

YA Café Podcast
Episode 46: *The Priory of the Orange Tree*
28 February 2019

- Danielle: 00:00 Welcome to the YA Café where we share conversations about books for teachers, readers, and caffeine addicts everywhere. On today's episode we'll be talking about *The Priory of the Orange Tree* by Samantha Shannon. Grab a mug of your favorite beverage, friends, and let's talk books.
- Amanda: 00:22 Have you tried the Radio Public app? It's a great app where you can find all of your favorite podcasts, like this one. You'll experience the same great content for free and we'll receive a small kickback every time you listen there. This is a great way to support any podcasts you enjoy. Come find us over on Radio Public.
- Amanda: 00:44 Welcome y'all. As always our first segment will be spoiler free and so you can stick around even if you haven't checked out the new novel yet. I'm Amanda Thrasher.
- Danielle: 00:51 And I'm Danielle Hall, an eighth and ninth grade English teacher, and I blog at teach nouvelle dot com, and our guest today is YA fantasy writer, Somaiya Daud. Hi Somaiya.
- Somaiya: 01:00 Hi. Thanks so much for having me.
- Danielle: 01:02 Thank you so much for joining us. I read *Mirage* last year, and was absolutely captivated. So we've talked about it on the show before. It's been a Thing We Like A Latte, and then it was in our Recommendation Round-up for 2018, Emily Skrutskie really liked it, and I just wanted to give you an opportunity to give any new listeners the rundown on *Mirage*.
- Somaiya: 01:24 Yeah, so *Mirage* is a novel that I wrote. It came out in August 2018, and it is about a young girl named Amani who lives on a backwater moon that's orbiting a larger planet and both the moon and the planet have been conquered in the last 20 years by a colonizing race called the Vathek, and on her majority night, which is like her coming of age ceremony, she is kidnapped by imperial [inaudible 00:01:47] and taken to the imperial palace on the main planet, and she finds out that she has to be the body double for the imperial princess, who she looks exactly like because the princess is half Kushaila, which is what Amani is, and half Vathek, and so it's about her getting pulled into the politics of a palace, and getting pulled into these complicated relationships with Maram and her fiance, [Adrizz 00:02:07], who is an indigenous prince who's been pulled into the imperial structure, and various other people. It's sort of the book that I always wanted to read, space fantasy, court politics.

Danielle: 02:17 With poetry.

Somaiya: 02:18 With poetry that I didn't write. I've gotten some people who have been like, "Did you write this?" And I'm like, "No, I'm not that saucy." And so that's 13th century Muslim Iberians that did that.

Danielle: 02:29 And you went on tour.

Somaiya: 02:31 Yeah it was so fun. It was really great to meet teen readers, 'cause they're fabulous, and they're so earnest, and I feel like the books mean so much more to them than they do to adults, because that's their first experience. You get to be their first version of a particular thing even if that thing's been done before, and that's always really nice.

Danielle: 02:48 And we met you at PDX BookFest in Portland.

Somaiya: 02:51 Yes. Yes.

Danielle: 02:52 And there was supposed to be three people on this panel and two of them got the flu, so it was just us hanging out with you and April Henry.

Somaiya: 03:00 Yeah which was fabulous. I had actually never been to Portland even though I lived on the west coast and I live in Seattle and I just had never made it down there. It was such a good festival, and I listen to a lot of podcasts and I feel like interviewing is a really acquired skill 'cause you have some people who are just sort of like, "Here's the bullet point questions that I want you to answer," and then there's people who know to have a conversation. April was so fun to talk to 'cause she is really quick on her feet, and then you guys in the audience we just amazing. It was so fun to have a reactive audience versus people who seem like they're looking at you through binoculars and waiting for you to mess up or something.

Danielle: 03:33 The crowd was so big and everybody was just so excited for you, which was great 'cause I was wondering, because you know, when two thirds of a panel cancels.

Somaiya: 03:42 Especially because I'm a debut and both of the people that I was sharing the panel with, this was like their third or fourth book, so they had established fan bases, so I assumed when they canceled, like I really thought they were gonna cancel my panel, or they were gonna make me talk to April in an empty room.

Danielle: 03:56 We would have been there.

Amanda: 03:57 I think you might have an established fan base at this point. I'm just gonna go out on a limb.

Somaiya: 04:01 Which is nice.

