

[Attolian Archives](#)

The Queen of Attolia, Chapter 16: Kiss With A Fist
by **Noelle** and **Caitlin**

Opening quote:

Noelle: “As the Mede soldiers reached the first of the Eddisians, the Eddisians threw themselves onto their knees, leaving their backs unprotected as they cut the legs out from under the men at the front of the phalanx. More Eddisians, running up, threw themselves at the shields, pushing the Medes backwards as their supporters pressed them forward. The first rush died, spitted on the swords of the Medes. But the orderly formation compressed, and then collapsed. Swinging their swords, the remaining Eddisians drove into the chaos that had been a fighting unit. The Medes struggled to reform, but they were overwhelmed. For a moment Attolia thought she saw Eugenides, but in the darkness she couldn’t be sure” (261).

Caitlin: Woohoo! They’re gonna win! Oh wait ... oh no. Never mind. Yikes. Making sure her crush doesn’t get crushed.

[Intro Music]

Noelle: You’re listening to the Attolian Archives, the Queen’s Thief reread podcast to get you through the wait for *Return of the Thief*. I’m Noelle.

Caitlin: And I’m Caitlin. It’s June 30, 2019.

Noelle: You might have noticed that a couple dozen people died in our intro today.

Caitlin: That’s the tone we’re going for from now on.

Noelle: Full-on welcome to the thunderdome.

Caitlin: It’s hard to avoid. Today’s chapter involves open melee, crossbows to the neck, slaps to the face, references to slow, painful death, and wet socks.

Noelle: It's the wet socks that make it hard for me to sleep at night.

Caitlin: This is Chapter 16 of *The Queen of Attolia*, wherein the tables turn and our hero somehow ends up in a worse situation than the one in which he started.

Noelle: Which is an accomplishment. I forgot how much I loved the back end of this book!

Caitlin: Yeah!

Noelle: It's sooo dramatic and I have whiplash! I have emotional whiplash from the last chapter to this chapter. We thought that we knew where we were going and then it just flipped.

Caitlin: Yeah.

Noelle: And it starts with just the two of them and then rapidly widens into a whole cast of characters.

Caitlin: Mm-hm.

Noelle: But there's that scene at the beginning where they're still climbing the stairs. For a really long time!

Caitlin: Yeah!

Noelle: Those are big stairs!

Caitlin: Half the night!

Noelle: I'm trying to picture how tall—

Caitlin: —this cliff is [laughs]

Noelle: And are they that long because they're not steep, or are they very steep *and* extremely far?

Caitlin: Good question.

Noelle: And she, Attolia tries to go up very fast. [Caitlin laughs]

Caitlin: Cause she's mad.

Noelle: And then she realizes she's started too fast but she's too stubborn, she doesn't want to lose face by slowing down so she just continues to go really fast. [Both laugh]

Caitlin: Which leads us to the priceless line, "I thought you might like the earrings" (252) because he's just trying to get her to slow down.

Noelle: He has no idea what to say. [Caitlin sighs] They have a—there's such a great exchange in that scene of genuine *awkwardness*.

Caitlin: Mm.

Noelle: We get a lot of the post-dramatic moment, or the fallout from dramatic moments, in these books, and I really appreciate that.

Caitlin: Yeah.

Noelle: Like, you have the big revelation on the boat, but then they have to climb these stairs. *For hours*. [Both laugh]

Caitlin: Yeah.

Noelle: They have to fill that time! And then of course in a larger sense, then we—instead of just marriage, the end, we then see how their dynamic develops from that point on.

Caitlin: Mm-hm. It's so Gen that in the middle of all this, when she's livid, he, like, mocks her with the goat sound. [Both laugh]

Noelle: [Laughing] And she's coming down the stairs and he's backing up so she doesn't get closer, and he says "The more stairs you go down the more stairs we'll have to climb up again." But it's a false confidence.

Caitlin: Mm. Yeah. Why do you think he chose to make a joke at that time? Just 'cause ... was he going for an effect or was it just he can't help himself and that's just who he is as a person?

Noelle: I think he can't help himself.

Caitlin: [Overlapping] Yeah, that's what I was thinking.

