

THE ADVENTURES OF SOLNA: THE GAUNTLET

Written by

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FADE IN:

The Island Empire of Atlantis, circa 2000 BCE. Atlantis is powerful and wealthy, and most of its wealth and power is built upon the backs of hundreds of thousands of slaves.

EXT. ARENA - DAY

The floor is covered with sand. The stands where the audience would sit to cheer gladiatorial contests are deserted.

There's a door to the outside that is closed. Near that door is a wider closed door where the gladiators would enter. Across the sandy arena floor from it is a cell with barred wall and door.

INT. CELL - DAY

It's a room large enough to hold around twenty prisoners, though, at the moment there are only two.

These are BRAEDA (20, Caucasian, female, meek and submissive) and SOLNA (30, Caucasian, female, tall and athletic, not submissive at all). They are both wearing shackles on their wrists and ankles.

EXT. ARENA - DAY

Entering the arena floor, is the MAGISTRATE (40, Caucasian, male, tall and wearing fine clothes and the robes of his office) along with BODYGUARD 1 (20, Caucasian, holding a cocked crossbow, a short sword sheathed on his hip) and BODYGUARD 2 (identical to Bodyguard 1).

Next to the Magistrate is the SENIOR PRIEST (50, Caucasian, male, bearing the tall and ornate staff and wearing the robes of his office) and the JUNIOR PRIEST (20, Caucasian, slim, male, dressed like the Senior Priest but not carrying a staff, nervous and wanting to be elsewhere).

MAGISTRATE

So, barbarian, are you aware of why
you are here today?

INTERCUT - ARENA and CELL

Solna smirks at him.

SOLNA

I assume when you say "barbarian"
you are addressing me?

MAGISTRATE

Indeed.

SOLNA

And I am here because I killed that pig, Jolinar.

MAGISTRATE

You murdered him.

SOLNA

I was defending someone else from an assault.

MAGISTRATE

That would be Braeda, there, correct?

SOLNA

Yes.

MAGISTRATE

You are aware that you and Braeda were both slaves, belonging to the deceased, are you not?

SOLNA

I belong to no-one.

MAGISTRATE

The laws of our land say otherwise.

SOLNA

The laws of your land are meaningless to me.

MAGISTRATE

How did you come to be a slave, barbarian?

SOLNA

If you must address me, my name is Solna. And I did not come here willingly. I was traveling in a distant land and became ill on the road. One of your slave traders found me, nursed me back to health, and sold me to Jolinar.

MAGISTRATE

So, you owed the slave trader for his treatment of your illness, and the price Jolinar paid was your recompense to him.

SOLNA

I didn't ask him to treat me.

MAGISTRATE

How ill were you?

SOLNA

Ill enough where I couldn't prevent him from putting these shackles on me.

MAGISTRATE

Where did you come from? And what were you doing?

SOLNA

I am from a land far to the north that has no name that you would know. I was exploring, and hiring myself out as a mercenary to different warlords to pay my way.

SENIOR PRIEST

(amused)

You? A mercenary?

SOLNA

Aye, priest. I thought of asking your people for employment. You always seem to be at war with someone.

SENIOR PRIEST

(contemptuous)

When we employ mercenaries we only employ strong, experienced warriors. Not ... women.

SOLNA

I see.

MAGISTRATE

And shortly after Jolinar brought you to his estate, you witnessed him with Braeda, and you murdered him using those very chains you wear now?

SOLNA

Aye. Nearly took his fool head off when I strangled him.

SENIOR PRIEST
 (shocked)
 You don't deny your guilt!

MAGISTRATE
 Jolinar was merely doing as he
 would with his personal property.

SOLNA
 She was weeping and begging him to
 stop. Property or not, no-one
 should do something like that to
 anyone.

MAGISTRATE
 Braeda, do you have anything to
 add?

BRAEDA
 (meekly)
 No, my lord. She speaks the truth.

The magistrate nods, and looks over at the priests.

SENIOR PRIEST
 (muttering to the
 Magistrate)
 I think the laws of the gods have
 been satisfied.

MAGISTRATE
 (to the priest) Very well. (to the
 prisoners) I sentence you to the
 choice.

SOLNA
 Choice?

Braeda sobs, tears streaming from her eyes.

SENIOR PRIEST
 You may be executed here, now, or
 you may attempt to fight your way
 through the gauntlet.

SOLNA
 What is this gauntlet?

SENIOR PRIEST
 Ten of our best gladiators. You
 will begin with one, and after the
 sands run through the glass,
 another will join him.

