

# POMPEII, AD 79

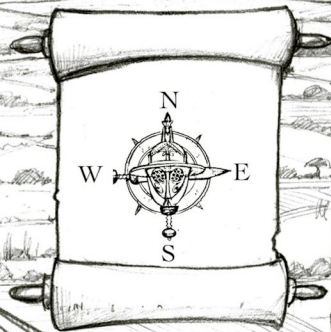
Mount Vesuvius

House of M. Nemonius Valens

Vesuvius Gate

To Rome

Schola Armatorum  
(gladiator barracks)

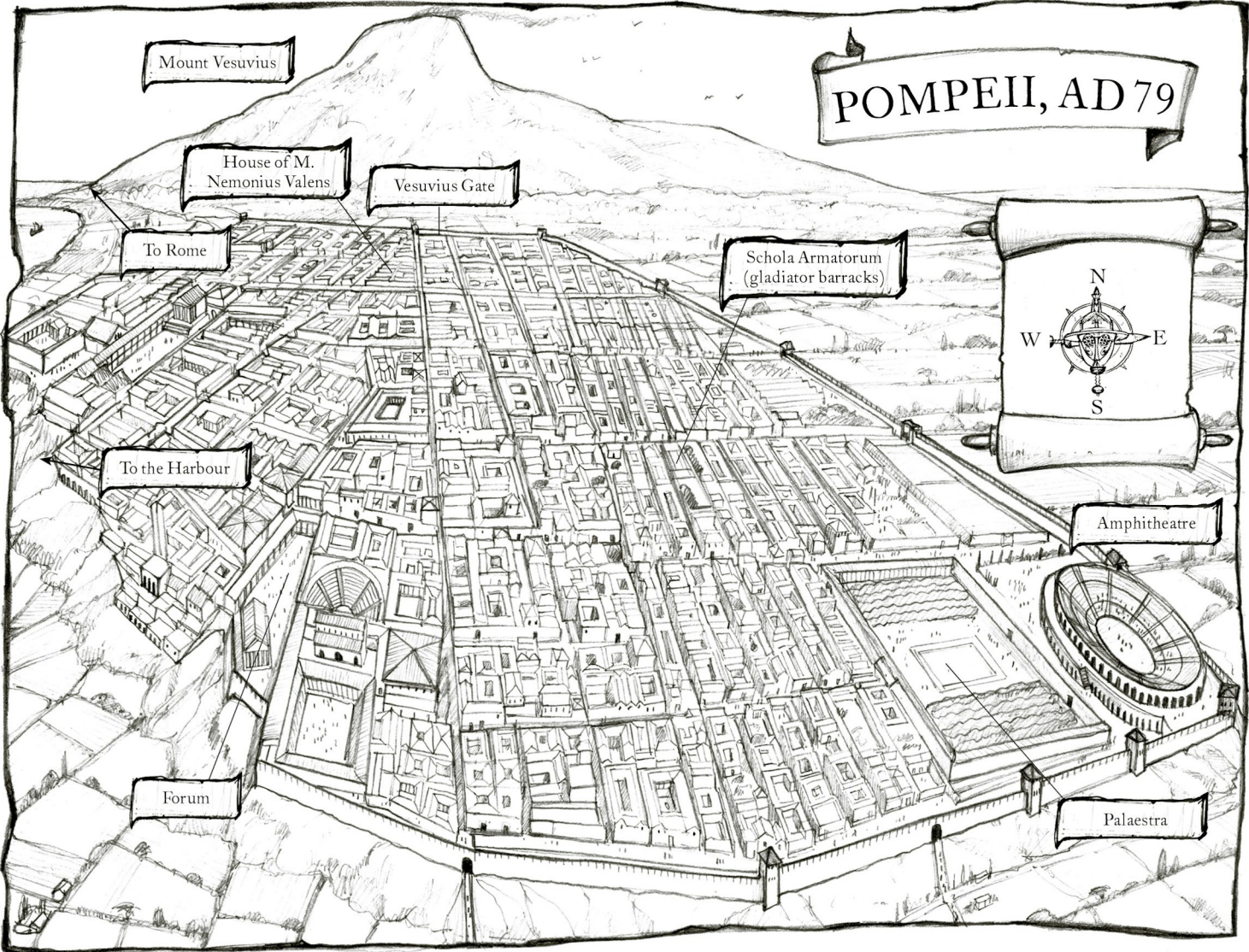


To the Harbour

Amphitheatre

Forum

Palaestra





## THE MAIN CHARACTERS

Lucius, a Roman boy

Quintus, his older brother

Aquila, their father

Ravilla, their uncle

Caecilia, their mother

Valeria, their sister

Isidora, Lucius's friend, an Egyptian slave

Crassus, a lanista (trainer of gladiators)

