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JULIUS ZEBRA

GRAPPLE WITH THE GREEKS!



GARY NORTHFIELD

WALKER BOOKS

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For Arthur and Elsie, welcome to a world of boneheads, nincompoops and holibobs. And that's before you start reading these books! Love Daddy.

Thank you as always to Lizzie and Chloé. Sorry for all the extra grey hairs.

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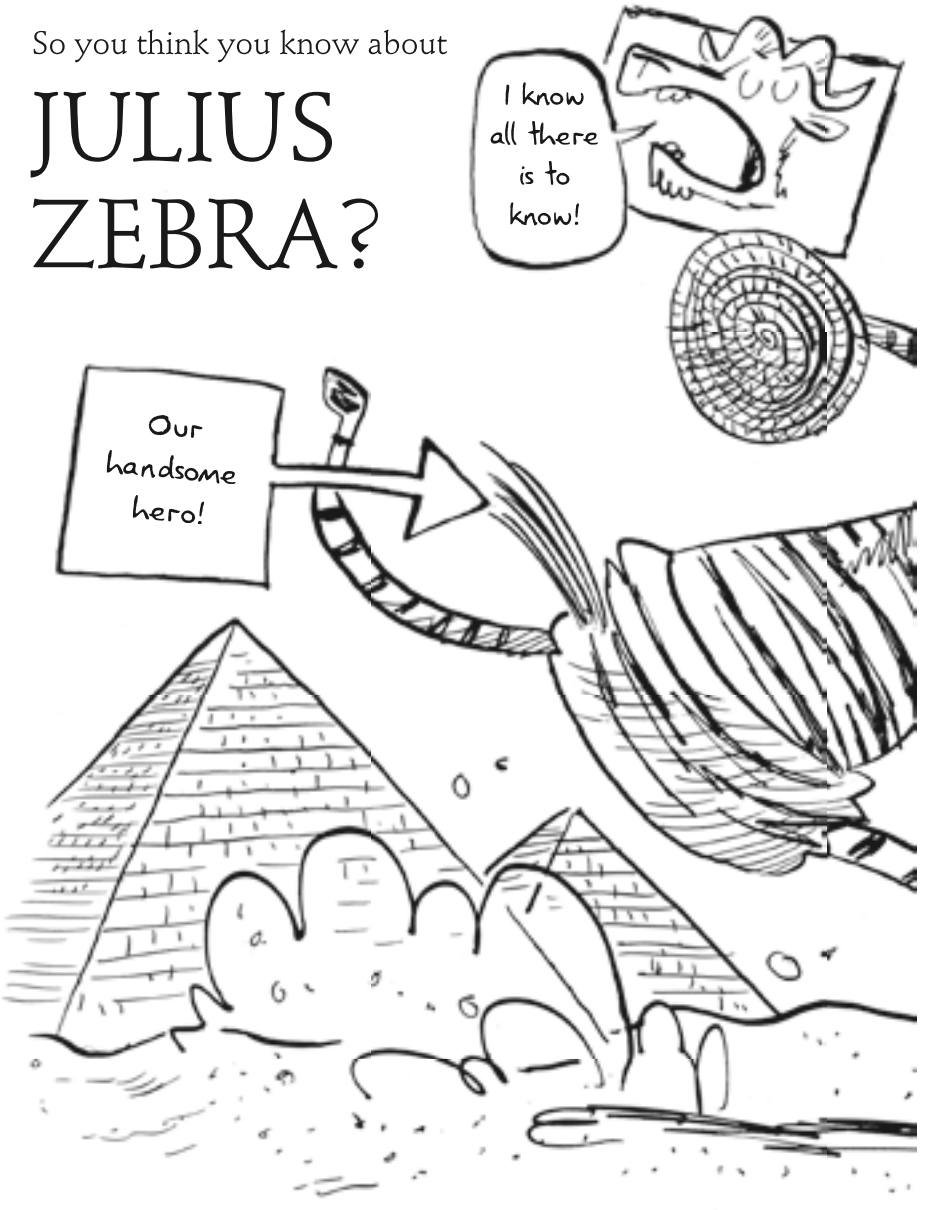
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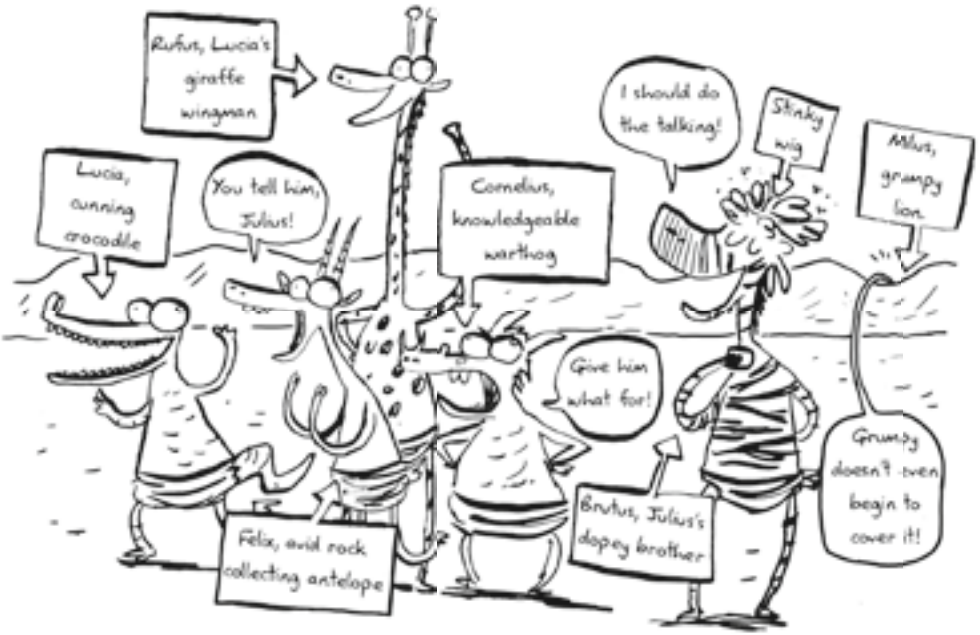


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Julius wasn't like any other zebra and wasn't going to put up with this stranger's nonsense!