Noelle: I mean I think it says "Unable to resist temptation"

Caitlin: Yeah. [Laughs]

Noelle: He *has* to make the goat sound. It's just *too good*.

Caitlin: And he's used to making animal sounds at Ornon, too, so. [Laughs]

Noelle: Yeah. And he, it's still—it's just the two of them. And anything could happen? Like they're, he doesn't know how she'll react to him, and so I think he continues to try things?

Caitlin: Yeah. To then find that as is maybe predictable she's still just livid and she's not gonna ...

Noelle: Yeah, she has—[laughs]

Caitlin: Nothing good is coming out of this right now. [Laughs]

Noelle: She has two settings [Caitlin laughs] and they are "statue" and "rage". It's just an on-off switch.

Caitlin: I had a question from early on in this chapter. This is something that's been bothering me for multiple rereads, ever since I noticed it, because I can't figure it out. When they get to the top of the cliff people are waiting there.

Noelle: Mm-hm.

Caitlin: Eddis's ministers and chamberlain, who does the official introductions. And it says, "Only once did [the chamberlain] falter, looking

over his shoulder. 'He said he wouldn't be here,' one of the ministers said in a carrying whisper, and the chamberlain went on with the formal greetings of the Queen of Eddis in abstentia" (254). So, who is that talking about? Because first of all, I thought automatically it must be the Minister of War, because he's not introduced. But I don't think that's it actually, because right after this they ride the whole day, no one new joins them, and then they get to an empty camp.

Noelle: Mm-hm.

Caitlin: In that camp there's just one messenger left behind to say that Xenophon encountered no problems getting out of Ephrata, and that's it. And then the Minister of War helps Attolia down from her horse. So, either the chamberlain was talking about the Minister of War and the Minister of War was the messenger? Talking about Ephrata? Or he was with them.

Noelle: Wait, wh—he *was* with them. He was with them at the start.

Caitlin: How do we know that?

Noelle: Ok, hold on hold on hold on hold on I can find it. [Sound of pages turning] Oh, no. Well, ok. She doesn't see him, until she gets to the camp. She refers to him as one of the soldiers.

Caitlin: Right. Ok. Yeah. So—

Noelle: And so he has to have been with them.

Caitlin: Right. Ok. So that makes sense, that question answered. But, so, who is the chamberlain referring to when he says—ah, when the other minister says to the chamberlain, "he said he wouldn't be here"?

Noelle: I still think it's the Minister of War, because the Minister of War is essentially in disguise.

Caitlin: Right.

Noelle: He has no markings on his uniform, he is there just as a soldier.

Caitlin: Mm-hm.

Noelle: And I think that he had been maybe advised not to come, because this is his son.

Caitlin: Right.

Noelle: But he couldn't stop himself, and he wants to be there to protect Gen.

Caitlin: Wait a minute, no, ok, so then but [Noelle laughs] wouldn't the chamberlain know ...?

Noelle: Wouldn't the chamberlain know—

Caitlin: So the minister says he said he wouldn't be here, be there, to the chamberlain, who was *looking* for someone.

Noelle: "Eddis's 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." It's possible he looked over his shoulder to react to the person talking to him and it's just slightly unclear with the order of the events on the page.

Caitlin: Could be ...

Noelle: Because it's not that there's somebody who should be there who's absent, it's that there's somebody who's there who shouldn't be. And—

Caitlin: Who?

Noelle: There's nobody it could be except the Minister of War.

Caitlin: So—you just said there's someone who's there who shouldn't be?

Noelle: Yeah, the Minister of War. He said he wouldn't be there, he said he wasn't going to come. But he did.

Caitlin: Ohhhh. That would make sense.

Noelle: Yeah.

Caitlin: / thought he was looking for someone who isn't there, and the person was saying he said he wouldn't be here and that's why he's *not* here.

Noelle: [Overlapping]—oh and that's why he's *not* here! Oh! Oh that's completely different than what I thought.

Caitlin: [Overlapping] That's why I was confused! You thought he was saying, he said he wouldn't be here but he is.

Noelle: But he is. Yeah. Oh!

Caitlin: I thought he was looking for someone, he was looking for the Minister of War.

