COVER NOT FINAL

MYTHS, GODS AND GLADIATORS IN ANCIENT ROME

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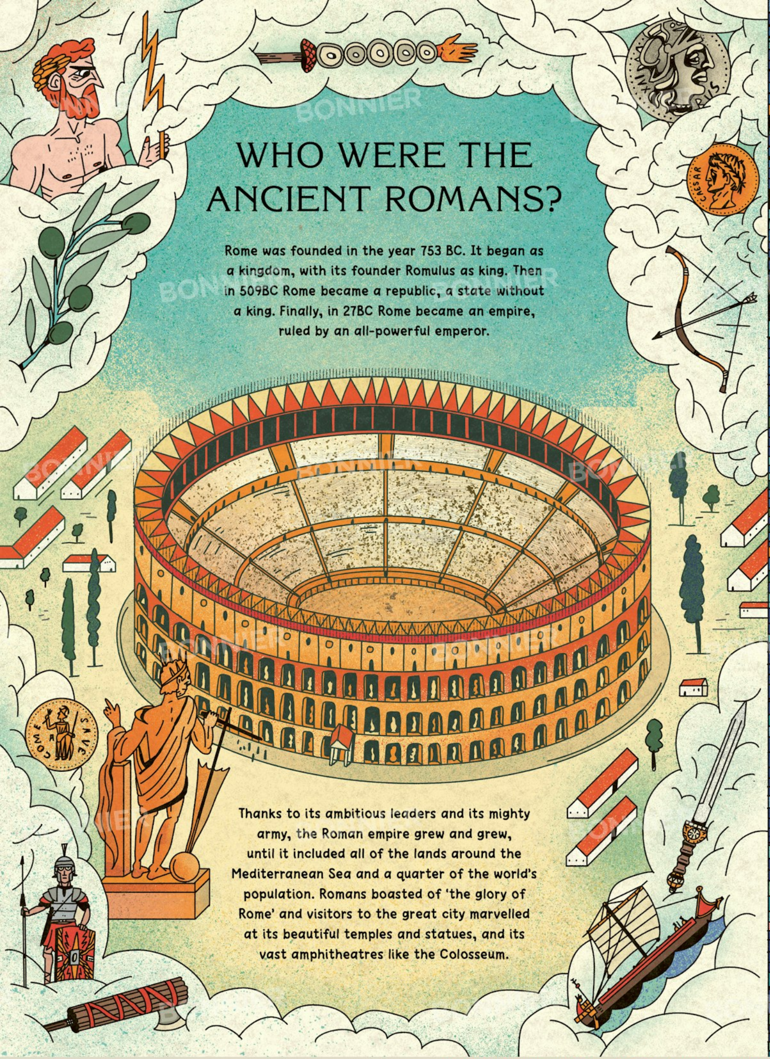
BIG PICTURE PRESS

WHO WERE THE ANCIENT ROMANS?

Rome was founded in the year 753 BC. It began as a kingdom, with its founder Romulus as king. Then in 509BC Rome became a republic, a state without a king. Finally, in 27BC Rome became an empire, ruled by an all-powerful emperor.

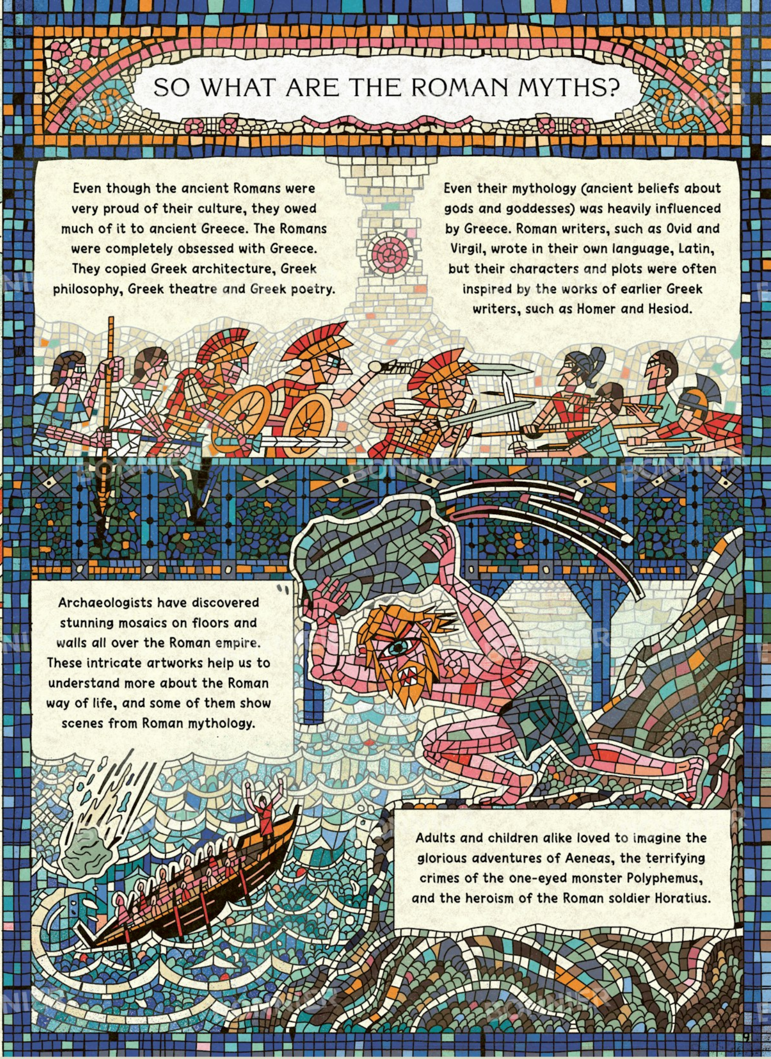


Thanks to its ambitious leaders and its mighty army, the Roman empire grew and grew, until it included all of the lands around the Mediterranean Sea and a quarter of the world's population. Romans boasted of 'the glory of Rome' and visitors to the great city marvelled at its beautiful temples and statues, and its vast amphitheatres like the Colosseum.

