

The story of POMPEII



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illustrated by
Peter Dennis

 Orpheus

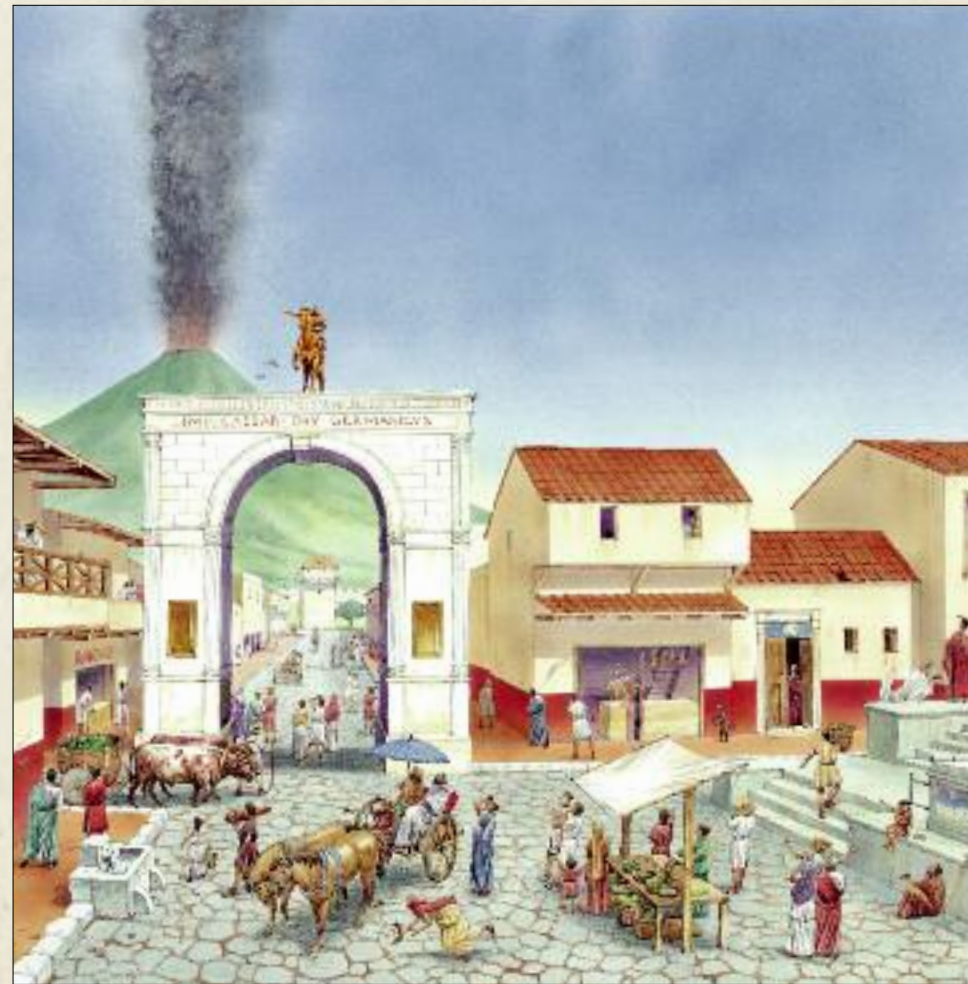
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ROMAN POMPEII

In the first century AD, a good part of Europe was under the rule of the Romans. Prosperous towns such as Pompeii grew up on the Bay of Naples, 200 kilometres southeast of Rome.



A busy harbour brought in ships full of goods from overseas. Wealthy merchants traded local produce—wine, cloth and *garum* (a fish sauce)—for glassware, jewels and spices. People crowded the town's bars, shops and taverns.

The story of Vesuvius, the volcano which erupted and made Pompeii famous, began much earlier...



Twenty-five thousand years ago, Europe lies in the grip of the Ice Ages. Vast ice sheets have spread out from the North Pole and the mountain ranges, smothering great expanses of land. Although ice has not come as far as southern Italy, the climate is cool and dry. Few trees grow here. Herds of saiga antelope graze the grasslands.

With a loud explosion, a volcano (which will one day be known as Vesuvius) erupts, blasting ash into the air. Alarmed by the shaking ground and deafening noise, the saiga gallop away, blocks of lava crashing all around them.

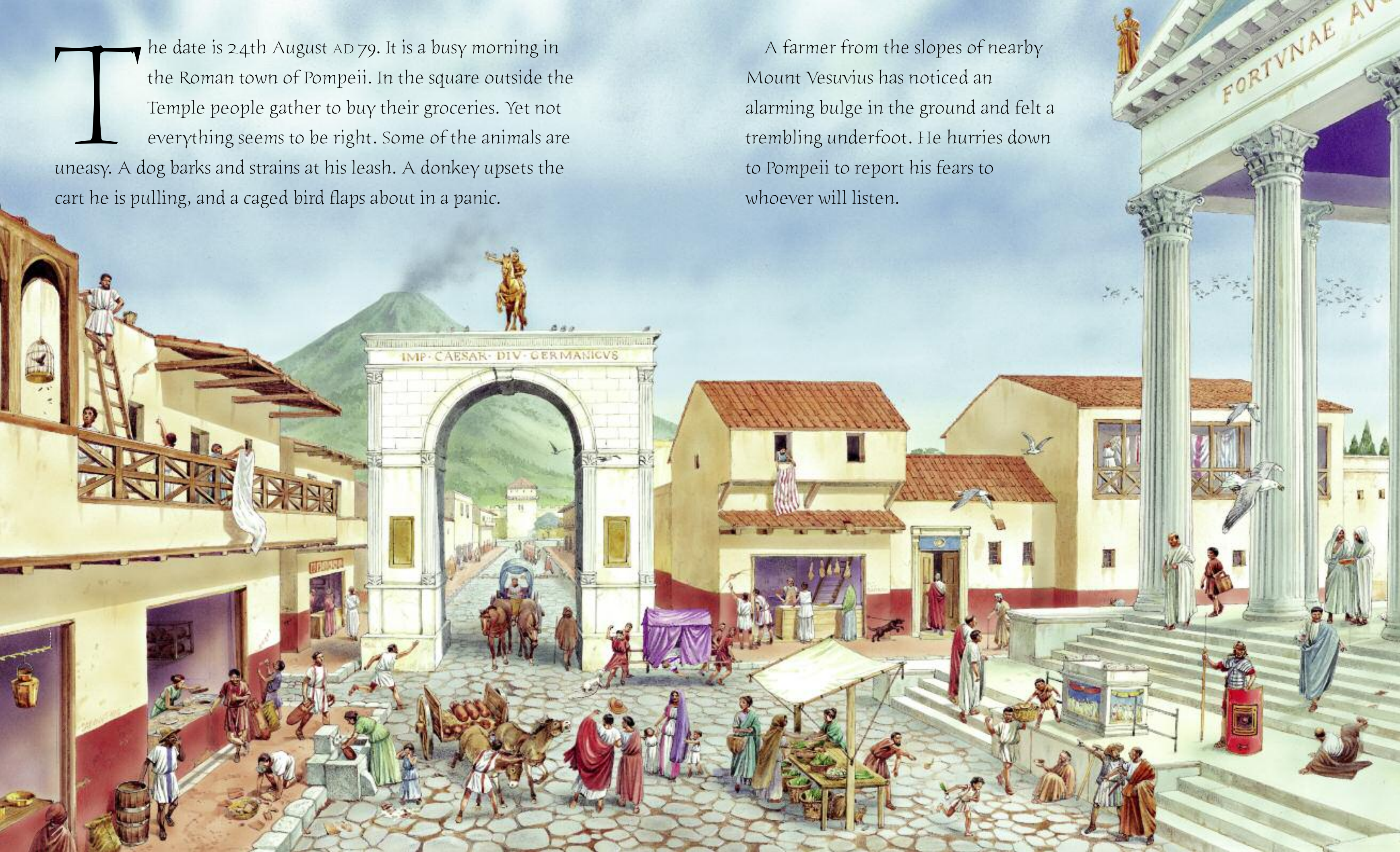
It is the year 500 BC. The Ice Ages have long been over. The summers in southern Italy are now warm and sunny. The soil is fertile and crops grow very well. Vesuvius lies close by. It has not erupted for many centuries.

