

But Julius wasn't quite like all zebras.
And, to make things even more interesting, he
lived in ...

ROMAN TIMES!!



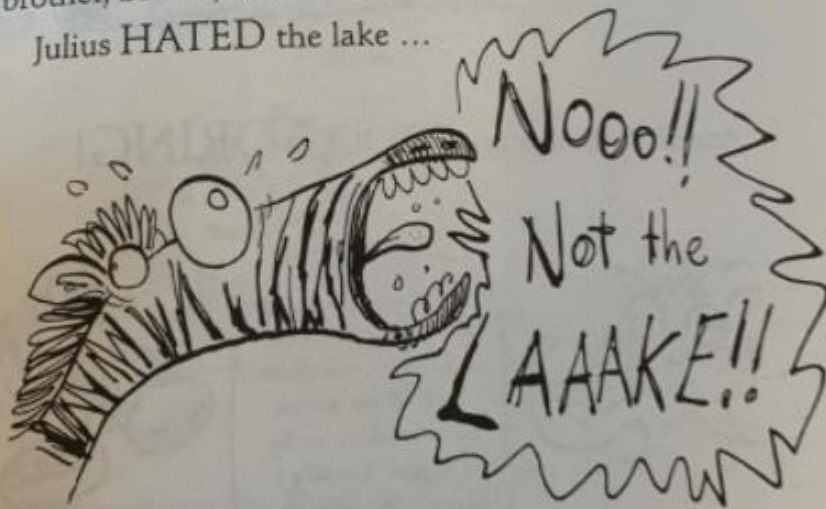
EXCITING, RIGHT?



(CHAPTER ONE)
LAKE OF DOOM

Life on the dusty, shrubby African plains wasn't all fun and games for Julius (i.e. eating grass all day). Every Wednesday, much to his disgust, his mum would drag him and his (very annoying, stupid) brother, Brutus, to the lake.

Julius **HATED** the lake ...



with a **PASSION!**

He thought all the animals **STANK!**



And that they were **SOOO BORING!**



...so, there I was, up to my neck in mud, wondering whether I would be eaten by crocodiles or by a hippo! Luckily I learned to swim as a youngster...



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 nifty plan to try and get out of going. "Look, Mum, I've found this little puddle. It'll do me just fine!" he said.



"No!" scolded his mum. "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 those to catch you," she said.

"What about those ferocious lions, then?" Julius protested.



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

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





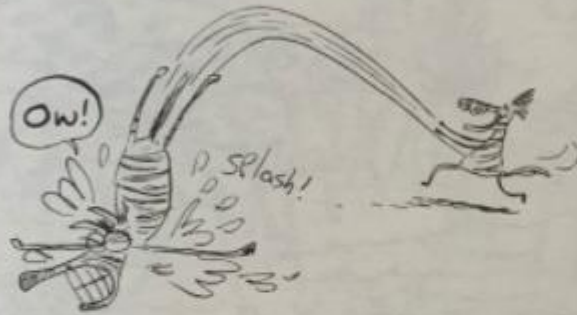
"Now, get to the lake this instant, or a lion with big teeth will be the least of your worries!"

Just as Julius was nursing his bruised bottom, Brutus strutted up to him. "Come on, bruv. The lake is brilliant! Far more exciting than your silly puddle."

