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Return of the Thief, Chapter 5: Pent Up Emotions
by Noelle and Caitlin

Noelle: Just a heads up, we are going to be discussing sexual assaults a little bit in this episode, so listener discretion is advised. Thank you very much, here's the episode.

"The King, assuming the meeting with the engineers was dragging on, had, like the Pent, waived formalities. Descending the flight of stairs from the royal apartments, he walked down the hallway trailing his attendants behind him to arrive in the open doorway precisely as the whole room full of people stood by watching the Queen of Attolia in the Pent ambassador's arms. No one paints moments like these on walls. Seeing him pale, I understood why even Eddis had braced herself after the oath taking ceremony when the king was told he could not fight his own battles. That had been illness. This was rage. The ambassador, sensing his dangerous exposure, swiveled his head. Seeing the king, he waffled over how alarmed he should be. Attolia pushed him away. She pointed to the set of doors on the far side of the room" (102).

[Meme clip of Awolnation "Run" plays]

[Intro music plays]

Noelle: Welcome back subversive playwrights! It's November 21st, 2021, and this is the Attolian archives, your Queen's Thief re-read podcast to help you recover from Return of the Thief. I'm Noelle.

Caitlin: And I'm Caitlin. And today we're discussing chapter 5 of Return of the Thief. We were just saying as we were taking notes on the chapter that it feels like every scene is something we could spend the entire episode talking about.

Noelle: Yeah.

Caitlin: And also thank you all for bearing with a somewhat more haphazard upload schedule. I am on a medical leave from work and the rest of my life pretty much, ah so yes. Podcasting has also been

somewhat affected. We may be a little more haphazard with uploading going on but we'll see. So thank you!

[Transition music]

Caitlin: So in the play Attolia is the name of by-the-sea, or maybe they pronounce it differently as one word, and she's a princess who was swayed by a pretty face. It said like "oh no Attolian would have gone so far as to rape the character of princess by-the-sea".

Noelle: That just went into my brain as uh a foreign word by-the-sea, I didn't, the three words did not register in my mind. Which makes you assume that Ematapolitis also has some obvious meaning to it.

Caitlin: Yeah maybe I didn't look that up.

Noelle: Well somebody ah somebody on tumblr named Alex, we will try to remember to reblog this post, says that the name of the fake king in the play is Ematapolitis, I've been trying to wrangle out some possible meanings. Some of the translations in the Queen's Thief are direct from Greek, some are not. Emy in Greek is "I am" and politis could be some derivation of polis, making this a variation of "I am the state", the Louis the 14th quote. I was also curious because popo looked like it could be a play on the Latin populace, meaning the common people. Emy is also a direct form from Latin, which initially got me excited as it derives from an older word meaning "take" which could ah mean "I took from the people", a very pointed name. However the Latin version usually refers to legitimately purchasing something so I'm stumped as to whether one or the other is the real meaning but I think they are both great options in terms of context. So thank you to Alex on tumblr for doing that research and posting it.

Caitlin: Hm yeah, that's interesting. And he's represented as a glutinous king who's sending his dinner guests into hiding to steal the wine left behind in their cups. And there are references to wine because Attolia has been increasing the royal requisition of it to increase her stockpiles for the war that's coming. And this play is Cenna giving a voice to all those resenting the war taxes and everyone who's thinking the Meedes are no longer a threat, which is apparently a sizeable percentage of the population.

Noelle: Yeah so that answers our question, are people really taking this seriously, and apparently they are not.

Caitlin: Right.

Noelle: I think it's relevant that Attolia says that the references to wine are a reference to how she has increased the royal requisitions of it as well as the other crops we are stockpiling, and Gen says "I don't see why that's my fault. Why isn't Queen Emapopalita the main character of this play?" (83). And then it talks about how nobody would have dared so openly criticize Attolia. And it's about how people are more afraid of her than they are of him, but also it's about how like things now fall on his head, like he's the guy. And what she does, she's not a figurehead in the same way anymore.