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Exciting right?

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CHAPTER ONE

ADVENTURE TIME!

"Oi!" cried Julius at the stranger. "You can't just go around chucking my friends through the air!"



"I told you!" laughed the muscle-bound man. "I am HERACLES, son of ZEUS, and I seek the champion named JULIUS ZEBRA and his friends for an exciting adventure!"

"Listen, Hairy Keith, son of Zoots," retorted Julius.

"Heracles!" corrected Heracles moodily.

"That's what I said," continued Julius. "I'm not looking for any more adventures!"

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Heracles seemed taken aback, and he bent over to have a good look at Julius. A big grin crept across his face and he gave a huge belly laugh.

"YOU?!" he exclaimed scornfully, and he took another close look at Julius, prodding him in his tummy and examining Julius's scrawny limbs.



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Heracles suddenly felt a kick to his shins and he spun round to find a crocodile looking at him crossly.

"You take that back, you big bully!" Lucia fumed. "Julius IS a champion, so you'd BETTER say sorry! I don't care WHO you are!"

Heracles laughed again. "Ha ha har!" he guffawed. "What strange, spirited creatures you are!" He gazed closely at the strange menagerie that stood before him. He grabbed Felix and held him in a headlock.

"And YOU, antelope, are YOU a great champion?"



Heracles let poor Felix drop to the ground as he paraded up and down in front of the animals, chuckling to himself.

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"As you are no doubt aware," he boomed, "due to my vast legendary status, spanning the centuries and traversing all the known lands, I was tasked to complete twelve arduous labours."



"But it appears I was DECEIVED!" continued Heracles. "And one of my labours has since been UNDONE!" The demi-god waved his arms defiantly towards the skies. "My father and ruler of all the gods, ZEUS, demands that I finally complete this labour if am to take my place on Mount Olympus."

He turned directly to the animals. "I seek great champions to aid me on this quest, yet all I find are puny beasts CLAIMING to be the heroes of legend!"

He turned to face them and placed his giant hands on his hips in a dramatic pose. "So you leave me with little choice. You must PROVE your greatness to me!"

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Cornelius had heard enough. "We don't have to prove ANYTHING to you!" squeaked the little warthog, wagging his trotter. "In fact, how do we know YOU are who you say you are, eh?"

Heracles strode towards a rocky outcrop where two gnus stood minding their own business. He crouched down and threw his two big arms around the boulder.

"If you have heard of me," Heracles declared, "then you know I am the STRONGEST BEING that has EVER lived!" Then, with a great roar, he began LIFTING the enormous rock in the air, his face going a deep red as the veins in his forehead looked ready to pop.



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A ripple of applause rose from the entranced animals.

"Bravo!" cried Felix. "I'm TOTALLY convinced!"

Heracles performed a small bow, before hurling the boulder, with gnus in tow, towards the lake.



Julius was furious. "Can you PLEASE stop chucking animals about!!" he yelled.

Heracles laughed as he flexed his muscles. "Calm down, zebra. Have I not just proved that I am indeed the mightiest in all the lands?"

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He placed a dusty hand on Julius's shoulder. "And now, you must prove who YOU are!"

"WE TOLD YOU!" interrupted Cornelius, still unimpressed. "We're not looking for any more adventures, so PUSH OFF!"

"Yeah!" agreed Julius. "Why should we listen to you anyway? What's in it for us?"

Heracles let out another of his deep guffaws. "What's in it for YOU?!" he laughed.



"IMMORTALITY!?" parroted Julius. "We don't need your 'immortality', sunshine! Now sling yer hook!"

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Julius turned to Cornelius. "What's 'immortality'?" he whispered.

"Immortality is where you get to live for ever and ever," replied Cornelius. "A bit like a god."

Julius raised an eyebrow. "So what, you don't die?"

"Not usually," said Cornelius.

Julius ran after Heracles, who had begun slowly striding away. "WAIT!" he called out. "We'll do it! We'll prove our greatness!"

Heracles turned round with a smug smile. "Excellent!" he proclaimed. "Already you show wisdom beyond your years!"



"What's Julius doing?!" cried Lucia, perplexed. "I thought we'd told that big buffoon to get lost?"

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Cornelius held his head in his trotters. "Yes, but now that Heracles has promised us all immortality, Julius has had a change of heart!"

Brutus poked his nose into the conversation. "Immortality?" he sniffed. "What's that when it's at home?"

"Like I just told Julius, it's when you get to live for ever, like a god," said Cornelius, holding his snout. "Hey, I thought your mum told you to get rid of that stinky seaweed wig?!"

"Nothing comes between a zebra and his wig!" replied Brutus, brushing it gently with his hoof. "But forget all that – did you say we can be GODS?! NOW you're talking my language!"



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As Cornelius buried his face once again in his trotters, a familiar figure approached the group.



"You're ALIVE!" cried Cornelius.

"Yes," growled Milus, brushing dust off his fur, "I'm alive." He gestured at Julius and Brutus. "Why are those IDIOTS talking to that lunatic?"

"We're all going to be GODS!" piped up Felix. "That big chap just promised us!"

Milus flopped backwards into the rough sand.