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



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

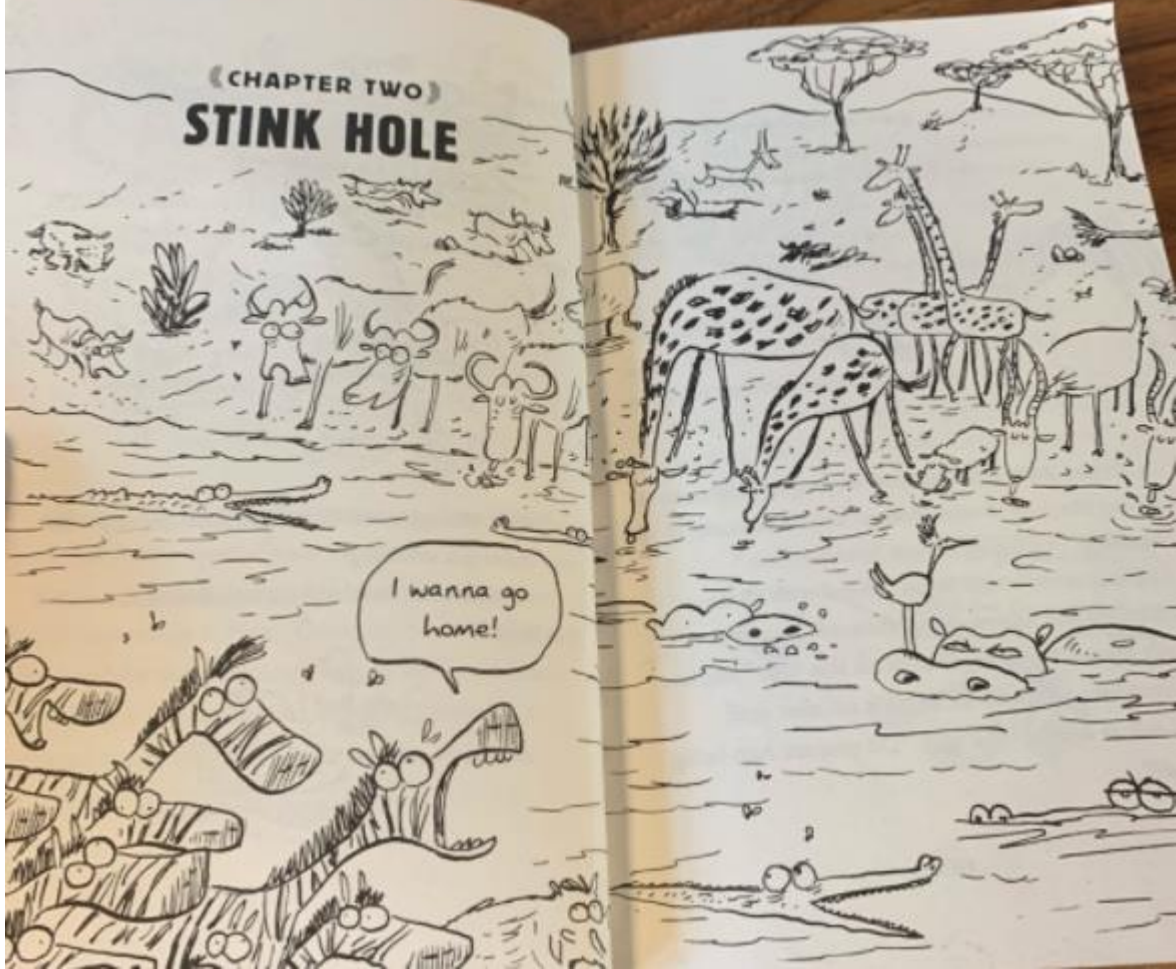


"Nope, thought not! Come on, nincompoop – last one there is a warthog!"

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 mum.

Julius sniffed the water, then creased 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 filth." 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 dribble from a hippo's mouth if he thought it would impress his friends.

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



Julius didn't fancy getting another kick up the bum.
So, reluctantly, he turned back.

As the rotten aroma of the lake wafted up his nostrils, Julius tried to imagine 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.



am.
He counted to
three, then took a big
GULP...



It tasted REVOLTING!
No stupid pretending was going to hide how vile
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 soon
get used to it."



I've been
drinking the
stuff for
years!

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



"NO, Julius!" she scolded. "We've only 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 turn 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 big 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!" barked 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 the like, thank you very much. But I'm not sure I fancy *your* chances."

"Don't you underestimate us warthogs," he warned, wagging his hoof. "We're *more* than able to dodge the wild beasts of *these* plains. Why, in fact, I think you'll find 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!