SO WHAT ARE THE ROMAN MYTHS?

Even though the ancient Romans were very proud of their culture, they owed much of it to ancient Greece. The Romans were completely obsessed with Greece. They copied Greek architecture, Greek philosophy, Greek theatre and Greek poetry.

Even their mythology (ancient beliefs about gods and goddesses) was heavily influenced by Greece. Roman writers, such as Ovid and Virgil, wrote in their own language, Latin, but their characters and plots were often inspired by the works of earlier Greek writers, such as Homer and Hesiod.



Archaeologists have discovered stunning mosaics on floors and walls all over the Roman empire. These intricate artworks help us to understand more about the Roman way of life, and some of them show scenes from Roman mythology.

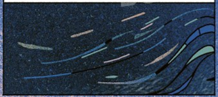
Adults and children alike loved to imagine the glorious adventures of Aeneas, the terrifying crimes of the one-eyed monster Polyphemus, and the heroism of the Roman soldier Horatius.

BONNIER

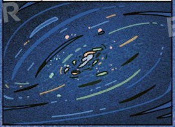
THE CREATION STORY

A creation myth is a story about how the world began. Ancient civilisations had all sorts of weird and wonderful ideas about how the world formed, and this is the Roman creation story.

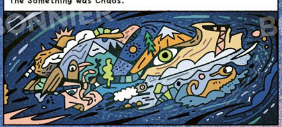
In the beginning, there was Nothing. That Nothing was Nox, goddess of night, spreading her black wings over the vast emptiness before her.



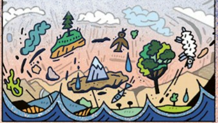
And then there was Something.



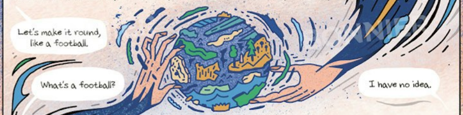
The Something was messy and disorganised. The Something was Chaos.



With a shuddering shrug of its shoulders, Chaos began to get organised. The light bits separated from the heavy bits, and the wet bits detached from the dry bits.

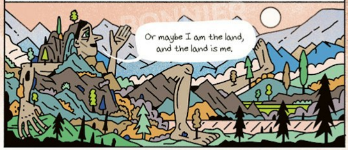


It was as if the heavenly fingers of some great god were at work, dividing solids from skies and liquid from air, moulding the Chaos slowly into shape.

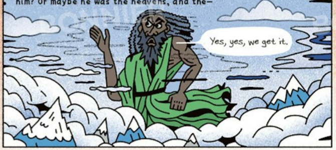

Let's make it round, like a football.
What's a football?
I have no idea.

Dryness bulged and buckled, forming craggy mountains and gloomy valleys. Wetness coursed in rivers and swelled in vast, blue oceans.

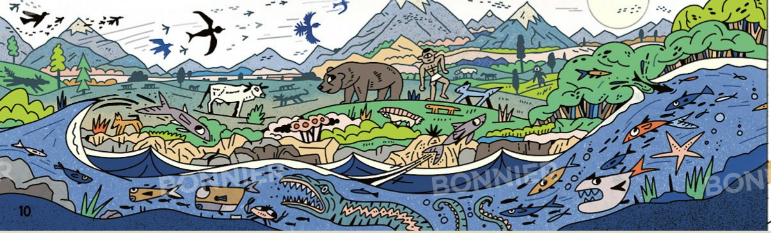
Terra, goddess of the land, appeared. Did Terra make the land or did the land make her?


Or maybe I am the land, and the land is me.

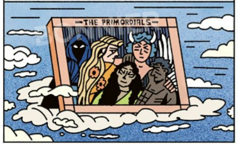
Caelus, god of the heavens, was there as well. Did Caelus make the heavens, or did the heavens make him? Or maybe he was the heavens, and the–


Yes, yes, we get it.

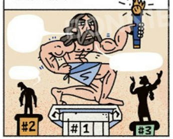
From the sea sprang fish, birds swarmed the air , and the land was overrun with pink fairy armadillos and other peculiar creatures.



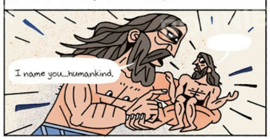
Meanwhile, the heavens brought forth gods and goddesses of all shapes and sizes.


THE PRIMORDIALS

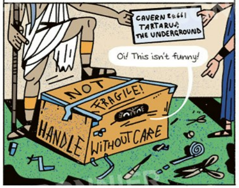
One of these gods, Prometheus, was the junk modelling champion of the universe.



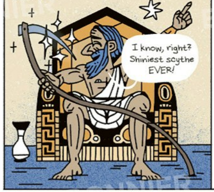
Prometheus mixed a lump of earth, a dash of water and a pinch of heaven, then moulded the mixture into the most beautiful shape he could imagine.


I name you...humankind.

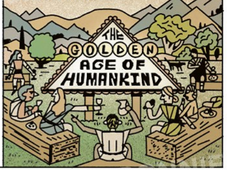
Life in the heavens was far from peaceful. Caelus was overthrown by his son Saturn, who banished him to the underworld.


CAVERN #661 TARTARUS, THE UNDERGROUND
Oi! This isn't funny!
NOT FRAGILE!
HANDLE WITHOUT CARE

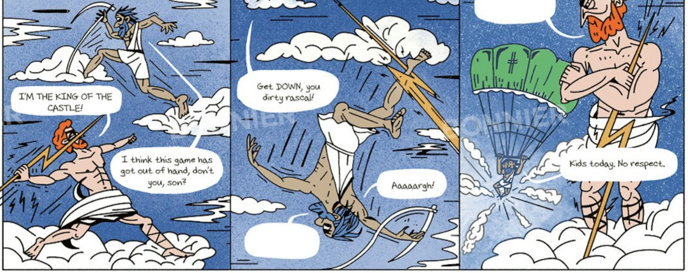
With his father gone, Saturn crowned himself king of the gods and ruler of the universe.


