

## [Attolian Archives](#)

By Noelle and Caitlin

### *Return of the Thief*, Part II, Chapter 4: Too Blessed to Be Stressed

Caitlin: “Eddis lifted her hands to cover her face. The king and I both averted our eyes, neither of us able to offer her the privacy she deserved. When she lowered her hands she had regained her composure, mostly. Her voice was only slightly ragged. ‘Have you considered Gen, even once, that you might achieve your goals with a minimum of damage to yourself and without the maximum amount of distress to those around you?’” (261).

Noelle: If Gen had ever considered that I think this story would be a lot shorter.

[Transition music plays]

Noelle: Welcome back warrior priests, I’m Noelle.

Caitlin: And I’m Caitlin.

Noelle: And this is the Attolian archives, your Queen’s Thief re-read podcast to help you recover from *Return of the Thief*.

Caitlin: It’s June 12th 2022, I was about to say 2020 again there.

Noelle: Eternal 2020.

Caitlin: We’re moving on. And today we are discussing erhg part II, chapter 4 yes of *Return of the Thief*. It gets tough keeping track guys it does. It shouldn’t, I write it down.

Noelle: Then we press record and we’re winging it. Yet another it-was-Gen’s-plan-all-along situation. IT WAS YOUUUU. If there’s ever like “there’s a mysterious person who’s behind this mysterious thing,” it’s Gen. It’s Gen every time. He’s causing his own problems on purpose.

Caitlin: Once again this gets a little bit, like I mostly understand it but it does get a little bit too convoluted for me, let's walk through this, walk me through this. Soo...

Noelle: Therespides was being paid by someone, which is a thing that I had forgotten. I wasn't really paying attention to that, like I knew that Cleon and Therespides were in cahoots and they were opposing Gen in support of Helen but I don't think that I kind of registered on either time I was reading this that there was money involved that was coming from somewhere?

Caitlin: I don't know if we knew that before this chapter?

Noelle: Maybe we didn't!

Caitlin: I don't think we did.

Noelle: Maybe that's new information.

Caitlin: I think we only knew that Cleon and Therespides were the ones causing trouble, and then if you remember back to *Queen of Attolia* you remember Therespides was already taking money from Attolia a few books ago so you could kind of like make that connection. I don't know if we knew that.

Noelle: So like literally Gen put a hit out on himself. [Both laugh]

Caitlin: So he was doing that to try and get people to support Eddis because too many people would prefer a man, even Gen, to be ruling Eddis instead of Helen.

Noelle: Mhm. So he needed to figure out a way he could cement both her power and his power in his own arena so they had to both accept her as the indisputable queen and him as annex. And the only way he could think to do that was to be beaten to a pulp in public by his own father.

Caitlin: But don't, aren't those conflicting goals? 'Cause now her authority really has been diminished since he's replacing her? Isn't that why she's crying here? I mean you know she's maybe -

Noelle: I think she didn't want him to get beaten to a pulp.

Caitlin: Yes. But she's also, he's apologizing and she says "I've always known I would be the last Eddis" (263). So in this conversation between the two of them he was saying I did it so that, if we hadn't done this, if I hadn't sent these agitators or whatever to make them rally around you they would have called you Eddia and called you Sounia and eroded your power and then they would have quote "forgotten" unquote you had ever had any power. But now that he's in charge her power as well as Sounis' and Irene's is diminished just in a different way that unites people.

Noelle: Mhm, maybe she's saying my power would have inevitably been diminished anyway?

Caitlin: Yeah, I think that was, that was how I interpreted it. So when Eddis took the throne she did not have this trial. What do you think about that? Do you think this is another gender thing which is all I can assume?

Noelle: I think that's gender, it has to be gender.

Caitlin: Yeah, right?

Noelle: 'Cause it's so, I mean god why do they have this? Who came up with this?

Caitlin: It's literally just seeing how long can he last, you know we don't even know what the criteria is in this fight actually.

Noelle: Yeah cause it was a win, I guess.

Caitlin: Yeah it says it was? But it says he didn't win all the matches and I have a quote written down, what does it say? It says uh this is a "trial to endure" (254), so like if he can just make it to the total and complete limits of his physical strength then they'll let him be king? I don't know.

Noelle: You can be king but we have to be able to hit you with a stick a bunch of times first, cause that's how we know you're a tough guy, that's how we know you're a real man.

Caitlin: Yeah, what would losing look like? Do they win a specific number of bouts? They had 12 matches against younger men who would be following him forever.

Noelle: Do you lose if you quit before a specific time?

Caitlin: I guess?

Noelle: Or if you die I guess?

Caitlin: That's true.

Noelle: Think about how easy it would be for someone to get killed.

