

# THE FATHER

A fiction written by Appius Taldrya Wight.

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**Mandalore**  
**The Wastelands**  
**25 ABY**

The young man known as Appius Wight held the weapon in his hand, carefully admiring the emerald glow that protruded from the hilt. This was *his*, his own lightsaber, one with a crystal imbued with his very essence poured within it. Sure, the weapon was basic in its construction, but the ashen-haired boy didn't care. He worked hard for this, and he was going to savour the moment for as long as he could. He was practically giddy at the prospect of what he could do with it, and how much like his father he could be.

"Careful, Appius. stare at it too long and you'll go blind."

Said father stood opposite his son, sarcasm completely intended with a proud smile on his face. His arms were folded, Jedi robes flowing gently in the wind. He was Sterion Wight. A tall, burly man that was physically well built. His blue eyes shone in the setting sunlight as his now greying hair was all the more visible.

Mandalore may have been a wasteland, but to Appius, right here, right now, there was no better sight in the galaxy than his dad being proud of him. It validated everything he had worked so hard to achieve up until now. The doubt that crept into his mind about being both a Mandalorian *and* a Jedi was swept away like dust in the breeze in moments like these. Those little times when he could prove everyone wrong meant everything.

The lightsaber hummed in the air as the young Mandalorian waved it in front of him. "This is so cool! Wait until Darrio sees this! It's a shame he couldn't be out here with us."

"Your brother leads the Clan now. He can't always come out to see your accomplishments, even if he would like to. His duty must come first," the Jedi said, each word laced with years of wisdom and experience.

Appius rolled his eyes. "Yeah, yeah, I know. *The youngest A'lor in the Clan's history*. I wonder if he's sick of hearing that yet?"

"Knowing your brother, that's very likely," Sterion allowed himself a small chuckle. "Regardless, now that you have your lightsaber, let me see what I have taught you."

Appius dropped into his stance, keeping a two-hand grip on his hilt as he held the blade to the side at an angle. Years of practice had pretty much drilled this into his head so deeply that the Mandalorian Jedi could do it in his sleep.

Sterion then adopted his stance, bringing his lightsaber above his head as he pointed it at Appius. "Good. Begin."

Instead of lunging at his father like Sterion would have expected, Appius poured the Force into the palm of his hand, sending forth a blast of telekinetic energy at Sterion's feet. Whilst the attack wasn't harmful, it did kick up a cloud of dust that irritated the Jedi's eyes and obscured the young Mandalorian from his sight.

Appius sensed his opening, and with his lightsaber in hand, he attacked. It was little more than a basic, horizontal swing, but against most enemies, that would prove to be lethal.

Sterion was not most enemies, and he proved this when he retaliated in kind, for one truly in touch with the Force did not need their eyes to see. Before Appius' lightsaber came near him, Sterion instinctively raised his lightsaber to parry the strike and the two weapons briefly clashed in a loud spark and hiss. Appius followed up on his momentum and spun, extending his hand forward towards his father's chest for a sudden blast with the Force.

"Too slow," the older Jedi said.

He grabbed his son's wrist, catching the son by surprise for half a second before flipping him onto his back. Appius landed with a loud thud, the breath was taken out of his lungs as he now stared up at the Mandalorian sky.

Appius' weapon rolled out of his hand upon impact. He suddenly felt the unmistakable hum of a lightsaber in his ear whilst he took his moment to recover. "Oh, come on!"

"There's no use protesting," Sterion said as he withdrew his weapon. "You still have much to learn."

Appius returned to his feet, summoning his lightsaber back to his hand with the Force. "If I knew we were using martial arts, I would have used the Core the Clan has been teaching me!"

"Then why didn't you?" the father asked.

Appius scowled. "Because I thought we were just using lightsabers and the Force!"

Sterion's face remained passive as he folded his arms. "I see. Did I tell you that we were just using lightsabers and the Force?"

"Well... No, but..."

"But nothing," the older Jedi said. "Do you think any other opponent would fight like that? Holding back because of rules when it is your life or theirs on the line?"

Appius' eyes leaned down towards the ground.

Sterion sat down and patted the ground beside him. Reluctantly, Appius did as instructed, placing his lightsaber hilt on his waist as he sat next to his father, who was busy staring into... nothing really. It didn't matter where you looked, Mandalore was the same sea of beige rock as far as the eye could see save for the scarce number of settlements that refused to believe the planet was cursed.

"Mandalorian Core is not a style I am well versed in. You would have done well to use it against me amidst the rest of your sequence. But your biggest problem is you are too predictable and lack patience," Sterion was methodical with each word he said, pronouncing them perfectly for Appius to hear. "The dust in my face was clever, but you followed that through with the same technique you usually do in our sparring sessions which made you easy to counter. There is nothing wrong with favouring one strategy over another, but I know you, Appius. You are very creative, its why i instructed you in *Niman*. Use that more to your advantage with the Force and whatever else at your disposal, and you'll catch most enemies unawares before they learn how to defeat you."

Appius' head had lowered further during his father's lecture. "Yes, father..."

"Appius, look at me."

The teenager did so, and was surprised to see his father looking back at him with a proud smile on his face. The older Jedi then placed an arm around his son. "You are doing well. Do not let a little criticism defeat you. I'm proud of you, Darrio is proud of you, and Clan Klars are proud of you. You've become a strong defender of the Clan and their way of life. What's stopping you is your self-doubt. Just don't listen to it, OK? You are better than you think you are."

It was such a simple gesture, but it sent a wave of confidence through Appius that he needed. His father was his idol, and he hoped to be as strong and wise as him someday.

"Thanks, dad. I love you," Appius said.

"I love you too, son. Now, let's get back to..."

Sterion suddenly stopped speaking, his attention being drawn to something in the distance.

"Dad? What is it?" Appius asked.

Sterion stared out into the horizon. At first, nothing came into view, but after a few moments, the silhouettes of one individual could be seen across the landscape. Then another was spotted, and another, and another, and another in rapid succession. As they got closer, it became apparent to Appius these were not travellers or wandering salesmen. What would wandering salesmen be doing in the middle of a Mandalorian wasteland anyways?

These beings, whoever they were, were armed to the teeth with enough weapons to make some of Clan Klars green with envy. Sterion rose to his feet, never taking his eyes off of the approaching threat.

"Dad?" Appius asked. "What's going on?"

Sterion did not take his eyes off the new arrivals. "Appius, take the speeder bike, and head back to the compound."