Danielle: 04:03 So at that conversation with you and April Henry, you mentioned Priory, and it is not being marketed as YA. And when I wrote to the publicist, well, I didn't write to the publicist, and when Leila wrote to the publicist and was like, "Can we read this book?" The publicist was like, "You know this isn't YA, right?" So-

Amanda: 04:22 I think they're wrong, but we can get into that in the conversation.

Danielle: 04:25 Well, we can get into it now. I thought it was really interesting. I read thick books in high school. I read inappropriate books. I read Game of Thrones way too young. I read it when I was 14. I think that's probably the reason is just because it's such a brick, like it's 800 pages. But I think that story wise it fits so nicely into YA fantasy and YA tropes, and in a great way not in a bad way.

Amanda: 04:51 Yes.

Somaiya: 04:51 Yeah yeah yeah. The thing that I've been realizing more and more recently 'cause I've been thinking about this a lot and I think that YA thing is really like a marketing strategy. Like with Priory it's so easy to market it as adult fantasy because it's so big and it's really dense, too. ... I have never had more fun reading a fantasy than reading the first hundred pages of Priory, but it's really slow.

- Somaiya: 05:13 I've had conversations with editors where they've been like, "You have to find a way to condense the first hundred pages." The thing that we revised the most with Mirage was the beginning because I write really upper YA that's like crossing into adult, and there's like four different versions of the beginning that didn't make it because my editors were like, "You firmly moved the pacing of this opening into adult and it needs to be sped up and condensed and parsed down."
- Somaiya: 05:35 And I think that that would have been the biggest struggle, which is not to say that, obviously YA readers are really clever and really smart and can handle that, but they're thinking about the largest pool. You're not gonna have a problem with the kid who's reading Game of Thrones at age 14, but they're thinking about the kid who's more likely to put it down when they've gotten 10 pages in and they're like, "Nothing has happened. Tane is just leading this guy through the streets."
- Amanda: 05:54 There's only been three murders, like why?
- Somaiya: 05:59 So I think that's the thing that's made it not YA, but yeah, if I had seen this on the library shelf or the bookstore shelf and I was 14 of 15, that's my summer gone.
- Danielle: 06:09 Me too. And I would have reread it, and then I would have written fan fiction about it.
- Amanda: 06:13 Yep. This is a world you could swim around in for a while.
- Somaiya: 06:17 Yeah.
- Amanda: 06:17 So let's go into the book and I'm gonna tell everybody what it's about since we just launched right in there. So, the Priory of the Orange Tree is an epic fantasy set in a world with sharp divisions. For those in the west, dragons are their most hated enemy and the only thing keeping them safe is the Queen's dynasty that has lasted 1000 years.
- Amanda: 06:34 In the east, sea dragons are gods, guarding and guiding the kingdom. When the enemy of humanity begins to stir, every nation must make a choice on how to fight it and what to believe. Told in third person, Priory follows the Queen's attendant, a prospective dragon rider, a loyal diplomat, and a disgraced alchemist to tell the story of a world at a crossroad.

Amanda: 06:53 So, Danielle, we talked a little bit about this book being YA versus adult or where it fits, but how did you like the book all together?

Danielle: 07:01 I loved it. There are so many amazing female characters in this book, or you know, just like characters, as we call them around here, and of course, there's dragons. That is what got me when at BookFest, Somaiya was like, "There are dragons." And I'm like, "Yes." And I mean, it's not a shock. There's a dragon on the cover. There are dragons, I'm there for that. There's fighting and scheming and diplomacy and it's awesome. Awesome book. How about you, Somaiya? What did you think?

Somaiya: 07:35 I loved this book so much. I remember when I was reading the beginning and it was so carefully built that I was losing my mind, and there's a moment about a hundred and fifty pages in, where, I'm trying to think if this is a spoiler, where something appears, right? This is the scene that's on the cover, and I feel like, and a lot of other fantasy books, when you get to that moment and someone says, "Hey, that's [Fredo 00:07:58], the right wing of the nameless one." It's not gonna pack a punch, but she's done so much careful world building, and just baked in the fear of this thing, that I literally screamed in my living room. It was such a good moment and it's such an earned moment and I feel like that's really the story of the book is that there are all of these careful moments that I think with a lesser writer, or less careful writer, they're sort of like, "Oh that's cool. Whatever."

