

**DAY OF
DISASTER**

THE MT.

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STORY IN
OUR AMAZING
VIDEO!

L

et's take a trip back to ancient Rome.

It's going to be a long trip—nearly 2,000 years. Close your eyes and imagine it: a time before George Washington was born, before Christopher Columbus sailed the seas, when only scattered Native American tribes were living in America. Back then, most of Europe and the Middle East were part of what

ERUPTION OF VESUVIUS

A.D. 79

Nearly 2,000 years ago, a volcanic eruption destroyed the city of Pompeii. Thousands died. It was the worst disaster of the ancient world.

Now imagine that you are there.

BY LAUREN TARSHIS

The Roman Empire stretched from England to Northern Africa. Pompeii is located in the country we now call Italy.

is known as the Roman Empire, a vast territory ruled by emperors from the capital city of Rome.

It's going to be a fascinating trip. But also frightening. Because you're about to witness one of the most devastating disasters in the history of the world.





Reading for Information What led to the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius? What was lost in the disaster?



LOOK FOR WORD NERD'S 10 WORDS IN BOLD>

It's a typical summer day in the beautiful city of Pompeii in the year 79 A.D. The main street is packed with people—women swishing by in long robes, men in **tunics**, children with leather sandals that slap against the hot stone streets.

Vendors shout for your attention, offering you slices of juicy melons or sizzling hunks of roasted meats. A parrot calls out a hello from the shoulder of a shopkeeper.

"*Salve!*" he squawks in Latin, the language of the Roman Empire.

You're surprised by how modern this city seems. It has a library, theaters, and grand temples. There are shops and restaurants and a food market where you can taste dozens of delicacies, from sweet dates and figs to fattened roasted mice stuffed with nuts and rose petals. Beautiful marble and bronze statues stand all over the city, monuments to famous citizens, mighty emperors, and fierce generals who built Rome into the most powerful empire in the world.

The heat makes you thirsty, so you stop at the big public fountain made of carved stone. You scoop up some of the cool, clean water. No wonder the people of the Roman Empire are proud of their water. Nowhere else in the world has such a **sophisticated** system of

aqueducts, underground tunnels that deliver fresh water to fountains, bathhouses, and private homes.

As you rest by the fountain, an enormous man lumbers past you, his arms covered with scars, his muscled legs thick as tree trunks.

This man is a famous gladiator, a special breed of fighter who is set to do battle that afternoon in Pompeii's amphitheater, a stadium big enough to hold 20,000 people. Romans love to watch gladiators fight each other with fists, swords, clubs, or knives. Sometimes men are pitted against ferocious lions or bears. If it sounds gruesome, that's

GLADIATORS were trained fighters who battled each other with knives, swords, and nets. They also fought wild animals. The fights attracted huge crowds. Most gladiators were slaves, forced to fight.



This gladiator's helmet was discovered in Pompeii.

FOUND

POMPEII'S RICH

lived in luxurious homes—villas decorated with paintings and mosaics. All cooking and housework was done by slaves. Less privileged citizens lived in smaller homes and apartments.

This silver drinking goblet was discovered in the ruins of an elegant home in Pompeii.



because it is. Some gladiators die in battle.

The Volcano

Maybe by now you've noticed it—the massive mountain that **looms** behind the city.

That's Mount Vesuvius.

You haven't given it much thought—and neither do the people of Pompeii. Why should they? It's just a big mountain, silent and still, its gentle slopes covered with trees and grape vineyards.

Except Mount Vesuvius is not just a mountain.

It is a volcano.

Vesuvius sits atop a crack in the earth's crust—the hard, rocky layer that covers the surface of our planet like the shell of an egg. The crack in the crust allows molten rock called magma to seep up from miles below. A huge lake of magma boils under Vesuvius, steaming with poisonous, explosive gases.

But the people of Pompeii have no idea what is **festering** below.

How could they? There is not even a word for volcano in Latin. And Vesuvius has been dormant—quiet—for 1,500 years.

But now Vesuvius is waking up.

For months, magma has been rising through the center of the volcano, filling it like fiery blood. Pressure is building. An enormous eruption is coming.

There have been warning signs over the past few weeks. Talk to the farmers who tend to the vineyards around Vesuvius. They'll tell you about a terrible stinging smell—like rotten eggs—that **wafts** from the mountaintop. Is it a warning from the gods? Like the ancient Greeks before them, the Romans believe that gods and goddesses control everything in the world. Some say that mighty Jupiter, god of the sky, is angry at the people of Pompeii.

Of course, nobody understands that the terrible smell is sulfurous gas, part of the explosive brew simmering inside the volcano.