The people who live here have no idea that it is a dangerous volcano. To them it is simply a cone-shaped hill. One day, this land will be part of the great Roman Empire, but at this time it is under the rule of the Etruscans, a people from northern Italy.



The date is 24th August AD 79. It is a busy morning in the Roman town of Pompeii. In the square outside the Temple people gather to buy their groceries. Yet not everything seems to be right. Some of the animals are uneasy. A dog barks and strains at his leash. A donkey upsets the cart he is pulling, and a caged bird flaps about in a panic.

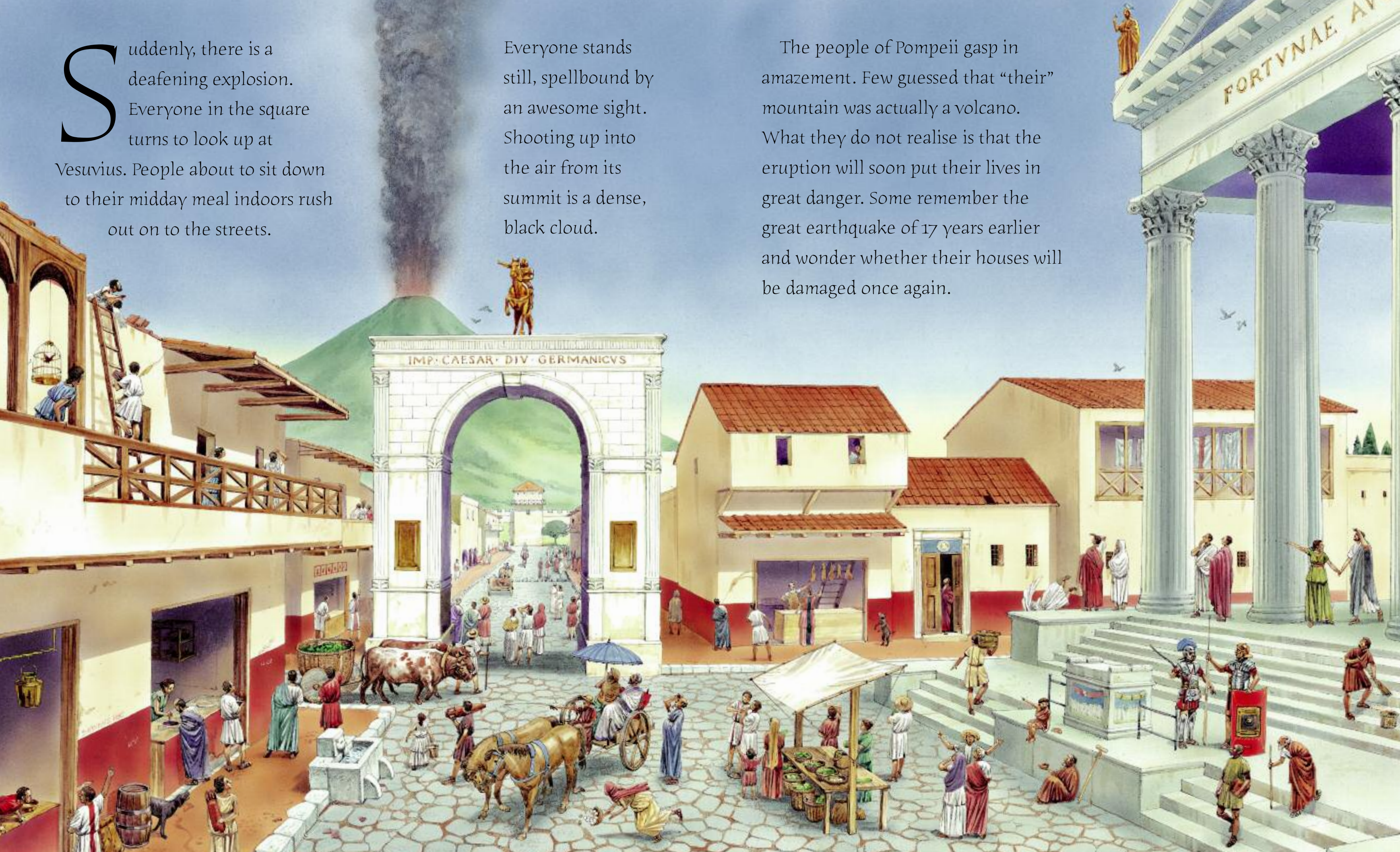
A farmer from the slopes of nearby Mount Vesuvius has noticed an alarming bulge in the ground and felt a trembling underfoot. He hurries down to Pompeii to report his fears to whoever will listen.



Suddenly, there is a deafening explosion. Everyone in the square turns to look up at Vesuvius. People about to sit down to their midday meal indoors rush out on to the streets.

Everyone stands still, spellbound by an awesome sight. Shooting up into the air from its summit is a dense, black cloud.