"What!? No! I'm not leaving you!" Appius exclaimed. "Who are they? What are they even doing here!? Are they more thugs after the clan's beskar?"

The Jedi looked at his son, a look of anger palpable on his face. "Appius, that is an order. Take the speeder bike and go back to the clan compound. I will take care of this."

With no further warning, the older Jedi began his approach to meet their intruders in the middle whilst Appius remained still, his jaw slightly slack, frozen in place. On the one hand, he didn't want to disobey his father, but on the other hand, he didn't want to abandon him when it looked like a fight was going to break out at any moment. Sterion's son was a *Mandalorian*. A proud people with a long lineage of honour and loyalty stretching back thousands of years to the time of Tarre Vizsla and before. It was ingrained in his brain at this point, and he couldn't just... leave!

So, Appius did the only thing his conflict-addled mind could do at that moment. He stayed right where he was and watched as his father approached with no fear, and no hesitation.

The group of heavily armed thugs were very much in eyesight, and the leader of which stepped forward, clapping his hands in a rather over-the-top and sarcastic manner. Appius stood and watched as his father and the thugs began conversing with one another. The rest of the heavily armed group began to circle the Jedi like a pack of wild animals trapping their prey. The younger Jedi Mandalorian felt his heartbeat quicken as sweat began to form on his brow. He didn't like this, not one bit, and his right hand grazed the lightsaber attached to his hip.

Appius' suspicions were confirmed when his father drew upon his lightsaber. The teenager inhaled a breath he didn't realise he needed as the mercenaries unleashed hellfire in blaster form at Sterion. Adrenaline poured into the young man's body as he leapt forward to help his dad, only to witness Sterion being shot in the back of the leg. The older man dropped to his knees as he was pelted by blaster fire across his body. A dust cloud formed, both from smoke grenades that then obscured the horror from Appius' eyes, and from the stray shots that hit the ground below.

"DAD! NO!"

Appius roared, his emerald blade sprung to life from the hilt now in his hand.

"Kill the brat!" the Mercenary leader said as streaks of red-hot blaster soared in the Mandalorian's direction.

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## **Pendroh-I, Pendroh System**

### **The Inner Rim**

**40 ABY**

The Kom'rk Fighter burst out of hyperspace into view of a world abundant with life. It wasn't *technically* Appius' per se, but he *was* the Taldryan Consul. So in a way, it kinda *was* his. Regardless, there wasn't anything anyone could do about it, so he took the House Ektrosis Kom'rk amidst Crysenia's protests and began his mission. The Port Kasiya Governess was just going to have to deal with it for now until he was back. After all, he was a Mandalorian, and thus, he had a reputation to uphold.

Being the Consul really did have its perks.

Pendroh-I had never been on the radar of the Brotherhood before. As far as those in power were concerned, it was a world with little material value outside of the lush landscapes and waterfalls that provided natural springs to the planet's wildlife. Yet, this was the supposed location of the *Lightbringers*. A sect of the Children of Mortis that sought to further their knowledge of the light side of the Force. It was also the sect where the Brotherhood had placed a spy, a spy that now needed to be retrieved from within enemy territory. Appius looked out to the planet below, a heavy feeling swept over him as the threat of the upcoming task loomed in his mind.

"It sounded so simple when the Grand Master put the order in..."

"You were the one stupid enough to accept."

A second Mandalorian entered the cockpit of the fighter, sans helmet, holding a drink in his hand which had the unmistakable stench of strong alcohol. Much like Appius, he had ashen-brown hair, but had a beard that was unkempt and looked like it hadn't been cared for in weeks.

"Do you have to be drinking, Darrio?" Appius asked.

He got little more than a shrug from his older brother. The other Mandalorian then added further fuel to the fire by taking a large gulp of liquid out of the bottle in his hand.

"I'm not joking. This could be the death of us both and I don't want it to be because you can't control your bad habit," Appius said.

Darrio scoffed and folded his arms. "If we die, then we die together."

Appius frowned. "I said I'm not joking."

Darrio looked back at his younger brother. "I wasn't."

Silence descended upon the two Mandalorians. The kind of silence that could be broken with the drop of a pin. Appius opened his mouth to speak, but no words formed out of his mouth. He tried again, and again, but with no result. Darrio, like most living beings in the galaxy, carried demons with him that plagued his every waking moment. Maybe it was his brotherly instinct, but Appius felt compelled to at least *try* to do something. The Taldryanites eyes were drawn to a symbol on one of Darrio's pauldrons. It was faded and scratched from being put through the wringer, but there was enough there for Appius to piece together the majesty of the phoenix, the symbol of Clan Klars of Mandalore, the same symbol he had imprinted on his armor to remember them by.

"From ashes we rise," the Taldryan Consul said in Mando'a. "I miss them."

Darrio didn't say anything, his eyes being drawn to something particularly interesting on the floor.

"Dad, the Clan... I miss them all."

"Of course you do," Darrio said. "You were always dad's favourite."

Appius furrowed a brow at his brother. "Dad loved you."

The older Mandalorian turned away and scoffed.

"You didn't see the look on his face when you were chosen," the Consul said.

"Appius, drop it."

"The youngest leader in the Clan's history. I swear he'd never been prouder."

Darrio threw the bottle he was holding to the ground. It smashed into hundreds of tiny fragments next to his feet. "I said drop it!"

"Darrio..."

"Dad's dead, the Clan's dead and they're never coming back! Just drop it!"

The older Mandalorian slammed his hand against the wall. Though Appius remained steadfast, simply watching Darrio with softer eyes.

"You need to move on," the younger Mandalorian said.

Darrio leaned in closer to Appius. "Move on? At least it clearly bothers me, unlike you."

"You don't think it bothers me?" Appius asked. "I went through hell for a very long time. First dad died, then when I finally found you all again, you were taken away from me. But you know what? I found someone to help me move on."

"The Chiss," Darrio said.

Appius glared daggers at his older brother. "Her *name* is Ankira, but yes, she did."

"And who's going to help me move on?" Darrio asked.

The younger brother smiled. "I will."

Darrio sighed deeply. "You won't even let me see your kids."

"No, but can you blame me? You need to be willing to change and be better," Appius said. "Put yourself in my shoes. Given how you've behaved lately, what would you do?"

The Weapon Specialist fell silent, once again staring at the floor like it somehow held the answers he was looking for.

Deciding not to go any further, for now, Appius changed to the matter at hand. "You said you had a plan to get us in?"

"I do," Darrio said, thankful for the change in topic. "Did you bring your old Jedi stuff like I asked?"

