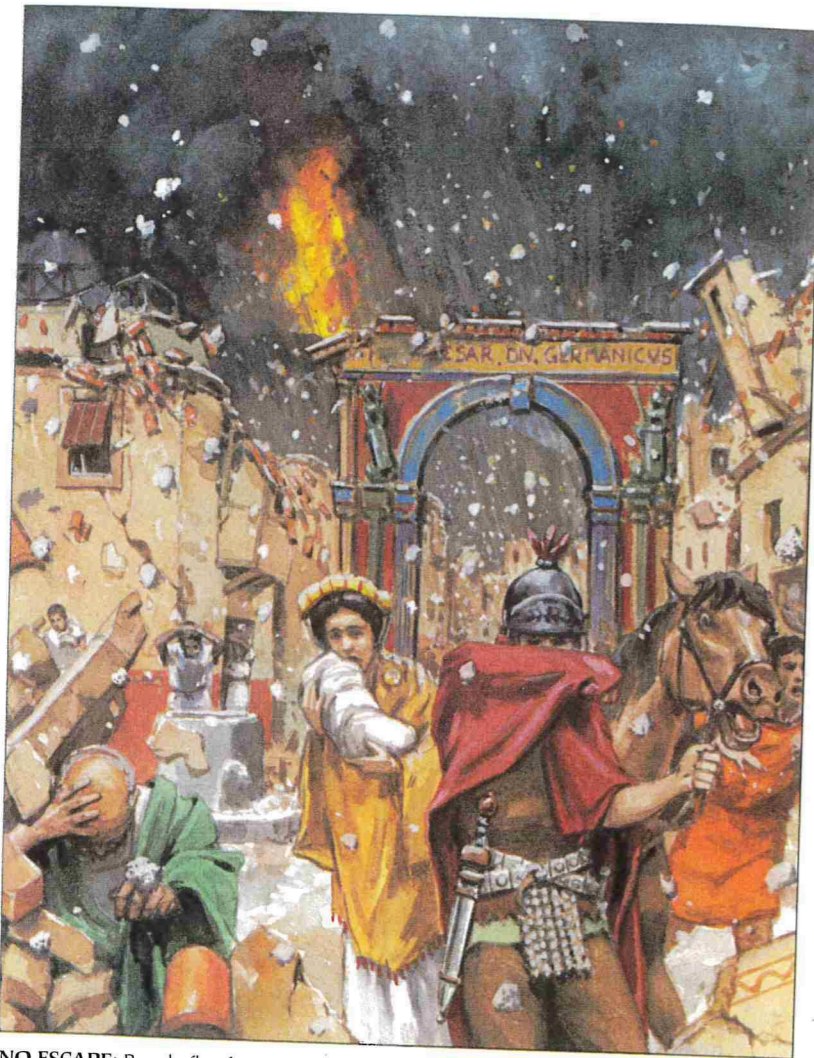


CITY DESTROYED

Illustrated by ALAN FRASER



NO ESCAPE: People flee from the volcano's deadly hail of stones and ash.

MOUNT VESUVIUS is peaceful enough today, with its olive groves and grazing animals. Yet it was the cause of one of the worst disasters ever to hit our nation — the death of an entire town.

IN THE AFTERNOON of 24 August, AD 79, Mount Vesuvius turned into a killer.

The volcano erupted, spewing out vast clouds

of ash and stones, and thick black smoke. The burning ash rained down on the bustling town of Pompeii, just 10 kilometres away.

Choking and blinded by the smoke, people fled in terror, barely able to run as an earthquake shook the ground.

Within hours, the ash had buried all but the tallest buildings.

More than 20,000 people died that day, smothered by the ash. A once-thriving town had vanished!

LUCKY ESCAPE!

ON THAT FATEFUL DAY, writer Pliny the Younger was just 30 kilometres away, in the town of Misenum. Here is his first-hand account of fleeing from the disaster.

"WE SAW THE SEA sucked away and forced back by the earthquake. It had shrunk away from the shore, and many sea creatures were stranded on dry land.

