

Attolian Archives
The King of Attolia, Chapter 12, Part I: Scythe of Relief
by **Noelle** and **Caitlin**

Opening quote:

Caitlin: “[Ornon] has been trying every way that he thinks might work to get Eugenides to take the reins of power. Mostly, I think he’s put his faith in rational argument, and he lectures Gen every opportunity he gets. It has only just dawned on him that if he succeeds, Eugenides will be King of Attolia.’ ‘And this is not happy news?’ ‘King,’ Eddis emphasized, ‘of Attolia.’” (309)

Noelle: Is that the book we’re reading?

[Intro Music]

Noelle: Hello nefarious thieves, I’m Noelle.

Caitlin: And I’m Caitlin.

Noelle: And this is the Attolian Archives, your Queen’s Thief reread podcast to get you through the wait for *Return of the Thief*, which is in six months and two days! It’s February 23rd, 2020.

Caitlin: This episode, we’re doing something we haven’t done before. We’re breaking a chapter into two parts. So between this episode and the next, we’ll be discussing Chapter 12 of *The King of Attolia*.

Noelle: We learned our lesson from Chapter 11 [Caitlin laughs] which was so long. Today’s talk will take us through the scene depicting the king’s royal tantrum. That’s to the top of page 328 in the newest edition, for those of you who are reading along, which means, unfortunately, no Costis.

Caitlin: A Costis-less week here on the Attolian Archives, but next time will be very Costis-centric.

Noelle: In the meantime, our discussion today includes Helen, the Magus, Eugendies, Attolia, Relius, and... Philologos?

Caitlin: Remember that guy?

[Music]

Noelle: There's a lot of talking *about* Gen in this first half of Chapter 12, and I'd like to draw attention to, I wrote down all the adjectives that are used to describe him, and the list that I ended up with is nefarious, underhanded, incorrigible, pleasant, irreverent, distracting, young, afraid, stubborn, and strong.

Caitlin: Love it. [Both laugh]

Noelle: We see him from Relius's perspective.

Caitlin: Mm-hm.

Noelle: And we see him from Attolia's perspective through her talking about him to Relius, and then we see him from his attendants' perspective again.

Caitlin: Mm-hm. And Helen's and the magus's too I guess.

Noelle: Yes.

Caitlin: Which, apparently the two of them are on first name terms! [Noelle laughs] Or at least, the magus is, we don't, I guess—

Noelle: Bold of you, magus! Yeah we don't even know his name.

Caitlin: Yeah!

Noelle: It's a Minister of War situation.

Caitlin: Mm-hm. I think Megan Whalen Turner said somewhere on the Internet that they do have names but—

Noelle: That she knows in her head?

Caitlin: That she knows in her head.

Noelle: [Sighs in frustration] That's—I'm interested in that choice. Because there are other characters whose names it took us a while for us to learn.

Caitlin: Mm-hm.

Noelle: Like Helen.

Caitlin: Yeah.

Noelle: And Attolia. But there was a moment where we gained access to that intimacy. But it hasn't happened with either the magus or the Minister of War, both of whom are older, and male, and sort of paternal figures, and I don't know if that's a factor or if it's just a coincidence.

Caitlin: Yeah. And, you know, I would think like ok, the Minister of War, we know him in his capacity as the Minister of War as well as Gen's father but the magus is a character who's central enough that we—he's very developed as a character, so ... I don't know. Well—

Noelle: Mm-hm. But we don't know, we don't see his family.

Caitlin: Yeah. We don't know ...

Noelle: We know some things about his past.

Caitlin: But not really about him as a person I guess. Like, just thinking about, like, all the things you would know about someone if you made friends with them, we don't know those things.

Noelle: Yeah. Although Helen has apparently made friends with him.

Caitlin: I guess! It's nice to be reminded now and then of, that, you know, things are happening off the page that we don't see.

Noelle: Yeah. That being kidnapped really worked out for the magus at the end of the day. [Caitlin laughs] And they talk about Sophos!

Caitlin: Yeah!

Noelle: Sophos! It's a Costis-less section but it is [laughs]—there's a Sophos presence.

Caitlin: Yeah!

Noelle: One point for Sophos.

