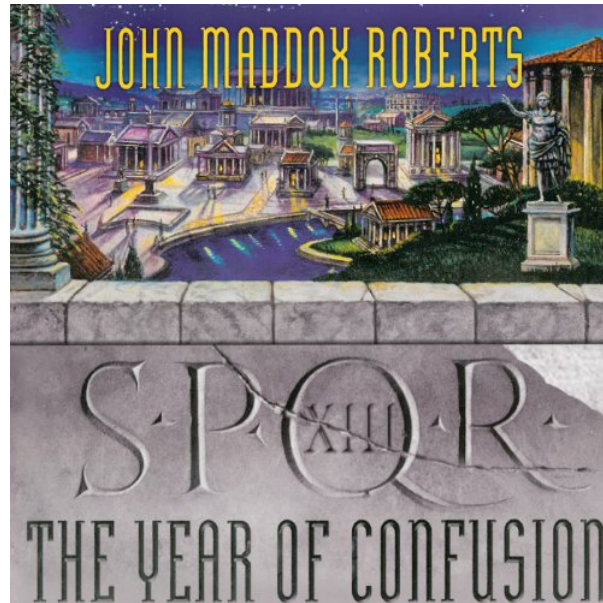
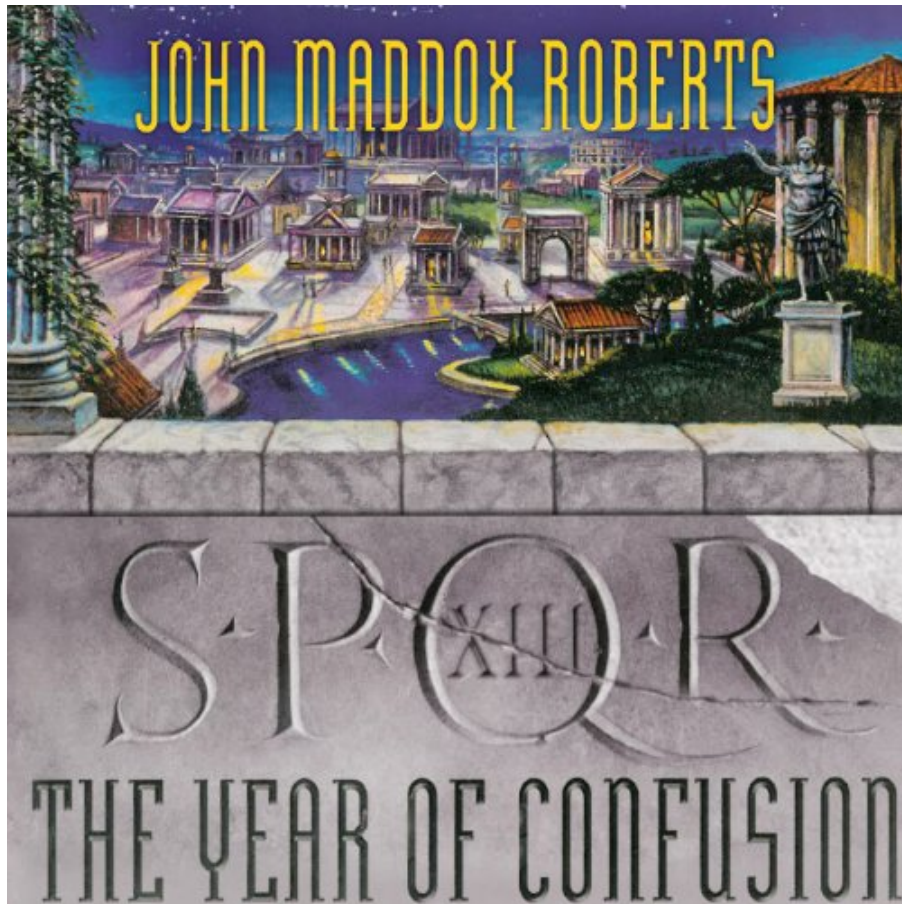