"I did, but how is that going to help us?" The Consul asked.

Darrio allowed himself a sly grin. "They're recruiting."

Appius' head tilted slightly to the side, causing Darrio to grumble.

"The Lightbringers are recruiting. There's a bounty out for any Jedi that can be brought to them. They're paying a pretty credit for it too," Darrio said.

"Ok, but how does..." Appius paused as a realisation dawned on him. "No."

Darrio took the seat next to Appius and leaned back into it. "I take you down, you get in as one of them, get the guy out, I pick you up. Job done."

"I'm not doing it," Appius said.

The older Mandalorian shrugged. "Fair enough. You can explain to your Grand Master why you decided to chicken out at the last second."

The Taldryan Consul bit his lip. Darrio had him on that one.

"I'm Mandalorian, I can't go without my armor," Appius said.

"If you go in your beskar, they'll know who you are and kill you on the spot," the Weapon Specialist pointed to the obvious giveaway signs in the Consul's armor. "If



you go in as Appius the *Jedi*, then you have a better chance. No-one will know about it, and you get in the Grand Master's good books. It's a win-win."

The Taldryan Consul looked to the passageway where he left his old Jedi gear, then to Darrio, who held the kind of smug smile on his face that Appius would be more than happy to slap. Then the younger brother looked to the passageway again, then to his brother, and finally down to his armor.

The Consul stroked his chin, a habit he'd gotten into as of late that helped him to think. "Nobody will ever find out about this."

The older Mandalorian placed one hand over where his heart would be and raised his other hand in the air, never letting his smile disappear.

"This stays between us," Appius said.

"Of course," Darrio lowered his hand and crossed his arms.

Appius was about to leave the cockpit when he stopped in the doorway.

"Just so you know, I'm not happy about this," he said as he left to get changed.

Darrio, on the other hand, couldn't stop himself from laughing. "Never said you had to be!"

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## **Pendroh-I**

### *The Nexus of Light*

**40 ABY**

### **The Inner Rim**

*Paradise basking in the light.*

From the little bits and pieces of information Appius was given before the mission, that one sentence was the one that stuck out the most.

Because it was true.

As soon as the Kom'rk burst through the upper atmosphere, the two Mandalorians were able to bear witness to the most spectacular sights either of them had ever seen. The mountain range they approached was home to soft, sandy beaches, dense, luscious forests, and rivers that stretched for miles as far as the eye could see. In the middle of all was a glorious castle that radiated the warmth and

revitalising energy of the light side of the Force. Waterfalls ran off the edges into chasms that ran hundreds of feet below, creating everlasting rainbows that would make Clan Arcona jealous.

Appius silently wondered if this was what Tython looked like during the days of the Old Republic. The Taldryan Consul also silently wondered to himself what he would have become if he was found by the Children of Mortis instead of the Brotherhood. All it would have taken is for Appius to have taken a different direction towards the Inner Rim instead of Wild Space and his life would be drastically different.

The Mandalorian Force User was broken from his revelry when the Kom'rk shuddered upon landing.

This was it. There was no turning back now.

Appius glanced at the cufflinks around his wrists. No matter how hard he pulled against them, they proved annoyingly effective at keeping him restrained. He turned to his older brother with a scowl.

"Is this necessary?" Appius raised his arms to gesture to the infernal contraption, but only got a snicker out of Darrio. The older Mandalorian held his hands up defensively.

"Do you want this to be believable?" Darrio asked.

Appius grimaced. "Yes, but do they have to be so tight?"

"Again, do you want this to be believable?"

Somehow, the Taldryan Consul was under the impression his older brother was enjoying this scenario more than he should have been. Regardless, as long as it got him into the *Nexus of Light*, Appius would deal with it.

The older Mandalorian approached him, having one last look over everything before they left the ship. "You ready?"

Appius answered with a firm nod. "Yeah, but will you do me a favour? Don't mention anything about Mandalore, or Klars..."

"Believe me, Appius," the older Mandalorian gazed into the younger man's eyes as the Weapon Specialist placed his helmet on his head. "That is the last thing I'm going to do. Move."

Darrio prodded Appius in the back with one of his blasters as the ramp lowered to the *Nexus of Light*.

Neither Mandalorian was prepared for the small procession that greeted them. Several individuals sporting clean attire and shining boots seemed to be waiting for them.

Appius rolled his eyes. Of course they were waiting for them. They were supposed to be frakking *Jedi* of all things. They probably knew they were here the second they broke through the atmosphere.

One of the Lightbringers stepped forward, clapping and looking particularly smug to the rest of his comrades. "See? I told you this would work! And now we have Mandalorians bringing recruits here for us! What did I tell you, Axe?"

"Yes, yes, very good, Ibo. I'm sure the *Harbinger* will be most pleased with your efforts," Axe looked dreary at Ibo's antics. She had pale white skin as light as snow, and long black hair that extended down her back. She then turned to the Taldryan Consul. "What is your name?"

"His name is Appius," Darrio said. "And I'm still waiting for my payment."

"Patience, my friend," Ibo said, the smug grin having never left his face. He was shorter than Axe, but his mane of bright red hair and sparkly white teeth shone in the sunlight. "It's just standard procedure. It's a bit of a chore, but once we get all the little details sorted, we'll get you your money. Just gotta wait a little bit longer, I'm afraid."

"That won't be necessary."

The two Lightbringers were startled by the arrival of another, this one radiated an aura that demanded respect, and held a power that could rival some of the best in the Brotherhood. His blonde hair seemed to wave in the wind, and his blue eyes seemed to sparkle like diamonds in the daylight.

"H-Harbinger!" Axe said. "What a pleasure to see you here, sir!"

The two Lightbringers bowed before the Harbinger of Light, not out of fear, but out of respect and admiration. Something that Appius took note of.

"Ibo, be a good sport and pay the Mandalorian his credits, will you? I'd like to escort Appius through the Nexus personally. You both know how I like to get to know our prospective recruits," the Harbinger smiled. The way he spoke seemed absent of any ill intention.

The red-haired Lightbringer jumped at the opportunity to please his superior. "Of course! Mr Mandalorian, sir. Please come this way!"

Darrio left his little brother to complete the mission on his own, but not before releasing him from his restraints.

Appius rubbed his wrists tentatively. They were a little sore from the cufflinks, and he shot Darrio a vengeful gaze because of it. Once the Weapon Specialist was out of sight, the Taldryanite turned his attention to the famed Harbinger, who hadn't taken his eyes off of Appius since he'd arrived. The blonde-haired man looked the new arrival up and down as if he was assessing the Mandalorian Force User's abilities just by looking at him.

