

Whatever, I'll Watch It

Season 1 Episode 18

The White Lotus Season 3

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Alexia Arani: But yeah, we're gonna get into Season 3 today. There's always so many freaking themes and disturbing moments to unpack on the show. So yeah, I'm excited about it. So, Saiba, just in case people forgot who you are and need a refresher. Do you mind introducing yourself by sharing a little bit about who you are?

Saiba Varma: Sure. Hi, Alexia! Hi, listeners! I'm so happy to be back.

Saiba Varma: I am a writer, an anthropologist. I live in San Diego. I also have been a big fan of this podcast and have learned so much from it. And I've also been studying Buddhism for a while. So I'm really excited to get into some of the themes of season 3. Especially Thailand, spirituality, Buddhism, and tourism. You know all of those exciting things that we have to talk about. So thanks for having me.

Alexia Arani: Yeah, I'm excited. And actually, I feel like we should start there. Because so in our last discussion, we basically broke down that like season one was about kind of like race and colonialism, as like the major themes, and then season two was like

gender and sexuality, and then season three, I'm curious what you think, Mike White kind of told us like from the get-go like this seasons about spirituality and death.

Alexia Arani: And at least for me. I saw obviously themes of spirituality, but I didn't actually feel like it was like a huge focal point of the season. So at least, maybe not more so than what we kind of got sprinkled in like season one, and like going to the healer. So anyways, I don't know I'm really excited for your thoughts on it, but I kind of want to start there. If this season is supposed to be about spirituality, kind of where did you see it in the show? And like, what were your thoughts on, on how it was depicted?

Saiba Varma: Yeah, I mean, I actually did see a lot of themes. A lot of Buddhist themes come up throughout the whole season. And especially, I mean, I think all seasons are really taking on these questions of desire, particularly because the protagonists that we're encountering through this show are these ultra rich people right who are deeply invested in a hyper materialist life and are flirting with spirituality in different ways. But have kind of committed themselves to living this like very capitalist life for the most part, and so seeing that either be challenged in different ways, or, you know, break down in different ways, like we see in this season, I think, was something really interesting, and I think just like meditating on the idea of desire, and how it drives different characters.

Saiba Varma: And how they resisted, or how they responded to it. I think that was definitely the theme I saw going through the whole show.

Alexia Arani: That. Yeah, I'm glad you said show, because I feel like all seasons. It's like that, that endless greed and need for consumption. And like, not just of material objects, but also often, like people.

Saiba Varma: Oh, yeah.

Alexia Arani: Need to consume others. You know.

Saiba Varma: Yeah, people, places, things, experiences. Yeah, I think. And that way, I think it also captures just this whole wellness, this whole like culture of wellness, and this whole, you know kind of luxury, wellness, as this phenomenon that we're constantly like surrounded by. And it's supposed to be the answer to all of our pain and suffering. I feel like just does a really good job of yeah in general, of just questioning all of that. And I'd love to actually hear your take on, because I know in a past life you were someone who was studying tourism. You know just how you thought about it, just the kind of commodification of Thailand or Buddhism or spirituality, and how it comes out in this season. If you had thoughts about that.

Alexia Arani: Yeah, I mean, oh, my gosh, I need to think about it more. But I mean, yeah. So for myself, I went into my grad program, thinking I was studying tourism and quickly lost interest honestly. Part of it for me, if I'm being fully honest, is that I'm aware that there's a lot of issues with tourism and travel, and it's also something I really enjoyed. It was just.

Alexia Arani: Do I actually want to ruin this for myself? So yeah, I think that was part of it. I also will say as much as I hate to admit this. I do feel like I really related so much to Piper because, in addition to studying these things, you know, like, when I was in my junior year of college, like I studied abroad for a year, I went to Cuzco Peru for the first semester. And then I went to southwest China, and, like Tibet for the other part of the semester, and as a college student I studied a lot of Tibetan Buddhism. I was like, you know, meditating a lot. And I mean, personally, I do like I wouldn't say that I identify as a Buddhist. But if I did have to say like, oh, what makes the most sense to me like definitely Buddhist philosophies and practices are still what I find most like resonant for myself and, like, you know, I come from somewhat of like a mixed class background like definitely never grew up working class like had what I needed, but like my mom often had like even when she was married, I was kind of considered her a single mom, because she had these kind of short term marriages, and had like kids, and was always working and work with work and money, was always stress in her house, like stressful in her house versus like having a wealthy father and having that experience of traveling with him and stuff

Alexia Arani: So anyways, I could relate to like being this like little college student really interested in Buddhism, coming from a wealthy family and wanting to like reject, you know, their materialism and their fucked-up family dynamics, and I just felt so called out by Piper so often. It was like she just needed to be mixed race, and then it would have really, like, you know been more of that for me. But yeah, I just felt so called out, this is a big tangent. Sorry. But this is where I'm going.

Alexia Arani: So yeah, I mean, I think...I feel like I don't have a I'm like riffing, like this isn't a very formulated thought, but I guess I do have empathy. I do have empathy and understanding for why people flock towards like why Americans flock towards Buddhism and flock towards these like religious traditions.

Alexia Arani: You know it's kind of the same thing that, like the monk says in that scene to Tim to the father of the Ratliff family, like, yeah, people are disillusioned with Christianity and with Western consumeristic values. And all of these things. And they're looking for an alternative. So I feel like I do have, you know, empathy for that. And there's also this part of me that recognizes that I feel like I don't know. True sort of ethical spiritual practice is done anywhere, and that's kind of the point like you shouldn't have to, you know, flock to these far away locations to get some what you think of as authentic experience? Because even in the United States I feel like there's like monasteries or communities of Buddhist practice you can find almost anywhere that you don't need to run away to Southeast Asia to do that.

Alexia Arani: Yeah, I feel like I'm just rambling.

Saiba Varma: No, no, I mean.

Saiba Varma: No, no, I didn't think, I think that's all really right, like I think the Eat, Pray, Love model of you know spirituality is still very much very much intact in the Western imagination, as is just, I think, the profound misunderstanding of also what Buddhist practice is, and.

Alexia Arani: Yes.

Saiba Varma: I liked that Saxon becomes the foil, for, like a lot of that misunderstanding, you know, like that it's, it's the most like Douchey, and like Frat boy character, who is the most ignorant in this whole show. And I appreciated that move like this idea that you know he's like a Buddhist. Just want to suppress everything right. And it's like this choice between either full desire for everything all the time. And this belief that you're just as long as you can just fulfill all of your need, all of your desires, like happiness is gonna flow from that. And then this.

Saiba Varma: Some kind of other imagination of like total repression of all feelings and wants and needs. And yeah, I just thought that was like that opposition or like, that's that. Yeah. I think that those like polar opposites were really well.

Alexia Arani: I also, I feel like it's I think it's important to name. And this is also like something that's missing in my knowledge, I guess is that, like hopefully, people listening know this. But it's like Buddhism isn't one thing like there's so many different variants of Buddhism, and it looks extremely different, depending on like region or village. So for myself, too, like a lot of what I was like studying was Tibetan Buddhism, and like, I actually don't know really important differences with what that looks like in Thailand.

Alexia Arani: And also what you were just talking about is like suppression of feeling. And like I'm thinking about like Zen Buddhism, for example. And I feel like that's very

much. It's very much not about that, you know, like a lot of it is about the spontaneity and like the joy and the embodiment.

Alexia Arani: So yeah, I don't know. I just want to throw that out there, too, and I don't know if you have any reflections on like Thai specific Buddhism to share. But that's something I was thinking about a lot while watching the show was that even as someone who has some understanding of these things, I'm sure I was missing so much of like the nuance of what it looks like in that specific place.

Saiba Varma: I mean, yeah, I think that's really important. And I'm not an expert in Theravada Buddhism, like, I also study in the under the Zen tradition, the Mahayana tradition. And there are. They are really different, like But I understand the Theravada tradition is much more about actually shoring up your, not like the self, but it's like you can kind of be on your own and do your bodily practice, whereas in Mahayana it's much more about being in the world and practicing in the world, you know it's much more like outward facing practice. And I don't know how much that comes through in. You know. I feel like the only encounter we really get with like quote, unquote, authentic Buddhism. And the show is with the monk in the monastery, right? The Buddhist light kind of stuff we get in the hotel is that's all like, so right like, that's also highly packaged and commodified.

Saiba Varma: We can get into that. But but yeah, I did think that I was glad that it broke down. At least some of like the most most like basic misunderstandings that people might still have about Buddhism.

Saiba Varma: I did want to say one more thing, though, about the I was thinking also about how like a couple of the characters, but particularly, I think, Chelsea. I think, functions as a Bodhisattva in the show.

Alexia Arani: Oh, interesting!

Saiba Varma: Wondering what you thought about that. And I think.

Alexia Arani: You have to say more! You can't just.

Saiba Varma: I will, and I think Lachlan too, to some extent, even though he is, I think, on his way to becoming a narcissist as well. But so what I mean by that is, you know, there's this concept of Bodhisattva, which is this idea of a spiritual being who kind of commits themselves to remain in the world until everyone is liberated. Like all sentient beings, are liberated, so they themselves have attained enlightenment, but. Instead of like releasing themselves from the cycle. You know this like cycle of birth and death, they decide to come back, remain like in this human form, continue to be reincarnated until all sentient beings are liberated. And

Saiba Varma: You know, in Buddhism we talk about like Bodhisattvas. Also, it's just like ordinary people who help you out in your journey right like someone shows you an act of kindness like you're in a long queue at the airport, and someone lets you cut in line because you're super stressed or just. You know, offers you something when you need it, basically.

Saiba Varma: The universe coming through for you. And it takes a form of some kind of Bodhisattva, or an animal that, just like, you know, nuzzles you at the right moment when you're feeling really sad, is a Bodhisattva, and I thought Chelsea was really embodying that Bodhisattva character in this way. That is also true to what? How they describe both these efforts, which is that they often come in disguise.

Saiba Varma: We don't really know their form, and when I think when you first encounter Chelsea, she seems kind of silly and like you don't really know what to make of her right. She just seems naive and innocent, and Pollyanna Ish or something. And then as

the season progresses, you realize how much depth there is to her and how she's she's like on this journey to like, facilitate Rick's like whatever he needs to kind of realize in this life, not as just like a purely sacrificial thing. She's on her own spiritual journey. But she's such an important part, you know, like she's provided she's doing this like profound, like spiritual service to him. In this season. So. That's something I was thinking about as well.

Alexia Arani: That's so interesting. I feel like that's such a generous like. Read of her, too. Because I mean, like everyone, Chelsea's such a sweetheart like, and I love the actress. Aimee Lou Wood. She's great on sex education as well. She's magnetic, and I hope her career like takes off.

Alexia Arani: I think I feel like I read her more as like someone who likely has her own traumatic backgrounds likely had her own issues with her parents that, like really fostered this like codependency, and this desire to like, save and to like fix, which is so common. For like women, right to be socialized into like wanting to fix broken men to the point where I was like kind of scared for her with Saxon, because I was like, Oh, no! Is this going to be her new project, you know. Is this like? Is him showing her a glimmer of vulnerability? What she like gonna actually work in this seduction that he, this long game seduction. He's playing with her. So yeah, I didn't really think of her that way. But I think

Alexia Arani: I think that's really interesting and especially interesting, because, like, you know, usually when characters are there to like, facilitate the growth of other characters, we tend to like critique that as like kind of like objectifying. But I think, like you're saying, Chelsea feels deep. She doesn't feel like she's just there to facilitate the men around her at all, you know.

Saiba Varma: No, yeah. And I think she has a really profound understanding of interrelationality, like she, she says, like several times like our fates, are bound up with each other. That's not. She's not just saying that I'm just here for you, right? It's like she. I think she understands that his path and his trajectory are like something that. So it's

like outside of her control, and probably outside of something she like. She can't even fully understand right what it is, and he doesn't even fully communicated. But I think she lives in a way where she's really like she has commitment to someone. And this deep sense of yeah, being like, bound up together. And also, yeah, I like, I loved her refusal of Saxon, you know, she really pushes him off, and that, too, to me, was like a real Bodhisattva power move, because. It's not right like it's not about just being compassionate to everyone all the time, and equal measure.

Saiba Varma: You like. You have to also know when the person is like ready to receive something ready to receive and ready to open themselves up, and so she kind of like puts him on this path. But she doesn't actually, emotionally invest in him at all.

Alexia Arani: Yeah.

Saiba Varma: And actually like rejects him on, you know. And I thought that was also like, yes, I like that. She's this like Trojan horse. She's like this, you know, unassuming young woman. And yet she has so much. Yeah, like, she has a lot of spiritual depth. Actually.

Alexia Arani: I wonder I feel like there's some, maybe potential irony or contradiction in what you were just saying, though, because I actually feel like I was really surprised with the way my feelings towards Saxon shifted over the season where I actually feel like he ended up in a place where you're like, Wait, is, is he actually open to these lessons, you know, because even after he's done trying to impress Chelsea, he's still like reading the book that she gave him, you know. So I actually feel like he ended up, maybe being the one who had like more potential. Whereas we see that Rick was actually like deeply committed to the path that he was on, and she could do nothing to disrupt that, you know, like I actually see him as the one who is completely, spiritually closed, and Saxon, maybe, is having more openness.

Saiba Varma: Yeah, I mean, that's a really good observation. I agree with you. I think that I think yesterday I was just like hearing this parable about? you know, it's like they're different kind, like we. We're all like different kinds of vessels, and one of the vessels is like when you're too full, right? You can't actually like receive any new knowledge. It's like you're already like overflowing with stuff. You're overflowing with judgment. You're overflowing with cynicism you think you like know everything. And I think what you're describing actually is like a really good way of thinking about Rick's character. And I think you're right, I think. I mean, I think Saxon begins that way as well. He's over full.

Alexia Arani: Okay.

Saiba Varma: Knowing with like he thinks he knows the world. It's this experience of maybe we're jumping to the next theme. Da-da-da has experience.

Alexia Arani: It could be fluid, you know.

Saiba Varma: The full moon party and the incest, and that yeah, it provides. Maybe there's like a little hole in the pot now, and so. It's gonna kind of come in.

Alexia Arani: Yeah, I feel like, yeah, we will get there. I do want to stick a PIN in that, because I think there's a couple more things like you mentioned. You think the show got some basic things right, or cleared up some misconceptions and a few things I really appreciated about that. I love that when she goes to the Temple they're like the monks are on laptops and like organizing appointments, and just showing, you know, because I think people this idyllic like vision in their head that, like Buddhism, is the antithesis of modernity or something. And it's not so. I appreciated that. And I appreciated them, showing like people making offerings to ask for like a promotion and stuff.

Alexia Arani: Because again, I think you know, when I studied abroad, that was something that I was surprised by, because in this Western imaginary it's like Buddhism's all peace, and it's like people make offerings and ask for a new shiny car or to get an A on their test, you know. So I appreciated that. And then I actually love the part where

Alexia Arani: where Chelsea's trying to encourage Rick to go do the meditation class, and she's like she's so wise. And Rick is like, why? Because she's Indian, and Chelsea's just kind of like, yeah. So I kind of like that. They're calling out, you know that just because she's like Indian and has an accent that you know Chelsea is like, Oh, she's spiritual. She seems so wise.

Alexia Arani: Yeah, like a nice little self-aware moment.

Saiba Varma: Yeah, it was. And I was. if you remember, actually the first scene when the show opens, it actually opens with her Amrita, and it opens with Belinda's son, and she's trying to.

Alexia Arani: That's right.

Saiba Varma: In a meditation, and then as soon as well. One is like the gunshots go off, and she has no idea right which is kind of

Alexia Arani: Yeah.

Saiba Varma: It's also a caricature of a meditation is supposed to make you hyper aware of what's going on around you. Unaware of what's going on, and so she misses that, and then, as soon as they're the gunshots, and she's the first one to run away. You know, she just she just runs and I think that was also just a funny. I did like her character, but I thought it was. There was like there was humor there that maybe. I don't know if people got it, but I got it, and I enjoyed that little. You know. This like luxury. Hotel version of spirituality is like, it's really skin deep.

Alexia Arani: Yeah, I think the one like one other thing I really wanted to touch on and get your thoughts, on which maybe this is like, too niche. But something. Something I was reading about, too, was like the way that the monk talks to Tim like the father of the Ratliffe family about death. Which I saw. Some people are drawing comparisons. I don't know if you've seen the good place, but there's also like a quote that they use in the good place. Talking about death is like, you know, life is like a wave, and we're returning to the wave, and it was very similar, but I could be mistaken. I think the quote in the good place was coming from Zen Buddhism, I believe.

Alexia Arani: But I don't know. I wonder what you thought I know for myself. I felt kind of surprised with him. Kind of telling like, oh, death! It's like you return to the water, and it's all good like. And I was reading, I'll link to it in the show notes. I think it's worth reading. It was a really interesting roundup of different Buddhist practitioners and scholars, and Thai people talk like giving their thoughts on the authenticity of the Buddhist representation on the show, and I did see quite a few people who said they were really jarred by the monks saying that because you know, their understandings of the afterlife, and Buddhism is like so tied to Karma and like rebirth, and that was totally missing for what he had to say. So it kind of felt like it was maybe just this like convenient plot device to give him permission to potentially kill himself and his family that felt not rooted in my understandings of Buddhism. So I don't know if you had thoughts on that conversation, or if that struck you as weird at all.

Saiba Varma: Yeah, I mean, I agree with that.

Saiba Varma: It's not, I think if someone had asked me like, What's the Buddhist perspective on death, that's not immediately what I would have

Saiba Varma: you know. That's not what I would have thought of.

Saiba Varma: And so in that sense, yeah, I agree with you that it was. Probably

Saiba Varma: it was useful for him to hear that at that moment. But then there is also that other aspect of

Saiba Varma: like. Put this knowledge where you

Saiba Varma: you know, there's this idea that you give the person like the knowledge that they can receive. It's like you, tailor. That's why they're like so many different kinds of meditation practices, for example, because not everyone can like sit and meditate. So you have

Saiba Varma: cooking, meditation or eating meditation or walking. You know.

Saiba Varma: And the idea is just like you.

Saiba Varma: you yeah, you have to find, like the right

Saiba Varma: vessel for the person. And so

Saiba Varma: I also kind of read it in that way that this is like this.

Saiba Varma: A spiritual teacher who can see through this person basically

Saiba Varma: kind of see what they need to hear.

Saiba Varma: and what he needed to hear at that moment, I think, was

Saiba Varma: yeah, not to fear death, but then also not this idea of death as an end.

Saiba Varma: I think it's like really important, right? Because he's coming from this very

Saiba Varma: like Christian, like Southern idea of death as failure.

Saiba Varma: And

Saiba Varma: it's tied up with this whole because he's like the patriarch of the family, and his financial ruin is like spells ruin for the entire family like they can't imagine a life beyond

Saiba Varma: this, like wealthy existence that they have. So I kind of read it as like the monk

Saiba Varma: in some way sensing.

Saiba Varma: Some of that, and then giving him like the wisdom that he needed at that moment, and that he was like able to receive as well.

Alexia Arani: Yeah, when you were saying that it also made me go back to thinking about Chelsea as a Bodhisattva. And I'm like, in that case like, maybe she knows that, like what Rick actually needs is like endless compassion. And what Saxon needs is literally to be nagged like this man like he needs rejection. That's like, actually what he needed to like. Learn a lesson. You know.

Saiba Varma: Yeah, I think she didn't know

Saiba Varma: like I you know she was. She was kind of like a doctor in that way, right like she knew what treatment like different people needed.

Saiba Varma: And

Saiba Varma: including Chloe as well, like who was also suffering, you know in her own way, and she needed her to be her friend.

Alexia Arani: And.

Saiba Varma: You know, I mean, they needed each other as well. And I think, yeah, just her ability to also gauge. That was.

Saiba Varma: I saw, as like part of our spiritual evolution.

Saiba Varma: Yeah.

Alexia Arani: Yeah. Is there more? You wanted to talk? I'm sure it will come up throughout the conversation. But is there more on this piece? Or do we actually kind of want to move into the Saxon?

Alexia Arani: Yeah, let's move into, we have a lot of juicy things. Yeah.

Alexia Arani: yeah. So something. I was thinking about so.

Alexia Arani: sorry. I'm trying to go back to what you were saying in the conversation that was.

Saiba Varma: Sorry. Actually, I'm thinking

Saiba Varma: I was also thinking, I don't know if you want to try this in now, but, like the other thing I, I thought, was interesting, also goes back to this idea of people being in disguises, which is that

Saiba Varma: it's the Mook and Gaitok piece, right? Which is that.

Saiba Varma: Who you would expect. I saw a little bit about this online, too, like

Saiba Varma: she's Thai right? She's supposedly like local Buddhist, whatever. And she's basically the most on Buddhist.

Alexia Arani: Character and so many things.

Alexia Arani: Yeah.

Saiba Varma: Like in the way you know, and how she like, pushes

Saiba Varma: Gaitok into this life of violence essentially, and ambition, and

Saiba Varma: makes them feel inadequate and makes them feel like.

Saiba Varma: yeah, like on like, not good enough, right? Like dissatisfied. And

Saiba Varma: so I thought that was interesting. That was like an interesting thing, too, is like this container of this person who you would expect to be embodying all of the ideals, is actually.

Alexia Arani: Yeah.

Saiba Varma: Not that.

Alexia Arani: Yeah, I saw some Thai viewers reacting online who said they felt very.

Alexia Arani: They felt shocked by that and felt, I don't know. They said, yeah, had a hard time imagining her really acting in that way. And also some Thai responses that I thought were helpful to contextualize Gaitok, and how seemingly incompetent and infuriating he was at his job, but also like, I don't know, some viewers who are just saying like, well, this actually feels really rooted in Thai culture and wanting to be like not wanting to be direct and not wanting to be confrontational. So I don't know just throwing that out there.

Saiba Varma: Yeah, I did think he was I did feel like he was more believable to me as a character like she just seemed

Saiba Varma: also, I mean, this might sound like really minor, but like even the way she was dressed, and stuff like her shorts, and I mean, I know that was like supposedly the uniform. But I could not imagine

Saiba Varma: a hotel in Thailand, and like women wearing like these tiny shorts and like running around on motorcycles. It just seemed.

Saiba Varma: Really, it seemed like an odd choice of costume design. And

Saiba Varma: oh, yeah, also, just like fed into this, like her un-Thainess in a way.

Alexia Arani: Yeah, I definitely think like a major critique of the season for me is that they did so little with the Thai cast.

Saiba Varma: Yes.

Saiba Varma: No.

Saiba Varma: Consent. Yeah. Like.

Alexia Arani: Gaitok and Mook like did not need to be there at all. I mean, it seemed like Gaitok's whole thing was just to have the gun to make us scared for a few episodes with the Ratliff family. But yeah, they just did

Alexia Arani: so little and pretty much nothing with them. And like, you know, Amrita, we see her a couple of times where she gets absolutely no character development.

Alexia Arani: Yeah, I just like that really failed the Thai people in the season.

Saiba Varma: I agree? Yeah, that's and I feel like that was such a strength of other seasons was how

Saiba Varma: like, how crucial the staff were to the whole show, and it was like that

Saiba Varma: encounter between the staff and the guests that was like so full of friction and.

Saiba Varma: Right, like I was such so productive as a viewer to be like

Saiba Varma: part of those. And you could really.

Saiba Varma: And here, I just felt like, yeah, I agree with you that the there wasn't any life that was like outside of the resort. You know everything. They were all just completely circumscribed by the context of the resort we like got no sense of Thailand.

