

## THE FATHER PART 2

A fiction written by Appius Taldrya Wight.

*Option 1.*

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### Chapter 1: Sterion Wight

#### Unknown Location

40 ABY

Everything *hurt*. It hurt more than when he woke in the presence of *The Father*, and the pain never seemed to stop. His body felt like it had been dipped into the molten rivers of Mustafar.

Blood and sweat left a repulsive stench in the air that made him queasy. He was given enough food to not starve to death, and enough water to stop his throat from going dry. Somehow, the light burned his retinas more than it ever did when he opened his eyes. Yet, he had to. Sterion didn't want to give them the satisfaction of breaking his body and spirit. No, he would be strong, and he'd look them in the eye as they conducted whatever torture their twisted minds envisioned. He'd remain steadfast and proud like the Jedi he was.

The chamber lit up like a beacon in Sterion's face, and he winced, sealing his eyes shut for a moment. The chains attached to his arms and legs rattled as he backed himself against the wall he was bound by. He blinked, momentarily blinded by the brightness. Slowly his vision returned to him.

Light footsteps echoed from the opposite side of the chamber, each tap along the duracrete making Sterion stiff and tense. Finally, he saw the man those footsteps belonged to.

"Good morning, Sterion. I hope you are well?"

The voice sounded as bored as ever, like it was disinterested in both him and what was about to happen. Sterion had expected those who specialised in torture and interrogation would take delight in his agony. He'd assumed they would glee like ravenous mynocks on a starfighter's hull, but not *him*.

Every now and then, he'd enter the room and walk over to the durasteel side table next to his cell, meticulously inspecting all the devices upon it, tweaking and fiddling with the hydrosponder in his hand before placing it down and speaking with him.

"Are you ready to talk today?"

Piercing crimson-yellow irises glared at Sterion. Those were the eyes of hate, malice, anger, and the Sith themselves, Sterion was sure of it. It didn't matter if the face that held those eyes were blank and neutral, it was the mark of surrender to the Dark Side.

Sterion howled in pain as lightning streamed out of the Sith's fingertips, wrapping itself around Sterion like a spider's web. It seared his flesh for a few seconds before it finally stopped. He slumped over, but was held up by his chains, his skin *burning* as smoke singed off his body.

"Good, you are alive. I was starting to think you had died in the night," the Sith said. He approached Sterion and cupped his chin in one hand. "Though, it won't be long, will it? You are old, and your injuries are adding up. The Force can only sustain you for so long."

The Sith let go of Sterion and took a deep breath. "This can all stop if you answer my questions. Failure to do so will result in more invasive methods into your body and soul. Now, what do you know about the Brotherhood?"

The Sith lifted Sterion's head with the Force to make him look at him. The telekinetic grip tightened around Sterion's throat and began to choke him.

"What do you know about Clan Taldryan?"

Veins began to bulge out of Sterion's throat and head, but he grit his teeth and endured his torment.

"What do you know about your son, *Appius*? What are his weaknesses?"

Sterion went wide-eyed and closed his lips. He clenched his fists and said nothing. His son's name was all he needed to hear to make him resolute and defiant.

Finally, the grip on his throat ceased, and he heaved and coughed saliva onto the floor. Nothing eased the burning of his lungs and the residual compression along the length of his neck.

The Sith rubbed the bridge of his nose and closed his eyes. "Every day we do this, I get a little closer to getting the answers I seek. You are merely delaying the inevitable. Your resolve will only help you for so long before I break through and you cave to your weakness. Now..."

The Sith raised his hand to something behind him, a device that Sterion had become uniquely acquainted with in his time of confinement. A large, spherical black object with sharp, needle-like appendages sharper than hornet stingers hovered towards him. The torture droid hummed ominously as Sterion inhaled deep breaths and braced himself for the inevitable.

The first needle pierced Sterion's forearm, and he bit his tongue to stop himself from screaming. Then the second pierced his wrist, injecting the toxin that would prevent him from passing out. The third entered last, and it felt like he had spontaneously combusted. Every fibre of his being begged for it to stop.

Then, after a few minutes, it did. The pain began to slowly ebb away like he had a cool ice pack upon his skin, numbing the torturous sensations. The droid had ceased its operations, collapsing to the floor in a heap. Though, when he looked up, he saw the reason *why* it had stopped. The Sith knelt before a shorter Human woman, who held an eerie smile across her face. She had a blindfold over her eyes, and her attire was drenched red with blood. Sterion knew who this was. It was hard not to recognise Rose Telsniw, the head of the Shadowseers, when she was in the room.