I know, right? Shiniest scythe EVER!

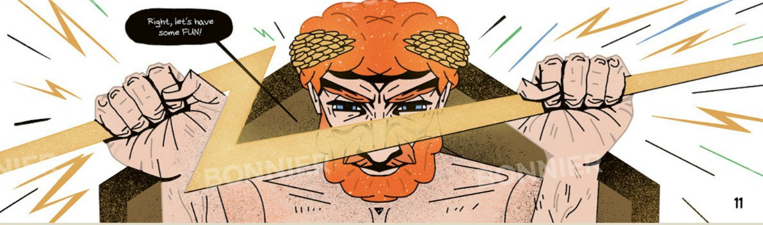
With Saturn reigning in the heavens, the humans on earth enjoyed an era of peace, happiness and All You Can Eat buffets. Looking back, the Romans called this THE GOLDEN AGE OF MANKIND.


THE GOLDEN AGE OF HUMANKIND

But it was not to last. Just as Caelus was overthrown by his son, Saturn was overthrown by his son, Jupiter.


I'M THE KING OF THE CASTLE!
I think this game has got out of hand, don't you, son?
Get DOWN, you dirty rascal!
Aaaaargh!
Kids today. No respect.

That headstrong, thundering son of Saturn seized the throne of power and ruled the cosmos from that day forth.


Right, let's have some FUN!

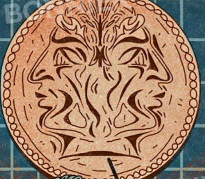
BONNIER

BONNIER

MEET THE ROMAN GODS

At one end of the Forum in ancient Rome stood the Porch of the Harmonious Gods, where a row of gold and bronze statues portrayed the twelve most important gods of Ancient Rome. These gods played a huge part in everyday life. If you offered them your prayers and sacrifices, they would be kind to you and bring you success.

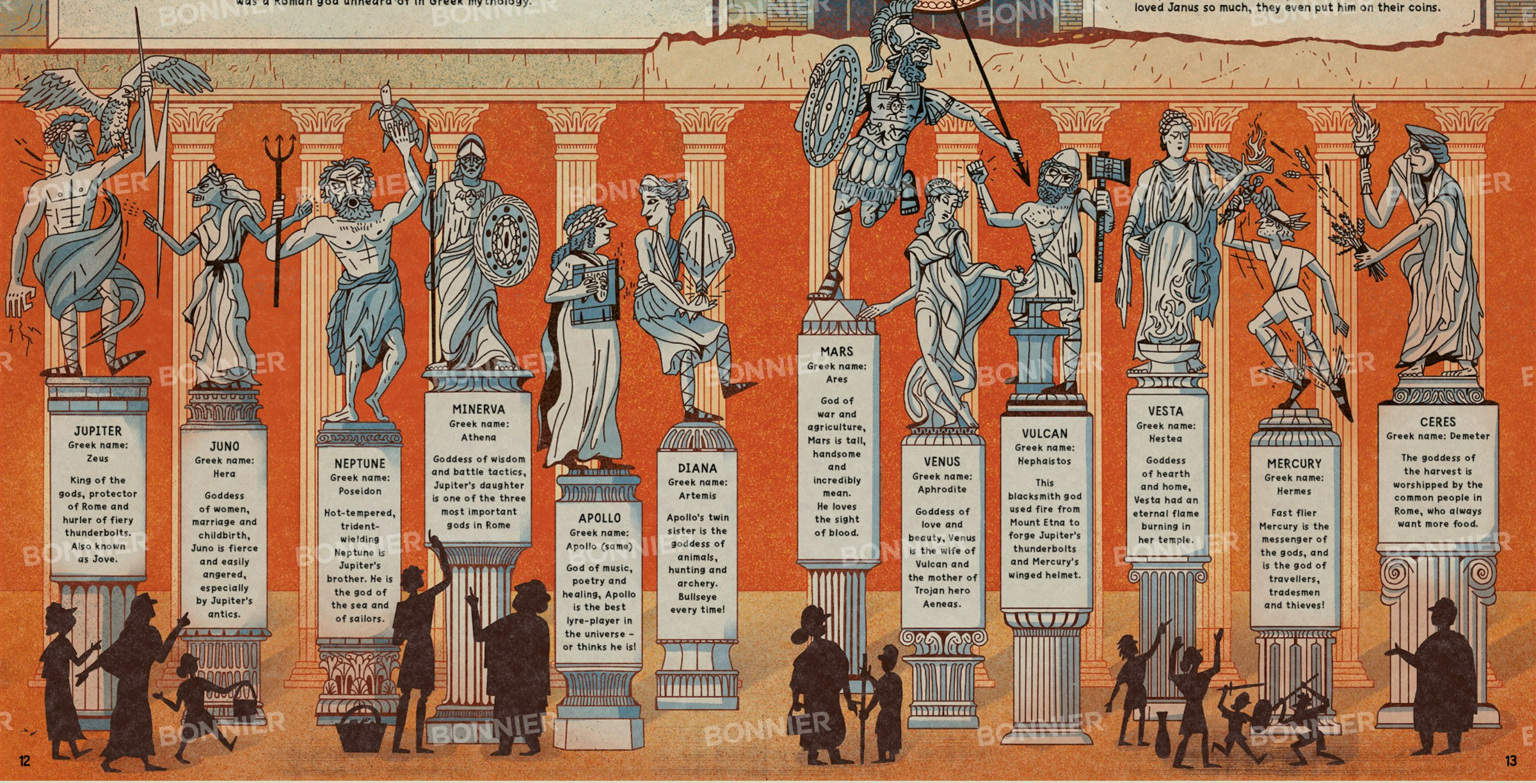
The Romans were heavily influenced by the ancient Greeks, and each of the Romans gods had a Greek equivalent...except for one. Janus, the god with two faces, was a Roman god unheard of in Greek mythology.



