



Episode 253: The Dragon Reborn's Court Jester

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

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

[theme song by Glynna Mackenzie plays]

EMILY: Okay.

SALLY: [yawning] Hello.

EMILY: Hi.

SALLY: How's everyone doing? Pause for reaction.

EMILY: I – [laughs].

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: Everyone answers back. It's like *Dora The Explorer*.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: What road should we take?

[long pause]

SALLY: That's a great idea! [laughs]

EMILY: That's a great idea! [laughs]. Okay, well, I could be better, personally.

SALLY: Yeah, same.

EMILY: After reading these chapters, but [sighs] let's just hop right in, you know? This is Everybody Hates Rand, your friendly neighborhood *Wheel of Time* podcast. I'm Emily Juchau.

SALLY: And I'm Sally Goodger.

EMILY: And did you know that Geneva Conventions Number One says, "Don't balefire entire fortresses [laughs] full of people."

SALLY: That is actually – I've – I can confirm those are the opening lines of the Geneva Convention.

EMILY: [laughing] We've done our research.

SALLY: [laughs] We've done our research. Ugh!

EMILY: It's – well, I promised you war crimes and I've given you war crimes. What can I say? It was – it's bad. It's bad, y'all. Tybalt.

SALLY: Is bad.

EMILY: Hey!

SALLY: And it's anticlimactic also at the same time, so it's, like, not only bad morally, but I was reading it and I was like, "Except for the sort of looming horror that I feel, this was an extremely boring chapter."

EMILY: And I have an even worse set of news for everyone. Graendal didn't even die.

SALLY: That's the other thing that I – Rand was like, "Ha ha! I've mastered, master chess mastered my way through this, and I was like, "No you didn't?"

EMILY: Yeah, like.

SALLY: Stupid.

EMILY: The bitch lives.

SALLY: Where's the body?

EMILY: Yeah, you can't – that's the tough thing with balefire, is you can never have physical body confirmation.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: It's a real neat narrative trick of Robert Jordan's to be like, "The only thing that can perma-kill these people is also the only thing that will not give them, give you any proof of their demise."

SALLY: Ha ha! Loophole!

EMILY: Tee hee hee.

SALLY: So, it was just, like, dumb.

EMILY: I spent the entire chapter being like, "What was the point of Rand sending this guy in?"

SALLY: Oh, I know.

EMILY: Like I fully for a while was like, "He just did that for fun." [laughs]

SALLY: It's kind of what it feels like.

EMILY: It turns out it's a maneuver – he's like, "I'm gonna send this guy in to get compulsioned by Graendal, so that I can have confirmation that, um, Graendal is dead when the compulsion is gone." Um, but Graendal got someone else to do the compulsion sooooooooooooooooooooo. I mean, a Forsaken did still die, if that helps everyone. Aran'gar was the one who did it.

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: We'll get that scene, I think, in the next book. Or maybe at the end of this book. I can't remember. Personally, I'm sick of Graendal, so.

SALLY: Same.

EMILY: She should have just died. I also think her threat level has been blown way out of proportion. Like, Rand spends this entire chapter being like, "Graendal's just such a smart member of the Forsaken that I can't possibly hope to defeat her." And I'm like, "We're talking about Graendal, who was in on Sammael's Cube Con 2000 of the Shaido Aiel."

SALLY: Oh my fucking god. Yeah.

EMILY: And we're calling – and we're saying she's the most brilliant of the Forsaken?

SALLY: None of the Forsaken are smart.

EMILY: None of them.

SALLY: And I think we need to just start to acknowledge that.

EMILY: They're all just a bunch of idiots.

SALLY: They're just running around with their silly little schemes and their silly little plans, being silly.

EMILY: There's only, like, five smart in the entire *Wheel of Time* and none of them are Forsaken. They're all, like, Ituralde and Bashere.

SALLY: Yeah, they're all generals.

EMILY: They're all military guys, because god forbid anyone else have a brain.

SALLY: Only the military boys.

EMILY: Yeah. So, like.

SALLY: Yeah, so, just like anticlimactic. I read it and I was like, "Well, that's a boring way to kill Graendal," and then immediately I was like, "She's not dead."

EMILY: [laughs] There's no way.

SALLY: There's no way. So, this was just, like, what – [sighs] the point is, of course, one, to escalate Graendal's threat level even higher. We tried to kill her in the only way could feasibly think to do it and it didn't succeed. So now how are we going to beat this sort of master strategist. Whatever.

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: And to still give us a Forsaken at the end of the book to fight, I guess. And two, perhaps more pressingly as we head towards Enlightenment Gate...two point nine thousand or whatever's happen there. Um.

EMILY: [whispers] EnlightenmentGate.

SALLY: EnlightenmentGate is what I'm gonna call it.

