

Brother, My Brother

A fiction written and submitted by Appius "Zappius" Wight

Nar Shaddaa
Hutt Sector
39 ABY

Dirty.

The grime and grease of the Nar Shaddaa bar's countertop smeared his cheek as he laid his face upon it.

Empty.

The glass had a few trickles of alcohol that stained the very bottom. Despite being nearly as dry as a Tatooine desert, he refused to release it from his grasp.

Loud.

The very worst of the Hutt world's scum and villainy gathered. If only to take, sell, and trade their narcotics. Such things were supposed to be illegal, but much like the Hutt's themselves that ran this cesspool of a world, nobody gave any frakks. Darrio certainly didn't as he raised a single finger from where his hand clutched his glass and motioned for the barkeep.

"More," the Mandalorian uttered, his voice no louder than a whisper and barely audible over the bustling crowd within the club. The Barkeep, a simple Gamorean with skin slimier than a slug, slammed another glass in front of Darrio and filled it up with a liqueur that the Hunter had no idea what was contained within. Not that it mattered. To Darrio, the fact that it *burned* when it trickled down his throat and got him slowly drunk was good enough for him. The Mandalorian often found himself in dingy little dumps like this after finishing a hunt to quite literally drown his sorrows. It usually ended up in some drunken ramblings about how everything was all his fault. Here Darrio was, former *alor* of *Aliit* Klars of Mandalore.

How the mighty did fall...

He could only imagine what their Jedi of a father would have taken to all of it. Appius was the one who was lucky enough to inherit all the space wizard sithspit whilst Darrio, the older brother, had to sweat, work hard, and *bleed* to gain his recognition and for *what*? It was all gone. When Appius needed him, he was there, and yet his little brother couldn't do the same for him? When their Clan needed him the most, Appius abandoned them for some kriffing other Clan in the Brotherhood, acting like some bigwig bigshot instead of doing what he should have been doing in the first place.

Darrio played the scenario over, and over, and over again in his mind. His artificial left arm served as a reminder of everything he'd lost and could never get back. It *seared* the back of his subconscious, the flames as they cooked his arm, turning it to charcoal as men, women and children screamed around him. Every time he closed his eyes those shrill screams echoed, and he blamed Appius for it all. He should have shot him. When he finally found him again, he should have put a blaster bolt between his eyes, but he didn't. He couldn't. Darrio wasn't the only one who suffered from Klars' end, Appius had too, and it sickened him, made him sick of himself. Darrio pitied his brother, and he *hated* Appius for it.

The Hunter was so absorbed in his train of thoughts for the fifth time that week that he almost failed to notice a Rodian male slip beside his seat. The blue-tinged being reached out for the Mandalorian helmet that lay idly by the seat. Darrio had knocked it off the counter earlier when he started drinking and had not bothered to retrieve it. The Rodian was a bold one, and as he grasped the durasteel helmet, he launched his smaller frame from the ground and leapt towards the exit like a mini speeder.

The crowd stood and watched as the Rodian tried to make his escape, none daring to get involved. What happened on Nar Shaddaa, stayed on Nar Shaddaa. Which is why when a thin, near-invisible cable tethered around the Rodian's thigh and tripped him up, no one interfered.

The source of the cable came from the vambrace attached to Darrio's forearm. The Mandalorian gripped the thin line with both hands and pulled the Rodian towards him like he was pulling a bucket out of a well until the frightened man lay before him.

"*Niuta oon't kidd jeesh!*" The Rodian blurted out in fluent Huttese. Darrio understood a couple of words of the language here and there. Time spent in the Outer Rim often did that, though he was far from fluent himself. He at least managed to catch the words *please* and *don't*.

Darrio retrieved the Westar 35 from his hip and wasted no time in placing a blaster bolt between the Rodian's bug-like eyes. A plume of smoke rose from the Westar as the Hunter sheathed it back onto his hip. Darrio reached into a small satchel and tossed a random number of credits on the bar's countertop in front of the barkeep.

"Keep the change," the Mandalorian muttered, picking up his helmet as he left. The regular patrons gave a wide berth for him, returning to their raucous activities and behaviour as soon as his heavily armoured frame went through the door.

If inside the bar was abysmally unhygienic and smelt worse than a burst sewer pipe, then the outside street was even worse. It was like it never rained, and the people never showered. A constant state of rotting foulness that passed through every single day. It made Darrio nauseous and dizzy. Whether that was because of the stench or because of how much he'd drunk back inside the bar was unbeknownst to him. Not that it mattered. His helmet was vacuum-sealed, so at least the smell could be dealt with. The spinning and heavy feeling in his head was another.

