah. It's rancid.

Sally: Mazrim Taim is there.

Emily: Rand gets back and, um, Perrin goes forward to talk to him about his issues, but immediately everyone starts -- oh, he also has that little conversation with Kiruna, who's sort of the leader of the -- I don't want to call them the Salidar Aes Sedai. The other Aes Sedai. (laugh) Who have sworn fealty to Rand. 'Cause they're not all from Salidar. Um. But Kiruna goes up to Rand, there's immediately a huge argument about what to do with the captive Aes Sedai. Um, Rand, finally, is like, "Here's what we're gonna do. The Wise Ones are in charge of all the Aes Sedai. Not just the captive Aes Sedai but also the ones who have sworn fealty to me." Um, and I think we'll just talk about that later 'cause we don't really have time to talk about it now, but, uh, that'll be a thing.

Sally: It certainly will be.

Emily: It certainly is. And whether that's, like, an ethical decision, I think, is something we can talk about later.

Sally: Yeah, I mean, Rand is really just making some ethically --

Emily: Yeah.

Sally: Wack decisions. Decisions -- right and left.

Emily: Rand orders Alanna to heal him 'cause he's all banged up from being in the box and whatnot. They have a very creepy interaction, um, that mostly tips off Mazrim Taim, who, as a reminder, is Demandred -- not. Not, exclamation point, Demandred.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: But may as well be. Um, that Alanna and Rand are bonded, which is an advantage to the Dark side, because they can be like, "Ah, here's a woman who, if she dies, Rand will go into a weird killing rage," 'cause that's a side effect of the Warder bond that's dumb.

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: Um.

Sally: Yeah, I mean, Rand just sort of, like, closing his eyes and pointing at Alanna in the crowd wasn't, like --

Emily: I'm like, could you be any more obvious?

Sally: A great strategic move on his part.

Emily: But then he does also do that to Dashiva. (laugh)

Sally: To Dashiva. (laugh) That's very good.

Emily: Who is one of the Forsaken, I feel like we should point out.

Sally: Yeah. (laugh)

Emily: So. Don't know if Lews Therin's Forsaken senses were tingling.

Sally: But to anyone else looking on, it's like, Rand can point out sexy women and crazy old men. (laugh)

Emily: It's his two senses. Perrin has a magic nose, Rand has a crazy middle-aged men detector. (laugh)

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: And Alanna, who might as well be a crazy middle-aged man.

Sally: It is very funny when he's just like, "That one."

Emily: Crazy pervert. Let's say that. It's a genderless thing.

Sally: Yeah, oh, there we go. Crazy pervert.

Emily: Rand has a crazy pervert radar.

Sally: There we go. I like that.

Emily: OK. Um.

Sally: Crazy pervert.

Emily: So, that happens --

Sally: The gender-neutral term "pervert." (laugh)

Emily: Yeah. (laugh) Then Mazrim Taim's like, "I really feel like you should take more Asha'man," and Rand's like, "Um, no, I'm fine with my four soldiers and my four Dedicated, blah blah blah blah blah." Mazrim Taim's like, "Please, sir." And Rand's like, "Fine, I'll take that guy." (wheeze) Like -- Dashiva is just over there, like, picking his teeth --

Sally: (laugh) Yeah.

Emily: And sort of staring into the middle distance, muttering to himself.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: He looks like Pig Pen in the Charlie -- Charlie Brown -- (laugh)

Sally: (laugh) And everyone is like --

Emily: And Mazrim Taim's like, "Ohhhhkay, if that's the one you want."

Sally: "This might as well happen."

Emily: Mazrim Taim has a weird reaction to that; I don't know if he knows that Dashiva is one of the Forsaken and is kinda like -- 'cause Mazrim Taim is like, "I'd rather you took one of my guys," which Rand doesn't understand, but we, the reader, know Mazrim Taim has his little coterie of evil followers. And so he clearly wants to have more, like, strings on Rand, but, you know, if he were just a Darkfriend, he'd probably be, like, trying to set up Dashiva and Rand to be together, so it's unclear whether Mazrim Taim knows --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: He is Forsaken.

Sally: Which Forsaken is Dashiva?

Emily: Sorry, I'm sorry if I spoiled that for you.

Sally: I don't care.

Emily: I don't know when it comes up. Uh, Dashiva is --

Sally: It just makes this scene way more funnier, actually.

Emily: Yeah, it does.

Sally: So I'm glad you told me. (laugh)

Emily: So Dashiva is the counterpart to Aran'gar.

Sally: Okay.

Emily: He is Osan'gar, who is, uh, Aginor reborn.

Sally: Okay.

Emily: Aginor died in book one. I believe Rand actually killed him. He was the one who Rand, like, burned --

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Or whatever.

Sally: Okay.

Emily: And then Aginor was resurrected in this body and then immediately went undercover at the Black Tower, and now he's, uh, part of Rand's coterie, so things are comin' up Osan'gar.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: Know what I'm saying?

Sally: Oh, how the turntables --

Emily: Oh, how the -- (laugh)

Sally: Mister Al'Thor.

Emily: Too bad he does have to pretend to be super crazy. But whatever.

Sally: I mean.

Emily: We will get -- in the next few chapters, I believe -- an introduction to all of Rand's boys, who Perrin sort of obliquely references.