EMILY: I think that's great because it's a real, um, you know, it's a real controversy. Rand's enlightenment.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: No one likes it. Just kidding. I'm sure some people on the Internet like it. My high school art teacher liked it a whole lot. Um, I was thinking about this today. Brandon Sanderson famously came to my school one time and the, the high school art teacher, who I knew was a fan of *Wheel of Time* because, like, I don't know, she must have seen me reading it at some point and said something. She was like, she popped her head in just to be like, "I just love what you've done with Rand's character." I think only *The Gathering* – no, *Towers of Midnight* was out at that

point, but Rand isn't really in *Towers of Midnight*, so it was just a reference to his enlightenment. And at his time I was like, "Yeah, who wouldn't like what he's done to Rand's character? Rand was the worst person imaginable and now he's still a terrible person, but in, like, a slightly different way. In a slightly less annoying way." [laughs]

SALLY: Yeah. Yeah.

EMILY: At least it's a chance of pace.

SALLY: Sure.

EMILY: And now I'm just like [sighs], "Girl. Yeah, yeah, we can all agree that Rand needed to have some sort of character shift or paradigm break but giving him enlightenment to wipe the slate clean of his literal crimes against humanity is...not the way."

SALLY: Not the! [laughs] Not the way!

EMILY: Not the way.

SALLY: This is not the way. Um, this we'll get into it a little bit more, but before I lose my point. The, in my opinion, the main, like, second point of this chapter is, of course, escalating Rand's bad behavior. Because, first, we get it through Min's point of view, which alienates and dehumanizes Rand even more.

EMILY: Mm-hmm.

SALLY: You know, he becomes even more of a monstrous figure when we don't get to see the thought process behind it. Um, and second of all, we just have to sit there and watch him commit this horrible atrocity, this massacre of hundreds of people, without blinking, you know? So.

EMILY: Yeah, which is, in turn, meant to push Nynaeve and Min to, um, take desperate action in an effort to change Rand's ways.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And go to Cadsuane and the Wise Ones, as though they would know anything.

SALLY: Yeah, I'm gonna go to a bunch of women who have had no success with Rand when he was a reasonable person to figure out –

EMILY: Yeah, and who Rand has, multiple times, said, "I hate Cadsuane."

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: "And I really don't trust her." Sooooo.

SALLY: So, to talk in – to talk into. To get into the – I say this loosely – scholarly [laughing] portion of this episode.

EMILY: You know us [laughs].

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: We're real scholars over here at EHR.

SALLY: Yeah, we have seventeen PhDs between the four of us in this household.

EMILY: Absolutely stacked degrees.

SALLY: Yeah, Ed holds most of them –

EMILY: [snorts]

SALLY: As you guys know [laughs]. Um, uh, very quick plot summary. We enter, men is – *Min* is watching Rand get dressed. We go through this whole thing about how Rand, how could Rand possibly get dressed with only one hand, which pisses me off.

EMILY: [laughs] Oh my god. Yeah.

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: She's like, "He's getting so good at it. It's a miracle!" And I'm like, "Yeah, you'd get at adjusting to having only one limb. Obviously."

SALLY: Yeah, people can exist in the world and function with – after amputations, so what was the point of this?

EMILY: We also get the huge revelation that, unlike Rand assumed, that Min – like, in the last chapter, Rand was like, "Well, my relationship with Min has changed so much. She's clearly afraid of me for almost killing her."

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: And Min instantly is like, "Of course I'm not afraid of Rand for almost killing me. I'm just mad because it turns out that he's been right all along and I shouldn't be with him all the time, because when it mattered, one of the Forsaken was able to use me against him and I was no help at all."

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Which [sighs] is annoying for its own set of reasons. It's annoying to have that pointed out – you know, everything in this book particularly, and in the next couple of books, Brandon Sanderson is painstakingly pointing out anything that could be textual subtext.

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: But is just making real sure that we understand everything.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Condescending, as we've said many times.

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: Um, it's annoying because *everyone* has known that Min was being an idiot about this and that any time one of Rand's loved ones has said, "Oh, well, I have to stay with you regardless of the dangers," that it was a stupid idea and that they weren't taking that fully into consideration.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: It's of course irritating because any time someone is like, "Rand, Perrin, whoever, I have to stay with you," it's a woman, so of course women are stupid.

SALLY: Women are silly!! They have no idea how the world works.

EMILY: It's also irritating that Min can't get a little bit of grace for herself here. Semirhage literally snuck into your bedroom.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: It's not like you went on an expedition with Rand where there was danger. It's not like you're beating yourself up over Rand losing his hand in defense of you when you walked into an ambush by Semirhage. Which, you know, is maybe something you could beat yourself up over.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And while it was stupid of both of you, as we've said multiple times, to not be like, "Wow, there's a weird woman in our bedroom when we're about to have sex."

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: [laughs] How strange and alarming.

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: Like, no one's giving you points for missing that one [laughs].

SALLY: How bizarre!!

EMILY: But, like, this was not one of the situations that you could have predicted danger.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: So, you just can't win, Min. There's absolutely no way.

SALLY: It's, like, a really astounding level of victim blaming in this instance. Um, that we get through Min's point of view, so I think we're supposed to be like, "She's correct to blame herself for this."

EMILY: Yeah, because everyone always has the clearest perspectives about their own role in traumas.

SALLY: Yeah, it's so annoying. It also makes me really mad that she's not allowed to be afraid of Rand. Like, even if it wasn't like a – fear is not always a, like, conscious thing, you know? It's not like she's making the conscious decision to be afraid of her partner, but it would be upsetting, and you would probably have flashbacks and all sorts of fear response to this person who almost murdered you.