"Axe, be a dear and give Ibo a hand, will you? You know how he misses details when he gets excited," the Harbinger said, never taking his eyes off of Appius.

Axe happily followed after Ibo and Darrio, leaving the Consul alone with the Harbinger of Light. The second they were alone, the blonde-haired man extended a hand out to Appius.

"J'hon Whetu, at your service."

Appius shook his hand, and the Harbinger gestured for the pair to continue. They crossed a wide stone bridge over into the castle complex, making small talk along the way. The Taldryan Consul took special note of the amount of respect the man beside him held. Whenever they walked past members of the Lightbringers, they would stop and bow out of respect and admiration.

"So, from what I can sense, you have had prior training?" J'hon asked.

"Yes, sir. I was trained by my father," Appius said.

J'hon looked at Appius and raised a brow. "You're father, eh? Jedi rarely had families back in the old days. It wasn't until Anakin Skywalker came along that the tradition was broken again."

"True, but Anakin was also Darth Vader. Luke Skywalker, his son, was a renowned Jedi who defeated his father and Emperor Palpatine."

The Harbinger smiled. "Your father educated you well. What was his name?"

"Sterion," Appius said.

"Sterion?" the Harbinger raised a brow again, his voice slightly raised before his face relaxed again. "A fine name indeed. Where is he now?"

Appius' eyes looked toward the marble floor. "He died fifteen years ago."

J'hon gave a slight nod of his head. "I see. I'm sorry to hear that, but you are amongst family now. You'll find yourself most welcome here."

The Jedi opened the door to a large circular chamber and stepped inside. Appius followed afterwards to see a myriad of blues and greens in the form of lightsaber blades humming amidst the darkness. The ones wielding them were practicing their standard drills among the giant stone statues that seemed to be watching over them like guardian golems.

"This is one of the many training facilities we have here in the Nexus of Light," J'hon said. The moment he spoke, all the students halted their practice and began murmuring amongst themselves. "Please, no need to stop your training on my account, but has anyone seen your instructor? I have a new prospective student I feel he'd be interested in meeting."

"I'm here, Harbinger."

Appius' heart skipped a beat. It had been over a decade since he had heard that voice, but he'd never forgotten it. It was like it was only yesterday the words of wisdom were imparted into his ear.

*'It can't be...'*

Yet, there he was. It was like looking back into a mirror that had aged him forward thirty years. The man that stood before him was almost a spitting image of Appius, though age had greyed his hair and wrinkles had deepened on his face. He was remarkably well-built for someone of his age, and he held himself with all the guile and respect Appius remembered oh so fondly.

"I apologise for the inconvenience, Harbinger. I left the students to practice their standard drills whilst I tended to my other duties."

"Not at all! I always admire your dedication to our cause," J'hon said as he grabbed Appius by his arm and pulled him forward. "I'd like you to meet our newest recruit. Appius, this is *Sterion*, the *Lightbringer Quartermaster* and chief combat instructor."

Time stood still for Appius as he stared at the man that he was so damn sure was his father. Yes, he'd aged in the decade and a half since the Mandalorian Force User had last seen him, but there was no mistaking it. This was his dad. The lumps

formed in Appius' throat, his body felt numb, and he could feel the tears forming in his eyes.

"How..." the word had barely come out louder than a whisper, yet the simple question was the one thing burning in his thoughts.

The Harbinger looked at Sterion, then to Appius as a mischievous grin formed on his face. "You know, you two kind of look alike."

J'hon then shrugged and turned to leave the room. "I'll give you a few moments to get to know our prospective student better, Sterion. Bring him to the induction room for his initiation once you are done."

"Of course, sir," Sterion said. The older Jedi then addressed his class. "You are dismissed until further notice."

The chamber emptied, leaving the father and son duo alone together for the first time in fifteen years. Neither man said anything for a few moments until Sterion cleared his throat.

"It's... good to see you again, son. I'm sure you have a lot of questions, but I..."

Appius didn't care, and embraced his father. Right now, he wasn't the Consul of Taldryan. He wasn't the proclaimed 'Mandaboo', nor was he the 'zappiest' man in the Brotherhood. Right now, he was his fifteen-year-old self that wanted to embrace his father after watching him be gunned down in front of his eyes.

Tears began to roll down Appius' cheeks. "I missed you..."

After a few seconds, Sterion returned the embrace. "I missed you too."

The father and son separated.

"Just... how?" Appius asked.

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**Unknown Region**  
**Unknown Location**  
**25 ABY**

Everything *hurt*.

It was ironic for a Jedi to find natural *light* to be piercing and offensive to their very being, yet here Sterion was, doing just that. He quickly regretted opening his eyes and sealed them shut. He moved his hands to cover his face, but the simple act sent a flash of pain through his body. He gasped at the unexpected agony and relented instantly.

For what felt like an eternity, Sterion remained where he was, alone, with only his ragged and coarse breathing to keep him company. That was broken when he heard echoing footsteps approach him, getting louder and louder until he was sure whoever they belonged to was next to him.

Sterion tried to move, but the pain returned, and it was unbearable.

**"Relax."**

Sterion had no room to argue, so did as instructed. He could feel them, whoever they were, looming over him. He could feel their warm breath upon his bare flesh, and he tensed, which only made the pain worse.

However, the pain only lasted a second. Soothing energy washed over Sterion, numbing the pain like he was drifting in a bath full of bacta. Sure enough, he found himself relaxing as the burns in his body healed. His breathing steadied, and he found himself able to open his eyes.

**"Welcome."**

Sterion turned in the direction of the voice. "Who... are you?"

The voice revealed itself from the shadows. A figure veiled by a cloak which hid his features.

**"A friend. I go by many names, but those who know me best call me *The Father*."**

Sterion lifted himself from the stone slab he had been perched upon. He rubbed his eyes, still weary and tired.

"What happened?"

**"You were near death. I rescued you."**

"But then... Appius!"

Sterion shot to his feet, and the figure held out his hand to halt him.

**"Your son is alive."**

Sterion went wide-eyed. There was no way he could have possibly known that for certain unless...

"You were there."

**"Very astute."**

"If you claim to be a friend, then why didn't you do anything sooner?" Sterion accused.

**"Because I wanted to conduct a test."**

"A test?" Sterion found his hands balling into fists at that idea. Though, he forced himself to relax as he recalled the first line of the Jedi Code.