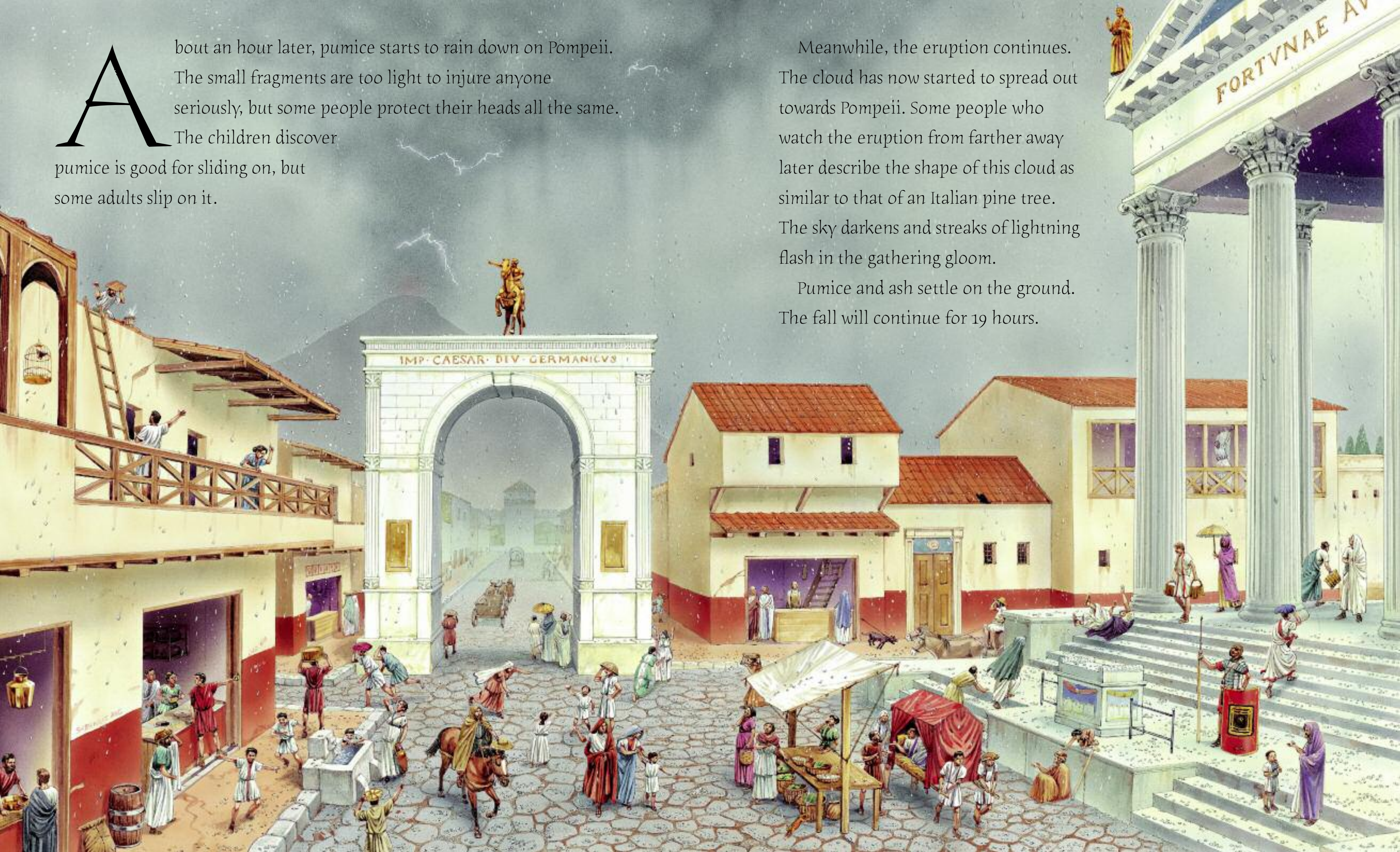
The people of Pompeii gasp in amazement. Few guessed that “their” mountain was actually a volcano. What they do not realise is that the eruption will soon put their lives in great danger. Some remember the great earthquake of 17 years earlier and wonder whether their houses will be damaged once again.



About an hour later, pumice starts to rain down on Pompeii. The small fragments are too light to injure anyone seriously, but some people protect their heads all the same. The children discover pumice is good for sliding on, but some adults slip on it.

Meanwhile, the eruption continues. The cloud has now started to spread out towards Pompeii. Some people who watch the eruption from farther away later describe the shape of this cloud as similar to that of an Italian pine tree. The sky darkens and streaks of lightning flash in the gathering gloom.

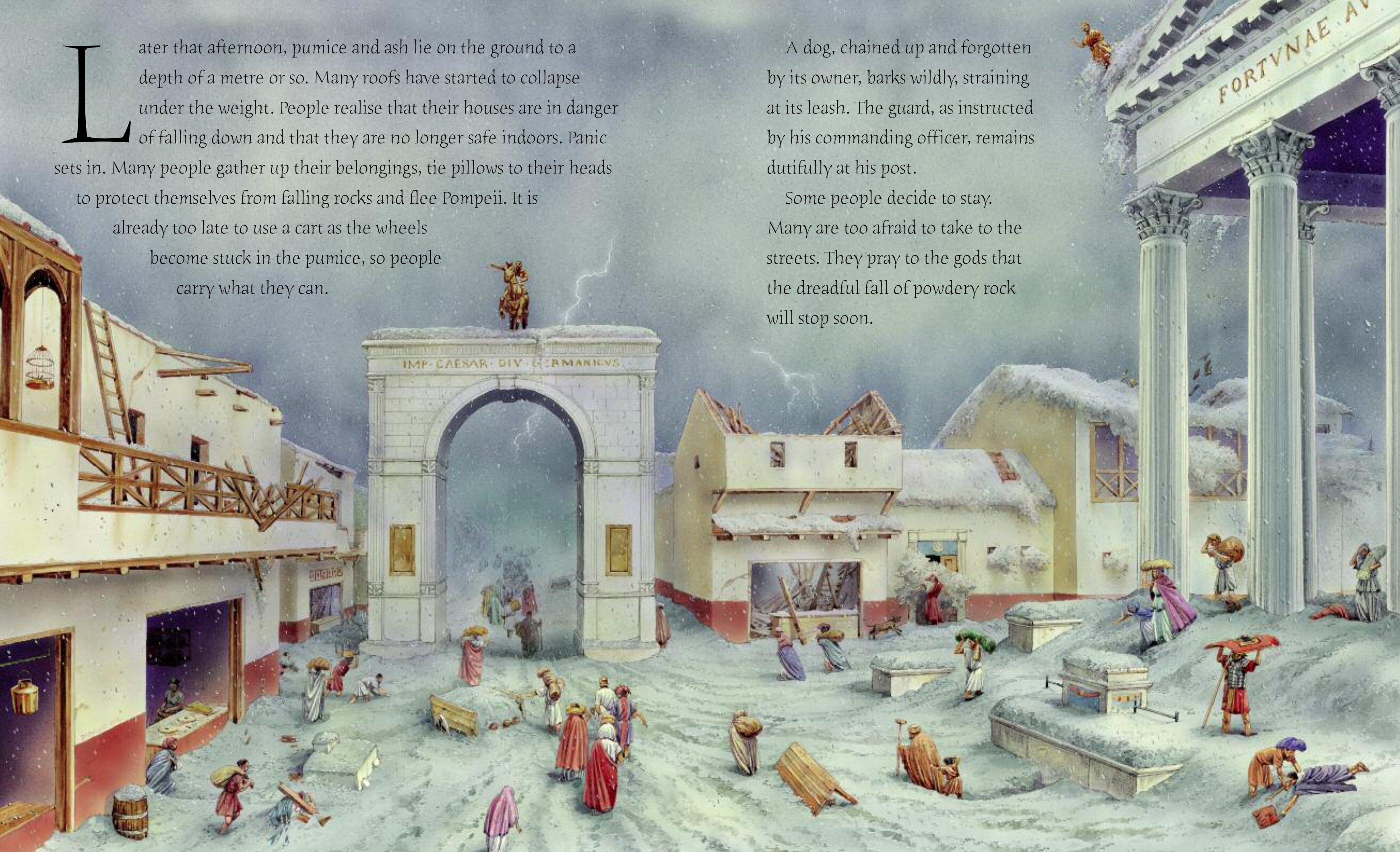
Pumice and ash settle on the ground. The fall will continue for 19 hours.