Saiba Varma: What's happening beyond the walls, you know.

Alexia Arani: Hmm.

Saiba Varma: Yeah, I was. I was pretty disappointed by that as well. And I think it was sad also that Gaitok who I think, was probably like the most fleshed out staff character.

Saiba Varma: His is like a loss of innocence. Story.

Alexia Arani: Yeah.

Saiba Varma: Which is just sad.

Saiba Varma: You know, like I wanted so much more for him

Saiba Varma: than to just become like this. Yeah, to lose his sweetness and to lose his

Saiba Varma: like just genuine, like curiosity and openness to the world, and become this like violent gangster person. And

Saiba Varma: I just felt it was just disappointing.

Saiba Varma: Yeah.

Alexia Arani: Yeah. And then.

Alexia Arani: like Porn Chai, who like he's almost like what Belinda was in season, one as just this like undeveloped just caring

Alexia Arani: character.

Saiba Varma: Yeah.

Alexia Arani: And I had issue with like, I feel like the writers were trying to mirror that like look

Alexia Arani: wealth corrupts. And now that Belinda has money. She's doing what Tanya did, and Porn Chai's Belinda. And I don't know. I just I really struggled with that. I did not think that those situations actually like mirrored each other the same way. But I think we're maybe left to think that, like Porn Chai is left feeling like abandoned and betrayed, and that he didn't get his good ending either.

Alexia Arani: Which I'm kind of like. Did anyone get a good ending this season? Because I know, like, you know, season one. We have that like white boy who gets to like, you know, kayak, or whatever season. Sorry I'm like. No, it's not even what happened, but I can't remember. Season . We get like the sex workers, one which I love.

Saiba Varma: Yeah, that's.

Alexia Arani: Then, this season, I'm like, did anyone come out better than we found them?

Saiba Varma: Yeah, that's such a good question.

Alexia Arani: It was a dark season.

Alexia Arani: I guess Belinda's our winner, but.

Saiba Varma: But yeah, I didn't, really. I didn't love like that whole plot line.

Saiba Varma: I I'd love to hear what you thought about it. But I just

Saiba Varma: yeah, I just thought it was like, too bad. You know, I was like, okay, like the person who was exploited like, I didn't know if we were supposed to be rooting for her in the end, like oh, she got her million dollars like that's justice.

Saiba Varma: And now she gets to be like part of this class of people, or whatever were we supposed to feel good about that? Or were we supposed to feel

Saiba Varma: like that? Was another kind of betrayal. I just didn't.

Alexia Arani: I feel like both. I feel like, yeah, I feel like we're supposed to feel like good for her. That oh, like she got what she, you know, because she was like

Alexia Arani: you know, robbed, or whatever of what Tanya promised her in season one. So I feel like we're supposed to feel good for her, and that she's like getting out of this industry. But then we're also supposed to see her as like corrupted because she's leaving Porn Chai, behind which I don't agree with. She just met this man.

Saiba Varma: It's nothing.

Alexia Arani: She never! She never even like acted interested in going into business with him when he proposed it. So I just don't buy it

Alexia Arani: but I think we are supposed to be rooting for her.

Saiba Varma: I did, though, feel that her son was like

Saiba Varma: ambivalent like I, I felt a lot of ambivalence towards him. I felt like

Saiba Varma: he in a way exemplified like this neoliberal.

Saiba Varma: this like person of color, neoliberal subject, you know. He's like business, Major, and he's like

Saiba Varma: just he's like trying to figure out the rules of this world, and he's like play right like playing these games.

Saiba Varma: And I felt like he, I know, like she has agency in in, and then she's like plays along like she

Saiba Varma: does a lot of like the machinations herself. So I'm not trying to think she's a pawn of him, but I did feel like his presence complicated

Saiba Varma: my like complicating my understanding of her as a character, my relationship to her as a character, you know, I felt like it's much more sympathetic towards her until.

Saiba Varma: yeah, it was like this new, this like new generation of people who's to me. He's he just seemed like extremely cynical

Saiba Varma: and.

Alexia Arani: Okay.

Saiba Varma: Couldn't. Really.

Saiba Varma: This is hard for me to like root for him.

Alexia Arani: Yeah, I don't. I don't definitely don't think we were meant to, because I mean especially the negotiation thing. He just comes off so Douche, you know, just like such an overconfident and like naive

Alexia Arani: like undergrad, you know.

Alexia Arani: He was like also another Duke student.

Saiba Varma: To me, you know.

Alexia Arani: Yeah, I'm like, you know, maybe this season it's like, I'm sad about the

Alexia Arani: treatment of the Thai characters. And maybe it's all it's really just the characters of color, like altogether.

Saiba Varma: Yeah.

Alexia Arani: Know, and I also think part of like. I don't know if this resonates for you, but I think part of the Belinda storyline too, like something I wrestled with this season. Is it just started to feel very soapy, feel very soapy? It felt like there was a lot more attention onto plot points and mystery than the like. Like. You said, the tensions between people and these, like.

Alexia Arani: you know, yeah, these little, these tensions between people and these like character developments like that happened a little bit. But I feel like a lot of that was really sacrificed in service of the like. What's gonna happen with the gun? Is he gonna shoot the family like, you know? Who's Rick gonna murder like that? It just was too much like, I kind of like, and I noticed, like, I think.

Alexia Arani: maybe, how some like viewers and critics also felt. But I just missed that from the first couple of seasons, and it felt kind of almost manipulative, too, of just like dragging out the sense of like dread and anxiety where it's just like, okay. Some of this, you know, is like storytelling, and some of this just feels like manipulative at a certain point.

Saiba Varma: I totally agree with you. I felt like

Saiba Varma: I'm I felt tired with this whole framing of like this murder mystery, and that that's

Saiba Varma: somehow supposed to

Saiba Varma: keep our interest in the show. It's like to figure out who did it. And in conversations with people I noticed like, that's what they would latch onto when they didn't want to actually talk about all of like the micro tensions that were happening like it just became such a convenient

Saiba Varma: thing to focus on. Instead, it's like, who's gonna die right?

Saiba Varma: And it's almost like a game. And I just felt like, okay, at this point like, we don't need that. We're already.

Alexia Arani: Interesting.

Saiba Varma: In the show. I feel like the power of the show is precisely in these.

Saiba Varma: in the way that it shows these micro dynamics. It's like.

Saiba Varma: Side glances and the back chatter and the right like just the power play within these very intimate relationships.

Alexia Arani: That's what I'm there for. And I think that's what you're there for you know and yeah.

Saiba Varma: I just felt like the like. We don't need this conceit.

Saiba Varma: I hope they don't do it in season. .

Alexia Arani: Yeah, I think, too, I think I really struggled with Rick's character and storyline for that reason, too, because it was I actually really enjoyed his character in the first few episodes, like seeing his evolving relationships with Chelsea, his dynamics with Amrita like that all was very interesting to me, and like I'm sure we'll get into his conversation with his friend. Frank was like, that's all interesting. But as soon as I got more focused on the revenge storyline again. It just felt like a soap opera, you know, and like.

Alexia Arani: and like the twist at the end that it's his dad and but there's also something almost. I don't know if this is intentional. It almost feels kind of Shakespearean, too, you know it just kind of felt like a classic Shakespeare sort of tragedy. I don't. I don't know. I don't think comedy of errors is the right term, but it felt like.

Alexia Arani: Yeah, I don't know if there was a play with that, but it also just felt like a weird thing to try to bring in when you're also trying to do a season focused on spirituality and death. It's just like there's too much, you know.

Saiba Varma: Yeah. And I think the I think his arc was.

Saiba Varma: yeah, I think I mean, I think you like hit it on the head earlier when you were talking about how he's really unable to grow. It's like for him. It's like his Karma catches up, you know. It's like this is the time. His karma's like catching up to him, and he's unable to escape his

Saiba Varma: his own instincts. It's like he has this opportunity, like Chelsea is there? She's trying to pull him out like there is this opening for him to

Saiba Varma: live a different kind of life, or do something different, and he's just unable to do it, and he

Saiba Varma: ends up precisely like fulfilling the.

Saiba Varma: you know, like the thing that's already. It's like already latent in him. And I think that's what makes him really tragic.

Alexia Arani: No, and like

Alexia Arani: the way that he, and like Chelsea's death, of course, right? That's like the tragedy is like it ends up harming

Alexia Arani: the one person who's like really ride or die, and like.

Saiba Varma: Yeah, I mean, I think to be generous. It's like there, there are those moments where he's

Saiba Varma: he. You feel like he's at the brink of like some kind of transformation that maybe he can actually

Saiba Varma: stop all of this from happening. But then there's yeah. Then of course he doesn't. But

Saiba Varma: yeah, I mean, I do think in terms of like.

Saiba Varma: yeah, in terms of thinking about your Karma. I think it does.

Saiba Varma: He? He is like telling us something. His character is kind of

Saiba Varma: it's like some kind of lesson, but it's not a satisfying one. I agree with you that it feels the way that it was. It felt very like artificially constructed like this whole dad plot line and all of that. Yeah.

Alexia Arani: Yeah, I think I think for me.

Alexia Arani: for me. The Ratliff family carried the season.

Saiba Varma: Me too.

Alexia Arani: Yeah, it like that was the core of like what was fascinating. And it also feels closer to the root, you know, of, like showing those interpersonal dynamics that are so

interesting, and we'll switch into more of what was interesting. But my one exception to that is, I just think they went. It was just too much of Tim

Alexia Arani: like sweating and taking the pills with no water like I can understand him doing that like once, but like y'all like or like he just like hugs it back. It's like a dog about to like throw up a bone like, Oh, I got tired of that, and just like you know how many episodes ended with him, just like staring off

Alexia Arani: and like

Alexia Arani: if that whole thing was just like way, too, dragged out for me. But besides that, and okay, sorry. Now that I'm ranting the fact that no one in the family was like, Dad, you're on pills that also really upset me, and that he's like taking a shit ton of Lorazepam and heavily drinking like he would have passed out, or like he was not exhibiting the behaviors of someone who's mixing substances in that way. So that's also bad, like public health education for people watching.

Saiba Varma: Don't mix your lorazepam and alcohol.

Alexia Arani: Yeah, no, I mean, Victoria can like she's been

Alexia Arani: for a while. She has the stamina, you know, but like a newbie like Tim, no way.

Saiba Varma: Yeah, I mean, I don't know what that particular cocktail is, but I just assumed that because he just became like a zombie right? Like he completely shut down. And I just assumed that that's what

Saiba Varma: that competition would do to someone.

Alexia Arani: Feel like he would have like, yeah, shutting down. And they did show him like slurring and stuff a little bit. But I feel like he would have been

Alexia Arani: I don't know, like I don't think he would have been nearly as functional as he was.

Alexia Arani: He would have passed out. He would have been sleeping through many of the scenes where he was.

Alexia Arani: you know, just seeming a little off.

Saiba Varma: I mean I.

Alexia Arani: Anyways, that's.

Saiba Varma: No, no, I I'm glad we're getting into the rack list. I agree that that was for me also, the

Saiba Varma: yeah, really, like the juiciest part of the show this this season, and also, you know, I feel like every season has its heartbreak.

Alexia Arani: And I think Piper was definitely like.

Saiba Varma: This for me, anyway. That was this. It was the heart, the heartbreak of this scene.

Saiba Varma: But yeah, I mean, I do. I do think the lack of noticing on the part of everyone was

Saiba Varma: that was deliberate right? Because this is a family that does it actually communicate.

Alexia Arani: Yeah.

Saiba Varma: With each other. And so I thought that was just very telling that everyone's like trapped in their own little

Saiba Varma: bubble, basically. And.

Alexia Arani: Yeah.

Saiba Varma: first like silently suffering, without anyone.

Alexia Arani: I mean to be fair. They did notice, like Victoria and Saxon, both multiple times. And Piper, I think almost everyone but Laughlin, which makes sense, I think, was like, you seem weird. Are you okay? What's going on? But the fact that none of them made the connection of clearly what's happening was annoying. But.

Saiba Varma: Yeah.

Alexia Arani: Yeah, clearly, they are all about like avoidance and not directly naming things.

Saiba Varma: Yeah. And I'm sure it's not the first time he's behaved in that kind of way before, right? Like, it's probably

Saiba Varma: that there's work stuff that's happening, and he probably just shuts off.

Alexia Arani: Imagine this is like part of a broader pattern of Md, difficult things.

Alexia Arani: Yeah, but we're like, Oh, my God, we're talking about the least interesting person.

Saiba Varma: I know. Sorry.

Alexia Arani: Tim, let's get into the other ones. No, it's okay. I know you did it, but.

Saiba Varma: As someone who taught a duke, though I have to say I loved all the Duke. People getting so mad.

Saiba Varma: Do people.

Alexia Arani: Mad about the show.

Saiba Varma: About this about the fact that he was from Duke, and he was wearing the Duke shirt when he was

Saiba Varma: like suicidal and.

Alexia Arani: Oh, my God, I mean, I don't know like the intricacies, but someone who, like grew up in the South, it feels right.

Saiba Varma: Yeah, it felt so good. It was very.

Alexia Arani: Also like, Oh, oh, my God! So I know. Okay, so more into Lexia's backstory.

Alexia Arani: so I'm from the South.

Alexia Arani: and most of my family in the South is white, a mixed race, so like a lot of my white family. I will say, though, that my family is not like the Ratliff family, because, like most of my like white Southern family, are not like preppy and rich like this. So this this didn't feel real to my family like my. Even my white brothers and stuff are not like preppy Duke kids. But I've seen

Alexia Arani: breed of family, I know. Thank God, I mean they have their own issues, but not these. But yeah, this breed of family. And like, I have a specific like Saxon in particular, I'm just like, Oh, my God. And I doubt this person. Listen to the Podcast, but I can't name it because I just do not want to be offensive. But there's like a specific person that I'm just like, I know this guy like I've met him and his Douchebros friends, and it was I was just like crawling out of my skin because it was so real. And I was just having like

Alexia Arani: ugh! Just flashbacks to being around these guys.

Alexia Arani: also, like kind of Saxon's fascination with

Alexia Arani: Chelsea like. Obviously she's gorgeous, and that's part of it. But I also feel like I had those experiences of being the like.

Alexia Arani: I don't know the kind of like indie like missed race girl with like hairy armpits like those guys would usually like think that was gross, but also feel like there was like a challenge in it for them, you know, of like wanting, because I was so uninterested, so that whole dynamic also just felt resident to me, and was just like, you know. I remember these experiences.

Saiba Varma: Yeah, no, I think that's such a huge part of his

Saiba Varma: attraction to her is that he can't get her right, and his whole MO in life is like

Saiba Varma: you can get anything.

Alexia Arani: Exactly.

Saiba Varma: That you want, and if that's and that like plays out in this like horrific way with the incest.

Saiba Varma: You know. But

Saiba Varma: yeah, I think that's like, yeah, it totally get that. Yeah, he just I mean what a great piece of costing. I think you know. I think.

Alexia Arani: He acted the hell out of that role.

Saiba Varma: He did, but also like Patrick Schwarzenegger.

Saiba Varma: Great good job casting director for putting this person in this room. I yeah, I love.

Alexia Arani: Oakland's also a nepo baby, right? I don't remember.

Saiba Varma: What is he?

Alexia Arani: Yeah, I don't remember the actor's name. I don't know his parents, but he also has famous parents, that actor as well. So yeah.

Alexia Arani: okay, I feel like it's come up a couple of times. I was re-listening to our podcast. Earlier today for season, one and something you pointed out in that episode is how all of the seasons have this moment of rupture centered around gay sex, and it literally happened again in season ,

Alexia Arani: which was so fascinating to me. Which I'm like we don't have to unearth that whole conversation around that. So we talked about it in season ones and feel free to go. Listen to it. Y'all if you don't remember on like, you know. Why Mike White puts in these sort of like

Alexia Arani: non-normative, deviant, gay sex things like we had the conversation already, but it was just like, Wow, they're doing it again this season with it. The gay sex in this case, being deviant and criminal and like rupturing, because it's like incestual between the brothers.

Alexia Arani: So that was interesting to notice.

Alexia Arani: But yeah, I so for listeners who don't know this. When I started watching the white lotus, I texted Saiba, and I was just like, Oh, my God! Like I do not want to talk about incest. But then, as the season went on, I was like, Okay, now, now, I actually like, do want to talk. It's like a weird thing to say, do you want to talk about incest? But just the ways I'm seeing people respond to it and talk about it online? I feel like I have to like.

Alexia Arani: intervene, and offer a different perspective. So.

Saiba Varma: Yeah, please do. I'd love to hear what you.

Alexia Arani: Yeah. So I mean, first of all, a lot of what I'm seeing. That I was really struggling with is like, I'm seeing so much depiction of Lachlan as a predator

Alexia Arani: like down to people making theories that Lachlan, like, spat out the drugs that he was given at the full Moon party, and that he was sober and faking it, and that he's you know, that he victimized his brother, like, you know, people saying he's a psychopath. You could see it from the beginning. And it's just it's such a clear like.

Alexia Arani: It just shows me how

Alexia Arani: like how wrapped up our society is in like casting people who engage in deviant sex acts as like

Alexia Arani: pathological and criminal like. It's just such a clear thread. And I think I didn't want to talk about this, because it's of those topics where I can see someone like hearing what I say, and like

Alexia Arani: taking it to the extreme, or willfully misinterpreting it and like getting pissy. But I'm like whatever I feel like I need to say my peace with this, you know.

Alexia Arani: And I just think it's I don't agree at all with that analysis. I think it's a lot more complicated. I think that there's ways in which, like Saxon, is almost like grooming Lachlan. first of all, you know where he's trying to like

Alexia Arani: He's like socializing him into like rape culture and like teaching him how to like. Take advantage of women, and how he needs to stay sober and, like.

Alexia Arani: you know, he's teaching these predatory behaviors to his brother. And then, of course, you know, as Lachlan said, like all you care about is getting off. He's talking all the time about that. He's like showing poor boundaries with his brother, but, like masturbating in front of him. And all of these things that like when you have, like a young, impressionable person like Lachlan, who is also like on drugs. And like, he said, I'm a people pleaser.

Alexia Arani: you know. I just don't think that Saxon is like this purely innocent victim in that dynamic at all. Which is how people are like portraying it online.

Alexia Arani: And I mean, there's a lot more to unpack. But I think the other thing that I'll say, too, and this is the part that feels like sticky to talk about. But like

Alexia Arani: I think obviously like incest, has a huge social taboo. I think some of that makes sense because there are really tricky power dynamics that come into play when you have family members and people of different ages and things like that. But that being said like, I also think incestual desire and incestual, like relationships like happen.

Alexia Arani: I think you know, especially, I feel like I know a number of people who some early experiences of like exploring sexuality would be like hooking up with a cousin or something like that, you know. So I also think there's ways that these discourses, like really

Alexia Arani: stigmatize people who have had experiences like this, that I think honestly, are not that uncommon?

Alexia Arani: So that's just kind of like my take on it. And, like, you know, power like the power dynamics are an issue. There's a lot of things we can break down. But in general I tend to just like I have a hard time with like black and white hardline policing of sexual deviance, you know. And

Alexia Arani: I guess. Yeah, that's I'll get off of my like pedestal. This is just what I have to say about the incest. Curious, if you what your thoughts are, Saiba.

Saiba Varma: Yeah, no, I think that's really. I think that's really great. And I hadn't heard those I hadn't heard like that line of interpretation which I just find so bizarre. I'm like just trying to wrap my head around that I'm like.

Alexia Arani: It's all over reddit.

Saiba Varma: Like. Do you not understand what the dynamics of this family are at all to, anyway? It's it seems, really off to me as well, so I'm glad you

Saiba Varma: I'm glad you brought that up. Yeah, I mean for me, I think. Yeah, I agree with everything you said. And I

Saiba Varma: I was really reading it, like from the framework.

Saiba Varma: like from the perspective of like sex and desire, right and like just this idea that, like from Saxons

Saiba Varma: point of view which is again like this.

Saiba Varma: like you need to like, own everything right, and like owning everything is like the way to live, and it's the way to happiness and all of that, and that

Saiba Varma: includes your family like you need to like, have ownership over all of them, and that takes this like

Saiba Varma: turn that he like, does not anticipate, and cannot.

Saiba Varma: But yet it is like the fulfillment of what he is

Saiba Varma: pushing for, and he's like kind of pushing Lachlan towards this right anyway. And so when it kind of.

Alexia Arani: His karma, catching up with him also.

Saiba Varma: Exactly. Yeah, that's kind of how I saw it, you know, as

Saiba Varma: and then he's like, actually unable to like.

Saiba Varma: He's unable to really stomach it.

Saiba Varma: And

Saiba Varma: and it, yeah, it produces like a new, maybe, maybe like a tiny glimmer of something new for him to kind of think about, but I also thought it was. I mean, I know, like the whole him and Lachlan thing was like the

Saiba Varma: that was like the main

Saiba Varma: thing we were supposed to focus on, but

Saiba Varma: he was also like doing the stuff with Piper. He was like constantly commenting on her sexuality.

Saiba Varma: Like no boundaries. He was like.

Saiba Varma: Making these jokes between about Lachlan and Piper. You know there's a scene right in the beginning when Lachlan, I think Piper says, like, oh, Lachlan, you can sleep in my room if you know he's like what like, you can't sleep in her room like, and

Saiba Varma: to me it was just about

Saiba Varma: control and ownership. And he's this narcissist, and he needs he actually wants Lachlan to desire him, you know, that is like at the found, and he wants everyone to him right, and that's like the foundation of his ego. And

Saiba Varma: that breaks, you know, at that point in the season. So I was kind of reading it more through. Sorry I like that, was rambling, but that's.

Alexia Arani: No, it wasn't at all.

Saiba Varma: I was thinking about it.

Alexia Arani: Yeah, that makes a lot of sense.

Alexia Arani: Yeah. And then it's interesting. So it's like it, it comes up again with Greg,

Alexia Arani: And again in a way that really like.

Alexia Arani: I know, Mike White says he's trying to like subvert expectations and play with deviance, and I just feel like it ends up, reinforcing all of these things like

Alexia Arani: first

Alexia Arani: and I feel that a lot of the way with like Greg, and how you know it's revealed that he's into like cuckolding like he likes watching people, you know. Fuck his wife. But then it's not enough that he's just into this like deviant sex act. We have to then like, pathologize it, and like bring it back to like. You know, these childhood experiences of overhearing his parents having sex which you know the way that the

Alexia Arani: characters are reacting and the way the audience is supposed to react is all painting that like clearly, there's something depraved with Greg, that he, like.

Alexia Arani: you know, was experiencing desire and getting off as he's like overhearing his parents having sex, and, like, you know, they do mention like revulsion all these feelings he was moving through. And like again, I just think that's an experience that, like a lot of people have had of like overhearing their parents overhearing family members, you know, having sex. And like.

Alexia Arani: I think there's like an array of like feelings that that would cause that could also include like, yeah, like having interest, or curious or sexual fantasies, or being aroused by things even as you're repulsed by them like that just feels human to me.

Alexia Arani: So it just really felt like some like just more like unnecessary, like stigmatization of these like deviant sexual practices. And it was like wrapped up in Greg, of course, being like a villain too, and this is like part of his villainy the same way that, like you know, the gay men in season, are the villains who are like fucking the young sex worker and killing people like. It's just this threat that I'm just.

Alexia Arani: I don't think it's subversive bike. I don't like it.