"Mistress, forgive me. I was not expecting to see you today," the Sith said, keeping his head low.

Rose let loose a sweet chuckle. "Rise, my dear Severin. There's no need to be so formal in front of our guest."

Severin returned to his feet and eyed Sterion with disgust. "Traitor is more accurate."

"Even so," Rose clasped her hands together and rubbed them together. "How is your interrogation going? I trust you have something juicy to share with me?"

For the first time, Sterion saw a genuine change of emotion coming from Severin. The blank and bored expression was gone, and was instead replaced with an abject look of terror.

Sweat formed on Severin's brow as his pupils dilated. "I... I just need a little more time. I'm close to a breakthrough, I can feel it."

"Oh? So there's nothing?" Rose said, placing one bloody finger under her chin. "That's a shame. Failure cannot be tolerated. I guess if there's nothing of value here, I'll just have to have you both killed. You cannot join the Shadowseers if you can't even conduct a simple Interrogation."

Sterion observed Severin's complexion suddenly drain of what colour it had left. The atmosphere in the room went ice cold.

Suddenly, Rose let out a blood-curdling laugh that echoed throughout the chamber. "I'm joking! What would be the point of that!? You are about to be very useful!"

Severin released the breath he hadn't realised he was holding, his hands twitching nervously at his sides.

"I came here because I brought good news!" Rose smiled as she leaned in closer to Severin, close enough that he could feel her breath on his face. "It's time."

Severin's eyes went wide. "You mean..."

Rose nodded. "Yes. The Father has declared war on the Brotherhood. All Clan territories are to be attacked, including Taldryan's. Soon, you'll be able to realise your *revenge*."

Sterion watched Severin's face return to the blank expression he'd come to know, but there was something different about the look in his eyes when he looked at Sterion. He was a man possessed with his goals, like a wild animal craving sustenance. Sterion had no idea what Severin wanted with his son, but if it involved the *Seer* herself, then it wasn't anything good.

Severin reached into his robe and pulled out a small dagger. Even in his wretched state, Sterion could feel the malevolent energy that radiated from the blade. It reeked of darkness and suffering. "In that case, it is time for this one to ascend."

Sterion's heart thudded in his chest, and his breathing became heavy. Luckily for him, Rose grabbed hold of Severin's sleeve before he could advance any further.

"No," she said.

Severin raised a brow. "No?"

Rose then approached Sterion until she stood inches in front of him. Somehow, even with the blindfold on, he felt like she was piercing into his soul.

"His youngest son is the current Taldryan Consul, yes? From what J'hon told me of what happened on Pendroh-I, this one..." Rose tentatively stroked Sterion's cheek. Her fingers were ice-cold, making him shudder at the touch. "Has a strong connection with his offspring. He's still useful."

Even through his pain, Sterion mustered the strength to spit in her face. "I will *never* harm my children."

His voice was hoarse and weak, and yet, Rose smiled at his defiance despite how pathetic it was. She wiped the spit off her face and haphazardly let it drop off her fingers to the ground.

"It's cute how he thinks he has a choice," Rose said, turning away from Sterion. "Severin, dear. It's time to put your training to use. You know what to do."

Rose handed Severin a large, blood-red tainted crystal. It let off a high-pitched hum as he held it in his hand. Ever the obedient servant, Severin marched up to Sterion and clasped his spare hand around his skull, forcing Sterion to look directly into it. Sterion tried to struggle, squirming violently against the sensations that poured into his head. A red beam of light shot out of the crystal and into his irises against his will.

Sterion felt his body burn like he had been launched into a star. He twisted and convulsed as he tried, and failed, to fight against the sensations burning through his body. Finally, he let out a tortured scream as his world faded to black.

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## Chapter 2: Darrio Klars

### **Port Kasiya Arroyo District 40 ABY**

The screams continued. Port Kasiya citizens ran. To where did not matter as long as it was far away from *them*. Abominations skulked after the living like a mynock horde demanding sustenance. Crystals spiked out of their flesh and every orifice, some even out of their eye sockets and mouths, leaving a trail of blood wherever they moved.

