

Benorix Hur: A Race for Freedom

By Alice Nelson

An adaptation of Lewis Wallace's novel *Ben-Hur*, with inspiration from *Asterix* comics by René Goscinny (writer) and Albert Uderzo (illustrator)

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An epically hilarious tale (Sea Battles! Horse Chariots!) of a Gaul warrior's vengeance under the rule of the Roman Empire.

Characters

*= historical figures

- *Hypatia:** Narrators and Chorus Leaders. She is a famed inventor, astronomer, mathematician and philosopher. Note: can we done with 3 actors, lines devided.
- Chorus: (1-5):** A group of actors in togas who comment on moral issues, react to the characters decisions and sometimes speak in unison. Once they enter, they should stay close to Hypatia. Note: can be done with more than 5 actors.
- Villagers of Gaul (8-10):** Specifically the Arvernix Celtic tribe (located in what is today the French Auvergne region), one of the most powerful tribes in ancient Gaul. They are opposed to the Romans and want freedom. They wear mismatched, colorful patterned tunics, with big buckled belts. The men have long pants under their tunics.
- Benorix Hur:** (child Benorix/ teenager Benorix) A young Gaul girl, then teenager who fights for her people. Fierce, compassionate and brave.
- Styolistix Hur:** Younger sister to Benorix. Boy crazy.
- Motherix Hur:** Mother to Benorix. A fierce woman who believes in equal rights.
- Fatherix Hur:** Father to Benorix. A peaceful man who believes in equal rights.
- Barker:** Loud Gaul Announcer at the entrance of Circus Minimus.
- Velocitrix:** A fast Gaul chariot racer at Circus Minimus. Kind and inspiring.
- Quickix:** Velocitrix's horse. Easily distracted by food.
- *Arachne:** Weaver who was transformed into a spider. Competitive and strong-willed.
- Chorus of Spiders (1-6):** Spiders who follow Arachne.
- Slyorix (Sly):** (child Slyorix/ teenager Slyorix) As a child, Benorix's best friend. As a teenager, a Tribune, then Consul in the Roman Empire. Two faced and self-serving.
- Hypersonix:** Benorix's horse. Fast and smart.
- Roman Soldiers (8-10):** Under the command of the Roman Emperor. They want to conquer.
- Jerryatrix:** A Gaul villager, very old, losing his vision and hearing. Grandfather of Confidantix.
- Confidantix:** A Gaul villager and granddaughter to Jerryatrix.
- Sarcastix:** Sidekick to Sly. Snaky.
- Tribune:** Ruthless Roman Tribune
- *Governor Valerius Gratus:** Governor of Rome. Loves to fire people and is short tempered.
- *Quintus Arrius:** Consul and Roman warship commander.
- Drummer:** At the front of the galley warship.
- Prisoners (10-15):** Tired and starving. They row the Galley ship.
- Ship Guards (4-5):** Tough guys on the warship that berate the prisoners.
- Pirates (8-10):** Fierce band of pirates who are after whatever is on board other ships.
- Boisterix:** Horse attendant for Quintus Arrius. Loud, good natured and encouraging.

Citizen of Rome:	Citizens who are free and love Chariot Races. They wear white togas.
Draco:	Sly's Chariot horse. A fighter but will only put up with so much.
Albanus:	Roman Chariot Racer. Very little experience.
Anxietix:	Albanus' Chariot Horse. Very nervous.
Lucanus:	Roman Chariot Racer. In love with his fans.
Vainix:	Lucanus' Chariot Horse. Very vain.
*Emperor Tiberius:	Succeeded first emperor, Augustus. Very deadpan and apathetic.
Boys:	Young girls disguised as boys, training to be Chariot Racers.

SETTINGS

Arvernix- Large Styrofoam menhir standing stones, boulders, trees, bushes. Since the Gaul Villagers are always on the move, there can be things lying about: line with clothes drying, cooking pots on a fire, etc.

Rome- Large Styrofoam Pillars (that can be moved to represent different locations).