Caitlin: It says the magus is conscience-stricken to have been safe in Eddis while Sophos was abducted. Even though his presence there wouldn't have done any good. And it says that before Sophos was abducted his uncle the king had sent him away from the magus, fearing the magus's influence. Or something.

Noelle: Mm-hm. Sophos going missing is both—they're worried about Sophos because Sophos is their friend, but also, it reopens the possibility of Helen having to marry Sounis.

Caitlin: Mm-hm.

Noelle: And there's that idea again of, Gen is going to have to start making decisions for the good of nations and not individuals, "no matter how much he might love them" I think is the phrase.

Caitlin: Yeah.

Noelle: And that is—the fact that that comes up during this discussion between Helen and the magus because it's an acknowledgement that in becoming King of Attolia Gen will have decision-making power over Sounis and Eddis.

Caitlin: Mm-hm.

Noelle: Even before that exists in any sort of official capacity.

Caitlin: Right. Which is—I feel like that's the first time we really see that acknowledged in the series, that his—I mean that like this is the first time we've seen people picture what his growing power is going to mean for the

peninsula now that, you know, he's kind of moseying his way into it, I guess.

Noelle: Mm-hm. "'King,' Eddis emphasized, 'OF ATTOLIA'" [Both laugh]

Caitlin: It's explained in *Conspiracy of Kings* that Sophos prior to this point in the whole series had proposed to Eddis, but this is the first hint we get of that.

Noelle: Right!

Caitlin: When Eddis is saying right here, apropos of nothing except he's just gone, she says "'But if he is gone, if he is dead and not a hostage somewhere, would you see me marry Sounis then?'" (311) implying that otherwise she would marry Sophos.

Noelle: Yeah. And it had been previously discussed as a possibility, like, they'd exchanged letters, they'd liked each other—

Caitlin: Oh! I forgot about that!

Noelle: They might have ... but that's really, like, she's acknowledging that if he hadn't gone missing that would be the plan. "The Thief of Eddis has a certain freedom to do whatever he wants?" 'And an accompanying responsibility'" (311) and let's just think back to "I can do whatever I want!"

Caitlin: Yeah!

[Music plays for ad break]

Noelle: Do you have a series of young adult novels that you have a lot of opinions about? Thinking of making your own podcast and wondering where we host ours? Well, let me take a second to tell you about Anchor, the easiest way to make a podcast. Seriously, it's so easy. It's totally intuitive, it takes out a lot of the leg work, and it's completely free, which is awesome. There are creation tools that allow you to record and edit a podcast directly into Anchor from your phone or computer - you also don't have to, you could upload a podcast you've created with your own tools, like we do. And Anchor will distribute your podcast for you, so that people

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[Music ends]

Caitlin: We get a lot about Gen as Thief and Thieves in general in this chapter. I feel like we haven't—this amount of detail hasn't been revealed to us before. And I think, like, it can really tell us a lot about Gen's motivations in the past.

Noelle: Mm-hm.

Caitlin: For why he is the way he is. Helen tells the magus, "The Thieves never swear loyalty to any ruler of Eddis, only to Eddis itself. [...] The Thieves of Eddis have always been uncomfortable allies to the throne, Magus. There is the niggling fear that if you fall out with a Thief, he might see it as his right and his responsibility to remove you. There are some checks, of course. There is only ever one Thief. They are prohibited from owning any property. Their training inevitably generates the isolation that makes them independant, but also keeps them from forming alliances that might become threats to the throne." (310)

Noelle: And then in the next scene with Relius and Attolia, Relius says, where is it written down, he says of Gen, "He has had very little company in his life, and he isn't used to it." (This being in public) "But there are other words for *privacy* and *independence*. They are *isolation* and *loneliness*." (319)

Caitlin: And that's his argument for saying, "Drive him out. Whether he wants to or not, he belongs in the open" (319). So he's making the argument that not only does the nation need Gen to be a king but Gen as a person needs this ... needs to step out more and form connections I guess.

Noelle: Is Gen always going to be to some extent cut off from other people?

Caitlin: Well there's the argument that royalty, all royalty, is necessarily cut off from the people below them.

Noelle: Yeah.

Caitlin: In a way. But he at least still does have his own wife at his level of society, and, you know, Helen and Sophos and whatever. So. I don't know.