Somaiya: 08:21 But the world is so carefully built and the characters are so carefully constructed, that you are understanding their shock and horror at the same time and it's really really cool. And the other thing too, that I could not stop thinking about is she's so obviously a Tolkien fan, 'cause the western dragons, I'm like, "I see that you read The Silmarillion many times and that you're probably a fan of the Fifth Battle." But I'm really curious to know if she read The Wheel of Time, because The Wheel of Time is sort of, people talk about it like the American Tolkien and it's not. but it's like a-

Amanda: 08:50 It's not.

Somaiya: 08:52 He doesn't have a codex, guys. You can't be the American Tolkien without a codex.

Danielle: 08:56 Oh, you know I'm remembering now at our panel, some guy said something about Robert Jordan and you were like, "Where is his codex?"

- Somaiya: 09:03 Not gonna do my Tolkien spiel because it's about Samantha Shannon, but part of the series is this group of female witches who influence politics in a really important way, and full respect to Robert Jordan, but it's super clearly written by a dude. Like even remembering it now because I read these books in high school, but the female relationships or even thinking about how female presenting power affects politics and stuff like that. It's just, whatever, and Ead's entire, her conception of her power and her relationship to the priory and all of this other stuff is just so nuanced and so lovely to read and so carefully built. I keep saying carefully built, the implication being that like other things are not as carefully built, but I'm gonna stand by that.
- Amanda: 09:42 I mean, it's true though. The world is so perfect, you're right.
- Somaiya: 09:49 I'm making a lot of assumptions about Samantha Shannon. But I feel like she definitely has the codex somewhere. Like she has a list of all the mythologies that are at work, and all the false historiographies, what really happened, and it shows. And it shows without bogging down the plot.. I got to page 200 and was like, "Oh, I have all of this knowledge about all of these different belief systems and stuff," but at no point was I flipping through five pages of her being like, "This is how people think about dragons in the east."
- Amanda: 10:16 Right.
- Danielle: 10:16 Yep. It was very well done. By having the split perspectives, so Amanda didn't name them in the summary, so let's name them now. We have Ead, who is the queen's attendant, and she's a perspective character in the west. We have Tane, who is the prospective, prospective, right, the future dragon rider. She's almost a dragon rider, and within the first 20 pages she gets her mantle. And so these women are really like the core of the story. And so because we have Ead and Sabran, who don't agree religiously, and we also have Tane, who worships the dragons as gods. We get it from the inside, from in their heads, not from the narrator being like, "Well, blah blah blah." That's my narrator voice.
- Amanda: 11:03 That's a good narrator.
- Danielle: 11:04 How about you Amanda, what did you think?
- Amanda: 11:06 Oh, I mean I loved it. It's a perfect book. I think that there are a lot of moments that are going to stick in my head in a very visual way, like Somaiya mentioned where the Right Hand of the

Nameless One shows up and it's just this very lonely tower with a dragon and the fact that we got so much world building up to that moment. That's gonna stick in my head. I just thought it was outstanding, and it's because of this incredible world building that she's done, and not in the boring way of let's describe court politics for 27 pages, or religious politics for 27 pages.

Danielle: 11:43 So at the core of this story we have a religious war and a dispute on religion.

Amanda: 11:51 Right. I think war is a strong word, but it's definitely-

Danielle: 11:54 But it's more than a dispute and less than a war.

Somaiya: 11:56 A standoff.

Amanda: 11:57 Standoff, that's a better word.

Danielle: 11:58 Standoff is good, yeah. So we have this religious standoff, and there is this moment where Ead, who is protecting Sabran. Sabran asks Ead, knowing that she wasn't raised in court and that she doesn't come from Virtue, that she comes from an outside place, she says, "Ead, tell the story as you know it." And Ead knows that her version of the story could get her killed.

Somaiya: 12:26 Right.

Amanda: 12:26 So I love that scene for so many reasons and one of the reasons I really loved it, was it was such an interesting picture of Sabran. I think it would have been very easy. We've seen a lot where, 'oh, this monarchy person is open-minded and actually wants to hear something outside of their prescribed version of events' or whatever, and I just liked how clearly it was like, 'nope, Sabran doesn't want that. Sabran asked for it but she didn't mean it.' And I really loved the tension in that scene, that Ead felt and that she got from Sabran, who was kind of a jerk.