Use of projections: A screen could be behind the performers where there are projections of the forest, Roman houses, ocean, and race track at Circus Maximus.

STYLE

Chorus work: This is an opportunity for the actors to play with gesture, tableau and working in unison. The tableaus in the script are only suggested options; feel free to create your own tableaus that serve the chorus & Hypatia's storytelling.

The scenes should flow from one to the next; as characters are exiting, others are entering. NO BLACKOUTS until the end of the play- this will keep the momentum going. Since the show has various locations and action (chariot racing, ships on the ocean, etc.) sound effects are key to igniting the imagination of the audience and the actors. It will help create the atmosphere and support the mime work onstage.

Slaves or prisoners can do the set changes- they are workers, so it makes sense that they are setting up the scenes.

CHARIOT RACE (Act 3)

As it's impossible to get the budget to do a chariot race onstage, this is the low-budget version, which can be extremely charming. Each racer has one horse. They wear a Chariot box (can be cardboard with straps over their shoulders) with wheels (on the sides). The horse is facing downstage with the chariot and racer behind (upstage). The horse can be kneeling, so that we can see the racer. It would be great if the horses can be on scooters (platform with wheels). The actor should play the physicality of the race, that the track is bumpy, and they have to lean to take a corner. Miming is key for this scene to work, and the mime can be very cartoon- we'll buy it as long as the actors are specific in their actions and commit.

Act 1

Intro: Hypatia Takes Us Back in Time

Epic music swells. Hypatia enters and strikes a dynamic poses.

HYPATIA : You are here for the story of Benorix Hur! A Gaul warrior who seeks vengeance under the rule of the Roman Empire! I am Hypatia. A super smart philosopher, astronomer and mathematician. Allow me to bring you into the world of our story through a short summary. This summary will be told by the Chorus.

Chorus 1-5 enters.

HYPATIA: Since I know the story best, I will be your Chorus Leader.

Throughout the next section the chorus delivers their dialogue with gestures in unison and/or tableaux which support their storytelling.

HYPATIA: We should probably start with Julius Caesar.

CHORUS ALL: In 49 BC he was Rome's greatest keener.

CHORUS 1: He was Rome's greatest general of the army.

CHORUS 2: He was what you might call smarmy.

CHORUS ALL: He was invading countries left and right.

CHORUS 3: He loved to put up a good fight.

Tableau: Julius Caesar and his army with swords raised. Citizens running away.

HYPATIA: Julius Caesar wanted to rule Rome like a king.

CHORUS 4: But the senators-

CHORUS ALL: Those who shared the power over Rome-

CHORUS 5: Didn't want him to run their home.

Tableau: Julius Caesar, filled with pride, in the middle. Senators in a circle around him, facing out.

CHORUS 1, 2: They assassinated him. *(they join the tableau)*

Everyone slowly turns in on Caesar, who's expression goes from greatness to terrified.

HYPATIA: But his legacy did live on through his adopted son.

CHORUS 3, 4: Augustus.

CHORUS 5: It was the kingdom he had won.

CHORUS 1, 2: The first Emperor of the Roman Empire.

Tableau: Augustus appears, as a snotty brat, and those around him bow down.

HYPATIA: Augustus enjoyed ruling. He also enjoyed Roman entertainment, especially the Gladiator fights.

CHORUS 3, 4: Which sometimes ended in last rites.

Tableau: Gladiators fighting-someone clearly losing- and Augustus watching with the crowd, perhaps being fed grapes and fanned.

HYPATIA: And who didn't love a good chariot race.

CHORUS ALL: At the Circus Maximus.

Tableau: Racers and horses- neck to neck. Augustus watches with the crowd on the edge of his seat, perhaps he's sitting on a servant.

HYPATIA: Augustus was the Emperor, continuing Caesar's legacy of conquering countries.

CHORUS 1,
2 & 3: Some might say abruptly.

