Sonya Nevin, "Entry on: Marathon (EDGE: Battle Books, 4) by Ollie Cuthbertson, Gary Smailes", peer-reviewed by Susan Deacy and Lisa Maurice. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2019). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/871. Entry version as of November 21, 2026.

Ollie Cuthbertson , Gary Smailes

Marathon (EDGE: Battle Books, 4)

United Kingdom (2011)

TAGS: Ares Athens Divination Gods Graeco-Persian Wars Greek History





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

General information	
Title of the work	Marathon (EDGE: Battle Books, 4)
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	United Kingdom
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2011
First Edition Details	Gary Smailes, *Marathon*. London and Sydney: Franklin Watts (a division of Hachette Children's Books), 2011, 108 pp.
ISBN	9781445101149
Genre	Choose-your-own stories
Target Audience	Crossover (children 10+, teens, young adults)
Author of the Entry	Sonya Nevin, University of Roehampton, sonya.nevin@roehampton.ac.uk
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This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

Creators



Ollie Cuthbertson (Illustrator)



Gary Smailes (Author)

Gary Smailes is a writer based in the Wirral, UK. He developed the EDGE: Battle Books choose-your-own-adventure series. He is also the author of Scottish Inventors and Scottish Criminals (Birlinn Ltd, 2011) children's non-fiction works.

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Additional information

Summary

This is a choose-your-own-adventure story in which the basic premise is established and the reader then makes choices that determine the development and out-come of the story. In *Marathon* the reader plays as Miltiades the general. Based on the choices made, the reader will then receive a ranking on their performance as general, poor, ok, good, or great, and the outcome of the battle will be either death, partial victory, or complete victory. The reader will be prompted to consider many aspects of ancient battle and society through the narrative that runs through the work and choices that they are presented with.

The opening section outlines the overall situation and key players. You are 60 year old Miltiades, an Athenian general chosen because of your knowledge of the Persians. With you are the Polemarch Callimachus, a military and spiritual leader, Leontis, your friend, Arimnestos, leader of the Plataeans, a young man who has impressed you with his energy and intelligence. Your army is made up of heavily armed hoplites. The Persian army contains archers, cavalry, spearmen, and an elite unit known as the Immortals. You and your army are at Marathon massively outnumbered by the invading force. You hear news that the Persian cavalry are being moved back on to the ships. Will you attack now or wait?

A whole series of further choices branch out from this first decision. The following decision is more crucial, however – will you strengthen your centre or your wings? You can achieve victory from either decision, but the journey will be different and it will be harder if you strengthen the centre. Further decisions ask you whether you wish the army to walk or run into attack, whether you wish to fight all the way through or take some time to step back and watch, and how you wish to follow-up any advantage. Fight sections may ask you whether to kill an opponent with a head shot or blow to the body. In many routes through the battle you will see a group of Persians surround Callimachus and you must decide whether or not to try and help him. You may also see Leontis in trouble and decide whether or not to assist. At one point a messenger arrives. You have the choice of whether to listen or ignore him. The outcome will be the same, but if you ignore the herald then the narrator says that you have been rude whereas listening brings the same result without censure.

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Via some routes you see an eagle bearing a snake and interpret it as an omen. Interpreting it as an omen to attack again brings you success; if you interpret it as an omen to retreat you will be killed in a rout. Two possible epiphanies are available. If you are reluctant to engage and then fail to rescue Leontis then Leontis will die and Ares will appear before you to tell you that the gods will punish your cowardice. This will be swiftly followed by your death. At another point you face a decision to carry on fighting or to drop back. If you drop back a divine figure will appear to you and tell you that retreat is not an option; you end up where you would have been had you gone straight ahead. If the battle goes your way you must decide whether or not to pursue the retreating Persians down to the ships. You are then faced with the decision of waiting for the Spartans, stopping to bury the dead, or hurrying back to Athens. If you choose the latter option, you must decide which route to take. Many ways through the book lead to death in battle. Many routes lead to a partial victory in which the battle is won but Athens is set on fire. A few routes lead to greatness in which you win the battle and save the city. A very short account of the battle is available at the end.

Analysis

Playing even just a few routes through *Marathon* will give readers a sense of the intensity of ancient battle, the scenario at Marathon, and a flavour of some of the concerns facing ancient generals. There are three other battles in the series, *Hastings, Arnhem*, and *Iwo Jima*, so *Marathon* represents antiquity and makes antiquity a part of this series of key battles. Choose-your-own-adventure books have been around for some decades but ancient stories remain rare within the genre, making this an unusual opportunity to explore antiquity in this manner.