(MORE)

SENIOR PRIEST (CONT'D)

Then another, and another. Provided
you are still alive.

SOLNA

If I win what do I get?

MAGISTRATE

Your freedom.

SOLNA

And by "defeat" you mean, "kill?"

MAGISTRATE

Indeed.

SOLNA

I see. Are you offering the same
choice to Braeda?

MAGISTRATE

Yes.

Solna looks at Braeda, who is silently weeping now, her head
lowered, not looking at any of them. Braeda is obviously not
a fighter of any kind. Solna turns back to face the
Magistrate.

SOLNA

I have another suggestion.

JUNIOR PRIEST

It's the Law! You can't negotiate --

MAGISTRATE

(holding up a hand)

Silence!

The young priest stops talking, surprised at himself for
speaking in the first place.

MAGISTRATE (CONT'D)

What do you propose?

SOLNA

Double the number of gladiators. If
I kill them all, you will free
myself and Braeda.

The Magistrate and Senior Priest both snort in amusement.

MAGISTRATE

(to Braeda)

Is this agreeable to you, Braeda?

(MORE)

MAGISTRATE (CONT'D)

Understand that if Solna falls, no matter how many men she has defeated, the penalty would fall on you, and you would be put to death. Do you agree?

Braeda looks at the ground, unwilling to look up.

BRAEDA

(quietly)
Yes, my lord?

SENIOR PRIEST

What? Speak up, woman!

BRAEDA

(louder)
Yes! I agree.

The Magistrate claps his hands.

MAGISTRATE

Very well! Done! Remove the barbarian's chains and give her a sword and shield.

One of the bodyguards approaches the door with a key in his hand, the other one covering him with his crossbow, as the Magistrate and both priests exit. Braeda finally lifts her head and smiles at Solna through her tears.

INT. ARENA - DAY

The Magistrate and both priests have now taken seats in the stands over the cell for the prisoners. The bodyguards, with crossbows ready, stand one on either side of the officials.

Braeda watches anxiously through the bars.

Solna, now unshackled, stands on the ground before them. She's holding an old, dull sword and a small, splintered shield, eyeing them skeptically.

MAGISTRATE

Do you have any questions?

SOLNA

What do they get? The gladiators, I mean. What do they get if they kill me?

MAGISTRATE

Some are slaves. If it be one of those who does the deed he will be given his freedom. If a freeman, he will be given five hundred gold sovereigns.

Solna whistles when she hears about the gold.

SOLNA

I'd be tempted to kill myself for that, if it were practical.

MAGISTRATE

Aye. So, they are motivated.

The Junior Priest holds up an hourglass, all of the sand at the bottom.

JUNIOR PRIEST

Once the contest begins with the first man, you have until the sand runs out before another joins the fight.

SOLNA

And another, then another, then another ... Let's get this started, shall we?

The Magistrate and the Senior Priest both chuckle.

MAGISTRATE

Very well. (shouts) First man, begin!

Solna turns to see the door on the other side swing open and a man emerge. He's wearing a token shackle on his left ankle - - marking him as a slave -- and his sword is well maintained and sharp, his shield new.

The man is tall, athletic but not overly muscled, wearing a helm over his head that helps protect his skull and eyes.

The Junior Priest flips the hourglass over and the sand starts trickling down as the gladiator approaches Solna.

Solna casts her shield aside in disgust as she readies herself to fight the man.

He charges her and they fight. Solna is quick and experienced with a sword, as is her foe.

Solna's fighting style is brutal and entirely practical, eschewing elegance and subtlety for efficiency.

They riposte and parry a moment before she gets the upper hand and stabs him deeply in the gut.

The bluntness of Solna's sword only makes its entry into the man's guts that much more painful. He screams as she pulls the blade out, and he collapses onto his knees.

He drops his shield and sword and tries to hold his guts into his abdomen as blood gushes. Then, he falls face first into the sand.

Solna turns and smiles at the Magistrate.

SOLNA

That's one.

MAGISTRATE

(amused)

Nineteen more.

There's still some sand to run through the glass, so Solna does some stretches.

SOLNA

Since we have some time, I want to ask you something.

MAGISTRATE

You may ask.

SOLNA

What gives you the right?

Solna takes the dead man's sword, after discarding the one she had been given. She looks it over appraisingly.

MAGISTRATE

The right to what?

Solna begins swinging the sword, getting accustomed to its heft and balance.

SOLNA

I've encountered others who claim they own other people. Slavers. Your people's reputation is your kingdom has more slaves than most. Your empire is built upon it. So, what gives you the right to claim you own other people?

