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Opening extract from

Gladiator School Book 1 Blood Oath

Written by

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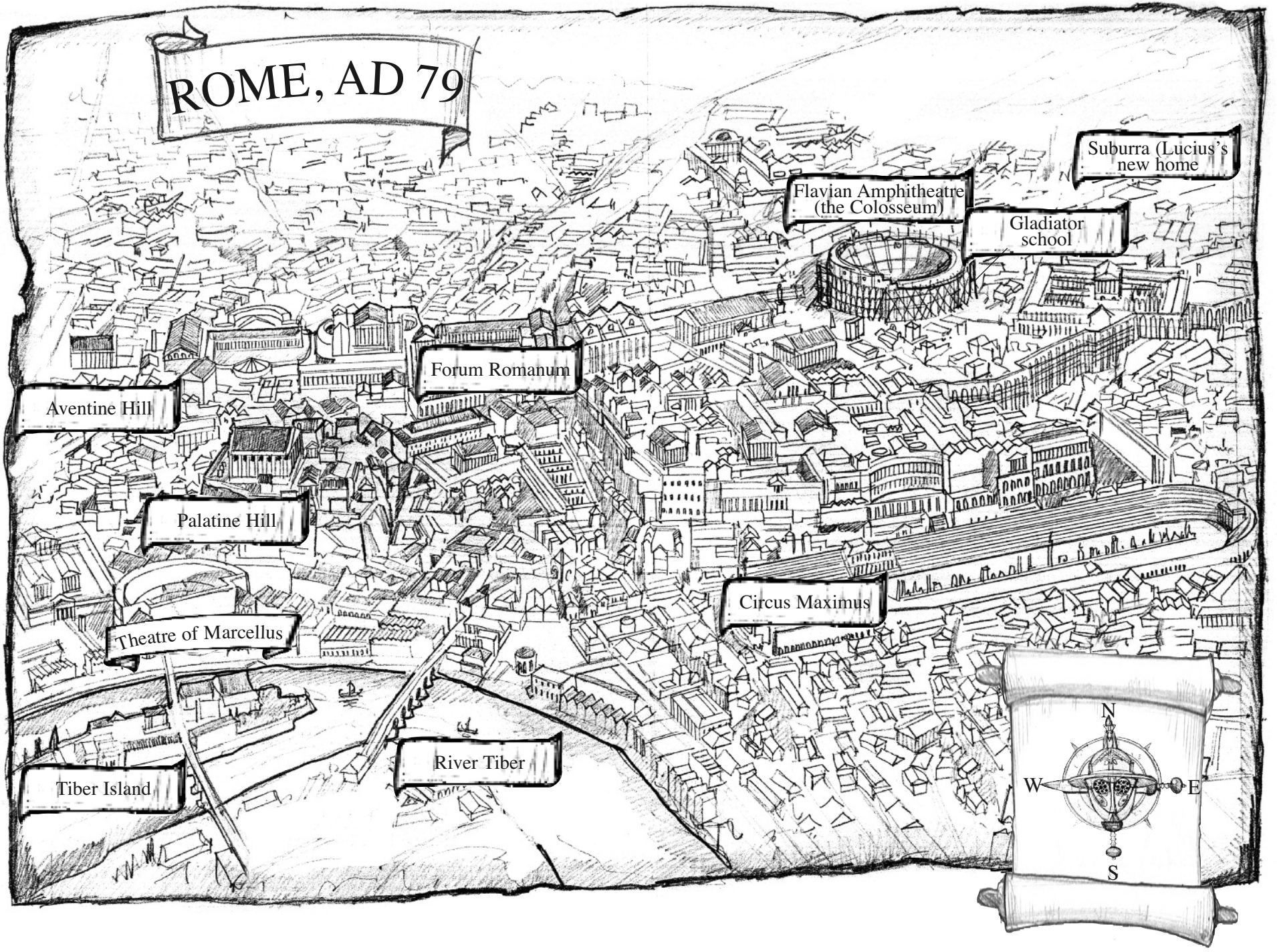
GLADIATOR SCHOOL
BOOK 1

BLOOD OATH

DAN
SCOTT



A division of Book House


ROME, AD 79
Suburra (Lucius's new home
Flavian Amphitheatre (the Colosseum)
Gladiator school
Forum Romanum
Aventine Hill
Palatine Hill
Circus Maximus
Theatre of Marcellus
River Tiber
Tiber Island
N
W
E
S



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, a slave
Rufus, a slave
Crassus, a trainer of gladiators



ROME
JULY AD 79

The Roman Empire flourishes; the world is at its feet and there is a new emperor in command. Determined to be a fair ruler, Titus has decided to put an end to trials and executions based on the hated Law of Treason. He plans to rid the Senate* of the networks of informers that have built up over the years.