Later that afternoon, pumice and ash lie on the ground to a depth of a metre or so. Many roofs have started to collapse under the weight. People realise that their houses are in danger of falling down and that they are no longer safe indoors. Panic sets in. Many people gather up their belongings, tie pillows to their heads to protect themselves from falling rocks and flee Pompeii. It is already too late to use a cart as the wheels become stuck in the pumice, so people carry what they can.

A dog, chained up and forgotten by its owner, barks wildly, straining at its leash. The guard, as instructed by his commanding officer, remains dutifully at his post.

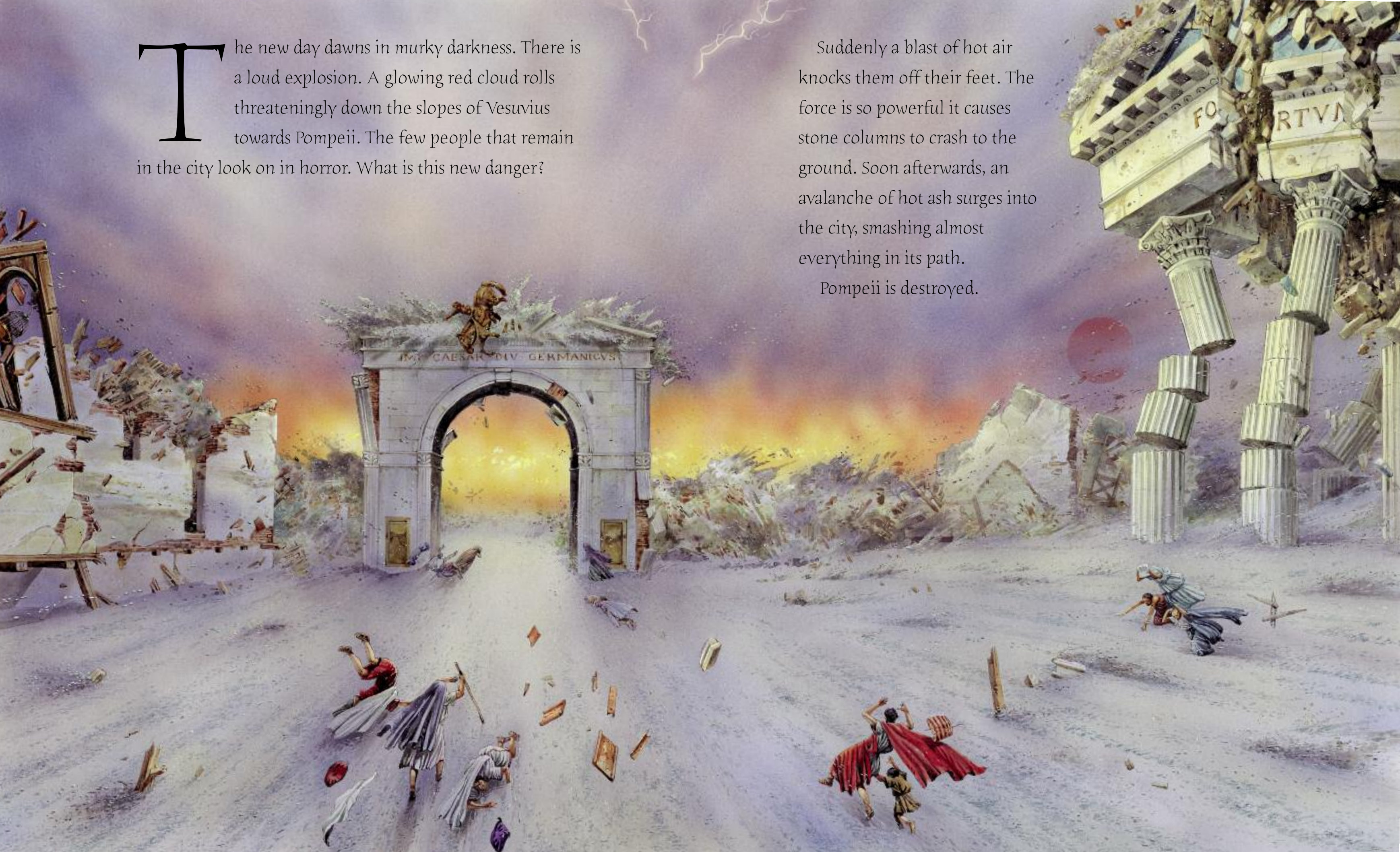
Some people decide to stay. Many are too afraid to take to the streets. They pray to the gods that the dreadful fall of powdery rock will stop soon.



The new day dawns in murky darkness. There is a loud explosion. A glowing red cloud rolls threateningly down the slopes of Vesuvius towards Pompeii. The few people that remain in the city look on in horror. What is this new danger?

Suddenly a blast of hot air knocks them off their feet. The force is so powerful it causes stone columns to crash to the ground. Soon afterwards, an avalanche of hot ash surges into the city, smashing almost everything in its path.

Pompeii is destroyed.