JANUS

Long before the city of Rome was built, Janus was a human king of Latium (Italy). When Jupiter overthrew Saturn, Janus welcomed Saturn into his home. In return, Saturn taught Janus how to plough, sow and harvest. Janus's farming skills caused his whole kingdom to prosper.

After his death, Janus became a god of beginnings and endings. He has two faces, one looking back to the past, the other looking forward to the future. Ancient Romans loved Janus so much, they even put him on their coins.



JUPITER
Greek name: Zeus

King of the gods, protector of Rome and hurler of fiery thunderbolts. Also known as Jove.

JUNO
Greek name: Hera

Goddess of women, marriage and childbirth, Juno is fierce and easily angered, especially by Jupiter's antics.

NEPTUNE
Greek name: Poseidon

Hot-tempered, trident-wielding Neptune is Jupiter's brother. He is the god of the sea and of sailors.

MINERVA
Greek name: Athena

Goddess of wisdom and battle tactics, Jupiter's daughter is one of the three most important gods in Rome

APOLLO
Greek name: Apollo (same)

God of music, poetry and healing, Apollo is the best lyre-player in the universe – or thinks he is!

DIANA
Greek name: Artemis

Apollo's twin sister is the goddess of animals, hunting and archery. Bullseye every time!

MARS
Greek name: Ares

God of war and agriculture, Mars is tall, handsome and incredibly mean. He loves the sight of blood.

VENUS
Greek name: Aphrodite

Goddess of love and beauty, Venus is the wife of Vulcan and the mother of Trojan hero Aeneas.

VULCAN
Greek name: Hephaistos

This blacksmith god used fire from Mount Etna to forge Jupiter's thunderbolts and Mercury's winged helmet.

VESTA
Greek name: Hestea

Goddess of hearth and home, Vesta had an eternal flame burning in her temple.

MERCURY
Greek name: Hermes

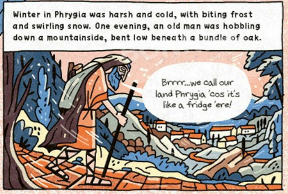
Fast flier Mercury is the messenger of the gods, and is the god of travellers, tradesmen and thieves!

CERES
Greek name: Demeter

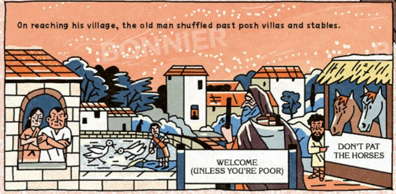
The goddess of the harvest is worshipped by the common people in Rome, who always want more food.

BAUCIS AND PHILEMON

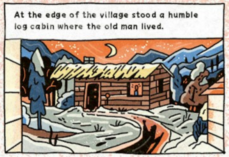
Winter in Phrygia was harsh and cold, with biting frost and swirling snow. One evening, an old man was hobbling down a mountainside, bent low beneath a bundle of oak.


Brrrr...we call our land Phrygia 'cos it's like a fridge 'ere!

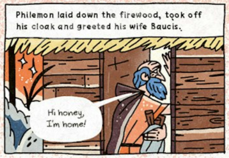
On reaching his village, the old man shuffled past posh villas and stables.

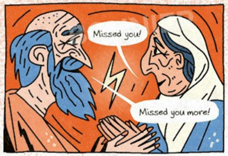

WELCOME (UNLESS YOU'RE POOR)
DON'T PAT THE HORSES

At the edge of the village stood a humble log cabin where the old man lived.

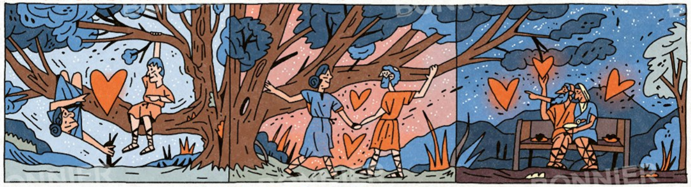


Philemon laid down the firewood, took off his cloak and greeted his wife Baucis.

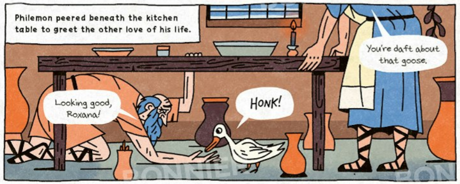

Hi honey, I'm home!


Missed you!
Missed you more!

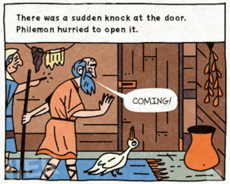
After fifty years of marriage, Philemon and Baucis were as much in love as when they first met. More so, in fact. Their love for each other had grown and deepened over the decades like the roots of an ancient tree.



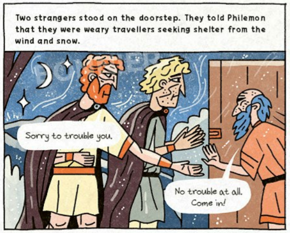
Philemon peered beneath the kitchen table to greet the other love of his life.


You're daft about that goose.
Looking good, Roxana!
HONK!

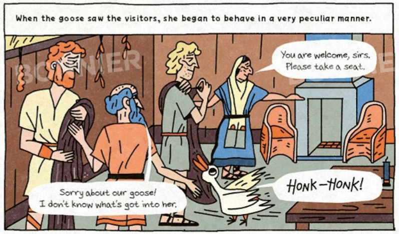
There was a sudden knock at the door. Philemon hurried to open it.