Smoke rose into the sky as the Arroyo district was set ablaze. Factories were left as rubble and dust as the Children of Mortis advanced further into Port Kasiya destroying anything and killing anyone in their path.

Death, after all, was only the start. The poor souls who were caught were exposed to the sordid red mist the monsters brought with them like a bad omen. Some then died, but some suffered a fate even worse. Their bodies rose again, reanimated to do their new Master's bidding. Taldryan's home was being used against them, and there was little they could do about it.

"Mommy! Daddy!" a little green-skinned Twi'lek girl screamed for her parents. She had broken away from the main group of stragglers scrambling away for freedom and was momentarily left behind.

"Sulla!" The mother yelled back. She reached out for her daughter, but was held back by other survivors.

"Don't do it!"

"It's too late!"

"Save yourself!"

The Twi'lek mother struggled against their grasp and cried profanities at them as she was carted away.

"Mommy!" Tears flowed down the little girl's face, and were suddenly replaced with shock when she was grabbed by the hulking near six-foot figure of one of the crystalline monsters.

The Twi'lek mother let loose a horrifying shriek. "No! My baby! You leave my baby alone!"

"Mommy!" Sulla tried to reach out to her, but her little arms flailed hopelessly. She was forced to turn and stare into the crystal-torn eyes of the Purified Ascendant Trooper as it readied to pierce her stomach.

A jetpack ignited, making the Ascendant turn its head in the direction of the sound. Then, a vicious roar was heard as Darrio slammed himself shoulder-first into the crystalline monster with as much momentum as he could summon. The sudden impact was enough to force the Ascendant to drop Sulla, who dropped to the ground with a hard thud. Darrio managed to turn his head to her.

"Run, Sulla!"

She didn't need to be told twice, and rose to her feet fast enough that she could easily be picked up by her mother. They, and the rest of the survivors ran away, out

of sight. Yet, before they did, the little Twi'lek girl turned back, smiled, and mouthed a *thank you*.

Darrio smiled at her beneath his helmet, and then scowled as he pushed the Ascendant back. "Your fight is with me now, you big ugly fre-AH!"

The Ascendant grabbed hold of Darrio's beskar-plated forearm, and used the propulsion from the Mandalorian's jetpack to flip him over their shoulder and into the ground. Darrio felt like paint that had been splattered upon a canvas; he groaned. That *hurt*.

The Ascendant grabbed hold of one of its weapons, and Darrio returned the favour by spraying a stream of flames in its face. The monstrosity recoiled from the heat, giving Darrio the opportunity he needed to get back to his feet.

He expected the Ascendant to be burned, but when he looked at it, the damage was repaired. Not even the crystals showed any sign of burning from the intense heat.

Darrio shook his head. "I'm not drunk enough for this..."

He grabbed hold of his twin blasters and unleashed volley after volley of shots at the enemy. Darrio had made shots like these with his eyes closed. From this distance, hitting his quarry was as easy as breathing.

The shots pelted the Ascendant like dirt in a sandstorm. Quick and fast, Darrio aimed for the head as several shots smacked into the Ascendant's cranium, causing its head to tilt back. Darrio ceased fire. Against almost any enemy, that would have been a kill shot and an end to the fight. However, this was not a normal enemy. Its head leaned forward again, and it shrugged off the attacks like they were child's play.

Darrio's eyes widened, his breathing quickened, and he pressed down on the triggers of his weapons. A volley of blaster fire erupted from the barrels, yet the Ascendant remained unperturbed in its approach.

Suddenly, it moved like a blur, and it was suddenly in front of Darrio. He moved his arms to defend himself, but was too slow, and was swiped with great force by the crystalline arm of the Ascendant. He flew through the air and rolled to a stop against a duracrete wall.

The Ascendant activated the weapon in its hand, producing a limp, whip-like blue lightsaber blade that tore into the ground. Darrio blocked the first strike with his beskar, and got lucky with the second as it crackled against his breastplate.

Darrio grunted against the onslaught. "For frakk's sake, Appius. Hurry up!"

He was answered when the Ascendant began to float in the air. From behind it, he saw the reason why.

"Does it hurt you to say please, Darrio?" Appius asked as he launched the Ascendant into a nearby wall as hard as he could with the Force.

Darrio dusted himself down. "Took you long enough. Did they get away?"