Caitlin: Yeah.

Noelle: Like you can, I don't care if it's a wooden sword, if you hit someone in the head really hard-

Caitlin: They're done.

Noelle: - that's the end.

Caitlin: And it's established that every person here is hitting with their max amount of strength.

Noelle: Yeah, and it is, it's a really cool contrast between the end of *The King of Attolia*, because the Attolians think they're so tough right and so well trained -

Caitlin: Yeah.

Noelle: And Gen just wipes the floor with them, and then this, the Eddisians, he cannot win.

Caitlin: Yeah, it's lucky 13 though, he fights 13 people in all. So what, what does it mean Noelle that the minister of war is the one that's trying him and it's super violent and then the aftermath is super gentle. Considering everything we've said about his father in the last episode and why is it his dad -

Noelle: Yeah it says he's literally cradling him like a child at the end -

Caitlin: - yeah -

Noelle: - and then he picks him up and carries him to bed.

Caitlin: - but to get him established in this position requires supreme and utter violence that he's wrecking on his own son -

Noelle: Yeah, and this is the thing they have to do -

Caitlin: - instead of letting someone else do it

Noelle: - and it's clearly like they both know that this is what they have to do and the minister of war has decided to do this himself, he's like it couldn't be Ornon.

Caitlin: Yeah, which they say is for practical reasons like oh it wouldn't be a contest if it was Ornon, it would be too easy.

Noelle: It would be too easy yeah. But yeah is it that he for some reason wants to do it himself?

Caitlin: Is that sacrifice part of the giving your all component you know what I mean, like the emotional level.

Noelle: Yeah, he's worried about accusations of favoritism.

Caitlin: Right, because I'm going to go all out so that nobody will even be able to imagine saying that I'm favoring you.

Noelle: Yeah.

Caitlin: 'Cause I'm going to destroy you.

Noelle: But also maybe he trusts himself not to accidentally kill Gen? In a way that he doesn't trust another person?

Caitlin: That would be fair.

Noelle: Maybe that doesn't make sense as a choice because I do think that Gen would have found it much easier to beat Ornon.

Caitlin: I don't know, just reading this whole scene just was making me think you have to be so dedicated to the cause that you're perpetuating this violence, and like how does this connect to what the minister of war wants for him slash has wanted for him in the past.

Noelle: Mm.

Caitlin: Is it all still about we're doing this to unite the country for the Meede threat or is it also I don't know what other layers are still under that. I don't have answers.

Noelle: You have people that care about each other and they need to accomplish something that cements their power or to do that they enact violence upon each other which is sometimes agreed upon.

Caitlin: And this just, just underlines the absurdity of violence as a tool to get things. Like war, why -

Noelle: And they think it's absurd, like Gen calls it this asinine business

Caitlin: -yeah. Which you know, cultural traditions.

Noelle: It says that Cleon was talking like an actor in a bad play.

Caitlin: Yeah. And everyone's embarrassed by Cleon.

Noelle: This is all proceeding to a script.

Caitlin: Right, that nobody is invested in. Or not that they're not invested in but they're doing it because they have to not because they want to.

Noelle: Gen feels like this is the only way.

Caitlin: Right, and he couldn't find another way is what he says.

Noelle: Yeah. And this is very specifically Eddisians, the Attolians are horrified by this. And the Eddisians have to like circle them and stop them from intervening.

Caitlin: And fight them to stop them from intervening.

Noelle: Yeah! And it doesn't seem to have been a thing that the Attolians or Sounisians were previously aware of.

Caitlin: Yeah.

Noelle: And there's a warrior priest, there are warrior priests apparently.

Caitlin: That's kind of cool.

Noelle: That's pretty cool.

Caitlin: That's pretty badass.

Noelle: Wonder what they've been up to this whole time.

Caitlin: Yeah.

Noelle: Pheris recognizes that this guy is a warrior priest because he has a zigzagging tattoo on his face.

Caitlin: Yeah. And I wanted to bring up at the beginning of the chapter Gen snaps at Ion about his hair because Ion says like oh it would be great if you grew it long and Gen says "teach me how to braid it with one hand Ion and I will grow it to my knees" (245) because he's pissed because he wants long hair but not if he can't braid it himself which he can't because he has only one hand. And the magus says "Still wishing for your lost hand back Gen?" - he says "I miss it, but if I hadn't lost the hand I'd be another person entirely by now. Wishing for the hand back would be like wishing for the man I already am to be replaced by some stranger. It would be wishing my own self out of existence and who would want that?" (246).

Noelle: Mmm.

Caitlin: And then this is such a rare and important idea. I know we've talked before about how the positivity with which disability is portrayed in this series is I feel just unparalleled.