*There is no emotion, there is peace.*

**"Yes, a test. In the face of adversity, I wanted to see how you both reacted. You held yourself with honour and dignity, even in the face of certain death. You never gave in to anger, hatred, or vengeance. Your son..."**

*The Father* suddenly paused, making Sterion nervous.

**"Are you aware that your son used *Force Lightning*?"**

Sterion's heart skipped a beat, and he let go of the breath he didn't realise he was holding.

"He would never..."

**"Force Lightning is a power that requires the user to have the intent to harm another. Your *death* in front of his eyes triggered something in him. A dark, twisted something..."**

"Stop..."

**"He didn't hesitate to enact his vengeance against those who caused him pain. He's not like you. It seems some traits don't get passed down from father to son."**

"You're lying," Sterion said, his eyes hardening.



*The Father* smiled at the accusation. He raised his green, gangly fingers and weaved the Force between them, chanting an incantation in a language so old Sterion couldn't recognise it. A faint fog began to fill the air in front of him, slowly becoming the faint image of his son.

"Appius..."

The young boy knelt beside his father with his head in his hands, tears rolling down his cheeks. Two of the mercenaries that attacked circled the two Jedi like attack dogs waiting to pounce. One approached Appius and pressed the barrel of his blaster against the young man's head, a sadistic grin plastered on his face. Sterion wanted nothing more than to jump in there and save his son before it was too late.

Then it happened.

Appius' head snapped towards his assailant, hatred burning out of his iris'. The young man thrust both hands forward, no doubt on instinct, as tendrils of electricity streamed out of his fingertips. Sterion watched as his son roared like a man possessed, The tendrils of lightning wrapping themselves around their intended targets until they lay on the ground. The Mercenary bodies twisted and pulsed until falling still and lifeless. Appius dropped to his knees, heavily breathing as he stared at his hands. His head then snapped to something behind him, and the young Mandalorian forced himself to his feet to flee the scene.

The fog faded, and with it, the vision of events that lay within.

"Why are you showing me this?"

**"So you can see the reality of the situation before you. I rescued you because I have a dream, a dream that the Jedi and Sith of old had forgotten to strive for."**

"And that would be?"

**"Balance."**

Sterion remained silent, but let *The Father* continue.

**"Balance between the Light, the Dark, and everything in between. All aspects of the Force act like a set of scales. When one becomes too heavy or too light, imbalance occurs and must be corrected. Light cannot exist without darkness, and without the darkness, there is nothing for the light to shine on."**

"I need to return to Mandalore," Sterion said. "They need me."

*The Father* leaned forward slightly.

**"You are not Mandalorian, Sterion, but you stayed out of obligation. is not your true calling. I know it, you know it. You left the Jedi Order you knew behind to search for exactly what I am also looking for. Peace. Not only in the galaxy, but in the Force itself. You can achieve that within the Children of Mortis."**

"My sons..."

**"You will see them again one day,"** *The Father* leaned back and closed his eyes. **"I have foreseen it."**

Sterion had his doubts as he stared at the open hand in front of him. This *Father* was a stranger to him, and yet he couldn't deny what the aged being had said wasn't true. He *did* become disillusioned with the Jedi Order and strike out on his own, and he *did* not belong on Mandalore. Not really. He stayed out of obligation to look after his sons, for their Clan, and for Janeesa.

That last one tore at his heart. He had *loved* her, and her untimely death after Appius' birth left a hole in his soul that would never be filled. Not to mention that Appius, in particular, worried him. If he was tapping into the Dark Side of the Force... It was a slap in the face to everything Sterion had taught him. His son was supposed to reject the darkness and embrace the light. Where had he gone wrong?

"I..."

What Sterion had here in front of him was an opportunity to do what he set out to do in the first place. He could help create a galaxy with peace and balance in all things, just like he had wanted when he left the Jedi Order, and like he wanted before he crashed landed on Mandalore.

"I accept." Sterion clasped *The Father's* hand with his own.

**"Wonderful. We will have powerful enemies to prepare for, my friend. Tell me, what do you know of the Brotherhood?"**

—

**Pendroh-I**  
***The Nexus of Light***  
**40 ABY**  
**The Inner Rim**

The scenery from the *Nexus of Light* did little to comfort Appius. Both father and son had slowly begun traversing the many areas of the castle which the Lightbringers called home. In any other situation, the Taldryan Consul might have found the inside almost as beautiful as the outside. The decor in the hallways was immaculate, shining bright with relics that could have dated back to the Old Republic. The library they passed was expansive and could have contained all the knowledge of the universe within. The gardens were teeming with natural life and flora from several star systems.

And yet, none of it mattered.

Appius hung on his father's every word as he told the story of how he survived, where he's been, and why he didn't come back.

"And you didn't try to find me or Darrio?" Appius asked.

"*The Father* said I would see you both again one day, and now here you are," Sterion smiled as he spoke.

Appius missed that smile, but couldn't look his father in the face. "It's not that simple."

Sterion raised a brow. "Why not? You are here, aren't you?"

"I have a family now."

Sterion stopped walking as he looked his son in the face, his jaw hung slightly slack.

"A family?" the older Jedi said, barely louder than a whisper.

"Yes. There's Rausu and Shi'kar, your grandchildren. And Ankira, my wife. I told them all about you," Appius said.

"I see. What did you say?" Sterion asked.

This time, it was Appius' turn to smile. "That you were single-handedly the greatest man I'd ever known."

The two walked in silence the rest of the way until they reached their destination. Appius kept opening his mouth to speak but shut it again and again. How was he supposed to tell his father, the man he had admired more than anything that he was a member of the Brotherhood? By all accounts, they were technically enemies. Yet, no matter what, Appius just couldn't see him in that way.

Sterion placed his hand against an authorisation panel. A green light shone around his fingers, as a click unlocked the door. He looked at his son with a heavy look in his eyes.

"Everything will change for the better, son. I promise."

Sterion opened the door and beckoned his son inside. Appius walked inside without a second thought. This was, after all, meant to be his initiation into the Lightbringers. From here, he could find their spy and complete the retrieval mission.

The room itself was grand in design, with long, arching windows that allowed natural light to shine into the room. In the centre of the room was a large, rectangular table made out of wroshyr wood with comfortable seating alongside in the form of elegant chairs.

However, the sight of Axe and Ibo holding Darrio, sans helmet, with lightsaber blades against his throat made Appius' blood run cold. His older brother looked to be in a sorry state. His face was battered, and it was a miracle he was able to open his one good eye. Blood seeped from his nostrils, and his cybernetic arm was missing, having been separated from his body.