EMILY: Yeah, she's like, "Of course I'm not afraid of Rand! Because even when he was strangling me, I knew that wasn't him. That was Semirhage, so." And there's that whole – it goes back to the actual scene where Rand is like, "Even while I'm killing her she loves me." Blah, blah, blah, blah. And it's just like, not to be overdramatic about it, but it's a little insulting to people who have actually been turned on by their partners in ways that their partner could not control. Like, you hear all those stories about, like, army veterans with severe PTSD who wake up from nightmares and harm the person next to them. And nine times out of ten that's their wife.

SALLY: Sure.

EMILY: And it's like, so are people just supposed to be so clear minded one hundred percent of the time and able to make those distinctions. Yeah, of course, like, logically you know it wasn't Rand hurting you, but that's not what your body...

SALLY: Yeah, that's not what your body remembers.

EMILY: Your body doesn't care about who was hurting you, just that it was being hurt.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: It's just [sighs]. Yeah, again, Min's not allowed to have any complicated feelings about Rand. It always just has to be completely black and white. She's one hundred percent devoted to him and it's annoying. Especially when we get this scene, where Min isn't even allowed really to



judge or condemn him for what he does. She's just kind of like, "Wow, baby boy is so hurt. I just wish everyone would stop thinking of Rand as a problem to be solved and more of a human." And I'm like, "He just nuked a town, like, a, a castle. So, yeah, he's a problem before he's a human at this moment."

SALLY: Yeah, like, it's so... frustrating both – that sentiment at the end killed me. She's like, "He's just a man who needs help." And it's just – she doesn't even say help, I think. She says, like, 'he's a man in pain' or some ridiculous nonsense. And it's, like, first of all –

EMILY: [laughing] Hitler was just a man in pain. Shut up! Because he didn't get into art school. Shut up!

SALLY: Shut up. Yeah.

EMILY: [yells]

SALLY: Men in pain commit atrocities – "men in pain," excuse me. I'm going to put that in quotes. Um, commit atrocities all the time and that doesn't, like, wipe the atrocities off the map?

EMILY: Just because they clearly needed therapy doesn't mean that they didn't do the atrocities.

SALLY: Yeah [gags]. I want to talk about Min and Nynaeve in particular and their response to this, but, like, absolutely speed running this, because the nitty gritty does not matter. Rand's plan – he finds out where Graendal is through the boy that he let Nynaeve horrifically murder.

EMILY: Apparently, it's only been a day? Which makes *no sense*.

SALLY: Yeah [laughs]. It's, like, murder of this child.

EMILY: Immediate meeting with the Seanchan. Now we're going to do a nuclear bomb. And somehow in all of that, Rand had time to consult a librarian? Who took hours to get back to him.

SALLY: Yeah. Yeah.

EMILY: Rand tells us the entire history of this place Graendal is holed up. It's called Natrin's Barrow, which is, like, [laughs] bestie, nobody asked. And nobody cares. He's like, "He's the little psychoanalysis of why Graendal is holed up here. Whatever." He calls Nynaeve and then he calls this guy, who I legitimately had no recollection of. He's like some assistant of so and so. And I was like, "Whomst?"

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Anyway, this guy shows up, is moderately annoying in the way that every politician we've ever interacted with his annoying.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And Rand is like, “Scootch your bootch. Go off the meet Graendal.”

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And everyone’s like, “This seems like a disproportionate way to handle a person who is just annoying.”

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Um, but he’s like, “Just go to this castle and see who they are. Do they support the Dragon Reborn?” So, clearly not giving him all the information. He leaves. As soon as he’s gone, Nynaeve and Rand are like, “What the fuckening?” And Rand is like, “Follow me.” And they travel to this place. It takes this little nobleman exactly thirty seconds to get to and from the castle and interact with quote “Graendal” unquote.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: But when he gets back, Rand is like, “Hey, Nynaeve, is compulsion on him? Nynaeve is like, “Yes. It’s not as bad as for that little boy guy, but, um, still quite bad. And I’m not going to just kill this guy, so, fuck you. I – ” They keep being like, “What is your plan here?” And Rand keeps saying dumb shit like, “I don’t sleep, I only dream.”

SALLY: [laughing]

EMILY: Nynaeve at one point was like, “So, you just don’t answer questions anymore?” And Rand death glares her and I’m like, “That was a very valid question of Nynaeve’s” [laughs].

SALLY: Yeah! I’m also, like, I know everyone keeps being like, “Rand is mega scary right. Like, you have no idea how scary he is.” But, like, Nynaeve, queen of the death glare herself couldn’t, like, withstand it a little longer. Min’s like, “She grows pale in the face of this.” And like.

EMILY: If I asked a man, “So, are you just not going to answer? I thought men loved answering questions. What’s the deal, homie?” And he was like, [*Psycho* knife noises] with his eyeballs, I [laughs] laugh at that man.

SALLY: I’d be like, “You’re ridiculous.”

EMILY: This is stupid. You’re stupid.