Somaiya: 12:59 Yep. I think that's the thing that I loved the most about her, is that she's so buttoned up and so rigid. And part of it is her fear because of what happened to her mother but I think part of it is just she's sort of a jerk. Which is nice. She's a jerk with really good intentions but she really wants to be a

good queen. But she also has been told that she is the vessel of Virtuedom, and is more than mortal, and has definitely absorbed that in a real way. She definitely believes that in the beginning of the book in a real way.

Amanda: 13:29 So one of the things that made me think of Mirage in this book. One of the things you said in your panel, you were talking about how you wrote very carefully. It was clear that Maram in Mirage is a tyrant and she's never not gonna be a tyrant and they're not gonna be friends. And in this book, you can sense from the beginning that Sabran may be buttoned up and she may be rigid, but she is not a tyrant. And she can be a jerk, but she's not going to have her underlings whipped for whatever. I like that line. I like having a not nice character who is not evil.

Somaiya: 14:12 Yeah.

Amanda: 14:13 One other thing that you have to talk about with Sabran is the fact that she is the queen and it's this long dynasty of queens, but largely her worth is tied to her childbearing, which is really difficult for her as a character, because she wants to be a good queen, and she doesn't really want to be a mom.

Danielle: 14:36 And she's been having nightmares her whole life of the child bed. That would definitely change your perspective on giving birth.

Amanda: 14:46 Let's talk about Tane.

Somaiya: 14:47 I really love her. She made me so worried all the time. Because she's also the youngest one and I think the most naive, and though she's had the most difficult upbringing, she's in a lot of ways really ... like the trials that she does for the dragon riding, she very much believes that her skill is less than others despite the fact that she's definitely one of the most skilled of the potential dragon riders.

Danielle: 15:13 She has imposter syndrome.

Somaiya: 15:15 Yes. To an extreme degree. Reading her chapters sometimes hurt, but I would just be like, 'you're wrong and you can't see it and I know why you can't see it.'

Danielle: 15:24 Yeah I definitely want to talk more about her and her imposter syndrome and her guilt in the spoiler section.

Danielle: 15:31 And with that friends, we'll take our first break. When we come back we'll share about things we like a latte. Then we'll return to our discussion of The Priory of the Orange Tree and dig a little deeper.

Danielle: 15:50 Hey, friends. Are you looking for an easy way to support this podcast? Order our book choices through the affiliate links in our show notes. You'll be supporting our authors, and making sure we get a small kickback to keep our show going. Next week we'll discuss Liar by Justine Larbalestier. You know how much we love liars as narrators on this podcast. If you'd like to help us keep bringing you great content, order through the link in our show notes. Happy reading.

Amanda: 16:26 Welcome back y'all. It's time for things we like a latte. Danielle, what's your brew of choice this week?

Danielle: 16:31 Well, Amanda.

Amanda: 16:32 Well, Danielle.

Danielle: 16:34 You're so hateful. All I do is love you. I'm just full of love.

Amanda: 16:39 Do you like anything this week?

Danielle: 16:40 I do.

Amanda: 16:41 How about you tell us?

- Danielle: 16:42 I will. All right, so Instagram. The 'gram. Basically you need to add some illustrators to your feed. They make everything better. So I love two illustrators a latte this week that I wanted to shout out. One of them is Vashti Harrison who illustrated and wrote *Little Dreamers: Visionary Women Around the World*. So we also met her at PDX BookFest. She is a luminous person. Her art is luminous, and it just makes me smile all the time, so that's Vashti Harrison.
- Danielle: 17:18 There's also Emily B. Martin. I honestly have no idea how I found her. She wrote *Creatures of Light*, which I haven't read, so I don't know. But she's also an amazing illustrator and park ranger.
- Amanda: 17:32 Nice.
- Somaiya: 17:33 Wow.
- Amanda: 17:33 And also has beautiful artwork, and these two women just fill my feed with beautiful art and everybody should follow them on Instagram. That's Emily B. Martin and Vashti Harrison. How about you, Somaiya? What do you like a latte?
- Somaiya: 17:50 I thought about this a lot and I was gonna recommend a book, but instead I'm gonna recommend a TV show.
- Danielle: 17:55 Yeah.
- Amanda: 17:55 Nice.
- Somaiya: 17:57 Nobody except for me and like five people watches this show. And it's on, it's the last season that's coming out and it's this coming summer. Summer 2019, and it's called *Killjoys*, and it's about space bounty hunters. But it's also sort of a space fantasy that's about memory and how memory can change and the contacts that you make in memory and how they become preserved, and about family and what you're willing to do for family, so everyone should be watching this show.
- Danielle: 18:25 This really sounds like something we would love.