Around the Senate, those who have informed on others dread discovery, and none more so than the most feared informer of all – the so-called Spectre.

When his real name is revealed, his freedom will be forfeit, and his family will suffer the shame and ignominy of his actions…

* *Senate: the ruling council of ancient Rome.*

PROLOGUE

TRAITOR!

ROME
JULY AD 79



Lucius stared at the household gods.

Everyone else seemed able to shout and cry and wail and rage, but Lucius couldn't even open his mouth. From the moment the soldiers had burst in to arrest his father and found him missing, Lucius's eyes had been glued to the little wooden statues.

The soldiers had stormed through the villa, overturning furniture, rattling their swords and yelling, 'We arrest you, Quintus Valerius Aquila; in the name of the Emperor, show yourself!'

His mother had collapsed, trembling, onto the couch in the atrium,* clasping Lucius's sister Valeria

* *atrium: the entrance hall of a Roman villa.*

close to her. Valeria, who was made of sterner stuff, had wriggled free and stared at the soldiers in round-eyed wonder.

Lucius's older brother had found plenty to say. Quintus, named after his father, was never lost for words. He had followed the soldiers through the villa as they searched for his father, warning them of the dire punishments that would fall on their heads when his father returned, threatening them with curses and finally invoking the household gods to protect the family against the intruders.

But, throughout it all, Lucius had stayed in the atrium, his back pressed against the cool marble walls. The statues were still wearing their crowns of flowers and leaves. Less than a day had passed since they had celebrated their mother's birthday. And now his world was crumbling around his ears.

'Where is he, boy?'

A soldier was standing in front of him, demanding an answer.

'The Senate?' snapped Quintus from the doorway to the atrium. 'The Forum?* Where else would you expect one of Rome's most respected senators to be at this time of day?'

'He's not there,' Lucius said.

His voice sounded croaky and unfamiliar.

'What are you talking about?' asked Quin.

* *Forum: the marketplace of ancient Rome, which was also the place for business meetings and political discussions.*

He sounded irritable and indignant. *How funny*, thought Lucius. *Quin always knows everything. How come he doesn't know this?*

'Explain yourself,' rapped out the soldier, who was evidently losing patience fast.

'Look,' said Lucius.

Finally, Quin followed the direction of his brother's gaze and his eyes fell on the altar. Lucius saw Quin's posture change. His shoulders sagged, his face registered confusion and disbelief.

'The dog's gone,' he said.

Of the three statues that represented their household gods, the wooden dog had always been their father's favourite. It had stood on the hearth altar for as long as Lucius could remember. Aquila had said that it represented the faithfulness of true friends. He would never take the statue on a normal working day. But it would always travel with him when he made a journey.

'He's taken the statue?' demanded the soldier.

Lucius nodded.

The soldier's mouth set into a grim line. 'Right,' he said.

He called his men and ordered them to his side.

'You're going?' Quin asked.

'Yes,' said the soldier. 'We'll leave you to your shame.'

'What's that supposed to mean?' Quin had recovered from his initial shock and was truculent again.

The soldier turned to stare at him. To this man, they were simply a job. He had no feelings about them, good or bad.

'It means that your father is a liar and an informer,' he said. 'It means that he's been found out and he's fled before he can be tried.'

Lucius looked away from the statues at last. Quin had gone very pale, and he was trembling.

'My father's not a traitor!' he declared.

But his words sounded empty, and the soldier clearly wasn't interested in what he had to say. Lucius's eyes fell on the hearth altar again. Whether their father was innocent or guilty, for some reason he had certainly left Rome. For now, they were on their own.