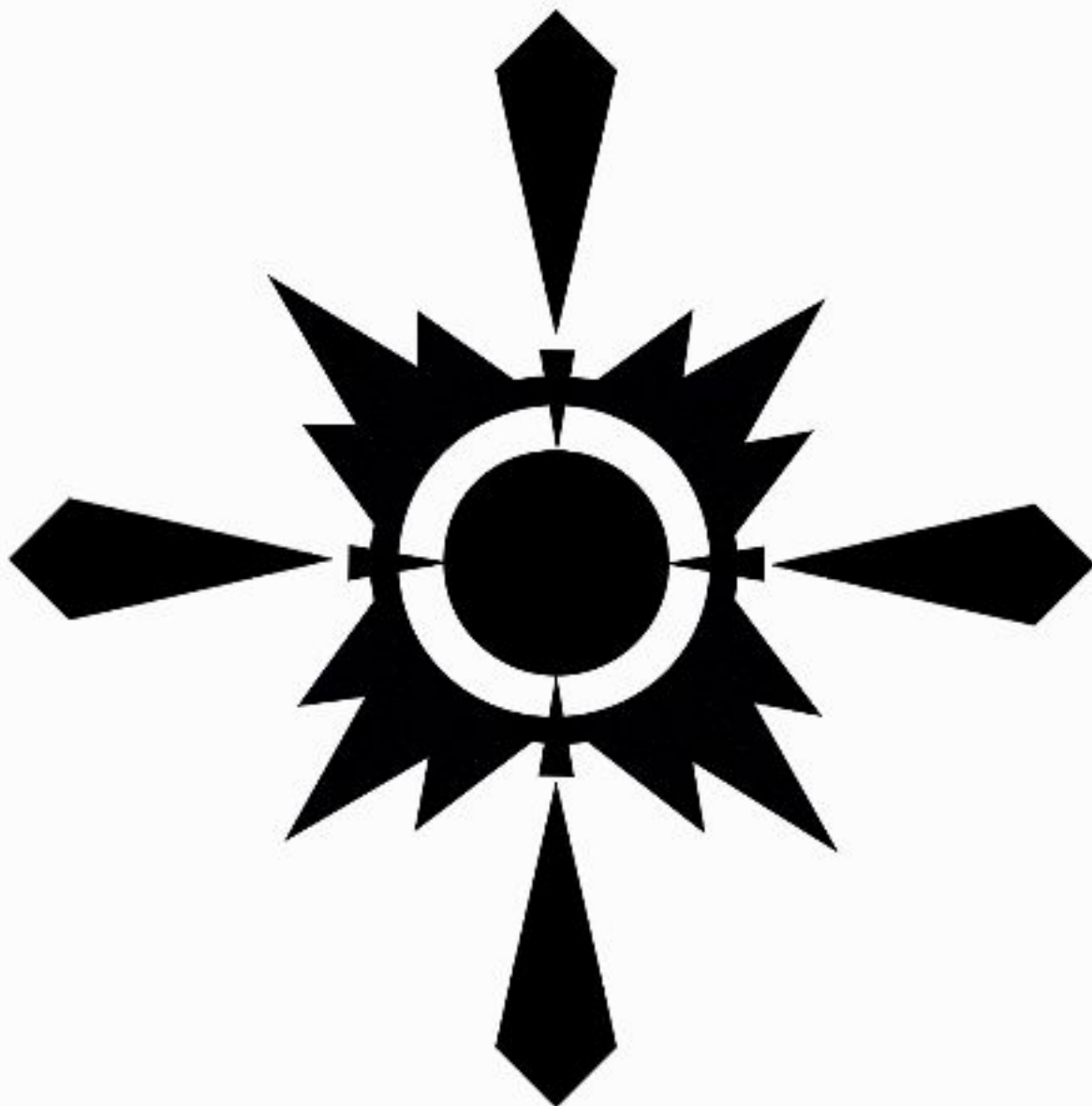


CIRCUMSTANCES



By: Commander Gaius Julius Caesar

There hadn't been a sound in what seemed like weeks. Light, both natural and artificial was absent from the seemingly tiny room, its dimensions were not known to the captured Plaguein. The only sense that remained free was his sense of smell, yet he wished that was taken as well. The interrogation was entering its thirty-fifth agonizing day. Commander Gaius Julius Caesar lay sprawled across the floor, strapped down by each of his appendages, save his missing left arm.

A soft distant voice funneled through the room and into the old man's ears. ***"Is he alive still? Doc made us promise that we wouldn't kill him."***

In his old, stubborn nature, Gaius cleared his throat very loudly, both to indicate his level of consciousness and to prepare for the upcoming session. Gaius had done worse to the slaves of Aliso than the fools of the Collective were capable of doing to him.

A quick clang was heard against the solid metal floor, followed almost immediately by the blinding light and intense ringing of a flashbang. This was an old trick, used to disguise how many people were actually entering the room. Caesar counted three separate sets of boots hit the ground, but couldn't be certain. A familiar voice boomed once more.