Sat in the seat at the far end of the room like a king to his court, was J'hon Whetu, the Harbinger of light, flanked by two crystalline abominations the likes of which Appius had seen only on Dandoran. When their eyes locked, J'hon rose to his feet and gave a round of applause.

"Appius Wight! I've been expecting you! Please, do come in. I would be honoured if you would join us," he said with great revelry. "Oh, excuse me. Where are my manners? I almost forgot I was speaking with a *Consul* of the Brotherhood."

Appius slowly turned to look at his father, who held a stoic expression on his features.

"I'm sorry," Sterion said. "Both of you."

"F-father?" Darrio suddenly spoke, though his voice was tinged with pain and weakness. "The kriff..."

Axe and Ibo inched their blue lightsaber blades closer to his throat.

"You will speak only when spoken to!" Axe said.

Appius instinctively reached for the Darksaber-inspired lightsaber at his waist, but was stopped when he heard the hum of another lightsaber in his ear. His eyes turned to the source, his father had drawn his lightsaber on him.

"I wouldn't do that if I were you. You are currently in no position to act brazenly," J'hon clasped his hands together. "And with that, my first question is who is it?"

Appius remained bitter, the betrayal stung worse than any wound a lightsaber could inflict. "Who is what?"

"Who is the spy?" J'hon asked. Upon seeing the shock on Appius' face, he continued. "We have agents in every territory within the Brotherhood. That's how I knew who you were just by name alone, and also how I know why you are here. We already tried prying the information from *this* one..."

Darrio coughed up a little blood, slightly startling Appius.

"But he doesn't seem to know anything about that. So, I'll ask again. Who is the spy?"

Appius stayed silent.

The Harbinger was many things. A powerful Jedi, the leader of the Lightbringers, and one of *The Father's* greatest assets, but one thing he could lack at times was patience. Appius noticed that when he saw the vein appear in the blonde-haired man's forehead, but J'hon caught himself before he snapped.

J'hon gestured a hand forward as a chair pulled out towards Appius. "Please, I insist, take a seat."

With no other option available to him, the Taldryan Consul begrudgingly took his seat at the table.

"Very good. At least Sterion taught you how to follow basic instructions," J'hon said with approval. The Harbinger then placed both hands behind his back as the smile on his face disappeared. "We can either do this the easy way, or the hard way. You can either tell me what I want to know, or I will break your body, mind and spirit until there is nothing left but a husk of what you once were."

Appius folded his arms and glared with defiance. "That's not very Jedi of you, is it, Harbinger?"

J'hon shook his head. "I tried to give you a chance. Take him away. He will reveal what he knows, one way or another."

The Crystalline Monsters rounded on Appius, grabbing him under his arms as they dragged him off to whatever hell he was about to experience. As he was about to turn the corner, Appius gave one last look to his father, a pleading look that begged for him to intervene.

He did not, and instead watched as his youngest son was dragged out of sight.

—

**Pendroh-I**

*The Nexus of Light*

**Underground Chamber**

**40 ABY**

**The Inner Rim**

The screaming was bad enough, what made matters worse was that Sterion had no clue as to what *exactly* they were doing to his youngest son. Darrio, at least, had been put in a containment cell where no harm would come to him, or where he couldn't cause any harm to others whilst he was here. Sterion had a sneaking suspicion the only reason Darrio hadn't been executed on the spot was because of their relationship as father and son. The Harbinger was generous like that.

Blood curdling screams and flashing lights coming from the locked room broke Sterion from his thoughts. He clenched his fists and grit his teeth. It would be over soon, it had to be. Each sound that came from the room ground on his nerves like fingers scratching a blackboard. Slight relief came when the lights stopped flashing, the door unlocked, and out stepped the *Truthseeker*, a wily Duros tasked with Interrogation, and in this case, torture.

"Did he speak?" Sterion immediately asked.

The Duros placed a finger to his chin and glanced up towards the ceiling, deep in thought. "No, he did not. Any attempts to probe his mind have been met with resistance. He has mental blocks in place and attempts at physical pain have so far not provided anything fruitful."

The *Truthseeker* then looked to Sterion and gave him a wry, toothy smile.

"Perhaps you would like to try? Given what he's been through already, your connection might be the key to unlocking his secrets? I need to report to the Harbinger, so I can grant you a little bit of time if you wish?"

Sterion nodded and wasted no time entering the room. There wasn't much that surprised him anymore. He was a Jedi with decades of experience, and had seen his fair share of blood, combat, and horror. Yet, the sight of his son, bound in chains upon the wall, held up by his arms with a pool of blood, saliva, and sweat on the floor. Upon taking in the scene, something broke something inside the Jedi for the first time in a very long time.

"Appius?"

The Taldryan Consul weakly raised his head and *stared* at Sterion. The pain in his eyes was palpable, but Sterion could sense the betrayal that lurked in his son's heart. He placed his hand on Appius' cheek, though his son pulled his head away at the touch.

"You can end this..." Sterion said. "Just tell them what they want to know, and this will stop."

"So they can just kill me and Darrio?" Appius said, though his voice was coarse and rough.

Sterion's face became stern. "I won't let that happen."

Appius let out a small chuckle, though the action caused him pain. "You've been doing a great job of that so far."

Sterion turned silent, and just stared at the bloody mess that was his son. That image was going to burn into his mind and haunt his dreams, but he tried to shake them off. He was a Jedi, and thus, he had to be strong.

"If you won't talk, then there's little I can do to help you," Sterion turned to leave the room, but stopped when he heard Appius coughing.

"You know... the Clan is dead."

*That* caught Sterion's attention, and he turned wide-eyed as he looked at his son.

"What did you say?" Sterion asked.

"The Clan is dead. They burned on Mandalore a couple of years ago..."

Sterion averted his gaze. It couldn't be... Janeesa's family were... he promised that... he swore that he would protect them... What would she think of him now? Of what he'd become? Of what had happened to their sons?

"And when I saw you... I thought maybe... a little bit of home had come back to life, but no. You're nothing but an imposter. My father died on Mandalore fifteen years ago. You are *nothing* to me."

Appius spat those last words with what little ounces of strength he had left.

Then, Sterion snapped.

The older man summoned his lightsaber to his hand with the Force and approached Appius, using the Force to quickly close the distance between the two of them. Sterion swung his blade, and Appius closed his eyes and braced himself for the inevitable.

Yet, it never came.

