

"BONKERS, FAST-PACED, AND FUNNY . . .
A ROMAN ROLLER COASTER OF A RIDE." — PHILIP ARDAGH

JULIUS ZEBRA

RUMBLE WITH THE ROMANS!



GARY NORTHFIELD

INTRODUCTION

So, you think you know about

ZEBRAS?





Well, you're probably

WRONG!



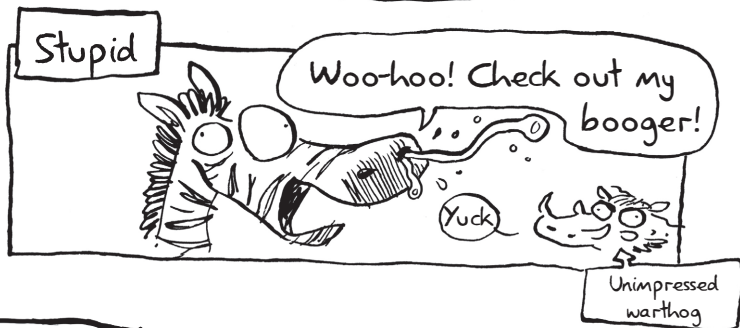
What most people think
they know about zebras:



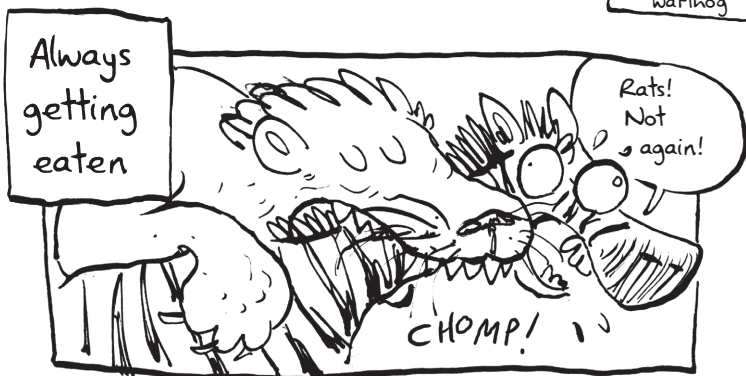
Eat grass



Stupid



Always
getting
eaten



What zebras are
REALLY like:



Loyal to their family and friends



Can outrun the fastest lions



And . . . er . . . Ok, they do
actually eat a lot of grass.



But Julius wasn't quite like all zebras.

And, to make things even more interesting,
he lived in . . .

ROMAN TIMES!



EXCITING, RIGHT?

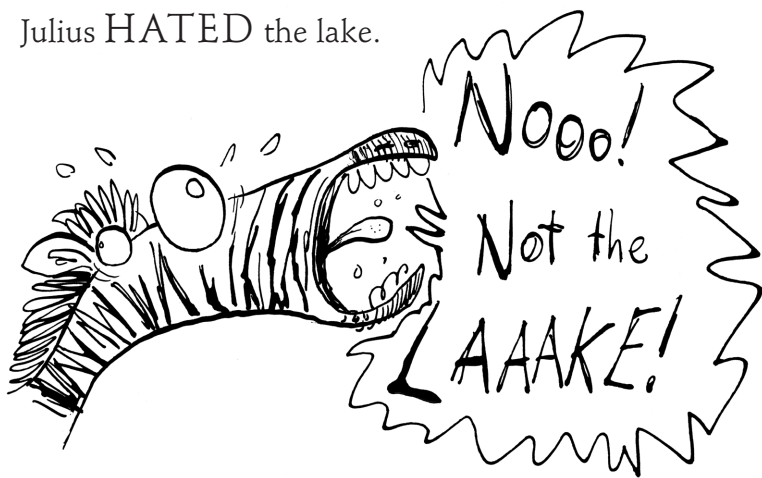


CHAPTER ONE

LAKE OF DOOM

Life on the dusty, shrubby African plains wasn't all fun and games for Julius, meaning that he didn't just eat grass all day. Every Wednesday, much to his disgust, his mom would drag him and his (very annoying) brother, Brutus, to the lake.