Caitlin: Yeah, which is, which is kinda interesting when you put it with this play specifically. Like one of the reasons this play succeeds is because it's hilarious. And everybody laughs until their sides split because it's about, ah you know the main character succeeds only because his plans are so stupid they keep working by accident, he keeps confounding his enemies because I don't remember what it says but they keep running into each other and then they all, he convinces them to colonize the moon at the end.

Noelle: Yeah!

Caitlin: Yeah I don't know, I'm trying to make some sort of, I don't know how to put this exactly, everything is falling onto his head for a reason related to that, I don't know I feel like there's a connection here as well. Like he's a comic figure. I don't want to say, not a scapegoat necessarily but there's some connection between him being a figurehead and he's easier to criticize than Attolia you know what I mean? Like nobody is going to go after her cause she's too dangerous to attack but he is a safe target in this way because he's easy to mock like this.

Noelle: And something that ah is surprising when you're reading for the first time is that it turns out that Cenna, the playwright, is very familiar with Gen, they know each other very well. "'I've exiled people for less than a play like that Cenna,' said the King sourly. 'But it was funny, Gen, wasn't

it?' 'Time will tell,' said the king" (85). Like to call him Gen?! That is an intimate person.

Caitlin: Yeah, someone I remember on tumblr was thinking they were probably cousins, which I thought was an interesting theory.

Noelle: Yeah. Also, an ambassador says he didn't go to the play because large crowds inevitably breed disease, amen to that!

Caitlin: And right on the heels of this scene, the evening of this day, we get a scene of just Gen and Irene, they're alone together, and Irene is saying "Moir's priestess will be much more careful about how they select the judges in the future, And Gen says, "Well we have more important things to worry about, the Namreen are still on the hunt and Costis may still be alive" (85).

Noelle: Costis alert!

Caitlin: Yes! Which gives us another clue about the timeline. We hear about in the the beginning of this chapter that that this is um, "Spring was well begun"(80) at this point, so this is the spring we assume after King of Attolia has ended. Gen prompts Irene and she says it's nothing cause she's mad about something. And it transpires that she's mad at Sophos because Sophos has asked her advise about a prisoner she's holding, he's holding excuse me, Nomides.

Noelle: Yeah it's really interesting, "you're angry at Sophos for asking you to make that decision about whether or not to pardon Nomides so he wouldn't have to". And she says, "I do what I must because I am Queen of Attolia, I am not here to cut Sophos' food for him" (87). And that's so, it's such a great insight into her.

Caitlin: Remember last time we were talking about how it introduces more moral questions about war and when it is or isn't more or less moral to kill people, and this is introducing even more nuance into pardoning people. She says um "Nomides betrayed him, Sophos should have killed him on the spot and he didn't have the stomach for it. He let a traitor play on his weakness and the result of his mercy is that he is asked for even more mercy." and "We are kings and queens, not all-powerful gods. We cannot

reward the good men and punish the bad ones just as we prefer. He should leave Nomides to rot and I told him so” (86).

Noelle: Yeah so fairness isn’t the point. That is not the primary concern, all of their decisions are utilitarian.

Caitlin: What do you think is the point in the Nomides situation? Like the look of the situation?

Noelle: The possibility of him continuing to be a threat outweighs whatever benefit you would get from pardoning him. Like he had to pardon the barons because he needs the barons.

Caitlin: Right cause she says “I told him he should save a better man, Nomides is a liar that will only lie to him again”(87). So that totally makes sense. We also get the great line “Sophos would let a viper nest in his shoe if it said pleassssssse” (86).

[Noelle laughs]

Noelle: And Gen is taking her hair pins out of her hair for her, it’s very casually intimate.

Caitlin: Ah, I’m emotional about the fact that he’s doing this because, it says “She finally began to work at the pins in her complicated braids, pulling them too hard, catching a few hairs with each pin and pulling them anyway” (86). Like she’s angry right now and she’s not being gentle with herself, she’s hurting herself, and he doesn’t want her to do that. And we also see in this scene that Sophos has matured, Gen is saying the decision is his and he would never try to evade that responsibility. So we see that Sophos has really grown into his role.