SALLY: You are a nonsense person.

EMILY: Like, maybe someone should mock Rand a little, is all I’m saying.

SALLY: Rand –

EMILY: Rand badly needs a court jester.

SALLY: Yeah! I was just gonna say the same thing! Could you imagine? You're the court jester to the Dragon Reborn and your whole job is to be like, "What an emo losseerrr."

EMILY: Could you imagine a little guy, just jingle jangling around after Rand. He goes to every single one of Rand's dumb meetings. With the Seanchan, with Semirhage. He goes to – this could have been Asmodean.

SALLY: Oh! My god.

EMILY: We were robbed!

SALLY: You're right. We were robbed of Court Jester Asmo-deen.

EMILY: Except Asmo-deen was not nearly as funny. I need an actual funny man.

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: Just a funny little guy.

SALLY: Just a funny little weirdo, who's like, "Okayyyy."

EMILY: Listen, you guys, sometimes court jesters play an invaluable role, both in politics and in the narrative.

SALLY: Yeah!

EMILY: And that we weren't given one here is ludicrous.

SALLY: Cruel!

EMILY: Cruel and unusual.

SALLY: Cruel and unusual. It would – ah. It would be so good.

EMILY: Yeah. Then it's, like, maybe instead of doing a mass crime against humanity, Rand could have murdered the court jester, which would have been a huge tragedy, but then it would have been, like, you know, this really touching scene of, like, weeping over his court jester's body. And being like, "What have I done?"

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: "I've killed all the good in this world" [laughs].

SALLY: I've killed all the good in the world. It would also be very symbolic of Rand – like, a big role that court jesters play, of course, are, the, the, the pushing on the ego of the king, you know?

EMILY: Yeah and being able to say executable things.

SALLY: Yeah!

EMILY: You know, technical treason and get away with it.

SALLY: Yeah, and so for Rand to keep the court jester around, be like, "I'm willing to tolerate mockery and criticism."

EMILY: Dissension, yeah.

SALLY: And dissension and all this stuff for a long time. And then suddenly he kills the court jester. That, I feel like, would be a much less, um, horrific and very potent turn of Rand's character.

EMILY: I agree it would be so potent. I think it would be equally horrific, because what happens here with the, with Rand balefiring – that's what happens next. Rand using his little nuclear codes, as we've been calling them, to balefire the entire, like, castle.

SALLY: Yeah, with hundreds of people it seems.

EMILY: Hundreds of people.

SALLY: Living and working there.

EMILY: Yeah. They can see little people moving around down there.

SALLY: Yeah. Doing their jobs.

EMILY: Just wipes it out of existence. Um, and it's, like, that, obviously is horrifying and it transcends murder and becomes a crime against humanity, as I believe we'll talk about in a minute.

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: But, um, there's a problem with narratives trying to escalate violence just in, like, ascending order of how they would be criminal – how they would be treated in a criminal court.

SALLY: Yeah. Yeah. Quote unquote magnitude or, like, the amount of bodies, almost.

EMILY: Yes. Yeah, like, using a body count to be like, "Well, obviously killing ten people is more horrifying than killing one person."

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And I just think that's sort of, like, gets away from the point of murder, generally, which is that, like, it's always going to be bad no matter who you do it to, no matter how many people you murder.

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: Like, a human life is a human life.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And, um, I don't know, I think, I think Rand actually killing someone who was close to him would have been a far more, like, interesting way to narrate the sort of descent that he is in right now, than just him being like, "I'm going to use my nukes."

SALLY: No, totally. I – that is an extremely good point and I agree. The, um, one of the, like, problems with, um, depicting crimes against humanity and mass murder and massacre is that, like, at some point you reach a body count that becomes, like, unfathomable to people. And it's, like, hard for you to wrap your head around the idea of killing that many people. You know? It becomes almost like a blank space in your head.

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: Because it's like, okay, I know it was bad, but, like, there's no real for me to access that, almost. Like, it's so distant.

EMILY: Yeah, like, the objective knowledge that six million Jews were killed in the Holocaust is almost of secondary importance to the subjective knowledge of, perhaps, experiencing the Holocaust Museum and actually, like, acquainting oneself with human stories.

SALLY: Yeah and, like, the victims and the personhood of those people.

EMILY: Right.

SALLY: So, there is certainly something to be said for, like, tragedy has more impact in, like, a narrative form when it is smaller and, like, more easily digestible.

EMILY: For sure.

SALLY: So, I think that's a really good point. Wow, I can't believe we fixed Rand's descent into horror.

EMILY: Just by giving him a court jester.

SALLY: Just by giving him a court jester.

EMILY: I legitimately have never wanted more to write fanfiction of *The Wheel of Time* [laughs].

SALLY: [laughs] Court jester time! Emily, you would write such a good fanfiction about that court jester.

EMILY: I would.

SALLY: His death would be so tragic. I would legitimately weep.

EMILY: [laughs]

SALLY: Um.

EMILY: I have to decide what his whole...

SALLY: What his whole, like, vibe is.

EMILY: What his whole deal is. Like is he Cairhienin?

SALLY: You've got to give him a name. Yeah. [gasp] A little French jester.

