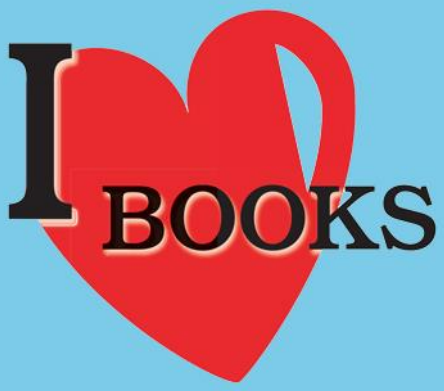


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Opening extract from

Julius Zebra
Bundle with the Britons

Written & Illustrated by

Gary Northfield

Published by

Walker Books Ltd

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For my wonderful friend
and studio-mate, Sarah McIntyre

Special thanks as always to Lizzie & Jack,
and to Lucy, for their editorial and designer
skillz and their deep reserves of patience

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First published in Great Britain 2016 by Walker Books Ltd
87 Vauxhall Walk, London SE11 5HJ

2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1

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This book has been typeset in Stempel Schneidler

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data:
a catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-4063-5493-5

www.walker.co.uk

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So, you think you know about

JULIUS ZEBRA?



Well, you're probably

WRONG!


What most people THINK they know about JULIUS ZEBRA!
I know it all!
Knowledgeable gnu
Hates the Stinky Lake!
Bleurgh! Tastes disgusting!
Pooey water
Lick!
A bit of a loser!
EEEEE!!
Put me down!!
Ha ha!
Rotten brother!
Probably eaten by a lion...
CHOMP!
Not again! Sigh...
It's all he deserves.


But THIS is what he's REALLY LIKE!!
This I gotta see!
Likes eating porridge!
Yum!
Crunchy beetles!
Actually gets on well with lions!
Julius! Your sword!
KLONK!
Ow! Watch it!
CHAMPION GLADIATOR!
Off you trot!
ZEBRA!
ZEBRA!
KLONK!

Julius wasn't quite like other zebras. Not only did he live during ROMAN TIMES, but he was also the

PEOPLE'S CHAMPION!!



EXCITING, RIGHT?



CHAPTER ONE

THE PEOPLE'S CHAMPION



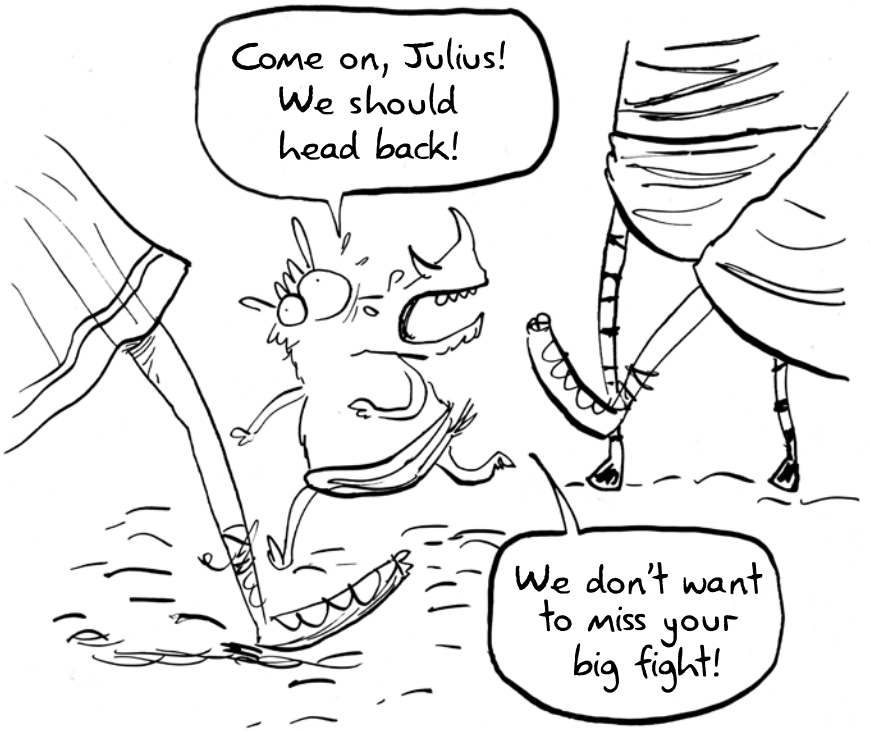
Walking through the noisy, smelly, bustling streets of Rome, Julius felt as if he was Caesar himself! The place may have smelled worse than a gnu's bottom, much like the stinky lake back home, but out here, unlike back home, everybody LOVED him.