Saiba Varma: Yeah, no, I agree. And then also Chloe in the end just becoming an instrument of his fulfilling this fantasy for him. Right?

Saiba Varma: I also did that where I mean, and that like dynamic.

Saiba Varma: it just felt different than the I mean. I felt like they were trying to draw a parallel between that dynamic and like Chelsea and Rick. But I just

Saiba Varma: like with Chelsea and Rick. There was a lot more

Saiba Varma: there was like some something mutual happening which maybe we didn't

Saiba Varma: like get the full ex like we didn't fully understand, like the history of their relationship, which I think like we could have. But with Chloe and Greg it just seemed like

Saiba Varma: this very instrumental relationship on both sides. You know, she's like.

Saiba Varma: I have a pretty good. I'm on this book like I'll make this work, you know, and

Saiba Varma: like. What is she other than that? What is she getting out of this.

Alexia Arani: I think, for Chloe. I feel like I read that a little differently where like, because it's instrumentalized on both sides.

Alexia Arani: Her like, you know, recruiting men to fuck, or whatever. I didn't read that as much as like her, just like giving in to his desires. If anything, I feel like. That's an arrangement that probably would work well for Chloe, too, because, like.

Alexia Arani: you know, if she's clearly a young woman who's like sexual and interested in having sex with other people. And I feel like this actually gives her a way to do that without potentially disrupting her relationship and her economic security and all the things she's getting out of her time with Greg. So I don't know. I kind of felt like, oh, this probably is going to work well for both of them. You know that she doesn't have to sneak around anymore, and she can keep doing what she wanted. And

Alexia Arani: relationship can still be stable at the end.

Saiba Varma: Yeah. But then, isn't that like a kind of good resolution.

Saiba Varma: do it? Where then? Greg's desire is maybe no longer just like deviant. But then it's folded into.

Saiba Varma: you know, different kind of.

Alexia Arani: Well, yeah, but I think as the audience, we're meant to see the whole thing as twisted and deviant, and then both as like perverse characters, because we also get that she was like the mail order bride, a sex worker like. There's ways in which Chloe is also painted as sexually deviant also her like seduction of like a minor. You know her attraction to Locklead and

Alexia Arani: you know I also have seen people calling her like a Groomer, that she's the one who gave them the drugs, and she's orchestrated everything. And like, I don't love. Yeah, I'm not into the intense blame game here, like, I think the dynamics are all much more complex than that.

Alexia Arani: But yeah, I think that it's

Alexia Arani: I feel like it's meant to be this like funny haha! Look at them. They do this deviant sex stuff. And they're weird, like, I feel like, that's what the show was.

Alexia Arani: how it's expecting us to respond.

Saiba Varma: Hmm, interesting.

Saiba Varma: Yeah, I think

Saiba Varma: I think I did feel like they settled into a dynamic that was like fulfilling for both of them. But

Saiba Varma: I yeah, it just felt

Saiba Varma: It felt very instrumental. Yeah, like I said, it felt to me like both of them were like, kind of instrumentalizing each other in this way that, and I didn't really know, like what. There was no depth to the

Saiba Varma: really trying to understand each other. Beyond that, you know.

Alexia Arani: I was like.

Saiba Varma: It's like you're exchanging like sex for money, basically in this dynamic. And that's it's working for you. So it's fine. But

Saiba Varma: there's no like. There's no transformation. There's no like growing together there. There was a lot of like, and that could just be like the writing, too, like it could just be.

Alexia Arani: Yeah.

Saiba Varma: Undeveloped, something.

Alexia Arani: Think they're not meant to be like good people like, I don't think Chloe is meant to be a good person like I think that we might empathize with her because of Chelsea's closeness to her. But, like Overall as a character, I think they're both. Yeah. I don't really. She doesn't really give us any depth to see her, and

Alexia Arani: like having any innocence to her.

Saiba Varma: Yeah, I think that's right. Yeah.

Saiba Varma: But yeah, neither did I feel like she's a villain, or she's a predator or anything.

Alexia Arani: Yeah.

Saiba Varma: You know.

Alexia Arani: Yes.

Saiba Varma: So.

Alexia Arani: I agree. I don't. I think there's certainly issues we could talk about, but I don't view her that way either.

Saiba Varma: Yeah.

Alexia Arani: Okay, so on this thread. We also, we need to talk about Frank.

Saiba Varma: Talk about Frank, but we haven't talked about like the friends.

Alexia Arani: Yes.

Saiba Varma: Yeah. Jacqueline.

Alexia Arani: I know, but I think yes, we need to get there, I guess.

Saiba Varma: I'm thinking of free.

Alexia Arani: Because we're just on this like sexual deviance, Combo.

Alexia Arani: But did you see sexual deviance among the friends? I'm curious if that's a thread you saw there, as well.

Saiba Varma: Not deviance. I said, Yeah, not deviance, I guess. But there is.

Saiba Varma: There's definitely like the you know, sexes like power and control. And Jacqueline and Lori.

Saiba Varma: their whole, their kind of history of like

Saiba Varma: competing with each other over math.

Alexia Arani: Which feels more norm, more normative, even if even as it's like toxic. Yeah, so yeah, I think I do think I want to talk about Frank's to me. It fits in with this which I'm talking about in terms of deviance. But actually in the notes I put perversion, and I actually feel like, that's almost a better word. Because I do think we're like, I think, that we are supposed to see all these characters as perverted, you know. Yeah,

Alexia Arani: Greg and Greg and Chloe included in that.

Saiba Varma: Yeah.

Alexia Arani: So yeah, I feel like I've been talking a lot. So I don't know. Do you want to get it going on, Frank? Or do you want me to continue ranting? What are your thoughts.

Saiba Varma: I don't feel like you're talking too much.

Alexia Arani: Okay.

Alexia Arani: So oh, my gosh! There's so much here, I'm not even sure. Again, I think, with Frank's character like it. Just feel like another moment where this sort of like sexual perversion is written in just for like.

Alexia Arani: it's for like shock factor, but also for like humor, because I feel like a lot of this was played for laughs like even like the sort of scene where Chloe's sharing that Greg's into cucking like it is Chelsea's facial reactions that are supposed to be like the humorous outlet like for the show. Right?

Alexia Arani: Yeah. And similarly, the scene where Frank is like confessing his sexual interests to Rick. It's Rick's facial reactions that we are like dying and responding to and laughing at. And again, it's like these, like sexual, like perversions are just being played for laughs.

Alexia Arani: I do think, in Frank's character it is complicated for a lot of reasons that we need to unpack, which, like the big things for me here, like

Alexia Arani: I guess to begin, I would just say, like.

Alexia Arani: obviously, I'm a defender of sexual deviance. So I'm like it shouldn't. I don't think it should be like a funny reveal that Frank, like enjoys cross dressing, or that he likes pegging, that he wants to be fucked in the ass like, okay, that's fine. A lot of people do those things, and even if they didn't, it's fine, you know.

Alexia Arani: But the part that feels tricky with Frank is like these different things. So one is that the way that he talks about like how he thinks that he really wants to be an Asian girl, or like maybe he actually is an Asian girl on the inside, and that's why he wants, like an Asian girl to look him in the eyes while he's like being fucked.

Alexia Arani: Is. I saw there's a lot of discourse happening on the Internet around this, as like a portrayal of auto gynephilia. Are you familiar with this at all, Saiba? Okay.

Alexia Arani: I'm not going to do like a total deep dive. But basically, this was like a theory that came out like, maybe in the eighties, when people were like theorizing around like, why are people trans and transness? And the idea was that like, Oh, this is actually kind of like

Alexia Arani: a sexual perversion, or like an erotic desire to be the thing that you're attracted to so understandably like many trans people and like trans. Women in particular, have, like strongly pushed back against that framework, and see it as like, extremely like fetishizing, and like a denial of trans identity. And all of those things which is important to be like aware of.

Alexia Arani: But I think also for myself, I can like, I understand that contextually, and I also think that we don't necessarily have to like fold those things together where, like

Alexia Arani: sexual desire and identity are very like complex. And I think somebody can like

Alexia Arani: have these specific desires without that? Then, being folded into like gender identity, like, I think both of these things can exist. But obviously, like the issue with autogynophilia was the collapsing of it with like trans identity. And like the pathologization.

Alexia Arani: Okay. So anyways, that just feels like messy, that that whole thing is coming back up.

Alexia Arani: And I also saw some people pointing out that, like Frank's whole storyline shows the way that, like trans people and like trans women often just get used for the personal development of like Cis. People who are like wanting to break out of like gender norms or sexual norms and kind of using, like, you know, trans people to help, and then kind of disposing of them when it's over. Which is clearly the case with Frank, because it was like, you know, just like a sex worker.

Alexia Arani: And then his other big thing is like transracialism.

Alexia Arani: right? Which I'm curious to hear your thoughts on this.

Alexia Arani: but I think my main issue with this is that it's just. It's so wrapped up in like fetishization, you know of like brick is saying like he feels like he's an Asian girl on the inside. But it's like, How do you know what an Asian girl feels like? It has to be relying on these like essentialized notions of Asian femininity. Because, of course, that is such a complex thing. It doesn't look the same from one Asian girl to the next.

Alexia Arani: Okay, I said a lot. Yeah. What are your? What are you thinking.

Saiba Varma: Oh, that's great! I'm

Saiba Varma: I'm really glad you brought that the like kind of trans perspective into it as well, because

Saiba Varma: I was like, of course I was. I was thinking about a lot about that, and like what it means for him to want to embody like an Asian woman, and but specifically like a sex worker. I think that's really.

Saiba Varma: Wouldn't just in terms of

Saiba Varma: like the identity as well like. It's not just any Asian woman, right? It's like he has these like very specific encounters. And for me, I was thinking a lot about like

Saiba Varma: him, representing, like, like some kind of like American capitalism, you know, and like him, like

Saiba Varma: basically this idea of

Saiba Varma: so his story, like so like the way that he begins his monologue, or whatever right is that like he comes in order to like, renounce, desire. And he lives this like very kind of renunciant life. Right? So he's trying to like, leave behind this consumerist.

Saiba Varma: Like.

Saiba Varma: yeah, this consumers way of living, and he's like doing something really different with his, with his life, like he's experimenting with a very different way of living, and.

Alexia Arani: Free of addiction. I just.

Saiba Varma: Yeah, it's like, it's so important. Yeah, that's huge. Right? Because he then becomes addicted to this renancy and kind of life. I mean. It was kind of reminded me of, like the.

Saiba Varma: It was like the story of the Buddha in a way right like Siddhartha was like this prince who lives this life of excess, who lives this life, where he's like every pleasure, everything available to him. And then he goes this like extreme way, where he like tries to live off like whatever ten grains of rice a day kind of thing. And it's like both are these extreme practices. And so I think Frank's kind of story like mirrored that. And then his.

Alexia Arani: Hmm.

Saiba Varma: His fall right or whatever you want to call his like lapse, or whatever you want to call him.

Saiba Varma: and I just felt like. It was also to me a commentary about like this.

Saiba Varma: a kind of like Western, like this masculine kind of consumption of like the East.

Saiba Varma: You know, and of everything so much so that it's not just enough that you're like

Saiba Varma: like buying sex. And you're like doing all this stuff, but that you like have to be even become the person, or you feel like.

Saiba Varma: Even own like again, it becomes about like this ownership where it's like, I can own this experience of this like.

Saiba Varma: Die sex worker. It's not enough that I have like this power over them, but

Saiba Varma: I can even become them.

Saiba Varma: You know.

Saiba Varma: So to me it was kind of like that like that. I felt like that was part of the narrative as well.

Alexia Arani: I was thinking the exact same thing as you were saying, it's like, Yeah, exactly. It's also, when you think of get out. It's like the get out dynamic, you know.

Saiba Varma: Exactly.

Alexia Arani: That it's not enough to just like use. You have to actually embody it and become it totally.

Saiba Varma: Exactly. Yeah, and so I think, like the gender. Jimmy also, like all the gender, and like queer dynamics in it, were also all part of that as well. Right? Because, of course, this is like.

Saiba Varma: I think it was also like just thinking about, like Thai, like Thailand, as being this

Saiba Varma: such a like sexualized economy, right like. So

Saiba Varma: economy is like dependent on sex tourism and.

Alexia Arani: That's like.

Saiba Varma: These older white men.

Saiba Varma: And like.

Saiba Varma: either like trans people in Thailand or women, or whoever like who are the objects of this, who are like

Saiba Varma: running the country like they're basically like running the economy. Right? Like, this is the engine of the economy

Saiba Varma: and so I felt like it was also

Saiba Varma: giving us like a glimpse into that that it's

Saiba Varma: yeah. I don't know what else I want to say about it, but maybe that gives you something to.

Alexia Arani: Yeah. Also with the parties that Greg and Chloe would throw, and all of the couples

Saiba Varma: Yeah, I love that. They showed that.

Alexia Arani: Which I'm curious what you think. So it was so funny. I loved when I don't know the character's name, but when Victoria was like, I can set you up with some nice men in North Carolina. And she was just. I love that. Her first response was you can't say that.

Saiba Varma: Yeah.

Alexia Arani: And she was like, why are you with these weirdos? She's like, you can't say that. But yeah, I was curious what you thought about that and her being like I love my husband like. What are you talking about?

Saiba Varma: Yeah, I mean to be honest, I felt like a little bit.

Saiba Varma: I was like, not sure I wanted to like to redeem that. Those relationships, you know, because I've got so much

Saiba Varma: sure southeast Asia and.

Alexia Arani: Yeah, sure.

Saiba Varma: Really gross.

Alexia Arani: Yeah, it's like.

Saiba Varma: And so yeah, I wasn't like I didn't know. I think it's like part of like goes with like your critique of the show, right? And

Saiba Varma: the

Saiba Varma: yeah, like, just like what kinds of behaviors are being excused? Right? And who is being like allowed some kind of like normative pathway. And for me I was like, why is this

Saiba Varma: the why is this kind of relationship being redeemed.

Saiba Varma: Then I feel like most of the time. It's there's nothing redeemable about it, you know. It's.

Alexia Arani: Yeah.

Saiba Varma: Yeah.

Alexia Arani: Pardon me.

Saiba Varma: Yeah, I was like, not that I'm ever with Victoria about you have on anything. But I was like.

Saiba Varma: I'm on neither people's side in this conversation, you know.

Alexia Arani: Yeah, yeah.

Saiba Varma: Yeah.

Alexia Arani: Ugh.

Saiba Varma: I know, I know.

Alexia Arani: Should we talk about Victoria?

Alexia Arani: Say like I? But even before the season I love Parker Posey, I really do. I was really excited to see her cast, and even though she plays like an awful person, I'm glad that the character didn't make me hate her. If anything made me just love the actress even more. She's just so good.

Saiba Varma: Yeah, she did an amazing job.

Saiba Varma: Was like, definitely the standout.

Saiba Varma: And there's yeah, absolutely like, never forget.

Alexia Arani: I think she was the Tanya replacement. You know, they're like we need that character who consistently brings the comedic relief.

Alexia Arani: And she did that.

Alexia Arani: Yeah, so many fucking funny lines I wish I'd like kept. I'm sure I don't have them in our shared show notes. I'm sure I have them in my personal like iPhone notes I was taking while watching, but.

Saiba Varma: Yeah.

Alexia Arani: I think my favorite oh, my God! I don't know why the top of my head! I think one of my favorite parts where she was like praying to Jesus to save Piper from the Buddhists. So funny.

Saiba Varma: I know. I think my favorite was like something about she was like he better be the best Buddhist.

Saiba Varma: Oh, yeah, I know. It's like what?

Saiba Varma: Yeah? And I feel like, the funny part's not even like China, like she doesn't know where she is. Okay. But it's the idea of the best Buddhist is so fucking funny.

Saiba Varma: No, I know. But I also love that like she doesn't quite know where she is.

Saiba Varma: Yeah.

Saiba Varma: yeah, that's not just the family whatever that is like. So such a like white, rich American tourist, to not know exactly in the world, and not have to know where you are.

Alexia Arani: Okay.

Saiba Varma: Yeah, not even knowing the country you're in. It's pretty bad.

Saiba Varma: Yeah, it's very bad.

Saiba Varma: but also totally believable, because it's like, does she? Yeah. She leaves the hotel reluctantly to the monastery, right? But it's like her whole. Her whole existence is pretty much in that room. Does she even like, oh, yeah, she goes to eat, I guess. But other than that, she's like in there the suite the entire time.

Alexia Arani: Yeah.

Alexia Arani: I know. I honestly feel like there's I feel like there's not even that much to really say about her character other than like she's just funny, and Piper nailed it or not. Piper Parker nailed it. Yeah,

Saiba Varma: Well, the I think the poverty stuff was really.

Alexia Arani: Hmm.

Saiba Varma: That was great. I thought, and the way that she yeah, like, she's just so

Saiba Varma: matter of fact, about like I cannot exist outside of this world, and like I would rather die.

Alexia Arani: There are. The poor

Alexia Arani: is fucked up, but I'm smiling because right after that she's like, I just love my sense, and she just is like smelling her little sense. I'm sorry I just.

Saiba Varma: No, I just want like also the.

Alexia Arani: The.

Saiba Varma: The way in which she, Piper, becomes her

Saiba Varma: was really well done as well. You know.

Alexia Arani: Yeah.

Saiba Varma: Like Piper's little fake ass rebellion.

Saiba Varma: Oh, yeah, the way that that like falls away so quickly, and then.

Alexia Arani: Like. I'm just always holding out hope for the youth on this show, because I the same way with Albie in Season 2. I was like low key defending him. I was like he stoles hope.

Alexia Arani: and maybe it's because I recognize some of myself and Piper. I think I'm holding on to a bit of hope for her still.

Alexia Arani: No, you're not fine, not I'm not her, but I like

Alexia Arani: I'm not definitely her. But I'm just like, is this the end for her? Like I'm not convinced. I don't know. It just seems too much, for, like I don't find it necessarily believable that she would

Alexia Arani: be like, okay, I don't actually want to stay at this temple. And then she just completely dives into the consumerism and the values of her family like that just seems like too quick of an it's like a , you know.

Saiba Varma: I mean, I think she's relieved to

Saiba Varma: not have to like fight them.

Saiba Varma: you know, because they're all it's like she has to battle like multiple, like they're all narcissists. Right? She has to battle multiple people in her family like, it's not easy.

Saiba Varma: Saxon. You have the you have, Victoria, you have Tim.

Saiba Varma: It's a multi front confrontation.

Saiba Varma: and I feel like when I was. I was rewatching episode one, and it's like the first time she actually like. As soon as they arrive she takes Lachlan to the monastery. She's like, I just want to check it out.

Saiba Varma: And you see her standing at the gate.

Saiba Varma: and she's not excited. She's not curious. She actually looks really scared.

Alexia Arani: Hmm.

Saiba Varma: She has this look of kind of like.

Saiba Varma: almost horror about like, what have I done, you know, and I realize that's like a little hint about what's to come.

Saiba Varma: I just felt like I mean don't get me wrong. I was also heartbroken

Saiba Varma: by her. But I did feel like.

Saiba Varma: yeah, it's a relief for her to be just to belong.

Saiba Varma: It's just a.

Alexia Arani: Yeah.

Saiba Varma: You know, and I think she's someone who takes that easy path because she herself is a narcissist, you know, pretending like she's not.

Alexia Arani: Interesting.

Alexia Arani: I think I'm over identifying with this character.

Saiba Varma: I think we all identify like I think I mean, I identified with our on some level right.

Alexia Arani: Yeah.

Saiba Varma: We all had to

Saiba Varma: rebel against our families in different ways in order to become the people we are like, live the lives that we live, but

Saiba Varma: you know that it's like you have to be able to bear the cost. There has to be like some kind of like moral courage and bravery in there, and

Saiba Varma: it's not there. It's she's empty, you know.

Alexia Arani: Hmm!

Alexia Arani: Okay. So we've

Alexia Arani: touched on most of the Ratliff family. I'm curious. If there's anything you want to talk about with Lachlan.

Alexia Arani: I think for me. We talked about some of his dynamics like Saxon and stuff. But

Alexia Arani: when you were talking about Piper being your heartbreak for this season. I feel like Lachlan was actually mine. But maybe it was just. I know he came back from the dead which felt kind of weird. Maybe we can unpack that. But just like his death.

Alexia Arani: I felt really deeply disturbed. By the way, that whole thing played out like some of it. I think it was like touching on some of my own maybe like triggers with like having lost a sibling, and they were a teenager, you know, and like that kind of stuff. But

Alexia Arani: Yeah, when I was watching the finale. I felt sick to my stomach, actually, like I felt kind of ill after watching the finale and just everything that played out. And the way Lachlan died. It's just like, ugh!

Alexia Arani: But yeah, I'm curious. If you have any other thoughts about Lachlan things we want to unpack with him.

Alexia Arani: Do you think he also is a Narcissist?

Saiba Varma: I think he will become one.

Alexia Arani: You do.

Saiba Varma: Yeah, I think he becomes.

Saiba Varma: You know, I think he, yeah, I think it's like Saxons.

Saiba Varma: Well, first of all, I think like the dynamics between them shift a lot right because of the

Saiba Varma: their little sexual experience with each other. And Lachlan kind of becomes like, comes into his own

Saiba Varma: and has a certain kind of power over Saxon now, and I just think that he's

Saiba Varma: moving in his image.

Alexia Arani: Hmm.

Saiba Varma: And that's that. That was like the feeling I was left with is like the last holdout in that family, like the one person who's not a narcissist.

Saiba Varma: Ultimately, also, the only way that you could survive is by becoming one.

Alexia Arani: Damn! That's dark cyber.

Saiba Varma: Dark.

Alexia Arani: Yeah.

Saiba Varma: What do you think?

Alexia Arani: I don't know. I mean our families fuck us up. I don't think that we're doomed to replicate them. And again, maybe this is me over identifying. But you know, coming from like I am such a different person than the family that I come from, you know. So I'm just like, I know it's possible to break out because I have done it.

Saiba Varma: Yeah. But maybe you had enough other influences in your life. You know, like the way that you were describing your life with your mom.

Alexia Arani: Your life with your dad. It was like you did have different.

Saiba Varma: Images of what? Of how one like you live life right and.

Alexia Arani: Yeah.

Saiba Varma: I think they're in such a closed universe that

Saiba Varma: you know it's like they are replicating each other. It's like they go to the same universities. They

Saiba Varma: like mirror each other in. Like all of these different ways, like Tim starts becoming Victoria, and Laughlin becomes Saxon, and Piper becomes Victoria. They just seem like a very

Saiba Varma: closed network, which is why I think they're so compelling to watch.

Alexia Arani: Yeah, they lost all that money, though.

Alexia Arani: So I think we have to remember that.

Saiba Varma: That was like, I think that for me was one of the redeeming

Saiba Varma: point, like things about the season.

Saiba Varma: was that they actually ended up losing everything, and their world is gonna shatter. You know.

Alexia Arani: Yeah. So who knows the trajectory? It's so weird that we're left actually, with some like.

Alexia Arani: I don't know. I feel like I was almost left with some hope, and maybe even rooting for Saxon in some ways that, like.

Alexia Arani: you know, everything has gotten destabilized. And maybe he's gonna get a second chance to choose who he like

Alexia Arani: wants to be like who he's gonna become, you know.

Saiba Varma: Yeah, no. And you're I mean, and it's also true that Lachlan is the only one who says, like he doesn't need money to survive.

Saiba Varma: And so, maybe, maybe, as Saxon changes, he will.