MAGISTRATE

Ah. (to the Senior Priest) A question for you.

SENIOR PRIEST

We own slaves through our own benevolent nature.

SOLNA

What? "Benevolent nature"?

SENIOR PRIEST

Indeed. We bring many here from far away places, and expose them to our culture. We educate them. Teach them discipline. Skills. Give them morals. Civilize them. These are all things they would lack, otherwise.

SOLNA

I see. And what would happen if you had no more slaves?

The sand finishes going through the glass.

MAGISTRATE

Next man!

Solna turns to face the next man who comes through the door. He's much like the previous one, except older and bigger, and not a slave.

Solna charges him, using the sword from the man she had killed, and they again parry and riposte.

This fight lasts longer, and the gladiator manages to nick Solna's neck, behind her right ear, so blood trails from it.

Time runs out as they fight and another man joins the fight. This one is even larger, but instead of a sword he's carrying a large hammer he wields using both hands.

As they fight he manages to hit Solna on the side of her head with a glancing blow from the hammer, and she falls to the ground, dazed.

The hammer-wielding gladiator is about to smash Solna's skull in when the other one, sensing his opportunity to earn a substantial payday slipping away, shoves him away. He turns then, lifting his sword, preparing to stab downwards and nail Solna to the ground.

Solna, though, is no longer there. The tip of Solna's sword emerges from the man's chest and then disappears as it's withdrawn from his body, and he turns to see Solna standing there. Blood trails from her nose and the corner of her mouth but she stands tall and his blood drips from her blade.

Solna slashes with the sword and the man's head separates from his body. Both head and body hit the sand.

The hammer-wielder charges and she dodges out of harm's way. He is unable to stop himself and she stabs him through his side as he passes her.

She picks up the first man's sword so she has one in each hand now, as she turns and faces the door, waiting for her next opponent.

She plays with both swords, skillfully, testing how the two of them balance in her hands.

Time runs out.

MAGISTRATE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Next man!

The next man carries a trident and a net, and he advances cautiously towards Solna.

SENIOR PRIEST

(muttering)

We may have a problem.

MAGISTRATE

(muttering)

What?

SENIOR PRIEST

(muttering)

What if she survives?

MAGISTRATE

(muttering)

She won't.

The fight between Solna and the trident-wielder has begun. They continue to talk during the fight.

SENIOR PRIEST

(muttering)

But what if she does? If word gets out, the slaves --

MAGISTRATE
 (muttering)
 She won't survive.

SENIOR PRIEST
 (muttering)
 The slaves will take heart. They'll
 revolt. It will be chaos.

JUNIOR PRIEST
 (muttering)
 It would be the will of the gods.

SENIOR PRIEST
 (muttering)
 (to the Junior Priest) Silence! (to
 the Magistrate) We must consider
 the possibility.

MAGISTRATE
 (muttering)
 She still has sixteen men to go.

There's a quick scream of pain from the arena, cut off
 abruptly.

SENIOR PRIEST
 (muttering)
 Fifteen.

MAGISTRATE
 (muttering)
 Silence, Priest.

MONTAGE: SOLNA ON THE RAMPAGE - Solna killing the next twelve
 men, brutally and efficiently. A couple of times she had
 multiple foes but managed to overcome them. She is limping
 and is wounded but none of the wounds are serious and most of
 the blood she is covered with is not hers.

The bodies of the vanquished litter the floor of the arena,
 their blood coloring the sand.

EXT. ARENA - DAY

Solna is dueling with her eighteenth foe. She's growing tired
 but is still strong. Her foe is fresh, and skilled.

The sand finishes running through the glass while she is
 still fighting the man, and the door for the gladiator's
 entry swings open.

MAGISTRATE

(shouting)

Next man! And the next! Both of
you, now!

The two remaining gladiators emerge, standing just outside
the door, confused.

MAGISTRATE (CONT'D)

(shouting)

Both of you! Have at her now! A
thousand sovereigns to each of you,
and your freedom, if you kill her!

That decides the two men, who run to join the fray.

JUNIOR PRIEST

(shocked whisper)

Heresy!

SENIOR PRIEST

(whispering)

Quiet!

The three men coordinate their efforts with the third man,
spreading out around Solna, circling her, staying in motion.

Solna is exhausted, panting, covered with blood. She glances
through the bars of the door to the cell where Braeda awaits,
watching her with a growing hope evident on her face.

Solna grins with one side of her mouth when she sees that.
She picks one of her new foes and charges him, getting
through his defenses and killing him quickly with a quick
stab of one of her blades.