Noelle: If he's looking for someone, and there's someone he thought was going to be there and isn't there, I have *no* idea who it is.

Caitlin: Right! [Noelle laughs] See?!

Noelle: Literally—

Caitlin: What's up??

Noelle: Oh no! Oh, that's an ambiguity.

Caitlin: Yeah. Who is this, Megan?

Noelle: Yeah!

Caitlin: And it's never addressed.

Noelle: I feel like the only, the only version of those two things for which I have an explanation is that the Minister of War said he wouldn't be there and is there.

Caitlin: Yeah.

Noelle: It's much more mysterious if it's someone who they expect to see who's absent.

Caitlin: Right.

Noelle: Uh-oh.

Caitlin: Man. [Noelle laughs] I don't know. And we're never gonna get an answer.

Noelle: We're never gonna get an answer.

Caitlin: Ever.

Noelle: Crowdsourcing this one.

Caitlin: Yeah, listeners—

Noelle: Please tell us, tell us how you interpreted that line.

Caitlin: Which one is it?

Noelle: Aaah! It would be so—if we could hear the emphasis, you know, "he *said* he wouldn't be here," would be the interpretation that you had thought. And "he said he wouldn't *be* here" would be the interpretation that I had thought. You can't see that on the page.

Caitlin: Let's find the audiobook.

Noelle: Yeah!

Caitlin: Yeah. We'll get the audiobook this weekend and see what it is.

Noelle: [Overlapping] But who says, who says that that interpretation was what Megan intended—

Caitlin: [Overlapping] Megan meant, yeah, it's not like Megan told the reader of the audiobook how to pronounce it, probably. [Laughs then whispers] Probably.

Noelle: Oof.

Caitlin: Oof.

[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 can actually hear it, on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, and all the major platforms. Another bonus is you can make money from your podcast with no minimum listenership. It's everything you need to make a podcast in one place. Download the free Anchor app or go to anchor.fm to get started.

[Music ends]

Noelle: So they climb the stairs, they have this conversation—or, she listens to the chamberlain drone for a while, and then they get to this camp. And Attolia wants to go talk to Eugenides. And she shows up unannounced at his tent and sees him removing the hook, and it's a moment of vulnerability that he did not intend for her to see.

Caitlin: Mm-hm.

Noelle: And she remembers the thought she had in the previous chapter about how he was too young to have bones that ached, and now she sees him in physical pain.

Caitlin: That she caused.

Noelle: That she caused. And that's a very interesting moment to me, because the loss of his hand represents so many things. And on one level it's just, Megan Whalen Turner's conviction that you don't have to be able-bodied to be the hero of an adventure story, and on the other hand—I did it [laughs]—and in another sense it is a physical representation of trauma that had changed him. And in another way it's this, like, it's a pain that they now share?

Caitlin: Mm. It's something that connects them.

Noelle: Yeah. And she sees that for a moment, the honesty of him in that moment.

Caitlin: Yeah, that's something he can't lie about.

Noelle: Yeah. And she—I mean, she spends a lot of this chapter looking for him.

Caitlin: Mm-hm.

Noelle: In various contexts. She's looking for him in the battle, she's trying to catch a glimpse of him. But I think she's also looking for him in an emotional sense.

Caitlin: Yeah.

Noelle: She wants to ... see what the truth is.

Caitlin: Mm-hm.

Noelle: And he keeps fading back into the darkness.

Caitlin: Yeah.

Noelle: It's so good!

Caitlin: Ugh! [Noelle laughs] And then later, she's asleep and she hears shouting, and she wakes up, and Eugenides comes in, and “When he

reached her side, he did not raise the sword as she had expected. He bent down and kissed her briefly on the lips” (259) and that's where I lost it.
[Noelle laughs]

Noelle: And she flinches away cause she's surprised more than anything.

Caitlin: Yeah. And she's livid. So—

Noelle: Yeah. Oh and it's so dramatic, he comes in and he has his sword out.

Caitlin: She thinks he's literally about to run her through.

Noelle: Mm-hm.

Caitlin: This is ... very yikes. [Noelle laughs]

Noelle: And this moment, I mean, he says "What luck you have" I think?

Caitlin: Yeah.