Amanda: 18:27 This is highly relevant to my interests. Killjoys, we're going to have to check that out.

Danielle: 18:31 Definitely. How about you, Amanda? Whatcha got this week?

Amanda: 18:35 So, slightly relevant to Tane's story. There's a great article in the New York Times that, well I guess when this episode airs it will have come out a few weeks ago, but it's called Why Are Young People Pretending to Love Work? And it's about how this whole crazy workaholic hustle culture is just really bizarre, and a tool of capitalist oppression to make people think that work is something they're supposed to love and accept a lot of negative things from their jobs and their employers because, you know, hashtag hustle, and I just really enjoyed really reading it. I think that it's a good companion to that millennial burnout piece that came out a few weeks back, and I think that it's really nice and it's really good to reexamine how we think about work and how we think about value and productivity and I just like anything that pokes the bear that is capitalism.

Danielle: 19:30 That sounds really interesting, I really liked the burnout article so I will definitely have to read this one.

Amanda: 19:35 Cool. So that is Why Are Young People Pretending to Love Work, by Eric Griffith.

Danielle: 19:40 We're going to take a quick break and when we come back we'll return to our discussion on The Priory of the Orange Tree. The rest of the show will contain spoilers, so if you're leaving us here, keep in touch on Instagram and Twitter @yacafepodcast and we'll be back.

Amanda: 20:12 Welcome back y'all to the YA Café. We're continuing our discussion on The Priory of the Orange Tree by Samantha Shannon. If you haven't read this yet we want to warn you again that this segment will contain spoilers.

Danielle: 20:22 Spoilers. And pirates.

Amanda: 20:24 You get to say it.

Danielle: 20:26 I love it when it includes pirates.

Amanda: 20:28 All right. Do you wanna talk about the pirates?

Danielle: 20:30 No, they're fine, just fine. Just kidding.

Amanda: 20:35 I mean they're good but there's 800 pages of book here. We gotta-

Danielle: 20:38 Yeah there is a lot.

Amanda: 20:38 -we gotta keep it moving.

Danielle: 20:39 But there are pirates and they-

Amanda: 20:42 They pirate around.

Danielle: 20:43 -smuggle. Smuggle isn't the right word.

Amanda: 20:45 They kidnap the dragons. That's their big thing.

Danielle: 20:47 They kidnap dragons and they sell their parts and so we were reading this book kind of like we were sharing it. Like I would read some and then Amanda would read some and I would read some and then she'd get ahead of me and I'd read more, and blah blah blah blah blah. And there was this one point where we get to this one part and I made this horrified noise, and Amanda had not even read it yet but from my noise, she discerned that the alchemist had cut off part of the dragon, just because that's exactly how these books go.

Amanda: 21:19 And that's the noise you made.

Danielle: 21:20 It was so brutal.

Amanda: 21:23 You made the dragon carving noise.

Danielle: 21:25 But Samantha Shannon does not pull her punches. And I really like that.

Somaiya: 21:29 Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah. I was saying this before we started recording but Niclays is such an interesting character for me because I hated him from the very beginning because he's so self-serving and he has these glimmers where you could have been a better man, where he's thinking about the man that he loved, and the life that he was trying to achieve for himself but he's never done an honest thing in his life. So all the decisions that he makes come back to bite him. Then also affect other characters. So while I was reading every time he'd show up I'd be like they're getting closer to her. They're figuring out because his philosophy is to sell out other people so that he can advance. And I think that those characters are really necessary but every time we were in his head I left feeling really gross.

Amanda: 22:17 No, I agree. He reminded me a lot of Gaius Baltar from the Battlestar Gallactica.

Danielle: 22:21 Yes, from Battlestar.

Danielle: 22:22 That is exactly right. He was just so ambitious.

Somaiya: 22:25 Oh my god, yes.

Danielle: 22:27 So ambitious

Amanda: 22:27 In it for himself.

Danielle: 22:28 Self-serving, didn't care who he hurt. And just-

Somaiya: 22:32 And also really pathetic.

