

Perish 541

Chapter 541: Vercingetorix Escapes Danger

Of course, after stepping down as Governor, Caesar was also preparing to continue serving as Governor of the Northern Three Provinces, at least to include Illyria under his command. This way, during his next Provincial Governor term, he could take military action against the Nix Tribe, grasp the long-desired papermaking technology, increase his wealth, and expand his influence in Rome...

This was Caesar's next political plan at the end of 52 BC (the 21st year after the establishment of the Nix Tribe), when he was observing the situation in Rome from Ravenna, having learned that Pompey issued a new decree allowing him to run for Governor in absentia.

However, the following year (51 BC), when Marcus Claudius Marcellus became Governor, the situation changed.

Marcellus hadn't previously had any grievances with Caesar, but the main reason was that the Triumvirate had almost monopolized all prominent and important offices in Rome, positions that under normal circumstances should have belonged to aristocratic families like Marcellus's.

Hence, it was clear that Marcellus not only despised Caesar but was also dissatisfied with Pompey. However, Pompey's power was too strong to offend at the moment, and Caesar's political position in Rome seemed quite vulnerable.

Thus, as soon as Marcellus took office, he publicly announced: Caesar should be recalled from the position of Governor of Gaul because although there were some conflicts in specific areas over the past year, there was no major war, which indicated that Gaul tribes had basically submitted to Rome, and Caesar was no longer needed to lead the army for conquest.

Moreover, he had a more justified reason: In 55 BC, the law of Crassus and Pompey granted Caesar a new five-year term in Gaul, which would expire by the first of March next year.

In response, Caesar obviously had a different view. He believed that the decree issued by Crassus and Pompey extended his original five-year term by another five years.

Caesar repeatedly wrote to the Senate to clarify this, although he never mentioned when he thought his gubernatorial term should end.

Additionally, Marcellus also advocated that the supplementary clause proposed by Pompey last year, which allowed Caesar to run for Governor in absentia, conflicted with the original decree and should not be valid.

Marcellus's actions challenged Pompey's authority, which displeased Pompey. Therefore, Pompey stated clearly that he would not support any motion to recall Caesar before his gubernatorial term ended.

Nonetheless, under Marcellus's continued pressure, the situation began to evolve.

In September, the Senate convened outside the official borders of Rome, allowing Pompey, as a Provincial Governor, to attend.

Pompey's father-in-law Metellus proposed to revisit Caesar's provincial matter in March of the following year, and Pompey didn't oppose.

However, when Marcus proposed several motions unfavorable to Caesar, such as demobilizing soldiers who had completed their service term under Caesar's command, and allowing those who could retire with honors despite incomplete service, he was repeatedly vetoed by several People's Guardians supporting Caesar.

That year, besides manipulating his supporters in Rome from Ravenna to fully safeguard his interests, Caesar did something else: He increased the levy of grain taxes from various Gaul tribes and treated Gaul leaders and nobles who might hold dissatisfaction against Rome more harshly.

Because he felt: The Gaul region was too quiet, making his political opponents think that it no longer needed him, so he had to stir up bigger commotions among the Gauls to make the Senate aware that Gaul would not succeed without him!

Since making an alliance with the Nix Tribe, Vercingetorix had been urging those tribal leaders who had secretly pledged sacred oaths to him to be patient, while also paying close attention to Caesar's and Rome's situations.

In the past, the Avelli Tribe mainly interacted with the Romans in these northern provinces, but now Vercingetorix instructed his trade officials to subtly gather more information about Rome.

From the intelligence gathered by his subordinates, Caesar's relationship with the Roman Senate was becoming increasingly tense, especially as time progressed into 51 BC... This made Vercingetorix excited and even more convinced of the oracle of the Danu Goddess.

However, the subsequent harsh measures taken by Caesar in the Gaul region made the survival of the Avelli and other tribes more difficult. Vercingetorix encouraged the allied tribal leaders to continue enduring through this toughest period.

But some tribes could tolerate no longer and successively launched uprisings, such as the Biturig Tribe and Sinonai Tribe, which were ultimately crushed by Roman Army attacks.

Vercingetorix still chose to endure, but his heart was filled with anguish.

The southern Gaul tribes saw the Avelli choose to watch in silence, hence did not dare to act recklessly, thereby preserving themselves.

However, the test for Vercingetorix was not over.

Caesar planned to convene another assembly of Gaul tribes and specifically named Vercingetorix to attend.

At the time, there were rumors that during the suppression of these tribes, someone informed against Vercingetorix, alleging his involvement in the rebellion against Rome, leading Caesar to intend to accuse Vercingetorix at this assembly.

His subordinates thus urged Vercingetorix not to attend the assembly, but after careful consideration, he decided to attend nonetheless, and on the day of the assembly, managed to induce a high fever.

At the assembly, he knelt humbly at Caesar's feet, tearfully narrating his grievances, and he also brought Caesar much more grain than the Romans' demands.

Caesar, seeing Vercingetorix's frail and pitiful state, recalled his previous esteem for him and the significant contributions he made leading the Gallian Cavalry for the Roman Army, ultimately declared to the outside world that these were mere rumors, slandering his loyal Vercingetorix.

