102/100 BCE: Gaius Julius Caesar was born (by Caesarean section according to an unlikely legend) of Aurelia and Gaius Julius Caesar, a praetor. His family had noble, patrician roots, although they were neither rich nor influential in this period. His aunt Julia was the wife of Gaius Marius, leader of the Popular faction.

c. 85 BCE: His father died, and a few years later he was betrothed and possibly married to a wealthy young woman, Cossutia. This betrothal/marriage was soon broken off, and at age 18 he married Cornelia, the daughter of a prominent member of the Popular faction; she later bore him his only legitimate child, a daughter, Julia. When the Optimate dictator, Sulla, was in power, he ordered Caesar to divorce her; when Caesar refused, Sulla proscribed him (listed him among those to be executed), and Caesar went into hiding. Caesar's influential friends and relatives eventually got him a pardon.

c. 79 BCE: Caesar, on the staff of a military legate, was awarded the civic crown (oak leaves) for saving the life of a citizen in battle. His general sent him on an embassy to Nicomedes, the king of Bithynia, to obtain a fleet of ships; Caesar was successful, but subsequently he became the butt of gossip that he had persuaded the king (a homosexual) only by agreeing to sleep with him. When Sulla died in 78, Caesar returned to Rome and began a career as an orator/lawyer (throughout his life he was known as an eloquent speaker) and a life as an elegant man-about-town.

75 BCE: While sailing to Greece for further study, Caesar was kidnaped by Cilician pirates and held for ransom. When informed that they intended to ask for 20 talents, he is supposed to have insisted that he was worth at least 50. He maintained a friendly, joking relationship with the pirates while the money was being raised, but warned them that he would track them down and have them crucified after he was released. He did just that, with the help of
volunteers, as a warning to other pirates, but he first cut their throats to lessen their suffering because they had treated him well.

72 BCE: Caesar was elected military tribune. (Note that Pompey and Crassus were the consuls for 70 BCE.)

69 BCE: He spoke at the funerals of both his aunt, Julia, and his wife, Cornelia. On both occasions, he emphasized his connections with Marius and the ancient nobility of his family, descended from the first kings on his mother's side and from the gods on his father's (revealing a notable talent for self-dramatization and a conception that there was something exceptional about him).

68/67 BCE: Caesar was elected quaestor and obtained a seat in the Senate; he married Pompeia, a granddaughter of Sulla. Caesar supported Gnaeus Pompey and helped him get an extraordinary generalship against the Mediterranean pirates, later extended to command of the war against King Mithridates in Asia Minor.

65 BCE: He was elected curule aedile and spent lavishly on games to win popular favor; large loans from Crassus made these expenditures possible. There were rumors that Caesar was having an affair with Gnaeus Pompey's wife, Mucia, as well as with the wives of other prominent men.

63 BCE: Caesar spent heavily in a successful effort to get elected pontifex maximus (chief priest); in 62 he was elected praetor. He divorced Pompeia because of her involvement in a scandal with another man, although the man had been acquitted in the law courts; Caesar is reported to have said, “The wife of Caesar must be above suspicion,” suggesting that he was so exceptional that anyone associated with him had to be free of any hint of scandal. In 61 he was sent to the province of Further Spain as propraetor.

60 BCE: He returned from Spain and joined with Pompey and Crassus in a loose coalition called by modern historians “The First Triumvirate” and by his enemies at the time “the three-headed monster.” In 62, Pompey had returned victorious from Asia, but had been unable to get the Senate to ratify his arrangements and to grant land to his veteran soldiers because he had disbanded his army on his return and Crassus was blocking his efforts. Caesar persuaded the two men to work together and promised to support their interests if they helped him get elected to the consulship.

59 BCE: Caesar was elected consul against heavy Optimate opposition led by Marcus Porcius Cato, a shrewd and extremely conservative politician. Caesar married his only daughter, Julia, to Pompey to consolidate their alliance; he himself married Calpurnia, the daughter of a leading member of the Popular faction. Caesar pushed Pompey's measures through, helped Crassus' proposals, and got for himself a five-year term as proconsul of Gaul after his consulship was over. However, he used some strong-arm methods in the Assembly and completely cowed his Optimate colleague in the consulship, Bibulus, so that jokers referred to the year as “the consulship of Julius and Caesar” (instead of “the consulship of
Caesar and Bibulus”). Caesar was safe from prosecution for such actions as long as he held office, but once he became a private citizen again he could be prosecuted by his enemies in the Senate.

