

# BOOK III



# BRI\*TA\*NNIA

## WE WHO ARE ABOUT TO DIE

**D**URING NERO'S REIGN IN ROME, ANTONIUS AXIA ROSE TO FAME AS HERO AT THE BATTLE OF TIGRANOCERTA, SAVING THE LIVES OF FELLOW LEGIONARIES. BRAVE, LOYAL -- ALL THAT A SOLDIER SHOULD BE -- HE WAS CALLED BY THE VESTAL VIRGINS TO BECOME THE WORLDS FIRST DETECTIONER, AND HE HAS BUILT A REPUTATION IN ROME.



AS ANTONIUS' INVESTIGATION TURNS TO ACHILLIA -- A WARRIOR FIGHTING FOR HER FREEDOM -- HE DISCOVERS HER INVOLVEMENT WITH A WOMAN WHO SEEMINGLY HAS MYSTICAL ABILITIES. UPON GOING TO QUESTION ACHILLIA, ANTONIUS FINDS HIMSELF SIDE-BY-SIDE WITH HER, IN THE MIDDLE OF AN ARENA, PREPARING TO FIGHT FOR THEIR LIVES.

THE GODS OF ROME ARE SEEMINGLY GROWING ANGRY, AS THE MURDER OF MANY YOUNG NOBLES CONTINUE TO PLAGUE THE GREAT CITY, CAUSING MASS FEAR AND CONFUSION. A FEAR THAT HAS FLOWED INTO THE HEART OF ANTONIUS, AS HIS SON, AVITUS, IS MANIPULATED BY SEEMINGLY SUPERNATURAL FORCES.




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I AM ANTONIUS AXIA,  
THE DETECTIONER. BUT  
ONCE I WAS A SOLDIER.

I LEARNED MY TRADE IN  
GERMANY, FIGHTING THE  
SAME TRIBES THAT HAD  
DESTROYED VARIAN'S  
LEGIONS AT TEUTOBERG.




I CAME TO KNOW  
HOW TO COMBAT THESE  
FIERCE WARRIORS. THEIR  
STRENGTHS, THEIR  
SUPERSTITIONS, THEIR  
WEAKNESSES.



AND I LEARNED  
THE LESSON FOR  
ANY SOLDIER.

RESPECT  
YOUR ENEMY.



BY THE TIME I WAS FIGHTING  
THE PARTHIAN KING VOLOGASES,  
I HAD MEN UNDER MY CONTROL  
AND I WAS THAT MOST FEARED  
THING IN THE WORLD.

AN EXPERIENCED  
ROMAN SOLDIER.