Since his triumphant, surprise victory at Rome's greatest amphitheatre, the Colosseum, only a month ago, Julius had been transformed into a GLADIATOR SUPERSTAR!

Stories of his deeds had spread like wildfire throughout the vast Empire. People were coming from all over just to see Julius fight and he was loving every minute of it.



Scuttling next to Julius was his friend Cornelius the warthog. Cornelius was a tiny little chap and in the mêlée of the crowded street he had to fight hard not to be trodden on.



"Stop panicking, Cornelius!" said Julius as he merrily waved to his fans. "We have PLENTY of time. Let the people of Rome enjoy the treat of seeing their hero walking among them!"

Cornelius tutted. "Careful, soon your head might get too big to walk down these narrow streets."

Suddenly, a scruffy young girl approached Julius, holding out a tatty parchment.



Julius ruffled the little girl's hair. "Of course, my dear little thing – do you have any ink?"

The girl pulled a very sad face. "No..." she sighed.

Julius quickly looked around the street to see what he could use to make a print. "How about if I dipped my hoof in mud? You'd have your very own Julius Zebra muddy hoofprint!"

The little girl's face lit up. "Oh yes please, Mr Zebra, that would be wonderful! Thank you!"

Julius bent down and squished his front right hoof into the mud, then he placed it very carefully onto the girl's parchment. He pulled his hoof away to reveal a perfect print.



"THAT IS SO AMAZING!!! THANK YOU MR ZEBRA!!!" squeaked the girl. "I LOVE YOU!!!" She kissed the print and ran off to a group of her friends who were standing nearby, who all squealed like little mice and jumped for joy at seeing such an exciting souvenir.

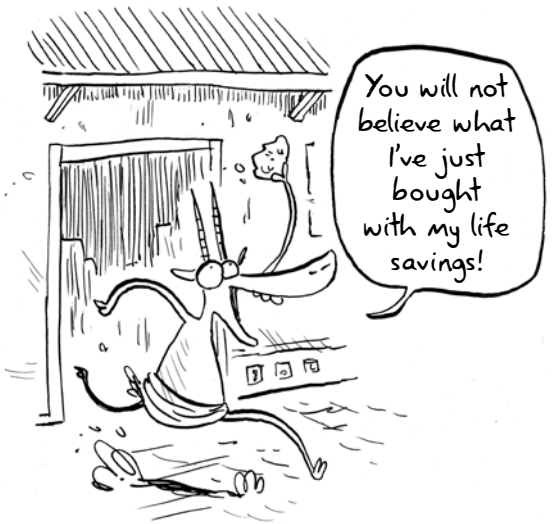
Julius sniffed his hoof, screwing up his nostrils. "You know, I don't think that actually was mud."

He passed his hoof to Cornelius to sniff.



"Quick!" said Cornelius. "Let's run the other way, we'll be long gone before she notices." And they scooted off into the crowds.

"WAIT!" cried a voice. "WHERE ARE YOU GOING?! WAIT FOR ME!" From one of the many shops that lined the street came bounding a lively antelope clutching a lump of rock.



"Let me guess, Felix," said Julius. "Is it a rock?"

"Well!" said Felix proudly. "What you have here is an actual piece of the PYRAMID OF GIZA IN EGYPT!!!"

Cornelius examined the rock carefully. "The only 'Giza' this rock has seen is the dodgy geezer who sold you this worthless rubbish!" he huffed. "These Roman shopkeepers see you coming a mile away, Felix. I don't know why you keep buying these stupid rocks."



"Forget all that," said Julius. "Where are the others? We promised to meet them here at noon!"

"Yes!" agreed Cornelius. "As I keep saying, we need to be heading back to the Colosseum. Julius has his important fight this afternoon in front of the Emperor to celebrate the Festival of Quinquatria!"