Noelle: In regards to the fact that the Medes have come.

Caitlin: Yeah.

Noelle: To rescue her, I mean it's a dubious rescue. But he's not angry, I think he's beyond all anger with her.

Caitlin: Yeah. He—I think he's very clearly, in his mind, substituted Nahuseresh as the person who he feels is responsible for the loss of the hand and he can be angry about it, at Nahuseresh.

Noelle: Yeah. Yeah! All his hate is directed at Nahuseresh.

Caitlin: Yeah.

Noelle: I hadn't really thought of that.

Caitlin: Doesn't he tell Eddis earlier in this book ...

Noelle: Mm-hm.

Caitlin: Like they're talking about the Mede and Attolia and he's angry about the Mede and she says, "Gen it was *Attolia* who cut off your hand, right?" And he was like "Yeah, but she would have just killed me if the Mede hadn't intervened." So he's focusing on the Mede so he doesn't have to be angry with Attolia, I think, to simplify his own emotions.

Noelle: [Overlapping] Yeah, and he feels, like the anger that he feels at Nahuseresh is white hot.

Caitlin: Yeah.

Noelle: It's very aggressive. And also, I mean, Nahuseresh, he's in this position where he may have power over her, in some way, and he doesn't respect her, he doesn't want to help her.

Caitlin: [Laughing] And he's trying to take over the entire peninsula, which is obviously quite an issue.

Noelle: [Overlapping] And he's trying to take over the entire peninsula. And he doesn't, he does not have its best interests at heart!

Caitlin: No!

Noelle: And so it's this weird combination of, Gen redirects anger that he might feel at her to him, and also wants to protect her from him.

Caitlin: Mm-hm.

Noelle: And also it's political.

Caitlin: Yes. [Both laugh] All ...

Noelle: There's always those ... they're all going on at once!

Caitlin: Yeah, it's all the things at once. All the time.

Noelle: [Overlapping] All those emotions in his tiny body.

Caitlin: With no brakes. And he comes in and kisses her because he thinks he's about to die and he doesn't want to die without having done that.

Noelle: And Attolia sees Gen and his father fighting together, and I think it's really cool how Gen's father is even more anonymous than usual in this chapter.

Caitlin: Mm-hm.

Noelle: He's disguised as a common soldier, not even the title of Minister of War is ever spoken, Attolia does not know who he is but notices that he and Gen fight very well in tandem.

Caitlin: Mm-hm.

Noelle: And are very in sync. And I think that's great, because from Gen's perspective, he and his father have all these problems connecting, but from an outside perspective they have this kind of natural rapport physically.

Caitlin: I also, I assumed it was—I mean yes, but also for fighting styles specifically I assumed it was a taught rapport, too.

Noelle: Yeah.

Caitlin: Because the Minister of War taught Gen how to do that, how to fight in sync, probably.

Noelle: And they're doing the thing together that Gen's father always wanted them to do.

Caitlin: Oof, yeah.

Noelle: Although not in the context—

Caitlin: [Overlapping] Well, not like this, but! [Noelle laughs] Not like this! But yes.

Noelle: [Overlapping] "Why don't you be in battle with me." There's a lot about the Eddisian fighting style in here. The Medes come in and they have that very Roman Empire rectangular formation with shields.

Caitlin: Mm-hm.

Noelle: And the Eddisians do this thing where they have like layers of attacks, and the first rush of people essentially sacrifice themselves

Caitlin: Yeah.

Noelle: Which is—it feels like a very Eddisian attitude. [Caitlin laughs] And the person who finally gives the order to surrender is Gen.

Caitlin: Yeah.

Noelle: Soldiers are following his orders.

Caitlin: Mm-hm. You can't see right now but Noelle's eyes just went super wide. [Noelle laughs] We get a lot of tiny hints in this chapter about what Attolia's really thinking and feeling that you can only really recognize [when] you've read the rest of it, and then you go back and all these things have a different significance again.

Noelle: Mm-hm.