HYPATIA: And, although Caesar had conquered Gaul-

CHORUS ALL: Which is today's France-

HYPATIA: There was one tiny Celtic village-

CHORUS ALL: Arvernix

HYPATIA: That kept moving around, hiding, and thus was never conquered. And this is where we begin our story of -

CHORUS ALL: Benorix Hur.

They strike an epic pose. Benorix Hur enters, runs downstage, and strikes an epic pose- Superhero like.

HYPATIA: Benorix Hur is trying to follow her passion -racing.

CHORUS 4, 5: It's an impossible dream she is chasing.

HYPATIA: Our story begins when Benorix was very young...

Scene 1: Benorix Goes to Circus Minimus

A hoard of Gaul Villagers line up to get into the "arena". Some are yelling out "tickets, tickets, tickets!"-hoping to attract those who haven't gotten a ticket yet. The Barker enters and stops the banter with megaphone announcement. Note: We never actually see the "arena" – but rather we witness it through the character's perspectives.

BARKER: *(in a makeshift megaphone)* Welcome to Circus Minimus!

(Gaul Villagers cheer)

BARKER: Soon you'll witness the race between the fastest chariot riders of Gaul!

(Gaul Villagers cheer)

BARKER: We're just waiting for one more racer -

(Gaul Villagers groan, disappointed)

BENORIX: And then we'll be off to the races! HA! HA! Get it? Off to the races?

BENORIX: *(making her way to the front of the line)* Excuse me mister, is this where the horses are?

BARKER: *(back into megaphone)* Yeah kid.

Styolistix enters, spots her sister and calls offstage.

STYOLISTIX: Motherix! Fatherix! I found her!

Fatherix and Motherix enter and run to Benorix and Styolistix.

MOTHERIX: Benorix Hur, you mustn't run off like that-

FATHERIX: Listen to your Motherix.

MOTHERIX: In a big crowd of people!

BENORIX: But, we know everyone in our village. Hello everyone!

VILLAGERS: Hi!

BENORIX: See.

STYOLISTIX: Why do we have to go to this stupid Circus Minimus race anyways?

BARKER: *(offended)* Hey!

STYOLISTIX: No offence, but Circus Maximus is where the *real* chariot races happen.

BENORIX: And where the Romans are. *(sarcastic)* You remember the Romans, don't you Styolistic? A bunch of big warriors who go around invading and conquering villages? Remember them? The reason why our village moves nearly every other week?

STYOLISTIX: *(returning the sarcasm)* Oh thank you dear sister, I almost forgot.

FATHERIX: Look, I know it's not the big Circus Maximum- but Circus Minimus has some of best racers in Gaul.

Barker High-Fives Fatherix. Velocitrix enters with his horse, Quickix, and runs up to the Barker.

VELOCITRIX: *(making his way through the crowd)* Let me through, I'm one of the racers. You've probably heard of me, I'm kind of famous.

STYOLISTIX: *(noticing Velocitrix)* Who's he?

BARKER: Papers.

VELOCITRIX: *(searching his person)* Papers? Papers? By Jupiter! I swear I had them just a second ago.

Benorix taps Velocitrix on the arm and points to Quickix, rips off some of the scroll and chews on it.

VELOCITRIX: Gimme those! *(takes scroll from Quickix and passes them to Barker)*. Thanks kid.

BENORIX: You're one of the racers?

VELOCITRIX: Yes, I'm Velocitrix *(strikes a pose)* and this is my horse, Quickix *(strikes a pose)*.

BENORIX: *(to Velocitrix)* This is my first race.

VELOCITRIX: I hope you enjoy it!

BARKER: *(to Velocitrix)* Get going Velocitrix- they've been waiting for you.

VELOCITRIX: Okay, okay! *(to Quickix)* Come on Quickix, let's get your chariot ready.

Velocitrix and Quickix go into the "arena".

STYOLISTIX: *(calling after Velocitrix)* I hope you win!

BARKER: Villagers of Arvernix, the races are about to begin.