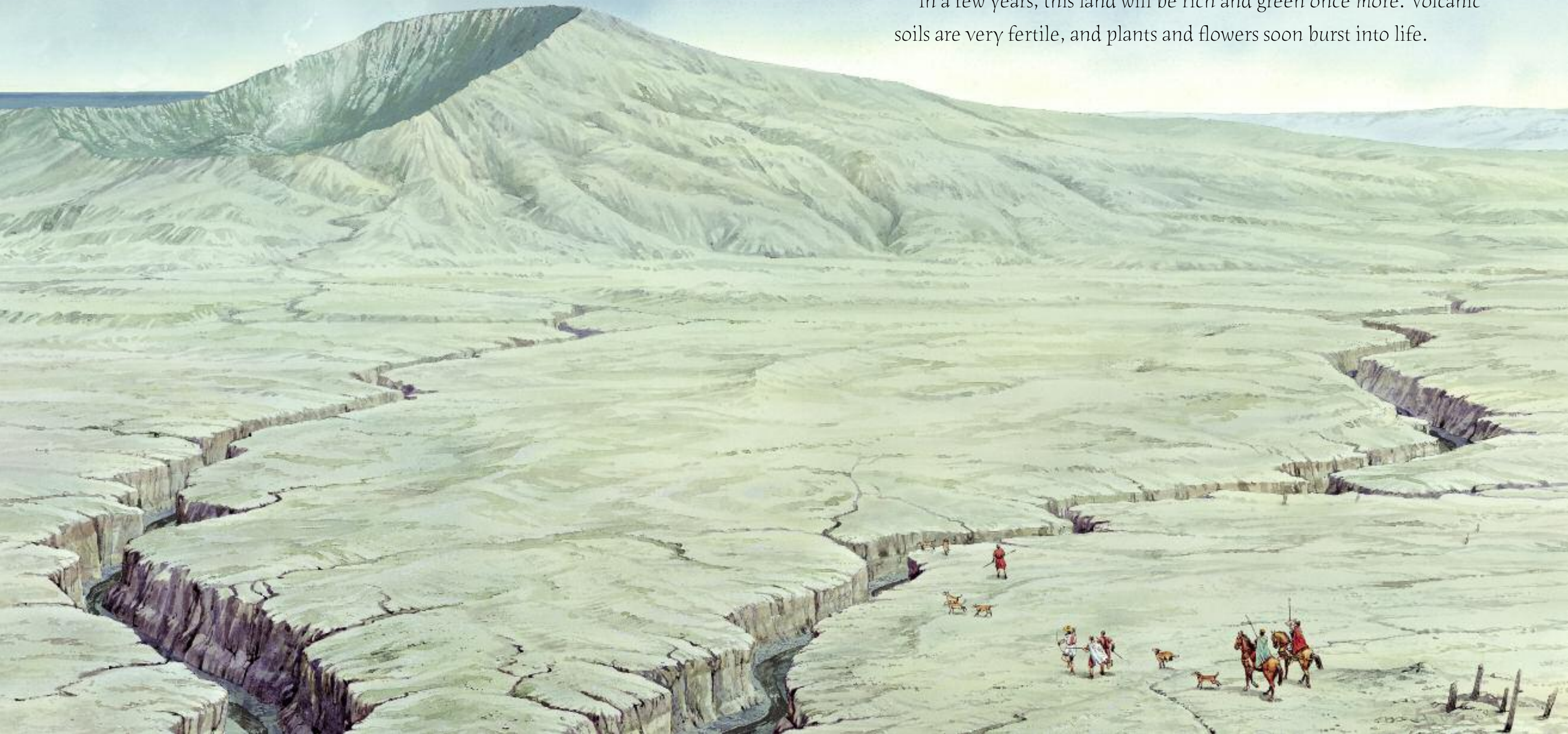


A

year has passed. Where there was once a city of 20,000 people, surrounded by fertile fields and vineyards, now there is a barren landscape. Nothing grows here. The only people are curious visitors.

Everywhere there is a thick layer of grey “snow”, the ash and pumice that fell on Pompeii during the eruption of Vesuvius. It lies to a depth of between three and five metres, completely covering the ruins of the Roman city. Each time it rains, torrential streams gouge out ravines in the soft material. A few bare tree stumps stick out from the ash layers.

In a few years, this land will be rich and green once more. Volcanic soils are very fertile, and plants and flowers soon burst into life.



More than a 1000 yers have passed. Lying under its thick blanket of volcanic ash and pumice, Pompeii has been buried and forgotten for many years. The Roman Empire also ended many centuries ago, and no new cities have grown up in this area.

Instead, country people plough the land and graze their livestock. The fertile volcanic soils ensure that their farms are prosperous, and they live good lives.

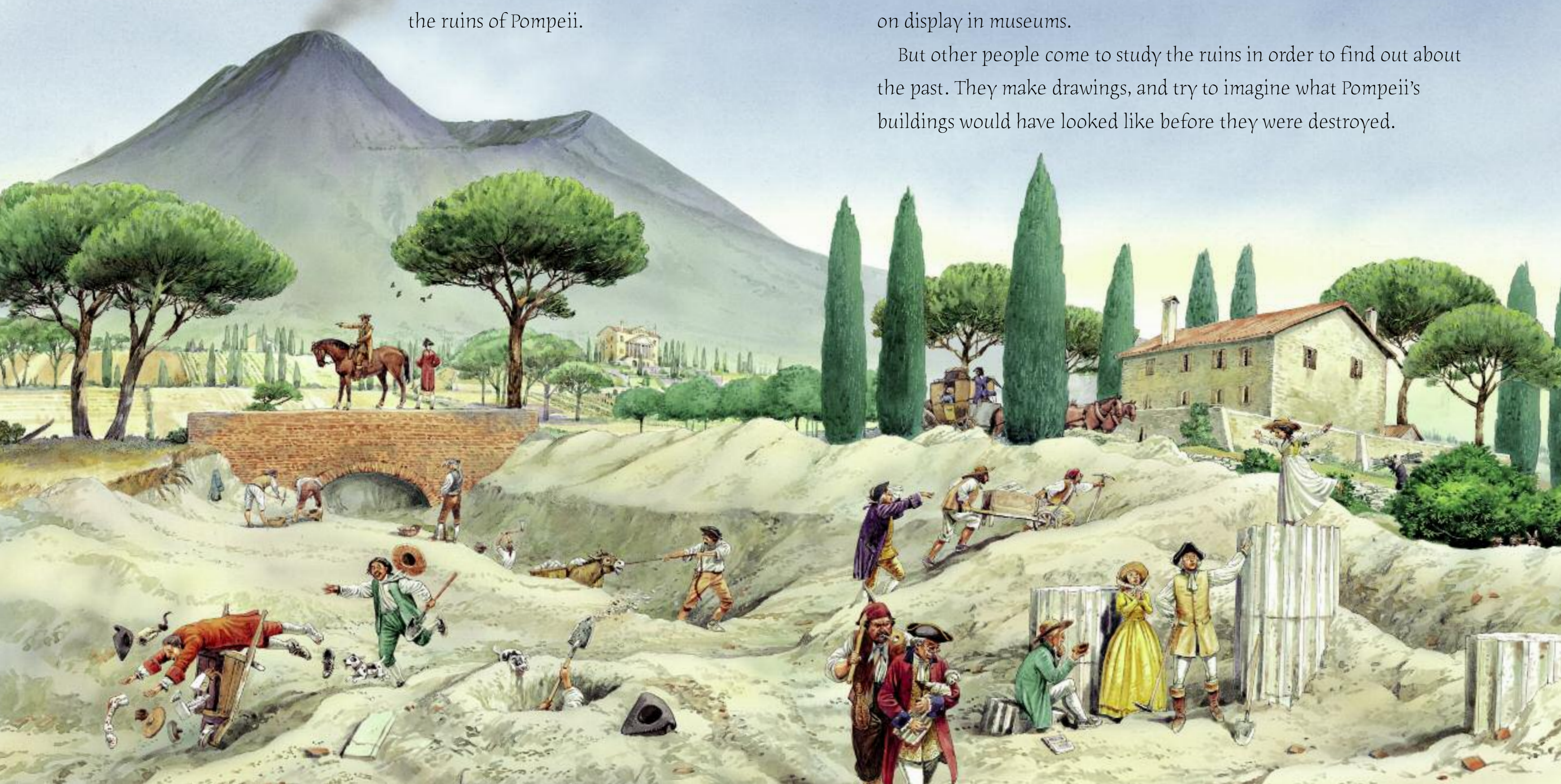
Sometimes, coins, tiles, pieces of pottery or old columns are dug up, but no-one thinks anything of them.