Two strangers stood on the doorstep. They told Philemon that they were weary travellers seeking shelter from the wind and snow.

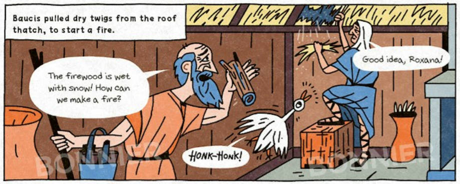

Sorry to trouble you.
No trouble at all. Come in!

When the goose saw the visitors, she began to behave in a very peculiar manner.

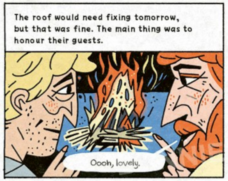

You are welcome, sirs. Please take a seat.
Sorry about our goose! I don't know what's got into her.
HONK–HONK!

RULE 1 The first rule of Phrygian hospitality was this: Make sure your guests are toasty warm.

Baucis pulled dry twigs from the roof thatch, to start a fire.

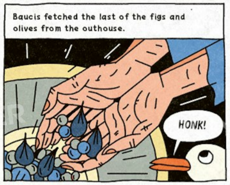

The firewood is wet with snow! How can we make a fire?
Good idea, Roxana!
HONK-HONK!

The roof would need fixing tomorrow, but that was fine. The main thing was to honour their guests.

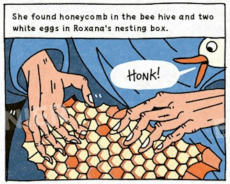

Oooh, lovely.

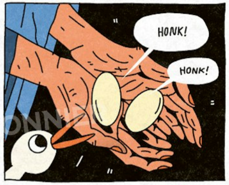
RULE 2 The second rule of Phrygian hospitality was just as important: Make sure your guests are well fed.

Baucis fetched the last of the figs and olives from the outhouse.

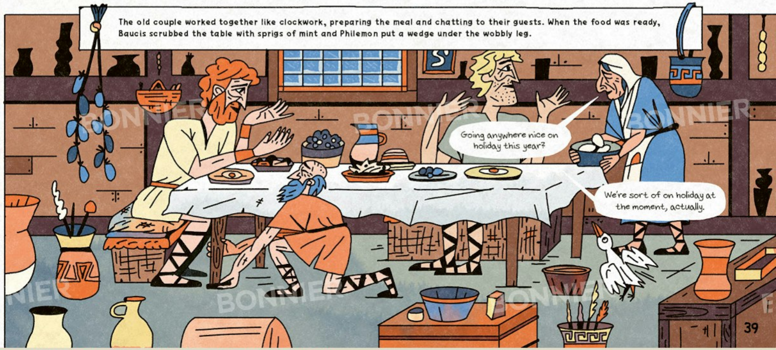


She found honeycomb in the bee hive and two white eggs in Roxana's nesting box.