Ashes were already falling, not as yet very thickly. I looked around — a dense black cloud was coming up behind us, spreading over the earth like a flood.

'Let us leave the road while we can still see,' I said, 'or we shall be knocked down and trampled underfoot in the dark.'

We had scarcely sat down when absolute darkness fell — not the dark of a moonless or cloudy night, but as if a lamp had been put out in a closed room.

You could hear the loud shrieks of women, the wailing of children, and the shouting of men.

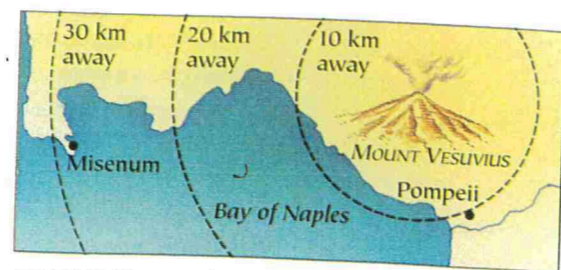
A curious kind of light appeared, not daylight but more like the light of a distant fire.



Then darkness came on once more and ashes began to fall again, this time in heavy showers.

We rose from time to time and shook them off, otherwise we would have been buried and crushed beneath their weight.

At last, there was genuine daylight. We were terrified to see that everything was changed, buried deep in ashes like snowdrifts."



FALLOUT: The spread of ash from the volcano.

Map by CHRIS FORSEY

THE ROMAN NEWS



HOLY WAR: No hope for Maxentius' troops, as Constantine's army storms to victory.

ONE RULER!

Illustrated by TONY SMITH

HISTORY HAS SHOWN that our Empire thrives when one strong leader is in control. But by the AD 300s, the Empire was split among several squabbling rulers. Then one man grasped the reins of power — the Emperor Constantine.

THE TROUBLE had all begun in AD 285, when the Emperor Diocletian split our Empire into four separate areas, each ruled by a different man.

Constantine first came to power 21 years later, in AD 306, as the ruler of one of these areas.

Although he controlled Germany, France and Britain, this was not enough for Constantine. He vowed to destroy his three co-emperors and become the sole ruler.

First, he had to seize control of the city of Rome from Maxentius, one of his co-emperors.

ON THE ATTACK

Gathering together his battle-hardened army, Constantine swept down through France, arriving in Italy in AD 312.

Maxentius fled, rather than face the invaders. But Constantine caught up with him near Rome's Milvian Bridge, where a

flimsy row of linked boats spanned the River Tiber. Here, Constantine's army won a decisive battle.

Maxentius and his men tried to flee over the bridge of boats, but most of them drowned when the bridge collapsed.

Constantine marched triumphantly into Rome and set about planning his next move.

His main rival was now Licinius, who had already defeated the remaining co-emperor, Maximinus.

In AD 324, Constantine attacked Licinius and, after two fierce battles, crushed his rival's army.

At last, our Empire was safely back in the firm hands of a single, strong ruler.

Victory report,
AD 312

VICTORY VISION

A remarkable sight was seen at the Battle of the Milvian Bridge. A Christian symbol had been painted on the shield of every single one of Constantine's soldiers.

The Emperor was told in a dream to fight under this sign. And now he claims it helped him win.

NO PEACE

CONSTANTINE CAME to power at a time of great turmoil for the Empire. Back in AD 324, *The Roman News* took a long hard look at the problems, and highlighted some of the troubles we faced.

■ For the last 200 years, our lands have been under continual attack from the fierce barbarian tribes who live outside our borders.

But the Empire is now so big that we simply can't protect all our lands. One day, these tribes will break through and ruin us.

■ It's no longer the politicians in Rome who decide who'll be emperor. The army is so powerful that now it's the soldiers who choose our leader. And if the one they pick

doesn't come up to scratch, they kill him and choose another!

So emperors come and go, and none rules long enough to sort out the chaos in the Empire. In AD 238, we had seven emperors in just one year.

■ Most of the soldiers aren't even Romans. Citizens don't want to join the army any more, and it's cheaper to pay barbarians to fight for us — even though these foreigners could turn against us at any time.

THE ROMAN NEWS