It is the year 1785. Ever since the news broke earlier in the century that an ancient city had been discovered under the ground near Vesuvius, travellers have been eager to see the remains for themselves. Wealthy people from all over Europe visit the ruins of Pompeii.

Some of Pompeii's visitors are treasure hunters, with wheelbarrows and spades. Pieces of marble are broken off and taken away as souvenirs. Columns, vases, statues and wall paintings are dug up and taken away. Some discoveries are used as ornaments. Others are put on display in museums.

But other people come to study the ruins in order to find out about the past. They make drawings, and try to imagine what Pompeii's buildings would have looked like before they were destroyed.



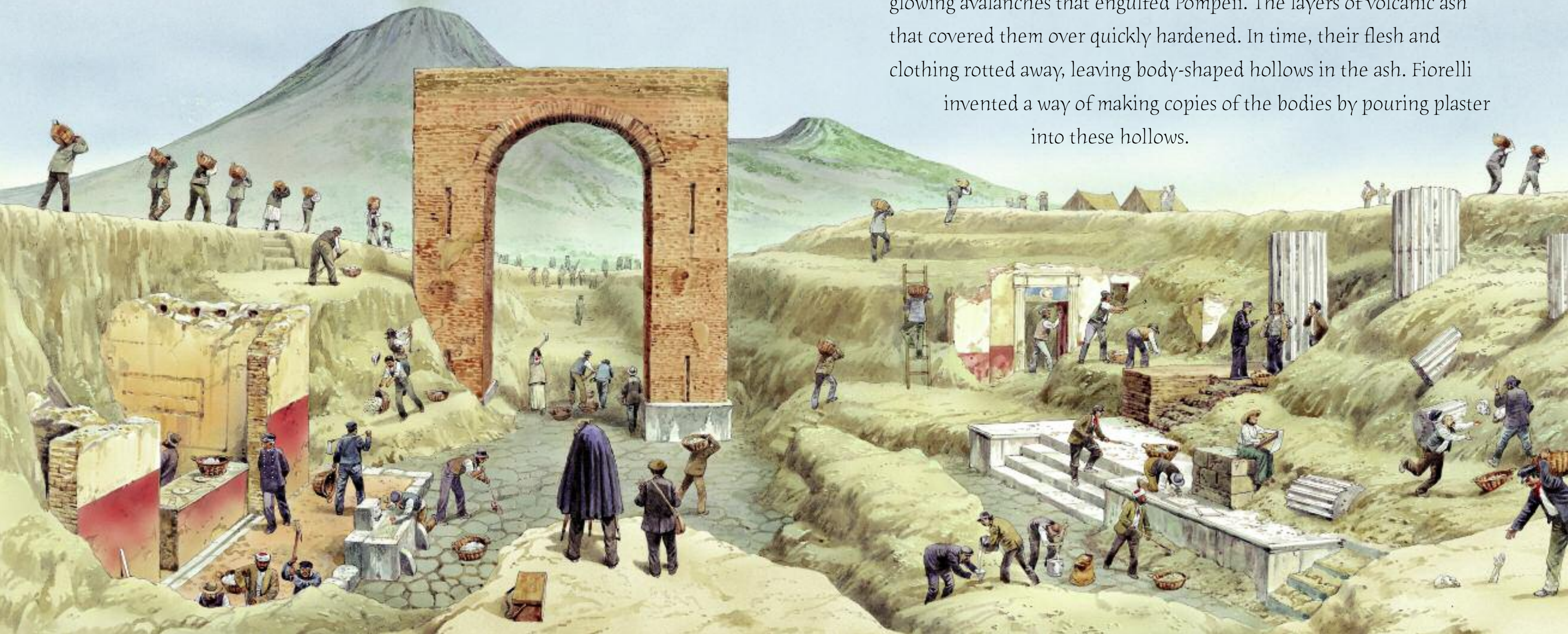
One hundred years later, thanks to the efforts of hundreds of workers armed with picks and shovels, the ruins of Pompeii are gradually emerging from the deep layers of pumice and ash that have covered them over for so long.

An archaeologist called Giuseppe Fiorelli has been appointed to supervise the excavation of Pompeii. He has made sure that proper scientific records are made of Pompeii's ruins.

First of all, mounds of ash are cleared away. He divides up the site into regions. Every block and building inside each region is given a number. This means that whenever an object is found, its precise position can be recorded.

Teams of workers carry away pumice and ash in straw baskets, watched over by supervisors, who make sure that nothing is stolen. Others make plaster casts of dead people whose skeletons have been found. They were the unfortunate ones who could not escape the glowing avalanches that engulfed Pompeii. The layers of volcanic ash that covered them over quickly hardened. In time, their flesh and clothing rotted away, leaving body-shaped hollows in the ash. Fiorelli

invented a way of making copies of the bodies by pouring plaster into these hollows.