Valens, editor (sponsor) of the games  
at Pompeii

Atia, a seer

Eprius, a young patrician (nobleman)  
of Pompeii

## PROLOGUE

# FIRST BLOOD

ROME

10 August AD 79



**G**ames given by Gaius Valerius Ravilla,' Lucius read aloud. 'Forty gladiators will fight. Perfumed water will be scattered.' His finger hovered over his brother's name. 'Quintus, Retiarius, tiro, will battle Burbo, Secutor.\* Burbo has won ten bouts.'

'You've read it at least twenty times,' said Isidora, sounding rather impatient. 'You can't change the words by staring at them, you know.'

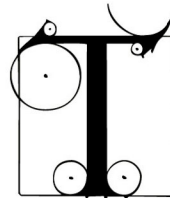
Lucius dropped the programme back into his bag and rubbed his eyes. He hadn't had much sleep.

*\* Retiarius: a gladiator who fights with net (rete) and trident; tiro: a gladiator fighting in public for the first time. Secutor: a gladiator who wears an enclosed, egg-shaped helmet and fights with a short sword (gladius); his name means 'Chaser'.*

# CHAPTER I

POMPEII, 19 AUGUST AD 79

*120 hours before the eruption of Vesuvius*



he midday sun beat down on Lucius as he pursued Quin through the streets of Pompeii. He glimpsed his brother's tall, athletic figure up ahead, sauntering along through the crowds heading west towards the Forum.\* Lucius would have preferred to walk side by side with Quin through this unfamiliar city, but sensed he would not be welcomed.

Smells of cooking meat from the fast-food shops mingled with the stench wafting over from the fish-sauce factories near the harbour. Lucius's ears echoed with the cries of fruit sellers and wine merchants and the pipes and drums of buskers. The noise and

*\* Forum: the main marketplace, which was also the place for business meetings and political discussions.*

squalor reminded him of Suburra, the area where he now lived in Rome. Yet Pompeii seemed to carry an extra air of menace. The shadow-filled alleys, the hard faces of the young men, the cold-eyed stare of a beggar woman – they all spelled danger to Lucius. Maybe it was his imagination, but Pompeii seemed like a city brimming with desperate and unscrupulous people who'd murder you for the price of a loaf of bread. He was glad he'd decided to follow Quin. Somehow, he felt his brother needed watching in a place like this. Of course, Quin was a gladiator and very capable of looking after himself – yet Lucius knew he could be hot-headed at times, and in these strange and scary streets he might very easily get himself into trouble.

From a nearby side street, Lucius heard a cry of pain. His natural caution made him want to hurry on past, but then he saw Quin turn and enter the alley. Hesitantly, Lucius followed, rubbing the ring on his forefinger for luck. It was his only memento of his father, and had become his talisman. Concealing himself behind a pile of amphorae,\* Lucius saw Quin approach a group of rough-looking young men. They were jeering and pushing around a lad of about their own age. From his smart, formal toga, now bespattered with mud, Lucius could tell the victim was a young man of status, though this did not seem to count for much among his tormentors.

\* *amphorae (singular amphora): earthenware storage jars.*

His sense of fairness clearly offended, Quin impulsively strode into the mêlée and pushed aside one of the bullies, who had been holding the victim in a neck lock. The bully squealed in surprise and fell to the ground. His friends immediately closed in around Quin, their jeers turning to snarls of anger.

There were six of them – three armed with sticks – against the unarmed Quin. Lucius groaned. He steeled himself, knowing he would have to go and help his brother. With his slender build, Lucius wasn't made for physical violence. He cursed their fate for bringing them here to Pompeii.



It was ten days since Crassus, the lanista of the gladiator school, had made the announcement. The school had received a great honour, he said: it had been chosen to represent Rome at the forthcoming games in Pompeii. A total of thirty gladiators would be going, including Quin. And Lucius had been dismayed to learn that he too was among those selected to go. It was a seven-day march to Pompeii, and there would be a further week spent in the city. Taking the return march into account, that meant that Lucius would be gone from Rome for three whole weeks – time he had been hoping to spend searching for his father. What if Aquila tried to contact him during that time? It seemed that fate had once again intervened to prevent them from meeting.