Thankfully, as he paced slowly and carefully down the street to whatever hovel was to be his bed for the night, most were willing to give the Mandalorian a wide berth. Even drunk, Mandalorians held a fierce reputation as proud warriors and few were willing to put that to the test.

Though that didn't mean those who were willing were nonexistent...

The H.U.D in Darrio's helmet buzzed to life with activity. Various symbols, letters and numbers flashed before his eyes in green Mando'a, far too fast for him to read properly in the state he was in. The warning, however, was noted. Several armed mercenaries surrounded him on the street. They closed him in a wide circle, giving him little to no escape from the ground. One of the mercenaries stepped forward. A Duros of a particularly muscular stature, the massive, seven-foot being held himself like a proud warrior in front of his men.

"Darrio Klars?" The hulking Duros questioned, his voice deep and grating like chalk down a blackboard.

"Who's asking?" The Hunter managed to slur out of his mouth.

"You are familiar with one Appius Wight and Ankira Irr, correct?"

The second Darrio heard his brother's name, his head snapped up to the Duros', causing the Mandalorian to stagger back a couple of steps from the sudden action. Appius was, of course, his brother, and Ankira was Appius' lover. The last time they'd met, she'd pinned Darrio to the ground and threatened to kill him. You don't easily forget something like that, no matter how drunk you get.

"What about them!?" Darrio snapped back, causing a wide, feral grin to appear on the Duros' face.

"The Sith Monarchy wish for revenge, and you'll do nicely."

The Sith Monarchs. They were the ones that destroyed Darrio's home, his clan. The utter mention of their name filled him with a rage equivalent to molten lava. The Mandalorian thrust his arm forward as the cable within his vambrace lanced towards the hulking Duros. Despite his massive frame, the being in question was surprisingly agile, and narrowly avoided getting wrapped up in it like a giant piece of meat. It instead collided with a second mercenary, causing him to topple to the ground with a hard thud as the line tethered around him.

"GET HIM!" The Duros roared with a primal rage. Darrio stumbled for the Westar blaster at his hip, grabbing at it and wrapping his fingers around the trigger. He pressed once as a single bolt of ionised tibanna gas soared and crashed into the shoulder of a random mercenary. The being in question tumbled to the ground, clutching his wound and screaming in pain.

A second shot fired, flying through the air like an X-Wing slamming into the gut of a second random mercenary, who clutched their stomach and let out one final gasp of air. Darrio had no care for *where* he was shooting, so long as he hit *something*, and there were plenty around for target practice. Yet, as the Mandalorian was about to press the trigger for the third time, the gap between him and the group had closed. His wrist was grabbed and yanked upwards. The blaster bolt soared into the sky and away from the group.

Darrio cursed his luck, wishing he'd brought his jetpack with him. Still, he had one last trick up his sleeve. Darrio released his hold of his blaster, letting it fall to the ground. He brought his forearm to his hand and managed to activate the flamethrower locked within the vambrace. Flames spewed out like an angry serpent, wriggling and writhing in the air as the Mandalorian struggled to get the mercenary to release their hold of him. It snapped the tether that extended at the vambrace, allowing the flames to swoosh and spin around the group as the pair struggled. Three caught on fire, running, screaming, and rolling upon the ground as others tried to extinguish the flames.

A few moments later, the fuel ran out. Darrio's H.U.D flared with a warning that came from his right. He turned his head as a huge, boulder-like fist slammed into his visor. The durasteel bent from the impact, and the visor cracked into several pieces, breaking the electronics within. Darrio's head snapped back from the impact as he staggered back. The Mandalorian's arms were held back by a couple of the Duros' goons, the same Duros that had just knocked him senseless with one punch. The Hunter barely had time to comprehend what else was happening, his vision blurring and seeing double before one more punch from the Duros turned it black.

I'm gonna frakking kill him!

Appius' foot tapped along the floor of the Upsilon Class shuttle as it tore among the treacherous atmosphere of a world that at one point few knew existed. He held the comlink firmly in his grasp and replayed the message again for the seventh time during his journey from the heart of Taldryan territory into the unknown dredges of space. The blue-hued image of an overly muscular Duros appeared in view.

"Appius Wight, a pleasure to make your acquaintance at last. I'm sure you have absolutely no idea who I am, but..."