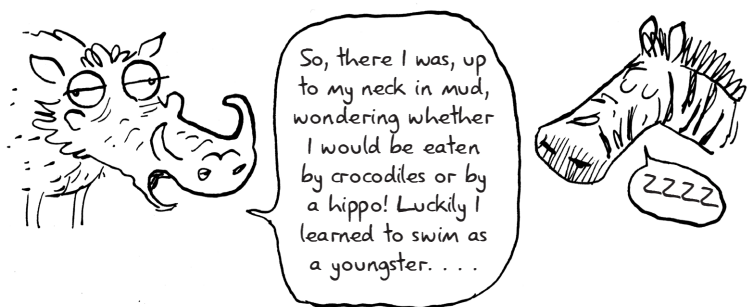
Julius **HATED** the lake.



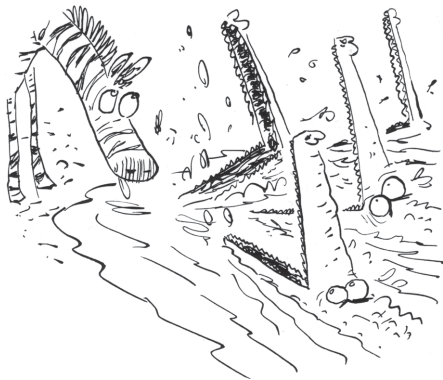
He thought all the animals STANK!



And they were SOOO BORING!



Not to mention his fear of being eaten at every turn.



On the other hand, Julius's brother, Brutus, *loved* the lake!



And nothing annoyed Julius more than his big show-off brother.

So, one week, Julius came up with a plan to avoid going. “Look, Mom. I’ve found this little puddle. It’ll do just fine!” he said.



“No!” scolded his mom. “You’ll come to the lake just like everyone else.”

“But what about all those crocodiles?”



"You'd have to be very old or stupid for one of *them* to catch you," she said.

"What about those ferocious lions?" Julius said.



"Bah! You're more likely to be hit by a flaming rock from the sky than to get caught by one of those lazy beasts!"

"But that's ridiculous," said Julius. "I've known plenty of zebras who have been eaten by lions. That has to be the stupidest thing I've ever heard!"





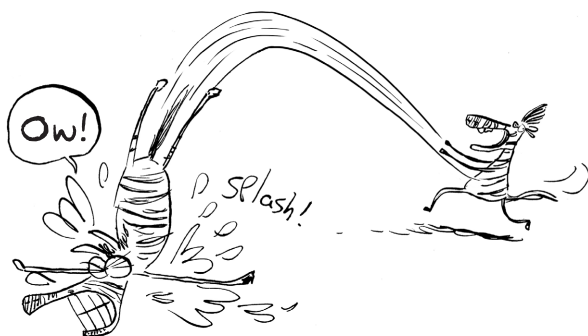
"Now, get to the lake this instant, or a lion with big teeth will be the least of your worries!"

Just as Julius was nursing his bruised bottom, Brutus strutted up to him. "Come on, bro. The lake is awesome! Way more exciting than your dumb puddle."

And before Julius could do anything about it, Brutus grabbed him by the front hooves and spun him around.



“Can you do amazing, backward somersaults into your puddle like we do at the lake? Let’s find out!”



“Nope, didn’t think so! Come on, nincompoop—last one there is a warthog!”

And with that, Brutus pranced off with the rest of the herd.



CHAPTER TWO

STINK HOLE





“Come on, Julius, drink up. It will give you strength!”
said his mom.

Julius sniffed the water, then scrunched up his face.



“If you don’t drink up, you won’t grow big and strong like your brother, Brutus. You’ll become a weakling—easy prey for any hyena or lion.”

“But it *stinks!*” cried Julius. “What with all those crocodiles and hippos doing their whatnot in it. I don’t know how *anyone* can drink this stuff.” His face twisted into a grimace as he took another sniff.