"Do you remember the circumstances to your capture?"

"Yes." muttered the old man. ***"I was assigned to salvage the wreckage of that ship you pigs blew up."*** The truth was hidden under the guise of salvage.

"That attack was over two years ago. It was the turning point in the War against your silly Brotherhood. We've been through this before." A holopad was presented in front of the Plaguein's face, showing the sacking of Arx, the homeworld of the Brotherhood. Aliso was ravaged, as were the other planets that the Clans called home. An image flashed onto the screen, showing a beheaded Mav Cantor, held proudly raised by Rath Oligard. ***"The War is over, Caesar."***

The holopad continued to provide the only light in the room, but it was enough for Gaius to confirm his count of those in the room. Three. Two of those present, including the voice who did most of the talking, appeared briefly to be Chiss males, hence their ability to perform in the complete darkness. The third was a trepid presence. Caesar's studies of The Liberation Front lead him to believe this was the "Doc" that the others referred to.

"Doc, I can't feel my leg." Caesar stammered. The darkness grew, as he waited for a response to confirm his belief. He received none. The sound of silence continued.



“Do you remember the circumstances to your capture?”

The question had been asked hundreds of times. Four hundred and fifty eight, if his memory served him right. The old man knew the answer. He knew the answer that was expected of him. Most of all, he knew the truth.

“You boarded our ship when we were dispatched to--” Electricity flew through his veins before he could finish. The voltage was weaker than it was yesterday, a technique that he practically invented. His core and legs tensed up, only being kept tied down by the leather restraints. The acting was beginning to take its toll on him. ***“--- the wreckage of your attack on the--”***. The shocks returned.



Three more days had passed since the last time Caesar heard a voice other than his own. He was being pumped all essential nutrients through an intravenous device that was attached to his arm the day he was taken prisoner.

“Do you remember the circumstances to your capture?” the voice boomed, out of nowhere. This time, it had caught Caesar off guard, flustered him even.

Finally giving into his captor, he cried out his response. ***“I was hiding in the Pinnacle on Aliso. We were overwhelmed.”*** he took a deep breath, ***“Plagueis defenses failed and the slaves turned against us.”***

“And we saved you.” interrupted the other voice in the room.

“And you saved me!” The old man broke down hysterically, acting as if he was unable to control the stream of tears that poured out of his eyes like the rivers that ran freely on his adopted world of Aliso. ***“Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!”*** Silence and darkness ensued for another ten days.



By his count, Gaius Julius Caesar just began his fiftieth day of captivity. For the first time, the lights were turned on. Three figures could be made out in the larger than expected room, but the sudden influx of light was wreaking havoc on the old man's senses. He felt their arms grab him and release the restraints. They raised him to his feet, helping him the entire time. Surely he would collapse if not for their assistance. For once, he was grateful of their presence.

The quartet slowly their way out of the room, into a corridor filled with people all lined up shoulder to shoulder. The crowd gathered in size and energy. The loud applause filled Caesar's ears, overwhelming him. He was being treated as a hero returning home from war. Smiles grew on the faces of humans and nonhumans alike. Their emotions confused Caesar, who was not used to such a warm welcome anywhere he went. *"They're cheering for you, Caesar. They've heard of your actions against the Brotherhood"* whispered one of the Chiss escorts. *"How you lead the Technocrats directly to the Iron Throne. How you finally rid the Galaxy of the strongest Force-users in existence. You are a hero to them."* The noise of the crowd grew with each step they took.

In his head, this was completely unexpected. The sensory deprivation, the repetitive questioning, the artificial limb removal, it was all expected. This, however, was impressive. The Liberation Front fools actually thought they broke Gaius Julius Caesar.

By now, the pins and needles in his legs were beginning to subside, making him less dependent on his escorts. They turned the corridor and made their way down a repulsor lift into a large hangar. The port was opened, and the wide expanse of a burnt-orange planet was all that was visible beyond the darkness of space. Nancora was much uglier in person than in the holograms Caesar had done research on. The old man and the two Chiss started to make their way down a double set of stairs, slowly, step by step. Walking seemed to be more difficult for Caesar as he aged. Stairs were becoming the most dreaded part of his life these days.

Caesar was lead into the back of a shuttle, seemingly destined for the surface of the dusty planet Nancora. He was seated in the back, with the other recruits who appeared to be in just as disarray as the Plaguein. A few moaned, and a few groaned, but almost all kept their heads down. *"You'll be on the ground and ready for your raining in no time, Caesar."* the Chiss whispered prior to his debarking.

The shuttle began its launch sequence and started its journey towards the planet. Caesar picked up his head to gaze around. His eyes circled each of the seated passengers. A smile grew on his face as he began to recognize a few fellow Inquisitors. He leaned over to his neighbor and whispered, *"Do you remember the circumstances to your capture?"*