Noelle: But all of those relationships are colored by this ... I want to say professional [Caitlin laughs] ah this like official ...

Caitlin: Yeah.

Noelle: Dynamic.

Caitlin: Right.

Noelle: That is layered over the personal one. Like, Gen, he goes from one type of isolation ... to another.

Caitlin: To a different type. [Laughs]

Noelle: Is what it feels like to me.

Caitlin: Yeah! There's a parallel in this way with Irene. We see in this chapter that she's always been set apart because it says, "She raised her head, and he was aghast to see her eyes bright with tears. 'I am tired of driving people and forcing them to my will. I am like a war chariot with bladed wheels, scything down those closest to me, enemies and my dearest friends alike' (319). So she's also someone who has been isolated and lonely, as I think we've brought up many other times.

Noelle: And that scythe imagery continues. Is there something in that about, like, tools, feeling that she's a tool?

Caitlin: Yeah.

Noelle: And that makes me think back to *The Thief* and the idea of tools, this is really snowballing. [Caitlin sighs]

Caitlin: No, yeah! I mean, I think these connections are there for a reason. I think this is a big theme.

Noelle: Mm-hm.

Caitlin: And I wanted to bring up that, this metaphor for driving people and forcing them to her will is something that she's tired of but she's been doing for a long time. But for Gen on the other hand it's kind of, like, he's entering into this stage.

Noelle: Yeah. But also, he's always sort of done that.

Caitlin: Yeah.

Noelle: And she says specifically that Gen is used to wielding power in secret which we've been talking about for this whole book.

Caitlin: [Overlapping] Yeah!

Noelle: Another thing about this scene that I need to point out is Attolia says "so" to mean yes!

Caitlin: Yeah!

Noelle: Which I'd forgotten! And because I associate it with Costis, I think of it as, like, something that, like—Costis isn't a working class person but he's a soldier, he's like rough around the edges. And the fact that she also uses that little piece of dialect—

Caitlin: Implies it's not just class specific, yeah.

Noelle: It's Attolian.

Caitlin: Yeah!

Noelle: And, also, it might reveal something about the comfort that she feels with Relius.

Caitlin: Yeah!

Noelle: It is casual language.

Caitlin: Right. Yeah there's a lot in this scene about how close the two of them are and how close Relius and Gen are becoming. She says that he's been, she's learned that "If we truly trust no one we cannot survive" (325) and that he's now reached a new level of trust where she trusts him unconditionally.

Noelle: Gen is so annoying likable. He comes and he hangs out with Relius, "Other nights he related the events of his day, spewing out his insights and analyses of the Attolian court in a devastatingly funny critique" (315) and they talk about plays and poetry and history. I hate him! [Caitlin sighs, both laugh] Stop that, be less good at stuff! I want the house that she offers to give Relius.

Caitlin: I *know*.

Noelle: Just give it to *me* instead! [Caitlin laughs] A study and a courtyard and land at the back for goats.

Caitlin: The dream.

Noelle: But he doesn't take it.

Caitlin: I knooooow!

Noelle: Because he's devoted to her. An idea that's resurfacing here is, I think we had talked before about the idea that in this book a trick is being played, but whose trick is it?

Caitlin: Mm-hm.

Noelle: Or, whose joke is it? And the fact that, like, Gen is maneuvering all of these pieces behind the scenes in order to arrive at this end goal. But we find out in this chapter that he's only doing that because Attolia specifically gave that goal to him, in order to spur him to do this specific set of things.

Caitlin: Mm-hm.

Noelle: And so behind it all there's him and then behind him [Caitlin laughs] there's her.

Caitlin: I feel like there's a joke to be made here but I don't know what it is. [Noelle laughs] Something about Russian nesting dolls, or ...

Noelle: It's her strategy. 'Cause he wanted something and she said "ok, you can do that—if ..." [laughs]

Caitlin: Yeah. So he wants to reduce the guard because it's dangerous to have a guard that large, who could eventually turn on them, and she wants him to be king, so she says "you can reduce the guard when you ask Teleus and Teleus will say yes" and Teleus will only say yes when he thinks Gen is a king. So Gen has to be a king for Teleus to say yes, and she wants him to be king so that's why she—ugh, convoluted! [Noelle laughs]

Noelle: Yeah Gen really, he looked at that goal and he picked the most roundabout way to get there. [Caitlin laughs] "First I'm gonna let a dude punch me. Not the dude I wanna convince. Another dude. [Laughs] Then we're gonna go in the garden and we're gonna learn about wheat."