"The Festival of *Quinquatria!*" corrected Cornelius. "It is a festival in honour of Minerva. She's the goddess of wisdom, so it's hardly surprising you've never heard of her."

"Well, how RUDE!" snorted Felix.

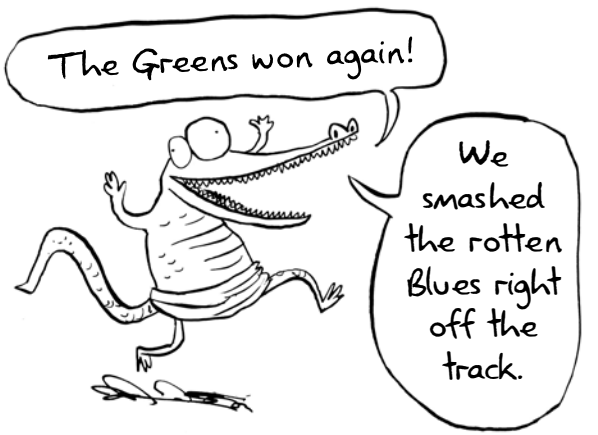
Julius put his arms round his friends. "Stop it now, you two!" he laughed. "Don't forget, Emperor Hadrian has finally PROMISED us our FREEDOM if I win this fight!"

"JULIUS!" cried a voice in the crowd. "JULIUS, WAIT!"

Julius turned round, expecting to greet one of his many fans, but was instead faced with the beaming sharp teeth of a smiling crocodile.

"LUCIA!" said Julius, pleased to see his friend. "How was the chariot racing?"

"A-MA-ZING!!!" she said.



"Rufus found you a present, too!" she squealed.

"He did?" asked Julius excitedly, clapping his hooves. A long shadow loomed over Julius, who looked up to see his friend, Rufus the giraffe.

"I did!" replied Rufus, and he handed a tiny statuette to the eager zebra.

"We didn't realise how popular you REALLY are!" said Lucia. "Look! It's a figurine of YOU!"



"That's BRILLIANT!" laughed Felix. "It even has your mad bog-eyes!"

Julius fired a dirty look towards Felix. "WHAT mad bog eyes?!"

Rufus quickly interjected to save the poor antelope. "They had a big stall selling hundreds of them! You are PROPER famous now!"

As if on cue, an excited mob started to crowd around the animals as people clamoured to see the gladiator superstar who was actually walking down their street.

"Come on!" said Cornelius. "We really should head back to the school before this lot tear us apart."

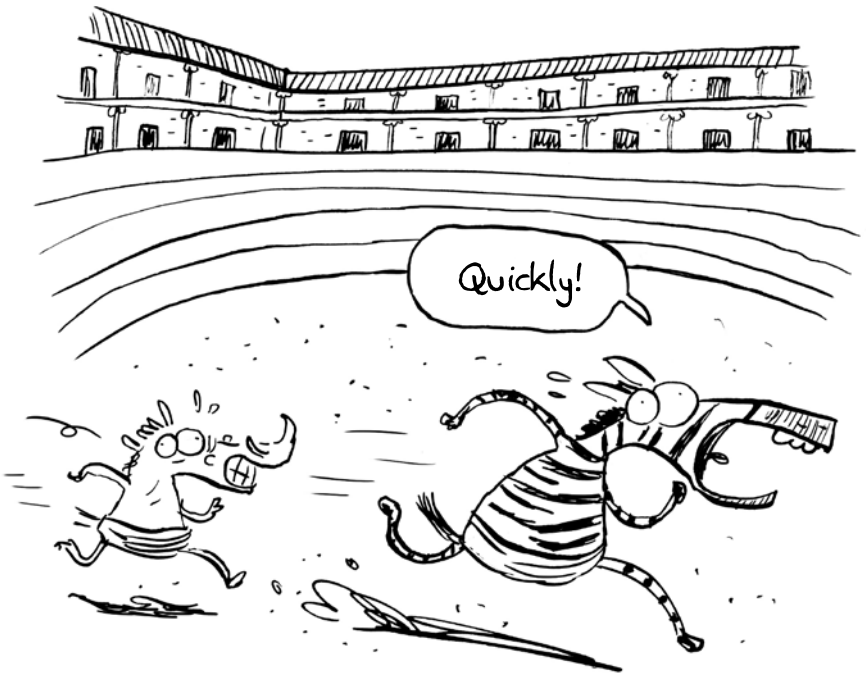


They pushed past the frenzied crowd out onto the main road that ran through the heart of Rome. Dashing under the arches of the great aqueduct and past the grand palace that sat up on the hill, the animals headed for the huge stone stadium that loomed large on the horizon.



