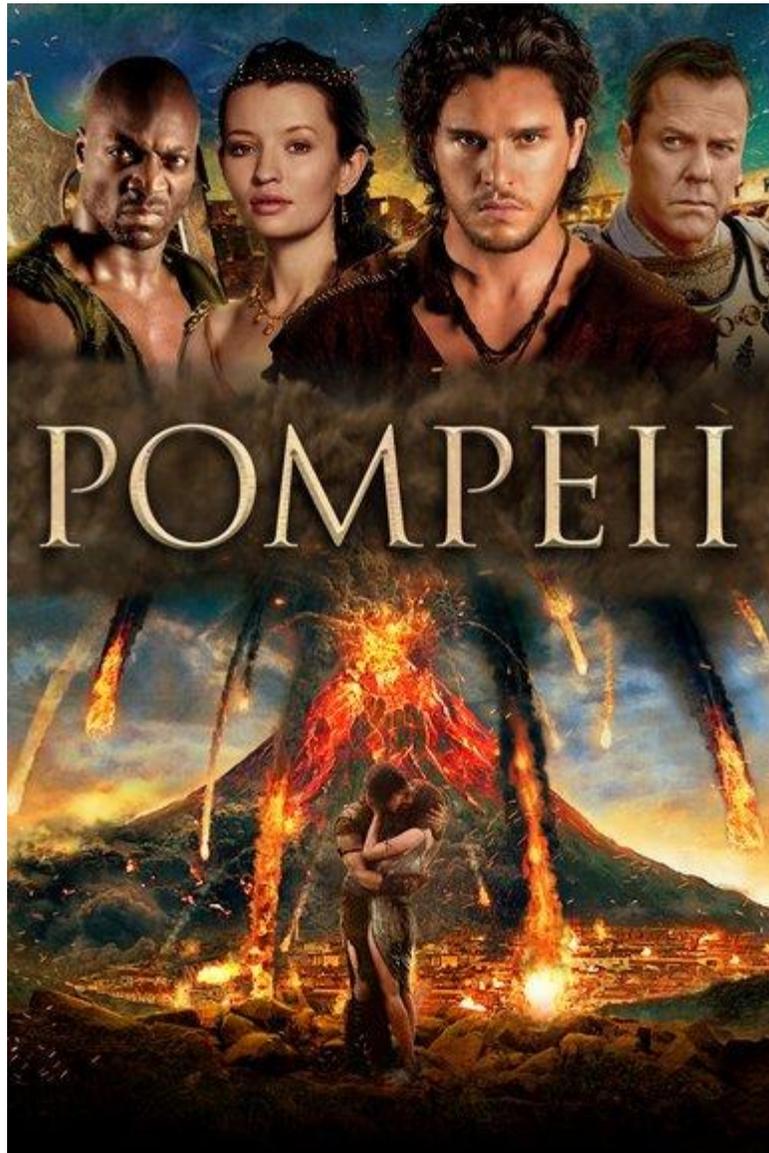


# Pompeii



Reviewed by Garry Victor Hill

Directed by Paul S. Anderson. Produced by Paul S. Anderson, Jeremy Bolt, Robert Kulzer and Don Carmody. Screenplay by Lee Batchler, Michael Robert Johnson and Janet Scott Batchier. Production Design by Paul D. Austerberry. Cinematography by Glen MacPherson. Art Direction by Nigel Churcher. Original Music by Clinton Shorter. Edited by Michael Conroy. Costumes by Wendy Partridge.

Cinematic length: 105 minutes. Distributed by Tri Star Films (U.S.A.). Lionshgate (International):. Cinematic release: February 2014: DVD release: May 2014. Check for ratings. Rating 70%.

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## Cast

- *Kit Harington* as Milo, a gladiator.
- *Emily Browning* as Cassia,
- *Adewale Akinnuoye-Agbaje* as Atticus
- *Kiefer Sutherland* as Senator Quintus Attius Corvus
- *Carrie-Anne Moss* as Aurelia
- *Jared Harris* as Severus
- *Jessica Lucas* as Ariadne
- *Joe Pingue* as Graecus
- *Currie Graham* as Bellator
- *Sasha Roiz* as Marcus Proculus
- *Dalmar Abuzeid* as Felix
- *Mark Whelan* as The Ship's Captain
- *Kristina Nicoll* as the rich Roman woman
- *Jean Frenette* as the slave boss
- *Jean-Francois Lachapelle* as Milo's father
- *Rebecca Eady* as Milo's mother
- *Dylan Schombing* as young Milo

## Review

*Pompeii* (2014) starts with the famous eyewitness quote by Pliny the Younger about how Pompeians were affected by the eruption and then it shows the victims' plaster casts. This suggests that the film will be historically accurate and this appears so until around halfway through. The director/producer Paul T. Anderson was fascinated with the Romans from childhood on and strove to get details historically right.<sup>1</sup> Such details included making the costumes from Pompeii's surviving wall paintings, replicating those wall paintings and also mosaics and

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<sup>1</sup> Dalya Alberge, 'Film Brings Pompeii Back to Life Perfectly – and Destroys It Again' *The Guardian*. 26<sup>th</sup> April 2014. p. 1-2. <http://www.theguardian.com/film/2014/apr/26/Pompeii-back-to-life-film-paul-ws-anderson>. Accessed 29<sup>th</sup> April 2016.

even replicating the bread and cobblestones.<sup>2</sup> Even types of fish, fruit and vegetables available in the markets had to be historically accurate. Six years of study for the film went into Pompeii, tsunamis and volcanoes.<sup>3</sup> Viewers will gain a great understanding of ancient Pompeii – at least in the first half.