58 BCE: Caesar left Rome for Gaul; he would not return for 9 years, in the course of which he would conquer most of what is now central Europe, opening up these lands to Mediterranean civilization—a decisive act in world history. However, much of the conquest was an act of aggression prompted by personal ambition (not unlike the conquests of Alexander the Great). Fighting in the summers, he would return to Cisalpine Gaul (northern Italy) in the winters and manipulate Roman politics through his supporters (see this map of Caesar's Gallic campaigns).

56 BCE: Caesar, Pompey, and Crassus met in Caesar's province to renew their coalition, since Pompey had been increasingly moving toward the Optimate faction. Pompey and Crassus were to be consuls again, and Caesar's command in Gaul was extended until 49 BCE.

54 BCE: Caesar led a three-month expedition to Britain (the was the first Roman crossing of the English Channel), but he did not establish a permanent base there. Meanwhile, Caesar's coalition with Pompey was increasingly strained, especially after Julia died in childbirth in 54. In the following year, Crassus received command of the armies of the East but was defeated and killed by the Parthians.

52 BCE: Rioting in Rome led to Pompey's extra-legal election as “consul without a colleague.” Without Julia and Crassus, there was little to bond Caesar and Pompey together, and Pompey moved to the Optimate faction, since he had always been eager for the favor of the aristocrats.

51 BCE: The conquest of Gaul effectively completed, Caesar set up an efficient provincial administration to govern the vast territories; he published his history The Gallic Wars. The Optimates in Rome attempted to cut short Caesar's term as governor of Gaul and made it clear that he would be immediately prosecuted if he returned to Rome as a private citizen (Caesar wanted to run for the consulship in absentia so that he could not be prosecuted). Pompey and Caesar were maneuvered into a public split; neither could yield to the other without a loss of honor, dignity, and power.

49 BCE: Caesar tried to maintain his position legally, but when he was pushed to the limit he led his armies across the Rubicon River (the border of his province), which was automatic civil war. Pompey's legions were in Spain, so he and the Senate retreated to Brundisium and from there sailed to the East. Caesar quickly advanced to Rome, set up a rump Senate and
had himself declared dictator. Throughout his campaign, Caesar practiced—and widely publicized—his policy of **clemency** (he would put no one to death and confiscate no property). In a bold, unexpected move, Caesar led his legions to Spain, to prevent Pompey's forces from joining him in the East; he allegedly declared, “I am off to meet an army without a leader; when I return, I shall meet a leader without an army.” After a remarkably short campaign, he returned to Rome and was elected consul, thus (relatively) legalizing his position.

**48 BCE:** Pompey and the Optimate faction had established a strong position in Greece by this time, and Caesar, in Brundisium, did not have sufficient ships to transport all his legions. He crossed with only about 20,000 men, leaving his chief legate, Mark Antony, in Brundisium to try to bring across the rest of the soldiers. After some rather desperate situations for Caesar, the rest of his forces finally landed, though they were greatly outnumbered by Pompey's men. In the final battle, on the plains of Pharsalus, it is estimated that Pompey had 46,000 men to Caesar's 21,000. By brilliant generalship, Caesar was victorious, though the toll was great on both sides; Caesar pardoned all Roman citizens who were captured, including Brutus, but Pompey escaped, fleeing to Egypt.

**October 2, 48 BCE:** Caesar, with no more than 4,000 legionaries, landed in Alexandria; he was presented, to his professed horror, with the head of Pompey, who had been betrayed by the Egyptians. Caesar demanded that the Egyptians pay him the 40 million sesterces he was owed because of his military support some years earlier for the previous ruler, Ptolemy XII (“The Flute Player”), who had put down a revolt against his rule with Caesar's help. After Ptolemy XII's death, the throne had passed to his oldest children, Cleopatra VII and Ptolemy XIII, as joint heirs. When Caesar landed, the eunuch Pothinus and the Egyptian general Achillas, acting on behalf of Ptolemy XIII (at this time about 12 years old), had recently driven Cleopatra (at this time about 20-21 years old) out of Alexandria. Cleopatra had herself smuggled into the palace in Alexandria wrapped in a rug (purportedly a gift for Caesar) and enlisted his help in her struggle to control the Egyptian throne. Like all the Ptolemies, Cleopatra was of Macedonian Greek descent; she was highly intelligent and well-educated. Caesar saw her as a useful ally as well as a captivating female, and he supported her right to the throne. Through the treachery of Pothinus and the hostility of the Egyptian people to the Romans, Achillas and an army of 20,000 besieged the palace. Caesar managed to hold the palace itself and the harbor; he had Pothinus executed as a traitor but allowed the young Ptolemy to join the army of Achillas. When he ordered the Egyptian fleet burnt, the great Library of Alexandria was accidently consumed in the flames.
February, 47 BCE: After some months under siege, Caesar tried unsuccessfully to capture Pharos, a great lighthouse on an island in the harbor; at one point when cut off from his men he had to jump in the water and swim to safety. Plutarch says that he swam with one hand, using the other to hold some important papers above the water; Suetonius adds that he also towed his purple general’s cloak by holding it in his teeth so that it would not be captured by the Egyptians.

