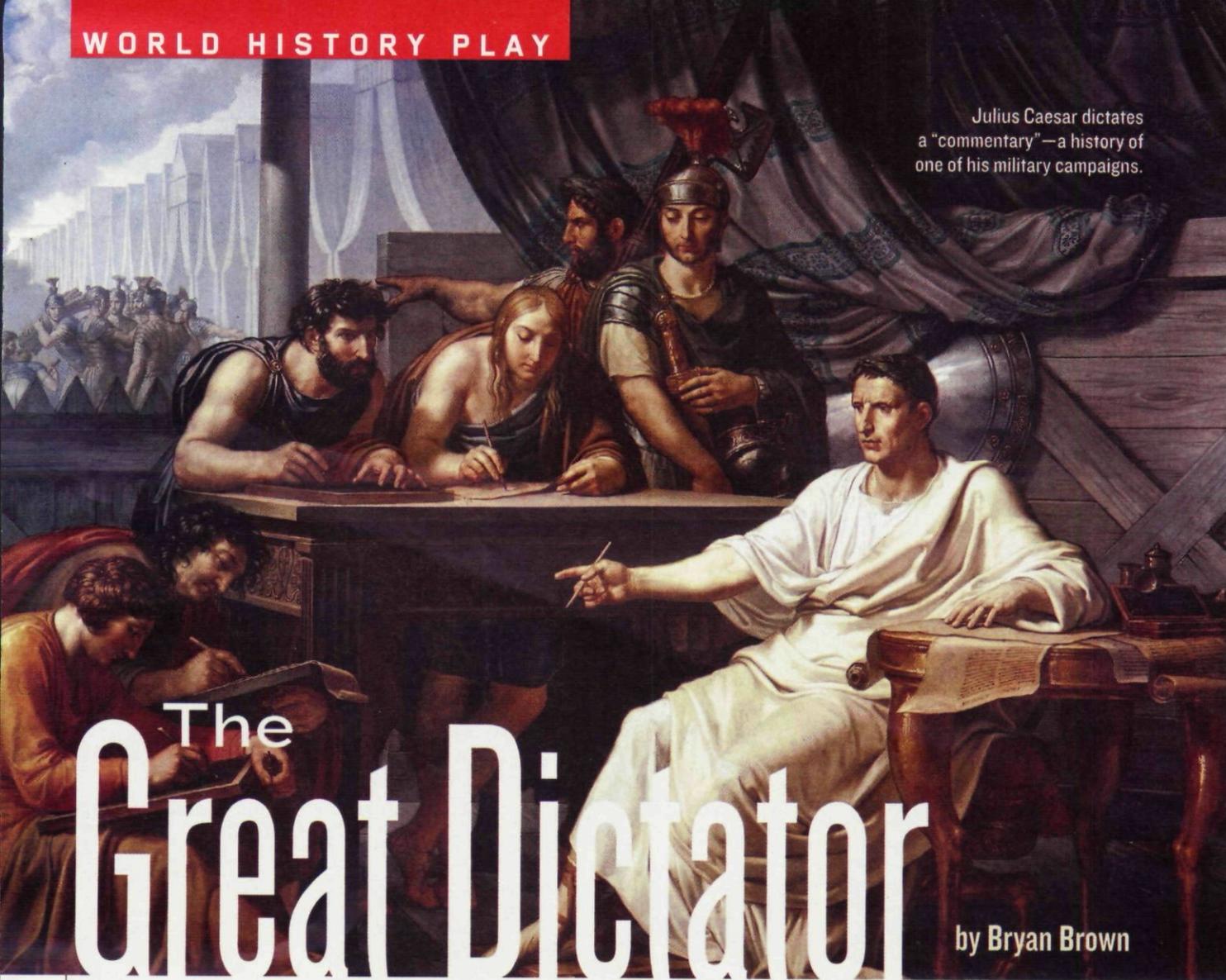


Julius Caesar dictates a "commentary"—a history of one of his military campaigns.



The Great Dictator

by Bryan Brown

Julius Caesar and the Death of the Roman Republic

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Citizens I-7*, people of Rome
Julius Caesar, politician and general
Pompey, politician and general
Marcus Crassus, politician and general
Marcus Cicero, Senator
Aide to Caesar*
Narrators A-D

* Indicates a fictitious character.

