

MAD, BAD AND DANGEROUS TO KNOW!

WHO'S ROME'S MADDEST MR. MAD???

AD68

Emperors come and go. Sometimes we get lucky and sometimes we don't. Following the death of Augustus in AD14, we've had some of the most headbanging loony-tunes this side of a SPITTING COBRA. But who is the maddest and, baddest? READ ON...

WHO WAS HE?

MAD?

BAD?

DANGEROUS TO KNOW?

THEN WHAT?

TIBERIUS
AD14-37



Stepson of Augustus. Top soldier and pretty good at ruling. Strengthened frontiers of Empire, and saved up lots of money.

Nope, but not unreasonable fear of assassination and unpleasant skin disease made him very edgy - not to mention rather unforgiving.

Not so much bad as hard to deal with. Moved from Rome to the remote Isle of Capri, where he felt safer and ruled by post. Hit and miss nature of Roman postal service caused loss of patience in the capital, and prompted assassination attempts.

Plots to depose him dealt with in starkly brutal fashion, and led to reign of terror in Rome, which cast long shadow over his final years as Emperor.

He died of old age.

CALIGULA
AD37-41



Great-nephew of Tiberius. Never quite right, even as a child. Got a lot worse once he became Emperor. Extremely extravagant - mainly with the money Tiberius had saved.

Built temple to himself, and appeared in it dressed as a goddess. Married sister. When she died he declared weeks of public mourning, when no one was allowed to laugh. Tried to have his horse declared consul. Assembled massive army to invade Britain, but forgot to provide ships for them to cross channel. Had them gather seashells instead.

Told his girlfriends while kissing them on the neck, "You'll lose this beautiful head whenever I decide." The silver-tongued charmer! Alas, many of Caligula's activities are unsuitable for a family newspaper.

Usual executions of rivals and plotters against him. Had a courtier executed for being too well-groomed. Insisted the victim's father come to the execution, and then invited him to dinner.

Assassinated by his own soldiers, and not a moment too soon.

CLAUDIUS
AD41-54



Nephew of Tiberius. Became Emperor at 50, having been plucked from obscurity by Palace guard following assassination of Caligula. Disabled, frail and nervous, he was far brighter than he looked.

Not remotely. Devoted his rule to improving the civil service, and involving the provinces more directly in government. He also added territory to the Empire. (Particularly Britain, and more of Greece.)

Not really. Main failing - a weakness for scheming wives, especially his fourth, Agrippina. (See below)

Only if you wanted to kill him. Despite being good at his job, he lacked support of Rome's ruling class. Various assassination attempts resulted in execution of 35 senators during his reign.

Agrippina poisoned his mushroom soup to make way for her son Nero.

NERO
AD54-68



Stepson of Claudius. Started off well, but power went to his head. Built a lot, including one of Rome's finest public baths, and a luxurious palace called the Golden House.

Artistic temperament - he thought the Greeks were wonderful and imagined himself as a poet, musician, charioteer and actor. When he performed NO ONE was allowed to leave the theatre, not even women to give birth. When he was really on form he had himself crowned five times a day.

Blamed Christians for a great fire in Rome (AD64) and persecuted them mercilessly. Some were even tarred, staked and torched to provide illumination in his private gardens.

Murdered mother, wife, brother, stepbrother, and forced tutor Seneca (the greatest philosopher of his age) to commit suicide. Also did away with scores more real and imagined rivals.

Committed suicide, shortly before his own soldiers came along to bump him off.