They raced past the crowds that were massing around the Colosseum and dashed RIGHT past the Colosseum itself.

Instead, they ran into an unassuming square building next to the amphitheatre, past the gruff guards at the door and into a huge courtyard that housed its own mini arena.



This was Ludus Magnus, Rome's biggest and best gladiator school and home to Julius and his pals. The *click-clack* of wooden swords could be heard as gladiators honed their fighting skills, but there was no time to stand and watch. They raced downstairs towards the tunnel that led directly to the underbelly of the Colosseum, only to find their way blocked by a scrawny, surly lion.



"Sorry, Milus!" gasped Julius, catching his breath. "But we had terrible trouble trying to outmanoeuvre my hordes of fans!"

Their grouchy companion just tutted and stepped to one side. "You have a hard life, zebra," he growled sarcastically. "Anyway, it's not me you've got to apologise to, it's PLINY!"

Julius slapped his forehead with his hoof. "Oh no! I promised Pliny I'd meet him early to brush up on those new sword moves he's been teaching me."

He sprinted down the tunnel, the stench of the rancid dungeons hitting his nose as he ran. He careered around a corner, past the cages with the growling leopards and towards one of the many lifts that spirited animals up into the arena.



The little mouse threw a gold helmet at Julius.

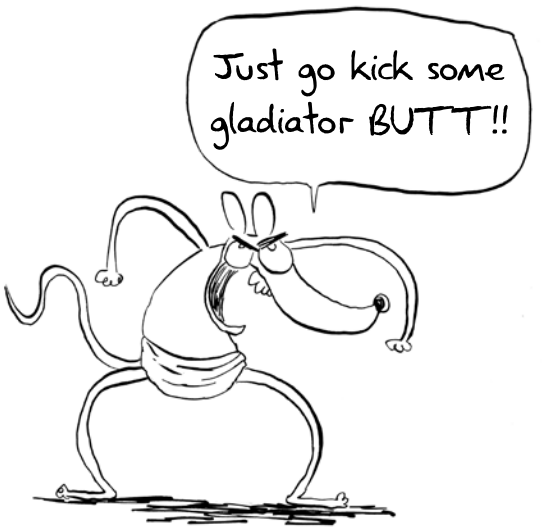
"You'd better get yourself suited and booted!" he said. "If you're ever gonna make a good impression in front of Hadrian, then today has to be the day!"



"Ah, you don't need no extra training!" laughed Pliny. "Your opponent is as useless as ALL the other animals you've had to face." The little mouse gave Julius a friendly punch on his shin. "There ain't no animal gladiator like YOU, Debra!"

"It's ZEBRA, not Debra!" said Julius, rolling his eyes. "How many times?"

"Zebra, Debra, Martha! Whatevah!" replied Pliny, pushing Julius into his cage.



CHAPTER TWO

ZEBRAMANIA!



Julius's heart pounded as the cage lifted up towards the ceiling, scraping roughly against the stone walls. Over the creaking of the stiff wooden frames, Julius could clearly make out the chanting of the crowd. "ZEBRA! ZEBRA! ZEBRA!"

