

Aliso City Landsdown Docks

The steam had subsided and cleared the way for the shuttle doors to open. The loud clank of metal slamming against the ground echoed in the dead of the night, waking most organic creatures who were nearby. That did not concern Gaius, who was finally returning to Aliso after the War. At his age, he rarely sees action on the field of combat, but managed to descend to the surface of Nancora in a failed attempt to infiltrate the Technocrats. The failure saw the Commander and what remained of his squad of snipers need emergency extraction. Coming to his aid was one blue-skinned mercenary, Laren Uscot. In addition to the credits paid, Raider Uscot was subsequently rewarded by being appointed the Proconsul of Plagueis for his various courageous acts during the War. That same blue-skinned alien stood directly in front of Gaius as he stepped foot out of the shuttle.

“Commander, good to see you managed to find your way to the ground safely this time.” he smirked. *“I need you to walk with me, if your frail legs can hold you.”*

Gaius begrudgingly obliged, due to his sheer loyalty to the di Plagia crest emblazoned on the Raider’s vest. Though it angered him that a mercenary could be honored as such, nevertheless, Laren had performed valiantly for Plagueis and was deemed worthy enough to retain such honor. The Commander began to walk with his Proconsul, though struggled to keep pace with the much younger man.

“Caesar, I have been told of your increased presence lately on Arx. What is an old man such as yourself continuing to study for, its obvious that you have found your niche in life with your interrogation duties.”

Gaius smiled politely as he became acutely aware that Laren was unaware of Caesar’s past as a Sith, who’s ability to call on the Force was stolen from him via his traitorous Master. Ever since crawling back to the Clan, he had been on a hunt for a way to reverse the effects of the poison used against him that stole the very foundation of his prior path. Caesar sought hope through his studies at the Shadow Academy with its new home on Arx. By surrounding himself with the finest scholars in the Brotherhood, Gaius had planned to coerce some of his fellow pupils to create something to reverse the effect of what had been done to him.

“The Academy offers a challenge that I don’t often get through the normal torture of slaves here on Aliso.” he replied. Knowing that Laren was the Praetor to the Headmaster, Gaius began to complain about the tuition policy for that of someone returning to the Academy. *“Unfortunately, a second stint at the Academy is quite costly, much more than the salary a Commander. I was able to find financing through a large banking corporation owned by Muuns, coined Mallie Sae. The debt is swallowing, but should be paid off shortly upon completion of my studies.”*

Laren grinned, the idea of charging tuition was his proudest contribution to the Shadow Academy, as it allowed the Headmaster to embellish the social life of himself, and his staff. *“Commander, there is a way I can have your debt forgiven, but it comes with great risk.”*

By now, the pair had reached the top floor at the Mobus Combine, and stood at the entrance to a private conference room, usually reserved for the members of the Willing to carry out partnership deals. The pair stepped in, and Laren sealed the door before removing the recording device installed in the panelling adjacent to the door. *“Final renovations are being completed to the Dark Vault. There are a few remaining scheduled transports of sacred Holocrons leaving the **Paladin** in three days. One in particular catches my eye, and I want you to retrieve it for me. In exchange, I will personally contact Mallie Sae and have your debt forgiven, and all credits spent refunded. Should you fail, I will not be there this time to rescue you.”*

The old man sat in disbelief as the Raider had just asked Caesar to commit treason against the Iron Throne. Upon his return, Gaius swore complete allegiance to Clan Plagueis, and in turn, the Brotherhood as a whole. On the other hand, Laren had hit one of Caesar’s soft spots, his hatred of debt that would loom over him for the rest of his life. With his head held in shame, *“It will be done.”* he said softly.

“Very well. Rumour has it there are a few transfers from Tarentum that are eager to make their mark within the Clan.”

VSD Paladin Loading Dock

The team stood at the ready, stowed beneath the grated floor of the loading dock. Warrior Mawgath broke his connection with the Force to give the all clear signal, and together with Gaius made their way onto the last transport headed for the ground. Following was Battlemaster Tahiri Thorn Morte Tarentae, both of whom possessed phenomenal physical prowess, in particular, they both excelled in lightsaber battle. Gaius had hoped it would not come to that, as he had no intention of taking a life during this mission.

“How are we supposed to know which is the target, Commander?” whispered the tall Pau’an.