In the early scenes Roman invaders commanded by Corvus conquer a British village, which by rebelling, has threatened the trade routes. Here war is a by-product of trade gone wrong and brutality, slaughter and glory are by-products of war. Good to see a film that does not just present war or even its brutality, but its real causes. What gives this film an edge on many epics is the way it depicts money, hierarchies and glory as being entwined motivations causing death and misery.

When the Romans massacre a rebellious Celtic village, Milo, a Celtic boy sees Romans kill his father and Corvus kill his mother. He survives by being piled up with the massacred and we see him escaping by clawing his way out of a pile of corpses and escaping to the forest, briefly. After being captured by slave traders he eventually becomes a gladiator who ends up in Pompeii. The focus shifts to the wealthy family of Severus, Pompeii's ruler. Corvus arrives and his crucial support for Severus's building expansion plans for Pompeii will cost an arranged marriage with Severus's reluctant daughter Cassia. The parents are also reluctant, but agree.

At the gladiatorial games a bizarrely masked chorus introduce the acts and acknowledge Corvus as the game's financier, thereby reminding the audience who rules at the top of their local social pyramid. The acclamation of the chorus clearly works as a Roman form of advertising. A subtext is that the chorus are not strange to the Romans but are strange to us: therefore they remind us that not everything in Roman society can be seen as being an earlier version of our society or can be neatly explicable to us. An almost intangible religious element comes into play here. Our public probably find that unsettling, but they will soon be reassured by a Hollywood formula fantasy game. Corvus plays one himself for in the arena he uses gladiators to recreate his conquest of the Celts, making it warrior against warrior - without mention of money or murdered women and babies, of course.

Corvus decrees 'Let the games begin' and this becomes ironic indeed as the film divides in half and the best half has gone. Until this point hard realities have, but

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<sup>2</sup> Alberge, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Alberge, p. 1.

*Gladiators Atticus and Milo and Rich Girl Cassia in the devastated arena*



*Corvus at the height of his power Let the games begin indeed*



we also see the power structures both within the family and between Severus and his superior Corvus. The sad, loveless reality of arranged marriages and how they serve the powerful also gains a presentation without melodrama. The public would get a realistic recreation of several aspects of Roman hierarchies and how they work here. The first half pulls no punches we see, brutal invasions, casual death, the sordid, filthy dreary life of slaves are all depicted without cosmetics.

Then the film changes in the arena. Suddenly we are in some familiar fantasy game where the action hero vanquishes enemies by the half dozen within seconds: they die instantly from a single blow and more just pile on, oblivious to the fate of their predecessors. Then just when Milo find himself surrounded by a fresh contingent and appears doomed, the eruption conveniently hits, allowing them to escape. From there on improbabilities pile up as Milo and Cassia repeatedly escape dangers and Milo revenges himself on Corvus.

In the second half not only reality and probability wane, the historical accuracy also weakens; Roman stirrups did not exist, only in Hollywood did proper Roman matrons walk alone down streets in skimpy clothes and Vesuvius did not spit fireballs.<sup>4</sup> The decision to include stirrups was made on the primacy of stuntmen's safety, but the fireballs? These fireballs may become another popular fallacy fostered on history by Hollywood. The scenes of Pompeiians during the eruption are powerful, but the second half has a romance resembling another disaster movie *Titanic* (1997). Resemblances abound: a forced marriage to a rich suitor, the loyal thug to carry out the chief villain's handywork, the mother matchmaking with the lustful villain. The lovers attempting to escape and nearly doing so but this time the poor boy sacrifices himself for the rich girl by getting off a weary horse, not a splintering door. The ending differs in that she stays as the volcanic cloud approaches so they eventually become plaster casts caught in a kiss.

While flawed the film remains worthwhile, as history, education and entertainment.

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<sup>4</sup> Alberge, pp.1-2



NO WARNING.  
NO ESCAPE.

# POMPEII IN 3D

TRISTAR PICTURES AND FILMDISTRICT PRESENT A CONSTANTIN FILM INTERNATIONAL / IMPACT PICTURES (POMPEII) PRODUCTION A FILM BY PAUL W.S. ANDERSON "POMPEII" WITH HARRINGTON CARRIE-ANNE MOSS  
EMILY BROWNING ADEVALE AKINNOUYE-AGBAJE JESSICA LUCAS WITH JARED HARRIS AND KIEFER SUTHERLAND COSTUME DESIGNER RONNA KRESS EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS DEBORAH BOWEN PRODUCED BY CLINTON SHORTER WRITTEN BY M.L.X INC. DIRECTED BY DENNIS BERARDI  
EDITED BY WENDY PARTRIDGE EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS JEREMY BOLT PRODUCED BY JEREMY BOLT PAUL W.S. ANDERSON ROBERT KULZER DON CARMIROY WRITTEN BY JANET SCOTT BATCHLER & LEE BATCHLER AND MICHAEL ROBERT JOHNSON DIRECTED BY PAUL W.S. ANDERSON  
SOUNDTRACK BY MILO MASON AND Koenigslander Music

Constantin Film FILMDISTRICT **PG-13** PARENTS STRONGLY CAUTIONED SOME MATERIAL MAY BE INAPPROPRIATE FOR CHILDREN UNDER 13 YEARS OF AGE IN THEATERS FEBRUARY 2014 SONY TRISTAR PICTURES

