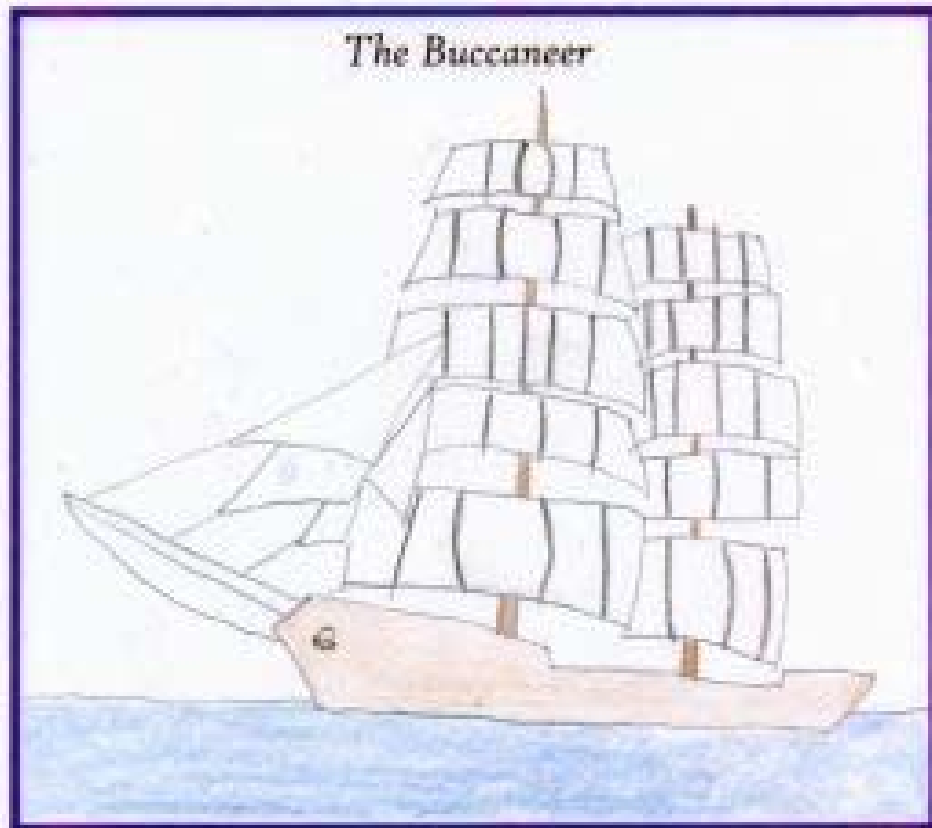


Destined to Die by Denarius



Grade Eight Student

This time travel circle story has a historical fiction base. Julius Caesar actually was kidnapped by pirates as a young man, later rescued and lived to order the pirates hunted down and destroyed.

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Creeping, Jared stole into his father's office. Flickering, candle light danced on the walls. Books lined the interior of his father's personal library. Jared advanced towards his father's cluttered desk. He reached for the knob on the drawer-locked. Jared wondered where the key might be. He sat down in his father's massive wool-stuffed chair, and leapt out with a cry of pain. There, nestled between the cushions, lay the key.

Dust scattered as Jared yanked the drawer open. Writing utensils rested, strewn across the bottom. Wrong drawer. The second of the three drawers creaked open, with Jared grasping the wooden handle. Inside was an old book. Time had worn the leather bindings to shreds. Luminous letters attracted his gaze. They read: *The History of Ancient Rome*. This book of faded runes was his father's latest rave. As Jared scanned through the book, bold characters met his stare. Few sections were in English; the rest were Latin. A dead child rested, forever captured in ink. The caption read: 'Julius Caesar, son of a wealthy merchant, captured and killed by a band of ruthless pirates. Age 14.' Suddenly a piercing *clang* echoed throughout the still room. Jared cringed, hoping the sound had not woken his father. Looking down, he saw a Roman coin, the denarius, spinning in circles on the floor. With a final clatter, the token fell silent. Jared slowly released his breath, straining to hear the padding of footsteps.

Reaching down, he silently groped for the coin, and froze as footsteps started down the hall. Frantically searching for a place to hide, he hit the coin. In his frantic state of mind, he accidentally rubbed the coin. At that moment, dark mist crept from all corners of the room, quickly enveloping it in complete and utter darkness. Jared fell into oblivion, as his father's office vanished. The last noise he heard was his father muttering, "Stupid rats," and shutting the door.