The image shifted to an unconscious Darrio, who sat in a seat still wearing his Mandalorian armor, sans helmet. He seemed mostly unharmed, but vulnerable.

*"I'm positive you know who **he** is. Attached to this recording are a set of coordinates to a cloning facility on Kamino. Come alone, or else."*

Just to make his point clear, the Duros pointed his blaster at the unconscious Mandalorian just as the message was cut. Appius reclined in his seat and let out a deep sigh. He'd taken it fairly seriously. So serious in fact that if Ankira found out what he was doing she'd have

him shot in places that beskar didn't cover. What else was he supposed to do? She was pregnant with their child, and someone had to stay at home to look after their Foundling.

Appius told her it was just *boring summit business*. The Force User could sense she didn't buy it one bit, but he was already out the door before she could question him. He was going to pay for it when he got home, and for ignoring all her calls during the journey, but it was what was best for her, *safest* for her and their children. Appius was doing this for her, or at least that was what he was telling himself to try and feel better about the whole thing.

Then there was Darrio...

Appius' relationship with his older brother was strained at best and volatile at worst. The last time the two of them were face to face with each other they'd tried to kill each other. Blame was thrown, emotions were high, and the once inseparable pair when they were younger was now more distant than they had ever been. Hell only knew what their father would have thought of the whole thing. Appius was the one fortunate enough to have been Force-sensitive, whilst Darrio, in his own words, had to claw, scratch, and climb his way upon his own strength without that silver spoon in his mouth.

"Master Proconsul, sir. We have arrived on the Kamino platform."

Not that Appius had any more time to think about it. The pilot droid announced their arrival as the ramp leading down to the torrential platform splashed into the rainwater. There were no more words as Appius rose from his seat and launched himself outside.

It only took a few seconds for the Mandalorians to be soaked in water. Lightning split the sky asunder as a light flashed in front of his visor. The pitter-patter of raindrops soaked the undersuit under his beskar armor. The Juggernaut propelled himself along the platform with his jetpack, hastily arriving at the Clone facility entrance and pried the door open with the Force. Appius ran inside, using his trained senses to pick up on his brother's location. However, there was something...wrong.

The Taldryan Proconsul was expecting a trap of some description. Darrio was being used to bait him out, after all, and there was a distinct *dark* feeling as he got closer and closer to Darrio. It started as a whisper and grew louder and louder until it was shouting in his ear. The feeling was somehow familiar, yet the Savant couldn't place his finger on how or why.

There was a distinct lack of Kaminoan cloners too, not that Appius cared when he approached a sealed set of durasteel blast doors. The best way to deal with a trap was to spring it, after all. The Mandalorian slammed his palm on the centre console as the pressure locking the door shut released with a *whoosh*, slowly opening up. The room within was almost pitch black, save for the lone chair that Appius' brother was sitting in. A force-field surrounded him, giving the older Mandalorian now way out, and no way to use his various tools and weapons.

"Darrio!" Appius called out as he paced to his brother's rescue. The older Mandalorians crystal-blue eyes locked onto his younger brother's visor as he approached.

"Frakk off," Dario swore in response, flipping Appius off in the process.

"Nice to see you too, Darrio. Good to see your manners haven't changed," the younger brother retorted sarcastically.

"What the hell are you doing here?" Darrio asked, gritting through his teeth.

"What's it look like?"

Appius got no answer.

"I'm here to save your stupid ass. Now hold still while I get you out of this," Appius finished his explanation as he took a single step back from the forcefield. The Force User raised his right hand as a stream of blue and white lightning jettisoned out of his fingertips. It struck the electronics above that created the impenetrable prison and short-circuited it as it sparked and hissed. Once the forcefield lowered, Darrio shot up to his feet and placed his helmet back on his head before barging past his little brother.

"Oh no, don't worry, Appius. I'm fine. I know you risked your life, your position, and your relationship to come out here to save me because I'm a dumbass and can't look after myself. I really appreciate it!" Appius put on a voice and impersonated Darrio, who spun around and got right into Appius' face.

"I never asked for your help," Darrio chastised.

"You don't have too, you're family. We are supposed to look out for one another! Ankira is pregnant, Darrio, and we have a foundling. You are an uncle now. An *uncle*," Appius retorted as the two sets of visors glared into one another. Both men went uncharacteristically quiet, especially Darrio as he tried to process the news.

"If you two are quite finished, allow me to formally introduce myself."

