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Gary Northfield

Julius Zebra: Rumble with the Romans!

United Kingdom (2015)

TAGS: Circus Maximus Colosseum Gladiator Games Gladiators Hadrian Spartacus





We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
Title of the work	Julius Zebra: Rumble with the Romans!
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	United Kingdom, worldwide
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2015
First Edition Details	Gary Northfield, *Julius Zebra: Rumble with the Romans!* London: Walker Books, 2015, 288 pp.
ISBN	9781406354928
Genre	Chapter book*, Graphic novels, Humorous fiction
Target Audience	Children (10–14)
Author of the Entry	Elizabeth Hale, University of New England, ehale@une.edu.au
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Hanna Paulouskaya, University of Warsaw, hannapa@al.uw.edu.pl Babette Puetz, Victoria University of Wellington, babette.puetz@vuw.ac.nz

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Creators



Gary Northfield , b. 1969
(Author, Illustrator)

Gary Northfield is a British comics writer, illustrator and publisher. He studied illustration at Harrow College, University of Westminster. Since graduation (in 1992), he has been part of the British comics industry, with roles such as in-house illustrator for the *Horrible Histories* series (2002–2007), and contributing to well-known magazines such as *The Beano*, *The Dandy*, *National Geographic Kids*, and *The Phoenix*. His works include *Derek the Sheep* (2008) and *The Terrible Tales of the Teenytinysaurs* (2013). With his partner, Nicky Evans, in 2017 he founded Bog-Eyed Books, a publisher of graphic novels for children.

Source:

Wikipedia (accessed: July 29. 2022).

Bog-eyed-books (accessed: July 29, 2022).

Bio prepared by Elizabeth Hale, University of New England, ehale@une.edu.au

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Additional information

Translation	German: *Julius Zebra: Raufen mit den Römern!,* trans. Friedrich Pflüger, München: Cbt, 2015. Dutch: *Julius Zebra. Rollebollen met de Romeinen!*, trans. Edward van de Vendel, Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Luitingh-Sijthoff, 2016. Italian: *Julius Zebra: Un gladiator a Strisce!*, trans. Giovanna Pecoraro, Milano: il Castoro, 2016. French: *Julius Zèbre: Rencontre avec les Romains*, trans. Patricia Guekjian, Varennes, QC: aDa éditions!, 2019.
Sequels, Prequels and Spin-offs	Gary Northfield, *Julius Zebra: Rumble with the Romans!,* London: Walker Books, 2015. Gary Northfield, *Julius Zebra: Bundle with the Britons!*, London: Walker Books, 2016. Gary Northfield, *Julius Zebra: Entangled with the Egyptians!*, London: Walker Books, 2017. Gary Northfield, *Julius Zebra: Grapple with the Greeks!,* London: Walker Books, 2018. Gary Northfield, *Julius Zebra Joke Book Jamboree*, London: Walker Books, 2019.
Summary	*Julius Zebra: Rumble with the Romans!* is the first of the *Julius Zebra* series of comic novels. Told through a combination of images and text, they feature the adventures of Julius, a kind-hearted but dim-witted zebra, who is captured by the Romans at his home near the “stinky lake” in north-east Africa, and along with a group of other wild animals, is taken to Rome to feature in the Circus. Some of these animals become his friends and appear in later adventures: they include a crocodile named Lucia, Felix: an antelope who likes collecting rocks, Milus: a grumpy lion, Rufus: a giraffe, and Cornelius: a warthog. Unexpectedly, Julius and his friends defeat the gladiators

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in their first battle at the Circus Maximus, winning the support of the crowd. The Emperor, Hadrian, orders that they are trained at Rome's finest gladiator school, in order to fight the toughest gladiators in a championship match celebrating his birthday.

Pliny, a clever mouse, trains Julius and his friends, and while the gladiators defeat his friends, Julius is ultimately victorious. Hadrian rewards Julius by freeing him, but Julius, loyal to his mates, refuses until they are all freed. Stepping back in shock, while the crowd goes wild, shouting "ZEBRA! ZEBRA! ZEBRA!" Hadrian says to Julius, "Zebra you are either very wise or very foolish. Only time will tell." (p. 276). The stage is set for a sequel, and an epilogue introduces a new zebra fighting in an arena near Africa: Julius's brother, Brutus.

Pages in the book are given in Roman numerals, and following the story are two explanatory pages, in which Cornelius, the clever warthog teaches how Roman numerals work, assisted (or hindered) by Felix, the less clever antelope. "Gary's glossary" comes next: 4 pages explaining different aspects of Roman culture, including famous buildings, statues, conventions, and gladiatorial terms.

Analysis

Julius Zebra: Rumble with the Romans! offers a comedic approach to the ancient world. The story is delivered through words and illustrations (i.e. illustrations continue the story), meaning that the reader needs to pay attention to both aspects, and also that the story appeals to both visual and verbal means of storytelling. This is an approach popular in chapter books for younger readers, such as Andy Griffiths and Terry Denton's *13 Story Treehouse* or Dav Pilkey's *Captain Underpants* series. Like these chapter books, the story uses slapstick and toilet humour to appeal to a base kind of comedy. It also contains many puns – mainly working with Roman names in the vein of the Asterix comics (Goscinny and Uderzo, trans. Anthea Bell). Jokes about Roman food (e.g. Hadrian snacks on "honey-dipped flamingo tongues" (p. 252)) and hygiene are similar to the preoccupation with gross-out humour seen in popular histories such as the *Horrible Histories* series.

Underlying the story is the parallel to the legend of Spartacus (this is developed further in the sequel, *Julius Zebra: Bundle with the Britons!*), and Northfield's use of African animal characters serves the purpose of critiquing Roman institutions such as slavery and

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	imperialism, as well as cruelty to animals. Rome is nevertheless amusingly portrayed, and influenced by popular culture (e.g. the Ridley Scott film, *Gladiator* (2000); the Stanley Kubrick film, *Spartacus* (1960)). And other familiar tropes can be seen: for instance, the idea of the underdog who comes out on top (Julius is generally regarded as hopeless by his family, but proves himself in the arena), and the values of generosity, team spirit and friendship (the animals have different skills, and support one another, in contrast to the venal and greedy Romans).
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Circus Maximus Colosseum Gladiator Games Gladiators Hadrian Spartacus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adversity Animals Friendship Sport
Further Reading	Blank, Trevor J., “Cheeky Behavior: The Meaning and Function of ‘Fartlore’ in Childhood and Adolescence”, *Children’s Folklore Review* 32 (2010): 61–86. Keen, Tony, “‘Wulf the Briton’: Resisting Rome in a 1950s British Boys’ Adventure Strip” in Lisa Maurice, ed., *The Reception of Ancient Greece and Rome in Children’s Literature: Heroes and Eagles*, Leiden: Brill, 2015, 280–290. McKenzie, John, "Bums, Poos and Wees: Carnivalesque Spaces in the Picture Books of Early Childhood. Or, Has Literature Gone to the Dogs?", *English Teaching: Practice and Critique* 4.1, 5 (2005): 81–94. Späth, Thomas and Margrit Tröhler, “Muscles and Morals: Spartacus, Ancient Hero of Modern Times”, in Almut-Barbara Renger and Jon Solomon, eds., *Ancient Worlds in Film and Television: Gender and Politics*, Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2012, 41–63.

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