“Look at Brutus,” she said. “Do you see him being afraid?”



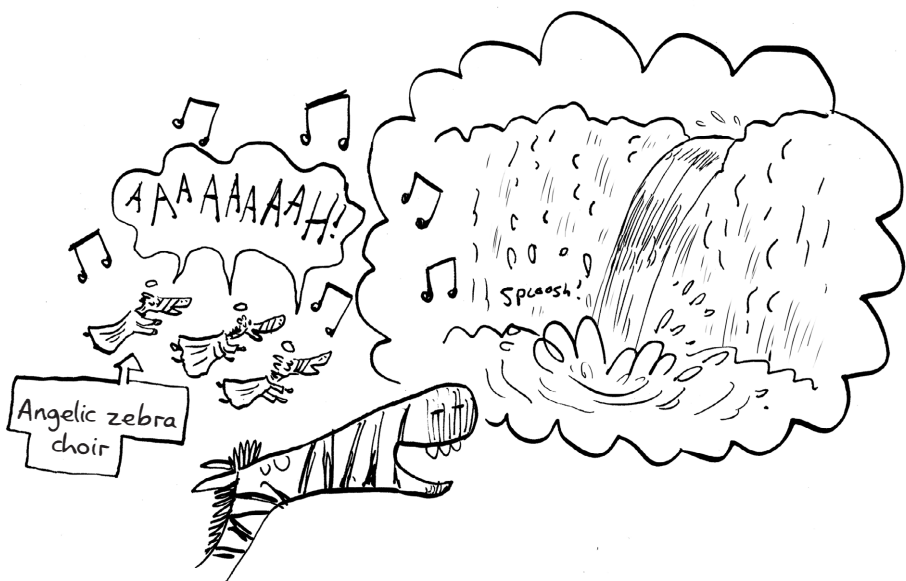
Nothing about Brutus surprised Julius. That idiot would lick the drool from a hippo's mouth if he thought it would impress his friends.

"I don't care," insisted Julius. "I'm still not drinking it. You can keep your nasty water—I'm going home." He turned on his hooves and started heading back up the ridge.



Julius wasn't in the mood for another kick in the rear. So, reluctantly, he turned back.

As the rotten aroma of the lake wafted up his nostrils, Julius tried to imagine that he was standing at the foot of the most beautiful crystal-clear pool, filled with the purest sparkling water that had trickled down from an ancient glacier high up in the mountains.



He counted to
three, then took a big
GULP.



It tasted REVOLTING!

No pretending was going to hide how gross THAT
was.

“There, that wasn’t so bad, was it?” piped up a
little voice.

Julius looked down to see a small, fat warthog
with a toothy grin beaming up at him.

“Don’t worry,” continued the warthog. “You get
used to it.”



Warthogs annoyed Julius. They always thought they were *so* smart. This was the last straw. Now he'd *really* had enough.



“NO, Julius!” she said. “We just got here. Stop being such a big baby!”

Bah! thought Julius. *I’m no baby. I’ll show them! I’ll trot back home on my own and when they all finally show up, they’ll realize I’m more than capable of looking after myself.*

So, moving very slowly and quietly, Julius slipped away from the herd. He tiptoed up the hill, crouched behind a boulder, and surveyed the landscape, trying to figure out his next move.

“Where are you off to, then?” squeaked a familiar little voice.



"Leave me alone!" shouted Julius, waving the warthog away.

"But there're all sorts of lunatics with big teeth prowling around out here. You should be careful," said the warthog.

"Well, you'd better get back to your friends, then," snapped Julius. "We zebras are pretty capable of outrunning lions and such, thank you very much. But I'm not sure I like *your* chances."

"Don't underestimate us warthogs," the warthog said, wagging his hoof. "We're *more* than able to dodge the wild beasts of *these* plains. In fact, the average speed of an adult male warthog . . ."



