

Background for participants

Rome first invaded Britain in 55 BCE – before it was an empire. Julius Caesar, in the process of conquering Gaul, tried to subdue this wild northern island whose people were supporting his opponents. He achieved the submission of the southeastern corner, as far in as London; and installed a client king who paid regular tribute to Rome.

Our story takes place nearly a century later – in 43 CE, in the reign of the Emperor Claudius. A belligerent tribe from further inland, the Catuvellauni, had gained power over the Roman client tribes of the southeast. Valuable tribute was under threat – and something had to be done.

A large Roman army of four legions, supported by at least as many auxiliary troops, crossed the Channel in May 43 under the command of Aulus Plautius. They were met with fierce resistance, but pushed the British barbarians back, eventually achieving a decisive victory at the Battle of the Medway. The two Catuvellauni brother-kings – Togodumnus and Caratacus – were captured, and the Romans made London their base for what was expected to be further expansion. This time, the British would not be left as allies or clients: they would be conquered, and made into subjects or slaves.

We begin the scenario in London – a busy military encampment. It's July 43. Aulus Plautius expects to invite Emperor Claudius to visit, in September: at which point this will officially become the Roman province of Britannia. Before that happens, though, there is a little local awkwardness which should really be cleared up – before it becomes an embarrassment.

After the Battle of the Medway, Junius Curtius, a senior officer in the Legio II Augusta, deserted the army. He fled up the River Thames, into the wild and dark forests that house a tribe called the Dobunni. It is rumoured that Curtius has set himself up as a local god-king among these savage and credulous people. This cannot be allowed to persist.

The army is not yet ready to mount an attack on the Dobunni, or the other inland tribes: it needs recovery time. But the longer Curtius remains in his forest, lording it over his credulous barbarian subjects, the worse it looks for Rome. A special team of skilled persons has been assembled to travel up the river, and to confront Curtius. And to come back either with him as prisoner – or with his head.



(image from the Hubbard Collection on picryl.com)

The woods of the north spark fear and uncertainty in the hearts of even the bravest Romans. It's well known that the British tribes draw mystical strength from their damp, grey forests – that their holy people can call on powers that are horrifyingly alien to civilized folk.

Fortunately, a local priestess, a member of the Catuvellauni's surrender delegation, will be travelling with the team – to act as interpreter, and perhaps to also provide some spiritual protection. If she can be trusted, that is; of course.