Jared froze. He couldn't tell how long he had been unconscious. Crying gulls, the sound of water lapping against a boat and a swaying sensation brought him out of his stupor. Suddenly his skin prickled. Two rough and husky voices were arguing. As they drew near, Jared managed to distinguish two words, "Julius Caesar."

"You feed him!" cried a tough voice.

"Brats feed brats, so that makes *you* the nominee!" Jared heard a soft thud. Suddenly pain coursed through his back as a large weight hit him full force. "Wait!" shouted the first voice. "There's somethin' under here, and it ain't no treasure."

In a flash, strong arms threw aside the tarp. Rough hands seized Jared, dragging him to his feet.

"Oh no! Not another princess to feed." mourned one of the men. "Pirates?!" barked Jared.

"Well we ain't no princesses, are we Henry?"

"Where'd we pick up this piece of scum?" growled Henry.

Jared opened his mouth to answer, but the words died in his throat.

“Toss im’ in the brig with the other brat, and I’ll go tell the capn’.” Jabbing his scabbard into Jared’s back, Henry quickened the pace. Jared staggered down the stairs, trying hard to keep his balance.

“You’ll get your sea legs soon enough!” laughed Henry, delivering a hearty slap. Jared went sprawling. Reaching the bottom, Jared waited for his eyes to adjust in the gloomy darkness. Suddenly he spotted a figure sauntering towards him.

“My food, I hope?” the young man questioned. “Tell the cook that he over-salted my fish yesterday, and failed to provide the wine I requested.”

“Shut yer trap, you fussy princess!” barked Henry.

“I am no princess; I am Julius Caesar to you, man!” thundered the young man. Jared’s jaw fell as some of the pieces came together.

“Everyone hates feeding you, you fussy girl!” sneered Henry. Suddenly Jared got an idea. “I’ll feed him!” he cried. Both men turned and stared at Jared.

Jogging, Jared weaved around the ship, carrying a plate of steaming fish. He leapt down the stairs, two steps at a time. Julius sat expectantly in the corner of the room, loudly complaining.

“I was napping, and you woke me. I could have your head for that!”

Jared apologized trying hard to conceal his mirth. Julius was a prisoner, and expected to be treated like a king! Jared shifted the ragged clothes that clung to his shoulders. The pirates had supplied him with clothes, but not with a cutlass. He anticipated the meeting with Henry this afternoon, where he would be taught the rules of the ship. The day flew by, with endless errands to be run. All of the men were busy preparing for battle. They had been pursuing a ship for days, and were closing the gap. Halting, Jared softly knocked on a huge oak door. It opened inwards, revealing a burly man.

“Where’ve you been, you dawdler?” asked the captain.

“I came a quickly as I could,” defended Jared.

“You’re a lousy pirate, especially by our *Buccaneer*’s standards,” exclaimed the captain. “Don’t you know that our ship, the *Buccaneer*, has a daring reputation to uphold? Why, come two days time, we’re going to raid a brimming Roman supply ship and annihilate the crew. Prior to that battle, you’ll need to be taught a thing or two about fighting. Go meet Henry in the hold.”

Five minutes later, Jared stood before Henry. “If you’re almost done lolly-gagging around, I think we’ll begin,” mocked Henry. “There’ll be no women, no gambling, and no stealing. If you get caught disobeying these here rules, you walk the plank into Davy Jones’ locker,” explained Henry. “Now, if you plan to float above Davy Jones’ locker, you’re going to learn to fight. Come two days time, the *Buccaneer*’s going to need all the help it can get, which means you-,” Henry poked Jared in the chest. “Are going to learn to fight. Time to learn to yield this here smoke bomb.”

Henry produced a glass bottle from behind his back. The smoke bomb was a jar filled with tar and rags. Jared gleefully accepted the token of trust.

“Now then, you little pyromaniac, go on deck, light it, and toss er into the sea,” chuckled Henry. “But,” he warned, “if you smoke out anybody, we’ll throw you into the sea, then hang you out to dry.”

“You can count on me!” Jared exclaimed.

Jared strode through the long hallway that led to the deck. Suddenly Jared lurched forward as his toe caught on an uneven board. The bomb flew from his hands, crashing into the torch that gave light to the dim hallway. All of the sudden, black smoke billowed from the jar. Jared heard it rolling, but sight was useless in the murky smoke. Silence ensued. Suddenly he heard a low crackling noise. It sounded strangely familiar to Jared, but he couldn't remember what caused it. The last time he heard that noise, he had been sitting on a couch, staring at the...