A dark, grizzled voice echoed amongst the darkness as the lights within the room snapped on with the brightness of a twin star. After a moment to compose themselves, the two Mandalorians were aghast at the sight of several cloning tubes each with the exact same pale, near-naked male body held within. Appius recoiled, the Force alarming him of the darkness held within each of their souls. Suddenly, that dark feeling he had as he entered the facility made a lot more sense.

"That's... that's..." Appius stammered his words, heart thundering in his chest like the Kamino storms on the outside world.

"My master, yes. Severin Gar."

The owner of the grizzled voice revealed himself as the Duros responsible for Darrio's capture. His hulking frame towered over the clone tubes as he stood atop the nearby stairway. Clearly having a flash for the dramatic, he wore a light brown trench coat and

space-black trousers. His heavy boots clanged against the steps as he made his way down to their level.

"Allow me to introduce myself. I am Zaalud Soon, heir to the Sith Monarchy. What we have here," the bluey-green skinned being gestured to either side of him with his large hands. "Is the future. Gaze upon the legacy of the Sith Monarchy, created from the DNA of Lord Severin himself."

"You're a madman!" Appius called out. "Severin only cared for himself, for his power and greed!"

"Appius, shut up," Darrio ordered bluntly, taking a few confident strides forward towards the Duros. "He's nothing more than a thug, I can handle this."

Ignoring his brother's quip for the moment, Appius focused his trained senses on the Duros.

"Darrio... he's no thug," Appius responded.

Zaalud retrieved a single hilt from his waist. The crimson blade erupted out of it and illuminated him in a blood-red hue. The older Mandalorian brushed the shock aside for a moment, before drawing upon his Westar blaster and letting loose a volley of plasma upon the dark side entity.

Ping, ping, ping!

The blaster bolts rebounded off of the Duros' lightsaber and away from harm, the dark sider treating the Mandalorian like he was a training dummy.

When a gap presented itself in the Duros' rate of fire, Zaalud reached into the Force and wrapped it around Darrio's throat, tightening it like a clamp on metal. The Mandalorian clutched at his airways as his feet dangled inches off of the ground before he was launched down the hallway.

"Darrio!" Appius cried out, watching his brother roll to a sudden stop as his spine slammed hard against the durasteel wall. The Mandalorian Force User twisted his head back to the Duros, who glared back at him with a sadistic grin that stretched across his face.

However, Appius believed, no, he *knew* what the bigger threat was. The Clones of Severin Gar. If they were allowed to fully grow and develop with the dark side of the Force on their side, it would spell certain doom for them all.

"If you think I'm going to let them exist, you are sadly mistaken!" Appius roared and thrust his left hand towards a random collection of tubes that held the Clones within. Suddenly, the Force sounded like a klaxon in his subconscious, and the Taldryan Proconsul summoned his saberstaff to his hand, activating the emerald blades out of both sides and parrying the incoming crimson before it could cleave into him. What began was a dance of green and red, with Zaalud committing to strong, powerful and aggressive strikes, taking advantage of his physicality to overwhelm and overpower Appius.

"Really? All that muscle and you can't land a hit? You're either seriously overconfident, or you are trying to compensate for something," Appius taunted, using his application of the Sith art of smack-talking, better known as *Dun Möch*, to force the gargantuan Duros into making a mistake that he could capitalise on.

Unfortunately, it didn't have the desired effect. The Mandalorian in question could do little more than instinctively react, parrying and deflecting each attack to the sides of him. Appius recognised the style well, Djem So, the Perseverance Form, a form that focused on physical strength to dominate over their opponents and force them into submission.

"It's funny, Severin was so powerful, yet, his fault was how he trained his apprentices."

"I will kill you both and secure his legacy, *my* legacy," Zaalud didn't just promise, he guaranteed.

"Anything is possible," the Mandalorian continued. "You haven't impressed me so far."

Thankfully, Appius' mastery of Soresu kept him alive for the moment as another cleaving blow descended upon his head. In honesty, Appius was having trouble keeping up with the ferocity of his attacks, and it appeared as if his *Dun Möching* had only made the Monarch's apprentice do better. The Mandalorian sidestepped the attack and allowed its momentum to drag the Duros forward. However, Zaalud intended this from the start and took the opportunity to spin, striking with a low, horizontal strike towards Appius' lower abdomen. The Juggernaut had no choice but to twist his staff sideways and block the attack head-on.

Holy Kriff!

