Babette Puetz, "Entry on: The Secret of the Roman Gladiator [Das Geheimnis des römischen Gladiators] by Sabine Kalwitzki ", peer-reviewed by Elizabeth Hale and Lisa Maurice. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/376. Entry version as of November 11, 2026.

Sabine Kalwitzki

The Secret of the Roman Gladiator [Das Geheimnis des römischen Gladiators]

Germany (2013)

TAGS: Rome

We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
Title of the work	The Secret of the Roman Gladiator [Das Geheimnis des römischen Gladiators]
Country of the First Edition	Germany
Original Language	German
First Edition Date	2013
First Edition Details	Sabine Kalwitzki, *Das Geheimnis des römischen Gladiators*. Würzburg: Arena Verlag, 2013, 51 pp.
ISBN	10: 3401096443 / 13: 9783401096445
Genre	Detective and mystery fiction, Didactic fiction, Historical fiction, Instructional and educational works, Magic realist fiction
Target Audience	Children
Author of the Entry	Babette Puetz, Victoria University of Wellington, babette.puetz@vuw.ac.nz
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Creators

Sabine Kalwitzki (Author)

Sabine Kalwitzki lives with her family in Munich (Germany). She is a primary school teacher with a special interest in story-telling and theatre. Sabine has published a number of books for early readers, some story books for children, CDs with fantasy stories and two books of Maths games for primary school children.

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Additional information

Summary

Primary-school aged friends Caro and Paul and police dog Benno are transported to ancient Rome by a magic coin. They meet Roman children Flavia and Titus who invite them to their house and tell them about gold-thieves who are burgling Roman houses. The children and Benno spy on the household slave Rufus meeting a stranger and overhear them talking about gold. They suspect that those two are the gold-thieves.

At dinner, Flavia's and Titus' father Marcus tells the children about gladiators fighting lions in the arena. The children notice that the slave Rufus is extremely nervous. They see him leave, pursue him and again spy on him meeting the stranger. We now learn that the stranger is Rufus' older brother. The children watch Rufus and his brother break into a villa. Titus and Flavia run home to tell their father to alert the guards. Caro and Paul follow the thieves into the house and watch them disable a snake trap in order to open a chest of gold. We now find out that Rufus' brother is a famous gladiator called Primus. The brothers are forced to steal because Primus is being blackmailed by a man called Servius. Should Primus refuse to pay Servius, he will send two lions into the arena with Primus instead of one. The thieves detect Caro and Paul, Primus threatens them with a sword, but Rufus recognises the children. At that moment, the guards arrive. Caro and Paul tell the thieves to flee. The two men escape over the roof. The children mislead the guards as to the direction the slaves have taken.

The next morning, the thieves send the children a message written on a stone, telling them that they made it to safety and thanking them. The children say goodbye and Caro, Paul and Benno are transported back to their own time.

Analysis

This is an exciting mystery story for early readers from 6-8 years of age with a quasi-didactic purpose of educating children in the social history of ancient Rome. Most of this story is set in ancient Rome and can be used as an introduction into some aspects of ancient Roman daily life. We meet a Roman family and their slave, a gladiator and Roman guards. We hear about Roman foods, gladiators are mentioned, as well as other details of Roman everyday life, such as

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	that houses were lit by torches. The illustrations provide more information: Roman clothing (tunics, toga, gladiator's outfit, Roman guards in uniform including spear and helmet), Roman houses, Roman statues, columns, amphorae, a throw with a Roman-style decorative border, and a Roman coin with Julius Caesar, a picture of Caesar in a modern book (which helps the children identify the coin), an aqueduct, an arena with fighting gladiators, graffiti referring to a gladiator, a gladius, a slave serving typical Roman food (bread, olives).
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Rome
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adventure Child, children Friendship History Society Travel

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