The other two step back, watching their comrade die as Solna
withdraws her blade from him and turns to face them.

MAGISTRATE

(screaming)

What are you waiting for? Kill her!
Now!

SOLNA

You heard the man.

The two foes charge her from two different angles and she
manages to kill the other fresh man quickly, slipping through
his rushed attack to run him through.

She leaves her blade in that man's body and, as he falls, she
uses the other blade to kill the remaining man, quickly.

As the last man's body falls she turns and approaches the Magistrate's position, holding the bloody sword. The bodyguards point their crossbows at her.

SOLNA (CONT'D)

It looks like I've passed through your gauntlet.

SENIOR PRIEST

You will not speak to the Magistrate in so insolent a manner!

SOLNA

I'll speak to him in any manner I please, priest. So, free my friend, here, and we'll be on our way.

The Magistrate nods at one of the bodyguards, who puts down the crossbow, and starts heading for the steps to take him down to the floor of the arena.

SENIOR PRIEST

(whispering)

You can't allow this!

MAGISTRATE

(whispering)

What alternative do I have?

The bodyguard has unlocked the door to the cell and Braeda emerges, smiling at Solna, tears in her eyes, as the bodyguard starts to unlock her shackles.

SENIOR PRIEST

Wait!

MAGISTRATE

(whispering)

What are you doing?

SENIOR PRIEST

(whispering)

I have an idea.

The bodyguard pauses unlocking the shackles and Braeda turns to look at the Senior Priest, expectantly.

SENIOR PRIEST (CONT'D)

Braeda, my dear, what if I agreed to take you into my own household?

BRAEDA

I'm sorry, my lord?

SENIOR PRIEST

If you agree, I'll take you into my house, where you will have a position of authority and esteem.

SOLNA

But she'll still be a slave, yes?

SENIOR PRIEST

Yes. But one with a great deal of latitude to chose her own role, in a comfortable, wealthy estate.

SOLNA

And what price will you ask of her to accept this role?

SENIOR PRIEST

Price?

SOLNA

There's always a price.

SENIOR PRIEST

Very well. I'll accept you into my house, on the condition that you never speak of the events of this day again. To anyone.

SOLNA

Braeda? Don't sell your freedom to this ... creature. Come with me and be free.

BRAEDA

And where would we go, with this freedom? How will we find food? How will we make our way in the world?

SOLNA

I've always found a way. You will, too. Many of these things you consider luxuries are simply more chains that bind you.

BRAEDA

I have always been a slave.

She looks up at the Senior Priest.

BRAEDA (CONT'D)

I accept your terms, my lord.

The Senior Priest claps his hands, once.

SENIOR PRIEST

Excellent!

Solna scowls at Braeda.

SOLNA

Ten men have died here for nothing,
then.

BRAEDA

I'm still alive.

SOLNA

No, you're not. You were dead
before I ever even met you. (to the
Magistrate) And what of me?

The Magistrate tosses a leather bag, tied shut with a length of string, to Solna, who catches it. There's the clinking of coins from inside.

MAGISTRATE

Go to the docks. There is enough
coin there for you to book passage
on a ship to take you to wherever
you want to go. Take it, and leave,
and trouble us no more.

SENIOR PRIEST

(muttering)

She'll still talk!

MAGISTRATE

(muttering)

She's a barbarian. No-one will
believe her.

Solna weighs the bag in her hand, toying with her sword with the other hand.

SOLNA

I could have this blade in you
before your bodyguards could do
anything, Magistrate.

MAGISTRATE

Your injured leg would slow you.
And they would still kill you
anyway.

SOLNA

I doubt it. And you would still be
dead.

MAGISTRATE

Enough! Leave us, and never return,
wretched woman!

SOLNA

I'll leave. But one day I will
return, with an army at my back.
And on that day, I will take
everything you love, and leave you
with nothing.

Solna looks at Braeda, who refuses to meet her gaze.

MAGISTRATE

Whatever. Just depart.

SOLNA

Very well. I'll see you all again.
Soon.

Solna turns and starts for the door to exit the arena, which
has swung open. Braeda, still shackled, is following the
bodyguard up the steps to meet her new master.

JUNIOR PRIEST

We have allowed a lion in our
midst, and fueled it with an
undying hatred. We've ignored the
laws of the gods. There will be a
price to be paid.

SENIOR PRIEST

(doubtfully)
Silence.

Solna limps out of the arena, the door slamming closed behind
her.

FADE OUT.