Noelle: Yeah.

Caitlin: And this specific example right here, it's just first of all just so good and so accurate and so true in my own personal findings but also it's like the opposite of the narratives that we get about disability from other sources, from print and literature and I don't know, from non-disabled people generally, is that people can get battered with this like "oh disability is something inherently wrong with you that needs to be fixed. It's something negative, it's something that should not be a part of you." You know, like there's all this debate over person-first language versus identity-first language which is saying like "a person with a disability" versus "a disabled person." I feel like this is an identity-first perspective that we don't see very often at all in literature or anywhere else really and I just really appreciated this.

Noelle: Yeah. And the fact that his feelings are so complex.

Caitlin: Yeah.

Noelle: Like this has been difficult for him and it continues to be difficult for him, it will always be difficult for him, but it has also made him the person that he is and so he can't wish it away. The themes in the story about disability are part of wider themes about change or are part of change in the story all come back to disability. Like everything about like changes in your life that can be devastating are also that's what makes you alive, that's what makes you a person.

Caitlin: I listened to the audio book version of this chapter instead of reading it and this was the first time I had listened to *Return of the Thief*, any part of that audio book. And Steve West the voice actor does Scottish accents for the Eddisians.

Noelle: That's so fun.

Caitlin: Yeah! Steve West, he sounds to me like he has an English accent



which is what he uses for the general narration and for the Attolian accents, so Gen was speaking with an English accent.

Noelle: But at one point during the trial it says that one of the Eddisians said something just incomprehensible like that and then Gen says something back that's equally incomprehensible. I've always kind of imagined them having Yorkshire accents for no reason at all.

Caitlin: For the Gift, I've always said it Hay-me-ay-this-is Gift, I don't know why I chose to pronounce it that way, but Steve West pronounces it rhyming with Hermione, it's Her-my-ah-these Gift.

Noelle: Her-my-a-these huh.

Caitlin: Yeah, and that could not be more different than how I say it.

Noelle: And the minister of war like stepping on Gen's hand, that's so intense.

Caitlin: Literally and metaphorically.

Noelle: Yeah. Poor Teleus.

Caitlin: Oh my god I know.

Noelle: He shows up he's like what is going on. I leave for 5 minutes.

Caitlin: Pheris thought that Teleus was about to rip someone's head off, his veins are showing. And when there's that short brawl between the Eddisians and Sounisians, Pheris jumps in to try and help the king, bites Aulus who is on Pheris duty. Aulus is like very respectful towards Pheris.

Noelle: Yeah.

Caitlin: Which is really nice. Nobody else is taking him seriously, laughing, saying he can't keep his word, it doesn't matter what he thinks. And Aulus asks for his word anyway and treats him like "I recognize you're a threat" cause he is.

Noelle: Yeah.

Caitlin: But also he's very compassionate when Pheris is upset.

Noelle: And this is a lot for Pheris to witness, he throws up.

Caitlin: Yeah.

Noelle: I'm really interested in "What happens now between your father and your queen?" "Well he already hates her because she cut off my hand, now the feeling is mutual." "So, so, you intend to separate them for the entirety of your reign?" The king shifted uncomfortably, looking for a softer spot on his mattress before he confessed. "I've arranged for them to both be in the garden at the same time entirely alone. We'll see which one leaves alive." "You are joking." "Only about one of them leaving alive, they might kill each other." "Gen." "Helen, you know how it will go. They will agree like people always do that it was all my fault." He shifted painfully again. Not finding a better spot, he gave up with a sigh. "They are adults, they know what is at stake. They will sit next to each other on a bench without speaking until the palace bells ring the hour and when they get up the whole matter will be finished. They will embark on a long relationship of mutual respect and admiration and lecturing me" (263).

Caitlin: We never really get any more insight into whether this truly did come to pass like he thinks it will but I think it's probably a pretty safe assumption, what do you think?

Noelle: Yeah, I think he knows these people very well.

Caitlin: Yeah. And when she decides to name their son after his father at the end of the book it's nice to think that it's not just for him, that she came to respect Hector too.

Noelle: Right yeah. And it is all Gen's fault.

Caitlin: It is.

Noelle: Imagine you're about to go to war against this empire that makes you look like a tiny insect and you're like you know what we need to do right now, you know what I think is really important. I think we need to find our guy that's going to lead us and hit him a bunch of times with sticks.

Caitlin: And almost kill him, just an inch from death.

Noelle: AIIIIIIImost.

Caitlin: Get most of the way there and then stop just as some practice.

Noelle: Then we'll pull back, we'll pull back. It will be really good for all of us, it will be really healing.