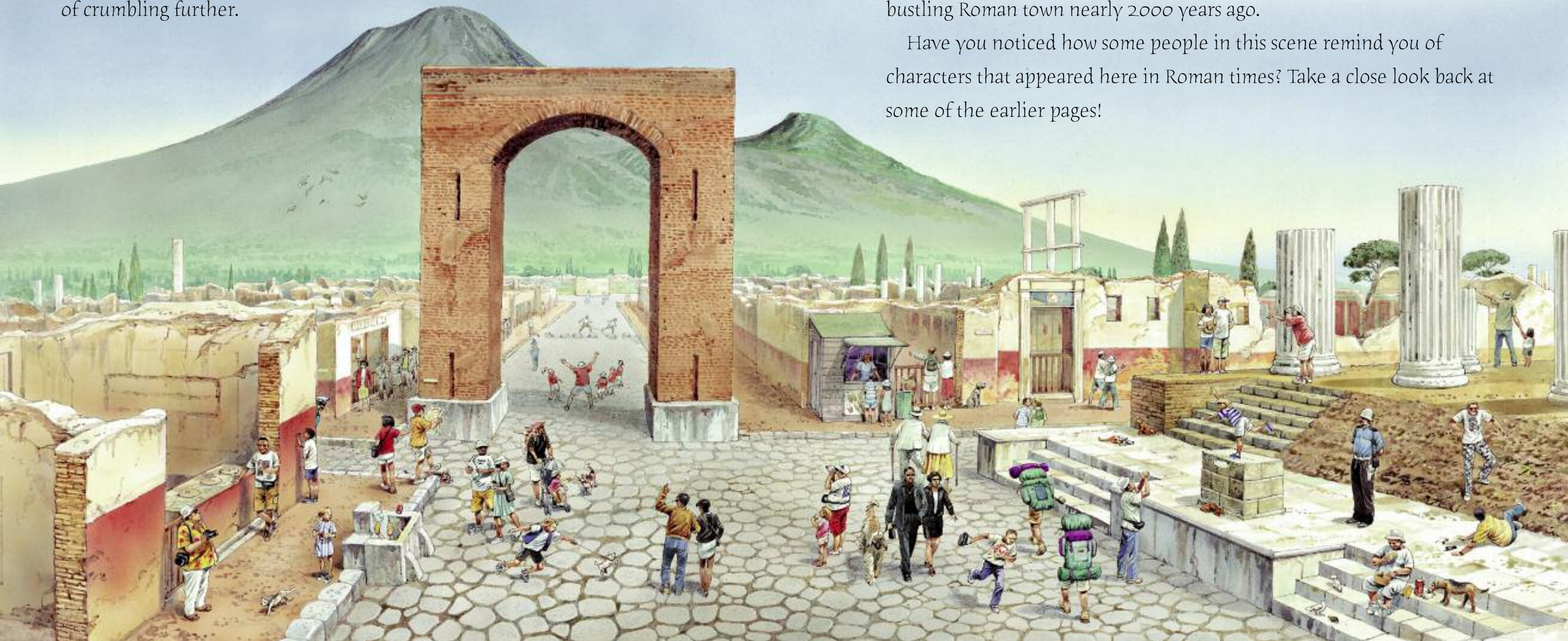
Visitors flock to see the ruins of Pompeii (about two million come each year). There are guides on hand to make sure that tourists can find their way around. They also answer questions about, for example, what life was like in Pompeii before it was destroyed, what happened during the eruption of Vesuvius and how the ruins were discovered and restored for all to see.

The ruins of ancient Pompeii are old and need to be looked after carefully. At the mercy of the weather and pollution, the walls are at risk of crumbling further.

Many of Pompeii's tall buildings were knocked down by the great force of the glowing avalanches. Some of those that have remained standing were plundered for building stone a long time ago. As a result, tall buildings are quite rare in Pompeii, although the great Arch of Caligula still stands proudly.

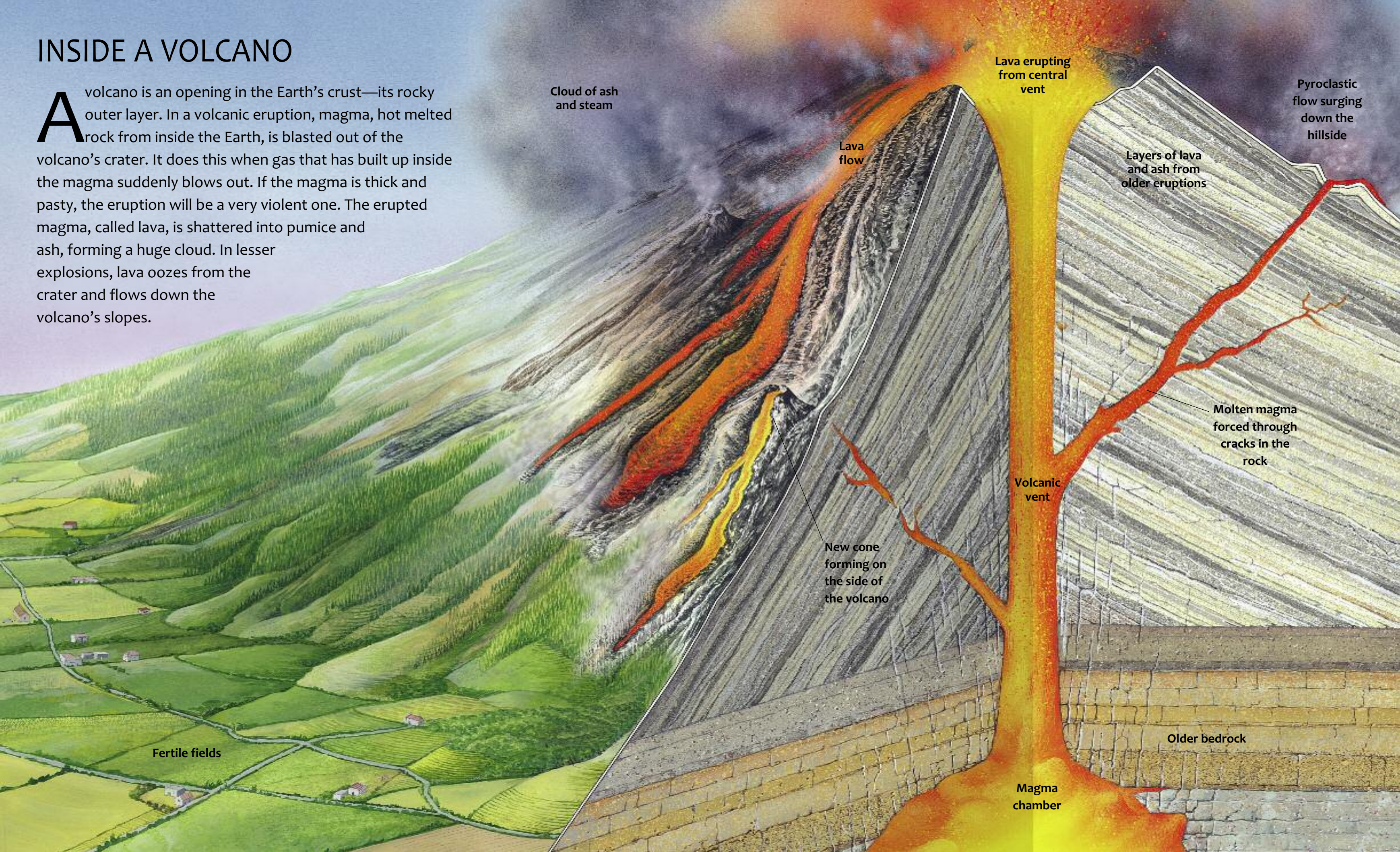
The tourists admire the many wonderful sights Pompeii boasts. They stroll around its streets enjoying the warm, sunny weather. Some wonder what it would be like to live and work in Pompeii when it was a bustling Roman town nearly 2000 years ago.