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Caius Julius Caesar, now Dictator of Rome, has decided to revise the Roman calendar, which has become out of sync with the seasons. As if this weren't already an unpopular move, Caesar has brought in astronomers and astrologers from abroad, including Egyptians, Greeks, Indians, and Persians. Decius is appointed to oversee this project, which he knows rankles the Roman public: "To be told by a pack of Chaldeans and Egyptians how to conduct their duties towards the gods was intolerable." Not long after the new calendar project begins, two of the foreigners are murdered.

Decius begins his investigations and, as the body count increases, it seems that an Indian fortune-teller popular with patrician Roman ladies is also involved.

This latest in the acclaimed series is sure to please historical mystery fans.

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- Format: Unabridged
- Original language: English
- Running time: 452 minutes

Most helpful customer reviews

25 of 25 people found the following review helpful.

Who is murdering Caesar's astronomers?

By Graham

It is 45 BC and an increasingly regal Caesar is busily reorganizing Rome, including summoning a conclave of astronomers to reform the Roman calendar. When one of these astronomers is mysteriously murdered, Caesar assigns our hero, Decius Caecilius Metellus, to investigate. As always, Decius is a wide ranging and thorough investigator, traveling throughout Rome, interviewing everyone from Cleopatra to racing touts, turning up many overlapping mysteries and minor crimes until he succeeds in resolving the main mystery.

As usual in the series, Decius sets a light tone, bantering casually through Rome's highest social circles. However, behind the light mood, there are many darker notes. For example, it slowly becomes clear that Decius is now the last survivor of his formerly powerful family and he needs to move with more care than before. Decius gently touches on the various ambitious politicians orbiting around Caesar amidst hints of emerging conspiracies.

The murder mystery is adequate but the real fun comes from touring Rome with Decius, seeing its sights and studying its ways. A good four stars.

Quick historical note: Although Decius is fictional, the Caecilii Metelli were real. In their day they were one of the greatest of the plebian families, with at least ten "Quintus Caecilius Metellus"es becoming consul, but they vanished from history after siding against Caesar in the Civil War. Our fictional Decius may owe his survival to his happy marriage to Julia, a (fictional) niece of Caesar.

17 of 17 people found the following review helpful.

Another Welcome Book in the SPQR Series

By Terry Weiss

I enjoy this series as much as any I've found. I like the mysteries themselves and the characters are interesting and well drawn - no cartoon-ish shortcuts. There is an underlying wry sense of humor that I find irresistible as well. As to the history, I have checked and double checked and Roberts knows his stuff. To the extent we have documentation, he's spot on. Where there's room for interpretation, he goes for it. His view of Caesar - the main character is married to Caesar's niece and has been part of the Senatorial class with Caesar all along the way - is pretty great. And I'd bet pretty darned accurate, if truth be told. I recommend this entire series to any mystery lover. If you like historical mysteries, you'll be delighted. and if you have a sense of humor, they are even better. I've found the SPQR series an interesting contrast with Steven Saylor's more serious books set in the same era. Frequently they have taken an opposite view of an historical character - but, while I enjoy the Saylor books - I more than enjoy SPQR. I buy them new, in hard cover when they come out and I can't give higher praise than that to any writer. Try them, you'll like them. I own them all and can't wait for more to come.

11 of 13 people found the following review helpful.

Wait for the paperback...

By Laurence R. Bachmann

Like its main character, the SPQR series is starting to show its age. Decius Metellus has lost a step or two and so too has the author. Other reviewers have noted the lack of a tie-in to major events--it's a serious detriment that makes this mystery far less engaging than most of the series. I would go so far as to say the ending was flat and disappointing.

It isn't bad, it just seems to have less of what Roberts usually provides: wit, pace and interesting twists. By all means give it a try, but wait for the paperback, or check it out of the library.

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