Caitlin: It's going to be a bonding experience. And then we'll be able to do this war right!

Noelle: This is their pep rally.

Caitlin: You know you also get the vibe in this chapter that you know the attendants are concerned about Gen because he's the king but also because they like him.

Noelle: What does it mean for this to be a book about adults that is from the perspective of a child? The characters that are not Pheris are at this point unequivocally adults. Like you can say in *The Thief* and in *Queen of Attolia* and in *Conspiracy of Kings* that we're talking about a coming of age situation but they're, Gen says in this chapter "my father and Irene will work out their differences because they're adults, they know what's at stake" (263). But we're looking at all of it through Pheris' eyes now, he's definitely the youngest you could say, like he's not a teen he's –

Caitlin: He goes out of his way to narrate that in different parts of the book that "I did not even understand this at the time because I was too young."

Noelle: I don't think I have an answer.

Caitlin: Yeah, me neither. But that is something very important to bring up. And it's interesting particularly in this chapter particularly when you ask that question because we see you know he narrates the events specifically what the adults are doing and his own reaction to it, he's obviously upset, he's scared, in the middle of the fight he throws up but we kind of have that distance that you mentioned before that you can almost forget he's narrating.

Noelle: Yeah sometimes I do.

Caitlin: Sometimes. It's interesting with this chapter's narration like you would think you have a child narrating the events the adults are going through and that's one thing, or you have him also saying this is what I was thinking and feeling this was my part of it but we don't get that either. It's just showing that he throws up and that he wants to help but he doesn't go into that experience at all, you know what I mean. It's like an afterthought that he was involved.

Noelle: Yeah. Well he kind of thinks of himself as this historical chronicler and that he can't help but remember how he felt. And I mean this was also formative for him clearly.

Caitlin: Yeah. But also he's writing the book as an adult so it's really an adult writing the remembered perspective of a child on adults' events.

Noelle: True, that is also important.

Caitlin: Because I'm thinking you know I was about to say maybe his child's narration of a war takes a step back from it and makes it all seem a little bit more absurd but no, remembering later on, he has an adult's perspective on war and why it's absurd.

Noelle: Yeah.

Caitlin: Not a child's.

Noelle: And there's a lot of like you mentioned before "I didn't understand this at the time."

Caitlin: Yeah.

Noelle: He remembers, "I didn't know what was going on" but now he knows.

Caitlin: And that he will put in separate specific adult explanation paragraphs explaining what this was.

Noelle: You know he is both the youngest perspective character and the oldest.

Caitlin: Yeah we don't know how old he is but he's definitely baron, he's like the baron I guess.

Noelle: Yeah I picture him writing from like

Caitlin: His thirties or something.

Noelle: Yeah or even middle aged.

Caitlin: And like having a child narrator I guess for practical purposes it does let him be places that adults might not, like he's small enough to slip behind the lemon tree in the council room so he can overhear the conversation so like it solves some practical purposes I guess.

Noelle: Yeah and like the factor of his youth and the factor of disability I think both combine to make him invisible in that way that I feel like he might not be as an adult.

Caitlin: I assume not, cause he will also be very politically powerful as an adult anyway.

Noelle: Yeah and people will think differently about him.

Caitlin: I had one little thing that I wanted to mention about last chapter that I forgot to slip in there, but when the king and the queen are having that huge fight about Gen having stolen from his god and all the attendants are listening in fear, Pheris includes a little bit about the queen's attendants and says like oh they were all so disappointed when they heard that the queen threw the coffee pot because Luria wanted the coffee pot as a gift because the queen gives the attendants gifts from her personal possessions on important occasions and Luria was about to get married.

Noelle: Right.

Caitlin: And they hear her throw the jug, and they heard her throw the dressing table and were like ooooo. So that just got me thinking you know

we've kind of talked before about how we don't get much about the queen's attendants but we do get much more of them through Pheris' eyes in this book than we have before kind of. Which is nice. So that was another little detail.

Noelle: They're much less alarmed about the breaking of things, they're just like god darn I wanted that. That's chapter 4, next time, a miracle.

Caitlin: Send us your comments, thoughts. Chime in at [attoliaarchieves.tumblr.com](http://attoliaarchieves.tumblr.com). And thank you everyone for waiting patiently for us to answer your blog questions which we haven't answered in a long time.

Noelle: We're doing them, we're doing them today.

Caitlin: Yes. We love it when you send in things -

Noelle: It makes us very happy.

Caitlin: - and we're sorry to not answer them quickly.

Noelle: Be blessed in your endeavors.

[Outro music plays]

Caitlin: Thank you for listening, this has been an amateur embroidery production, find us on iTunes, Stitcher, anywhere podcasts are available.