Even if Caesar still held some suspicions about Vercingetorix, under the circumstances back then, he could not accuse Vercingetorix. After all, the series of measures he previously implemented against the Gauls were too harsh, causing dissatisfaction even among those Gaul tribes submissive to him. Should he choose to severely punish his deferential Vercingetorix then, it would foster bad associations among all Gaul leaders, possibly sparking a major rebellion, which would be extremely disadvantageous to him, now caught in a political quandary.

Vercingetorix narrowly escaped danger and safely returned to his tribe.

By the end of the year, no civil war broke out in Rome.

Vercingetorix felt some disappointment and had expressed grievances towards Lurios, but having invested so much already, could not just abandon midway, choosing instead to continue enduring through the difficulties.

Marcellus stepped down as Governor, and Caesar was still recognized as the legal governor of the three provinces.

However, Pompey's actions and remarks during this period revealed a growing estrangement between him and his ally, Caesar.

On one hand, Caesar's continuous spectacular victories in Gaul made Pompey somewhat jealous, and the large army under Caesar threatened his own position as Rome's foremost military commander.

On the other hand, conservative Roman Elders were trying hard to win him over, especially his father-in-law's family, making him feel being accepted by these notable Roman aristocrats.

Of course, Pompey also understood that if he helped the conservative Roman Elders completely topple Caesar, aristocratic Roman Elders like Cato, Marcellus, and others who inherently disliked him wouldn't need him much in the future, which could easily put him in a politically weaker situation.

Pompey wanted to weaken Caesar but also needed Caesar to continue serving his own interests, keeping this balance to profit from this dominant position.

Thus, he publicly stated in the Senate: He couldn't accept terminating Caesar's governorship before next year's March 1st, but his stance might change after that date.

When asked by a Roman Elder: What if on that day, a People's Guardian vetoes the Senate's resolution, what his stance would be?

Pompey replied: Whether Caesar personally opposes the Senate's resolution or uses a People's Guardian to oppose, it does not matter.

Another Roman Elder asked: If Caesar wants to become Governor while retaining his army, what then?

Pompey cleverly retorted: If my son wants to beat me with a stick, what then?

All in all, this seemingly ambiguous position encouraged Cato, Marcellus, and their group.

They continued raising Caesar's provincial term issue repeatedly in the Senate.

Although far away in Ravenna, Caesar was not sitting idly by. He took a fancy to a new People's Guardian, Little Curio. This representative of the younger generation Romans was notorious for his lavish lifestyle, yet ambitious and bold, and he had married the widow of Claudius, known as "Claudius II."

Just like what Crassus did for him back in the day, Caesar used gold from Gaul war spoils to help Little Curio clear his massive debts, bringing him into his camp.

Thus, Little Curio took action.

He proposed in the Senate: If they wanted to remove Caesar's position as Governor of Gaul to ensure fairness, Pompey should also relinquish his exceptional governorship in the Provinces of Spain, which would be safer for Rome.

As Little Curio expressed such views at previous public meetings and received widespread public approval, this brought considerable pressure on Pompey.

Although Pompey had been finding excuses to stay in the outskirts of Rome since becoming Governor of Spain, his son and able subordinates were making substantial enterprises in Spain, and his gubernatorial term was extended during his consulship in 52 BC, with several more years to run. He was unwilling to terminate it prematurely.

Due to Pompey's unwillingness to take a stance, the standoff between both sides lasted for several months, and Pompey even faced persistent pursuit and attacks from Little Curio, rendering his entire third consul term under scrutiny and assault, leaving him in a messy situation.

Time was dragged past the scheduled March 1st final vote for Caesar's term.

By summer, the Senate made a decision: To draw one legion from under Pompey and another from under Caesar, then dispatch these troops to reinforce the Roman Army at the Parthian border.

Chapter 542: Parting Ways

Pompey immediately decided to assign the legion that he had previously lent to Caesar and had fought under Caesar's command (the First Legion) to the Parthian frontier.

This meant that Caesar would suddenly lose two legions. He did not express any refusal, but gave each soldier a generous bonus just as the troops were about to leave.

The young Roman official responsible for redeploying these two legions back to Gaul returned claiming that Caesar's entire army was dissatisfied!

Meanwhile, once these two legions returned to Italy, they displayed an uncooperative attitude, and naturally, no one made any effort to send them overseas.

All of Rome felt tense over this.

Coincidentally, at this time, Pompey fell ill with a persistent fever, and people from all over Italy spontaneously prayed for this Roman hero's recovery and wished him a speedy recovery.

By August, he finally recovered, and the populace rejoiced. Crowds gathered along his return route from Naples to the outskirts of Rome to greet him.

Pompey, who had always relished others' gratitude, interpreted the people's enthusiasm as respect and support, and he also sensed their hopes for peace, not civil war.

Pompey decided to respond to the public's expectations. He wrote a letter to the Senate, expressing his willingness to resign from his position as governor and assured them that Caesar would do the same.

Thus, in September, the Senate convened an important meeting held in the outskirts of Rome to ensure that Pompey could participate, requiring all Roman Elders not to be absent.

At the beginning of the meeting, Little Curio once again proposed that both Caesar and Pompey should resign simultaneously.

Then, Governor Makarius (not the Makarius who was governor the previous year, but another one) divided the matter into two sections, submitted separate motions for voting by the Elders.

The first motion – that Caesar should resign – was passed with a majority, demonstrating how weak Caesar's influence was in the Senate; the second motion was that Pompey should also resign.

Before the vote, Pompey requested to speak.