March, 47 BCE: Caesar had sent for reinforcements, two Roman legions and the army of an ally, King Mithridates; when they arrived outside Alexandria he marched out to join them and on March 26 defeated the Egyptian army (Ptolemy XIII died in this battle). Although he had been trapped in the palace for nearly six months and had been unable to exert a major influence on the conduct of the civil war, which was going rather badly without him, Caesar nevertheless remained in Egypt until June, even cruising on the Nile with Cleopatra to the southern boundary of her kingdom.

June 23, 47 BCE: Caesar left Alexandria, having established Cleopatra as a client ruler in alliance with Rome; he left three legions under the command of Rufio, as legate, in support of her rule. Either immediately before or soon after he left Egypt, Cleopatra bore a son, whom she named Caesarion, claiming that he was the son of Caesar.

August, 47 BCE: After leaving Alexandria, Caesar swept through Asia Minor to settle the disturbances there. On August 1, he met and immediately overcame Pharnaces, a rebellious king; he later publicized the rapidity of this victory with the slogan *veni, vidi, vici* (“I came, I saw, I overcame”).

October, 47 BCE: Caesar arrived back in Rome and settled the problems caused by the mismanagement of Antony. When he attempted to sail for Africa to face the Optimates (who had regrouped under Cato and allied with King Juba of Numidia), his legions mutinied and refused to sail. In a brilliant speech, Caesar brought them around totally, and after some difficult battles decisively defeated the Optimates at Thapsus, after which Cato committed suicide rather than be pardoned by Caesar.
July 25, 46 BCE: The victorious and now unchallenged Caesar arrived back in Rome and celebrated four splendid triumphs (over the Gauls, Egyptians, Pharnaces, and Juba); he sent for Cleopatra and the year-old Caesarion and established them in a luxurious villa across the Tiber from Rome. In a letter at this time he listed his political aims as “tranquility for Italy, peace for the provinces, and security for the Empire.” His program for accomplishing these goals—both what he actually achieved and what he planned but did not have time to complete—was sound and farsighted (e.g., resolution of the worst of the debt crisis, resettlement of veterans abroad without dispossessing others, reform of the Roman calendar, regulation of the grain dole, strengthening of the middle class, enlargement of the Senate to 900), but his methods alienated many of the nobles. Holding the position of dictator, Caesar governed autocratically, more in the manner of a general than a politician. Although he nominally used the political structure, he often simply announced his decisions to the Senate and had them entered on the record as senatorial decrees without debate or vote.

April, 45 BCE: The two sons of Pompey, Gnaeus and Sextus, led a revolt in Spain; since Caesar's legates were unable to quell the revolt, Caesar had to go himself, winning a decisive but difficult victory at Munda. Gnaeus Pompey was killed in the battle, but Sextus escaped to become, later, the leader of the Mediterranean pirates.

October, 45 BCE: Caesar, back in Rome, celebrated a triumph over Gnaeus Pompey, arousing discontent because triumphs were reserved for foreign enemies. By this time Caesar was virtually appointing all major magistrates; for example, when the consul for 45 died on the morning of his last day of office, Caesar appointed a new consul to serve out the term—from 1:00 p.m. to sundown! Caesar was also borrowing some of the customs of the ruler cults of the eastern Hellenistic monarchies; for example, he issued coins with his likeness (note how the portrait on this coin, celebrating his fourth dictatorship, emphasizes his age) and allowed his statues, especially in the provinces, to be adorned like the statues of the gods. Furthermore, the Senate was constantly voting him new honors—the right to wear the laurel wreath and purple and gold toga and sit in a gilded chair at all public functions, inscriptions such as “to the unconquerable god,” etc. When two tribunes, Gaius Marullus and Lucius Flavius, opposed these measures, Caesar had them removed from office and from the Senate.

February, 44 BCE: Caesar was named dictator perpetuus. On February 15, at the feast of Lupercalia, Caesar wore his purple garb for the first time in public. At the public festival,
Antony offered him a diadem (symbol of the Hellenistic monarchs), but Caesar refused it, saying Jupiter alone is king of the Romans (possibly because he saw the people did not want him to accept the diadem, or possibly because he wanted to end once and for all the speculation that he was trying to become a king). Caesar was preparing to lead a military campaign against the Parthians, who had treacherously killed Crassus and taken the legionary eagles; he was due to leave on March 18. Although Caesar was apparently warned of some personal danger, he nevertheless refused a bodyguard.