Caitlin: It's like this enormous ... one of those huge domino chains. [Noelle laughs]

Noelle: Sejanus is gonna come back.

Caitlin: Yeah!

Noelle: The fact that he ain't dead, it's a, uhh, a *flashing* red light.

Caitlin: Yeah. I did not—I never—like that never registered for me on any other reread, but I read that today and I was like [deep breath in] "I am betting right now—"

Noelle: [Overlapping] Never incarcerate your enemy in the hinterland!

Caitlin: [Exasperated sigh] Ugh.

Noelle: It will not end well!

Caitlin: Is this where mercy is gonna get us? [Noelle laughs]

Noelle: This is, this is the actions of people who don't understand that there's gonna be a sequel. [Caitlin sighs] There's more fallout from the assassination attempt in the form of a temper tantrum [Caitlin laughs] thrown by Gen. Like full on, he *destroys* everything in his room.

Caitlin: Breaks everything breakable, rips all the hangings, hammers holes into the bedposts with his knife hand. [Laughs]

Noelle: His KNIFE HAND. "Oh this is just our harmless friend, Knife-hand McGee" [Caitlin laughs]

Caitlin: Smashes all of the inkwells over the walls.

Noelle: Which recalls Irene throwing an inkwell at him.

Caitlin: Mm-hm.

Noelle: On their wedding night. Which is also from this chapter.

Caitlin: Yeah!

Noelle: She talks about how they both cried on their wedding night. And he suggested halving the guard and she threw an inkpot at him. And he ducked. [Both laugh]

Caitlin: In that interview that Megan Whalen Turner gave, I think last summer or the summer before, the video interview, she said she had written down that scene, the wedding night scene—but just cut it out. [Noelle makes an anguished sound] I want it! She should publish it as a short story sometime.

Noelle: Come on ... [both laugh]

Caitlin: I know. What do we gotta do?

Noelle: What else did you cut out? [Caitlin laughs] Is it Gen's sisters? I'll never let it go. Where are they? We got to see his cousins Heckle and Jeckle!

Caitlin: Him throwing this tantrum and like destroying everything in this king's bedroom is also, like, Irene threw all the chairs and the plates when she heard that he and Eddis were close or whatever in *Queen of Attolia*.

Noelle: Oh yeah.

Caitlin: But what I wanted to say about this is this *stresses me out*. [Noelle laughs]

Noelle: They have to clean that up!

Caitlin: Like, how—yeah! They're not the ones who clean it up, that's why they get to do it, but, like, ugh, I stress for Philologos and Hilarion. But how—what is the number, how expensive is it for this thirty seconds of, of, emotional release, which, you know—

Noelle: 'Cause they've already talked about how expensive all the stuff in the room is. The cloth of gold.

Caitlin: It's a king's bedroom—oh that was her bedroom, not his bedroom.

Noelle: That was her bedroom. I'm sure his also has it though.

Caitlin: [Overlapping] But I mean probably, right? You would think? How expensive do you think accumulated goods for a *king of a country* would be, right? Hundreds of thousands of dollars in our money? Ugh.

Noelle: Ugh.

Caitlin: Stresses me out, man.

Noelle: It's like—

Caitlin: This is why their treasury—

Noelle: It's like slapstick property damage in movies. [Caitlin laughs] You know you're an adult when you just sit there and go "ohh, that's so *expensive*." But Philologos, instead of being annoyed about that, which I would be, is empathizing with Gen.

Caitlin: Yeah.

Noelle: And Philologos, if you recall, is the attendant who is the youngest and the only one who is the direct son of a baron. And he explains to the others that Gen isn't angry because Nahuseresh tried to kill him, he's angry because he can't go and kill Nahuseresh.

Caitlin: But because he has one hand, is why he can't do that.

Noelle: Because he has one hand. He doesn't want Attolia to know that he still has this level of rage about it.

Caitlin: Yeah.

Noelle: It's also, like—Gen, in a really straightforward way, wants to go kill that guy. Which is very different from the Gen of two books ago.

Caitlin: Right.