This time, while ill, Pompey had rare quiet time to reflect on the state of Rome, admitting that the current chaos was mainly caused by him and Caesar.

Although Caesar's successful campaigns in Gaul, German, and Britannia made the idle Pompey somewhat jealous, he had already achieved numerous triumphs on three continents (Asia, Africa, Europe) before Caesar became a military commander, believing his achievements far exceeded Caesar's. Hence, he never regarded Caesar as his equal, but always as a younger brother needing his support, a role he had indeed played in safeguarding Caesar's campaigns in Gaul.

But when Little Curio, acting on Caesar's behalf, proposed that both men must resign simultaneously, it infuriated him because it implied the protege he had been supporting now considered himself Pompey's equal.

When he agreed to transfer the legion lent to Caesar to the East, he was astonished to discover that under Caesar's influence, the legion no longer obeyed his commands.

Moreover, he learned from secret channels that Caesar commanded ten fully staffed legions and could also recruit tens of thousands of auxiliary troops from the Gaul Tribe loyal to him at any time... The Gaul region had been peaceful for nearly two years, but Caesar still maintained such a vast army and was suddenly adopting a harsher attitude towards the Gauls this year, seemingly provoking conflict. What was he planning to do?

In history, the great Gaul rebellion led by Vercingetorix had lasted for over a year from the previous year to the last, and although Caesar ultimately achieved victory with great difficulty, it came at a tremendous cost – over half of his soldiers were killed or wounded, followed by a long period of rest and replenishing new recruits.

In the current scenario, the prolonged "docility" of the Gauls and Caesar's vast forces were putting immense pressure on Pompey, causing him serious doubt about Caesar's intentions.

Though Pompey frequently broke Roman traditions and regulations, he harbored no ambition to change Rome's political system. He merely wanted to hold on to his preeminent position in Roman politics and

maintain public support, thus he did not wish for Caesar, driven by ambition, to change Rome's status quo by force.

This was why Pompey did not speak before the Elders voted in history, but in this instance, he took the initiative to have the Elders vote in favor of his resignation.

The Elders, moved by his words, praised him for his selflessness and integrity.

Pompey accepted their praise calmly, thinking to himself: Although the simultaneous resignation would incur significant losses for him, Caesar's loss was even greater. Losing his army, upon returning to Rome, Caesar would face further suppression, or even potential persecution, by the Elders, leaving him no choice but to seek Pompey's protection and once again become his protege...

Pompey admitted his lack of political talent, whereas Caesar was highly capable in this regard. With Caesar's support, he would have nothing to worry about.

Although the Elders were inspired by Pompey, the voting results – with just over half in favor – were not due to their excessive love for Pompey, willing to violate his wishes, but out of fear of a potential outbreak of war.

Nevertheless, the voting result was sufficient to pass the motion.

Little Curio was dumbfounded. He had planned to have the Senate vote on the motion that both should resign; now it was entirely unnecessary.

In anger and shame, he yelled at everyone: "You foolish people, don't you think about what terrible consequences this will lead to!"

The entire assembly suddenly fell silent.

Cato was the first to speak, confidently saying: "Everyone cast their sacred vote based on conscience, and the entire voting process was completely in accordance with the regulations. As long as someone is a Roman citizen, he should strictly abide by the endorsed proposal! If anyone refuses to implement it, he

is a criminal of Rome, and the Senate can impose stern punishments on him. Furthermore, all Roman citizens will censure and oppose him! —"

Little Curio gave Cato a sidelong glance, smirking, causing Cato to be unable to continue his passionate speech.

Pompey stood up and said loudly: "Caesar has always been rational and deeply loves Rome. I believe he will implement today's Senate resolution, resign from his governorship, disband his armies, and return here to continue serving Rome!"

"What if he refuses to honor the agreement and instead leads his army against Rome?!" Former Governor Makarius' question drew all the Elders' eyes towards Pompey.

Faced with numerous worried eyes, Pompey boldly declared: "Then I will lead my soldiers bravely into battle to fend him off, ensuring Rome remains unharmed!"

The chamber erupted in cheers, with the Elders surrounding Pompey enthusiastically, and some even shouted: "Magnus Pompey!"

Amidst the cheers of the Roman Elders, Pompey could not help but feel a bit elated...

However, once he returned to his residence and regained his composure, he immediately began writing to Caesar.

In his letter, he briefly recounted the proceedings of this meeting, then emphasized the current political environment, indicating that both parties stepping down was imperative. He reminded Caesar of the widespread Roman citizens' longing for peace and promised that after Caesar returned to Rome, he would ensure his safety and fully support him in running for governor.

Pompey's trusted aide carried the letter, riding swiftly towards the north.

When the messenger arrived in Ravenna and delivered the letter to Caesar, Caesar was already aware of the Senate's decision for his resignation.

In front of the messenger, Caesar opened the letter calmly to read, and privately smiled at Pompey's promise.

Unlike Pompey, Caesar entered the Roman political scene always adhering to Rome's official protocols, proceeding gradually through ranks (of course, due to his outstanding performance, he often advanced at the youngest allowable age for each rank).

On the surface, he appeared to be a Roman citizen who strictly upheld Roman traditions, but in reality, he understood the true nature of power early on. To gain greater authority, he was willing to forsake intoxicating honors, use any means to attack political enemies, and bow when in disadvantage, seeking support from Pompey, borrowing money from Crassus, and rallying behind them, eventually gaining their trust and support to become governor and Governor of the Northern Three Provinces.