Gaius signaled with his fingers three separate numbers; three, one, four. The crates being loaded into the transport were all stamped with a three digit code, and locked accordingly. Gaius had been acting on a tip from a Docent that crate 314 included a holocron found in the ruins of an academy once run by a cult of Sith students devoted to the teachings of a former Headmaster whom had gone Rogue.

The team moved swiftly through the cargo transport, searching for the crate, while keeping an eye on the workers loading up the final pallet. The pallet being loaded included the last of the artifacts being sent to the Dark Vault, so this was their only opportunity. The plan was to sneak their way onto the transport, find the Holocron, and exit before departure. Of course, this only worked if the target was loaded prior to this last pallet. Gaius and his team knew the dangers of being caught. They would be branded as traitors, and dealt with by the might and power of the Headmaster.

A light gasp came from the tail-headed female. She found the black eyes of her former Tarentum clanmate as they both sensed through the Force that danger was upcoming, and found themselves reaching out to pull Gaius down onto the floor. The trio lightly gripped their respective weapons, the two Sith with the lightsabers, and Caesar with his trusted slugthrower pistol, preparing to draw them to action. The pounding of boots slamming against the ground grew louder, at least five separate pairs could be identified. The team was able to identify that one was a Professor, and the other were his security detail, armed to the teeth with equipment and arms. Gaius needed a plan, fast.

He reached his hand slowly into his medic bag, softly pulling out a remote detonator. While he hadn't planned to take a life on this mission, there seemed to be no option remaining. He gripped the cylindrical electronic tightly, and flipped up the guard and pressing down on the detonator button in one single motion. The ground beneath them shook, as the charge he had planted on the way in exploded with great force. The Professor looked at his staff and demanded that they investigate, while he hurried to the transport to begin the process of descending to the surface. The doors shuttered, leaving the three Plagueins alone with the Professor.

Gaius looked over at Thanadd and whispered, "*All yours, my Lord.*" with a grin on his face. He knew that Thanadd was the muscle of the team. A devout juggernaut, Thanadd loved to be the aggressor in most situations. The hissing and crackling of his ignited lightsaber meant that he would finally be useful on this mission. He quickly engaged the Professor who had ignited his blade as well. The two locked weapons as the ground shook once more, the transport had left the *Paladin*, and was now headed to the ground.

Gaius and Tahiri continued to search for the crate labeled 314, although much more quickly than earlier, they were determined that it was located on this transport. They shuffled through, side by side, picking up where they left off. On the left hand side of Gaius, he could make out the second and third digits that matched their target, and lifted the crate to the top of the pile, revealing the first digit was a match as well. They had found their holocron. Gaius reached in and pulled out the cubed device and handed it quickly to Tahiri, "*My Lord, please secure this. I will find a way out.*"

The Commander moved as quick as his older joints let him, gliding past the recently slain Professor, with Thanadd deactivating his lightsaber just a few moments after. Gaius made his

way to the cockpit, and blasted a hole through the pilot's back. He threw the slumped body to the side, and took a seat. Clueless as to how to actually operate most vehicles, Gaius was particularly familiar with how to access and initiate the autopilot feature. He reached up and flicked the switch, instantly initiating the autopilot function which began to route a retreat course. The Lambda-class Shuttle made the jump to hyperspace, without being fired upon by a single Academy vessel.

Acclamator-class Assault Ship, *Wrath*

Gaius stood at attention in the Proconsul's chambers, as the door slid open. The familiar blue-faced mercenary stepped into the room, the door closing quickly behind him. Without saying a word, he held his hand out. Gaius reached forward with his right hand and grabbed the Raider's hand in a handshake motion. "*The Holocron, you old fool!*" bellowed the Proconsul. Quickly, the old man reached into his pack and brought forth the cube, handing it over softly, carefully as to not drop it. The mercenary held it tightly, his yellow eyes glowing more intense each second that passed. He brought it over to his desk, where he placed it on the center. The desk was that of his predecessor, and was modified through use of the Force to activate holocrons. A bright purple smoke filled the air, and a soft melody began to play, followed by lyrics:

***I love you.
You love me.
We're a happy family,
With a great big hug and a kiss from me to you,
Won't you say you love me too?***

Gaius smirked, offered a salute, and made his way out of the room, fighting back a smile.