INTRODUCTION

IN 409 B.C., THE PEOPLE OF THE CITY-STATE OF ROME did something rare for their time. They banished their King and became a **republic**. The King was replaced by two elected **consuls**. A Senate and Assembly were organized to pass laws. But over the next 300 years, as Rome became more powerful, its government grew more corrupt. The **oligarchy** enriched itself with the slave labor of conquered peoples. Many citizens went bankrupt, and the gap between rich landowners and everyone else became extreme. An atmosphere of great discontent led to political chaos and eventually to the destruction of the Roman Republic. One man would put the final nail in its coffin: Julius Caesar.

SCENE ONE

Narrator A: In 70 B.C., Rome is on the verge of yet another crisis. For nearly a century, it has been the scene of constant revolt. The city has not recovered from the struggle between two generals, Marius and Sulla, that ended in Sulla's reign of terror in 82 B.C. Meanwhile, the **Optimates** party, which controls the Senate, struggles with the party of the **Populares**, which controls the Assembly. Out in the street . . .

Citizen 1: Friend, I see that you have returned from Cyrene [*sigh-REE-nee; see map, p. 17*]. You missed a lot of excitement.

Citizen 2: So I hear. Politicians killing one another. Competing armies and mobs terrorizing the city. Even in Cyrene, one had to be careful about using the names Marius and Sulla in public.

Citizen 3: The generals just get more powerful. They use their battles to get rich from **plunder** [goods taken by force].

Citizen 1: And public office is open to the highest bidder. As my friend Cicero says, "There is one sure way to win an election in Rome: Buy it."

Narrator A: That year, in fact, the elections for consul are basically

bought by two rich men, Pompey and Crassus. Both are generals and politicians who fought for Sulla. They are also sworn enemies. An ambitious young politician observes their success. A relative of Marius, he narrowly escaped being killed by Sulla. His name is Julius Caesar.

SCENE TWO

Narrator B: During the next decade, Caesar's influence grows. Between holding elective offices in Rome, he serves as the Governor of Spain. In 60 B.C., Caesar returns to Rome. He meets with Pompey and Crassus.

Julius Caesar: Greetings to you, gentlemen and noble Romans.

Marcus Crassus: Why have you brought us together? It is no secret how we feel about each other.

Caesar: Yes, but I believe that we can also help each other. Both of you have profitable agreements in Asia that are being blocked by the Senate. Pompey, the Senate also refuses to give land to your veterans. If I am elected consul, it could be good for all of us. Further, if we appeal to the Assembly and get the people on our side, the Senate will be too nervous not to support us.

Pompey: I like the way you think.

Narrator B: The three men form a **triumvirate**. Caesar is elected one of Rome's two consuls for the year 59 B.C. Despite the Optimates' resistance, Caesar gets two land acts passed. These grant land to poor citizens, including many of Pompey's soldiers. The Populares are delighted.

Citizen 4: Did you hear? Pompey and Crassus stood on either side of Caesar

Words to Know

- **consul***: the highest office in ancient Rome. Two were elected every year and shared power.
- **dictator***: a ruler with absolute power; in ancient Rome, an appointed office.
- **oligarchy** (*oh-li-gar-kee*): rule by a small group of powerful individuals.
- **Optimates** (*op-tim-AH-teez*)*: the party of the oligarchy.
- **Populares** (*pop-yoo-LAH-reez*)*: the party of common citizens.
- **republic**: government by citizens and their elected representatives.
- **triumvirate** (*try-UHM-vur-it*): an alliance of three people.

*See Teacher's Edition for further explanations.



Caesar crosses the Rubicon to invade Italy, January 10, 49 B.C.

and defied the Senate. They said they will fight anyone with the sword who opposes Caesar's laws.

Citizen 5: That Caesar is a slick one. When his co-consul Bibulus tried to delay a vote, Caesar had a bucketful of dung dumped over his head.

Narrator B: The triumvirate is further strengthened when Pompey marries Caesar's daughter, Julia. In all, Caesar's year as consul is a big success for the three men—much to the frustration of the Senate.

SCENE THREE

Narrator C: The following year, Caesar receives a military command that includes the Roman province of Cisalpine Gaul. [Today, that area is northern Italy and southern France.] A brilliant general, Caesar begins a steady, brutal conquest of the rest of Gaul. In victory, Caesar builds his own loyal army and source of wealth. Back in Rome, Pompey worries that Caesar's increasing power will threaten his own. He tries to hide his concern from his ally, the

Senator Marcus Cicero.

Marcus Cicero: I don't trust Caesar. He is a snake.