“Fire!” shouted a pirate on deck.

“When I get my hands on that little twerp!” vowed Henry.

Immediately salt water was thrown on the blaze, dousing the flames. Strong arms seized Jared, hanging him on a hook, on deck, for all to see. Suddenly a figure, covered in soot, strode on deck. Wiping his face, he bellowed, “Which of you rats dropped the bomb into my quarters?”

All fingers pointed to Jared. He started to defend himself when it dawned on him. He had smoked out the captain.

“I'll hang em out to dry!” bellowed the captain. “You two, go swab my quarters on the double.”

They didn't need to be told twice. As the captain approached Jared, two crewmen scampered off. In two strides he seized Jared, hanging his belt loop on a hook. Jared caught his breath as the captain's eyes bore holes through his head.

“You're first offence! A day ought to make you a bit more careful when handling a bomb!” decreed the captain.

As the warm Mediterranean sun reached its highest point, Jared's parched lips split and beads of bloods coloured them. Hunger clawed at his stomach; how long would it be before it was sated? But hunger was soon forgotten; thirst became his biggest foe. Salt water did not quench the roaring fire of thirst; it only lessened the blaze before it returned stronger than ever. Two pirates forced salt water down his throat, worsening his agony. A while later, Henry approached, looking gleeful. “Ransom's on the way, and Julius's father is delivering it in one of his own ships!” he crowed. “Only we got a little surprise for them.” Henry leaned in closer. “You ain't goin nowhere, so I figure it can't hurt to let you in. We're gonna collect the ransom, sink their ship, then lighten the *Buccaneer* by a man.”

You're gonna kill me?!” croaked Jared.

“No, not you!” laughed Henry. “The brat!”

Jared rasped, “Just so long as it isn't me.”

Henry lifted Jared off the hook, deliberately gouging his back. Jared stifled a cry, inwardly seething ‘*I wouldn't give you the pleasure of seeing me in pain.*’

“As your final punishment, you'll have supper with his ladyship, Julius.” declared Henry sarcastically.

‘*This could be my only chance!*’ thought Jared.

Jared slowly crawled down the ladder into the hold.

“I hope they decided to feed me real food tonight.” mocked Julius.

“Hush up, Julius, because I’ve only a few minutes down here, and it’s critical. Your father is coming tomorrow with the ransom money. The pirates are planning to take the ransom, destroy your father’s ship, then murder you!”

Julius gasped.

“We need a plan, and fast!”

Ten minutes later, the conspiring pair had the making of a rescue plan. Suddenly Jared remembered. The coin! Without it, he could not escape. Shoving a hand into his pocket he quaked. The door to his time would be sealed without it. Fingers closing around the small silver disc, Jared heaved a sigh of relief. He must not rub the coin until it was absolutely necessary.

Suddenly Henry barged in. “You’ll sleep here tonight!” he barked. “I’ll be down to tuck you in later!”

Striding out of the hold, Henry slammed the door behind him. With the plan complete, Jared and Julius fell asleep immediately.

The following morning, Jared woke with a start. The door leading out of the hold was still vibrating. They had already come for Julius. Jared leapt up. *I slept right through those noisy buccaneers!* Jared tried the door’s knob. Luckily, the pirates had not locked him in. He slowly crept along the dim hallway. Halting, Jared listened. Hearing nothing, he continued cautiously.

Suddenly a door opened and Henry lurched out. Regaining his balance, he caught sight of Jared. “Up already, are we?”

“There you are!” exclaimed Jared, not wanting to divulge his true plan. “I’ve been looking everywhere for you! I wanted to tell you about the brat. He must have snuck out this morning, and I can’t find him anywhere. By the way, where’s my weapon?”

“I’ll give it to you just before we, uh, ‘exchange the ransom money for Julius,’” winked Henry. Suddenly a cry echoed throughout the *Buccaneer*.

“Ship in sight!”

Henry grabbed Jared, and they both scrambled on deck. Emerging on the western horizon, a pair of sails loomed. Only yesterday, the *Buccaneer* had stopped pursuing the supply ship, preferring to wait for the ransom. As the ship drew nearer, Jared spied a white flag flapping in the breeze. A short while after, Henry showed Jared a pile of smoke bombs. “Just don’t-”

“I know, I know.” interrupted Jared. “Don’t smoke out anybody.”

Bellowing, the captain declared the order of operations to the assembled crew. “Most of you will remain hidden in the hold until we give the signal. This would put them less on their guard, for we will appear to be a small crew.”