Have you noticed how some people in this scene remind you of characters that appeared here in Roman times? Take a close look back at some of the earlier pages!



INSIDE A VOLCANO

A volcano is an opening in the Earth's crust—its rocky outer layer. In a volcanic eruption, magma, hot melted rock from inside the Earth, is blasted out of the volcano's crater. It does this when gas that has built up inside the magma suddenly blows out. If the magma is thick and pasty, the eruption will be a very violent one. The erupted magma, called lava, is shattered into pumice and ash, forming a huge cloud. In lesser explosions, lava oozes from the crater and flows down the volcano's slopes.



Cloud of ash and steam

Lava erupting from central vent

Pyroclastic flow surging down the hillside

Lava flow

Layers of lava and ash from older eruptions

Molten magma forced through cracks in the rock

Volcanic vent

New cone forming on the side of the volcano

Older bedrock

Magma chamber

Fertile fields

GLOSSARY

Active volcano A volcano that is erupting.

Archaeologist Someone who studies human life in the past, using the evidence from finds buried in the ground or at sea.

Ash, volcanic Lava that has been blown to powder by the force of the explosion when a volcano erupts.

Crater The circular, funnel-shaped basin at the summit of a volcanic cone.

Dormant volcano A volcano that has stopped erupting, but which may burst into life again some time in the future.



This is what volcanic ash looks like under a microscope. The particles range in size from sand to flour. They are the remains of the walls of “bubbles” inside the magma caused by gas escaping from it.

Earthquake A shaking or trembling of the ground, caused by the sudden movement of part of the Earth’s crust. They usually occur near tectonic plate boundaries.

Eruption The blasting out of lava, ash or pumice from a volcano into the air or on to the Earth’s surface.

Excavation The unearthing of objects in an attempt to find out about the past.

Extinct volcano A volcano that has permanently stopped erupting.

Ice Age A cold period in the Earth’s history when ice spreads out from the poles and mountain ranges to cover large areas of the Earth’s surface. The last Ice Age began about 2 million years ago.



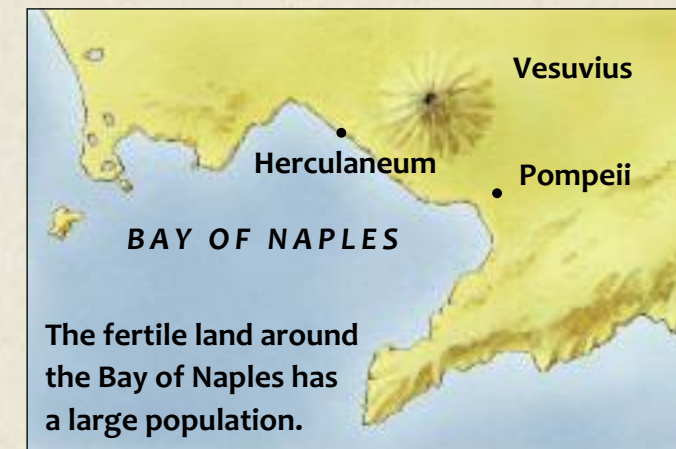
The finds made at Pompeii tell us a great deal about life in Roman times. By being buried in ash, even some foods have survived to the present day.

This plaster cast reveals a dog that was buried alive, struggling to free itself of its chain.



Lava Magma that has erupted on to the Earth’s surface through volcanoes.

Magma Hot, melted (molten) rock that comes from beneath the solid rock of the Earth’s crust.



The fertile land around the Bay of Naples has a large population.

Pumice A volcanic glass “froth” formed from cooling gassy lava. It contains many bubbles.

Pyroclastic flow Hot, glowing avalanches of rock that surge down the slopes of the volcano during an eruption.

Ravine A deep, narrow valley formed by the action of a fast-running stream.



PLASTER CASTS

This is how plaster casts of dead people and animals

found at Pompeii were made. A woman is buried by falling ash and pumice (1). The layers of ash and pumice set hard around her body. This later rotted away, leaving a body-shaped hollow. The hollow was filled with liquid plaster (2).

After the plaster had set hard, the ash was dug away, leaving a perfect cast of the body that once filled the hollow (3). Nowadays, casts are made using a tough, transparent material

so we can see the bones inside.



Tectonic plates The large slabs into which the Earth’s surface is divided. Each plate moves slowly, either pushing into, pulling away or sliding underneath one another. Many volcanoes are found near the plate boundaries.

Volcano An opening in the Earth’s crust through which magma erupts. The term is normally used to describe a cone-shaped mountain with a crater at its summit.

There was an amphitheatre, a stadium, in Pompeii, where gladiatorial contests took place. Wall paintings, plaster casts of gladiators’ bodies and finds of helmets and armour tell us what the contests were like.

THE ERUPTION OF VESUVIUS

This sequence shows the eruption of Vesuvius. The cloud of ash and pumice was shot high into the air before it



spread out (1). The cloud of pumice erupting from Vesuvius reached its maximum height after about an hour. Winds then began to blow it in a south-easterly direction across Pompeii. The pumice then began to fall on the city (2). Eventually, the great cloud of ash and pumice collapsed back down to Earth, causing an



avalanche of glowing, red-hot rock travelling at nearly 300 km/h. (3)