EMILY: A little French guy. Just a rando. Who knows?

SALLY: Gotta give him a name and a whole life.

EMILY: I'll think about it. I'll come back and he'll be, you know. Next episode.

SALLY: He'll be fully fleshed out.

EMILY: I'll have a whole backstory. He'll have a D&D subclass. I'll be ready to go [laughs].

SALLY: Okay, as we keep referencing, I did just want to perhaps briefly perhaps not, there's not a whole lot to talk about with Egg. It's just – Egg is the second chapter and it's just like, "Ohh! Politics! Elaida's a maniac!"

EMILY: [laughing] As usual.

SALLY: [laughs] Surprise. Um, so we keep, uh, using these phrases, particularly throughout this book, um, "war crime," "crime against humanity," "violation of human rights." And all of these things, if you dig into the, like, legal theory behind them and the ethics behind them, get really complicated, but, um, briefly, uh, to just talk about particularly war crimes and crimes against humanity. Crimes against humanity is, like, the top umbrella and war crime is actually a crime against humanity that sits –

EMILY: A subset.

SALLY: Under the idea of crimes against humanity. Um, war crimes, my understanding, they're basically the same thing, but they take place in the context of war. And so the idea, again this is my – I'm not a sort of legal scholar or anything, um, the idea with war crimes, of course, is that there's this sort of code of conduct that people are supposed to be following. Like, you shouldn't

–

EMILY: Murder civilians.

SALLY: Murder civilians and execute prisoners and all that sort of stuff. There's an idea that you should be conducting warfare in a particular fashion, which if you chew on that in any particular way becomes sort of a bizarre thought experiment. Like –

EMILY: Yeah, we have to kill each other, but we have to do it nicely.

SALLY: Yeah. Like.

EMILY: It's a little ridiculous.

SALLY: Okay?

EMILY: We, as a, uh, a general populace, have decided that that's better than just having anarchic warfare.

SALLY: Yeah. Um, uh, so, crimes against humanity. I have the Wikipedia page up, because of course Wikipedia makes things more digestible, um, so just gonna read some sections of this. Um, "Crimes against humanity are widespread or systemic criminal acts which are committed by or on behalf of a *de facto* authority, usually by or behalf of a state, that grossly violate human rights." And we could talk about what a human right is, like, forever, but it's generally it's the type of stuff you think of. You know, humans have a right to be alive and not be tortured and have access to food and shelter and those types of things.

EMILY: Yeah, all of the victims of Graendal have a right to live despite the fact that they have been put under a sort of horrible mental manipulation by Graendal.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And they are no considered by Rand, at least, to be subhuman. They still have a right to live.

SALLY: Yep! They still have a, um, it says literally here in this thing, "The term "crimes against humanity" is potentially ambiguous because of the ambiguity of the word "humanity," which can mean humankind (all human beings collectively) or the value of humanness."

EMILY: Hmm.

SALLY: Um, and it says, “The history of the term shows that the latter sense is intended.” Which, again, kind of get into that, but I think if we talk about “which can mean humankind,” like, people have very different definitions of what that means, like, Rand in this instance is not considering those people, perhaps has part of his humankind, but they are still humans and they still have a value of humanness.

EMILY: Yeah, and to the point of that, like, definition, that differing definition, it is still a crime against humanity, because Rand is committing a crime against what we consider to be “good humanity.”

SALLY: Hmm. Yeah.

EMILY: You know, a general, like, character – the general human conscience. I think is what that’s also saying.

SALLY: Yeah! That’s a good point, Emily. Um, yeah. That makes sense. Uh, like, “Unlike war crimes, crimes against humanity do not have to take place within the context of wars, and they apply to widespread practices rather than acts which are committed by individuals,” necessarily. It’s, like, what are people doing – like, Rand is committing crimes on a regular basis, I think at this point. Um, “Although crimes against humanity apply to acts which are committed by or on behalf of authorities, they do not need to be part of an official policy, and they only need to be tolerated by authorities.” So, I think that is an interesting thing to talk about. Where it’s, like, I don’t think Rand would ever say his policy is to just kill whoever gets in his way. Maybe he would.

EMILY: Mm-hmm.

SALLY: Um, what I think is – but, again, this piece that I kind of what to hit on is this idea of, like, they just need to be tolerated by the authorities. Like, nobody is punishing Rand for what he is doing. You know? In any particular context, if the authorities are allowing something to happen, that doesn’t necessarily mean it’s legal, it’s still a crime against humanity, but nobody is going after them.

EMILY: Yeah, this is, I think, um, if we’re looking at *The Wheel of Time* narratively, this is a reversal of Rand’s position in earlier books where in every country he conquered, he was doing sort of, like, he was creating new laws and consequences and violating laws. Particularly in regards to, like, the Aiel, who are an invading force under Rand’s command, cannot go around, like, killing civilians.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: And, um, he established the death penalty for that, which is its own thing, but Rand was not tolerating that sort of behavior.

SALLY: Yeah.



EMILY: As opposed to now, where he is perpetrating that behavior on his, like, literally with his own hand.

