Romulus and Remus

Twin brothers who founded the city of Rome

The Quick Version of the Story...

Romulus and Remus had a rough childhood—they were raised by a wolf. In fact, they weren’t even supposed to be alive.

Several years before the two brothers were born, their grandfather—who was a King—had a falling out with his brother. It didn’t end so well, and the King was dethroned.

Some time passed before the feuding brother learned that the former King’s daughter had become the mother of twin boys, Romulus and Remus (by the way, their father was Mars, the Roman God of War). The brother worried that the boys would grow up to avenge their disgraced grandfather. Around 771 BC, he sent a servant to kill the young babies.

The servant couldn’t bring himself to do it. He placed the twins in a cradle and sent them down the Tiber River. As luck would have it, a female wolf found Romulus and Remus...
and took them in as her own. Eventually, the twins were rescued and raised by foster parents.

You would think that with a childhood like that, Romulus and Remus would be the best of friends. That wasn’t the case.

The boys grew strong and became leaders of their community, and eventually restored their grandfather as King. They returned to the spot where they had been cared for by the wolf, and decided to start a city of their own.

Unfortunately, at this point Romulus and Remus began to feud over the location and structure of the new city. The tension rose until a huge fight broke out, and Romulus killed Remus in a fit of anger.

Romulus was left to rule the city on his own, which is known today as Rome (you can guess who it’s named after). The power of the Romans was clear from the start. Its residents even decided to invade a nearby city to steal women to take as wives.

What it tells us about World History...

Obviously, there are quite a few details about the lives of Romulus and Remus that aren’t quite true (they were sons of the God of War, they were raised by a wolf, etc.). This story does, however, give us an idea of when the great Roman Civilization first got its start, around 753 BC, when Romulus and Remus were eighteen years-old.

That tells you just how long the Ancient Romans were around. The rise of Julius Caesar didn’t occur until 700 years later, and the fall of the Roman Empire came over 1,200 years after its initial founding. Keep in mind that the United States has been in existence for less than 250 years.

The Romans were famous for keeping detailed historical records. Most of these, however, date back to the Roman Empire, which is usually considered to span from 31 BC to 476 AD. It’s tough to find any written accounts from the 8th century BC. This may explain why the Romans had to resort to a little mythology to explain how their whole civilization got started.