March 15, 44 BCE: Caesar attended the last meeting of the Senate before his departure, held at its temporary quarters in the portico of the theater built by Pompey the Great (the Curia, located in the Forum and the regular meeting house of the Senate, had been badly burned and was being rebuilt). The sixty conspirators, led by Marcus Junius Brutus, Gaius Cassius Longinus, Decimus Brutus Albinus, and Gaius Trebonius, came to the meeting with daggers concealed in their togas and struck Caesar at least 23 times as he stood at the base of Pompey's statue. Legend has it that Caesar said in Greek to Brutus, “You, too, my child?” After his death, all the senators fled, and three slaves carried his body home to Calpurnia several hours later. For several days there was a political vacuum, for the conspirators apparently had no long-range plan and, in a major blunder, did not immediately kill Mark Antony (apparently by the decision of Brutus). The conspirators had only a band of gladiators to back them up, while Antony had a whole legion, the keys to Caesar's money boxes, and Caesar's will. Click here for some assessments of Caesar by modern historians.

Caesar's early Life

Caesar grew up in a period of unrest and civil war in Rome. The increased size of the empire had led to cheap slave labour flooding into the country which in turn made many Roman workers unemployed. The Social Wars created turmoil all over Italy and Marius and Sulla were the great leaders of the time.

As a member of an old aristocratic family Julius was expected, at the completion of his education, to assume a modest office on the lower end of the long ladder of the Roman political career. However, Caesar was not like other Romans. Already at a young age he had realized that money was the key to Roman politics as the system had by his time long been corrupt. When, Caesar was fifteen years old, his father Lucius died, with him died the fatherly expectations that Caesar should engage on a modest political career. Instead Caesar now set out to better himself.

His first step was to marry into a yet more distinguished family. Further he began building a network of connections, some of which with politicians currently out of favour (the supporters of Marius).

But these were dangerous contacts to have. Sulla was dictator of Rome and was seeking to wipe out any Marian sympathizers. A nineteen year old Caesar was arrested. But it appears that Sulla chose to spare him, as he did some others. Influential friends managed to have him released, but it was obvious that Caesar would have to leave Rome for a while, in order to let things cool down.
Caesar goes into Exile

And so Caesar left Rome to join the army. Naturally, as a member of a patrician family, he didn't enter the forces as a common soldier. His first posting was as a military assistant to a provincial governor. Thereafter he was posted to Cilicia, where he proved himself a capable and courageous soldier, winning praise for having saved the life of a comrade. It's believed that his next assignment was in one of the armies which crushed Spartacus' slave rebellion.

After this Caesar left the army, yet it was still considered unwise for him to return to Rome. Instead he spent some time in the south of Italy improving his education, in particular rhetoric. Caesar later proved an incredibly talented, if not genial, public speaker and much of this will undoubtedly have come from his training in rhetoric.

'Do you know any man who, even if he has concentrated on the art of oratory to the exclusion of all else, can speak better than Caesar?' (quote by Cicero).

Caesar decided to spend the winter on the island of Rhodes, but the ship taking him there was captured by pirates, who held him hostage for about forty days, until a large ransom bought his freedom. During this misadventure Caesar displayed much of the ruthlessness which should later lead to his world fame. While captured he joked with his captors, telling them he'd see them all crucified, once he was released. Everyone laughed at the joke, even Caesar himself. But it was in fact exactly what he did once he was released. He hunted the pirates down, captured them and had them crucified.

Caesar's next task was to organize a force to defend Roman property along the coast of Asia Minor (Turkey).

Caesar returns from Exile

Meanwhile the regime in Rome had changed and Caesar could return home. Based on his deeds and military achievements so far, Caesar successfully campaigned for a post in the Roman administration. Caesar served in 63 BC as a quaestor in Spain, where in Cadiz he is said to have broken down and wept in front of a statue of Alexander the Great, realizing that where Alexander had conquered most of the known world at thirty, Caesar at that age was merely seen as a dandy who had squandered his wife's fortunes as well as his own.

Caesar returned to Rome, determined to achieve political standing. His first wife had died, so Caesar once more entered into a politically useful marriage. Though he divorced his new wife soon afterwards, on suspicion of adultery. The suspicion was unproven and friends urged him to show greater faith in his wife. But Caesar declared that he could not live with a woman even suspected of adultery. There was some truth in that statement. His enemies were only waiting to ruin him, seeking any chance to exploit a weakness, no matter if true or not.