SALLY: With his own hand. And also, um, as we touched on when we talked extensively about how Rand is not held to any consequences, nobody does anything about this.

EMILY: [laughs] Yeah!

SALLY: Like.

EMILY: Min and Nynaeve after this – Nynaeve is like, Nynaeve says, “This is intolerable,” basically. She’s like, “This is loathsome. What you’ve just done is terrible.” And Rand is like, “Well, you know what they say? Fuck ‘em!” [laughs] And Nynaeve’s like, “Okay, I’ll go to Cadsuane.” But it’s like, Cadsuane’s not gonna do anything to hold Rand accountable.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: No one is holding Rand accountable. Nynaeve and Min’s reaction to this is “we have to change Rand” not “hold him accountable.”

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Which is a consequence of a sort, but not any sort of retributive consequence.

SALLY: Yeah. Yeah! Nobody is holding Rand accountable for anything. Cadsuane’s plan does not seem to be like, “We need to commit some sort of coup or Rand is going to continue to nuke people.”

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: She’s like, “Nynaeve, why don’t you go find Perrin. He’s gonna be important in this.”

EMILY: Somehow.

SALLY: Um. So...ugh. I – I think – I know I’m making this more complicated, but I get really caught up in the fact that I don’t fully understand ethics or legal terms, so I might not be using all of this correctly. So, I apologize if you are someone who understand this in more depth and we – I, I, have interpreted something wrong. But, I just get really stuck on this idea of, like, um, so – the different between war crimes and crimes against humanity is that crimes against humanity can happen whenever. It doesn’t necessarily have to be World War II for someone to be like, “Uh, you can’t massacre people, because you can’t do that.” Which is what Rand has just done. He has used – there’s a whole list here – there’s a whole list here, and I’m just gonna list off the ones that I think Rand’s hit so far.

EMILY: Fun.

SALLY: Um. War crimes. He's done crimes in the middle of a war. Murder.

EMILY: Mm-hmm.

SALLY: Massacres.

EMILY: Mm-hmm.

SALLY: Dehumanization.

EMILY: Yep.

SALLY: Deportations.

EMILY: Mm-hmm.

SALLY: Um, I would say that Nynaeve taking the compulsion off that child could in a way qualify as unethical human experimentation. Extrajudicial punishments, including the use of weapons of mass destruction. Death squads, kidnappings, the use of child soldiers maybe [laughs]. Narishma's like seventeen.

EMILY: [laughs]

SALLY: [laughs] Unjust imprisonment. Torture. Political repression. So, that was like, what? Fifteen.

EMILY: Yeah, Rand's done a lot of things that are bad [sighs]. Yeah, and I guess, like, to head this off, I guess. You could argue that what happened here was a war crime, because Rand was at war with the Shadow, generally, and therefore Graendal.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Um, but I think in terms of, like, the definitions here, this isn't a war that is being...regulated in the terms of, like, the way that we – if it's a war crime it's because it's a sort of acknowledged war.

SALLY: Sure.

EMILY: And what Rand is doing here is more an ideological war than an actual war. At least until the Last Battle [some feedback as the mic is bumped].

SALLY: Sure, and I, like, I only bring up the distinction because there is a distinction and we most typically say war crimes, because generally the book is –

EMILY: About war.

SALLY: About war. The distinction is more or less irrelevant. As we discussed, the idea of whether or not you are killing some people or [laughs] killing other people in a not okay way, doesn't really mean a whole lot to me, personally.

EMILY: Yeah, for sure.

SALLY: Um, uh, but it is, like, a, in the context of how these terms are used in, like, international courts, they are slightly different, um, and yeah. I think, in particular, in this particular instance, it elevates itself – I don't think we should, I shouldn't say that. It's not, like, a scale, as though crimes against humanity are worse than certain war crimes. But the idea more generally is that, yeah, Rand does not storm this fortress. He does not do any sort of act of war against these people. It's just like [snaps] annihilated. You know?

EMILY: Mm-hmm.

SALLY: So, it certainly – It's just fucked. I don't know. I just wanted to bring some of that, like, language and, like, theory to what we're talking to kind of back of what we've been saying over the past couple of episodes about Rand committing atrocities that, um, if there were anything like an international court in this world, would be recognized as crimes against humanity and war crimes. And the way, um, particularly, like, it's not just one sort of terrorist committing these acts, as it's talking about, it's not just, like, an individual who's doing something, which is, of course, horrible. It's elevated to the state level. Rand is *The State* – capital T, capital S – In this world and he's making these decisions unilaterally. He's just doing them and, um, they are being absolutely, one hundred tolerated by his quote, unquote government or the quote, unquote state, because he is the state at this point; he is a tyrant. But they are also being tolerated by his advisors, because nobody is taking really any direct action to try and prevent this in the future or to hold Rand accountable. So, that's trying to summarize the thoughts I said more sporadically throughout the episode, but that was my intention in bringing that. Chew on it as it makes sense to you.

EMILY: Yeah, thanks.

SALLY: So.

EMILY: Um, I think the question here becomes, um, is this working on the narrative level?