Gaul Villagers cheer as they move to their seats. It would be ideal to have a row of villagers standing on a long bench and then have a row standing in front of the bench. They are all facing the audience.

Over the Chorus' narration the villagers do slow motion cheering and reacting, as if watching the race- heads should all be in sync as they watch the racers pass in front of them.)

BARKER: And they're off!

HYPATIA: As the villagers watched the race-

CHORUS 1,
2 & 3: They felt the excitement

Villagers cheer.

CHORUS 4, 5: The tension.

Villagers tense.

CHORUS ALL: The carnage.

Villagers disgusted & horrified.

HYPATIA: And Benorix felt something else-

CHORUS ALL: Inspiration.

Velocitrix and Quickix enter. Velocitrix is wearing a shiny medal-should look very makeshift and low budget, it is Circus Minimus afterall- around his neck.

VELOCITRIX: Thank you villagers of ...(whispers to Quickix) Where are we?

Quickix whispers in Velocitrix's ear.

VELOCITRIX: Arvernix!

BENORIX: YOU WON!

VELOCITRIX: *(proudly)* I know.

STYOLISTIX: I knew you'd win.

BENORIX: I want to be just like you! I want to race chariots!

(two villagers who have overhead Benorix laugh loudly.)

BENORIX: What?

VILLAGER 1: You can't race.

BENORIX: Why not?

VILLAGER 2: You're a girl.

BENORIX: So?

MOTHERIX: Benorix, it's time to go.

BENORIX: Why can't girls race?

VILLAGER 1: They just can't.

BENORIX: That's not a reason.

VELOCITRIX: *(to Benorix)* Perhaps you'll be the first girl to race and start a new trend!

BENORIX: *(eyes lighting up, looking out to audience)* Me? The first?

VELOCITRIX: Well, I'm off! *(to everyone)* What do you think I do?! Race horses all day?

EVERYONE: *(nodding)* Yes.

VELOCITRIX: Correct!

Velocitrix and Quickix exit.

STYOLISTIX: Bye Velocitrix! *(big sigh)*.

BENORIX: *(to Villagers 1 & 2)* Ya hear that? I'm going start a trend!

VILLAGER 2: *(to Fatherix)* You better teach your little girl not to talk back.

BENORIX: *(putting on her best fighter face)* Who are you calling a little girl?

FATHERIX: Come along Benorix, it's time to head home.

BENORIX: What? Fatherix, you told me to stick up for myself.

FATHERIX: Yes, but sometimes walking away is sticking up for yourself. You're saying that you're above the argument- you don't need to engage.

BENORIX: *(understanding)* Ahhhhh.... So, when you and Motherix have a disagreement and she walks away? She's above you?

FATHERIX: Well....

MOTHERIX: I would say that's correct.

Everyone exits.

Scene 2: Arrival of Arachne

HYPATIA: It's easy to *want* to be something-

CHORUS 1, 2: But to become it-

CHORUS 3, 4: Especially when the odds are stacked up against you-

CHORUS 5: Is quite another thing.

HYPATIA: Women in Ancient Rome could not vote or hold political office.

CHORUS ALL: They certainly couldn't be chariot racers.

It is night and the stars are out. Benorix enters.

BENORIX: Why did I have to be a girl? After Styolistic was born, Motherix and Fatherix wanted a son. But they got me. And all the things I want to do, I can't because I'm a girl! The laws don't make any sense.

Magical sounds.

BENORIX: *(looking around)* What's that? Is someone there?

ARACHNE: *(entering)* I am Arachne.

BENORIX: *(screaming at the sight of Arachne)* AHHHHHHHH! GIANT SPIDER!

ARACHNE: WHERE?

BENORIX: YOU!

ARACHNE: Ohhhh, right- sometimes I forget. Has anyone ever told you that it's rude to scream in someone's face?

BENORIX: Sorry! It's just you're a- a-

ARACHNE: Giant spider. Yes, I know. There's a story there. I wasn't always a spider.

BENORIX: What were you?