Julius was heading back the way he'd come. Or so he thought. He wasn't exactly sure. He'd been distracted by some tasty shrubs when he should've been watching where he was going.

Anyway, it doesn't matter, he thought. I'm FREE! I can walk wherever I want now!



“Mr. Zebra! Sir! I insist that you come back to the lake. It really is very dangerous out here!” said the little warthog, scampering after him.

Julius spun around. “Go away! Why do you care about me? If you talk to my mom and my brother, you’ll find out I’m not worth bothering with.”



“Your mother does sound quite insistent,” said the warthog, who was really beginning to worry now. But Julius defiantly marched on.



Then, out of the blue, a frantic family of gnus thundered past.

They were followed by giraffes and antelopes, barking alarm calls and crying for help.

"You know, perhaps we should go back after all," said Julius, scooting toward the watering hole. "I don't want Mom and Brutus thinking I've been eaten or something."

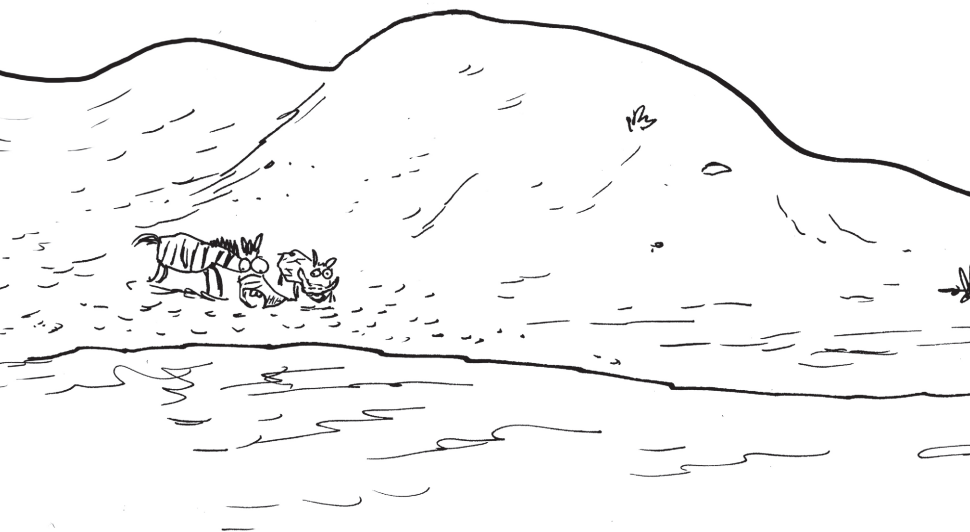


"But wait!" called the warthog. "It's not safe! There's a lion on the loose!"



But when they jumped over the ridge and reached the lake, it was absolutely deserted. No zebras, no antelopes, no animals left at all—nothing but clouds of dust.

Julius ran to the spot where he'd stood earlier with his mom and Brutus. "I don't understand," he gasped, looking at the chaotic mess of footprints in the dirt. It was impossible to figure out which way everyone had gone.