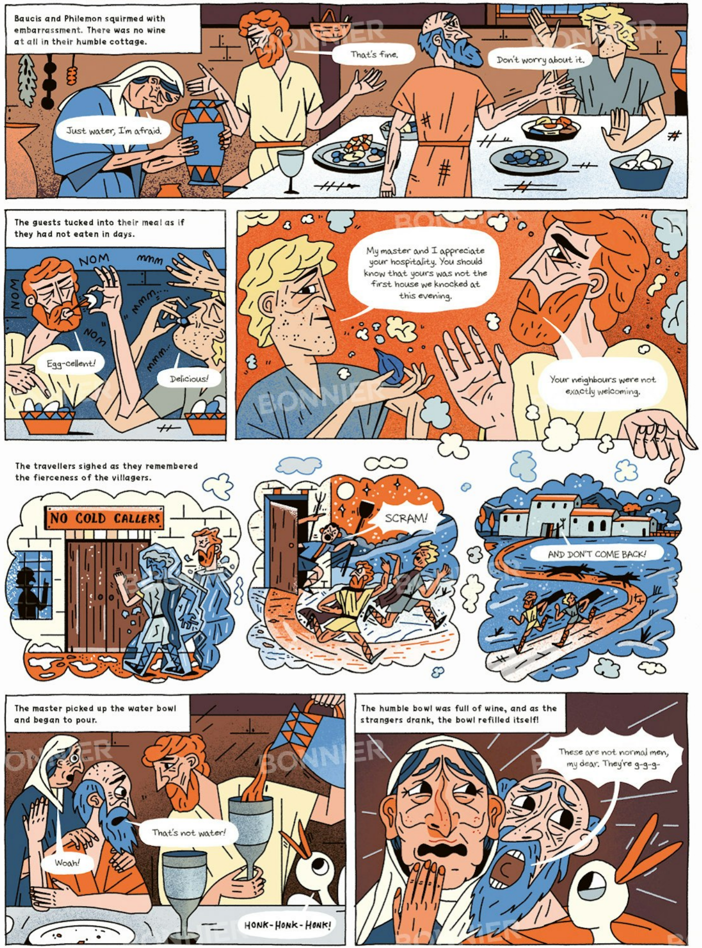


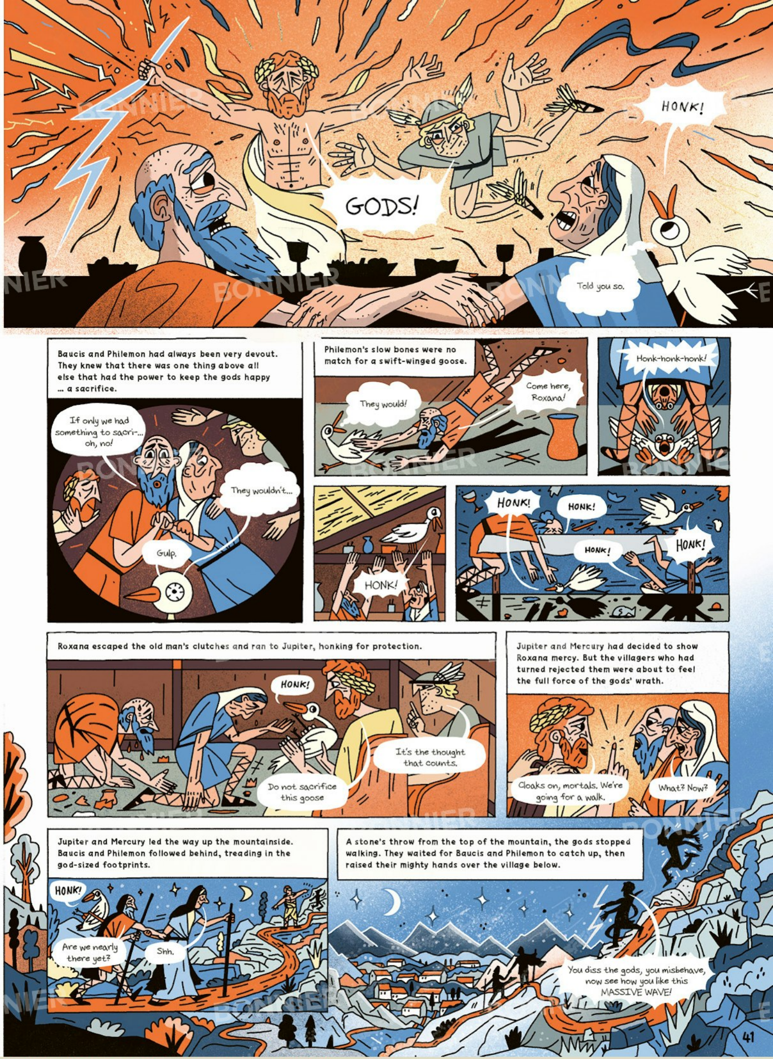


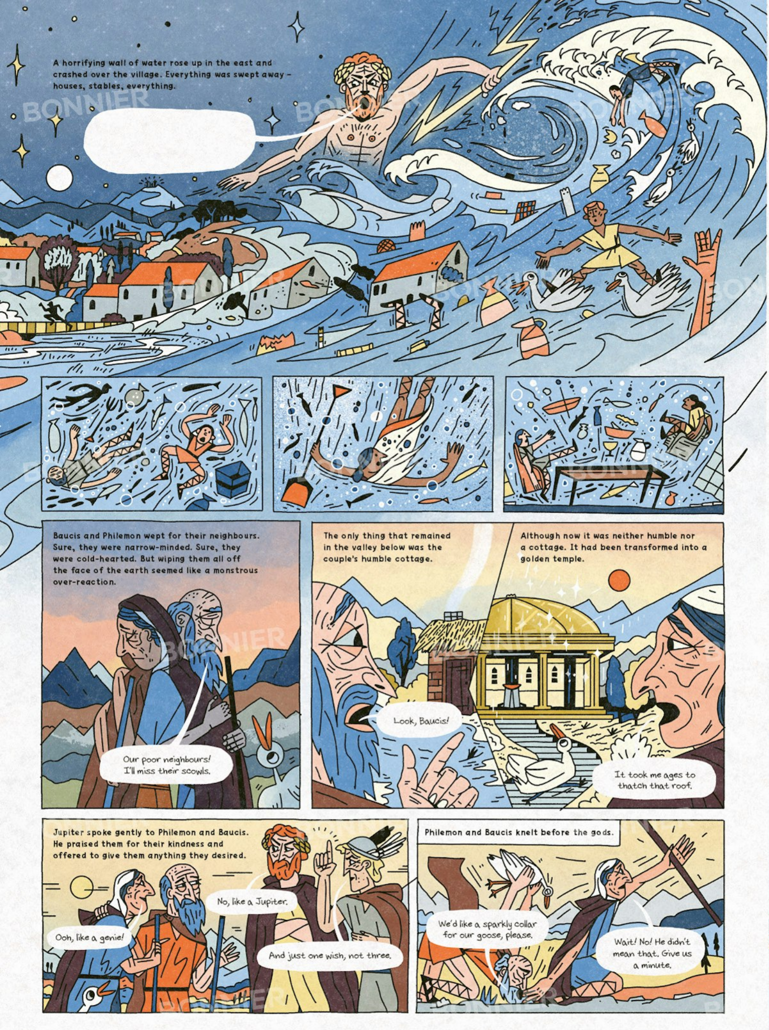
The old couple worked together like clockwork, preparing the meal and chatting to their guests. When the food was ready, Baucis scrubbed the table with sprigs of mint and Philemon put a wedge under the wobbly leg.


Going anywhere nice on holiday this year?
We're sort of on holiday at the moment, actually.

RULE 3 The third and final rule of Phrygian hospitality was this: Don't forget the wine.