Sally: Yeah, it's mostly a really good set of boys.

Emily: Yeah, there are, uh, nine of them including Dashiva. Two of them are going to end up with Perrin, which leaves the other seven to sort of orbit around, uh, Rand, although I think he kind of sends a few off on errands every once in a while.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: But we'll talk about it. But Rand basically is like, "Let's -- everyone get ready to go," so everyone gets ready to go. Mazrim Taim leaves. All the Asha'man except for Rand's Asha'man leave. Then Perrin finally gets a minute alone with Rand and is like, "Hey, exsqueeze me, I think there might be a murder," and Rand's like, "What if I let there be a murder?" and Perrin's like, "Well, then, I would stop you," and Min's like, "Could you guys not be insane for five fuckin' minutes?"

Sally: Yeah. (laugh) She's like, "Neither of you are going to do anything about the Aes Sedai. Shut up."

Emily: "This is so stupid. Shut up." And I'm like, finally, Min makes a valid point.

Sally: (laugh) Yeah, seriously.

Emily: Then Rand's like, "Min, have you seen any interesting and plot-relevant, um, auras?" And she's like, "No they're all blurry 'cause everyone's channeling," and then she's like, "Don't worry, Perrin, all the Aiel know that I can see the future, and they're all really cool with it, unlike all the people in my backstory who --"

Sally: (laugh)

Emily: "Um, weren't." And then she gives us, like, a three-paragraph retelling of her tragic backstory that we have not known until now. Literally have spent six books knowing Min and never once has it come up, like, "When was the first time you saw the future? What happened?"

Sally: She was -- she was almost burned at the stake as a witch, basically. (laugh)

Emily: Yeah, they were like, "My aunts had to be like, 'No, don't worry, she's just a twelve-year-old. She's not, you know, meeting with the devil in the woods or whatever.'"

Sally: Yeah, like, there are, like, literally Whitecloaks in the town, and she's being accused of nonsense, and the whole town, like, mobs her. (laugh) And it's like, this is when you wanna drop this nugget in, Robert Jordan? Right after Dumai's Wells?

Emily: He's like, "Ah, I'm not really good at, like, fleshing out my female characters. I'll just add -- I'll just sprinkle this in for flavor."

Sally: Yeah. Fully wild. It's so wild.

Emily: So wild. But, uh, then they all get up to leave. I believe that's that.

Sally: That's -- that is those two chapters.

Emily: Uh, the next three chapters, which is what we're reading next, the, uh -- everyone will get back to Cairhien and will have to deal with the fact that, uh, what's-her-name, Coulavere --

Sally: Oh, yeah.

Emily: Usurped the throne while Rand was gone. Um, Perrin will have to re-confront his shitty marriage, another constant, uh, plot thread for Perrin. Um, and that's kind of it. We'll get a little more, you know, just sort of exposition, introducing the Asha'man, stuff like that, I believe.

Sally: My boys.

Emily: Our boys.

Sally: Give me Grady and Neald or give me death.

Emily: Love those two. Uh, thanks for listening, everyone. We'll be back next week with three chapters. Um, thanks to Glynn MacKenzie for our theme song. Thanks to our patrons on Patreon. Thanks to our social media followers. Do you have anything else?

Sally: Um, thanks for saying such nice things about the podcast coming back.

Emily: Oh, yeah, that was nice, yeah.

Sally: I don't know if I said that last week, but everyone left a bunch of really nice comments.

Emily: Thanks, y'all.

Sally: Yeah.

Emily: And, uhhh, do you have a sign-off?

Sally: Yes. Um, a couple of weeks ago, I helped my brother and his family move up to Washington, which is where they now live. But I had to work while I was doing it, so I was, like, driving with them during the week and then helping them for a few days, but I still had to work, like, my nine-to-five job, Monday through Friday, which meant that one of these days, I had to, uh, listen to an all-staff meeting, but the wifi wasn't set up at my brother's house yet, so I just had it on, like, my phone.

Emily: Uh-huh.

Sally: My work phone. And I was like, I'm not gonna listen to this all -- like, I'm gonna have it going, show that I'm there.

Emily: Yeah, yeah.

Sally: And of course this was the all-staff meeting where they decided that rather than have it be, like, webinar-style, where just, like, a few people are presenting, like, everyone is, uh, you know, a participant in the all-staff meeting and everyone has, like, audio and video.

Emily: Oh, no.

Sally: And somehow I got unmuted while I was, like, in the bathroom, changing clothes, and also, like, changing my pad. (laugh)

Emily: (gasp) Nooo!

Sally: And so my boss -- and I, like, was probably muttering to myself -- and my boss finally texted me and she's like, "You're unmuted," and so I had to be like, "Oh, sorry, I was changing my niece's diaper!" (laugh) So, sorry, Zoe, blamed you for that one.

Emily: Oh. My. God.

Sally: (laugh) It was so bad, you guys. It was so bad.

Emily: Ahhhh! (laugh) That's, like, the nightmare.

Sally: Yeah. I can laugh about it now, but I was not pleased afterwards. (laugh)

Emily: Ok, everyone. Hope your week is better than that.

Sally: Yeah. (laugh) That was a rough one, friends.

Emily: Jesus. Bye.

Sally: Bye!