For the next years, Caesar continued to buy popularity, both with the people of Rome as well as with the high and mighty in important places. Achieving the post of aedile, Caesar used it
Caesar well knew that his actions were costing him fortunes. And some of his creditors were calling in their debts. Furthermore, many senators were beginning to dislike this brash newcomer who in the most undignified fashion was bribing his way up the political ladder. But Caesar cared little and bribed his way into the office of pontifex maximus (chief priest). This new office bestowed upon Caesar not only the sheer status of a powerful position, but so too the post's dignity granted Caesar a solemn appearance which he otherwise would have struggled to attain. Being a religious post it also made him sacrosanct as a person. The pontifex maximus a man very hard to criticize or attack in any way.

Caesar in Spain

In 60 BC Caesar's career took him back to Spain. Aged 41, he was awarded the post of praetor. It may well have been that the senate decided to send the young upstart to a troubled region, in order to have him fail. Trouble had been brewing with the local tribes in Spain for a long time. But Caesar undaunted by the problems, excelled in his new role. Caesar discovered a talent for military command which he himself hadn't known he possessed. The experience he gained in Spain would be of great value in his further career. But more so the ability of capturing some spoils of war for himself, to put his personal finances back to right and repay his debt was what rescued his career. If there was one lesson, Caesar learnt in Spain then it was that war could be politically and financially very profitable.

Caesar allies with Pompey and Crassus

'The First Triumvirate'

In 59 BC Caesar returned to Rome, having proved himself a capable ruler. He now formed a valuable pact with two of the most prominent Romans of the day, - the so-called 'first triumvirate'.

The triumvirate helped Caesar achieve his greatest ambition to that day. He was elected consul, the highest office of Rome. The political influence he had built up in his previous years of bribery, together with the enormous power and influence of Crassus and Pompey managed to virtually oust the second consul, L. Calpurnius Bibulus, who stayed at home for most of the time, knowing he had little say at all. The historian Suetonius tells of people joking of it being not the joint consulship of 'Bibulus and Caesar', but of 'Julius and Caesar'. The formation of the ruling triumvirate with Crassus and Pompey was a mark also of Caesar's determination to push through genuine and innovative measures in the face of a hostile senate.
which was suspicious of his motives and to ensure that there was some continuity of progressive legislation after his term as consul was over.

Caesar's laws are indeed seen as more than mere populist measures. For example, tax demands on farmers were cancelled. Public land was allocated to fathers of three or more children. These were laws hardly likely to make Caesar less popular than he was, and yet they reveal that he also possessed insight into the problems weighing on Rome at the time.

Caesar also remarried, once again to a bride from a very influential Roman household. And his daughter Julia was married to Pompey, further cementing his political partnership with the great general.

**Caesar becomes Governor of Gaul**

As his one-year term of office as consul came to an end, Caesar needed to think of finding a new office into which to retire from his current position. For his enemies were that bent on vengeance, to not have held any office would have left him open to attack in the courts and possible ruin. He therefore obtained for himself the governorship of Cisalpine Gaul, Illyricum and - due to the sudden death of that governor - Transalpine Gaul for a period of five years, which was later extended for a second term. Gaul at the time comprised the subjugated region south of the Alps and to the east of the Apennines as far as the river Rubicon, together with a small portion of territory on the other side of the Alps, roughly corresponding with today's French regions Provence and Languedoc.

The following military campaign Caesar then embarked upon against the Gauls is still subject of study to students at military academies today.

Caesar had read and informed himself well in the art of warfare. Now also he should benefit on the experience he had gathered in leading troops in Spain. Had Caesar at first been hoping to conquer the lands north of Italy. For this purpose his first task was to start raising, partly at his own expense - more troops than those which he already commanded as governor. Over the next few years he was to raise a force of ten legions, about 50'000 men, as well as 10'000 to 20'000 allies, slaves and camp followers. But it was to be in his very first year in office, 58 BC, before many additional troops had been levied that occurrences beyond Caesar's control should set him on the path to history.

**Caesar defeats the Helvetians**

The tribe of the Helvetians (Helvetii) had been forced from their mountainous homelands by the migration of Germanic tribes and were now pushing into Transalpine Gaul (Gallia Narbonensis). Caesar acted swiftly and shattered the Helvetian invasion in a crushing defeat.