In terms of personnel, it makes sense that Miltiades is the protagonist as historically he survived the battle and was the more significant military leader on the day. The introduction contains the historical detail that Miltiades knew the Persian military well. It is less frank in its depiction of Miltiades' political career however, insisting that the Athenians put him on a 'false trial' and making no mention of him being tried for tyranny or serving as tyrant in the Chersonese. This simplifies the 'goodies' and 'baddies' dynamic by presenting Miltiades in an unusually positive uncomplicated manner. It is also claimed that the generals have all put off fighting and only you (as Miltiades) have

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the drive to engage. This avoids the tradition that the generals were split on when to fight and ultimately gave Miltiades their command days (Herodotus, 6.109-10). Instead Miltiades is presented as unusually aggressive and brave, and the text lionises those qualities. Having Callimachus amongst the few named figures broadens the reader's awareness of key people involved. As much is made of him as a spiritual leader as a military one, perhaps in an attempt to deflect questions about why he is not in charge. Arimnestos does not play much role in the choices but his positive characterisation reflects him depiction in Herodotus' *Histories*. The death of Callimachus was mentioned by Herodotus and became the subject of much of the discourse around Marathon, so its inclusion adds another key aspect of the historical tradition. It is not possible to save him, and in that sense it is true to history. You will always die if you attempt to save Callimachus. Different routes provide different degrees of censure for the decision to leave him; if you have made over-cautious decisions before you will receive more implied censure, if you have been braver, less. Ultimately to do well you must weather the feelings of cowardice that it always makes you feel and listen to the hints that he cannot be saved – he is surrounded, the two of you would be massively outnumbered, and you are both of mature years fighting younger men. This is a difficult choice to present a young person with and it carries the tough message that charging to the rescue is not always the responsible thing to do. The situation is a little different when Leontis is in danger. You and he are not so isolated and you have an opportunity to save him. If you try and save him you cannot fail, but if you do not try, you will receive censure. When it is not futile, bravery is represented as preferable.

The account of how a phalanx works is overly simple and out of date in its emphasis on formal ranks, locked shields, and well-coordinated action, but beyond that it gives a good sense of the importance of the use of spears, massed soldiers, and wings that can be directed separately. The reader has very little information to go on at the start, so they must draw on their own sense to consider whether it would be preferable to attack and attempt to avoid the Persians' arrows and so on. If you do charge, more information is provided that enables a more informed decision about whether to have a strong centre or wings. The way to achieve the rank of Great General is to act as closely as possible in accordance with what Miltiades is thought to have done on the day. Too many reckless or over-cautious decisions are likely to lead to your death. If you make the early mistake of walking through

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the arrows you can redeem it, but it is harder to succeed. The lesson that you can win the battle but lose the war through the loss of your city adds a layer of complexity to the situation – many routes lead to victory on the battlefield but the destruction of Athens. The tradition of the run to Sparta and or Athens does not feature; Herodotus' account of the army's swift return to Athens is preferred (Herodotus, 6.116).

The depictions of omens and epiphany are done well. These were an important part of the Marathon tradition and of Greek culture more generally, so it adds something culturally distinctive to the landscape that distinguishes this battle from, for example, Hastings. Quite rightly omens are depicted as an event that a general may observe and respond to, not as a definitive representation of the future. How you choose to respond to it (interpreting it as a sign to renew attack or to retreat) is represented as a reflection of the general's emotional state combined with his reading of the tactical situation. There is no ancient tradition of Ares appearing at Marathon, but as a well-known god of battle his appearance chimes well with a Greek environment (42). The unnamed other divine figure may or may not be Ares and there is something pleasing about the ambiguity (52). The divine figures are described in terms familiar from Homeric epiphany. They are massive, imposing, clad in golden armour and shimmering in the light. Ares shape-shifts fleetingly. He announces the gods' punishment of your failure. The unnamed divinity has the additional descriptor of blond with enraged eyes. His voice thunders though his lips do not move. You also take omens from a sacrifice before battle and take reassurance from the clearness of the goat's entrails - another neat period detail. References to the heat, the sun, the rocky hillside and the smell of herbs trampled underfoot add to the feeling of a lived-in environment.

Perhaps the least sophisticated element of the book comes in the descriptions of the Persians: 'wild animals' (p. 27), the army a 'single creature' (p. 27), 'hungry mountain lions' (p. 68), 'wild boars' (p. 71), 'sometimes honourable' (p. 85), 'arrogant' (p. 90), 'dogs' (p. 98); the Spartans consider them 'demons' (p. 39). While this may be intended to represent a hostile Greek point-of-view, it is unnecessarily dehumanising. This is especially harmful when so little attention had been paid to the cause of the battle, which leaves an implied sense that this was an unprovoked attack from a faceless enemy. The *What Really Happened* section does not explore the background of the war. Herodotus' *Histories* is mentioned as the main source: 'some…

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	accurate, some… factually wrong and some – well – he just made it up!' (p. 99). This at least invites readers to explore Herodotus further if they so choose, while a bullet-point summery is given of the main events as they relate to some of the key choices in the book. *Marathon* offers an opportunity to be immersed in an ancient experience and to experiment with some extremely adult responsibilities and choices.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Ares Athens Divination Gods Graeco-Persian Wars Greek History
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adventure Adversity Conflict Death Freedom Heroism Historical figures History Nation Violence War
Further Reading	Bridges, E., Hall, E. and Rhodes, P.J., eds., *Cultural Responses to the Persian Wars: Antiquity to the Third Millennium*, Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2007. de Souza, Philip, *The Greek and Persian Wars 499–386 BC*, Oxford: Osprey, 2003. Fink, Dennis L., *The Battle of Marathon in Scholarship: Research, Theories and Controversies since 1850*, Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co Inc., 2014. Frost, F.J., "The Dubious Origin of the 'Marathon'", *American Journal of Ancient History* 4 (1979): 159–163. Harrison, Evelyn B., "The South Frieze of the Nike Temple and the Marathon Painting in the Painted Stoa", *American Journal of Archaeology* 76.4 (1972): 353–378. Krentz, Peter, *The Battle of Marathon*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010.

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