Instead, Appius dropped to the floor, the chains that held him in place having been sliced through. Sterion sheathed his weapon and carefully picked up his son, slinging his arm over his shoulder.

"You're heavier than I remember," Sterion said as they left the Interrogation room.

"What are you doing?" Appius asked.

"I'm getting you and your brother out of here. Speaking of which..."

Sterion stopped at a control panel on a nearby wall and pressed his one available hand to it. The concealed doors slid open to reveal the one-armed Darrio, still bloodied, but with no further injuries.

"Father?" Darrio said as he locked eyes with Sterion.

"Hello, son. I know you probably have a lot of questions, but that will have to wait."

"Like hell it will!" Darrio raised his voice, though was distracted when Appius began coughing blood once again. "What... What happened to him?"

"There's no time to explain. I need to get you both out of here while I still can. Can you walk?" Sterion asked.

Darrio rose to his feet. It was a little perturbed seeing his eldest son with only one arm, but there were more urgent matters to attend to right now.

Yes, I can," Darrio said.



"Then you can help me with your brother. Grab his other arm and move."

For the first time in a long time, Darrio did not protest a direct order given to him, a fact that Appius paid particular attention to as his brother moved to his other side. That was the kind of respect and love Sterion once had from his sons. They would listen to, and do anything he said, almost without question.

Darrio slung Appius' left arm over his shoulder, and supported him with his only arm. The three of them left the containment cell and walked directly into the Duros, the *Truthseeker*, who cocked his head at the sight in front of him.

"Oh? What's this?" the Duros said.

"Prisoner transfer. I have an order from the Harbinger to move them higher up," Sterion said.

"I see..." the Duros then pointed at Darrio. "And you are using one of those said prisoners to help you transfer them both?"

A brief, uncomfortable pause formed between all four beings in the corridor.

"Yes..." Sterion finally said.

To his surprise, the Duros smiled at him and nodded, but that gesture faded immediately as the *Truthseeker's* eyes hardened, and his body tensed.

Sterion immediately felt the danger in the Force, and just as the Duros reached for his lightsaber, the older Jedi wrapped the *Truthseeker* in a telekinetic grip, lifting him into the air, and throwing him into the containment cell. Sterion slammed his hand on the control panel, causing two several inch thick layers of durasteel to close.

"Quickly," Sterion said. "That won't hold him for long."

A blue lightsaber blade suddenly pierced through the durasteel like it aimed to prove Sterion's statement true. The father and sons quickly left, dragging Appius through what felt like a maze of corridors and hallways until they reached the outside world.

—

## The Inner Rim

How long had they been down there?

That was Appius' first question as the cool air hit him upon exiting the castle. If one thought the *Nexus of Light* was beautiful during the day, it took on a whole other kind of majesty at night. The bright moon above shone upon the waterfalls of the castle, creating rainbows in the dark so wonderful it could only be described as miraculous. The stars twinkled in the sky above like they were dancing to a tune of their own. Yet, the best sight of all, at least in Appius' eyes, was the sight of the Kom'rk Class Fighter he and Darrio had arrived in still in one piece right where they'd left it. Lights upon the platform illuminated it like a beacon to their freedom. There were signs that it had been ransacked, and no doubt any valuables, likely including his beskar armor, would no longer be there.

He didn't care. All Appius cared about right now was their escape right in front of them.

Suddenly, Sterion stopped. He unhooked Appius' arm from his shoulder and took a step back. The two sons looked at him with confusion on their faces.

"Go," Sterion said.

Darrio went wide-eyed "What are you doing!? Come with us and get out of here!"

"You need to leave now. This is your only chance to do so. I'll buy you as much time as I can."

Appius looked to his father. "You can't... not again..."

To both Darrio and Appius' surprise, their father smiled back at them warmly, like he used to do back on Mandalore so many years ago.

"It is my duty as a father to look after my children first and foremost. I... had forgotten that, until I saw you both again. I can't thank you enough," Sterion said.

Appius grit his teeth and coughed. "He's here..."

Darrio looked to his younger brother. "Who's here?"

Right on cue, clapping could be heard coming from the darkness. A head of blonde hair lit up as he stepped out onto the platform, yet he held the smile that both Appius and Darrio had become increasingly sick of seeing on the man's face.

"Well, well. Isn't this a surprise! Sterion, I never took you as one to be the traitorous kind," J'hon said as he stepped forward. His boots echoed across the platform in the dead of the night. "I was quite fond of this family reunion, and it would be such a shame to see you all leave so soon."

Sterion grabbed his lightsaber, the blue blade igniting brightly amidst the darkness. He launched himself at the Harbinger, who drew his cerulean coloured lightsaber and blocked the incoming attack. The two lightsabers sparked and hissed against one another.

"What are you waiting for!? Leave. NOW!"

The demand in Sterion's voice left no room for arguments. Darrio was in no condition to help with only one arm and no weapons, and Appius *definitely* was in no condition to help. They hobbled onto the ramp of the Kom'rk as Darrio threw Appius down onto the first available seat they passed.

"Stay here," Darrio said as he made his way to the cockpit.

On the platform, Sterion found himself unable to find a gap in the Harbinger's sequences. The leader of the Lightbringers moved with textbook footwork, striking at Sterion with Force-imbued might and strength. The *Quartermaster* was struggling to keep up, not just because J'hon was much younger than he was, but because he was simply the better warrior.

The Kom'rk's engines whirled to life, kicking up a torrent of air as wind blew across the platform. The Harbinger parried an incoming vertical strike intended for his head, and sidestepped the next attack intended to slice him in twain.

"Enough!" the Harbinger roared, wrapping the Force around Sterion's throat.

The older Jedi gasped and wheezed as he was lifted into the air. The grasp on his airways got tighter and tighter until he was cast aside across the platform like bantha fodder.

J'hon faced the Kom'rk as it spun and faced the sky. It began to fly away until the Harbinger dropped his weapon and raised his hands in front of him. The ship shook, but then suddenly remained in place.

Inside the Kom'rk, flashing red lights filled the ship as alarms blared in both Appius and Darrio's ears. The latter frantically scrambled for anything to make the ship move. He was far from the best pilot in the galaxy, a fact that was proving evident as he fumbled around pressing random buttons.

Darrio slammed his hand on a computer panel. "What the hell!? Why aren't we moving!?"

"The Harbinger has hold of the ship..."

Appius staggered into the cockpit, still looking worse for wear.

"Do it's your Space Wizard kark!? Just frakkin' great!" Darrio didn't give two frakks about Appius' condition at that moment, instead deciding to take his frustration at the situation out on him.