**Caesar defeats the Germans**

But no sooner was this done a large force of Germans, Sueves and Swabians, crossed the Rhine and then entered into the Roman part of Gaul. Their leader Ariovistus was an ally of Rome, but so too was the Gallic tribe of the Aedui, whom the Germans were attacking.
Caesar sided with the Aedui. the Germans had had their eye on Gaul for some time, and Caesar wanted to use this opportunity to put a stop to any such ambitions. Gaul was to become Roman, not German. The Germans were the larger army and the fighting prowess of the Germanic tribesmen was renowned. But they did not possess the iron discipline of the Roman army. Caesar felt sufficiently confident to meet them in battle. On learning that the Germans believed in a prophecy that they should lose the battle if they fought before the new moon, Caesar forced a battle upon them immediately. The Germans were defeated and large numbers of them were slaughtered, trying to escape the field of battle.

**Caesar defeats the Nervii**

The following year (57 BC) Caesar marched his troops northwards to deal with the Belgae. The Nervii were the leading tribe of the Celtic Belgae and were apparently preparing to attack the Roman forces, as they feared Caesar might otherwise conquer all of Gaul. How right they were in this assumption no one can say with absolute certainty. But it gave Caesar all the reason he needed to begin a full-scale war and invade Nervian territory. It was during the campaign against the Nervii that a weakness of Caesar's tactics was exposed. Namely that of bad reconnaissance. His horsemen were mainly German and Gallic. Perhaps he didn't sufficiently trust them. Perhaps he didn't understand how to use them properly as scouts ahead of his army. But it is due to that oversight that Caesar was taken by surprise several times during his campaigns in Gaul. In one particular incident the Nervii swarmed down on his marching troops. It was only due to the iron discipline of his soldiers that panic did not take hold of the startled troops.

When the decisive battle eventually came, the Nervii fought heroically, and the battle for some time hung in the balance, but eventually they were defeated. With the Nervii smashed the other tribes of the Belgae were gradually forced into submission.

Having conquered most of Gaul, Caesar met up with the two other triumvirs in 56 BC in the town of Luca in Cisalpine Gaul, where it was decided that his governorship of Gaul was to be extended and Crassus and Pompey should once more be consuls.

**Caesar launches attacks on Germany and Britain**

Then in 55 BC another invasion of Germans demanded Caesar's attention. The Germans were confronted and shattered near today's town of Koblenz (Germany). Caesar then proceeded in building a bridge across the river Rhine. His description of events states his troops only took 10 days to construct the wooden bridge. Recent experiments by have indeed proved it possible. The meaning of the bridge was mainly symbolic. This display of Roman engineering and power was meant to frighten the Germans as well as impress people back home in Rome. (The bridge was used to carry Roman raiding parties into Germany. But appears to have been destroyed by the Caesar's troops shortly afterwards.)

The senate however was angered at Caesar's flouting of the rules. For as governor of Gaul Caesar was by no means entitled to take any action against territory east of the Rhine. But Caesar was not to care for what his enemies in the senate thought of him. With the Germans crushed, he turned to Britain in the same year (55 BC). The following year he
launched another expedition into Britain. These raids on Britain were as such not very successful from a military standpoint. But to Caesar they were invaluable propaganda. Britain was virtually unknown to the Roman world, but for some trading links. Ordinary Romans heard of Caesar fighting near mythical enemies in unknown lands. Meanwhile the senate was seething.

Gaul rises against Caesar

On his return from Britain in the autumn of 54 BC, Caesar faced a large revolt of the Belgae. The rest of 54 BC and the following year were spent subduing the rebellious tribes and ravaging the lands of those who had risen against him. But in 52 BC Gaul arose in a massive revolt against its conqueror. Under the Arverni chief Vercingetorix, almost all the tribes of Gaul, except for three, allied against the Romans. At first Vercingetorix achieved some advances, trying to starve the Romans out of Gaul. Caesar had spent the winter in Cisalpine Gaul and now hurried, at great danger to himself, back to join his troops. Immediately he launched attacks on Vercingetorix allies, overrunning one foe after the other. At the fortified hill town of Gergovia he was however repelled. His lieutenant Labienus had been sent with half Caesar's force against another tribe, the Parisii. Caesar eventually realized he had insufficient forces to win the siege and withdrew.

The Battle of Alesia

Alas, Vercingetorix made his fatal error. Rather than continuing his small scale guerilla war against Roman raiding parties looking for food for the army (and so denying Caesar's men food), he switched to a direct confrontation. The amassed Gallic army then launched a full-scale attack on Caesar's army and suffered a terrible defeat. Lucky to get away, the remainder of the Gallic force withdrew into the fortified hill town of Alesia. Caesar laid siege to the town. The Gauls watched on as the Romans built a deadly ring of trenches and fortifications around the town. Vercingetorix did not intervene against the Romans as they built their siege works. Evidently he was hoping for relief forces to arrive and drive Caesar off. Caesar knew that such a force had been sent for and hence also built an outer trench to defend against any attacks from outside.