Murmurs of respect rippled through the pirates.

“Those of you standing on the port side; disable the cannons, or any other large artillery Mr. Caesar may have on board. The key is surprise. They’ll probably be suspecting a trap, so we mustn’t give them any proof to support their hunch. If our cover is blown, we must move swiftly; speed is of the essence. Do not kill unless necessary, for they will fight harder when they realize death is at hand.”

Jared shuddered. He was listening to a weathered killer, one who knew his job well.

“They certainly won’t fire on us until they have Julius, because a near miss might kill him. Once Julius is aboard, they will open fire. By delaying the ransom those I have instructed will have time to board the ship. Now, men! To your stations!”

Two thirds of the pirates scrambled into the hold, preparing their weapons. Jared eyed his. The pile of smoke bombs was nestled near the entrance to the hold. Sauntering into the hold full of milling pirates, he managed to spy Julius huddled alone in a corner. Pretending he had been shoved, Jared sprawled across the floor towards Julius. Looking up at him, Jared hissed, “Stay near the door and wait for me!”

Picking himself up, Jared rushed out of the hold and plunked down beside his stash of smoke bombs. Shortly afterward, the *Buccaneer* advanced at about 5 knots towards the ransom ship which was anchored half a league away. Jared did the calculations, and came to the conclusion that the meeting was only 30 minutes away. Grim apprehension settled over the silent crew. The half hour flew by, and before Jared knew it, a pirate’s voice rang out, “Prepare to exchange!” Jared heard the rustling of all of the pirates in the hold rising to their feet as the minutes dragged by.

Moments later the two ships were within shouting distance. Tension mounted.

“Where’s the boy?” boomed the Captain of the Blue Dragon.

“Show me the money and I’ll show you the brat!” retorted the Buccaneer Captain with a roar.

Hoisting an open chest teeming with gold, two crewmen of the Blue Dragon heaved until it rested on the railing.

“Aye! There hangs our future boys! Doesn’t it gleam!” gloated the Captain.

“Henry, let’s lay the plank and make the brat walk it!” Henry and the Captain grabbed hold of a thirty foot board and slid it across open waters establishing a link between the two vessels.

Suddenly a deep voice rumbled, “Board ship!”

Instantly, Jared lit a smoke bomb and bounded over to the hold yanking the door open. Tossing it into the hold, smoke swelled concealing the doorway. Julius was leaning on the wall beside the door, and the moment it flew open, he sprinted through.

Igniting bomb after bomb, Jared and Julius pitched them into the hold. Chaos broke loose! Curses flooded the air as the pirates slammed blindly into walls searching for the masked exit.

“Nothing like going out with a bang, hey Julius?” quipped Jared.

Julius just grinned.

The buccaneers on deck who had been expecting a stampede of brave pirates were caught off guard. Once the pile was depleted, Julius and Jared raced for the boarding ramp that linked the two ships.

Suddenly everything went wrong. Someone steered the *Buccaneer* away from Julius’s father’s ship, the Blue Dragon! The plank fell away sinking out of sight.

“Some bang!” muttered Julius as the pirates in the hold managed to find the door and burst out. “I’m history!” At that moment a familiar voice broke the air.

“What’s going on you filthy, no-good, cheating scum? I want my son!” raged the Captain of the Blue Dragon.

“Father!” screamed Julius waving both arms. “I’m here!”

Barreling towards the *Buccaneer's* portside, the outraged pirates suddenly realized they were too late. Spotting Jared and Julius, alone and unarmed they advanced. Wicked grins contorted their evil features. Jared and Julius saluted the pirate band turned around and leapt over board.

Yelling until they were hoarse the pair failed to attract the *Blue Dragon's* attention. The *Buccaneer* left them to drown, and was soon just a blotch on the horizon. Julius was a strong swimmer, but Jared floundered helplessly.

At the last moment, the *Blue Dragon* turned around drawing near. But Jared did not have the strength to stay afloat. Julius harnessed powerful strokes to lessen the gap.

'*I've saved Julius, but my life is forfeit*' thought Jared, as he slowly sank beneath the waves. Suddenly he remembered. The *coin!* Reaching into his pocket he rubbed the denarius. One moment he was drowning in the Mediterranean Sea, the next he was gasping for air in his father's office, dripping wet. He returned the coin to its place and his eyes widened. The page had changed. Pictured was a tall man with a crown of leaves. Beneath, the caption read: 'Julius Caesar, the greatest emperor of Rome.'