Noelle: And there’s a kind of button at the end of this, about the subjectivity of all of it. Attolia says “Nomidies is a liar that will only lie to him again” and Gen says “‘Whereas I am filled with truth as a hive is with honey’, his voice sticky sweet. ‘Oh what a lie that was,’ she said, her expression finally softening” (87). Noelle: Is that a *Howl’s Moving Castle* reference?

Caitlin: Um yes? I think so?

Noelle: Does that, I think that line appears in *The Thief*?

Caitlin: We're going to have to come back to this because I'm, I wasn't sure about was this why at the end of the book *Nomadies* is there, or did he like escape?

So the rest of the chapter is so packed with other stuff I wanted to discuss I was almost tempted to uh just skip over the next scene, but the next scene is Juridius blackmailing Pheris out of information Arondedis needs about uh tactical information stealing from the king about grain wagons. Pheris had been targeted by a member of their family who was one of the servants at the vila, and Pheris had arranged an accident that stopped this man Emptis from hurting him anymore, and Juridius was the only one who knew about it but after Juridius was forced to choose between Pheris and the rest of his family, "At first Juridius had been puzzled by the way I was treated, then uncertain, and then, when it was clear to him that he could not be my companion and also the proud son of my father, he'd joined the others in chasing me off.

"People are frequently cruel in just such an artless, unreflective way"(90). So now he's blackmailing Pheris, threatening to tell everyone here what Pheris did to Emptis.

Noelle: He knows that Pheris is intelligent, he knows that Pheris is observant. That is also what he is threatening to expose. "Melisante knew how dangerous it was to be me. It was her hope that people might take pity on a poor witless boy, where they would fear and despise a clever one" (89). And right after this scene where Pheris was genuinely threatened by Juridius, there's this scene where Sophos and Gen are kind of play fighting, and it really upsets Pheris.

Caitlin: Cause Sophos and Gen are play fighting as brothers who really love each other would be doing. And it's started over Gen singing Didi's song that he made to mock Gen originally, the king's wedding night song which we've never heard any of but we hear a part of the chorus which shockingly involves part of a dig at Attolia. "Keeping his own dear love in mind he said, you are more beautiful but she is more k- "(93) and then the word would have been kind.

Noelle: Yeah, it's a line from The Thief, it's something Gen said in prison in The Thief which uh is surprising that it would become a knowledge to me.

Caitlin: Yeah.

Noelle: But then again everybody overhears everything.

Caitlin: Yeah. But like, the narration, Pheris' narration says "I saw Eddis wince, and nod at his sour notes. He had to have known we would hear him and that we would recognize the song. Without a word, Sounis pulls him back out of the chair. He reached for a pitcher of water." "After a moment's uncharacteristic hesitation, [Attolia] gave a tight nod and just as the King reached the chorus" (92). So this is showing the Eddis is uncomfortable with the song, Sounis wants to throw a picture of water at his because of the song, Attolia is like yeah, this is a shitty thing of him to do because we all hate this song because it's made to make all of us feel like shit

Noelle: And he parkours up the wall, and they're like half falling out the window. And Pheris starts crying and they think that Pheris is crying because he genuinely thinks they're fighting each other and trying to hurt each other but then Chole says "I have little brothers, though none as ugly as you" she said, "and they only cry when they are ashamed of themselves. I wonder, what are you ashamed of little monster?" (95). And so Pheris is thinking about how he has just betrayed the king to Juridius. And he is eating these honey ball things and I want themmm.

Caitlin: Yeah they sound really good! And apart from Pheris' mood at the end of this scene this is such a sweet happy scene. This is so nice. Like you were really right to say this is the most intimate book in the whole series.

Noelle: And even Attolia is animated, she's laughing.

Caitlin: Yeah, it says "everyone was shouting or laughing, even Attolia" (93). I think it's nice, and it means something too that Attolia was still paying attention enough, like we see we talk a lot about how like Gen is observant enough about other people and still keeping an eye on Pheris that he's you know looking out for Pheris, making sure nobody pitches

him out a window, whatever. But Attolia was paying enough attention in spite of everything going on right now in this scene that she notices how upset Pheris is. She's the one who says Gen enough. I liked all this background detail about this aqueduct. I thought that was really cool.