Alas, a massive relief force arrived, gathered from all parts of Gaul. Caesar tells of a force of 250'000 thousand infantry and 8'000 cavalry. The accuracy of such estimates is unclear, and one must consider that Caesar might well have exaggerated the scale of his challenge. But with the Gauls drawing from an overall population which by today's estimates numbered between eight and twelve million, Caesar's figures might indeed be accurate. However high he odds were facing him, Caesar did not retire. The situation was desperate. The Romans still had a force of 80'000 warriors under Vercingetorix to contain within their siege works and a massive force without. More still, the Roman troops had stripped the surrounding countryside of any food. The Gallic troops had brought little for themselves and now faced the stark choice of having to fight or retreat.

And initial nightly attack by the Gauls was beaten back. A day and a half later another massive attack was concentrated on one of the main Roman camps. With fierce fighting all
around Caesar mounted his horse, haranguing his troops to fight on. He sent his reserve cavalry out into the field to ride around a nearby hill and fall onto the Gauls from behind. Then he finally rushed in to fight in person. He might have been the general who commanded form a distance. But here there was no retreat. there was Gauls on either side of the trenches and to have lost this battle would have meant certain death. Fighting alongside his men he helped drive off the Gauls. Some soldiers, either weary from battle or panicked by fear, who sought to flee were grabbed by the throat by Caesar and forced back to their positions.

Alas, Caesar's cavalry emerged from behind the hills and fell into the rear of the Gauls. The attacking army fell into disorder, panicked and tried to retreat. Many were slaughtered by Caesar's German mercenary horseman. The Gallic relief force realized its defeat and retired. Vercingetorix admitted defeat and the day after surrendered in person. Caesar had won the battle of Alesia (52 BC).

**Caesar, Master of Gaul**

Vercingetorix was offered no mercy. He was paraded through the streets of Rome in Caesar's triumph march, during which he was ritually strangled. The inhabitants of Alesia and the captured Gallic soldiers fared little better. They were shared out as slaves among the victorious Roman soldiers, who either kept them to help carry baggage, or sold them to the slave traders which accompanied the army.

It took Caesar another year to quell Gallic resistance to Roman rule. Eventually he assembled all the tribal chiefs of Gaul and demanded their allegiance to Rome. Gaul was beaten, they could do nothing but comply with his demands and Gaul was finally secured as a Roman province.

When Caesar had finished his series of brilliant campaigns, he had changed the nature of the Roman empire from a purely Mediterranean realm into western European empire. He had also driven the empire's frontier up to the Rhine, a natural, easily defendable border, which should come to be the imperial border for centuries.

**Caesar crosses the Rubicon, takes Rome**

But then things turned nasty in 51 BC when Caesar's governorship of Gaul was revoked by the senate. This left Caesar hanging high and dry, needing to fear prosecution for past irregularities once he returned to Rome. For months on end there was diplomatic to'ing and thro'ing with Caesar remaining in Gaul, until he lost patience with the niceties of political life. In 49 BC Caesar crossed the Rubicon, the demarcation line between his province and Italy. He marched on Rome at the head of his battle-hardened army, where he met little resistance.

Though Caesar's tale is a tragic one. His taking control of Rome by force had destroyed the very system within which he had wanted to succeed. And there is little sign that he enjoyed the task of reconstruction. And yet there was much to reconstruct for Caesar, foremost he had to reinstate order. his first task was to have himself appointed temporary dictator, a post of the republic set aside for emergencies, during which one man would be given absolute powers.
Accustomed to working at top speed from his time in Gaul - he dictated letters to two secretaries while on horseback! - Caesar went to work.

**Caesar defeats Pompey**

Caesar might have ruled Rome. But things were far from under control, just because the capital lay in his hands. The entire state of Rome was under threat and only one man could stop Caesar - Pompey. But Pompey, though an excellent general, deemed superior to Caesar by many, he didn't possess the troops to take on the invader. So he withdrew his troops from Italy to gain time to train his troops. Caesar tried to stop him but failed.

But with Pompey forced to flee eastwards, Caesar was left to turn to Spain to put the Pompeian legions there out of action. Not so much by fighting as by skillful manoeuvering was Caesar by his own admission for once outgeneraled. However, the campaign was brought to a successful issue in six months, most of the troops joining his standard.