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: Um, what happen – what Rand does here is objectively bad as we have just proven.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: It's a crime against humanity. Um, the book itself makes some effort to acknowledge that it is a crime against humanity, um, not through consequences, but by other characters' reactions. Min and Nynaeve are horrified by what has happened. Um, it remains, unfortunately, a

gray situation in the fact that Rand extensively tries to justify it. And, again, the only perspectives we're getting are Rand justifying it and a bunch of women who have spent the entire series doing their own arguable crimes against humanity.

SALLY: Yeah!

EMILY: Saying, "That wasn't great." So, it's not like we're having any sort of...the narrative isn't really coming down on Rand, is what we're saying.

SALLY: Yeah. Yeah.

EMILY: Um, obviously every book doesn't have to portray a bad thing that the character does and then the character gets punished for doing the bad thing, you know? This isn't Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. Um, but then the question is 'is it working like the authors intend it to?' And this is, I believe, meant to embody sort of, like, the absolute lowest point for Rand.

SALLY: Mm-hmm.

EMILY: Um, and, you know, it's all uphill from here. Not, not quite in the literal sense, but here we're at the lowest and so now we're going to reach enlightenment. But I think we've pretty strongly made the argument already that because Rand reaches enlightenment without having to reckon with any of these things, including this lowest point.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: It doesn't work in the narrative. This would – this could be a very, um, powerful narrative choice if it was something that Rand had to reckon with, if it was something that any of the other characters had to reckon with.

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: If it was treated at all like an actual thing that happened and not just a sort of, like, thought exercise of 'what if the Dragon Reborn did a bad thing kind of off screen of everyone else?'

SALLY: Yeah. What would we do about it? What would we as, allegedly, his...

EMILY: Supporters.

SALLY: Supporters.

EMILY: Tolerate.

SALLY: Tolerate, yeah, exactly. No, I agree. I don't think it's working on the narrative level. Um, it's also just, like, I think in part because it's not surprising at this point. In no way am I like, "Rand has reached his lowest," watching this. I'm like, "Rand has already reached his lowest."

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: Um, he's already...like, obviously this is horrific, but, again, there's not some sort of delineated sign where it's like you step past this and you've become a...

EMILY: A bad guy.

SALLY: A bad guy. Like, Rand has been going there for a long time in the way that he treats people and the way that he considers decision making and all sorts of stuff. So, I'm just like, "Okay, this isn't surprising at this point. It's awful and I hated reading about it." But so, it doesn't surprise me. It doesn't particularly strike me as, like, the abyss. Usually when you see a character reach a low point, there's sort of a way that you can, like, feel that. Put together – usually because there's something afterward where the character has to be like, "Fuck."

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: They have to reckon with that decision either being like, "I'm not happy with the decision that I made," or even just being like, "That was bad."

EMILY: Yeah. In a way this is almost meant to be, like, lower than rock bottom, because the abyss in Rand's case, and as the narrative very strenuously tried to convince us, was him attacking Min.

SALLY: Yeah. Good point.

EMILY: Um, and so everything past that has been bad and it's just meant to be, like, "Oh, well, it's not as bad because Rand doesn't care as much?"

SALLY: Yeah.

EMILY: So, it's not, like, a character abyss so much as it is, like, in terms of scale, a legal [laughs] abyss.

SALLY: [laughs] Let's see. You've gone past the sort of individual crime through war crimes to crimes against humanity. All sorts of stuff. Um, yeah, and also to, like, um, step away – like, to step – I know I always bring this up, so here we go. Um, to step out of this narrative itself just about Rand, into just the general way that this series and this book in particular has been presenting crimes against humanity and atrocities. Um, there is such a level of dehumanization and desensitizing of these things. Like, in no way do we linger on them and in no way are we allowed to, like, see them, really. Like, we never have – because we're not reckoning with the consequences and because we're not seeing what happened inside this castle – and not necessarily that we could – we could reckon with that without seeing what happened, but we are in no way being asked to, like, actually witness the things that are going on. And this is the way that real world atrocities are used all the time. This is, I talked a lot about this when I was writing about how we present the Holocaust, but you can see it in a lot of media where it's just, like,

slavery or, uh, police brutality or anything is used as a sort of story point rather than being like, “This is a thing that really happens” and, um, by not letting us sit with that, it’s just, like, insensitive. It’s just insensitive to use it as, like, a steppingstone. I know this is not real – I know these are not real-world events, but it’s just, like, representative of the ways we treat these sort of things. As, like, narrative tools rather than something to really sit with.

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: So, that’s my soapbox for a second.

EMILY: For sure.

SALLY: Sorry, we’ve talked a lot about this.

EMILY: No, it’s a thing worth talking about.

SALLY: Um, but in summary, I don’t think it’s working for Rand. I don’t think there was any point to it.

EMILY: Yeah, it didn’t even take Graendal off the board, so.

SALLY: Bad.

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: Thumbs down.

EMILY: And taking Aran’gar off the board, if that’s what you want to argue, was sort of a null point at this –

SALLY: Yeah, what was Aran’gar even doing?

EMILY: Yeah, she had already been kicked out of the Aes Sedai camp, so she had sort of receded as a character anyway.

SALLY: Yeah, she was not a threat at this point.