Noelle: Yeah. And Pheris is really interested in it too, until they start talking about money and then he falls asleep. But the actual logistics of it, and the architecture, that interests Pheris.

Caitlin: Yeah, and how the river took, how the town took root around this Chilean spring and then the invaders came and the city got built and then

Noelle: And also there's a lot of detail about the room, one of the things that he says is "The lemon trees are long gone now, replaced by pedestals of famous admirals. The beautiful landscapes that used to cover the walls had been painted over with the naval battle of Hempsha, a shame as the work was not well done and war should not be made beautiful to look at" (98). So they like, the lemon trees, busts of admirals, that's gone militaristic, and so has the murals, in this future time in which Pheris is writing. Which is post the war.

Caitlin: And when you read this for the first time Noelle, like how did all these references to the future make you feel? Cause like we knew that Pheris was still writing from Attolia, and like the blurb on the back of the book said like okay, Pheris is writing it and it's written by the victors, by the grandson of Arondides. Were you reassured by this or like still nervous about the war and who would live, like, what were you thinking by all these future references?

Noelle: I felt, I felt somewhat. I felt somewhat comforted by them because it seemed like he was, future Pheris was living in a time of prosperity and that things have worked out well for him. And then the Pents! The Pentttttttt, he's that guy at work that nobody likes!

Caitlin: Yeah, so the scene with the Pent.

Noelle: I feel like with the whole chapter has so many good things in it, but the whole scene with the Pent makes you forget all the good interesting things that came before because the scene with the Pent is

just so much. And it's a type of drama that we haven't really seen before you know?

Caitlin: Yeah, it's like Nahusaresh part 2 but worse. Like you see, the conversations in here, finally we get something with just Attolia, you know the whole book is like okay Gen's just the center and everybody is flipping out at how great he is which he is okay I get it but you know I always want more Attolia and like okay yeah she's finally getting the better of somebody and it's just her and she's running rings around this guy and he thinks he's so great, and then she gets assaulted.

Noelle: Yeah. And like you get the sense that she would have handled the situation.

Caitlin: Yeah, but she can't because her asshole husband wrecks her ability to do that. He completely finishes what the Pent started and just takes away her agency and her ability to do that by completely overblowing his own reaction and selfishly taking the reigns of this situation and just like somebody says at the beginning of the next chapter his overreaction makes it so that they can't get any justice in getting the Pents and this one particular man to apologize and put this situation right and get some restitution for the woman who was actually wronged here, you know? Attolia never gets any justice or any apology or any revenge or anything out of the situation. Because Gen was selfish here.

Noelle: And he's sooo confident, when he calls her Irene that like, it caused a physical shudder.

Caitlin: Yeah.

Noelle: Right up my spine.

Caitlin: This scene makes me want to kill somebody. Yeah we get another line of "complaints had been made to the queen and to the king about Quedue, about bills he'd run up with the palace tradesmen, the unwanted attention he paid to the women of the court, his insults to minor patrinoi and his rudeness to the servants" (99). If he's assaulting the queen of the country what else is he doing to the women of the court?

Noelle: Yeah.

Caitlin: Yikes. Yeah, “the kitchens hated him.” “No one, not even his fellow ambassadors, liked him, but there was little that could be done. He was the ambassador to one of the most important countries on the Continent. Only the Braelings were more powerful” (99).

Noelle: He says “we have a saying in my country, that a beautiful woman deserves love” and everybody makes wide eyed yikes faces at each other and then Attolia says ““Ugly women do not?” as if genuinely curious”. And he’s not listening to her, it’s like “this is not what the Pent had expected, and after a brief hesitation, he ignored her” (101).

Caitlin: It says a little further down “the conversation which he had obviously practiced in advanced was going further and further astray”. So he has it all completely scripted out.

Noelle: And she’s so obviously telling him to get lost and he still goes for it. Because he says “Nonsense. You are hemmed about with his spies, but I can silence them. I know what you would say if you were free to speak” (102). And everybody, the energy in the room shifts. It says “The king hadn’t moved, except to lift his hand to his heart, like a man slowly realizing the fatal nature of a wound. He even looked down, as if expecting to see a blade protruding from his chest” (103). What a drama queen. A drama king.