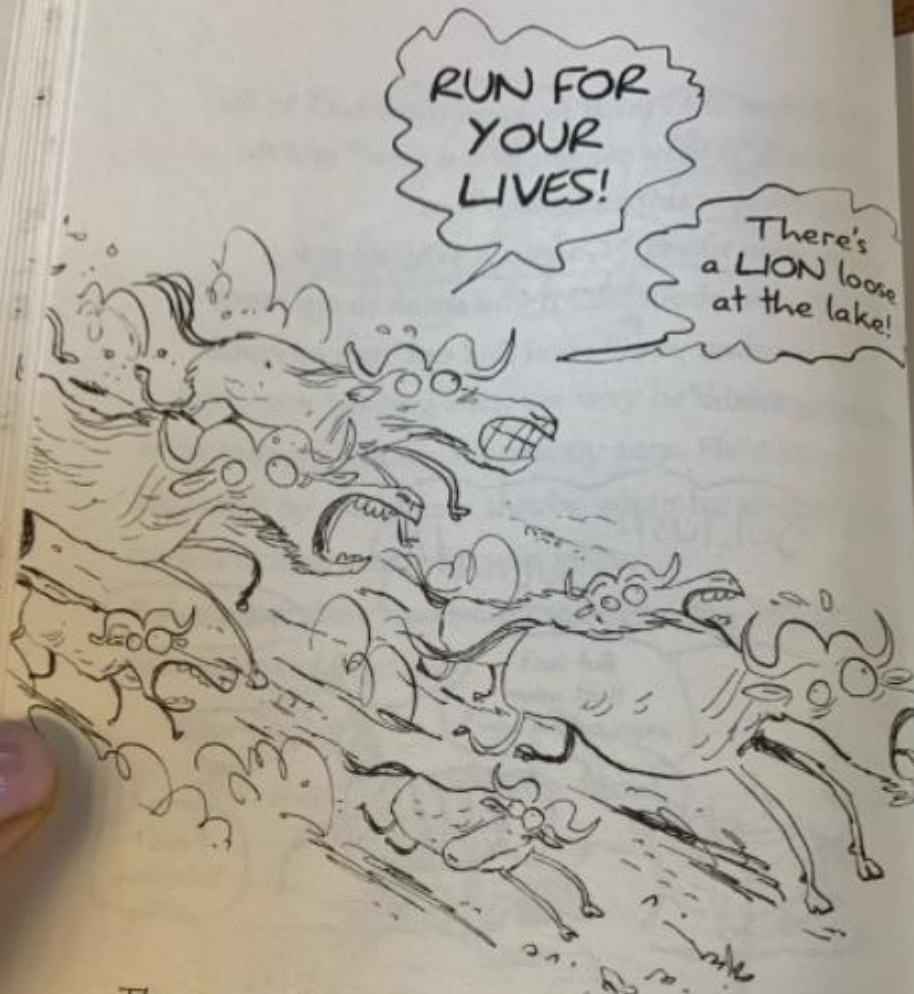


"Mr Zebra! Sir! I insist that you come back to the lake. It really is very dangerous out here!" said the little warthog, scampering after him.

Julius spun round. "Go away! Why do you suddenly care about me? If you speak to my mum and my brother, you'll soon 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 marched on, defiantly.



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... I don't want Mum and Brutus thinking I've been eaten or something," said Julius, scooting back towards the watering hole.



"But wait!" called the warthog. "It's not safe! here'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.