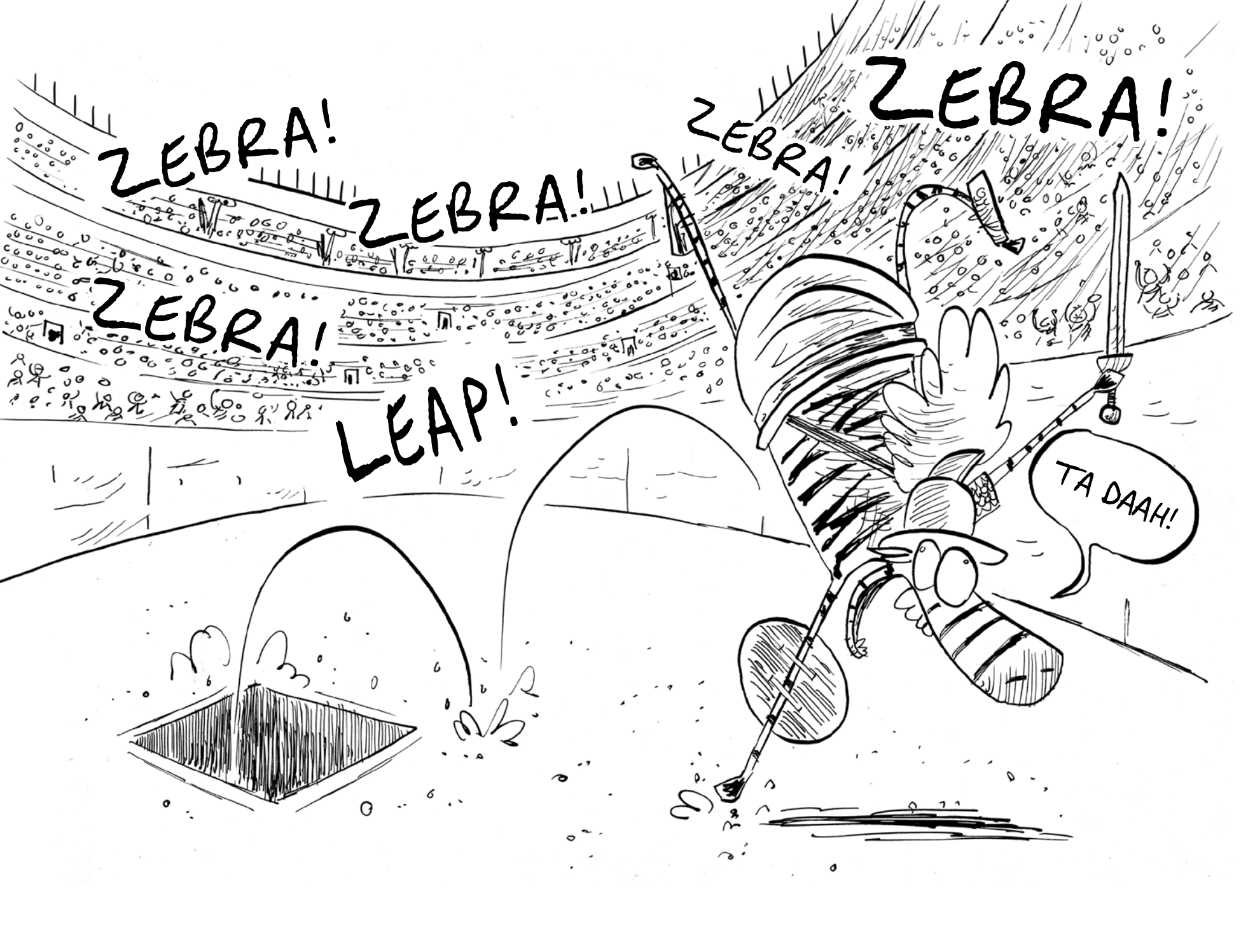


The cage stopped moving with a great THUMP and Julius had to grab the wooden bars to stop himself falling over.

Just above him he could hear the voice of the Summa Rudis, the referee.

"CITIZENS OF ROME!" bellowed the Summa Rudis. "As you all know, to celebrate the Festival of Quinquatria, Emperor Hadrian has decreed that you should enjoy a day of FEASTING and FIGHTING!" The crowd roared. "YOUR FIRST OPPONENT," he screamed, "Rome's very own PEOPLE'S CHAMPION, JULIUS ZEBRA!!"