Caitlin: I’m almost more angry at what Gen did than what the Pent did. Cause you can’t expect good behaviour from assholes like the Pent.

Noelle: Something that’s really interesting and I want to get your thoughts on is “‘It hurts’ he said. His voice breaking. ‘Serves you right’ said the queen, every word as cold as ice. ‘Serves me right?’ said the king. Incredulous as well as angry, he said, ‘Serves me right?’ ‘You dare,’ said Attolia, rising to her feet like a thundercloud. ‘You dare impune me.’”(105). So ahh she’s pissed at him, but why does she say serves you right specifically? And then she repeats it again on the next page.

Caitlin: Yeah because, she’s saying it because it serves him right to be in pain right now because he just fucked up. You know? Because the right thing for him to do right then was nothing.

Noelle: what I should have done was nothing

Caitlin: The thing to do was to go after the Pent by the book in a way that would have had actual consequences. They could have put chains on this guy and put him in a oubliette. And then I don't know, done something completely awful to this guy.

Noelle: And she says "If I cannot kill the Pent ambassador, then neither will you'. The fire in the king flickered. His eyes fell away from her face. There was another long silence until, in a milder voice he inquired, 'Can we not kill him?'" (105). Which is very funny. Like this scene, it's like a really entertaining scene a lot of it is very funny. I always felt like the serves you right might be referring to something else that might have happened earlier?

Caitlin: Oh I don't think so. I think it's, no I think it's serves you right for what you just did. And I think the uh "you dare inpune me" is you dare to say this is my fault.

Noelle: Yeah.

Caitlin: Like he's saying you told him to shut the doors as if you're trying to save his life for a good reason. And like why, why are you trying to save his life, because you like him?

Noelle: Um and then they kick Pheris out and they push the couches together and have some old timey Netflix and chill I guess.

Caitlin: And everybody else saw the council room and thought they were murdering each other.

[Noelle laughs]

Noelle: Yeah they genuinely think that one of them may be dead.

Caitlin: I think it's great that Hilarian is relieved to let Frazine be in charge of every situation thats a little bit iffy. You know the fact that he did overreact like this is a major plot point that has huge ramifications on the war and all that so thats why it happens in the narrative and whatever and

like that's cool and all that but, ah. It leaves a bad taste in my mouth that we never get any sort of resolution for Attolia.

Noelle: About the Pent?

Caitlin: About the Pent. What do you think about that? Like why don't we ever get a sentence in there like oh Relius went to go do something to this guy and before he got captured he succeeded. You know?

Noelle: Yeah.

Caitlin: Like I feel like that would have been kind of easy to add.

Noelle: I feel like, I mean, it calls back to that "we cannot reward the good men and punish the bad ones as we see fit". Her opportunity to do something about this um was a limited window. And she can't make the decision about what she's going to do based on what feels like personal justice to her.

Caitlin: Right.

Noelle: Which you know, that's what Gen was doing and it was both personally shitty and not the right political decision and she, she has to make the right political decision. And it's the queens attendants that really are aware of what's going on and really step up in this situation. Like not only Frenzine but also Chole.

Caitlin: Yeah I feel like that's also relevant, that this is an entire room of mostly women that he's completely discounting. Like oh yeah I can silence this room of like 15 of the most important women in the kingdom, I can just shut them all up for you.

Noelle: It feels like for most of the conversation none of her attendants are thinking of the Pent as an actual threat to her, like they're laughing at him. They're making faces, they're snorting. He doesn't know that Attolia is making fun of him.

Caitlin: And you know they're shocked that he's being you know this forward enough to sit on the ground and use her name because that's like ridiculous but they don't know he's going to take it that far.

Noelle: Yeah.

Caitlin: Cause that's crazy

[Transition music]

[Outro music]

Caitlin: Send us your comments, questions, thoughts! Chime in at attolianarchieves.tumblr.com

Noelle: Be blessed in your endeavors.

[Outro music continues]

Caitlin: Thank you for listening, this has been an Amature Embrodiery Production, find us on on iTunes, Stitcher, Google Podcasts, anywhere podcasts are available.