Baucis and Philemon squirmed with embarrassment. There was no wine at all in their humble cottage.
That's fine.
Don't worry about it.
Just water, I'm afraid.
The guests tucked into their meal as if they had not eaten in days.
NOM
mmm
NOM
mmm...
NOM
mmm...
Egg-cellent!
Delicious!
My master and I appreciate your hospitality. You should know that yours was not the first house we knocked at this evening.
Your neighbours were not exactly welcoming.
The travellers sighed as they remembered the fierceness of the villagers.
NO COLD CALLERS
SCRAM!
AND DON'T COME BACK!
The master picked up the water bowl and began to pour.
That's not water!
Woah!
HONK-HONK-HONK!
The humble bowl was full of wine, and as the strangers drank, the bowl refilled itself!
These are not normal men, my dear. They're g-g-g-


GODS!
HONK!
Told you so.
Baucis and Philemon had always been very devout. They knew that there was one thing above all else that had the power to keep the gods happy ... a sacrifice.
If only we had something to sacri-... oh, no!
They wouldn't...
Gulp.
Philemon's slow bones were no match for a swift-winged goose.
They would!
Come here, Roxana!
Honk-honk-honk!
HONK!
HONK!
HONK!
HONK!
HONK!
Roxana escaped the old man's clutches and ran to Jupiter, honking for protection.
HONK!
It's the thought that counts.
Do not sacrifice this goose
Jupiter and Mercury had decided to show Roxana mercy. But the villagers who had turned rejected them were about to feel the full force of the gods' wrath.
Cloaks on, mortals. We're going for a walk.
What? Now?
Jupiter and Mercury led the way up the mountainside. Baucis and Philemon followed behind, treading in the god-sized footprints.
HONK!
Are we nearly there yet?
Shh.
A stone's throw from the top of the mountain, the gods stopped walking. They waited for Baucis and Philemon to catch up, then raised their mighty hands over the village below.
You diss the gods, you misbehave, now see how you like this MASSIVE WAVE!



A horrifying wall of water rose up in the east and crashed over the village. Everything was swept away – houses, stables, everything.

Baucis and Philemon wept for their neighbours. Sure, they were narrow-minded. Sure, they were cold-hearted. But wiping them all off the face of the earth seemed like a monstrous over-reaction.

Our poor neighbours! I'll miss their scowls.

The only thing that remained in the valley below was the couple's humble cottage.

Although now it was neither humble nor a cottage. It had been transformed into a golden temple.

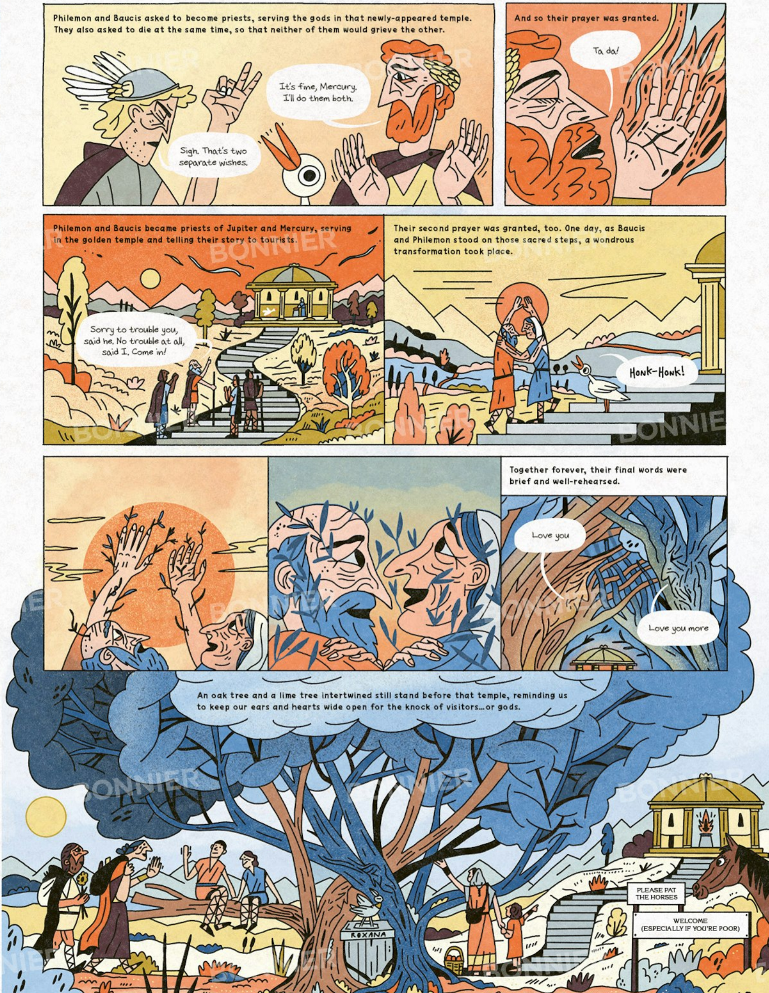
Look, Baucis!
It took me ages to thatch that roof.

Jupiter spoke gently to Philemon and Baucis. He praised them for their kindness and offered to give them anything they desired.

Ooh, like a genie!
No, like a Jupiter.
And just one wish, not three.

Philemon and Baucis knelt before the gods.

We'd like a sparkly collar for our goose, please.
Wait! No! He didn't mean that. Give us a minute.



Philemon and Baucis asked to become priests, serving the gods in that newly-appeared temple. They also asked to die at the same time, so that neither of them would grieve the other.

Sigh. That's two separate wishes.
It's fine, Mercury. I'll do them both.

And so their prayer was granted.

Ta da!

Philemon and Baucis became priests of Jupiter and Mercury, serving in the golden temple and telling their story to tourists.

Sorry to trouble you, said he. No trouble at all, said I. Come in!

Their second prayer was granted, too. One day, as Baucis and Philemon stood on those sacred steps, a wondrous transformation took place.

Together forever, their final words were brief and well-rehearsed.