Recognizing how hard-won these opportunities were, he put forth 100% effort during his tenure as Governor of Gaul, and naturally, he received substantial rewards:

Throughout the years of the Gaul War, he amassed immense wealth, which not only paid off his debts but also expanded his network with money;

Conquering the Gaul territories essentially brought them under Roman control and led the Senate to reward him with more than two public thanksgiving celebrations, significantly boosting his prestige in Rome;

Most importantly, he held command of a large and battle-hardened army, whose officers and soldiers all remained loyal to him, willing to fight for him. This was the foundation of his rising status in Rome, and he certainly wouldn't naively follow others' advice to resign as governor or disband his troops.

On the contrary, to maintain this army's loyalty and secure his position in Rome, he needed to do more, such as having Rome enact new laws, rewarding his soldiers with land, legally affirming his arrangements in Gaul, similar to what Pompey once did for the East. He even wanted the Senate to pass other bills to win over various Roman social classes fulfilling his ambition to reform Roman politics...

To achieve these goals, Caesar realized he couldn't remain in the provinces indefinitely; he had to return to Rome and become a governor, so on one side, he denied the opponents limiting his term as governor

but never clearly stated when his term would end. On the other hand, he hoped for Pompey's support to smoothen his run for governor.

In short, he wanted both the bear and the fish.

Chapter 543: Crossing the Rubicon

However, the development of the situation did not go as Caesar wished, as his greatest reliance in Rome—Pompey—finally betrayed him.

The Senate passed a resolution to strip him of his position as Governor of Gaul, dissolve his army, and leave him to return home alone. Not only would he lose the chance to celebrate a Triumph for his glorious achievements in Gaul, but it would also be difficult for him to successfully win the consulship campaign. On the contrary, in his vulnerable state, he would only attract more attacks from his political enemies.

If Pompey's promises were trustworthy, Cicero wouldn't have been forced into exile initially.

What Caesar yearned for was a peaceful return, to obtain a prominent position in Rome, and to have all the Elders, even those who disliked him, acknowledge his prestige, influence, and authority, enabling him to fulfill more political ambitions.

Now it seems that not only will he not achieve this wish, but he might also end up like Milo, exiled overseas, living in poverty and humiliation.

The Senate doesn't want me to live! ... sighed Caesar deeply.

The messenger beside him saw Caesar holding the letter without speaking for a long time and couldn't help but ask him, "Governor, are you going to reply to Pompey?"

Caesar thought for a moment and nodded.

In the letter to Pompey, Caesar recalled their past friendship, thanked Pompey for his support, and then stated clearly that if Pompey could enable the Senate to pass a resolution allowing him to return to

Rome after relinquishing the governor's post with immunity from prosecution and retain partial military command, he would consider seriously complying with the Senate's recent decree.

The messenger left with the letter Caesar had written.

Caesar immediately called for his financial officer, Mark Antony.

Mark Antony, a distant relative of Caesar, was not from a famous Roman noble family as indicated by his name.

Antony's family rise mainly came from his grandfather, who was one of Rome's most outstanding orators and even served as a consul, but was killed in Marius' purge upon his return to Rome. His father, of mediocre talent, was tasked with clearing pirates but unfortunately suffered a defeat and soon died in regret. His mother remarried with the nine-year-old Antony, and his stepfather, Lentulus, was one of the Catiline Conspirators executed on Cicero's orders.

Antony's growth was fraught with difficulties. Upon reaching adulthood, he became a follower of Little Curio, who introduced him to the pleasures of revelry and women, leading to a life nearly devoid of self-control.

In short, Little Curio, Antony, and their gang of young men lived indulgent, reckless lives, notorious in Rome, despised and detested by many.

Besides these, Mark Antony's strong physique and abundant energy made his character particularly flamboyant, assertive, and unafraid of threats.

However, his crude nature and lack of meticulousness made him an unsuitable financial officer; nevertheless, Caesar chose him to win over Little Curio and because Caesar's family was thin-blooded, with few relatives who could support him, making Antony a rare trustworthy and worthy figure to cultivate, aligning with Caesar's principle of employing personnel.

The Ulysses family, while a famous Roman priestly family, achieved little in the political arena and couldn't compare with noble families, and in Caesar's generation, it had further declined, lacking numerous guests and strong political connections, relying mainly on Caesar's own efforts.

When Caesar took the position of Governor of Gaul, most of the advisors willing to follow him were New Roman Nobles. The noble children looked down on the 'upstart' Caesar and distanced themselves from him due to political stance differences.

However, a few lawless yet ambitious young nobles, naturally unafraid of authority, disliked the traditional gradual advancement of the Roman officialdom, without firm stances, they were willing to work for Caesar if given rapid advancement opportunities.

And due to their origins and their unrestrained manner, they often managed to cause quite a stir for traditional Roman Elders, thus creating situations favorable to Caesar. Claudius did so, Little Curio did so, and now Caesar had set his eyes on Mark Antony.

Handling provincial finances poorly was inconsequential, as Caesar had professionals responsible. He just wanted to give this distant relative a chance to ascend to the upper echelons; and even before Mark Antony had served a year as Gaul's financial officer, Caesar maneuvered to make him next year's Roman People's Guardian.

Antony was naturally grateful and devoted to Caesar.

With the changing situation, Caesar decided to release this fierce wolf ahead of schedule.