Zaalud was as strong as Appius feared, and it took little to no effort for the hulking Duros to push Appius back and press him against the wall. With nothing more than brute strength, the heir to the Sith Monarchy forced the saberstaff out of the Taldryan Proconsul's hands as it rolled out of sight. The Duros leaned back, clenched his fist, and then slammed it into Appius' visor, causing it to ring and vibrate inside. The beskar managed to deal with the impact, though Zaalud's sheer strength was enough to create a dent in the normally invincible piece of armor.

The Mandalorian Force User seized his moment and thrust both of his hands forward and pressed them into the Sith's sternum. A blast of energy from the Force sent Zaalud skidding back across the durasteel floor and into one of the Clone tubes, smashing it as water poured out from inside onto the ground, leaving the Clone within exposed to the elements. The Duros pulled himself out of the wreckage, his eyes burning a crimson-yellow filled with a hate that could burn planets to ashes. Hate for what the Mandalorian's did to the Monarchy, to his master, and *him*.

"I hope you two haven't forgotten about little ole me."

Both Appius and Zaalud glanced towards Darrio, who had returned to his feet and was standing with his blaster upholstered, pointing at a set of terminals.

"You!" Zaalud spat through gritted teeth.

"If I'm not mistaken, this is the life support system used to maintain the vitals of every Clone in this room. Am I correct?" Darrio inquired with a smug tone in his words. The Duros eyes went wide, sweat dripping down his brow, his babies, his future were all being held hostage by the will of an itchy trigger finger. "It'd be a shame if anything happened to it..."

"You wouldn't..." the Duros threatened in a particularly poor selection of words. For Darrio, as a matter of fact, would. The older Mandalorian pressed the trigger as a single blaster bolt penetrated the console, lighting it up in a cacophony of sparks and flames. Amongst the hissing electronics, one by one all the Clone Tubes began to power down, leaving the husks inside with no way to support themselves.

"NO!"

Zaalud released a primal roar as his attention was diverted to the Clones in their tanks. One by one, the Sith could feel their life force drain and ebb away as their vital organs failed.

"NOW, APPIUS!" Darrio commanded his younger brother. Thankfully, Appius was aware of what his brother wanted him to do, and began to pour the dark side within himself into his fingertips. Streams of lightning erupted towards the Sith and enveloped him in a torturous blanket, cooking and searing the heir's flesh and organs as he screamed in pain.

The older Mandalorian seized his opportunity and pointed his blaster towards the ceiling, firing a few shots into the durasteel. The panelling above the Duros proceeded to buckle and collapse on top of him, crushing him under the weight of the heavy metal.

Suddenly, silence. Only the sparking of electronics stopped the dark eeriness from taking over. Appius slumped back against the wall, taking a moment to catch his breath. Darrio approached amidst the wreckage and asked a single question.

"Is he dead?"

Appius closed his eyes and tapped into the Force, allowing that mysterious energy to enlighten his senses to everything around him. After a few seconds, the Savant answered.

"Yes."

Caelus System
Taldryan Territory
39 ABY

"Are you sure you don't want to come to Ostara?"

The trip back to the Caelus System had been left in total silence. Neither Brother had said much to each other. Darrio had agreed to accompany Appius back home, if only to pay his brother back for his part in saving his life. The Taldryan Proconsul had extended the offer for Darrio to join Taldryan, though the former head of *Aliit Klars* refused.

And that was the end of that, until the two vessels, one Firespray and one Upsilon Shuttle, emerged from the whirling blue vortex of hyperspace. Appius just could not let his brother go that easily.

"I know you've been alone, Darrio. I know you've been spiralling out of control. You drink to cope with what happened, taking any random contract to try and forget. I was the same, but it doesn't have to be that way. Ankira would accept you, and so would your niece. Hell, the new baby will when they arrive too. What do you say? How about you come home, come and be with your family again." Appius spoke softly in an attempt to reassure his brother.

"No, it's..." Darrio's voice responded through the ships communication channel, deep and somber, like a man with not much left to live for. "It's too late for me, Appius. Enjoy your life without me, *vod*, and congratulations."

"Wait! Darrio!" Appius pleaded, his words falling on deaf ears as the Firespray suddenly vanished into the black void of space.

"KRIFFING DAMN IT!"

The Taldryanite swore and slammed the palm of his hand into the ship's dashboard before leaning back into his seat. He released a heavy sigh, hoping somehow, someday his brother would find the peace he was looking for, even if today was not going to be that day.

"Take us home, Spinky."

"Affirmative, master!" The pilot droid answered with unearthly enthusiasm. The Ostara atmosphere burst into view, as the Taldryan Proconsul returned home.

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