ARACHNE: I was an incredibly beautiful woman and a talented tapestry weaver.

BENORIX: What happened? *(joking)* Did ya lose a bet?

ARACHNE: *(deadpan and serious)* Yes.

The Chorus of Spiders enter to tell Arachne's story.

BENORIX: AHHH! More giant spiders!

SPIDER 1: We are Arachne's chorus of spiders. Now listen up to her story.

As they tell Arachne's story, they mime it out.

SPIDER 2-6: Arachne was once a gifted weaver.

SPIDER 2 & 3: Turning thread into tapestries.

SPIDER 4 & 5: She was an outstanding achiever.

SPIDER 6: When her thread flew across the loom-

SPIDER 1: Citizens would watch her work bloom.

SPIDER 2: As if it shot out from her fingers,

SPIDER 3: People would stop and linger.

SPIDER 4: But she was a little too proud.

SPIDER 5: When bragging to the crowd.

SPIDER 6: She claimed she was the best.

SPIDER 1 & 2: Athena, a Greek goddess,

SPIDER 3: Put Arachne's pride to the test.

SPIDER 4: She challenged the boastful girl to a weaving contest.

SPIDER 5: But Arachne was better than Athena could have guessed.

SPIDER 6: Enraged at losing,

SPIDER 1: Athena turned her anger onto Arachne.

SPIDERS 2-6: She twisted and turned, unable to flee.

The Chorus of Spiders dissolves back behind Arachne, who comes forward to finishes her story.

ARACHNE: And that is how I came to be-

BENORIX: The creature I see before me.

ARACHNE: I've still got incredible weaving skills.

BENORIX: All right, I think I understand how you got to be a giant spider, but why are you here, talking to me?

ARACHNE: I'm here to deliver a message from the Fates.

BENORIX: The Fates? As in *The Fates*? The ones who control mortal destinies?

ARACHNE: The very ones. They want me to tell you, that you are destined to become a chariot racer.

BENORIX: That can't be right. I'm a girl.

ARACHNE: True. But this is your destiny!

BENORIX: There are rules.

ARACHNE: And the rules aren't fair- so find a way to make them fair for you.

BENORIX: Huh?

ARACHNE: I have a solution to your problems. Look- (*puts a curly, long wig on head*) am I a girl spider or a boy spider?

BENORIX: A girl?

ARACHNE: There you go. Now- (*takes of curly, long wig and hold to chin, like a huge beard, drops her voice an octave*) am I a girl spider or a boy spider?

BENORIX: A boy?

ARACHNE: There you go!

BENORIX: So... I should grow a beard?

ARACHNE: (*baffled that Benorix doesn't get it*) NO!

Benorix looks confused. Another Spider enters, out of breath, and makes various hisses to Arachne, communicating in spider gibberish. Something is clearly wrong. Arachne listens to them.

ARACHNE: Uh huh.

BENORIX: What are they saying?

Chorus of Spiders, concerned, hiss among each other. They might also do some vigorous leg gestures.

ARACHNE: I see. We must save them at once!

BENORIX: What are they saying?

ARACHNE: Another Gaul villager has been captured by Romans in the forest. We have to free them.

BENORIX: Why are you helping us?

SPIDERS: We don't like seeing weaker creatures get squashed.

BENORIX: But you have no weapons.

ARACHNE: We are great at scaring even the bravest of warriors.

Arachne and the Chorus of Spiders raise their arms and hiss- preferably at the audience.

BENORIX: *(Jumping back)* Well done, well done.

Chorus of Spiders exits, hissing. Arachne is about to follow them off.

BENORIX: *(stopping Arachne)* Wait! What do I do now?

ARACHNE: Get racing! I look forward to seeing drive the chariot. I do *love* a good competition.

BENORIX: But didn't you lose?

ARACHNE: Oh no, I won. I just played against a sore loser. Now, remember what I said Benorix. Or should I say... Ben? *(exits)*

BENORIX: Ben? *(understanding)* OOOoooooh, BEN!