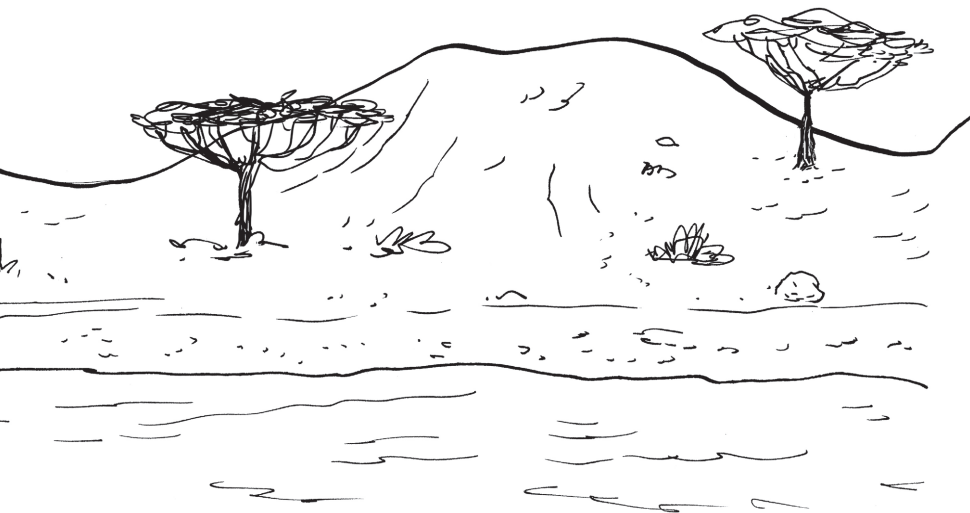


The warthog gave Julius a gentle nudge. “Um, I think maybe we should leave, too. . . .”

“But we have to figure out what’s happened!”

“Ah . . . I’m afraid there’s not enough time,” said the warthog, staring ahead and slowly backing away from the water’s edge.

Peering in the same direction, all Julius could see was the silhouette of a solitary lion emerging from the dust clouds. Nervously, he started to back away, too.



"B-but how can one lion cause so much trouble?
Surely there were others, too?"

"That is a nomadic lion," said the warthog
knowingly. "He works alone and is far more wily
than your ordinary lion."

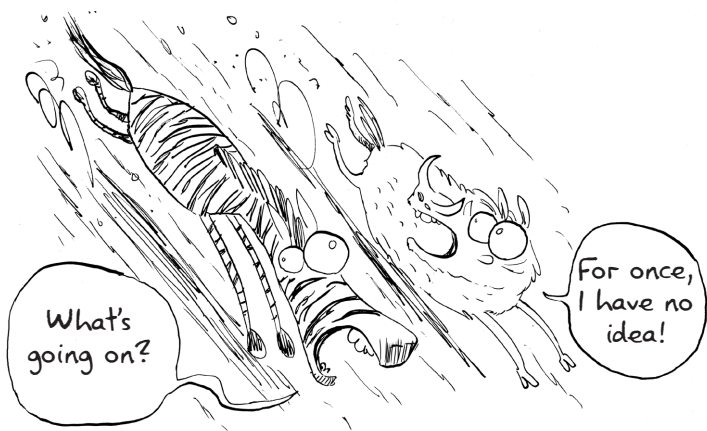
From across the water, the scruffy-looking beast
narrowed his eyes at Julius and the warthog and,
baring his great white pointy teeth, let out a low,
rumbling growl.



They were about to turn when a chilling sound of snarling and barking echoed around the lake—a sound unlike anything Julius had heard before.

The lion was startled and jumped backward. Through trees in the distance, a pack of angry wolves bolted straight for the lion.

Taking their chance, Julius and the warthog scrambled up the ridge and ran as fast as their legs could carry them.



But as they leaped and landed, the loose red soil collapsed from under their feet, and they plummeted down to the bottom of a huge pit.



"WHAT IDIOT PUT THIS STUPID HOLE HERE?" screamed Julius, pushing the warthog's hairy bottom off his face.

The warthog brushed himself down. "I have heard stories about these pits, and if I'm right (and I dearly hope I'm not), we could be in quite a nasty pickle."

Julius was just about to ask what a pickle was when another large bundle of fur and bones thumped on top of him.

“OOF! WHAT’S GOING ON?” Julius shouted, trying to heave the big lump off. “WHY DOES EVERY IDIOT HAVE TO LAND ON MY HEAD?”



Realizing who the big lump was, Julius and the warthog frantically scrambled up the sides of the pit and launched into high-pitched screams: “LION! LION! GET US OUT! GET US OUT!”

But their wailing couldn’t be heard above the savage snapping and barking of the wolves. Then a booming voice bellowed from above, “Away, boys, away! I need these creatures ALIVE!”

Julius slumped to the floor of the pit and sighed a deep sigh.



Julius Zebra: Rumble with the Romans

Gary Northfield

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