Saiba Varma: She, like, you know, that will give him space to also grow differently.

Saiba Varma: I think we could be hopeful about that.

Alexia Arani: I mean, they're all gonna have to be working and supporting their families. So they're going to come into. You know, their bubble has been punctured. They're going to be exposed to a lot of different things, that will, you know.

Alexia Arani: Although I wonder? For people like them, they seem like old money, you know. So I'm like, even with them, losing everything like, would they actually suddenly be poor? And I'm like, maybe you know, their family and their friends would probably all turn their back on them. But

Alexia Arani: I don't know. I just imagine that they have family money. I'm sure that, like they have

Alexia Arani: rich siblings, and parents they don't like. Tim does not seem like a self-made person, you know.

Saiba Varma: I'm wondering if that was ever in the season, because, like the only thing I can remember is Victoria.

Saiba Varma: Basically, you know, being like playing like the good wife, and being like you, built everything you did.

Saiba Varma: This was you. No one helped you, you know. She gives him that.

Alexia Arani: Oh, my God! It was.

Saiba Varma: Beach.

Alexia Arani: Much like my stepmom with my dad.

Alexia Arani: It was intense.

Saiba Varma: You know that like made me think that he was.

Saiba Varma: He was like the first generation that had really achieved this level of.

Alexia Arani: No, that's just what rich people say. That's how they like it, you know. Like, honestly, I'm like as I've seen this in my family. I'm like. That's just what rich people say. That's how they justify their wealth is this delusion that they're self-made. And they built everything when it's like. No, you didn't, and no, you're not, you know.

Saiba Varma: Oh, yeah, no, you're right. It could.

Alexia Arani: Yeah, she's just performing the role of a good wife. She's.

Saiba Varma: Yeah.

Saiba Varma: not knowing that. Like all of the things she's saying are actually like, gonna terribly backfire, right? Because the more it's like just his own.

Saiba Varma: the more it's also gonna be his own failure.

Alexia Arani: Yeah, like, I feel like, if Saxon had a partner, Saxon's partners would say the exact same thing to him because he is hardworking. He dedicates his whole life to his work, you know, and I feel like it's that conflation of.

Saiba Varma: Yeah, that's true.

Alexia Arani: You know.

Saiba Varma: Yeah. Rich people. Delusion.

Alexia Arani: Okay, there's so much with the Ratliff family, we haven't even talked about our girls. Yet, and I know, we're like an hour and a half into this discussion. So we, I guess we should talk about them. But I also think the fact that we haven't gotten to them yet to me kind of

Alexia Arani: is a reflection of the season, you know, where there were some interesting dynamics, but I don't actually think there was like that much, at least for me going on with them.

Alexia Arani: So yeah, I'm curious to hear where you want to start. What? What was most interesting to you about the trio and their dynamics.

Saiba Varma: I mean, I did like the

Saiba Varma: I did like the fact that they were

Saiba Varma: deeply enmeshed with each other, and also completely

Saiba Varma: unwilling to trust each other.

Saiba Varma: And

Saiba Varma: Just the way I like that. Their scenes were filmed, you know, so that you could like kind of see all of the

Saiba Varma: the glances and the gestures and the body language, like the disconnect between, like what people were saying and what they were feeling.

Saiba Varma: The dishonesty and the fate.

Saiba Varma: The performance of this deep friendship and sisterhood.

Saiba Varma: I thought it was like, I really like that. I wanted like a bigger kind of

Saiba Varma: breakdown, but like explosion like I want

Saiba Varma: arc. I think that was like one of my critiques of the whole season as well, was like the

Saiba Varma: payoffs were just like, not big enough like. Except for the Ratcliffe family, I felt like everyone else's, was kind of like

Saiba Varma: the.

Alexia Arani: Especially for how like dragged out and tense it was for your what's gonna happen.

Alexia Arani: And then nothing.

Saiba Varma: Nothing really like that happens, you know, and then just they just like make up in the end, or whatever so I wanted, like a bigger

Saiba Varma: rupture with their, I guess. But I did. I did. I did like the way that they

Saiba Varma: yeah, that there was just this lack of genuine engagement with each other.

Saiba Varma: You know?

Saiba Varma: Yeah, what about you? What did you think.

Alexia Arani: Yeah, I agree. And I think what you're talking about. I think that was something that's really like excellent in the performances that all the actresses did an amazing job of saying one thing, but then showing on their faces like

Alexia Arani: what they weren't saying, especially Kate. She was like the Republican right. She was so good at that. Her facial expressions, and, like, you know, the performance, I think

Alexia Arani: I feel like Lori and Jacqueline were a little different where I mean Lori does get real with them, you know, in the closing monologue, and in general she seems the most like kind of grounded, but I do think the of them and their dynamics felt the most grounded in reality to me. I think all of the other, like the Ratliff family, Rick and Chelsea. A lot of it was very kind of like over the top, like.

Alexia Arani: you know, even like Belinda, and like the whole thing with like a lot of it. Yeah, I just felt very over the top. But the of them felt very like, Oh, yeah, these are. These are believable. As like friends who are going on a vacation together.

Saiba Varma: Yeah.

Alexia Arani: Totally.

Alexia Arani: I did some of the discourse around. It was interesting where? I didn't like read into it too much, but I know there were a lot of like reviews or things written about how like the white lotus is like nailing like toxic female friendships, or like what happens when you have friends and like

Alexia Arani: I don't know I can see that. But also I was just like.

Alexia Arani: I don't know. You have bad friends, if that's what you think like, I just kind of hate that like, you know, minimization, that like, Oh, female friendships are catty. And this is what it's like. And I'm like, maybe, for, like a certain small cut of like upper middle class, like white women who shy away from vulnerability. But I just don't really like that kind of discourse I'm seeing around them. It feels misogynistic to me.

Saiba Varma: Yeah, no, totally. I didn't feel like it was supposed to.

Saiba Varma: I mean, it should not represent like female friendships in general.

Saiba Varma: Yeah, like women together in general at all. I felt like it was much more

Saiba Varma: yeah, about a particular, because

Saiba Varma: I mean, like, the great thing about the show is like, it's always about class, right? And I think.

Saiba Varma: Even in this case it was like the

Saiba Varma: the class dynamics between them playing out like

Saiba Varma: Jacqueline, funding this trip for the other . And how that's like, never really something they like

Saiba Varma: pretend like everyone's cool with it. But actually like they're not. And it plays out in all of these other ways where she's.

Saiba Varma: She's like in control, right? And she's like the yeah.

Saiba Varma: there, there's no there like it's not an equal

Saiba Varma: French, you know, and I felt like it captured that really? Well.

Saiba Varma: and yeah, I also like the way that Kate was, because

Saiba Varma: I mean, we've all seen that dynamic in in the , I mean, it's also like Lachlan Piper and Saxon, right where there's like the one person who's like becomes mediator who's just trying to

Saiba Varma: please, and I thought, like Kate did a really good

Saiba Varma: like she did that Leslie Bib like. Did that really? Well, kind of like.

Saiba Varma: Both of them, and trying to

Saiba Varma: being like the peacekeeper, right and.

Alexia Arani: Yeah.

Saiba Varma: Yeah.

Saiba Varma: So I appreciated their, I appreciate like their scenes. For just

Saiba Varma: yeah, all of those like really small, the small.

Alexia Arani: The way.

Saiba Varma: Like power can shift so quickly. It was like very Foucauldian. It's like, no one actually has power, but it's like all in the relations.

Saiba Varma: And you see that like.

Alexia Arani: How the trio like moves. And every yeah, they yeah, yeah.

Alexia Arani: shit behind each other's back. I actually think, like, I actually think Kate was like my favorite character out of the , surprisingly and not favorite, because I like liked her. But I just. I thought she was super interesting because she felt very real and very understandable to me that when they found out she was a Republican, I was like, Yeah, of course she is like, look at her like, you know, like, and like very superficially, can be like, look at the haircut, and like she's from Texas, but also just like the way like.

Alexia Arani: I don't know. I just that like that sort of like.

Alexia Arani: very like nice, but like not kind sort of thing, you know, because it's all about like being polite and keeping things very surface level. And

Alexia Arani: you know, finding out she's like a Trumper like it all makes so much sense, which makes you kind of, at least for me. It makes me kind of like shy away from her. But then, when, like Lori and Jacqueline are parting with those sketchy Russian guys, and like she just wants to have her pajamas on. And she's like really looking out for her friends. I was like, Oh, I actually relate to Kate a lot right now. And I really like.

Saiba Varma: Her care.

Alexia Arani: Or

Alexia Arani: So I don't know. I think it was just like.

Alexia Arani: I think I really appreciate when TV shows make me challenge my biases, basically, you know, which I think that happened with Saxon where I was like, oh, my God! I'm revolted by this character. And then, by the end, I'm like actually hoping for him that he's capable of more. And I feel like I kind of had that same experience with Kate where it's like, you know it's easy to hate on someone who votes for trump and part of my own, like personal like praxis, has also been trying to really like.

Alexia Arani: not just hate people I don't know who vote for Trump and try to exercise some like compassion and contextual understanding of how people end up in the positions that they're in, you know, and also as someone who, like, grew up in the South and has a lot of white family, I can understand how someone like Kate would like end up

Alexia Arani: in like a conservative area around a bunch of white Christians, and like kind of fall into that. And it's like, you know I have so much family and extended family that vote for trump and will always vote Republican because you just don't question it. It's just what people do like. If you're a white person in the South. In most cases it's like there's not even other options. It's like.

Alexia Arani: that's what it is, you know.

Alexia Arani: So anyways, I think I just appreciated the journey that Kate took me on where it would have been really easy to like. Write her off and demonize her, but I think she gave a much more like complex performance, and had a lot more like there was a lot more going on for the character.

Saiba Varma: Yeah.

Alexia Arani: Yeah, I don't think they were just written to be just like rich white bitches, you know, there was like a lot. There's a lot of vulnerability, I think, for all of the characters.

Saiba Varma: Yeah, definitely. And I liked that. They

Saiba Varma: you know, her vulnerability was like that. She's a Republican, and she voted for trump, right? Because that becomes

Saiba Varma: like them.

Saiba Varma: point of difference between her and the other , and you.

Alexia Arani: See.

Saiba Varma: Immediately how the other like just turn on her in that moment, just because I was like.

Saiba Varma: there's some point of difference, you know, and it's.

Alexia Arani: Yeah.

Saiba Varma: Really effectively shows like how fragile.

Saiba Varma: Or just like what a fragile kind of construction their whole friendship really is, where

Saiba Varma: people just throwing on each other on a dime, basically.

Alexia Arani: It's also fair like she voted.

Alexia Arani: Oh, boy.

Alexia Arani: like, even with what I said, I'm like. It's still fair, though, right to be like what the fuck, you know, with someone you thought you.

Saiba Varma: I don't know. I I'm not into like this whole like I like that. They like made fun of like Democrats, like pretending like they're like, morally superior.

Alexia Arani: Yeah.

Saiba Varma: Everyone else, because that's also that's like a whole other thing, right?

Alexia Arani: For sure.

Saiba Varma: So I kind of. I kind of appreciated that.

Saiba Varma: Not that I'm like, great like you. Yeah, not that I agree with her, but I'm just like.

Alexia Arani: No, no.

Saiba Varma: I live.

Alexia Arani: I hear what you're saying. And I'm like over here talking about how I'm like trying to like, you know.

Alexia Arani: be more grounded and compassion. And then my old self is rearing up. That's like, but also fuck her so it's a growing process for me. It's a journey. I'm not at my destination yet, but.

Saiba Varma: Yeah, I just felt like there was such a lack of

Saiba Varma: tolerance, and like she knows that, you know, and so she likes. She has to like hide parts of herself parts of her life because she knows that they're gonna like judge it like even the fact that she goes to church and stuff. They're like, extremely judgmental about all of that.

Alexia Arani: Yeah.

Saiba Varma: It's like who the fuck are you.

Saiba Varma: Better than anyone else, you know.

Alexia Arani: Yeah, yeah, I really appreciate that.

Saiba Varma: Yeah, yeah.

Alexia Arani: There's something I was gonna say, and I'm what was it?

Alexia Arani: I had a thought. I've lost it. I'm trying to refind it. So if you had something else

Alexia Arani: to say, feel free.

Saiba Varma: I'm just.

Alexia Arani: Oh, I remembered. Okay, something. I don't know. If you've heard this, you might find this interesting. I was reading that in the original script. There was going to be this whole like storyline, and seeing that, like Lori's teenage child was going to be non-binary, and there was going to be a whole thing around Lori like struggling with like using the right pronouns. And that ended up being, I think, maybe one of those ruptures you were missing between Lori and Kate, with Kate having voted for Trump and Lori being like, I have a trans child

Alexia Arani: but they actually ended up cutting it out of the show, and I didn't hear there weren't direct quotes from Mike White, but there were quotes from Leslie Bibb who plays Kate? Who was saying that, like

Alexia Arani: They decided that it was like too political, or it was like too much, or they didn't want it to like, you know. After trump was elected, it became like a big visible issue, and they didn't want to get like wrapped up in it.

Alexia Arani: I don't know. I it seems interesting that they would shut. They're doing like an auto gynephilia thing, and they're like casually saying, like, you know, lady boys, and all this stuff. But then, like touching on having a non-binary kid is like too much for the

show. I don't know, but I don't know if you'd heard that, or if you have any thoughts on their decision to take that out.

Saiba Varma: No, I hadn't.

Saiba Varma: I hadn't heard that. And yeah, I wonder.

Saiba Varma: Yeah, I mean.

Saiba Varma: yeah, I wonder if it would have. Just

Saiba Varma: yeah. I like. I wonder why they did it? Because I feel like

Saiba Varma: Lori is already.

Saiba Varma: Maybe it's because, like Glory already is.

Saiba Varma: it's different enough from the of them.

Alexia Arani: Yeah.

Saiba Varma: I think maybe it would have just like pushed her character over

Saiba Varma: like it would have been too far from the other , or something like that. And I think, like having some kind of intimacy between that like having this like intimate kind of thing, was so important to showing

Saiba Varma: like how they can also turn on each other. Right? It's like built on this

Saiba Varma: weird, long term, like familial kind of intimacy that they have. So I wonder if it was like about that. But I don't know. I don't really.

Saiba Varma: I'm just like, I guess there are a lot of decisions that they made this season that I'm like not, I feel like

Saiba Varma: could have made for better or richer like conclusions or conflagration.

Saiba Varma: whatever like we were talking about earlier, and maybe that would have been something cool to actually like. See, play out, you know.

Alexia Arani: yeah, I'm wondering if we want to get into that I know, we've like been talking for a, while so just kind of like overall season thoughts.

Alexia Arani: especially in the context of like, I know, when I was looking up the season, I saw a lot of bad reviews. There's like a lot of the sort of critics were not happy with the season. So

Alexia Arani: I know we touched on some of it. But yeah, I'm curious about your kind of big picture thoughts.

Saiba Varma: Yeah. And I I'd love to hear yours as well. I think. Yeah, I would say that

Saiba Varma: I it was for me as well, like my, I mean, I saw a lot of stuff online as well about people saying it was the weakest season, and I think I had a lot of hopes for it, because

Saiba Varma: it was in Thailand. That's like a place I know as a tourist, you know. I've seen like these dynamics play out, and I was

Saiba Varma: hoping for more like we talked about more like

Saiba Varma: careful and nuanced use of, like the place I would have loved to see like more of the role of like the hotel staff, and more of the dynamics like oh, just very quickly. But even that Fabian character was like completely undeveloped. You know, I kept waiting for something to happen. There's this whole build up of him

Saiba Varma: going to sing. And then I was like, what's gonna happen when he sings, and, like nothing happened.

Alexia Arani: Okay, I did.

Saiba Varma: Kind of a.

Alexia Arani: Appreciate that as like a joke, and I was also seeing apparently the guy who plays him, I think, is a musician and an amazing singer. So I think they were like building up to like. Oh, we can have this beautiful magical number, and I kind of love that they just.

Saiba Varma: Got it.

Alexia Arani: You know. I think it was like kind of a joke because of who.

Saiba Varma: Yeah.

Alexia Arani: Was, but.

Saiba Varma: Yeah, I just like, wanted. I wanted something. I think it's like.

Alexia Arani: Yeah.

Saiba Varma: Anything in general is like more like more excitement other than like who's gonna die in the end.

Alexia Arani: Yeah.

Saiba Varma: Yeah. And I felt like when I compared the kind of moments of like

Saiba Varma: sort of moral breakdown or transformation in the other seasons, you know. I just felt like they were so much more powerful than what we got in this season as well.

Saiba Varma: I just didn't feel like

Saiba Varma: there were like a couple of I mean Chelsea and a couple of characters, but, like in general, I wasn't.

Saiba Varma: I just didn't feel like that sense of

Saiba Varma: even the heartbreak was like, Okay, it's Piper, but it's like, not that. It's not as deep as like the heartbreak of season one and .

Saiba Varma: So, yeah, what about you?

Alexia Arani: Yeah, I mean, I really agree. And I feel like I already kind of touched on. You know, some of my critiques of it focusing too much on like these really contrived plots. Yeah, I think the heart of the season for me it was really like Chelsea.

Alexia Arani: Saxon Lachlan. That whole dynamic was like what kept me interested in watching and then the comic relief provided by Parker, Posey, you know.

Alexia Arani: But yeah, I mean, I liked watching it. I'm like, did I like watching it? Actually, like, you know? So it's like I, there's parts of it I enjoy, but also just like the feeling of dread. Every episode was like rough

Alexia Arani: Just that prolonged, intense stress like, Oh, God, it's too much!

Alexia Arani: So I mean, I'm not done with the white lotus like, I think, you know, I'm definitely still gonna watch season

Saiba Varma: Dubai season is gonna be.

Alexia Arani: I haven't heard anything about it. I also one more thing about this season. This is like something I saw online. It could be wrong. I remember seeing somewhere that, like apparently, Mike White had like gotten really sick in Thailand, and that a lot of this season was meant to be kind of like a fever dream of like things that he like hallucinated in Thailand.

Saiba Varma: Wow!

Alexia Arani: So that also might explain some of the like what is even going on. Cause it was like literally inspired by like a fever dream. So.

Saiba Varma: Yeah, that makes sense. I mean, I heard maybe we talked about it. I don't remember in the last

Saiba Varma: episode that we did, that they were choosing between India and Thailand.

Saiba Varma: Be.

Saiba Varma: And I, yeah, I'm like, Do I? Wanna do I wanna see something in India? I.

Alexia Arani: Yeah, where would you?

Saiba Varma: You want them to.

Alexia Arani: So next.

Saiba Varma: Hmm!

Saiba Varma: Oh, that's such a good question.

Saiba Varma: Feel like they should do like a safari or something.

Alexia Arani: Oh, my God!

Alexia Arani: I don't know if I'm even ready for that.

Alexia Arani: Oh.

Saiba Varma: Where would you like them to go.

Alexia Arani: My God, I mean, I think you're right, but I'm just like, Oh, my God! I'm not sure if I'm ready for this show's like treatment of anti-blackness, or how it would explore that, you know, just like ugh!

Saiba Varma: Yeah, because I mean, I think it has to be.

Saiba Varma: They haven't really gone into like a post-colonial.

Alexia Arani: I mean Hawaii kind of, but.

Saiba Varma: Hawaii was like the closest.

Alexia Arani: Yeah.

Saiba Varma: I mean it is. But yeah, I would love to see like

Saiba Varma: I don't know. Love to see is probably not the right way, but like the Caribbean or.

Alexia Arani: Hmm.

Saiba Varma: Somewhere in East Africa or South Africa, or something like that, would be.

Alexia Arani: Which, if they do that, I hope that they also like, I do hope they continue some of this thread of like sex tourism, but also showing the ways that, like women, fall like white women, fall into this fetishization of men of color that like has to be there.

Saiba Varma: Yeah, cause I was there a little bit in season one. But I think that you're right. That needs to come back. That's.

Alexia Arani: Yeah, I don't know if this is an actual

Alexia Arani: thing that's happening. If I just saw someone talking about it. But I remember seeing somewhere on the Internet, people mentioning like a cold location like the next one, you know, don't even know what that means.

Saiba Varma: Because we've like.

Alexia Arani: Switzer.

Saiba Varma: We've overdone like the ocean scenes and the waves as being like poignant and.

Alexia Arani: Yeah, maybe I don't know.

Saiba Varma: That's cool.

Saiba Varma: Yeah, I'm dumb. I mean, I would definitely, I would definitely watch

Saiba Varma: another season, because I still feel like they're not that many shows that deal with class in.

Saiba Varma: In an interesting and complex way, and he's still he still does that well.

Saiba Varma: even though there are like lots of other problematic dynamics.

Alexia Arani: No.

Saiba Varma: Talked about, but.

Alexia Arani: At the very least I will keep watching the show, because I love talking about with you so much.

Saiba Varma: Same here.

Alexia Arani: Like that's the best part honestly has.

Saiba Varma: Conversation.

Alexia Arani: Then.

Saiba Varma: I know I learned so much.

Saiba Varma: This is great.

Alexia Arani: Well, I know we need to wrap up so. My God, I love you!

Saiba Varma: I know I love you too. Thank you for having me. This is so much fun.

Alexia Arani: Yay, and to folks listening. I hope that you enjoyed the episode, encourage you to please share it with folks who've watched the white lotus or who listen to podcasts. You might have noticed that I'm like, never on Instagram, because I'm just tired of these tech billionaire Bros. And I don't want to support their platforms.

Alexia Arani: so I do nothing to promote the show, which means I need your help, so please share the episode. Please give it stars. Leave a little review if you can. It's all very appreciated and helps encourage me to keep doing these, because having people like reach out and say, I loved. Your episode is like what gives me the will to keep going when I'm overbooked and tired and squeezing in recording in the little bits of time I have on the weekend. So yeah, thanks for listening, and

Alexia Arani: take care. Be careful with the Lorazepam. Do not mix it with alcohol.

Saiba Varma: Yes, a good reminder. PSA.

Alexia Arani: Don't do anything that family does, basically.

Saiba Varma: Yeah.

Alexia Arani: Okay. Bye, y'all.

Alexia Arani: But yeah, we're gonna get into Season 3 today. There's always so many freaking themes and disturbing moments to unpack on the show. So yeah, I'm excited about it. So, Saiba, just in case people maybe forgot who you are need a refresher. Do you mind introducing yourself sharing a little bit about who you are?

Saiba Varma: Sure. Hi, Alexia! Hi, listeners! I'm so happy to be back.

Saiba Varma: I am a writer, an anthropologist. I live in San Diego. I also have been a big fan of this podcast and have learned so much from it. And I've also been studying Buddhism for a while. So I'm really excited to get into some of the themes of season 3. Especially the Thailand spirituality, Buddhism tourism. You know all of those exciting things that we have to talk about. So thanks for having me.

Alexia Arani: Yeah, I'm excited. And I actually, I feel like we should start there. Because so in our last discussion, we basically broke down that like season one was about kind of like race and colonialism, as like the major themes, and then season two was like gender and sexuality, and then season three, I'm curious what you think, Mike White kind of told us like from the get-go like this seasons about spirituality and death.

Alexia Arani: And at least for me. I saw obviously themes of spirituality, but I didn't actually feel like it was like a huge focal point of the season. So at least, maybe not like

more so than what we kind of got sprinkled in of like season one, and like going to the healer. So anyways, I don't know I'm really excited for your thoughts on it, but I kind of want to start there. If this season is supposed to be about like spirituality, kind of where did you see it in the show? And like, what were your thoughts on, on how it was depicted?