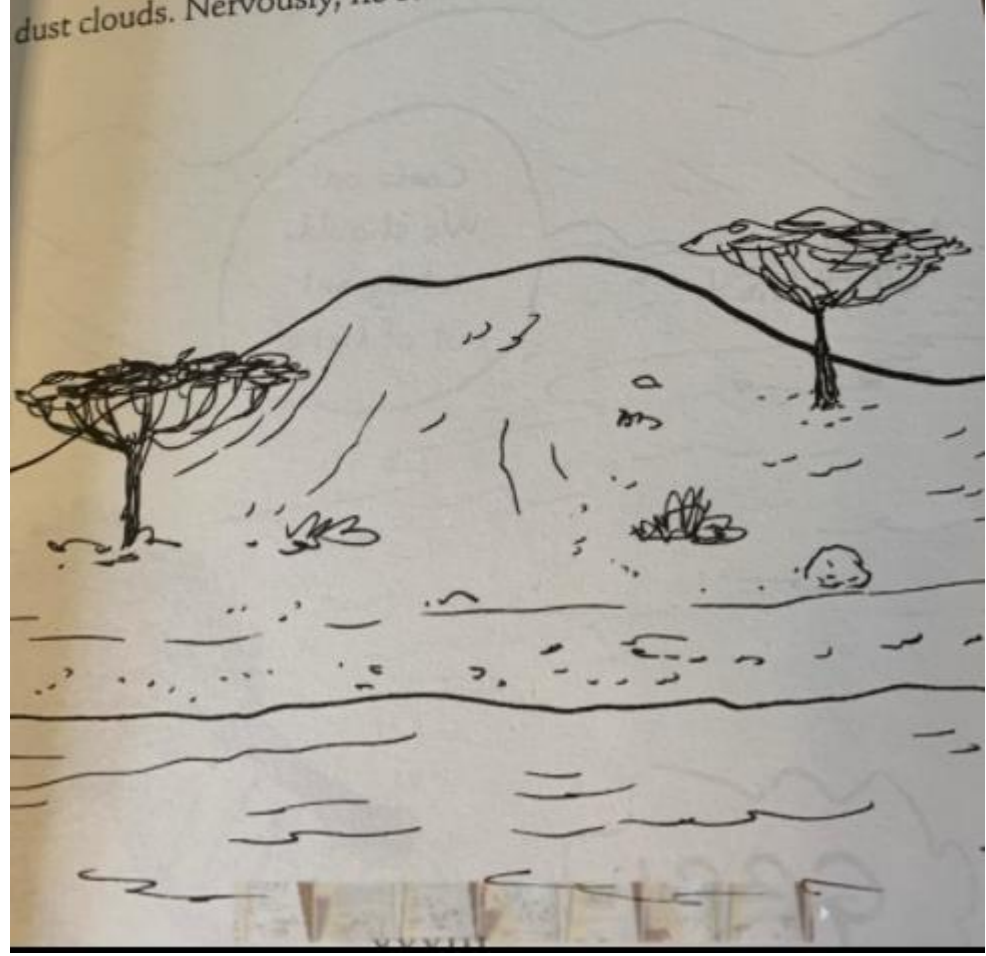
Julius ran to the spot where he'd stood earlier with his mum and Brutus. "I don't understand," he gasped, looking at the chaotic mess of footprints in the dirt. It was completely impossible to work out which way everyone had gone.



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

"But we have to figure out what's happened!"
"Erm ... 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."

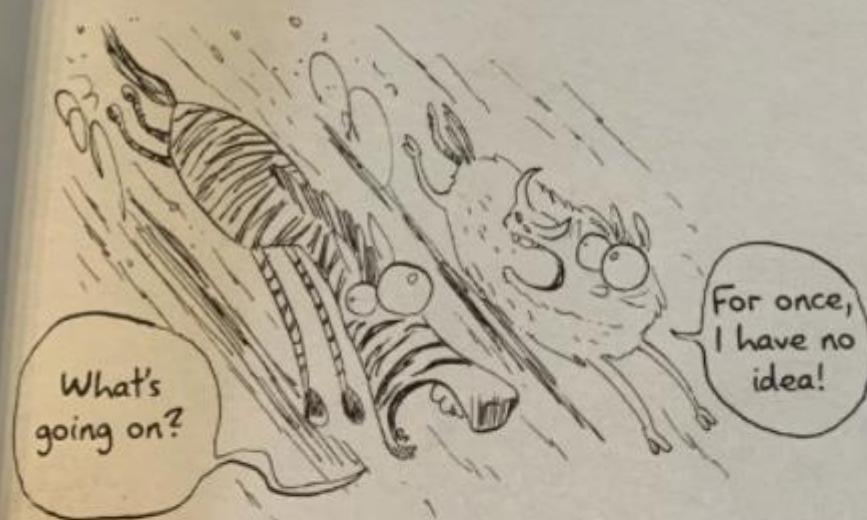
From across the water, the scruffy-looking beast
narrowed his eyes at Julius and the warthog and,
baring his great white pointy teeth, he let out a low,
rumbling growl.



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

The lion was also startled and jumped backwards. Through trees in the distance, a pack of agitated wolves bolted straight for him.

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



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