And there have been other signs of a coming disaster. The extreme heat underground has caused streams to dry up. Goats and sheep are dropping dead on the mountain, their lungs **seared** by the poisonous gases. Most alarming of all: Small earthquakes have erupted throughout the city, a sign of growing strain on the land.

All of this is evidence that a huge eruption

will come at any moment. The people of Pompeii should have evacuated days or even weeks before. But no one heeded the signs.

So what are you doing standing around? You should run.

Now!

A Boiling Avalanche

But at this point, it's too late for the people of Pompeii . . . and for you.

Boom!

Boom!

Two powerful explosions, seconds apart, seem to shatter the sky. The ground shakes violently. People fall. Horses and donkeys scream. Birds scatter by the thousands.

You see a terrifying sight: a gigantic column of gray smoke spewing from the top of Mount Vesuvius.

Except it's not smoke.

The intense heat produced by the eruption has turned millions

of tons of solid rock into superheated foam. The boiling plume shoots 12 miles into the sky at rocket speeds. When it hits the freezing air above Earth, the melted rock turns into tiny pebbles called pumice. It spreads through the air, carried by the wind, and pours down on Pompeii.

The pumice falls with painful force. It is mixed with hot ash, which clogs your nose and throat.

Many people are fleeing. Go with them! Push your way past the donkey carts and get through the gates of the city. Grab hold of the hand of a little boy who has become separated from his family. Keep moving. The farther away you get, the more likely you are to survive.

Other people decide to stay behind, to guard their homes and businesses. Crime is bad in Pompeii. An abandoned home or shop will almost certainly be **ransacked** by thieves. People hide in their homes. They think this strange storm of ash and rock will soon end.

They are wrong.

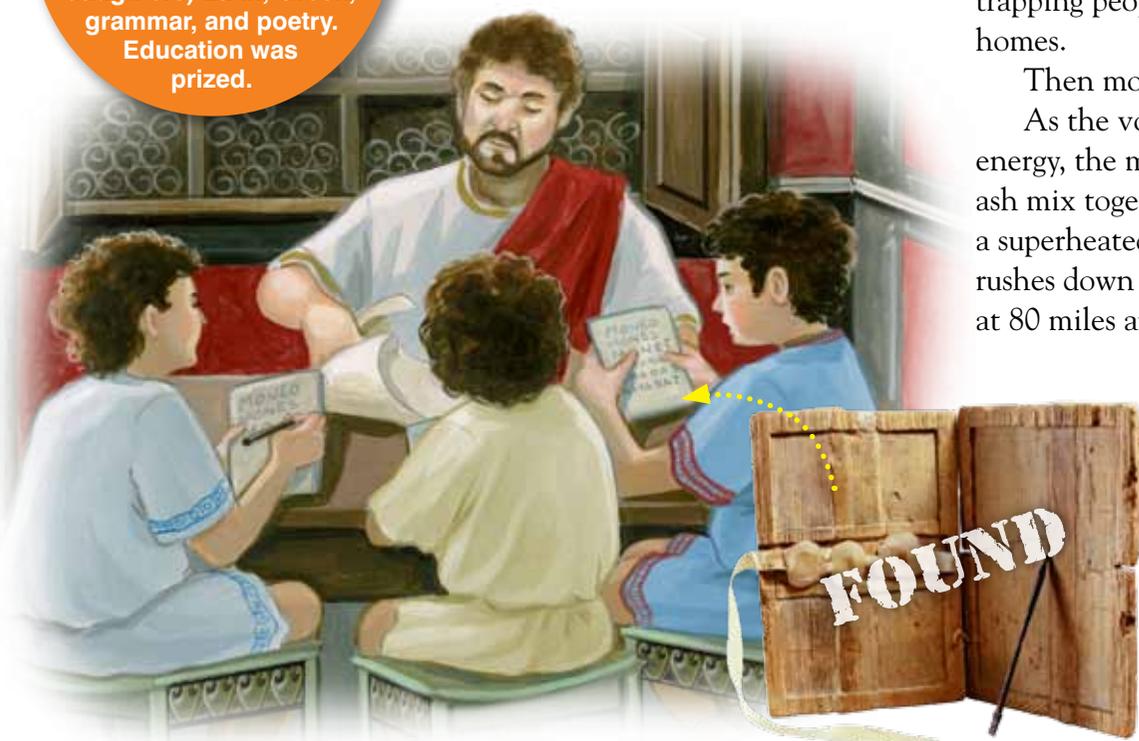
The sky turns black. As hours pass, the weight of the pumice causes roofs to collapse, trapping people in their homes.