Saiba Varma: Yeah, I mean, I actually did see a lot of themes. A lot of Buddhist themes come up through the whole season. And especially, I mean, I think all seasons are really taking on these questions of desire, particularly because the protagonist that we're encountering through this show are these ultra rich people right who are like deeply invested in a hyper materialist life and are flirting with spirituality in different ways. But have kind of committed themselves to living this like very capitalist life for the most part, and so seeing that either be challenged in different ways, or, you know, break down in different ways, like we see in this season, I think, was something really interesting, and I think just like meditating on the idea of desire, and how it drives different characters.

Saiba Varma: And how they resisted, or how they respond to it. I think it was that was definitely theme I saw going through the whole show.

Alexia Arani: That. Yeah, I'm glad you said Show, because I feel like all seasons. It's like that, that endless like greed and need for consumption. And like, not just of like material objects, but also often, like people like.

Saiba Varma: Oh, yeah.

Alexia Arani: Assume others. You know.

Alexia Arani: yeah, people, places, things, experiences. Yeah, I think. And that way, I think it also captures just this whole wellness.

Saiba Varma: This whole like culture of wellness, and this whole, you know kind of luxury, wellness, as this phenomenon that we're constantly like surrounded by. And it's supposed to be the answer to all of our pain and suffering. I feel like just does a really good job of yeah in general, of just questioning all of that. And I'd love to actually hear your take on, because

I know in a past life you were someone who was studying tourism. You know just how you thought about it, just the kind of commodification of Thailand or Buddhism or spirituality, and how it comes out in this season. If you had thoughts about that.

Alexia Arani: Yeah, I mean, oh, my gosh, I need to think about it more. But I mean, yeah. So for myself, I went into my grad program, thinking I was studying tourism and quickly was lost interest honestly, part of it for me, from being fully honest is that like, I'm aware that there's a lot of issues with tourism and travel, and it's also something I really enjoyed. It was just.

Saiba Varma: Like.

Alexia Arani: Do I actually want to like ruin this for myself? So yeah, I think that was part of it. I also will say as much as I hate to admit this. I do feel I do feel like I really related so much to Piper because, in addition to like studying these things, you know, like, when I was my junior year of college, like I studied abroad for a year, I went to Cuzco Peru for the first semester. And then I went to southwest China, and, like Tibet for the other part of the semester, and I like as a college student like studied a lot of Tibetan Buddhism. I was like, you know, meditating a lot. And I mean, personally, I do like I wouldn't say that I like identify as a Buddhist. But if I did have to say like, oh, what makes the most sense to me like definitely Buddhist philosophies and practices are still what I find most like resonant for myself and, like, you know, I come from somewhat of like a mixed class background like definitely never grew up working class like had what I needed, but like my mom often had like even when she was married, I was kind of considered her a

single mom, because she had these kind of short term marriages, and had like kids, and was always working and work with work and money, was always stress in her house, like stressful in her house versus like having a wealthy father and having that experience of traveling with him and stuff

Alexia Arani: so anyways, I could relate to like being this like little college student really interested in Buddhism, coming from a wealthy family and wanting to like reject, you know, their materialism and their fucked-up dynamics, and I just felt so called out by Piper so often. It was like she just needed to be like mixed race, and then it would have really, like, you know been more of that for me. But yeah, I just I felt so called out, this is a big tangent. Sorry. But this is where I'm going.

Alexia Arani: So yeah, I mean, I think

Alexia Arani: I feel like I don't have a I'm like riffing like this isn't a very formulated thought, but I guess I do have like empathy. I do have empathy and understanding for why people flock towards like why Americans flock towards Buddhism and flock towards these like religious traditions.

Alexia Arani: you know it's kind of the same thing that, like the monk says in that scene to Tim to the father of the Ratliff family, like, yeah, people are disillusioned with Christianity and with

Alexia Arani: Western consumeristic values. And all of these things. And they're looking for an alternative. So I feel like I do have

Alexia Arani: you know, empathy for that. And there's also this part of me that recognizes that like I feel like I don't know. True sort of ethical spiritual practice is done

anywhere, and that's kind of the point like you shouldn't have to, you know, flock to these far away locations to get some what you think of as authentic experience? Because even in the United States I feel like there's like monasteries or communities of Buddhist practice you can find almost anywhere that you don't need to run away.

Alexia Arani: to Southeast Asia to do that.

Alexia Arani: Yeah, I feel like I'm just rambling. I'm like.

Saiba Varma: No, no, I mean.

Alexia Arani: The outsider.

Saiba Varma: No, no, I didn't think.

Saiba Varma: I think that's all really right, like I think the eat. Pray, love model of you know.

Saiba Varma: Yes, spirituality is still very much.

Saiba Varma: very much intact in the Western imagination, as is just, I think, the profound misunderstanding of also what Buddhist practice is, and.

Alexia Arani: Yes.

Saiba Varma: I liked that

Saiba Varma: Saxon becomes the foil, for, like a lot of that misunderstanding, you know, like that it's.

Saiba Varma: It's the most like Douche, and

Saiba Varma: like Frat boy character, who is the most ignorant in this whole show. And I appreciated that

Saiba Varma: that move like this idea that

Saiba Varma: you know he's like Buddhist. Just want to suppress everything right. And it's like this choice between either

Saiba Varma: full desire for everything all the time. And this belief that you're just as long as you can just fulfill all of your need, all of your desires, like

Saiba Varma: happiness is gonna flow from that. And then this.

Saiba Varma: some kind of other imagination of

Saiba Varma: like total repression of all feelings and

Saiba Varma: wants and needs. And yeah, I just thought that was like

Saiba Varma: that opposition or like, that's that. Yeah. I think that those like polar opposites were really well.

Alexia Arani: Isn't it.

Saiba Varma: The show, you know.

Alexia Arani: I also, I feel like it's I think it's important to name. And this is also like

Alexia Arani: something that's missing in my knowledge, I guess is that, like

Alexia Arani: hopefully, people listening know this. But it's like Buddhism isn't one thing like there's so many different variants of Buddhism, and it looks extremely different, depending on like region or village. So for myself, too, like a lot of what I was like studying was Tibetan Buddhism, and like, I actually don't know really important differences with what that looks like in Thailand.

Alexia Arani: And also what you were just talking about is like suppression of feeling. And like I'm thinking about like Zen Buddhism, for example. And I feel like that's very much. It's very much not about that, you know, like a lot of it is about the spontaneity and like the joy and the embodiment.

Alexia Arani: So yeah, I don't know. I just want to throw that out there, too, and I don't know if you have any reflections on like Thai specific Buddhism to share. But that's something I was thinking about a lot while watching the show was that even as someone who has some understanding of these things, I'm sure I was missing so much of like the nuance of what it looks like in that specific place.

Saiba Varma: I mean, yeah, I think that's really important. And I'm not an expert in Theravada Buddhism, like, I also study in the under the Zen tradition, the.

Saiba Varma: Mahayana tradition. And there are. They are really different, like.

Saiba Varma: But I understand the Theravada tradition is much more about actually

Saiba Varma: shoring up you're not like the self, but it's like you can kind of be on your own and do your bodily practice, whereas in Mahayana it's much more about

Saiba Varma: being in the world and practicing in the world, you know it's much more like outward facing

Saiba Varma: practice. And I don't know how much that comes through in.

Saiba Varma: You know. I feel like the only encounter we really get with like

Saiba Varma: quote, unquote, authentic autism. And the show is with the monk

Saiba Varma: in the monastery, right? The Buddhist light kind of stuff we get in the hotel is.

Saiba Varma: that's all like, so right like, that's also highly packaged and commodified.

Saiba Varma: We can get into that. But

Saiba Varma: I but yeah, I did think that

Saiba Varma: I was glad that it broke down. At least some of like the most

Saiba Varma: most like basic misunderstandings that people might still have about Buddhism. I did think that I did that.

Alexia Arani: I think.

Saiba Varma: Lovely with that with the encounter like with the monk, you know.

Saiba Varma: I did want to say one more thing, though, about the I was thinking also about how like

Saiba Varma: a couple of the characters, but particularly, I think, Chelsea.

Saiba Varma: I think, functions as a Bodhisattva in the show.

Alexia Arani: Oh, interesting!

Saiba Varma: Wondering like what you thought about that. And I think.

Alexia Arani: You have to see more. You can't just.

Saiba Varma: I will, and I think Lachlan too, to some extent, even though he

Saiba Varma: is, I think, on his way to becoming a narcissist as well. But

Saiba Varma: so what I mean by that is, you know, there's this concept of

Saiba Varma: Bodhisattva, which is this idea of a spiritual being who

Saiba Varma: kind of commits themselves to remain in the world until everyone is liberated. Like all sentient beings, are liberated, so they themselves have

Saiba Varma: attained enlightenment, but.

Saiba Varma: Instead of like releasing themselves from the cycle. You know this like cycle of birth and death, they decide to come back, remain like in this human form, continue to be reincarnated until all sentient beings are liberated. And

Saiba Varma: you know, in Buddhism we talk about like Bodhisattvas. Also, it's just like

Saiba Varma: ordinary people who help you out in your journey right like someone shows you an act of kindness like you're in a long queue at the airport, and someone lets you cut in line because you're super stressed or just.

Saiba Varma: You know, offers you something when you need it, basically.

Saiba Varma: the universe coming through for you. And it takes a form of some kind of Bodhisattva, or an animal that, just like, you know, nuzzles you at the right moment when you're feeling really sad, is a Bodhisattva, and I thought

Saiba Varma: Chelsea was really embodying that Bothi software character in this way. That is also

Saiba Varma: true to what? How they describe both these efforts, which is that they often come in disguise.

Saiba Varma: We don't really know their form, and when I think when you first encounter Chelsea, she seems kind of silly and like

Saiba Varma: you don't really know what to make of her right. She just seems naive and innocent, and.

Saiba Varma: Pollyanna Ish or something. And then.

Saiba Varma: as the season progresses, you realize how much depth there is to her and how she's

Saiba Varma: she's like on this journey to like, facilitate Rick's

Saiba Varma: like whatever he needs to kind of realize in this life, not as just like a purely sacrificial thing. She's on her own spiritual journey. But she's such an important part, you know, like she's provided she's doing this like

Saiba Varma: profound, like spiritual service to him.

Saiba Varma: In this season. So.

Saiba Varma: That's something I was thinking about as well with.

Alexia Arani: That's so interesting. I feel like that's such a generous like. Read of her, too. Because I mean, like everyone I Chelsea's such a sweetheart like, and I love the actress.

Alexia Arani: Amy Lou Wood. She's great on sex education as well. She's magnetic, and I hope her career like takes off.

Alexia Arani: I think I feel like I read her more as like

Alexia Arani: someone who likely has her own

Alexia Arani: traumatic backgrounds likely had her own issues with her parents that, like really fostered this like codependency, and this desire to like, save and to like fix, which is so common. For like women, right to be socialized into like wanting to fix broken men to the point where I was like

Alexia Arani: kind of scared for her with Saxon, because I was like, Oh, no! Is this going to be her new project, you know. Is this like? Is him showing her a glimmer of vulnerability? What she like gonna actually work in this seduction that he, this long game seduction. He's playing with her. So yeah, I didn't really think of her that way. But I think

Alexia Arani: I think that's really interesting.

Alexia Arani: and especially interesting, because, like, you know, usually when characters are there to like, facilitate the growth of other characters, we tend to like critique that as like

Alexia Arani: kind of like objectifying. But I think, like you're saying, Chelsea feels deep. She doesn't feel like she's just there to facilitate the men around her at all, you know.

Saiba Varma: No, yeah. And I think she has a really profound understanding of

Saiba Varma: interrelationality, like she, she says, like several times

Saiba Varma: like our fates, are bound up with each other.

Saiba Varma: That's not. She's not just saying that

Saiba Varma: I'm just here for you, right? It's like she. I think she understands that his

Saiba Varma: path and his trajectory are like something that.

Saiba Varma: So it's like outside of her control, and

Saiba Varma: probably outside of something she like. She can't even fully understand right what it is, and he doesn't even

Saiba Varma: fully communicated. But I think she lives in a way where she's really

Saiba Varma: like she has commitment to someone. And this deep sense of yeah, being like, bound up together. And also, yeah, I like, I loved her refusal of Saxon, you know, she

Saiba Varma: really pushes him off, and that, too, to me, was like a real Bodhisattva power move, because.

Alexia Arani: It's not right like it's not about just being compassionate to everyone all the time, and equal measure.

Saiba Varma: You

Saiba Varma: like. You have to also know when the person is like ready to receive something ready to receive and ready to open themselves up, and so she kind of like puts him on this path. But she doesn't actually, emotionally invest in him at all.

Alexia Arani: Yeah.

Saiba Varma: And actually like rejects him on, you know. And I thought that was also like, yes, I like that. She's this like Trojan horse. She's like this, you know, unassuming young woman. And yet she has so much.

Saiba Varma: Yeah, like, she has a lot of spiritual depth. Actually.

Alexia Arani: I wonder I feel like there's some, maybe potential irony or contradiction in what you were just saying, though, because I actually feel like

Alexia Arani: I was really surprised with

Alexia Arani: The way my feelings towards Saxon shifted over the season where I actually feel like he ended up in a place where you're like, Wait, is, is he actually open to these lessons, you know, because even after he's done trying to impress Chelsea, he's still like reading the book that she gave him, you know. So I actually feel like he ended up, maybe being the one who had like more potential. Whereas we see that Rick was actually like

Alexia Arani: deeply committed to the path that he was on, and she could do nothing to disrupt that, you know, like I actually see him as the one who is completely, spiritually closed, and Saxon, maybe, is having more openness.

Saiba Varma: Yeah, I mean, that's a really good observation. I

Saiba Varma: I agree with you. I think that

Saiba Varma: I think yesterday I was just like hearing this parable about?

Saiba Varma: you know, it's like they're different kind, like we. We're all like different kinds of vessels, and one of the vessels is

Saiba Varma: like when you're too full, right? You can't actually like receive any new knowledge. It's like you're already like overflowing with stuff. You're overflowing with judgment. You're overflowing with cynicism you think you like know everything. And I think what you're describing actually is like a really good way of

Saiba Varma: thinking about Rick's character. And I think you're right, I think. I mean, I think Saxon begins that way as well. He's over.

Alexia Arani: Okay.

Saiba Varma: Knowing with like he thinks he knows the world. It's this

Saiba Varma: experience of maybe we're jumping to the next theme. Da-da-da has experience.

Alexia Arani: It could be fluid, you know.

Saiba Varma: The full moon party and the incest, and that

Saiba Varma: yeah, it provides. Maybe there's like a little hole in the pot now, and so.

Saiba Varma: It's gonna kind of come in.

Alexia Arani: Yeah, I feel like, yeah, we will get there. I do want to stick a PIN in that, because I think there's a couple more things like you mentioned. You think the show got some basic things right, or cleared up some misconceptions and a few things I really appreciated about that. I love that when she goes to the Temple they're like the monks are on laptops and like organizing appointments, and just showing, you know, because I think people this idyllic like

Alexia Arani: vision in their head that, like Buddhism, is the antithesis of modernity or something. And it's not so. I appreciated that. And.

Saiba Varma: I appreciated them, showing like people making offerings to ask for like a promotion and stuff.

Alexia Arani: Because again, I think you know, when I studied abroad, that was something that I was surprised by, because in this Western imaginary it's like Buddhism's all peace, and it's like people make offerings and ask for a new shiny car or to get an A on their test, you know. So I appreciated that. And then I actually love the part where

Alexia Arani: where Chelsea's trying to encourage Rick to go do the meditation class, and she's like she's so wise. And Rick is like, why? Because she's Indian, and Chelsea's just kind of like, yeah. So I kind of like that. They're calling out, you know that just because she's like Indian and has an accent that you know Chelsea is like, Oh, she's spiritual. She seems so wise.

Alexia Arani: Yeah, like a nice little self-aware moment.

Saiba Varma: Yeah, it was. And I was.

Saiba Varma: if you remember, actually the first scene when the show opens, it actually opens with her Amarthi, and it opens with Linda's son, and she's trying to.

Alexia Arani: That's right.

Saiba Varma: In a meditation, and then.

Alexia Arani: Oh!

Saiba Varma: As soon as

Saiba Varma: well. One is like the gunshots go off, and she has no idea right which is kind of

Alexia Arani: Yeah.

Saiba Varma: It's also a caricature of a meditation is supposed to make you hyper aware of what's going on around you.

Alexia Arani: Yeah.

Saiba Varma: Unaware of what's going on, and so she misses that, and then, as soon as they're the gunshots, and she's the first one to run away.

Saiba Varma: You know, she just she just runs.

Saiba Varma: and I think that was also just a funny. I did like her character, but I thought it was.

Saiba Varma: There was like there was humor there that maybe.

Saiba Varma: I don't know if people got it, but I got it, and I enjoyed that little. You know. This like

Saiba Varma: luxury. Hotel version of spirituality is like, it's really skin deep.

Saiba Varma: You know.

Alexia Arani: Yeah, I think the one like one other thing I really wanted to touch on and get your thoughts, on which maybe this is like, too niche. But something. Something I was reading about, too, was like the way that the monk talks to Tim like the father of the Rattler family about death.

Alexia Arani: Which I saw. Some people are drawing comparisons. I don't know if you've seen the good place, but there's also like a quote that they use in the good place. Talking about death is like, you know, life is like a wave, and we're returning to the wave, and it was very similar, but I could be mistaken. I think the quote in the good place was coming from Zen Buddhism, I believe.

Alexia Arani: But I don't know. I wonder what you thought I know for myself. I felt kind of surprised with him. Kind of telling like, oh, death! It's like you return to the water, and it's all good like.

Alexia Arani: And I was reading, I'll link to it in the show notes. I think it's worth reading. It was a really interesting roundup of different Buddhist practitioners and scholars, and

Thai people talk like giving their thoughts on the authenticity of the Buddhist representation on the show, and I did see quite a few people who said they were really jarred by the monks saying that because.

Alexia Arani: you know, their understandings of the afterlife, and Buddhism is like so tied to Karma and like rebirth, and that was totally missing for what he had to say. So it kind of felt like it was maybe just this like

Alexia Arani: convenient plot device to give him permission to potentially kill himself and his family that felt not rooted in my understandings of Buddhism. So I don't know if you had thoughts on that conversation, or if that struck you as weird at all.

Saiba Varma: Yeah, I mean, I agree with that.

Saiba Varma: It's not, I think if someone had asked me like, What's the Buddhist perspective on death, that's not immediately what I would have

Saiba Varma: you know. That's not what I would have thought of.

Saiba Varma: And so in that sense, yeah, I agree with you that it was. Probably

Saiba Varma: it was useful for him to hear that at that moment. But then there is also that other aspect of

Saiba Varma: like. Put this knowledge where you

Saiba Varma: you know, there's this idea that you give the person like the knowledge that they can receive. It's like you, tailor. That's why they're like so many different kinds of meditation practices, for example, because not everyone can like sit and meditate. So you have

Saiba Varma: cooking, meditation or eating meditation or walking. You know.

Saiba Varma: And the idea is just like you.

Saiba Varma: you yeah, you have to find, like the right

Saiba Varma: vessel for the person. And so

Saiba Varma: I also kind of read it in that way that this is like this.

Saiba Varma: A spiritual teacher who can see through this person basically

Saiba Varma: kind of see what they need to hear.

Saiba Varma: and what he needed to hear at that moment, I think, was

Saiba Varma: yeah, not to fear death, but then also not this idea of death as an end.

Saiba Varma: I think it's like really important, right? Because he's coming from this very

Saiba Varma: like Christian, like Southern idea of death as failure.

Saiba Varma: And

Saiba Varma: it's tied up with this whole because he's like the patriarch of the family, and his financial ruin is like spells ruin for the entire family like they can't imagine a life beyond

Saiba Varma: this, like wealthy existence that they have. So I kind of read it as like the monk

Saiba Varma: in some way sensing.

Saiba Varma: Some of that, and then giving him like the wisdom that he needed at that moment, and that he was like able to receive as well.

Alexia Arani: Yeah, when you were saying that it also made me go back to thinking about Chelsea as a Bodhisattva. And I'm like, in that case like, maybe she knows that, like what Rick actually needs is like endless compassion. And what Saxon needs is literally to be nagged like this man like he needs rejection. That's like, actually what he needed to like. Learn a lesson. You know.

Saiba Varma: Yeah, I think she didn't know

Saiba Varma: like I you know she was. She was kind of like a doctor in that way, right like she knew what treatment like different people needed.

Saiba Varma: And

Saiba Varma: including Chloe as well, like who was also suffering, you know in her own way, and she needed her to be her friend.

Alexia Arani: And.

Saiba Varma: You know, I mean, they needed each other as well. And I think, yeah, just her ability to also gauge. That was.

Saiba Varma: I saw, as like part of our spiritual evolution.

Saiba Varma: Yeah.

Alexia Arani: Yeah. Is there more? You wanted to talk? I'm sure it will come up throughout the conversation. But is there more on this piece? Or do we actually kind of want to move into the Saxon?

Alexia Arani: Yeah, let's move into, we have a lot of juicy things. Yeah.

Alexia Arani: yeah. So something. I was thinking about so.

Alexia Arani: sorry. I'm trying to go back to what you were saying in the conversation that was.

Saiba Varma: Sorry. Actually, I'm thinking

Saiba Varma: I was also thinking, I don't know if you want to try this in now, but, like the other thing I, I thought, was interesting, also goes back to this idea of people being in disguises, which is that

Saiba Varma: it's the Mook and Gaitok piece, right? Which is that.

Saiba Varma: Who you would expect. I saw a little bit about this online, too, like

Saiba Varma: she's Thai right? She's supposedly like local Buddhist, whatever. And she's basically the most on Buddhist.

Alexia Arani: Character and so many things.

Alexia Arani: Yeah.

Saiba Varma: Like in the way you know, and how she like, pushes

Saiba Varma: Gaitok into this life of violence essentially, and ambition, and

Saiba Varma: makes them feel inadequate and makes them feel like.

Saiba Varma: yeah, like on like, not good enough, right? Like dissatisfied. And

Saiba Varma: so I thought that was interesting. That was like an interesting thing, too, is like this container of this person who you would expect to be embodying all of the ideals, is actually.

Alexia Arani: Yeah.

Saiba Varma: Not that.

Alexia Arani: Yeah, I saw some Thai viewers reacting online who said they felt very.

Alexia Arani: They felt shocked by that and felt, I don't know. They said, yeah, had a hard time imagining her really acting in that way. And also some Thai responses that I thought were helpful to contextualize Gaitok, and how seemingly incompetent and infuriating he was at his job, but also like, I don't know, some viewers who are just saying like, well, this actually feels really rooted in Thai culture and wanting to be like not wanting to be direct and not wanting to be confrontational. So I don't know just throwing that out there.

Saiba Varma: Yeah, I did think he was I did feel like he was more believable to me as a character like she just seemed

Saiba Varma: also, I mean, this might sound like really minor, but like even the way she was dressed, and stuff like her shorts, and I mean, I know that was like supposedly the uniform. But I could not imagine

Saiba Varma: a hotel in Thailand, and like women wearing like these tiny shorts and like running around on motorcycles. It just seemed.

Saiba Varma: Really, it seemed like an odd choice of costume design. And

Saiba Varma: oh, yeah, also, just like fed into this, like her un-Thainess in a way.