He only subtly expressed his disappointment with Pompey's betrayal and his anger toward the persistent suppression by the Senate to Antony.

Antony immediately promised to do his utmost for Caesar.

Upon receiving Caesar's reply, Pompey assumed Caesar had compromised.

He very happily read Caesar's letter aloud in the Senate, while comforting the anxious Elders, he requested them to also make some compromises and grant Caesar immunity and partial military command as requested in the letter.

He faced stern refusal and rebuttal from Cato, Makarius, and others.

While the impasse persisted, Antony, ordered to return to Rome early as Caesar's representative, attended the Senate and delivered a particularly sharp and malicious speech, attacking Cato, humiliating Pompey's entire political career, and even threatening with armed conflict.

The whole assembly was in an uproar, Pompey stood dumbfounded in shock, recalling his recent efforts to defend Caesar, felt deeply deceived and humiliated by Caesar, trembling with anger he shouted, "If even a minor financial officer under Caesar is so arrogant and domineering, what do you think would happen if Caesar ruled Rome?!"

After the meeting, Pompey invited all the Elders to his residence and solemnly displayed his guarantee: He firmly supported the Senate and, if necessary, he was willing to lead troops to battle!

While aligning with the Conservative Elders that war might be required to relieve Caesar of his governorship, Caesar was inspecting the 13th Legion in Ravenna, delivering a speech.

He passionately recounted: how he and the soldiers bravely overcame difficulties, sacrificed for Rome's territorial expansions, creating immortal achievements, yet those Elders treated him unfairly, thereby implicating the soldiers; he should have become a consul due to his illustrious achievements in Gaul, to enact laws for soldiers to own land, enjoy the cheers of Roman populace, but those who envied him not only severed his chance to become a consul but also issued a decree removing him from the governor's position, disbanding his troops, and even prosecuting him...

To be more convincing, Caesar brought Little Curio, who had come from Rome to discuss urgent matters, before the soldiers.

Little Curio deliberately wore torn clothes, with a face full of grievance claimed: The Senate, due to his defense of Caesar, attempted to arrest and prosecute him, and he barely escaped...

The soldiers were greatly moved, shouting loudly: willing to avenge Caesar and the injustices suffered by the People's Guardian (Little Curio)!

Although Caesar dispatched a messenger to Gaul and recalled the two stationed legions immediately after sending away Mark Antony, at that moment, Caesar had only left the Thirteenth Legion in the Northern Italy Province.

This legion was assembled shortly after he assumed office and had followed him through numerous campaigns. Every soldier had received his generous rewards, all officers appointed and promoted by his grace, thus he was very confident in persuading them to stand by his side.

Indeed, this was the case. When all soldiers and team officers loudly declared their willingness to declare war on Rome for him, Caesar was deeply encouraged, and without waiting to merge with the legions from Gaul, he led the Thirteenth Legion southward directly.

At this time, it was still mid-October of 50 BC, nearly three months earlier than when Caesar declared war on Rome in the previous life.

Due to the absence of the great rebellion led by Vercingetorix in Gaul in the previous life, Caesar's forces were stronger and preparations more thorough, giving Caesar more confidence after learning of Pompey's open betrayal (in the previous life Pompey's stance was always ambiguous) and the ruthless intent from Cato and others against him, prompting him to decisively choose to use force.

Once he made the decision, Caesar's action was astounding. Before reviewing the Thirteenth Legion, he had already sent some capable personnel and soldiers in plain clothes with clandestine weapons to control Amininum.

On October 20th, 50 BC (the 22nd year of the founding of the Nix Tribe), Caesar led the Thirteenth Legion to the northern bank of the Rubicon River, where he paused.

According to Roman Law, as Governor of Gaul, Caesar possessed legitimate authority north of the Rubicon River, but once he led his army south of the Rubicon River without a special Senate decree, he became an outright rebel.

Pompey and Cato could rally Roman citizens to defend the legitimate republic, politically speaking, Caesar lost a move.

Caesar was unclear about how his daring action would impact the situation and uncertain whether he'd achieve ultimate victory, but he knew for certain: he could not retreat as it was already a sheer cliff behind him!

Emotions surged through Caesar, ultimately firming up, calmly stating, "The die is cast."

He then spurred his warhorse, the first to ford the river.

With preparations made in advance, Caesar easily captured Amininum and stayed there for a while, awaiting the hastily fleeing Antony from Rome.

Caesar commanded him to lead a few large units to capture Arezzo and dispatched several units to occupy Pisaurum, Fanum, and Ancona.

Wherever the army went, towns opened their gates to surrender without any battles, and everything proceeded smoothly.

Chapter 544: Caesar Takes Control of Italy

In Rome, after Pompey broke with Caesar, he reached an agreement with Cato and the others. Fearing that Caesar would refuse to comply with the Senate's decisions and resort to force in anger, they began recruiting new soldiers and forming an army.

However, many people believed that Caesar, seeing the unprecedented unity of the Senate and its immense strength, would certainly compromise.

Even Pompey himself judged that Caesar's main forces were still north of the Alps, and with winter approaching, even if Caesar wanted to start a rebellion, he would have to wait for the next year's combat season and carefully complete troop consolidation before that.

Therefore, Pompey and the elders were not in a hurry to prepare for war; instead, they greedily began to divide up the spoils left by Caesar after his resignation.