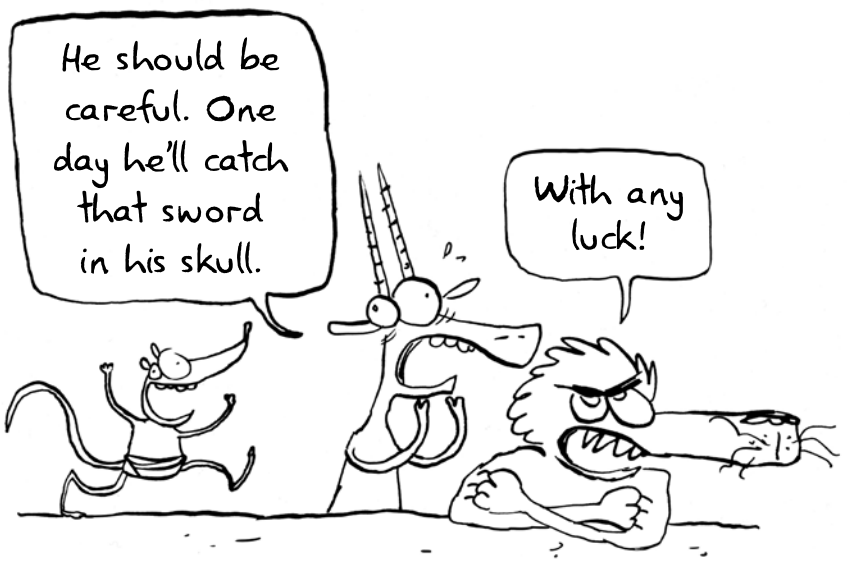
Ahead of Julius a trapdoor opened to a thunderous cheer and the blast of a hundred trumpets. He bounded through the hatchway.


ZEBRA!
ZEBRA!
ZEBRA!
LEAP!
ZEBRA!
ZEBRA!
TA DAAH!

Julius threw up his arms to greet the 80,000-strong crowd, who were roaring his name so loudly that the whole amphitheatre shook.

Eager to show off his skills, Julius leapt into a backwards somersault, throwing his sword into the air and deftly catching it while landing nimbly on the arena floor like a cat. The spellbound audience erupted into another round of chanting and cheering.

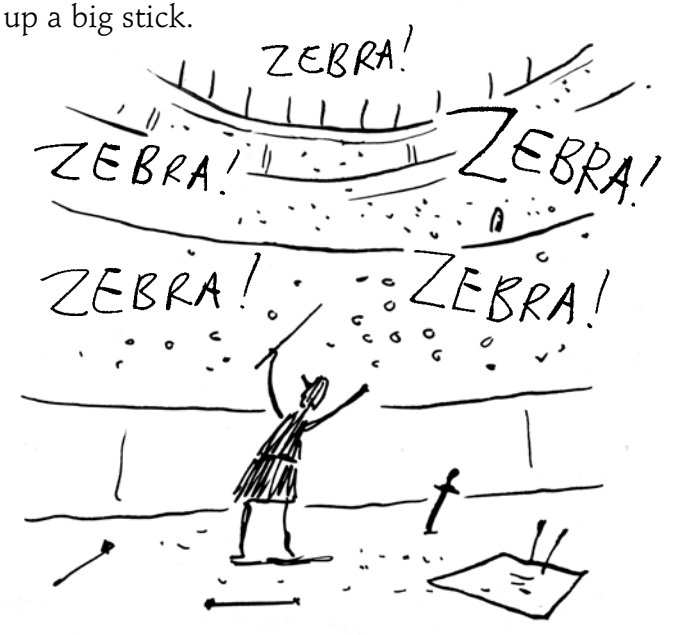
Watching from the sidelines, Julius's proud friends were on their feet, clapping and cheering him along.



Over on the other side of the arena in his gold and marble royal box sat the Emperor Hadrian, enthusiastically applauding his zebra champion.

Excellent! thought Julius. *Hadrian seems to be in a good mood. There's no way he's not granting me my freedom today!*

In the centre of the arena stood the Summa Rudis, a beefy man wearing a white tunic embellished with two long blue parallel stripes. In his right hand he held up a big stick.



The Summa Rudis battled to make himself heard.

"YOUR SECOND OPPONENT!" he screamed. "ALL THE WAY FROM THE CITY OF ALEXANDRIA IN EGYPT, the mighty camel warrior, IMHOTEP!"