Alexia Arani: Yeah, I definitely think like a major critique of the season for me is that they did so little with the Thai cast.

Saiba Varma: Yes.

Saiba Varma: No.

Saiba Varma: Consent. Yeah. Like.

Alexia Arani: Gaitok and Mook like did not need to be there at all. I mean, it seemed like Gaitok's whole thing was just to have the gun to make us scared for a few episodes with the Ratliff family. But yeah, they just did

Alexia Arani: so little and pretty much nothing with them. And like, you know, Amrita, we see her a couple of times where she gets absolutely no character development.

Alexia Arani: Yeah, I just like that really failed the Thai people in the season.

Saiba Varma: I agree? Yeah, that's and I feel like that was such a strength of other seasons was how

Saiba Varma: like, how crucial the staff were to the whole show, and it was like that

Saiba Varma: encounter between the staff and the guests that was like so full of friction and.

Saiba Varma: Right, like I was such so productive as a viewer to be like

Saiba Varma: part of those. And you could really.

Saiba Varma: And here, I just felt like, yeah, I agree with you that the there wasn't any life that was like outside of the resort. You know everything. They were all just completely circumscribed by the context of the resort we like got no sense of Thailand.

Saiba Varma: What's happening beyond the walls, you know.

Alexia Arani: Hmm.

Saiba Varma: Yeah, I was. I was pretty disappointed by that as well. And I think it was sad also that Gaitok who I think, was probably like the most fleshed out staff character.

Saiba Varma: His is like a loss of innocence. Story.

Alexia Arani: Yeah.

Saiba Varma: Which is just sad.

Saiba Varma: You know, like I wanted so much more for him

Saiba Varma: than to just become like this. Yeah, to lose his sweetness and to lose his

Saiba Varma: like just genuine, like curiosity and openness to the world, and become this like violent gangster person. And

Saiba Varma: I just felt it was just disappointing.

Saiba Varma: Yeah.

Alexia Arani: Yeah. And then.

Alexia Arani: like Porn Chai, who like he's almost like what Belinda was in season, one as just this like undeveloped just caring

Alexia Arani: character.

Saiba Varma: Yeah.

Alexia Arani: And I had issue with like, I feel like the writers were trying to mirror that like look

Alexia Arani: wealth corrupts. And now that Belinda has money. She's doing what Tanya did, and Porn Chai's Belinda. And I don't know. I just I really struggled with that. I did not think that those situations actually like mirrored each other the same way. But I think we're maybe left to think that, like Porn Chai is left feeling like abandoned and betrayed, and that he didn't get his good ending either.

Alexia Arani: Which I'm kind of like. Did anyone get a good ending this season? Because I know, like, you know, season one. We have that like white boy who gets to like, you know, kayak, or whatever season. Sorry I'm like. No, it's not even what happened, but I can't remember. Season . We get like the sex workers, one which I love.

Saiba Varma: Yeah, that's.

Alexia Arani: Then, this season, I'm like, did anyone come out better than we found them?

Saiba Varma: Yeah, that's such a good question.

Alexia Arani: It was a dark season.

Alexia Arani: I guess Belinda's our winner, but.

Saiba Varma: But yeah, I didn't, really. I didn't love like that whole plot line.

Saiba Varma: I I'd love to hear what you thought about it. But I just

Saiba Varma: yeah, I just thought it was like, too bad. You know, I was like, okay, like the person who was exploited like, I didn't know if we were supposed to be rooting for her in the end, like oh, she got her million dollars like that's justice.

Saiba Varma: And now she gets to be like part of this class of people, or whatever were we supposed to feel good about that? Or were we supposed to feel

Saiba Varma: like that? Was another kind of betrayal. I just didn't.

Alexia Arani: I feel like both. I feel like, yeah, I feel like we're supposed to feel like good for her. That oh, like she got what she, you know, because she was like

Alexia Arani: you know, robbed, or whatever of what Tanya promised her in season one. So I feel like we're supposed to feel good for her, and that she's like getting out of this industry. But then we're also supposed to see her as like corrupted because she's leaving Porn Chai, behind which I don't agree with. She just met this man.

Saiba Varma: It's nothing.

Alexia Arani: She never! She never even like acted interested in going into business with him when he proposed it. So I just don't buy it

Alexia Arani: but I think we are supposed to be rooting for her.

Saiba Varma: I did, though, feel that her son was like

Saiba Varma: ambivalent like I, I felt a lot of ambivalence towards him. I felt like

Saiba Varma: he in a way exemplified like this neoliberal.

Saiba Varma: this like person of color, neoliberal subject, you know. He's like business, Major, and he's like

Saiba Varma: just he's like trying to figure out the rules of this world, and he's like play right like playing these games.

Saiba Varma: And I felt like he, I know, like she has agency in in, and then she's like plays along like she

Saiba Varma: does a lot of like the machinations herself. So I'm not trying to think she's a pawn of him, but I did feel like his presence complicated

Saiba Varma: my like complicating my understanding of her as a character, my relationship to her as a character, you know, I felt like it's much more sympathetic towards her until.

Saiba Varma: yeah, it was like this new, this like new generation of people who's to me. He's he just seemed like extremely cynical

Saiba Varma: and.

Alexia Arani: Okay.

Saiba Varma: Couldn't. Really.

Saiba Varma: This is hard for me to like root for him.

Alexia Arani: Yeah, I don't. I don't definitely don't think we were meant to, because I mean especially the negotiation thing. He just comes off so Douche, you know, just like such an overconfident and like naive

Alexia Arani: like undergrad, you know.

Alexia Arani: He was like also another Duke student.

Saiba Varma: To me, you know.

Alexia Arani: Yeah, I'm like, you know, maybe this season it's like, I'm sad about the

Alexia Arani: treatment of the Thai characters. And maybe it's all it's really just the characters of color, like altogether.

Saiba Varma: Yeah.

Alexia Arani: Know, and I also think part of like. I don't know if this resonates for you, but I think part of the Belinda storyline too, like something I wrestled with this season. Is it just started to feel very soapy, feel very soapy? It felt like there was a lot more attention onto plot points and mystery than the like. Like. You said, the tensions between people and these, like.

Alexia Arani: you know, yeah, these little, these tensions between people and these like character developments like that happened a little bit. But I feel like a lot of that was really sacrificed in service of the like. What's gonna happen with the gun? Is he gonna shoot the family like, you know? Who's Rick gonna murder like that? It just was too much like, I kind of like, and I noticed, like, I think.

Alexia Arani: maybe, how some like viewers and critics also felt. But I just missed that from the first couple of seasons, and it felt kind of almost manipulative, too, of just like dragging out the sense of like dread and anxiety where it's just like, okay. Some of this, you know, is like storytelling, and some of this just feels like manipulative at a certain point.

Saiba Varma: I totally agree with you. I felt like

Saiba Varma: I'm I felt tired with this whole framing of like this murder mystery, and that that's

Saiba Varma: somehow supposed to

Saiba Varma: keep our interest in the show. It's like to figure out who did it. And in conversations with people I noticed like, that's what they would latch onto when they didn't want to actually talk about all of like the micro tensions that were happening like it just became such a convenient

Saiba Varma: thing to focus on. Instead, it's like, who's gonna die right?

Saiba Varma: And it's almost like a game. And I just felt like, okay, at this point like, we don't need that. We're already.

Alexia Arani: Interesting.

Saiba Varma: In the show. I feel like the power of the show is precisely in these.

Saiba Varma: in the way that it shows these micro dynamics. It's like.

Saiba Varma: Side glances and the back chatter and the right like just the power play within these very intimate relationships.

Alexia Arani: That's what I'm there for. And I think that's what you're there for you know and yeah.

Saiba Varma: I just felt like the like. We don't need this conceit.

Saiba Varma: I hope they don't do it in season. .

Alexia Arani: Yeah, I think, too, I think I really struggled with Rick's character and storyline for that reason, too, because it was I actually really enjoyed his character in the first few episodes, like seeing his evolving relationships with Chelsea, his dynamics with Amrita like that all was very interesting to me, and like I'm sure we'll get into his conversation with his friend. Frank was like, that's all interesting. But as soon as I got more focused on the revenge storyline again. It just felt like a soap opera, you know, and like.

Alexia Arani: and like the twist at the end that it's his dad and but there's also something almost. I don't know if this is intentional. It almost feels kind of Shakespearean, too, you

know it just kind of felt like a classic Shakespeare sort of tragedy. I don't. I don't know. I don't think comedy of errors is the right term, but it felt like.

Alexia Arani: Yeah, I don't know if there was a play with that, but it also just felt like a weird thing to try to bring in when you're also trying to do a season focused on spirituality and death. It's just like there's too much, you know.

Saiba Varma: Yeah. And I think the I think his arc was.

Saiba Varma: yeah, I think I mean, I think you like hit it on the head earlier when you were talking about how he's really unable to grow. It's like for him. It's like his Karma catches up, you know. It's like this is the time. His karma's like catching up to him, and he's unable to escape his

Saiba Varma: his own instincts. It's like he has this opportunity, like Chelsea is there? She's trying to pull him out like there is this opening for him to

Saiba Varma: live a different kind of life, or do something different, and he's just unable to do it, and he

Saiba Varma: ends up precisely like fulfilling the.

Saiba Varma: you know, like the thing that's already. It's like already latent in him. And I think that's what makes him really tragic.

Alexia Arani: No, and like

Alexia Arani: the way that he, and like Chelsea's death, of course, right? That's like the tragedy is like it ends up harming

Alexia Arani: the one person who's like really ride or die, and like.

Saiba Varma: Yeah, I mean, I think to be generous. It's like there, there are those moments where he's

Saiba Varma: he. You feel like he's at the brink of like some kind of transformation that maybe he can actually

Saiba Varma: stop all of this from happening. But then there's yeah. Then of course he doesn't. But

Saiba Varma: yeah, I mean, I do think in terms of like.

Saiba Varma: yeah, in terms of thinking about your Karma. I think it does.

Saiba Varma: He? He is like telling us something. His character is kind of

Saiba Varma: it's like some kind of lesson, but it's not a satisfying one. I agree with you that it feels the way that it was. It felt very like artificially constructed like this whole dad plot line and all of that. Yeah.

Alexia Arani: Yeah, I think I think for me.

Alexia Arani: for me. The Ratliff family carried the season.

Saiba Varma: Me too.

Alexia Arani: Yeah, it like that was the core of like what was fascinating. And it also feels closer to the root, you know, of, like showing those interpersonal dynamics that are so interesting, and we'll switch into more of what was interesting. But my one exception to that is, I just think they went. It was just too much of Tim

Alexia Arani: like sweating and taking the pills with no water like I can understand him doing that like once, but like y'all like or like he just like hugs it back. It's like a dog about to like throw up a bone like, Oh, I got tired of that, and just like you know how many episodes ended with him, just like staring off

Alexia Arani: and like

Alexia Arani: if that whole thing was just like way, too, dragged out for me. But besides that, and okay, sorry. Now that I'm ranting the fact that no one in the family was like, Dad, you're on pills that also really upset me, and that he's like taking a shit ton of

Lorazepam and heavily drinking like he would have passed out, or like he was not exhibiting the behaviors of someone who's mixing substances in that way. So that's also bad, like public health education for people watching.

Saiba Varma: Don't mix your lorazepam and alcohol.

Alexia Arani: Yeah, no, I mean, Victoria can like she's been

Alexia Arani: for a while. She has the stamina, you know, but like a newbie like Tim, no way.

Saiba Varma: Yeah, I mean, I don't know what that particular cocktail is, but I just assumed that because he just became like a zombie right? Like he completely shut down. And I just assumed that that's what

Saiba Varma: that competition would do to someone.

Alexia Arani: Feel like he would have like, yeah, shutting down. And they did show him like slurring and stuff a little bit. But I feel like he would have been

Alexia Arani: I don't know, like I don't think he would have been nearly as functional as he was.

Alexia Arani: He would have passed out. He would have been sleeping through many of the scenes where he was.

Alexia Arani: you know, just seeming a little off.

Saiba Varma: I mean I.

Alexia Arani: Anyways, that's.

Saiba Varma: No, no, I I'm glad we're getting into the rack list. I agree that that was for me also, the

Saiba Varma: yeah, really, like the juiciest part of the show this this season, and also, you know, I feel like every season has its heartbreak.

Alexia Arani: And I think Piper was definitely like.

Saiba Varma: This for me, anyway. That was this. It was the heart, the heartbreak of this scene.

Saiba Varma: But yeah, I mean, I do. I do think the lack of noticing on the part of everyone was

Saiba Varma: that was deliberate right? Because this is a family that does it actually communicate.

Alexia Arani: Yeah.

Saiba Varma: With each other. And so I thought that was just very telling that everyone's like trapped in their own little

Saiba Varma: bubble, basically. And.

Alexia Arani: Yeah.

Saiba Varma: first like silently suffering, without anyone.

Alexia Arani: I mean to be fair. They did notice, like Victoria and Saxon, both multiple times. And Piper, I think almost everyone but Laughlin, which makes sense, I think, was like, you seem weird. Are you okay? What's going on? But the fact that none of them made the connection of clearly what's happening was annoying. But.

Saiba Varma: Yeah.

Alexia Arani: Yeah, clearly, they are all about like avoidance and not directly naming things.

Saiba Varma: Yeah. And I'm sure it's not the first time he's behaved in that kind of way before, right? Like, it's probably

Saiba Varma: that there's work stuff that's happening, and he probably just shuts off.

Alexia Arani: Imagine this is like part of a broader pattern of Md, difficult things.

Alexia Arani: Yeah, but we're like, Oh, my God, we're talking about the least interesting person.

Saiba Varma: I know. Sorry.

Alexia Arani: Tim, let's get into the other ones. No, it's okay. I know you did it, but.

Saiba Varma: As someone who taught a duke, though I have to say I loved all the Duke. People getting so mad.

Saiba Varma: Do people.

Alexia Arani: Mad about the show.

Saiba Varma: About this about the fact that he was from Duke, and he was wearing the Duke shirt when he was

Saiba Varma: like suicidal and.

Alexia Arani: Oh, my God, I mean, I don't know like the intricacies, but someone who, like grew up in the South, it feels right.

Saiba Varma: Yeah, it felt so good. It was very.

Alexia Arani: Also like, Oh, oh, my God! So I know. Okay, so more into Lexia's backstory.

Alexia Arani: so I'm from the South.

Alexia Arani: and most of my family in the South is white, a mixed race, so like a lot of my white family. I will say, though, that my family is not like the Ratliff family, because, like most of my like white Southern family, are not like preppy and rich like this. So this this didn't feel real to my family like my. Even my white brothers and stuff are not like preppy Duke kids. But I've seen

Alexia Arani: breed of family, I know. Thank God, I mean they have their own issues, but not these. But yeah, this breed of family. And like, I have a specific like Saxon in particular, I'm just like, Oh, my God. And I doubt this person. Listen to the Podcast, but I

can't name it because I just do not want to be offensive. But there's like a specific person that I'm just like, I know this guy like I've met him and his Douchebros friends, and it was I was just like crawling out of my skin because it was so real. And I was just having like

Alexia Arani: ugh! Just flashbacks to being around these guys.

Alexia Arani: also, like kind of Saxon's fascination with

Alexia Arani: Chelsea like. Obviously she's gorgeous, and that's part of it. But I also feel like I had those experiences of being the like.

Alexia Arani: I don't know the kind of like indie like missed race girl with like hairy armpits like those guys would usually like think that was gross, but also feel like there was like a challenge in it for them, you know, of like wanting, because I was so uninterested, so that whole dynamic also just felt resident to me, and was just like, you know. I remember these experiences.

Saiba Varma: Yeah, no, I think that's such a huge part of his

Saiba Varma: attraction to her is that he can't get her right, and his whole MO in life is like

Saiba Varma: you can get anything.

Alexia Arani: Exactly.

Saiba Varma: That you want, and if that's and that like plays out in this like horrific way with the incest.

Saiba Varma: You know. But

Saiba Varma: yeah, I think that's like, yeah, it totally get that. Yeah, he just I mean what a great piece of costing. I think you know. I think.

Alexia Arani: He acted the hell out of that role.

Saiba Varma: He did, but also like Patrick Schwarzenegger.

Saiba Varma: Great good job casting director for putting this person in this room. I yeah, I love.

Alexia Arani: Oakland's also a nepo baby, right? I don't remember.

Saiba Varma: What is he?

Alexia Arani: Yeah, I don't remember the actor's name. I don't know his parents, but he also has famous parents, that actor as well. So yeah.

Alexia Arani: okay, I feel like it's come up a couple of times. I was re-listening to our podcast. Earlier today for season, one and something you pointed out in that episode is how all of the seasons have this moment of rupture centered around gay sex, and it literally happened again in season ,

Alexia Arani: which was so fascinating to me. Which I'm like we don't have to unearth that whole conversation around that. So we talked about it in season ones and feel free to go. Listen to it. Y'all if you don't remember on like, you know. Why Mike White puts in these sort of like

Alexia Arani: non-normative, deviant, gay sex things like we had the conversation already, but it was just like, Wow, they're doing it again this season with it. The gay sex in this case, being deviant and criminal and like rupturing, because it's like incestual between the brothers.

Alexia Arani: So that was interesting to notice.

Alexia Arani: But yeah, I so for listeners who don't know this. When I started watching the white lotus, I texted Saiba, and I was just like, Oh, my God! Like I do not want to talk about incest. But then, as the season went on, I was like, Okay, now, now, I actually like, do want to talk. It's like a weird thing to say, do you want to talk about incest? But just the ways I'm seeing people respond to it and talk about it online? I feel like I have to like.

Alexia Arani: intervene, and offer a different perspective. So.

Saiba Varma: Yeah, please do. I'd love to hear what you.

Alexia Arani: Yeah. So I mean, first of all, a lot of what I'm seeing. That I was really struggling with is like, I'm seeing so much depiction of Lachlan as a predator

Alexia Arani: like down to people making theories that Lachlan, like, spat out the drugs that he was given at the full Moon party, and that he was sober and faking it, and that he's you know, that he victimized his brother, like, you know, people saying he's a psychopath. You could see it from the beginning. And it's just it's such a clear like.

Alexia Arani: It just shows me how

Alexia Arani: like how wrapped up our society is in like casting people who engage in deviant sex acts as like

Alexia Arani: pathological and criminal like. It's just such a clear thread. And I think I didn't want to talk about this, because it's of those topics where I can see someone like hearing what I say, and like

Alexia Arani: taking it to the extreme, or willfully misinterpreting it and like getting pissy. But I'm like whatever I feel like I need to say my peace with this, you know.

Alexia Arani: And I just think it's I don't agree at all with that analysis. I think it's a lot more complicated. I think that there's ways in which, like Saxon, is almost like grooming Lachlan. first of all, you know where he's trying to like

Alexia Arani: He's like socializing him into like rape culture and like teaching him how to like. Take advantage of women, and how he needs to stay sober and, like.

Alexia Arani: you know, he's teaching these predatory behaviors to his brother. And then, of course, you know, as Lachlan said, like all you care about is getting off. He's talking all the time about that. He's like showing poor boundaries with his brother, but, like masturbating in front of him. And all of these things that like when you have, like a young, impressionable person like Lachlan, who is also like on drugs. And like, he said, I'm a people pleaser.

Alexia Arani: you know. I just don't think that Saxon is like this purely innocent victim in that dynamic at all. Which is how people are like portraying it online.

Alexia Arani: And I mean, there's a lot more to unpack. But I think the other thing that I'll say, too, and this is the part that feels like sticky to talk about. But like

Alexia Arani: I think obviously like incest, has a huge social taboo. I think some of that makes sense because there are really tricky power dynamics that come into play when you have family members and people of different ages and things like that. But that being said like, I also think incestual desire and incestual, like relationships like happen.

Alexia Arani: I think you know, especially, I feel like I know a number of people who some early experiences of like exploring sexuality would be like hooking up with a

cousin or something like that, you know. So I also think there's ways that these discourses, like really

Alexia Arani: stigmatize people who have had experiences like this, that I think honestly, are not that uncommon?

Alexia Arani: So that's just kind of like my take on it. And, like, you know, power like the power dynamics are an issue. There's a lot of things we can break down. But in general I tend to just like I have a hard time with like black and white hardline policing of sexual deviance, you know. And

Alexia Arani: I guess. Yeah, that's I'll get off of my like pedestal. This is just what I have to say about the incest. Curious, if you what your thoughts are, Saiba.

Saiba Varma: Yeah, no, I think that's really. I think that's really great. And I hadn't heard those I hadn't heard like that line of interpretation which I just find so bizarre. I'm like just trying to wrap my head around that I'm like.

Alexia Arani: It's all over reddit.

Saiba Varma: Like. Do you not understand what the dynamics of this family are at all to, anyway? It's it seems, really off to me as well, so I'm glad you

Saiba Varma: I'm glad you brought that up. Yeah, I mean for me, I think. Yeah, I agree with everything you said. And I

Saiba Varma: I was really reading it, like from the framework.

Saiba Varma: like from the perspective of like sex and desire, right and like just this idea that, like from Saxons

Saiba Varma: point of view which is again like this.

Saiba Varma: like you need to like, own everything right, and like owning everything is like the way to live, and it's the way to happiness and all of that, and that

Saiba Varma: includes your family like you need to like, have ownership over all of them, and that takes this like

Saiba Varma: turn that he like, does not anticipate, and cannot.

Saiba Varma: But yet it is like the fulfillment of what he is

Saiba Varma: pushing for, and he's like kind of pushing Lachlan towards this right anyway. And so when it kind of.

Alexia Arani: His karma, catching up with him also.

Saiba Varma: Exactly. Yeah, that's kind of how I saw it, you know, as

Saiba Varma: and then he's like, actually unable to like.

Saiba Varma: He's unable to really stomach it.

Saiba Varma: And

Saiba Varma: and it, yeah, it produces like a new, maybe, maybe like a tiny glimmer of something new for him to kind of think about, but I also thought it was. I mean, I know, like the whole him and Lachlan thing was like the

Saiba Varma: that was like the main

Saiba Varma: thing we were supposed to focus on, but

Saiba Varma: he was also like doing the stuff with Piper. He was like constantly commenting on her sexuality.

Saiba Varma: Like no boundaries. He was like.

Saiba Varma: Making these jokes between about Lachlan and Piper. You know there's a scene right in the beginning when Lachlan, I think Piper says, like, oh, Lachlan, you can sleep in my room if you know he's like what like, you can't sleep in her room like, and

Saiba Varma: to me it was just about

Saiba Varma: control and ownership. And he's this narcissist, and he needs he actually wants Lachlan to desire him, you know, that is like at the found, and he wants everyone to him right, and that's like the foundation of his ego. And

Saiba Varma: that breaks, you know, at that point in the season. So I was kind of reading it more through. Sorry I like that, was rambling, but that's.

Alexia Arani: No, it wasn't at all.

Saiba Varma: I was thinking about it.

Alexia Arani: Yeah, that makes a lot of sense.

Alexia Arani: Yeah. And then it's interesting. So it's like it, it comes up again with Greg,

Alexia Arani: And again in a way that really like.

Alexia Arani: I know, Mike White says he's trying to like subvert expectations and play with deviance, and I just feel like it ends up, reinforcing all of these things like

Alexia Arani: first

Alexia Arani: and I feel that a lot of the way with like Greg, and how you know it's revealed that he's into like cucking like he likes watching people, you know. Fuck his wife. But then it's not enough that he's just into this like deviant sex act. We have to then like, pathologize it, and like bring it back to like. You know, these childhood experiences of overhearing his parents having sex which you know the way that the

Alexia Arani: characters are reacting and the way the audience is supposed to react is all painting that like clearly, there's something depraved with Greg, that he, like.