After several meetings, Pompey's father-in-law, Metellus, was appointed as the governor of Syria, and Domitius finally got his wish to go to the Western Fa Province as governor before the next year. A senior legal officer was named as the governor of the Northern Italy Province...

At this moment, the news that "Caesar has led his army across the Rubicon River" finally arrived, shocking all the elders.

In an instant, some elders cursed Caesar as a traitor to the republic; some elders recalled the bloody storm when Marius and Sulla invaded the city of Rome and began to tremble; others remained silent but entertained thoughts of how to withdraw from Rome...

Cato decisively urged the Senate to appoint Pompey as the Supreme Commander until Caesar's rebellion was defeated.

But the current governors and former governors were too arrogant to accept command from others, using the argument that only governors had the right to lead troops, and rejected Cato's request.

While the Senate argued incessantly over how to deal with Caesar's rebellion, unable to reach a consensus, Caesar made a brief stop in Ariminum and then continued to advance with his army, rapidly occupying several towns and entering the Cisalpine area.

This was Pompey's old home, where his family had deep roots.

Caesar encountered some resistance here.

Pompey also entrusted someone to deliver a letter to Caesar, persuading him to return to Gaul, disband his army, and promising that the Senate would seriously consider his demands at a future meeting.

Since he had already started a war, Caesar was never going to compromise without a satisfactory result. Not only did he ignore Pompey's persuasion, but he also accelerated his conquest of the Cisalpine area. After achieving victories, he treated the captured soldiers well, causing them to defect and join his army.

And the civilians in the area, under Caesar's disciplined army and lack of local disturbances, were not willing to oppose him and sometimes even provided assistance.

Seeing that he couldn't move Caesar and that he was rendered useless in the Senate, Pompey decided to leave Rome and head to southern Italy, where he could more conveniently gather his forces to battle Caesar.

Pompey's departure left the elders led by Cato panicked. Without the protection of this "god of war of Rome," they could only talk but had no troops to support them; how could they face the sword and shield of Caesar's soldiers? Thus, they all followed Pompey in leaving Rome, but quite a few neutral and a few Caesar-supporting elders and nobles stayed behind.

In just a few days, the once bustling and crowded city of Rome became unusually quiet.

At this time, Caesar gathered the scattered 13th Legion together, and the 12th Legion also rushed from the Gaul Province to his side, which gave him more confidence.

As he continued south, Caesar finally encountered a worthy opponent—Domitius.

This former governor, who had always coveted Caesar's position as Governor of Gaul, had been eagerly recruiting soldiers at home as soon as he was appointed as next year's Governor of Gaul by the Senate. He wanted to stabilize his position quickly and smoothly receive the wealth that Caesar left in Gaul.

When he encountered Caesar's army, he had already recruited more than thirty battalions, but they were all untrained recruits.

In the far south, Pompey, upon learning of this situation, quickly wrote to Amityus, hoping he would abandon direct confrontation with Caesar, preserve his strength, and come to join him.

But Amityus instead requested that Pompey lead his army to join him.

During their bickering, the Eighth Legion and more than twenty battalions that were recruited from Caesar's loyal Gaul tribes and trained and equipped to Roman Legion Soldier standards successively arrived, greatly enhancing Caesar's military strength.

Seeing the unfavorable situation, Domitius hurriedly retreated to Corfinium for defense.

Caesar promptly led his forces to surround it.

To boost morale, Domitius announced to the soldiers that as long as they held out for a while, the great Pompey would lead reinforcements to their aid.

But in reality, Pompey had already sent a message saying he did not plan to send troops to rescue Domitius. So privately, Domitius was planning to abandon the army and flee.

However, his sneaky actions quickly revealed the truth to his subordinates.

Team officers and soldier representatives quietly held a meeting. Since many of them were Marsi and not very loyal to Rome, they quickly reached an agreement to arrest Amityus and then surrender to Caesar.

After Caesar marched into the city, Amityus, realizing he had opposed Caesar in the political arena for a decade, feared for his life, expecting harsh treatment. He asked his doctor to provide poison to commit suicide.

But soon he received news that Caesar publicly announced he would not execute important prisoners, making him regret his rashness immediately.

The doctor then told him that the amount of poison he took was minimal and posed no harm.

Thus, Domitius's gloom turned to joy, and he, along with more than fifty elders and knights, surrendered to Caesar.

Caesar warmly welcomed them, even showing a smile to Domitius.

Caesar expressed to the group the unfair and illegal treatment he received from the Senate, explaining he was compelled to resort to force.

Then, he ordered the release of Domitius and the over fifty others, while the surrendering soldiers were required to swear allegiance to Caesar.

When Caesar crossed the Rubicon River, all Romans thought he would engage in a massacre like Sulla or Marius, but his leniency at Corfinium quickly spread. Even his mortal enemies were released, making the Roman citizens realize he was completely different from the former two.

Caesar's kindness and restraint, as well as his army conducting operations in Italy with minimal harm to civilians, greatly improved his reputation among Roman citizens, making his army's operations smoother.

In southern Italy, seeing Caesar's army getting closer, Pompey quickly decided: he only had two experienced but unreliable legions (previously drawn from Caesar) and some ineffective recruits, making it impossible to defeat Caesar in Italy.

So, he decided to change the battlefield and move to Greece, where he would gather a large army to fight Caesar again.