From the gates a hapless camel came stumbling in, his loose, ill-fitting armour rattling as he scrambled across the arena floor. As he reached the Summa Rudis, he clumsily tripped over his spear and landed in a clattering heap on the floor.



The crowd roared with laughter.

On the sidelines, Milus shook his head in despair. "Where do they find these idiots?"

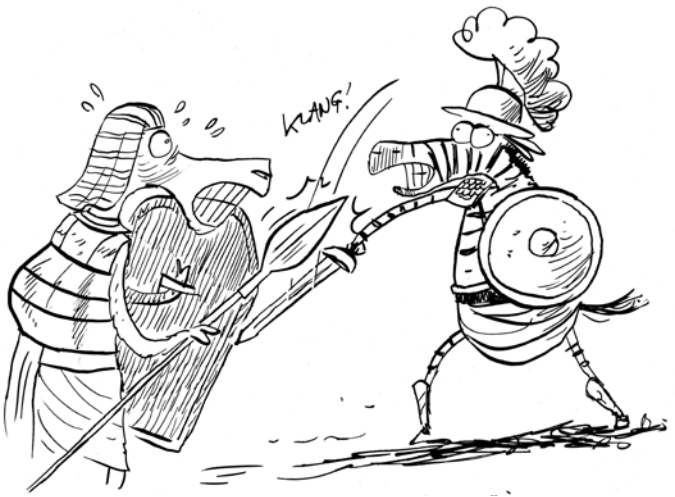
Julius took up his position in the arena and smacked his sword noisily into his shield with a dramatic growl. This threw the crowd into another wild frenzy. Imhotep the camel gulped and took a small step backwards. He nervously glanced over his shoulder as the zebra-mad spectators hurled insults and rotten food in his direction.



The horns of the cornicen trumpeted the start of the fight and the Summa Rudis stepped aside. The Colosseum roared.

Julius edged confidently towards the twitchy Egyptian camel, flicking his sword from behind his shield.

"'AVE 'IM!" yelled the crowd. "LOP HIS HEAD OFF! FINISH HIM!"



Imhotep timidly shuffled backwards, his armour jangling as he shivered with fear. "Come on!" cried Julius. "At least try to hit me with your spear, give the punters a bit of a show. I promise I won't hurt you

too much!" The camel gulped and shook his head. Rotten vegetables splattered his nice shiny headdress. The audience screamed.



Imhotep finally collapsed onto the floor, sobbing. "PLEASE DON'T KILL ME, ZEBRA!" he cried. "DON'T BLOW ME UP WITH MAGIC LIGHTNING FROM YOUR EYES!"

Julius stood over the blubbing Egyptian and kicked his spear away with his hoof. "I shall spare your life, Imhotep," he declared. "No lightning shall pass from my eyes today."



"Come now," said Julius, turning to the crowd. "You want I should give this camel the HUMP?"



Pliny turned to Milus. "Please tell me he didn't really just say that?"

"I'm afraid he did," replied Milus flatly.

In the arena, the Summa Rudis grabbed Julius's arm and thrust it into the air. "THE WINNER!" he announced.

Julius jumped for joy and excitedly turned to the royal box to seek the Emperor's approval and his long-awaited promise of freedom.

But the royal box was empty. Hadrian was gone!



Julius's friends suddenly came dashing across the arena.



"Milus saw him receive a message, then he stormed off in a huff!"

Julius flopped to the floor in despair. "But, he PROMISED...!" he sobbed.

Felix tried to console him. "If it helps, Hadrian didn't look happy to leave, he was really enjoying himself until he scarpered…"

Julius looked like he was ready to burst into tears. "We'll NEVER win our freedom!" he whimpered. "We'll be stuck in this Roman poohole for the REST OF OUR LIVES!"

As Julius dragged himself up and began to shuffle miserably out of the arena, a familiar figure stood in his way. "Then you'll be pleased to hear my news, donkey!" came a gruff voice.

"Septimus," groaned Julius.

The towering figure of the Lanista, boss of the gladiator school, stood in front of them, hands on his hips.



"OOH! A SURPRISE!" squealed Julius, clapping his hooves. "I LOVE surprises!"