Alexia Arani: you know, was experiencing desire and getting off as he's like overhearing his parents having sex, and, like, you know, they do mention like revulsion all these feelings he was moving through. And like again, I just think that's an experience that, like a lot of people have had of like overhearing their parents overhearing family members, you know, having sex. And like.

Alexia Arani: I think there's like an array of like feelings that that would cause that could also include like, yeah, like having interest, or curious or sexual fantasies, or being aroused by things even as you're repulsed by them like that just feels human to me.

Alexia Arani: So it just really felt like some like just more like unnecessary, like stigmatization of these like deviant sexual practices. And it was like wrapped up in Greg,

of course, being like a villain too, and this is like part of his villainy the same way that, like you know, the gay men in season, are the villains who are like fucking the young sex worker and killing people like. It's just this threat that I'm just.

Alexia Arani: I don't think it's subversive bike. I don't like it.

Saiba Varma: Yeah, no, I agree. And then also Chloe in the end just becoming an instrument of his fulfilling this fantasy for him. Right?

Saiba Varma: I also did that where I mean, and that like dynamic.

Saiba Varma: it just felt different than the I mean. I felt like they were trying to draw a parallel between that dynamic and like Chelsea and Rick. But I just

Saiba Varma: like with Chelsea and Rick. There was a lot more

Saiba Varma: there was like some something mutual happening which maybe we didn't

Saiba Varma: like get the full ex like we didn't fully understand, like the history of their relationship, which I think like we could have. But with Chloe and Greg it just seemed like

Saiba Varma: this very instrumental relationship on both sides. You know, she's like.

Saiba Varma: I have a pretty good. I'm on this book like I'll make this work, you know, and

Saiba Varma: like. What is she other than that? What is she getting out of this.

Alexia Arani: I think, for Chloe. I feel like I read that a little differently where like, because it's instrumentalized on both sides.

Alexia Arani: Her like, you know, recruiting men to fuck, or whatever. I didn't read that as much as like her, just like giving in to his desires. If anything, I feel like. That's an arrangement that probably would work well for Chloe, too, because, like.

Alexia Arani: you know, if she's clearly a young woman who's like sexual and interested in having sex with other people. And I feel like this actually gives her a way to do that without potentially disrupting her relationship and her economic security and all the things she's getting out of her time with Greg. So I don't know. I kind of felt like, oh, this probably is going to work well for both of them. You know that she doesn't have to sneak around anymore, and she can keep doing what she wanted. And

Alexia Arani: relationship can still be stable at the end.

Saiba Varma: Yeah. But then, isn't that like a kind of good resolution.

Saiba Varma: do it? Where then? Greg's desire is maybe no longer just like deviant. But then it's folded into.

Saiba Varma: you know, different kind of.

Alexia Arani: Well, yeah, but I think as the audience, we're meant to see the whole thing as twisted and deviant, and then both as like perverse characters, because we also get that she was like the mail order bride, a sex worker like. There's ways in which Chloe is also painted as sexually deviant also her like seduction of like a minor. You know her attraction to Locklead and

Alexia Arani: you know I also have seen people calling her like a Groomer, that she's the one who gave them the drugs, and she's orchestrated everything. And like, I don't love. Yeah, I'm not into the intense blame game here, like, I think the dynamics are all much more complex than that.

Alexia Arani: But yeah, I think that it's

Alexia Arani: I feel like it's meant to be this like funny haha! Look at them. They do this deviant sex stuff. And they're weird, like, I feel like, that's what the show was.

Alexia Arani: how it's expecting us to respond.

Saiba Varma: Hmm, interesting.

Saiba Varma: Yeah, I think

Saiba Varma: I think I did feel like they settled into a dynamic that was like fulfilling for both of them. But

Saiba Varma: I yeah, it just felt

Saiba Varma: It felt very instrument. Yeah, like I said, it felt to me like both of them were like, kind of instrumentalizing each other in this way that, and I didn't really know, like what. There was no depth to the

Saiba Varma: really trying to understand each other. Beyond that, you know.

Alexia Arani: I was like.

Saiba Varma: It's like you're exchanging like sex for money, basically in this dynamic. And that's it's working for you. So it's fine. But

Saiba Varma: there's no like. There's no transformation. There's no like growing together there. There was a lot of like, and that could just be like the writing, too, like it could just be.

Alexia Arani: Yeah.

Saiba Varma: Undeveloped, something.

Alexia Arani: Think they're not meant to be like good people like, I don't think Chloe is meant to be a good person like I think that we might empathize with her because of Chelsea's closeness to her. But, like Overall as a character, I think they're both. Yeah. I don't really. She doesn't really give us any depth to see her, and

Alexia Arani: like having any innocence to her.

Saiba Varma: Yeah, I think that's right. Yeah.

Saiba Varma: But yeah, neither did I feel like she's a villain, or she's a predator or anything.

Alexia Arani: Yeah.

Saiba Varma: You know.

Alexia Arani: Yes.

Saiba Varma: So.

Alexia Arani: I agree. I don't. I think there's certainly issues we could talk about, but I don't view her that way either.

Saiba Varma: Yeah.

Alexia Arani: Okay, so on this thread. We also, we need to talk about Frank.

Saiba Varma: Talk about Frank, but we haven't talked about like the friends.

Alexia Arani: Yes.

Saiba Varma: Yeah. Jacqueline.

Alexia Arani: I know, but I think yes, we need to get there, I guess.

Saiba Varma: I'm thinking of free.

Alexia Arani: Because we're just on this like sexual deviance, Combo.

Alexia Arani: But did you see sexual deviance among the friends? I'm curious if that's a thread you saw there, as well.

Saiba Varma: Not deviance. I said, Yeah, not deviance, I guess. But there is.

Saiba Varma: There's definitely like the you know, sexes like power and control. And Jacqueline and Lori.

Saiba Varma: their whole, their kind of history of like

Saiba Varma: competing with each other over math.

Alexia Arani: Which feels more norm, more normative, even if even as it's like toxic. Yeah, so yeah, I think I do think I want to talk about Frank's to me. It fits in with this which I'm talking about in terms of deviance. But actually in the notes I put perversion, and I actually feel like, that's almost a better word. Because I do think we're like, I think, that we are supposed to see all these characters as perverted, you know. Yeah,

Alexia Arani: Greg and Greg and Chloe included in that.

Saiba Varma: Yeah.

Alexia Arani: So yeah, I feel like I've been talking a lot. So I don't know. Do you want to get it going on, Frank? Or do you want me to continue ranting? What are your thoughts.

Saiba Varma: I don't feel like you're talking too much.

Alexia Arani: Okay.

Alexia Arani: So oh, my gosh! There's so much here, I'm not even sure. Again, I think, with Frank's character like it. Just feel like another moment where this sort of like sexual perversion is written in just for like.

Alexia Arani: it's for like shock factor, but also for like humor, because I feel like a lot of this was played for laughs like even like the sort of scene where Chloe's sharing that Greg's into cucking like it is Chelsea's facial reactions that are supposed to be like the humorous outlet like for the show. Right?

Alexia Arani: Yeah. And similarly, the scene where Frank is like confessing his sexual interests to Rick. It's Rick's facial reactions that we are like dying and responding to and laughing at. And again, it's like these, like sexual, like perversions are just being played for laughs.

Alexia Arani: I do think, in Frank's character it is complicated for a lot of reasons that we need to unpack, which, like the big things for me here, like

Alexia Arani: I guess to begin, I would just say, like.

Alexia Arani: obviously, I'm a defender of sexual deviance. So I'm like it shouldn't. I don't think it should be like a funny reveal that Frank, like enjoys cross dressing, or that he likes pegging, that he wants to be fucked in the ass like, okay, that's fine. A lot of people do those things, and even if they didn't, it's fine, you know.

Alexia Arani: But the part that feels tricky with Frank is like these different things. So one is that the way that he talks about like how he thinks that he really wants to be an Asian girl, or like maybe he actually is an Asian girl on the inside, and that's why he wants, like an Asian girl to look him in the eyes while he's like being fucked.

Alexia Arani: Is. I saw there's a lot of discourse happening on the Internet around this, as like a portrayal of auto gynephilia. Are you familiar with this at all, Saiba? Okay.

Alexia Arani: I'm not going to do like a total deep dive. But basically, this was like a theory that came out like, maybe in the eighties, when people were like theorizing around like, why are people trans and transness? And the idea was that like, Oh, this is actually kind of like

Alexia Arani: a sexual perversion, or like an erotic desire to be the thing that you're attracted to so understandably like many trans people and like trans. Women in particular, have, like strongly pushed back against that framework, and see it as like, extremely like fetishizing, and like a denial of trans identity. And all of those things which is important to be like aware of.

Alexia Arani: But I think also for myself, I can like, I understand that contextually, and I also think that we don't necessarily have to like fold those things together where, like

Alexia Arani: sexual desire and identity are very like complex. And I think somebody can like

Alexia Arani: have these specific desires without that? Then, being folded into like gender identity, like, I think both of these things can exist. But obviously, like the issue with autogynophilia was the collapsing of it with like trans identity. And like the pathologization.

Alexia Arani: Okay. So anyways, that just feels like messy, that that whole thing is coming back up.

Alexia Arani: And I also saw some people pointing out that, like Frank's whole storyline shows the way that, like trans people and like trans women often just get used for the personal development of like Cis. People who are like wanting to break out of like gender norms or sexual norms and kind of using, like, you know, trans people to help, and then kind of disposing of them when it's over. Which is clearly the case with Frank, because it was like, you know, just like a sex worker.

Alexia Arani: And then his other big thing is like transracialism.

Alexia Arani: right? Which I'm curious to hear your thoughts on this.

Alexia Arani: but I think my main issue with this is that it's just. It's so wrapped up in like fetishization, you know of like brick is saying like he feels like he's an Asian girl on the inside. But it's like, How do you know what an Asian girl feels like? It has to be relying on these like essentialized notions of Asian femininity. Because, of course, that is such a complex thing. It doesn't look the same from one Asian girl to the next.

Alexia Arani: Okay, I said a lot. Yeah. What are your? What are you thinking.

Saiba Varma: Oh, that's great! I'm

Saiba Varma: I'm really glad you brought that the like kind of trans perspective into it as well, because

Saiba Varma: I was like, of course I was. I was thinking about a lot about that, and like what it means for him to want to embody like an Asian woman, and but specifically like a sex worker. I think that's really.

Saiba Varma: Wouldn't just in terms of

Saiba Varma: like the identity as well like. It's not just any Asian woman, right? It's like he has these like very specific encounters. And for me, I was thinking a lot about like

Saiba Varma: him, representing, like, like some kind of like American capitalism, you know, and like him, like

Saiba Varma: basically this idea of

Saiba Varma: so his story, like so like the way that he begins his monologue, or whatever right is that like he comes in order to like, renounce, desire. And he lives this like very kind of renunciant life. Right? So he's trying to like, leave behind this consumerist.

Saiba Varma: Like.

Saiba Varma: yeah, this consumers way of living, and he's like doing something really different with his, with his life, like he's experimenting with a very different way of living, and.

Alexia Arani: Free of addiction. I just.

Saiba Varma: Yeah, it's like, it's so important. Yeah, that's huge. Right? Because he then becomes addicted to this renancy and kind of life. I mean. It was kind of reminded me of, like the.

Saiba Varma: It was like the story of the Buddha in a way right like Siddhartha was like this prince who lives this life of excess, who lives this life, where he's like every pleasure, everything available to him. And then he goes this like extreme way, where he like tries to live off like whatever ten grains of rice a day kind of thing. And it's like both are these extreme practices. And so I think Frank's kind of story like mirrored that. And then his.

Alexia Arani: Hmm.

Saiba Varma: His fall right or whatever you want to call his like lapse, or whatever you want to call him.

Saiba Varma: and I just felt like. It was also to me a commentary about like this.

Saiba Varma: a kind of like Western, like this masculine kind of consumption of like the East.

Saiba Varma: You know, and of everything so much so that it's not just enough that you're like

Saiba Varma: like buying sex. And you're like doing all this stuff, but that you like have to be even become the person, or you feel like.

Saiba Varma: Even own like again, it becomes about like this ownership where it's like, I can own this experience of this like.

Saiba Varma: Die sex worker. It's not enough that I have like this power over them, but

Saiba Varma: I can even become them.

Saiba Varma: You know.

Saiba Varma: So to me it was kind of like that like that. I felt like that was part of the narrative as well.

Alexia Arani: I was thinking the exact same thing as you were saying, it's like, Yeah, exactly. It's also, when you think of get out. It's like the get out dynamic, you know.

Saiba Varma: Exactly.

Alexia Arani: That it's not enough to just like use. You have to actually embody it and become it totally.

Saiba Varma: Exactly. Yeah, and so I think, like the gender. Jimmy also, like all the gender, and like queer dynamics in it, were also all part of that as well. Right? Because, of course, this is like.

Saiba Varma: I think it was also like just thinking about, like Thai, like Thailand, as being this

Saiba Varma: such a like sexualized economy, right like. So

Saiba Varma: economy is like dependent on sex tourism and.

Alexia Arani: That's like.

Saiba Varma: These older white men.

Saiba Varma: And like.

Saiba Varma: either like trans people in Thailand or women, or whoever like who are the objects of this, who are like

Saiba Varma: running the country like they're basically like running the economy. Right? Like, this is the engine of the economy

Saiba Varma: and so I felt like it was also

Saiba Varma: giving us like a glimpse into that that it's

Saiba Varma: yeah. I don't know what else I want to say about it, but maybe that gives you something to.

Alexia Arani: Yeah. Also with the parties that Greg and Chloe would throw, and all of the couples

Saiba Varma: Yeah, I love that. They showed that.

Alexia Arani: Which I'm curious what you think. So it was so funny. I loved when I don't know the character's name, but when Victoria was like, I can set you up with some nice men in North Carolina. And she was just. I love that. Her first response was you can't say that.

Saiba Varma: Yeah.

Alexia Arani: And she was like, why are you with these weirdos? She's like, you can't say that. But yeah, I was curious what you thought about that and her being like I love my husband like. What are you talking about?

Saiba Varma: Yeah, I mean to be honest, I felt like a little bit.

Saiba Varma: I was like, not sure I wanted to like to redeem that. Those relationships, you know, because I've got so much

Saiba Varma: sure southeast Asia and.

Alexia Arani: Yeah, sure.

Saiba Varma: Really gross.

Alexia Arani: Yeah, it's like.

Saiba Varma: And so yeah, I wasn't like I didn't know. I think it's like part of like goes with like your critique of the show, right? And

Saiba Varma: the

Saiba Varma: yeah, like, just like what kinds of behaviors are being excused? Right? And who is being like allowed some kind of like normative pathway. And for me I was like, why is this

Saiba Varma: the why is this kind of relationship being redeemed.

Saiba Varma: Then I feel like most of the time. It's there's nothing redeemable about it, you know. It's.

Alexia Arani: Yeah.

Saiba Varma: Yeah.

Alexia Arani: Pardon me.

Saiba Varma: Yeah, I was like, not that I'm ever with Victoria about you have on anything. But I was like.

Saiba Varma: I'm on neither people's side in this conversation, you know.

Alexia Arani: Yeah, yeah.

Saiba Varma: Yeah.

Alexia Arani: Ugh.

Saiba Varma: I know, I know.

Alexia Arani: Should we talk about Victoria?

Alexia Arani: Say like I? But even before the season I love Parker Posey, I really do. I was really excited to see her cast, and even though she plays like an awful person, I'm glad that the character didn't make me hate her. If anything made me just love the actress even more. She's just so good.

Saiba Varma: Yeah, she did an amazing job.

Saiba Varma: Was like, definitely the standout.

Saiba Varma: And there's yeah, absolutely like, never forget.

Alexia Arani: I think she was the Tanya replacement. You know, they're like we need that character who consistently brings the comedic relief.

Alexia Arani: And she did that.

Alexia Arani: Yeah, so many fucking funny lines I wish I'd like kept. I'm sure I don't have them in our shared show notes. I'm sure I have them in my personal like iPhone notes I was taking while watching, but.

Saiba Varma: Yeah.

Alexia Arani: I think my favorite oh, my God! I don't know why the top of my head! I think one of my favorite parts where she was like praying to Jesus to save Piper from the Buddhists. So funny.

Saiba Varma: I know. I think my favorite was like something about she was like he better be the best Buddhist.

Saiba Varma: Oh, yeah, I know. It's like what?

Saiba Varma: Yeah? And I feel like, the funny part's not even like China, like she doesn't know where she is. Okay. But it's the idea of the best Buddhist is so fucking funny.

Saiba Varma: No, I know. But I also love that like she doesn't quite know where she is.

Saiba Varma: Yeah.

Saiba Varma: yeah, that's not just the family whatever that is like. So such a like white, rich American tourist, to not know exactly in the world, and not have to know where you are.

Alexia Arani: Okay.

Saiba Varma: Yeah, not even knowing the country you're in. It's pretty bad.

Saiba Varma: Yeah, it's very bad.

Saiba Varma: but also totally believable, because it's like, does she? Yeah. She leaves the hotel reluctantly to the monastery, right? But it's like her whole. Her whole existence is pretty much in that room. Does she even like, oh, yeah, she goes to eat, I guess. But other than that, she's like in there the suite the entire time.

Alexia Arani: Yeah.

Alexia Arani: I know. I honestly feel like there's I feel like there's not even that much to really say about her character other than like she's just funny, and Piper nailed it or not. Piper Parker nailed it. Yeah,

Saiba Varma: Well, the I think the poverty stuff was really.

Alexia Arani: Hmm.

Saiba Varma: That was great. I thought, and the way that she yeah, like, she's just so

Saiba Varma: matter of fact, about like I cannot exist outside of this world, and like I would rather die.

Alexia Arani: There are. The poor

Alexia Arani: is fucked up, but I'm smiling because right after that she's like, I just love my sense, and she just is like smelling her little sense. I'm sorry I just.

Saiba Varma: No, I just want like also the.

Alexia Arani: The.

Saiba Varma: The way in which she, Piper, becomes her

Saiba Varma: was really well done as well. You know.

Alexia Arani: Yeah.

Saiba Varma: Like Piper's little fake ass rebellion.

Saiba Varma: Oh, yeah, the way that that like falls away so quickly, and then.

Alexia Arani: Like. I'm just always holding out hope for the youth on this show, because I the same way with Albie in Season 2. I was like low key defending him. I was like he stoles hope.

Alexia Arani: and maybe it's because I recognize some of myself and Piper. I think I'm holding on to a bit of hope for her still.

Alexia Arani: No, you're not fine, not I'm not her, but I like

Alexia Arani: I'm not definitely her. But I'm just like, is this the end for her? Like I'm not convinced. I don't know. It just seems too much, for, like I don't find it necessarily believable that she would

Alexia Arani: be like, okay, I don't actually want to stay at this temple. And then she just completely dives into the consumerism and the values of her family like that just seems like too quick of an it's like a , you know.

Saiba Varma: I mean, I think she's relieved to

Saiba Varma: not have to like fight them.

Saiba Varma: you know, because they're all it's like she has to battle like multiple, like they're all narcissists. Right? She has to battle multiple people in her family like, it's not easy.

Saiba Varma: Saxon. You have the you have, Victoria, you have Tim.

Saiba Varma: It's a multi front confrontation.

Saiba Varma: and I feel like when I was. I was rewatching episode one, and it's like the first time she actually like. As soon as they arrive she takes Lachlan to the monastery. She's like, I just want to check it out.

Saiba Varma: And you see her standing at the gate.

Saiba Varma: and she's not excited. She's not curious. She actually looks really scared.

Alexia Arani: Hmm.

Saiba Varma: She has this look of kind of like.

Saiba Varma: almost horror about like, what have I done, you know, and I realize that's like a little hint about what's to come.

Saiba Varma: I just felt like I mean don't get me wrong. I was also heartbroken

Saiba Varma: by her. But I did feel like.

Saiba Varma: yeah, it's a relief for her to be just to belong.

Saiba Varma: It's just a.

Alexia Arani: Yeah.

Saiba Varma: You know, and I think she's someone who takes that easy path because she herself is a narcissist, you know, pretending like she's not.

Alexia Arani: Interesting.

Alexia Arani: I think I'm over identifying with this character.

Saiba Varma: I think we all identify like I think I mean, I identified with our on some level right.

Alexia Arani: Yeah.

Saiba Varma: We all had to

Saiba Varma: rebel against our families in different ways in order to become the people we are like, live the lives that we live, but

Saiba Varma: you know that it's like you have to be able to bear the cost. There has to be like some kind of like moral courage and bravery in there, and

Saiba Varma: it's not there. It's she's empty, you know.

Alexia Arani: Hmm!

Alexia Arani: Maybe next week a bathroom break.

Saiba Varma: Yeah.

Alexia Arani: Okay. I'm just gonna use the bathroom real quick. I just need to.

Saiba Varma: Bosses.

Alexia Arani: Okay. So we've

Alexia Arani: touched on most the Ratliff family is. I'm curious. If there's anything you want to talk about with Lachlan.

Alexia Arani: I think for me. We like talked about some of his dynamics with like Saxon and stuff. But

Alexia Arani: when you were talking about like Piper being your heartbreak for this season. I feel like Lachlan was actually mine. But maybe it was just. I know he came back from the dead which that felt kind of weird. Maybe we can unpack that. But just like his death.

Alexia Arani: I felt really deeply disturbed. By the way, that whole thing played out like some of it. I think it was like touching on some of my own maybe like triggers with like having lost a sibling, and they were a teenager, you know, and like that kind of stuff. But

Alexia Arani: yeah, I watching the finale. I felt sick to my stomach, actually, like I felt kind of ill after watching the finale and just everything that played out. And the way Lachlan died. It's just like, ugh!

Alexia Arani: But yeah, I'm curious. If you have any other like thoughts about Lachlan things we want to unpack with him.

Alexia Arani: Do you think he.

Saiba Varma: Also in our.

Alexia Arani: Narcissist.

Saiba Varma: I think he becomes one.

Alexia Arani: You do.

Saiba Varma: Yeah, I think he becomes.

Saiba Varma: You know, I think he, yeah, I think it's like Saxons.

Saiba Varma: Well, first of all, I think like the dynamics between them shift a lot right because of the

Saiba Varma: their little like sexual experience with each other. And Lachlan kind of becomes like, comes into his own

Saiba Varma: and has a certain kind of power over Saxon now, and I just think that he's

Saiba Varma: moving in his image.

Alexia Arani: Hmm.

Saiba Varma: And that's that. That was like the feeling I was left with is like the last holdout in that family, like the one person who's not a narcissist.

Saiba Varma: Ultimately, also, the only way that you could survive is by becoming one.

Alexia Arani: Damn! That's dark cyber.

Saiba Varma: Dark.

Alexia Arani: Yeah.

Saiba Varma: What do you think?

Alexia Arani: I don't know. I mean our families fuck us up. I don't think that we're doomed to replicate them. And again, maybe this is me over identifying. But you know, coming from like I am such a different person than the family that I come from, you know. So I'm just like, I know it's possible to break out because I have done it.

Saiba Varma: Yeah. But maybe you had enough of other influences also in your life. You know, like the way that you were describing your life with your mom.

Alexia Arani: Your life with your dad. It was like you did have different.