Love you
Love you more

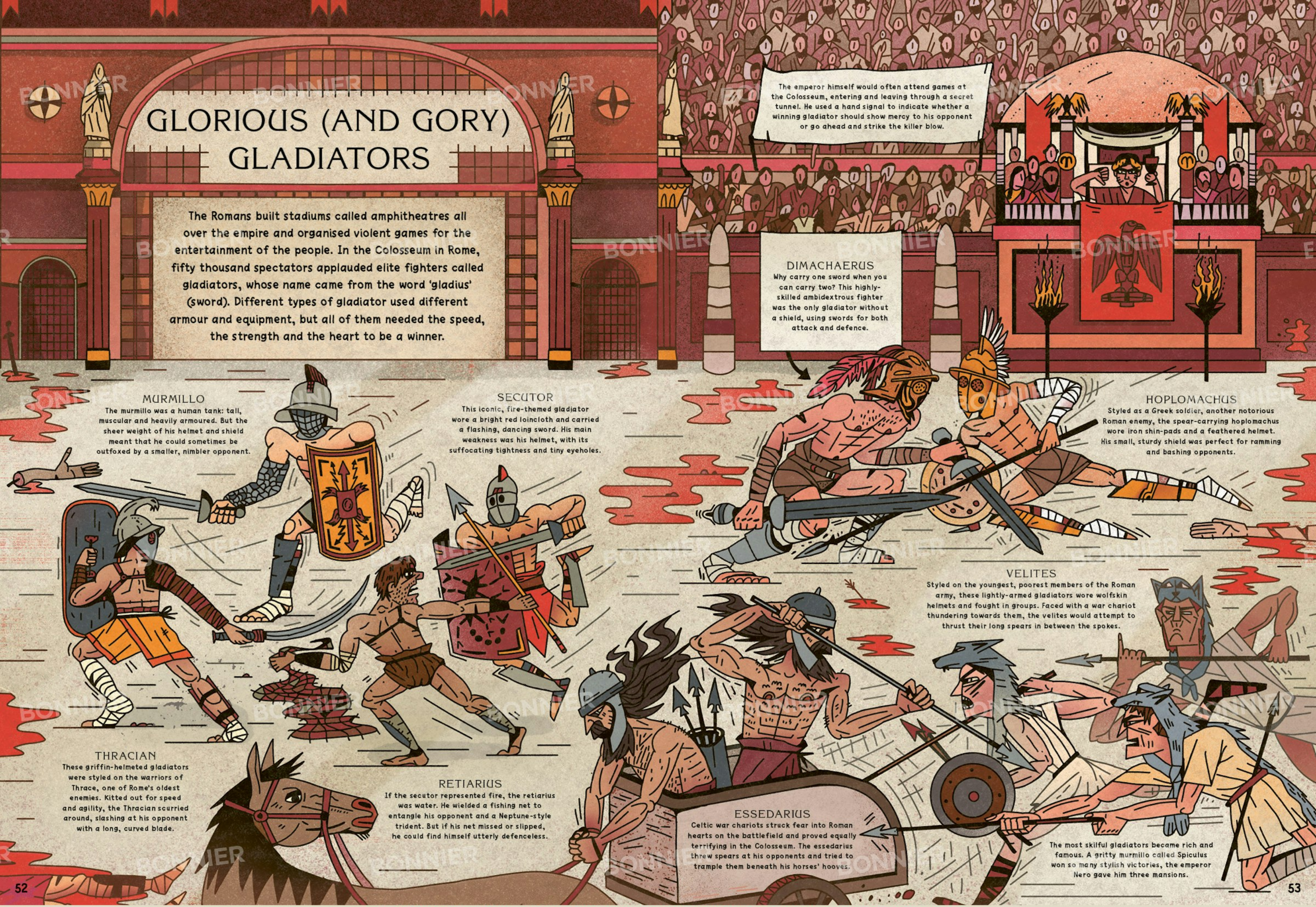
An oak tree and a lime tree intertwined still stand before that temple, reminding us to keep our ears and hearts wide open for the knock of visitors…or gods.

ROXANA
PLEASE PAT THE HORSES
WELCOME (ESPECIALLY IF YOU'RE POOR)

BONNIER

GLORIOUS (AND GORY) GLADIATORS

The Romans built stadiums called amphitheatres all over the empire and organised violent games for the entertainment of the people. In the Colosseum in Rome, fifty thousand spectators applauded elite fighters called gladiators, whose name came from the word 'gladius' (sword). Different types of gladiator used different armour and equipment, but all of them needed the speed, the strength and the heart to be a winner.



MURMILLO

The murmillo was a human tank: tall, muscular and heavily armoured. But the sheer weight of his helmet and shield meant that he could sometimes be outfoxed by a smaller, nimbler opponent.

SECUTOR

This iconic, fire-themed gladiator wore a bright red loincloth and carried a flashing, dancing sword. His main weakness was his helmet, with its suffocating tightness and tiny eyeholes.

THRACIAN

These griffin-helmeted gladiators were styled on the warriors of Thrace, one of Rome's oldest enemies. Kitted out for speed and agility, the Thracian scurried around, slashing at his opponent with a long, curved blade.

RETIARIUS

If the secutor represented fire, the retiarius was water. He wielded a fishing net to entangle his opponent and a Neptune-style trident. But if his net missed or slipped, he could find himself utterly defenceless.

The emperor himself would often attend games at the Colosseum, entering and leaving through a secret tunnel. He used a hand signal to indicate whether a winning gladiator should show mercy to his opponent or go ahead and strike the killer blow.

DIMACHAERUS

Why carry one sword when you can carry two? This highly-skilled ambidextrous fighter was the only gladiator without a shield, using swords for both attack and defence.

HOPLOMACHUS

Styled as a Greek soldier, another notorious Roman enemy, the spear-carrying hoplomachus wore iron shin-pads and a feathered helmet. His small, sturdy shield was perfect for ramming and bashing opponents.

VELITES

Styled on the youngest, poorest members of the Roman army, these lightly-armed gladiators wore wolfskin helmets and fought in groups. Faced with a war chariot thundering towards them, the velites would attempt to thrust their long spears in between the spokes.

ESSEDARIUS

Celtic war chariots struck fear into Roman hearts on the battlefield and proved equally terrifying in the Colosseum. The essedarius threw spears at his opponents and tried to trample them beneath his horses' hooves.

The most skilful gladiators became rich and famous. A gritty murmillo called Spiculus won so many stylish victories, the emperor Nero gave him three mansions.