Danielle: 22:34 Yeah.

Amanda: 22:35 So pathetic. So there's the scene where the dragon gets kidnapped. The dragon gets kidnapped because he is blackmailing Tane, and saying, "Either let me cut off pieces of the dragon or I'm going to report you to the authorities for not murdering someone on site."

Danielle: 22:54 Ugh, shady dude. But pathetic. Well said. Yeah.

Amanda: 22:58 One of the things that you mentioned that I liked too, before we started recording Somaiya, was that you didn't like him, except when he was talking about his dead boyfriend.

Somaiya: 23:08 Okay this is really mushy but when people are in love that's the best version of them, so anytime he was thinking about him it was like the best version of him would come forward, but was always subsumed by his greed.

Amanda: 23:21 He was clearly changed a lot by exile and by his failed attempts at immortality.

Danielle: 23:27 His grief.

Somaiya: 23:28 Yeah.

Amanda: 23:29 Yeah.

Danielle: 23:30 Jannart died of the plague. He got the plague and then he killed himself and that I think that just compounded the grief. All the things that Niclays wanted to do with his alchemy and with his medicine and he couldn't save the dude he loved.

Somaiya: 23:45 Yeah.

Danielle: 23:47 So the other perspective character who we haven't talked about yet is Loth.

Somaiya: 23:53 Oh yeah.

Danielle: 23:53 And for most of the book I did not understand why Loth was there. Because he was just Loth-ing around, he was ostensibly an emissary of the Queen and he did diplomatic work but wasn't a diplomat. He was originally exiled from the court by, I don't know, a shady advisor dude.

Amanda: 24:14 The spider.

Danielle: 24:14 The spider, yeah. It was Veris. It wasn't Veris. But he had little birds, and he exiled Loth.

Amanda: 24:21 That's not such a deep cut but this episode has some deep cuts.

Danielle: 24:24 But every court has a spider. Like every court has the master of whispers or whatever.

Amanda: 24:29 Yeah. It was that guy.

- Danielle: 24:30 So Loth went away, blah blah blah, and then discovered stuff, and plot and plot, but I didn't understand why we weren't with the awesome ladies. And then I got it. Because there was this moment where everyone else was having kind of this reckoning that people needed to put aside their religious differences, and unite to fight the dragons, and Loth was in the corner with his arms crossed and being like, "This is blasphemy. This is wrong."
- Amanda: 25:00 I thought that he was the one who was encouraging Sabran not to call people heretics anymore because he's like, "Man, I got called a heretic for a long time and it felt real bad."
- Danielle: 25:10 "It hurt my feelings."
- Amanda: 25:11 So I read it differently I think. 'Cause I thought that, yes, he did have a long arc to get there, but I think that he did finally get there, like, "I guess we can just coexist or whatever."
- Danielle: 25:21 No, I agree with you. I agree that he got there, but it only occurred to me the middle third of the story that because all of our women were super awesome, like, they weren't all completely tolerant the whole time of each other or anything, but I think we needed someone more intolerant in the story, and it wasn't gonna be one of the women.
- Somaiya: 25:46 Oh that's really interesting.
- Amanda: 25:49 So talking about evolution of feelings on religion, I loved the way that Sabran, the queen, changed through the book. She had so much character growth.
- Danielle: 26:01 Yeah.
- Amanda: 26:01 And just the way that she went from being intolerant of a different version of a story at the beginning, to being willing to tell her entire kingdom that their religion was founded on a lie at the end, was just really remarkable. I really enjoyed seeing her develop through the book.
- Danielle: 26:22 Me, too. And let's talk about what else develops.

Amanda: 26:26 Hey-oh. *laughter*

Danielle: 26:30 Dude, I am here for this book. I think this book would have changed my life if I had read it at
14.

Somaiya: 26:36 Yeah.

Danielle: 26:36 For sure. It's definitely gonna stick with Buffy in the vein of things that would have changed my life if I had seen them, read them sooner. And that is because Ead and Sabran have a relationship in this book. It's such a good relationship. It is sexy, but it is also like, they disagree with each other and Ead is constantly calling Sabran out and slowly working to change her mind. Sabran wants Ead to take better care of herself, and a lot of things. This is a great relationship. I love it.