Then more terror.

As the volcano loses energy, the molten rock and ash mix together to create a superheated wave that rushes down the mountain at 80 miles an hour. This

Students wrote on tablets like this one, using a stick, or *stylus*, to mark on a layer of wax. Letters were erased by warming the wax and smoothing it.

SCHOOLS did not exist in Pompeii, but wealthy citizens hired tutors to teach their sons (but usually not their daughters) Latin, Greek, grammar, and poetry. Education was prized.



burning, poisonous avalanche is known as a pyroclastic flow. When it hits Pompeii, death for those left behind is almost instant.

Over the next hours, millions of tons of ash and rock fall on the city.

In the weeks that follow, people search Pompeii for survivors.

There are none.

In fact, the entire city seems to have vanished. Pompeii is buried under 12 feet of rock.

Within a few decades, Pompeii is all but forgotten, wiped off the face of the Earth.

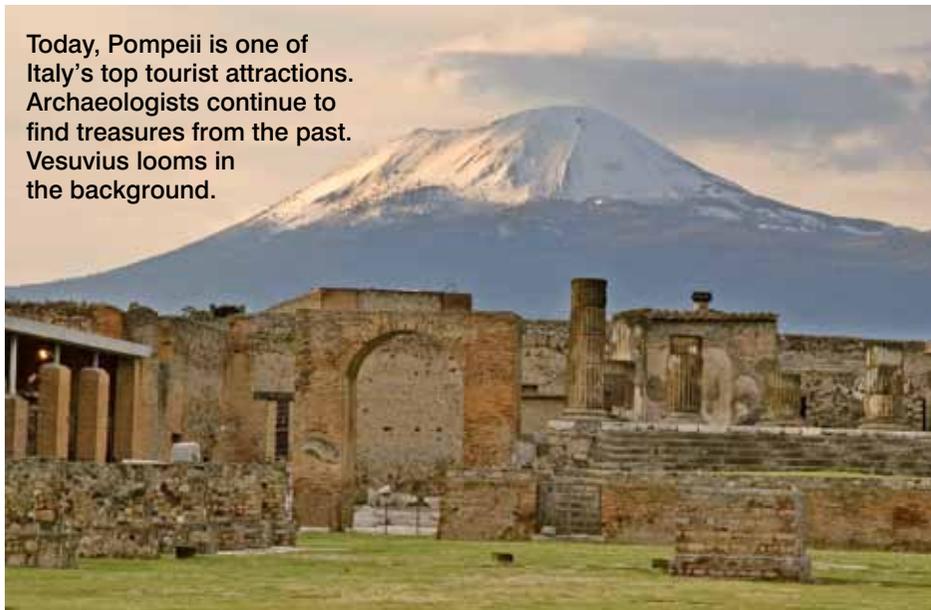
A Vanished World

You survived your day in Pompeii. You are one of the lucky few who made it far enough away from the city to escape being crushed.

But before you go home, let's take one more trip, to Pompeii today. The ruins lie near the city of Naples, in southern Italy. For nearly 1,700 years, Pompeii was forgotten. It was re-discovered in 1748 and has been under almost constant study ever since.

The layers of pumice and ash that fell on Pompeii formed a shell over the city, preserving it as a time capsule of Roman life. Over the centuries, **archaeologists** have unearthed dazzling treasures, like jewels and silver dishes, mosaic artwork and statues. They even found

Today, Pompeii is one of Italy's top tourist attractions. Archaeologists continue to find treasures from the past. Vesuvius looms in the background.



a basket of **petrified** eggs and the remains of a bowl of chicken soup.

As you walk through the ruins of Pompeii today, you can admire the remains of houses, shops, and temples. You can almost hear the voices and laughter of the citizens. And you can see Mount Vesuvius.

It is silent and still. But don't be fooled.

Vesuvius has erupted more than 80 times since Pompeii was destroyed, the last time in 1944. These eruptions were small. But scientists have no doubt that the volcano will erupt again, possibly with the same explosive force as it did in 79 A.D. They worry about the millions of people who live in the eruption zone.

Will there be enough warning before the next eruption? Or will people suffer the same fate as ancient Pompeiians—swallowed by fire, buried in ash, and lost to time?

Would you want to be there to find out? 🚒

WRITE TO WIN!

Write a news story about the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius. Use details from the story to explain why the eruption happened and what was lost. Send your article to "Vesuvius Contest" by February 15, 2013. Ten winners will each receive a copy of *Bodies From the Ash* by James Deem. See page 2 for details.

FIND AN
ACTIVITY
SHEET
ONLINE!