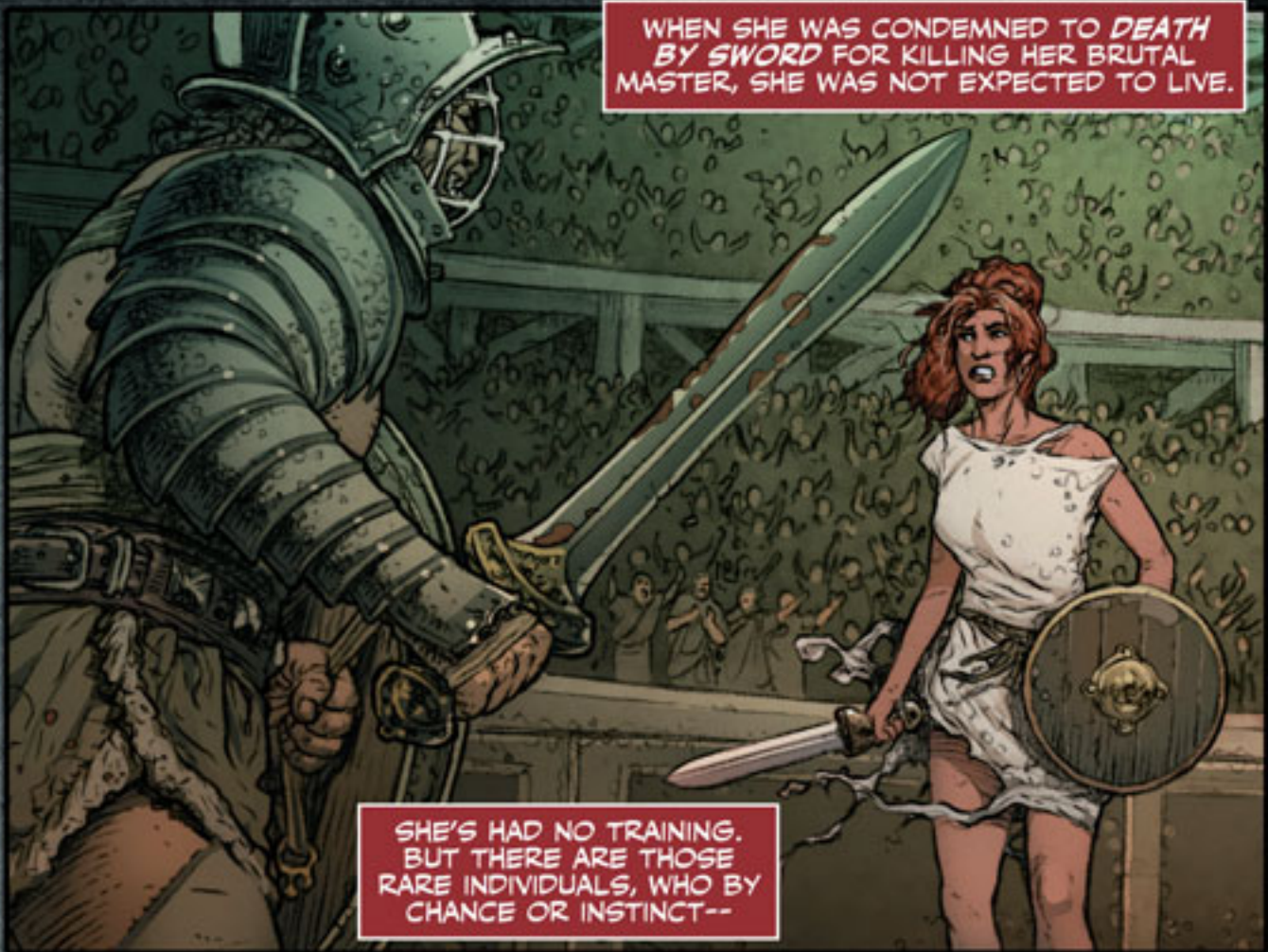


ACHILLIA TOOK A VERY DIFFERENT ROUTE.



WHO KNOWS HOW OFTEN THAT PRETTY SLAVE GIRL HAD TO FIGHT AND SCRAP TO DEFEND HERSELF?

WHEN SHE WAS CONDEMNED TO DEATH BY SWORD FOR KILLING HER BRUTAL MASTER, SHE WAS NOT EXPECTED TO LIVE.



SHE'S HAD NO TRAINING, BUT THERE ARE THOSE RARE INDIVIDUALS, WHO BY CHANCE OR INSTINCT--

--POSSESS THAT FIRE.



THAT TRUE WARRIOR'S SPIRIT.

ACHILLIA HONED HER SKILLS IN THE ARENA, WHERE ANY MISTAKE WOULD BE FATAL.



THEY KEPT THINKING SHE WOULD LOSE THIS TIME.



THEY KEPT BEING WRONG.





AND NOW WE ARE TOGETHER.

TWO VERY DIFFERENT WARRIORS, FROM TWO VERY DIFFERENT BACKGROUNDS.



BUT WHO ARE BOTH ABOUT TO DIE.

T-TELL ME, DETECTIONER. HOW GOOD ARE THESE PRAETORIAN GUARD?

HOW GOOD? THEY ARE TRAINED NIGHT AND DAY--



--TO DO NOTHING BUT KILL.

AAAGHH!



SO WERE ALL THE MEN THAT I SLAYED.

AAIEEE!



UGHH!





WE ARE DOOMED ANYWAY, YOU MIGHT AS WELL TALK. ELISSA, THE CURSE, MY SON...

V-VERY WELL. SOME POWERFUL MEN DID NOT LIKE ME WINNING.

CRAXUS AND HIS FRIENDS?

MY VICTORIES MADE THEIR WOMEN STRONGER. THEY FELT THREATENED... AND SENT ASSASSINS...

SO YOU SOUGHT HELP FROM ELISSA? YOUR FELLOW SLAVE WHEN YOU KILLED THE SENATOR TRYING TO RAPE YOU?



LIKE ME, HER BLOOD IS FROM CARTHAGE, WHICH IS KNOWN FOR ITS SORCERY. SHE TRIED TO SCARE THESE POWERFUL MEN OFF--

AND WHAT OF MY SON?



I'M SORRY... I DO NOT KNOW. ELISSA... SHE IS OUT OF CONTROL. I NEVER WANTED INNOCENT YOUTHS TO DIE.




ALL I EVER WANTED WAS MY FREEDOM.

THEY ARE PREPARING FOR THE FINAL ASSAULT.

WE SHALL BOTH BE FREE ENOUGH SOON, ACHILLIA.






THEN I LOOK HARD  
AT THE SOLDIERS.  
OUR KILLERS.



LIKE MANY OF NERO'S  
GUARDS, THEY ARE  
NOT ROMAN BORN.

THE BEARDS MIGHT BE GONE  
BUT THEIR FEATURES REVEAL  
THEIR HOMETLAND IN THE DARK  
GERMANIC FORESTS.



TAKE THE  
GIRL DOWN FIRST,  
BOYS. THEN WE'LL  
HAVE A LITTLE FUN  
WITH THE OTHER  
ONE.



ACHILLIA,  
LISTEN. THEY'RE  
GERMANS.

AT LEAST  
I WON'T DIE AT  
A ROMAN'S  
HAND.

I REMEMBER  
SOMETHING FROM MY  
OLD DAYS FIGHTING THEM.  
WE'RE GOING FOR THAT  
BIG ONE, THE LEADER.

EVERYTHING  
WE HAVE LEFT,  
ACHILLIA.



SOME OF THE TRIBES  
HAD THIS SUPERSTITION.

**NOW!**



THOUGH BRAVE,  
THEY HAD A FEAR  
OF A PARTICULAR  
WAY OF DYING.



**AAGHHH!**

**WSSHHH**

SOMETHING ABOUT  
A HEADLESS MAN NOT  
BEING ABLE TO ENTER  
THEIR SPIRIT WORLD.