The choice of Greece over his base in Spain was based on several considerations:

Politically, Greece is very close to Italy, just across the narrow Adriatic Sea, allowing him to return to Italy anytime, preventing the elders following him from feeling he was abandoning Rome;

Economically, although his main forces were in Spain, in Greece, he wasn't entirely without support. In the past, he conquered the Eastern regions and issued regulations for each province and kingdom to follow. These affluent provinces and kingdoms regarded him as their leader, ready to fund him to establish an army large enough to counter Caesar.

Militarily, Spain was too far from Italy. If he returned there, even gaining troops quickly wouldn't make the return to Italy easy. Traveling overland through Caesar-conquered Gaul was unsafe, and crossing the Alpine Pass or moving along coastal roads into Italy would be challenging if Caesar mounted full defenses.

By sea, compared to the Adriatic, the sea route from Spain to Italy was too far; transporting tens of thousands of troops wouldn't be easy, and prolonged sea voyages increased the chance of unforeseen events (like storms). Landing in Italy from the sea while Caesar was on guard was also difficult.

Pompey, after careful consideration, decided to retreat to Greece.

But he didn't tell the elders following him because he knew that these elders, led by Cato, wouldn't agree. So he quietly concentrated his forces in Brindisi, sent troops to requisition ships from coastal towns, gradually transported personnel and equipment across the Adriatic, and even built a military base on the other side of the sea...

This was quite a cumbersome task, but fortunately, it was something Pompey excelled at. He had fully showcased this skill when he was in charge of eradicating Mediterranean pirates.

By early February of the following year, Caesar's army approached Brindisi, and by then, he had six legions under his command, including the battle-hardened 13th Legion and the newly formed Fifteenth Legion (Skylark Legion).

However, Pompey had made adequate preparations and smoothly led the remaining troops to withdraw from Brindisi by sea.

With the situation so severe, the elders led by Cato had no choice but to follow him to Greece.

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Although the outbreak of the Roman civil war was relatively late, almost exceeding "the deadline given by the Oracle of the Goddess Danu," when the news reached the Avelli Tribe, Vercingetorix danced with excitement.

He immediately sent Lurios to contact the secret Nix base in Massilia, asking when the Nix Kingdom intended to begin their attack on Rome.

The Nix post in Massilia had already received a hand-written order from Maximus.

Chapter 545: The Anti-Roman Military Alliance is Ready to Launch

Maximus gave his reply: The civil war in Rome has just begun. If we launch an attack too early, it might cause Pompey and Caesar to reconcile and unite against us. We must wait until both sides have exhausted considerable strength through continuous fighting and become mortal enemies, then launch an attack when their main forces are far from Italy and far from the Gaul region. This way, we can increase the success of our assault and reduce the casualties of our troops.

Although Vercingetorix was somewhat unwilling, he had to admit that Maximus was right.

Since they had endured for such a long time and the Gaul tribes had paid a considerable price, waiting a little longer for the ultimate revenge against the Romans seemed acceptable. Vercingetorix had to suppress his excitement, especially since the successful fulfillment of the "Oracle of the Goddess Danu" made him trust Maximus a bit more.

Compared to Vercingetorix, Brebiusta was much more stable.

After the outbreak of the Roman civil war, he admired Maximus's precise judgment of the Roman situation and, against his subordinates' advice, personally traveled to Yeriboli, the capital of Nix, to meet Maximus and discuss the progress of the Roman civil war and the strategies the Danish Alliance should adopt in response.

He also suggested that "we should wait until Caesar and Pompey are both exhausted before choosing the right moment to declare war on Rome."

He subtly expressed his hope that Pompey would ultimately be defeated.

This surprised Maximus because he vaguely remembered that in previous historical records, Brebiusta had written to Pompey expressing support when Pompey and Caesar clashed in Greece, and even considered sending reinforcements to join the battle...but in this timeline, Brebiusta was showing a completely opposite attitude.

However, after pondering a bit, Maximus understood why the King of Dacia's attitude differed in different timelines.

Because in the past, Brebiusta lacked the confidence to lead Dacia alone in challenging the mighty Rome. Compared to the aggressive Caesar, he preferred choosing Pompey, who liked being boss and made life easier for his subordinates; as long as Pompey was in power and Dacia remained submissive, the safety of the entire race was assured.

But in this timeline, with Nix's assistance, Brebiusta had ambitions to occupy more territories and establish a more glorious Dacia Kingdom. As Pompey was the de facto leader of the Eastern powers, if Dacia advanced towards Thrace or attacked other city-states and kingdoms, Pompey would feel responsible and unite the Eastern powers to siege him.

And if Caesar emerged as the final victor in the Roman civil war, it would take time for him to inherit Pompey's legacy and gain recognition from the Eastern powers. Brebiusta planned to utilize this chaotic period to expand his strength.

Moreover, Caesar's main base was in the Gaul region and Italy, where Nix and the Gaul Tribe could handle their own. Caesar could hardly spare more energy to target Dacia.

Anyway, after this meeting, a more detailed military cooperation was discussed regarding Rome's civil war and the upcoming attack both sides planned to initiate. They swore again to their respective Divine to reach a new agreement: when one party launches an attack against the Romans, the other party must promptly follow the agreement to attack; both parties will collaborate closely during the war against the Romans, and if one side encounters difficulties and seeks help from the other, the other side must do its utmost to provide support; after achieving victory against the Romans, the territories will be divided by the Adriatic Sea and Libya, with the east belonging to Dacia and the west to Nix...