EMILY: The other chapter we read involves Egg in *tel’aran’rhiod*. Sivan tries to convince her to let them rescue her. Egg’s like, “No,” as usual, but, um, as soon as she exist *tel’aran’rhiod* – oh, of course, there’s, like, a whole thing about Sivan being like, “Oh and Gawyn’s here,” and then Egg has to go on, like, a little walking around tour and be like, “Well, I can’t, I still – I can’t just let my concern for the world and the White Tower overcome my libido. [laughs] I still want to fuck Gawyn. So, that’s still important. People need to be happy, still. Even when they’re politicians.” It’s so stupid. Then she wakes up and is pretty quickly informed that she is being released. Uh, she has to piece this together throughout the chapter, but what happened is that Silviana, the Mistress of Novices who Egg has been interacting with, basically bitched Elaida out

for what she's doing to Egg and was like, "You absolutely cannot do this, you absolute idiot." Um, and Elaida is now punishing Silviana for that. She's been replaced as Mistress of Novices by Katherine. This in turn had destabilized the entire Red Ajah because Silviana is also of the Red Ajah, so now there's a rift there.

SALLY: Yeah, the girls are fighting.

EMILY: The girls are fighting, the girls are fighting. And Egg is like, "Dear god, everything is gonna fall apart." She's all in a rush. She manages to get her, um, handlers, who are of the Red Ajah, off her to go try and, like, deal with this crisis and in exchange she takes a bunch of forkroot to prevent her from channeling. Um, which will be important in a minute. Um, and then she walks into her room and there is Verin. Who, promptly lies in a dumb way to be like, "Guess what?"

SALLY: I'm, uh, not sworn on –

EMILY: I can lie.

SALLY: What am I trying to say? [laughs]

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: Um, it's also so funny to me that Verin was like – has she just been sitting in Egg's room for, like, days on end? What's going on here?

EMILY: [laughing] I think she'll tell us in a minute, but it is extremely funny to just think of her being like –

SALLY: When's she coming?

EMILY: Hmm, wonder when she's gonna get let out of prison? Like, bestie? Okay?

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: Um, and that's where we leave Egg. The next chapter will be our big Verin reveal. Where Verin will tell us not just that she is Black Ajah, but also the context behind it, how she has used that throughout her life, ultimately for good. Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. Um, and then we will get into the climactic sequence of this book, which is the Seanchan attack on the White Tower.

SALLY: Boo.

EMILY: So –

SALLY: Speaking of crimes against humanity.

EMILY: Yeah, seriously. Crimes against – yeah. I think another point of this narrative was to be like, “Rand is just as bad as the Seanchan.” [laughs] And it’s like guys.

SALLY: That has no value to me because, like...

EMILY: I’ve always known the Seanchan are very bad and I’ve – the title of my podcast is Everybody Hates Rand.

SALLY: Yeah!

EMILY: [laughs]

SALLY: It has no value to me. And also, like, what? I don’t give a shit about comparing tyrants.

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: It’s not –

EMILY: Oh, two states are bad?

SALLY: [laughs] Breaking news.

EMILY: Breaking news.

SALLY: Breaking news! You can’t trust the government.

EMILY: Oh no.

SALLY: Whatever. What a weird thing to be talking about the week *Oppenheimer* gets released.

EMILY: [laughs] Yeah. Enjoy, I guess.

SALLY: Whatever. Thanks for going on that crimes against humanity sidebar with me, everybody.

EMILY: Thanks for going on this quest with us. And just tonight, when you’re trying to go to sleep, remember the court jesters that could have been.

SALLY: Ugh! The court jester never would have stood for this.

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: The court jester would hold Rand to consequences. That’s why he’d be murdered, but that’s the point.



EMILY: Just jingle jangling his way around [sighs] the world being like, “You’re bad. You’re bad and evil.”

SALLY: You’re also boring. Have you considered being less boring and more fun?

EMILY: And your mom’s a ho!

SALLY: [laughs]

EMILY: [laughs] So.

SALLY: Rand would be the type of guy to react to that.

EMILY: Yeah, exactly.

SALLY: So, those are those chapters.

EMILY: Yeah, thanks for listening? I guess. Thanks to, um, [clears throat] Glynna Mackenzie for our theme song. Thanks to our patrons on Patreon and our followers on social media.

SALLY: Yeah. You guys are the best, as always.

EMILY: Do you have a sign off?

SALLY: Oh, this is just more medical drama from Sally’s life. My insurance plan changed recently, due to our fiscal year. I have to go pick up my big allergy medication and the pharmacist lady told me it was going to me \$370.

EMILY: Oh my god!

SALLY: That’s gonna be my copay.

EMILY: AHHHH.

SALLY: I’m just, like, hemorrhaging money at the moment.

EMILY: Speaking of crimes against humanity, how ‘bout that U.S. healthcare system?

SALLY: How ‘bout having to pay for medications. What?

EMILY: Yeah.

SALLY: How does that make sense?

EMILY: Okay, everyone. Have a nice week.

SALLY: Yeah, have a good one.

EMILY: Goodbye.

SALLY: Don't do war crimes [laughs].

EMILY: Jesus Christ.