Somaiya: 27:12 I mean, I keep saying so carefully built, but that relationship, it's such good slow burn, but it's also, there's such a tenderness to it. Like there's a moment when, I think it's right after Sabran and her husband's wedding night, where Ead is washing her hair, and Sabran takes her hand and kisses her cheek, and it's such a small thing but it's such a tender moment. They have such real affection for each other, even before that develops into steamier stuff. And they're sort of poking at each other, trying to figure out where the other one stands and Sabran's recognition of Ead as a stronger person is just one of those things where I was just holding my face the entire time, anytime they were on page together.

Danielle: 27:54 It was really beautiful. And those scenes could never have been written by a dude, and felt the same way.

Somaiya: 28:00 No.

Amanda: 28:00 Yep.

Danielle: 28:02 I don't think I've ever read a queer female relationship written by a dude, that didn't make me feel gross.

- Somaiya: 28:08 No, it's like a viewfinder thing, so it's not thinking about women being in love with each other. It's having a separate interior world but instead as a person looking through the glass being like, 'what are you guys doing?', and not thinking about their thoughts and the foundations that form. And I think that's the problem with a lot of women in general, written by men, is that, basically we're like dolls, and they're not thinking about "what is her interior world like?" And how does that interior world relate to other women and how does that develop into sexual and romantic feelings for other women? They're basically thinking about two Barbie dolls instead of a Barbie and a Ken doll. It's really frustrating.
- Danielle: 28:46 Another thing I wanted to talk about was Tane's guilt. We talked about her imposter syndrome. She feels guilty because at the beginning of the episode we referenced that at the beginning of the book, she wanted to graduate and get her wings, get her dragon on her winging day. All I have in my head is flight school. But anyway, she wanted to get her dragon, and the night before that happened, she saw a stranger emerge from the ocean and they were so phobic of getting the plague that she was supposed to turn him in immediately, but she didn't want to derail her own future and so she had her friend hide him away and then the friend gets killed and Tane feels super guilty and Namaethuem, the dragon, forgives her. It's so precious.
- Amanda: 29:41 It's wonderful. I think one of the things I liked most about that scene is that when Tane says, "Well I did it for a selfish reason," her dragon says, "Well you kind of sucked but the ills of the world are not on your shoulders," basically.
- Somaiya: 29:55 Yeah, you're not responsible for every bad thing that happens.
- Amanda: 29:58 Yeah.
- Danielle: 29:58 Yeah. And her dragon calls her out and is like, "If you venerate me, you have to believe what I'm telling you is true, and I am telling you, you are worthy."
- Amanda: 30:09 Yeah.
- Danielle: 30:10 We're all worthy y'all.

Amanda: 30:12 I mean, Tane's worthy. *laughter*

Danielle: 30:15 So a lot of plot happens. There are 800 pages in this book.

Amanda: 30:20 So stuff happens.

Danielle: 30:21 Stuff happens, but in the end, the nameless one is brought down by the convergence of Ead and Tane wielding these two jewels, and then the sword of Escalen, or the sword of something, the magic sword thing-

Amanda: 30:39 The magic sword.

Danielle: 30:40 And Sabran is involved and these three women are doing the thing and I felt like that was the three-headed dragon I've been waiting 20 years for. It still hasn't happened on Game of Thrones but Priory gets it done.

Amanda: 30:56 Yep.

Danielle: 30:57 Also it's done. It's not the first of 20.

Amanda: 31:01 Yeah, I loved it's just this self-contained book and it does what it set out to do and it does it wonderfully, and I just loved it.

Danielle: 31:10 I loved it too. It is the right number of pages.

Amanda: 31:13 I mean overall it was fantastic. If you didn't get that from the last 30 minutes, I don't know what to tell ya.

Danielle: 31:17 Where have you been? What podcast have you been listening to?

Somaiya: 31:20 Yep.

Danielle: 31:21 We loved it. Go read it. It's awesome. That's our show for today, friends. Thank you so much for joining us, Somaiya.

Somaiya: 31:29 Thank you so much for having me. This was so much fun.

Danielle: 31:29 Yay. And we can't wait to read the sequel of Mirage. You can find Somaiya on Instagram, Twitter, and at Somaiyabooks.com. You can find us @yacafepodcast. We'd love to hear from you. If you're enjoying this show, leave us a review.

Dani & Amanda: 31:44 Happy reading.