



## Interview with Jonathan Soler about the novel AELIA

(June 2019)

### **How did you get the idea for *Aelia*?**

I wanted to write a story that takes place in the Middle Ages. The few ideas I had were not particularly inspiring. When I read Robert Greene's *Power*, probably inspired by all the stories of power conquests, the idea for *Aelia* came to me suddenly: the story of a peasant woman who becomes the leader of a kingdom. At that moment, I didn't need to develop more, I knew that I was going to have a lot of fun writing a story full of ambition, danger, and betrayal.

### **How was the writing process?**

After having the idea of the plot. I wrote down all the ideas that went through my head. But I didn't start the writing process directly. Since I wanted to write a screenplay, and it was unlikely that a screenplay like *Aelia* could quickly find a way into film production, I didn't see the point in writing it right away.

I started writing the screenplay at the end of the summer of 2018 and I had so much fun writing it and creating this universe that I thought I could turn it into a novel. It would allow me to extend my stay in this world.

### **So it was originally a screenplay?**

Yes, it was. In screenplay formatting, one page means roughly one minute on the screen. The first draft was 200 pages long! With almost no description of the fights.

### **Do you prefer the novel version or the screenplay?**

I added a lot of details in the novel about Aelia's mentality and some characters who are not in the screenplay. Let's say that a screenplay is not meant to be read. It is a working tool. If you have to read one, I think it's better to read the novel.

### **Would you still like to see a movie version of this story?**

If I had not written the novel, I would have felt that Aelia's story was not over until it's made as a movie. Now that the novel exists and people can read it, her story is complete. So I no longer feel the same need to see it adapted. And that's a good thing because it will allow me to be more careful if it has to be adapted to the screen.

### **It's a sprawling world. And yet the whole story is focused on Aelia. Is the idea of developing the universe or other characters is planned?**

Not to date. But why not? Queen Estrilda deserves her own story. I could tell how a young woman of the aristocracy of the Turian kingdom who could have enjoyed an idle life got involved in political intrigues and became the queen of the enemy kingdom, Namos. I could reveal how half of her face has been burnt and how she became the cold, efficient, and relentless woman she is in *Aelia*. I think there would be a lot of things to develop.

### **Is she your favorite character?**

After Aelia, I think so. But I have quite a tender opinion about Gundred too. At the beginning of the novel, she is just a superficial little heiress who thinks she's superior to everyone. But once she runs into a force of nature like Aelia, she becomes more humble and mature. Even if the character is haughty at first, I can't hate her completely.

### **The "prologue", the introduction of Aelia's story, before she becomes Aelia, happens halfway through the novel. Why did you choose such a different structure?**

When I was developing the screenplay, I liked the idea of meeting Aelia from Gundred's point of view, without knowing anything about her, and little by little, that the elements around her were becoming clearer. So that the audience discovers who Aelia is the same way we discover the elements of an investigation, one by one, sometimes with false leads and surprises.

**How did you develop Aelia's character? Did you get inspiration from other characters?**

When I had the idea of the story – a peasant woman who becomes queen – I imagined it a bit like a young female version of Tony Montana in the Middle Ages.

Both of them don't want to live in poor conditions anymore and are hungry for more. They are very ambitious and ready to do anything to reach their goals. Even if they have to do it with methods that are sometimes morally ambiguous.

*Push it to the limit* could be Aelia's anthem and motto.

**What are the similarities and differences between you and Aelia?**

I like her ambition. I like the fact that she is ready to do anything to achieve her goals. Although, my difference with her is that I prefer to focus on my work to make my dreams come true, rather than bleeding people to do it! (Laughs.) I like her determination and her refusal to give up.

**What is your favorite passage?**

When her father gives her the dagger and tells her about her mother. She understands that she can no longer be the nice girl protected by her father, but that she will now have to face a dirty and cruel world on her own.

Other than that, when the Queen of Sangar and the king's counselors discuss the involvement of women in political affairs, someone asks for her opinion. She takes the opportunity to explain how she judges people. And I totally agree with her opinion.

**Which is?**

You have to read the novel to find out.