Pompey: Don't worry. I need Caesar now, and I can control him.

Cicero: I'm not so sure. The common people of Rome think that Caesar has promised them liberty. This "liberty" will end with his becoming a tyrant.

Narrator C: In 54 B.C., Pompey's wife, Julia, dies. Her death cuts Pompey's family tie with Caesar. The following year, Crassus is killed in battle. Now Pompey feels even more threatened by Caesar. Allying himself with the Senate, Pompey is appointed sole consul in 52 B.C. With total control, he makes his move against his rival. Shortly thereafter, in Gaul . . .

Caesar: Here is another letter from Rome. The Senate wants to recall me and take my command. If I don't have the protection of my army, they can simply kill me. With me out of the way, Pompey will take over.

Aide: The Senate says that you want to make yourself into a **dictator**.

Caesar: As if Pompey does not! Let's face it, the Republic is dead. It is a mere name, without a body or form. I won't go back to Rome defenseless.

Narrator C: Caesar tries to avoid a war with Pompey. But on January 7, 49 B.C., the Senate declares that Caesar will be considered a public enemy if he does not disband his army.

Camped on the far side of the Rubicon, a river at the border of Italy, Caesar considers his next move.

Caesar: If I cross this river with my men, it will mean war. I did not want to have to do this. But Pompey and the Senate have left me no choice. The die is cast.

Narrator C: On January 10, 49 B.C., Caesar begins leading his troops across the Rubicon. The civil war that will change Rome forever has begun.

SCENE FOUR

Narrator D: Pompey immediately retreats to Greece with his army. Caesar and his soldiers quickly cross the Adriatic Sea and attack Pompey. In August 48 B.C., word

reaches Rome of the decisive battle at Pharsalus [*far-SAY-luss*].

Citizen 6: Caesar was greatly outnumbered, but Pompey was outgeneraled. Thousands of Pompey's soldiers surrendered or fled—many others were killed outright. Pompey, too, ran for his life.

Citizen 7: I heard that Caesar's men found all the tents in Pompey's camp decorated for a



Pompey is assassinated before he can reach shore at Alexandria, Egypt.

THE GROWTH OF ROME



Above: A profile of Caesar. Ancient Greeks and Romans honored generals, athletes, and other champions with crowns of laurel leaves. Caesar especially desired to be crowned with laurel because he was going bald.



victory party. And Caesar ate Pompey's meal for him!

Narrator B: Pompey flees across the Mediterranean to Alexandria, Egypt. Trying to land there, he is killed by order of one of the Pharaoh's officials. But the war is not over yet. Caesar must fight Pompey's allies and other rebels in the provinces for the next three years. He is unable to return to Rome for good until 45 B.C. There, he meets with Cicero.

Cicero: Caesar, we are grateful that you pardoned many of us for fighting on Pompey's side. I hope you will be so generous to all of Rome's citizens.

Caesar: From the beginning, I have only sought to save Rome from itself. Now we must heal our wounds. The poor shall be given relief, and private property will be respected. One day, after I have restored order, perhaps the Republic will be great again.

Narrator B: In 44 B.C., the Senate

makes Caesar dictator for life. But Caesar has little time to enjoy the peace he has won. On March 15, 44 B.C., he is assassinated in the Senate. Leading the plotters is one of Pompey's allies whom Caesar had pardoned, Marcus Brutus.

AFTERWORD

Julius Caesar's stamp on history was huge. Historians say that he saved the Roman state, enabling the spread of Greek and Roman thought throughout the world. Culturally, he left us invaluable histories of his time. The calendar we use today is based on his reform of the Roman calendar.

It is doubtful that Caesar really planned to restore the Republic—or that it could have been saved. Caesar's assassination resparked the civil war. When the war finally ended, in 30 B.C., Caesar's heir, Octavian, held power. Renaming himself Augustus Caesar, he was the

first in a series of Emperors, who ruled the Roman Empire for another five centuries. **JS**

Your Turn

WORD MATCH

- | | |
|--------------|------------------------------|
| 1. consul | A. ruler with absolute power |
| 2. dictator | B. goods taken by force |
| 3. oligarchy | C. government by citizens |
| 4. plunder | D. Roman high office |
| 5. republic | E. rule by a small group |

THINK ABOUT IT

1. What conditions led to turmoil in the Roman Republic?
2. Was the leadership of a strong ruler like Caesar better for the average Roman than the chaos of the Republic? Explain.