Caitlin: So not just seeking out Eugenides through the battle but also when Nahuseresh gets there, he says "I have landed my army at Rhea" et cetera et cetera "I can only hope that Her Majesty will forgive me for bringing my men uninvited through her territory" Attolia squeezed his hands. 'What alternative do I have?' she said lightly" (264) So, we think from an outsider's perspective who doesn't know what her attachments are to the Mede, that she's just joking but, ya know ...

Noelle: She's gonna heck him up.

Caitlin: Yeah. [Both laugh] And then later—so also I said a minute ago that you get hints to her emotions but I guess I more meant motivations also.

Noelle: Mm-hm.

Caitlin: Because later when she's making sure Eugenides isn't hurt, she—like he insults her, and starts talking about "I hope you believe Nahuseresh when Nahuseresh says he loves you" and then she hits him. And it says, "She hoped the fall would shut him up but considered kicking him to be sure. She had no desire to hear him protest his undying love" (269). So the first read, when you don't know how it's gonna end up, you can think like "oh, well, she doesn't want to hear it because, you know, that's just repulsive to her and she's done with it, whatever" but then later you realize, like, she's trying to shut him up because she doesn't want Nahuseresh to hear about that!

Noelle: Yeah.

Caitlin: Because it's all part of the plan.

Noelle: It's a, like, she has an agenda, and Gen has an agenda, and I mean [sighs] there's that juxtaposition of this very romantic motivation with this very pragmatic motivation.

Caitlin: Mm-hm.

Noelle: And, like, this book is a, it's a story of those things happening to work in tandem. And why and what that tells us ... I don't know. I mean, it might be just that all of these things were ordained by the gods, right?

Caitlin: Yeah, partially.

Noelle: I'm gonna have to think about that for another ten years. [Caitlin laughs]

Caitlin: We'll never be done.

Noelle: But it's a, it's like a, Gen and Attolia both have an agenda and they're possibly at odds but they, like, exist together and have this give and take.

Caitlin: Yeah. And I think as soon as the Medes came over the ridge and Attolia realized they were Medes and not her own soldiers, she fell in line with Gen's plan.

Noelle: Yeah.

Caitlin: And knew that the only way she's gonna get the Medes out is to agree with him.

Noelle: Mm-hm. And that's so unromantic!

Caitlin: Yeah!

Noelle: And yet! [Both laughs]

Caitlin: Because both of them still think that romance is never, never gonna be a factor. He thinks she hates him and there's a whole paragraph about that in here, like, worse than knowing that he was going to die was knowing that she was going to kill him, because she hated him.

Noelle: In a horrible, horrible way.

Caitlin: Yeah. So that's what he's still thinking and then she obviously still doesn't believe him because he's a liar. [Both laugh, Caitlin sighs]

Noelle: There's that great line, "better to trust in the moon's promises than the word of the Thief of Eddis. He was famous in three countries for his lies." Gen is really—he's very broken in this scene. She speaks to him and he can't look at her, he's looking at the ground.

Caitlin: Mm.

Noelle: Which is—it's difficult to imagine in the sense that it's hard to look at even in your mind's eye. [Caitlin sighs] He had been so proud just pages before, and now she knows that while there's life there's hope, because her agenda has shifted, but he doesn't know that. And so which of them really understands the situation—in Chapter 15, he understood these are the steps of the drama that we're gonna play out here.

Caitlin: Mm-hm.

Noelle: And she had, she was *not* on the same page.

Caitlin: And he said as they got into the boat "'Where there's life, there's hope, Your Majesty?'" (236) asking it as a question.

Noelle: Mm-hm.

Caitlin: And now she says it back to him.

Noelle: Yeah, now it flips, and now he has no clue. Right as it gets to the point where it would, like, be with her and know what she's up to, the point of view shifts to him.

Caitlin: Yeah.

Noelle: And his despair. And he's in agony but in a sexy way. [Caitlin laughs]

[Transition music note]

Noelle: That's chapter 16! Next episode, the gods go a-meddling, Gen's friends and family try their best to kill him, and Attolia's motivations get muddy.

Caitlin: Send us your comments, questions, thoughts! Tell us the answer of who the chamberlain was looking for, please!

Noelle: Please!

Caitlin: [Laughs] Chime in at attolianarchives.tumblr.com

Both: 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!

Noelle: Nice!

Caitlin: Nice!