Caesar now turned east to deal with Pompey himself. The Pompeians controlled the seas, causing him great difficulty in setting across to Epirus, where he was shut up within his own lines by a much larger army of Pompey in November. Caesar avoided a pitched battle with some difficulty, whilst waiting for Mark Antony to join him with the second army in spring 48 BC. Then, in midsummer of 48 BC Caesar met Pompey on the plain of Pharsalus in Thessaly. Pompey's army was much the bigger, though Pompey himself knew them not of the same quality as Caesar's veterans. Caesar won the day, utterly destroying the force of Pompey, who fled to Egypt. Caesar followed, though Pompey was eventually assassinated on arrival by the Egyptian government.

**Caesar in the East**

Caesar in hot pursuit of Pompey arrived in Alexandria, only to get entangled in the quarrels of succession to the throne of the Egyptian monarchy. Initially asked to help settle a dispute, Caesar soon found himself attacked by Egyptian royal troops and needed to hold out for help to arrive. His few troops he had with him, barricaded the streets and held off their opponents in bitter street fighting.

The Pompeians still controlling the seas with their fleet, made it nigh impossible for Rome to send help. Alas it was a independent expedition of wealthy citizen from Pergamum and the government of Judaea which helped Caesar end the 'Alexandrian War'. And yet Caesar did not leave Egypt at once. The legendary charms of the woman he had made queen of Egypt, Cleopatra, persuaded him to stay a while as her personal guest. Such was the hospitality that a son, named Caesarion, was born the following year. Back

Caesar first dealt with king Parnaces, the son of Mithridates of Pontus, before returning to Rome. Pharnaces had used the Roman's weakness during their civil war to recover his father's lands. It was after this crushing victory in Asia Minor (Turkey) that he sent his celebrated message to the senate 'veni, vidi, vici' (I came, I saw, I conquered.)

**Caesar, Dictator of Rome**
Back home Caesar had been confirmed dictator in his absence, an appointment which was regularly renewed thereafter. With this began an era, the rule of Rome being held by men who successively held the name Caesar, by birth or adoption.

But the fact that Caesar had not returned home at once had given Pompey's sons enough time to raise new armies. Two more campaigns were needed, in Africa and Spain, culminating in the battle of Munda on 17 March 45 BC. In October of that year Caesar was back in Rome. Quickly it showed that Caesar was not merely a conqueror and destroyer. Caesar was a builder, a visionary statesman, the likes of which the world rarely gets to see. He established order, begun measures to reduce congestion in Rome, draining large tracts of marshy lands, gave full voting rights to the inhabitants of his former province south of the Alps, revised the tax laws of Asia and Sicily, resettled many Romans in new homes in the Roman provinces and reformed the calendar, which, with one slight adjustment, is the one in use today.

Caesar's colonial policy, combined with his generosity in granting citizenship to individuals and communities, was to rejuvenate both the Roman legions and the Roman governing class. And Caesar, who included some provincial aristocrats in his enlarged Senate, was perfectly aware of what he was doing. But despite the pardons he granted to his old senatorial enemies, despite not drowning Rome in blood like Sulla and Marius had done, when they had seized power, Caesar failed to win over his enemies. Worse still, many Romans feared that Caesar was going to make himself king. And Rome still held an old hatred to its ancient kings. Many saw their fears only confirmed as Cleopatra with her son Caesarion was brought to Rome. Was Rome perhaps the most cosmopolitan place in the world of that day, it still didn't take kindly to foreigners, the people of the east in particular. And so Cleopatra had to leave again.

But Caesar did manage to persuade a senate which knew it possessed no effective powers to declare him dictator for life. Julius Caesar was king of Rome in all but title.

Caesar then began to plan a campaign against the vast Parthian empire in the east. Why is unclear. Perhaps he sought more military glory, perhaps he simply preferred the company of soldiers to that of intriguing politicians in Rome.

The Murder of Caesar

But Caesar's campaign against Parthia was not to be. Five months after his arrival back in Rome, only three days before his departure on campaign to the east, Caesar was dead, at the hands of a band of senatorial conspirators led by Marcus Junius Brutus (d 42 BC) and Gaius Cassius Longinus (d 42 BC), both former Pompeians who'd been pardoned by Caesar after the battle of Pharsalus. He was, at the excuse of some of the conspirators, who claimed to want to present a petition to him, lured into one of the back room of Pompey's Theatre in Rome. (The rooms of the theatre were used for senatorial affairs, while the senate building was being restored.) There the conspirators pounced and Caesar was stabbed 23 times (15 March 44 BC).

Julius Caesar had changed the nature of the Roman empire, he had swept away the old, corrupt system of the late Roman republic and had set an example to future Roman emperors as well as other future European leaders to live up to.