Saiba Varma: Images of what? Of how one like you live life right and.

Alexia Arani: Yeah.

Saiba Varma: I think they're in such a closed universe that

Saiba Varma: you know it's like they are replicating each other. It's like they go to the same universities. They

Saiba Varma: like mirror each other in. Like all of these different ways, like Tim starts becoming Victoria, and Laughlin becomes Saxon, and Piper becomes Victoria. They just seem like a very

Saiba Varma: closed network, which is why I think they're so compelling to watch.

Alexia Arani: Yeah, they lost all that money, though.

Alexia Arani: So I think we have to remember that.

Saiba Varma: That was like, I think that for me was one of the redeeming

Saiba Varma: point, like things about the season.

Saiba Varma: was that they actually ended up losing everything, and their world is gonna shatter. You know.

Alexia Arani: Yeah. So who knows the trajectory? It's so weird that we're left actually, with some like.

Alexia Arani: I don't know. I feel like I was almost left with some hope, and maybe even rooting for Saxon in some ways that, like.

Alexia Arani: you know, everything has gotten destabilized. And maybe he's gonna get a second chance to choose who he like

Alexia Arani: wants to be like who he's gonna become, you know.

Saiba Varma: Yeah, no. And you're I mean, and it's also true that Lachlan is the only one who says, like he doesn't need money to survive.

Saiba Varma: And so, maybe, maybe, as Saxon changes, he will.

Saiba Varma: She, like, you know, that will give him space to also grow differently.

Saiba Varma: I think we could be hopeful about that.

Alexia Arani: I mean, they're all gonna have to be working and supporting their families. So they're going to come into. You know, their bubble has been punctured. They're going to be exposed to a lot of different things, that will, you know.

Alexia Arani: although I wonder? For people like them like they seem like old money, you know. So I'm like, even with them, losing everything like, would they actually suddenly be poor? And I'm like, maybe you know, their family and their friends would probably all turn their back on them. But.

Alexia Arani: I don't know. I just imagine that they have family money. I'm sure that, like they have

Alexia Arani: rich siblings, and parents like they don't like. Tim does not seem like a self-made, you know.

Saiba Varma: I'm wondering if that was ever in the season, because, like the only thing I can remember is Victoria.

Saiba Varma: basically, you know, being like playing like the good wife, and being like you, built everything you did.

Saiba Varma: This was you. No one helped you, you know. She gives him that like.

Alexia Arani: Oh, my God! It was.

Saiba Varma: Beach.

Alexia Arani: Much like my stepmom with my dad.

Alexia Arani: It was intense.

Saiba Varma: You know that like made me think that he was.

Saiba Varma: He was like the first generation that had really achieved this level of.

Alexia Arani: No, that's just what rich people say. That's how they like, you know. Like, honestly, I'm like as I've seen this in my family. I'm like. That's just what rich people say. That's how they like justify their wealth is this delusion that they're self-made. And they built everything when it's like. No, you didn't, and no, you're not, you know.

Saiba Varma: Oh, yeah, no, you're right. It could.

Alexia Arani: Yeah, she's just performing the role of a good wife. She's.

Saiba Varma: Yeah.

Saiba Varma: not knowing that. Like all of the all of the things she's saying are actually like, gonna terribly backfire, right? Because the more it's like just his own.

Saiba Varma: the more it's also gonna be his own failure.

Alexia Arani: Yeah, like, I feel like, if Saxon had a partner, Saxon's partners would say the exact same thing to him because he, because he is hardworking. He dedicates his whole life to his work, you know, and I feel like it's that conflation of.

Saiba Varma: Yeah, that's true.

Alexia Arani: You know.

Saiba Varma: Yeah. Rich people. Delusion.

Alexia Arani: okay, there's so much with the Ratliff family, we haven't even talked about our girls. Yet, and I know, we're like an hour and a half into this discussion. So we, I guess we should talk about them. But I also think the fact that we haven't gotten to them yet to me kind of

Alexia Arani: is a reflection of like the season, you know, where there were some interesting dynamics, but I don't actually think there was like that much, at least for me going on with them.

Alexia Arani: So yeah, I'm curious to hear where you want to start. What? What was most interesting to you about the trio and their dynamics.

Saiba Varma: I mean, I did like the

Saiba Varma: I did like the fact that they were

Saiba Varma: deeply enmeshed with each other, and also completely

Saiba Varma: unwilling to like trust each other.

Saiba Varma: And

Saiba Varma: just the way I like the way that like that. Their scenes were filmed, you know, so that you could like kind of see all of the

Saiba Varma: the glances and the gestures and the body language, like the disconnect between, like what people were saying and what they were feeling.

Saiba Varma: The dishonesty and the fate.

Saiba Varma: The performance of this deep friendship and sisterhood.

Saiba Varma: I thought it was like, I really like that. I wanted like a bigger kind of

Saiba Varma: breakdown, but like explosion like I want

Saiba Varma: arc. I think that was like one of my critiques of the whole season as well, was like the

Saiba Varma: payoffs were just like, not big enough like. Except for the Ratcliffe family, I felt like everyone else's, was kind of like

Saiba Varma: the.

Alexia Arani: Especially for how like dragged out and tense it was for your what's gonna happen.

Alexia Arani: And then nothing.

Saiba Varma: Nothing really like that happens, you know, and then just they just like make up in the end, or whatever so I wanted, like a bigger

Saiba Varma: rupture with their, I guess. But I did. I did. I did like the way that they

Saiba Varma: yeah, that there was just this lack of genuine engagement with each other.

Saiba Varma: You know?

Saiba Varma: Yeah, what about you? What did you think.

Alexia Arani: Yeah, I agree. And I think what you're talking about. I think that was something that's really like excellent in the performances that all the actresses did an amazing job of saying one thing, but then showing on their faces like

Alexia Arani: what they weren't saying, especially Kate. She was like the Republican right. She was so good at that. Her facial expressions, and, like, you know, the performance, I think

Alexia Arani: I feel like Lori and Jacqueline were a little different where I mean Lori does get real with them, you know, in the closing monologue, and in general she seems the most like kind of grounded, but I do think the of them and their dynamics felt the most grounded in reality to me. I think all of the other, like the Ratliff family, Rick and Chelsea. A lot of it was very kind of like over the top, like.

Alexia Arani: you know, even like Belinda, and like the whole thing with like a lot of it. Yeah, I just felt very over the top. But the of them felt very like, Oh, yeah, these are. These are believable. As like friends who are going on a vacation together.

Saiba Varma: Yeah.

Alexia Arani: Totally.

Alexia Arani: I did some of the discourse around. It was interesting where? I didn't like read into it too much, but I know there were a lot of like reviews or things written about how like the white lotus is like nailing like toxic female friendships, or like what happens when you have friends and like

Alexia Arani: I don't know I can see that. But also I was just like.

Alexia Arani: I don't know. You have bad friends, if that's what you think like, I just kind of hate that like, you know, minimization, that like, Oh, female friendships are catty. And this is what it's like. And I'm like, maybe, for, like a certain small cut of like upper middle class, like white women who shy away from vulnerability. But I just don't really like that kind of discourse I'm seeing around them. It feels misogynistic to me.

Saiba Varma: Yeah, no, totally. I didn't feel like it was supposed to.

Saiba Varma: I mean, it should not represent like female friendships in general.

Saiba Varma: Yeah, like women together in general at all. I felt like it was much more

Saiba Varma: yeah, about a particular, because

Saiba Varma: I mean, like, the great thing about the show is like, it's always about class, right? And I think.

Saiba Varma: Even in this case it was like the

Saiba Varma: the class dynamics between them playing out like

Saiba Varma: Jacqueline, funding this trip for the other . And how that's like, never really something they like

Saiba Varma: pretend like everyone's cool with it. But actually like they're not. And it plays out in all of these other ways where she's.

Saiba Varma: She's like in control, right? And she's like the yeah.

Saiba Varma: there, there's no there like it's not an equal

Saiba Varma: French, you know, and I felt like it captured that really? Well.

Saiba Varma: and yeah, I also like the way that Kate was, because

Saiba Varma: I mean, we've all seen that dynamic in in the , I mean, it's also like Lachlan Piper and Saxon, right where there's like the one person who's like becomes mediator who's just trying to

Saiba Varma: please, and I thought, like Kate did a really good

Saiba Varma: like she did that Leslie Bib like. Did that really? Well, kind of like.

Saiba Varma: Both of them, and trying to

Saiba Varma: being like the peacekeeper, right and.

Alexia Arani: Yeah.

Saiba Varma: Yeah.

Saiba Varma: So I appreciated their, I appreciate like their scenes. For just

Saiba Varma: yeah, all of those like really small, the small.

Alexia Arani: The way.

Saiba Varma: Like power can shift so quickly. It was like very Foucauldian. It's like, no one actually has power, but it's like all in the relations.

Saiba Varma: And you see that like.

Alexia Arani: How the trio like moves. And every yeah, they yeah, yeah.

Alexia Arani: shit behind each other's back. I actually think, like, I actually think Kate was like my favorite character out of the , surprisingly and not favorite, because I like liked her. But I just. I thought she was super interesting because she felt very real and very understandable to me that when they found out she was a Republican, I was like, Yeah, of course she is like, look at her like, you know, like, and like very superficially, can be like, look at the haircut, and like she's from Texas, but also just like the way like.

Alexia Arani: I don't know. I just that like that sort of like.

Alexia Arani: very like nice, but like not kind sort of thing, you know, because it's all about like being polite and keeping things very surface level. And

Alexia Arani: you know, finding out she's like a Trumper like it all makes so much sense, which makes you kind of, at least for me. It makes me kind of like shy away from her. But then, when, like Lori and Jacqueline are parting with those sketchy Russian guys, and like she just wants to have her pajamas on. And she's like really looking out for her friends. I was like, Oh, I actually relate to Kate a lot right now. And I really like.

Saiba Varma: Her care.

Alexia Arani: Or

Alexia Arani: So I don't know. I think it was just like.

Alexia Arani: I think I really appreciate when TV shows make me challenge my biases, basically, you know, which I think that happened with Saxon where I was like, oh, my God! I'm revolted by this character. And then, by the end, I'm like actually hoping for him that he's capable of more. And I feel like I kind of had that same experience with Kate where it's like, you know it's easy to hate on someone who votes for trump and part of my own, like personal like praxis, has also been trying to really like.

Alexia Arani: not just hate people I don't know who vote for Trump and try to exercise some like compassion and contextual understanding of how people end up in the positions that they're in, you know, and also as someone who, like, grew up in the South and has a lot of white family, I can understand how someone like Kate would like end up

Alexia Arani: in like a conservative area around a bunch of white Christians, and like kind of fall into that. And it's like, you know I have so much family and extended family that vote for trump and will always vote Republican because you just don't question it. It's just what people do like. If you're a white person in the South. In most cases it's like there's not even other options. It's like.

Alexia Arani: that's what it is, you know.

Alexia Arani: So anyways, I think I just appreciated the journey that Kate took me on where it would have been really easy to like. Write her off and demonize her, but I think she gave a much more like complex performance, and had a lot more like there was a lot more going on for the character.

Saiba Varma: Yeah.

Alexia Arani: Yeah, I don't think they were just written to be just like rich white bitches, you know, there was like a lot. There's a lot of vulnerability, I think, for all of the characters.

Saiba Varma: Yeah, definitely. And I liked that. They

Saiba Varma: you know, her vulnerability was like that. She's a Republican, and she voted for trump, right? Because that becomes

Saiba Varma: like them.

Saiba Varma: point of difference between her and the other , and you.

Alexia Arani: See.

Saiba Varma: Immediately how the other like just turn on her in that moment, just because I was like.

Saiba Varma: there's some point of difference, you know, and it's.

Alexia Arani: Yeah.

Saiba Varma: Really effectively shows like how fragile.

Saiba Varma: Or just like what a fragile kind of construction their whole friendship really is, where

Saiba Varma: people just throwing on each other on a dime, basically.

Alexia Arani: It's also fair like she voted.

Alexia Arani: Oh, boy.

Alexia Arani: like, even with what I said, I'm like. It's still fair, though, right to be like what the fuck, you know, with someone you thought you.

Saiba Varma: I don't know. I I'm not into like this whole like I like that. They like made fun of like Democrats, like pretending like they're like, morally superior.

Alexia Arani: Yeah.

Saiba Varma: Everyone else, because that's also that's like a whole other thing, right?

Alexia Arani: For sure.

Saiba Varma: So I kind of. I kind of appreciated that.

Saiba Varma: Not that I'm like, great like you. Yeah, not that I agree with her, but I'm just like.

Alexia Arani: No, no.

Saiba Varma: I live.

Alexia Arani: I hear what you're saying. And I'm like over here talking about how I'm like trying to like, you know.

Alexia Arani: be more grounded and compassion. And then my old self is rearing up. That's like, but also fuck her so it's a growing process for me. It's a journey. I'm not at my destination yet, but.

Saiba Varma: Yeah, I just felt like there was such a lack of

Saiba Varma: tolerance, and like she knows that, you know, and so she likes. She has to like hide parts of herself parts of her life because she knows that they're gonna like judge it like even the fact that she goes to church and stuff. They're like, extremely judgmental about all of that.

Alexia Arani: Yeah.

Saiba Varma: It's like who the fuck are you.

Saiba Varma: Better than anyone else, you know.

Alexia Arani: Yeah, yeah, I really appreciate that.

Saiba Varma: Yeah, yeah.

Alexia Arani: There's something I was gonna say, and I'm what was it?

Alexia Arani: I had a thought. I've lost it. I'm trying to refind it. So if you had something else

Alexia Arani: to say, feel free.

Saiba Varma: I'm just.

Alexia Arani: Oh, I remembered. Okay, something. I don't know. If you've heard this, you might find this interesting. I was reading that in the original script. There was going to be this whole like storyline, and seeing that, like Lori's teenage child was going to be non-binary, and there was going to be a whole thing around Lori like struggling with like using the right pronouns. And that ended up being, I think, maybe one of those ruptures you were missing between Lori and Kate, with Kate having voted for Trump and Lori being like, I have a trans child

Alexia Arani: but they actually ended up cutting it out of the show, and I didn't hear there weren't direct quotes from Mike White, but there were quotes from Leslie Bibb who plays Kate? Who was saying that, like

Alexia Arani: They decided that it was like too political, or it was like too much, or they didn't want it to like, you know. After trump was elected, it became like a big visible issue, and they didn't want to get like wrapped up in it.

Alexia Arani: I don't know. I it seems interesting that they would shut. They're doing like an auto gynephilia thing, and they're like casually saying, like, you know, lady boys, and all this stuff. But then, like touching on having a non-binary kid is like too much for the

show. I don't know, but I don't know if you'd heard that, or if you have any thoughts on their decision to take that out.

Saiba Varma: No, I hadn't.

Saiba Varma: I hadn't heard that. And yeah, I wonder.

Saiba Varma: Yeah, I mean.

Saiba Varma: yeah, I wonder if it would have. Just

Saiba Varma: yeah. I like. I wonder why they did it? Because I feel like

Saiba Varma: Lori is already.

Saiba Varma: Maybe it's because, like Glory already is.

Saiba Varma: it's different enough from the of them.

Alexia Arani: Yeah.

Saiba Varma: I think maybe it would have just like pushed her character over

Saiba Varma: like it would have been too far from the other , or something like that. And I think, like having some kind of intimacy between that like having this like intimate kind of thing, was so important to showing

Saiba Varma: like how they can also turn on each other. Right? It's like built on this

Saiba Varma: weird, long term, like familial kind of intimacy that they have. So I wonder if it was like about that. But I don't know. I don't really.

Saiba Varma: I'm just like, I guess there are a lot of decisions that they made this season that I'm like not, I feel like

Saiba Varma: could have made for better or richer like conclusions or conflagration.

Saiba Varma: whatever like we were talking about earlier, and maybe that would have been something cool to actually like. See, play out, you know.

Alexia Arani: yeah, I'm wondering if we want to get into that I know, we've like been talking for a, while so just kind of like overall season thoughts.

Alexia Arani: especially in the context of like, I know, when I was looking up the season, I saw a lot of bad reviews. There's like a lot of the sort of critics were not happy with the season. So

Alexia Arani: I know we touched on some of it. But yeah, I'm curious about your kind of big picture thoughts.

Saiba Varma: Yeah. And I I'd love to hear yours as well. I think. Yeah, I would say that

Saiba Varma: I it was for me as well, like my, I mean, I saw a lot of stuff online as well about people saying it was the weakest season, and I think I had a lot of hopes for it, because

Saiba Varma: it was in Thailand. That's like a place I know as a tourist, you know. I've seen like these dynamics play out, and I was

Saiba Varma: hoping for more like we talked about more like

Saiba Varma: careful and nuanced use of, like the place I would have loved to see like more of the role of like the hotel staff, and more of the dynamics like oh, just very quickly. But even that Fabian character was like completely undeveloped. You know, I kept waiting for something to happen. There's this whole build up of him

Saiba Varma: going to sing. And then I was like, what's gonna happen when he sings, and, like nothing happened.

Alexia Arani: Okay, I did.

Saiba Varma: Kind of a.

Alexia Arani: Appreciate that as like a joke, and I was also seeing apparently the guy who plays him, I think, is a musician and an amazing singer. So I think they were like building up to like. Oh, we can have this beautiful magical number, and I kind of love that they just.

Saiba Varma: Got it.

Alexia Arani: You know. I think it was like kind of a joke because of who.

Saiba Varma: Yeah.

Alexia Arani: Was, but.

Saiba Varma: Yeah, I just like, wanted. I wanted something. I think it's like.

Alexia Arani: Yeah.

Saiba Varma: Anything in general is like more like more excitement other than like who's gonna die in the end.

Alexia Arani: Yeah.

Saiba Varma: Yeah. And I felt like when I compared the kind of moments of like

Saiba Varma: sort of moral breakdown or transformation in the other seasons, you know. I just felt like they were so much more powerful than what we got in this season as well.

Saiba Varma: I just didn't feel like

Saiba Varma: there were like a couple of I mean Chelsea and a couple of characters, but, like in general, I wasn't.

Saiba Varma: I just didn't feel like that sense of

Saiba Varma: even the heartbreak was like, Okay, it's Piper, but it's like, not that. It's not as deep as like the heartbreak of season one and .

Saiba Varma: So, yeah, what about you?

Alexia Arani: Yeah, I mean, I really agree. And I feel like I already kind of touched on. You know, some of my critiques of it focusing too much on like these really contrived plots. Yeah, I think the heart of the season for me it was really like Chelsea.

Alexia Arani: Saxon Lachlan. That whole dynamic was like what kept me interested in watching and then the comic relief provided by Parker, Posey, you know.

Alexia Arani: But yeah, I mean, I liked watching it. I'm like, did I like watching it? Actually, like, you know? So it's like I, there's parts of it I enjoy, but also just like the feeling of dread. Every episode was like rough

Alexia Arani: Just that prolonged, intense stress like, Oh, God, it's too much!

Alexia Arani: So I mean, I'm not done with the white lotus like, I think, you know, I'm definitely still gonna watch season

Saiba Varma: Dubai season is gonna be.

Alexia Arani: I haven't heard anything about it. I also one more thing about this season. This is like something I saw online. It could be wrong. I remember seeing somewhere that, like apparently, Mike White had like gotten really sick in Thailand, and that a lot of this season was meant to be kind of like a fever dream of like things that he like hallucinated in Thailand.

Saiba Varma: Wow!

Alexia Arani: So that also might explain some of the like what is even going on. Cause it was like literally inspired by like a fever dream. So.

Saiba Varma: Yeah, that makes sense. I mean, I heard maybe we talked about it. I don't remember in the last

Saiba Varma: episode that we did, that they were choosing between India and Thailand.

Saiba Varma: Be.

Saiba Varma: And I, yeah, I'm like, Do I? Wanna do I wanna see something in India? I.

Alexia Arani: Yeah, where would you?

Saiba Varma: You want them to.

Alexia Arani: So next.

Saiba Varma: Hmm!

Saiba Varma: Oh, that's such a good question.

Saiba Varma: Feel like they should do like a safari or something.

Alexia Arani: Oh, my God!

Alexia Arani: I don't know if I'm even ready for that.

Alexia Arani: Oh.

Saiba Varma: Where would you like them to go.

Alexia Arani: My God, I mean, I think you're right, but I'm just like, Oh, my God! I'm not sure if I'm ready for this show's like treatment of anti-blackness, or how it would explore that, you know, just like ugh!

Saiba Varma: Yeah, because I mean, I think it has to be.

Saiba Varma: They haven't really gone into like a post-colonial.

Alexia Arani: I mean Hawaii kind of, but.

Saiba Varma: Hawaii was like the closest.

Alexia Arani: Yeah.

Saiba Varma: I mean it is. But yeah, I would love to see like

Saiba Varma: I don't know. Love to see is probably not the right way, but like the Caribbean or.

Alexia Arani: Hmm.

Saiba Varma: Somewhere in East Africa or South Africa, or something like that, would be.

Alexia Arani: Which, if they do that, I hope that they also like, I do hope they continue some of this thread of like sex tourism, but also showing the ways that, like women, fall like white women, fall into this fetishization of men of color that like has to be there.

Saiba Varma: Yeah, cause I was there a little bit in season one. But I think that you're right. That needs to come back. That's.

Alexia Arani: Yeah, I don't know if this is an actual

Alexia Arani: thing that's happening. If I just saw someone talking about it. But I remember seeing somewhere on the Internet, people mentioning like a cold location like the next one, you know, don't even know what that means.

Saiba Varma: Because we've like.

Alexia Arani: Switzer.

Saiba Varma: We've overdone like the ocean scenes and the waves as being like poignant and.

Alexia Arani: Yeah, maybe I don't know.

Saiba Varma: That's cool.

Saiba Varma: Yeah, I'm dumb. I mean, I would definitely, I would definitely watch

Saiba Varma: another season, because I still feel like they're not that many shows that deal with class in.

Saiba Varma: In an interesting and complex way, and he's still he still does that well.

Saiba Varma: even though there are like lots of other problematic dynamics.

Alexia Arani: No.

Saiba Varma: Talked about, but.

Alexia Arani: At the very least I will keep watching the show, because I love talking about with you so much.

Saiba Varma: Same here.

Alexia Arani: Like that's the best part honestly has.

Saiba Varma: Conversation.

Alexia Arani: Then.

Saiba Varma: I know I learned so much.

Saiba Varma: This is great.

Alexia Arani: Well, I know we need to wrap up so. My God, I love you!

Saiba Varma: I know I love you too. Thank you for having me. This is so much fun.

Alexia Arani: Yay, and to folks listening. I hope that you enjoyed the episode, encourage you to please share it with folks who've watched the white lotus or who listen to podcasts. You might have noticed that I'm like, never on Instagram, because I'm just tired of these tech billionaire Bros. And I don't want to support their platforms.

Alexia Arani: so I do nothing to promote the show, which means I need your help, so please share the episode. Please give it stars. Leave a little review if you can. It's all very appreciated and helps encourage me to keep doing these, because having people like reach out and say, I loved. Your episode is like what gives me the will to keep going when I'm overbooked and tired and squeezing in recording in the little bits of time I have on the weekend. So yeah, thanks for listening, and

Alexia Arani: take care. Be careful with the Lorazepam. Do not mix it with alcohol.

Saiba Varma: Yes, a good reminder. PSA.

Alexia Arani: Don't do anything that family does, basically.

Saiba Varma: Yeah.

Alexia Arani: Okay. Bye, y'all.