Appius, much to his credit, stumbled into the seat beside his brother, grunting in pain as he sat down. Every little action took every ounce of strength he had left, and left him winded and in agony.

"That one... that one... and that one..."

Appius pointed to each putting, and Darrio wasted no time in following the instructions. The Kom'rk shook more violently than it had so far as all available power was rerouted to the thrusters and engines.

Back on the platform, J'hon found himself needing to use more and more power to keep the ship in place. Nevertheless, the Force was his ally, and a powerful ally it was in his hands. Slowly the ship began to pull back to the platform. Sweat began to drop from J'hon's brow, but he grinned from ear to ear as he strained.

*Snap-Hiss!*

The sound of a lightsaber broke the Harbinger's concentration. He spun and summoned his lightsaber back to his hand from the ground, just in time to block the hard, overhead blow from Sterion.

Unfortunately for the leader of the Lightbringers, the Kom'rk broke free from his grasp and disappeared into the upper atmosphere.

"NO!"

Frustrated, J'hon took his anger out on the traitor responsible for this transgression. In a flurry of movements, he disarmed Sterion with a hard, vengeful slice into the older man's right arm.

Sterion howled in pain as the Harbinger added insult to injury, sending a blast of telekinetic energy into the traitor's chest which sent him careening across the

platform. He finally rolled to a stop as backup finally arrived in the form of the *Truthseeker* as well as Axe and Ibo.

J'hon glared in the direction of Sterion's body. "Take that piece of trash into custody."

The order was simple, but filled with bitter malice. Axe and Ibo nervously approached Sterion, steering clear of the toxic energy being exuded by the Harbinger.

J'hon turned to the *Truthseeker*, who smiled back at him like he was waiting for him to say what he wanted to hear.

"Do what you must. Get every last ounce of information on his sons that you can get out of him as you can."

"Sir!"

J'hon was alerted by the arrival of more Lightbringer members. "Sir, Ernesto Hayes is here. He wishes to speak with you."

This was just the icing on the cake. As Sterion was picked up and dragged off to his fate, the Harbinger spun to go and meet his. *The Father* would not be pleased with his failure, and there was still the matter of the spy to deal with.

"Chains Unbound..." J'hon whispered as he disappeared back into the castle.

—

**Port Kasiya**  
**Caelus System**  
**40 ABY**

The distant sunset over Port Kasiya began to lower slowly, the warmth of the orange glow vanishing more each second until the city was plunged into darkness. The streets lit up like stars below as the most nocturnal of the moon's citizens began scurrying about on the grounds below.

*'It's good to be wearing beskar again.'*

Appius had been with his armor for so long that being without it felt alien to him. For whatever reason, the Lightbringers had left his armor alone, assuming anything that did not provide information on the Brotherhood was not worth their

time or effort. He left his helmet on his desk, choosing to forego the arrangement with Zxyl because damn it, he'd been through enough in the last forty-eight hours.

Since he and Darrio had returned to the Caelus System, neither brother had been able to sleep very much. The events at the *Nexus of Light* still haunted their waking thoughts. Ankira was concerned, as of course she would be, but she understood he needed the time to... process everything, including the torture. His injuries were, fortunately, easy to heal, and it was nothing a quick dunk in a bacta tank couldn't fix, but the mental scars would take some time to get over.

That left Appius with one question to answer; what now? War was inevitable. Their failure to recover the spy had led to the unfortunate Infiltrator's demise, a fact the Grand Master was less than pleased about. Thankfully, Appius had gleaned enough from his time in custody with the Lightbringers to provide *some* useful information. Enough that he was allowed to keep both his job, and his head. Though, he chose to leave the part about their father out. That was a personal family matter that did not need to be the concern of the Dark Council. He and Darrio would see to it themselves.

Speaking of his older brother, the doors to the Consul's office opened as Darrio, sans helmet, let himself in.

"Nice of you to knock first," Appius said, not taking his eyes off of the city below.

Darrio approached his younger brother's side. "Good to see your sense of humour is still intact."

Neither of them had said a word to one another after they returned home. Appius needed urgent medical attention, and Darrio was *desperate* for a drink, or seventeen...

Yet, now, here they were, with the one topic they wanted to talk about on the tip of their tongues and both brothers too stubborn and uncomfortable to bring up the subject first.

"How are you holding up?" Darrio suddenly asked.

"I..." for a moment, Appius considered giving his brother one of his usual sarcastic quips, but didn't feel like it this time. "I've been better."

Darrio nodded his head.

"How's the new arm?" Appius asked in return.

Darrio shrugged. "Honestly? It feels weird."

"Maybe you just need to... break it in?" Appius suggested. "Aylin and Dasha are really good. It'll be the best arm you've ever had."

"They wanted to put glitter on it," Darrio scoffed.

"Be thankful they didn't," Appius said, a small smile forming on his face. "They aren't easy to convince."

Darrio's head looked to the ground before he spoke again.

"How'd Ankira take it?"

Appius let out a heavy sigh. "About as well as you'd expect. She was ready to head over Pendroh-I and put a blaster in every one of their heads for what they did to me."

"She never left your side," Darrio said. "The moment you were in the tank, she was there, watching over you. She wouldn't let anyone bother you without a good reason. You got a good one, Appius."

"I know. Sometimes I think I don't deserve her."

Darrio shrugged again. "Someone has to look after your sorry ass. Like hell I'm doing it anymore."

Appius allowed himself a small chuckle. "Thanks."

The two Mandalorians stared out into the horizon as Darrio began to shuffle on the spot. "What do we do, Appius?"

"I don't know..."

"Our father might be dead."

"He isn't."

That took Darrio by surprise. "How do you know?"

"The Force..." Appius paused and looked at his brother. "Space Wizard kark, Darrio. I don't know for certain, but I have a... feeling. It's hard to explain."

"Ok... So if he's alive, then what?" Darrio asked.

"It's obvious, isn't it?"

Darrio raised a brow at the question.

"We save him. We do everything in our power to get our father back."

For the first time in what felt like an eternity, Darrio gave Appius an honest smile of approval. "For what it's worth, when we do go back, you have my blaster."

Appius returned the smile his brother shared with him. "Thanks. That means a lot coming from you, vod."

Traffic from the speeders whizzed around the Taldryan Tower in perfect view of both Mandalorians as they looked out into the distance. It had been a long time since the two brothers were able to stand together, comfortable in the presence of each other.

"Of course, Appius," Darrio said. "Anytime."

-END-