In the eyes of some high-ranking figures in Nix, this agreement seemed like a loss for the Kingdom because the region east of the Mediterranean was populated, prosperous in commerce, advanced in technology, and wealthier, while the areas west, except for Italy and Sicily, were relatively backward.

Maximus convinced them: The primary enemy of the Nix Kingdom at present is Rome. To ensure Dacia devotes its full effort to fighting against Rome's Eastern provinces and easing the pressure on Nix, it is

reasonable to concede some benefits at this time. This also prevents any conflict of interest during the war that could lead to unexpected outcomes benefitting the enemies.

Moreover, the Eastern regions, although wealthier and more developed, also imply they are stronger and less easily conquered, especially against Parthia, which had once defeated Rome; comparatively, the western regions were weaker and more easily subdued, and being conquered earlier means sooner managed and reformed by Nix officials... Given these considerations, who the ultimate victor is, is quite apparent.

Based on such considerations, Brebiusta proposed in the final clause of the agreement: Dacia and Nix should establish permanent peace.

Maximus gently reminded: This proposal might not be practical; we can keep peace between our two countries as long as we are in power because of our mutual understanding. However, we cannot foresee or prevent future generations or leaders from tearing up this peace agreement due to some reason...

Brebiusta remained silent for a while and then expressed his agreement.

Thus, the last clause of the agreement was modified: As long as Maximus and Brebiusta are in power, Nix and Dacia will remain military allies.

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Caesar easily occupied Brindisi, but since Pompey's army had already gathered most of the commercial ships in the area and taken them away, collecting and mobilizing enough vessels from other regions to transport his army would take considerable time.

Caesar has always enjoyed taking the initiative and was reluctant to waste time waiting in place.

Taking advantage of spring, which is an ideal season for combat, he decided to leave some troops here to gather ships while keeping an eye on Pompey across the sea. He himself would lead parts of the army to Spain to attack Pompey's finest troops there, aiming to weaken his power.

He joked to his subordinates that he would first deal with an army without a general, then go to Greece to confront Pompey and sweep away a general without an army.

Meanwhile, he dispatched Little Curio to lead Amityus's forces, which had previously surrendered to him, to guard Sicily, ensuring Italy's grain supply and sent another force to occupy Sardinia.

Now Caesar militarily controlled the entire Italy, but before going to Spain, he decided to politically clear his name as a traitor, to show his enemies, all Roman citizens, and the other Roman provinces that the state apparatus was still functioning in Rome, and the Rome under his control remained the center of the Roman World.

Thus, he first headed to Rome, planning to convene a Senate meeting on March 1st, hoping for as many Elders as possible to attend.

Caesar also wrote to Cicero, hoping he could attend this meeting as well.

This period was quite tough for Cicero.

When Cicero returned from exile, his relationship with Caesar quickly warmed up, with his brother Quintus becoming Caesar's Legion Commander, he was invited to participate in Caesar's architectural projects, and even Caesar lent him a substantial sum of money, maintaining friendly correspondence over the long term.

Therefore, when tensions escalated between the Senate and Caesar, he was on pins and needles, not wishing others to believe he had been bought by Caesar and become a supporter of his rebellion, nor wanting people to think he opposed Caesar just to evade his debt.

When Caesar crossed the Rubicon River with his troops, Cicero deemed it a shocking, heinous crime. Later, upon hearing Caesar's leniency towards the captured Amityus's troops, his attitude softened, and he wrote to Caesar, praising his mercy.

On the other hand, while he did not entirely agree with the stance and behavior of Pompey, Cato, and other Elders, neither did he oppose them and even accepted recruiting duties assigned by the Senate.

However, learning that the Pompey he had always trusted abandoned Rome to head south severed his connections with him. Later, upon hearing he had retreated from Italy, his loathing grew, opting to wait in the solitude of his countryside villa, observing how events unfolded.

Despite Caesar's invitation, Cicero, not wishing to be used by him, steadfastly refused to travel to Rome.

Even without Cicero's participation, the Senate still convened on the designated date, but attendance was sparse, with notable figures absent.

The meeting was held outside the official boundaries of Rome, as Caesar, being a Provincial Governor, was not permitted to enter Rome.

Caesar did his best to ensure that this meeting's process adhered to legal procedures, demonstrating that he was not a rebel, but a defender of Roman order.

During the meeting, Caesar publicly reiterated his grievances and proposed that the Senate dispatch an envoy to negotiate and reconcile with Pompey.

Ironically, while his proposal was approved, no one was willing to volunteer as this envoy.

Caesar then had People's Guardian Anthony call a public assembly where he again explained his actions to the Roman people, blaming his political opponents for instigating the war.

Despite assuring that Rome's grain supply would remain unaffected and generously gifting each Roman citizen 300 sesterces, most of the populace remained cautious.

After all, with the civil war just beginning, without knowing who would ultimately prevail, no one dared hastily choose sides for fear of future retribution.

Another critical move Caesar made during his stay in Rome was accessing the treasury.

Given he commanded 10 legions and some independent detachments and auxiliary troops, and after entering Italy, had assembled several new legions, these forces required pay, equipment, and provisions. Despite his considerable wealth, maintaining such a vast army was unsustainable on his own, and to win the war, he set aside reservations.

The treasury provided him with 15,000 gold bars, 30,000 silver bars, and 30 million sesterces.