Noelle: I mean, I would wanna kill that guy too, possibly.

Caitlin: [Laughs] There's a line.

Noelle: I don't know if I would tear up my curtains about it. [Laughs] Oh gosh, one more thing—so we get in the conversation between Helen and the magus this idea that Gen has like a particular sort of power over what's happening on the entire peninsula or he has the potential to.

Caitlin: Mm-hm.

Noelle: Or it would become necessary for him to have that. And then in the conversation between Attolia and Relius, Relius says that he sees the possibility of a golden age.

Caitlin: Yeah!

Noelle: So we're starting to get these sorts of ideas.

Caitlin: Yeah! The camera's starting to pull back and do a panorama.

Noelle: Yeah.

Caitlin: Of like, this is what it could be ... not, like, next week, but ...

Noelle: If you stop being a baby ... [Caitlin laughs]

Caitlin: Yeah. Let's all just cross our fingers *Return of the Thief* ends with it all set up and like ok, the Medes are gone, Sejanus is dead, Nahuseresh has died horribly screaming and now we have a golden age.

Noelle: But nothing lasts forever! In the eyes of the gods we are all but dust on the wind, Caitlin. [Caitlin laughs]

Caitlin: Ugh, you're right, thematically—don't tell me this, don't wreck my hopes! [Both laugh]

[Music]

Caitlin: So, moving back to Queen of Attolia, we got a wonderful ask from nohumanswereharmed on tumblr saying, in regards to *Queen of Attolia* Chapter 16, where [laughs] we were losing our minds trying to figure out, this was when Gen and Irene come up the stairs and the ministers were talking to Attolia and one minister said "He said he wouldn't be here." So we were trying to figure out what that was. And this person says, "I always interpreted that as 'he = Gen'". Gen told the Eddisian troupes that he/Gen would not be there when Attolia arrived at the top of the cliff. As in, he never was going to kill her, that was all a bluff (because she would never believe anything different). He gave her the opportunity to kill him and she was so ruthless she was going to do it. He was going to bare his heart to her, and even though she thought she would be killed at the top of the cliff without him, he had prepared the Eddisians that he wouldn't be there when she arose. He fully expected to bare his heart and then die, because he

couldn't do anything else. She would arrive, she'd still be kidnapped, Eddis would negotiate, the war would end, but he would be dead."

Noelle: [Whispers] I hate it. [Caitlin laughs]

Caitlin: This is some next-level analysis

Noelle: [Whispers] Don't do this to me. [Caitlin laughs] [At a normal volume] There's some—we were wondering if Megan Whalen Turner intended for this to be ambiguous at all. 'Cause there are definitely points—the way that she talks about *The Thief* is that she expected everyone to catch on really quickly.

Caitlin: Right.

Noelle: And then a lot of readers were surprised. And so—

Caitlin: She might just be giving us more credit than we deserve [Noelle laughs] or like, maybe she, I don't know.

Noelle: Maybe in this theory Gen said "There's a possibility that she will kill me" and all the ministers interpreted that as "Oh she's gonna." [Both laugh]

Caitlin: Yeah.

Noelle: Like they didn't think that he would succeed.

Caitlin: It says "Eddis own chamberlain, brought along to perform the obligatory introductions, which he did without a whisker's deviation from his usual palace style. Only once did he falter, looking over his shoulder. 'He said he wouldn't be here' one of the ministers said in a carrying whisper." So, he's facing Attolia, and Eugenides is coming up the stairs ... behind her, so he sees, he could be seeing Gen right then, and then looking behind him at a minister.

Noelle: Mm-hm.

Caitlin: In surprise.

Noelle: Yeah, in surprise.

Caitlin: And the minister says "He said he wouldn't be here."

Noelle: Hmm, food for thought.

Caitlin: I don't know man.

Noelle: Crunchy and full of fiber. [Caitlin laughs]

[Music transition sound]

Noelle: That's chapter 12, part 1! Next time, Costis and Gen have a heart to heart and then lovingly beat the shit out of each other.

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

Noelle: Be blessed in your endeavors

[Outro music]

Caitlin: [Overlapping] Thank you for listening, this has been an Amateur Embroidery Production. Find us on iTunes, Stitcher, Google Podcasts, anywhere podcasts are available!