Appius answered with a small nod. "Yes, thanks to you, but we've gotta get out of here. They've got reinforcements on the way."

"You're retreating?" Darrio asked. He then stamped his feet on the ground. "Where's your damn pride!? This is not how Mandalorians fight. We stand our ground!"

"Darrio, now is not the time! Arroyo is lost! We need a better plan. Attacking them head-on isn't working. We are losing more and more people by the minute!"

A hellacious roar boomed from the Ascendant. It sent chills down the spines of both brothers as they started down the now visibly furious Ascendant. A large piece of stone suddenly soared through the air towards Appius and Darrio.

The former held out his hands, stopping the trajectory of the stone slab before it could hit them. "I think this belongs to you!"

Appius hurled the stone back at the Ascendant, who stabbed through with strength that seemed to defy belief. Seizing his moment, Appius summoned streams of lightning out of his fingertips. The electricity wrapped itself around the Ascendant like the lightwhip in its hand. It didn't bother to try and deflect it, instead using the pain as fuel for its anger.

Ever the opportunist, Darrio grabbed a rectangular device and threw it down at the Ascendant's feet. Seven seconds passed as Appius' stream of lightning stopped, and the explosion began.

It started by pulling the Ascendant into a vacuum, and into the centre of the blast radius. Then, a thunderous explosion tore apart the duracrete floor and wall, causing it to tumble down on top of the monstrosity. Dust and debris covered Appius and Darrio from head to toe. As the dust settled, there was no sign of the Ascendant to be seen.

"Is it dead?" Darrio asked.



Yet, before Appius could answer, the ground shook as a violent *boom* tore through the adjacent district. It left a small mushroom cloud in its wake, and Darrio paled and went limp when he saw the direction it was coming from.

He let out a pained cry. "No, Sulla!"

Darrio was about to launch himself in the direction of the blast when Appius stopped him.

"Darrio, don't! It's too late. I can't sense anything. They are already dead. We need to get out of here. Now!"

Blaster fire became louder and louder as it approached them. The sound of Truthwarden speederbikes hummed echoed in the distance, getting closer to them.

Appius shook his older brother. "Darrio!"

Darrio shoved him back. "Frakk off, Appius! You don't understand!"

A red, bloodied arm covered in crimson crystals shot out of the rubble. The Ascendant was still alive. Appius turned to his brother, clenching his fists.

"Fine. Stay and die if you want! There are plenty more people that still need my help!"

Appius activated his jetpack and rocketed away. Darrio's body tensed. He shook, gritted his teeth and growled. He felt hot inside like boiling lava raged in his soul. Yet, reluctantly, he followed after his little brother.

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## Chapter 3: Appius Wight

### Port Kasiya

### Taldryan Tower District

### 40 ABY

The Taldryan Tower District was more occupied than it had ever been. Rows upon rows of citizens flocked to it when their homes were attacked. It was easily the most fortified location in Port Kasiya, thanks mostly in part to the Taldryan Tower.

It packed enough firepower and might to fight back against most ground and air forces that dared tread near it, though it was barely equipped to fight against a seemingly immortal army.

Regardless, it was probably the safest place in the city, and Appius had those skilled with first aid to provide the necessary care to those who desperately needed it the most.

Large tents lined up on the walkways both as temporary housing and as first-aid tents for the Medical Corps to do their thing. Families grieved for the loss of those close to them who were either dead, missing, or even worse, had become one of those *things*.

The atmosphere was tense not just because of the feeling of impending doom, but because Port Kasiya was under attack *again*, because of Taldryan's presence on the moon.

"Crysenia, report."

Appius beckoned over the acting Ektrosis Quaestor and reigning governess of Port Kasiya. She looked worse for wear thanks to the bags under her eyes.

"Appius, it's not good," she said.

"Tell me something I don't know," Appius couldn't help the little quip to try and lighten the mood, despite how inappropriate it might have been. He carefully removed his helmet to converse with her properly.

"The military is trying to stop them advancing, but we are suffering heavy losses. The evacuation is being conducted by members of Ektrosis, as well as Cryo and the Kasiya Protection Programme. They keep bringing more and more people back."

"Good. And what of House Thanatos?" Appius asked.

"They are aiding in the evacuation as best they can."

"Any news from Teebu?"

"None so far. He's still on board the Axios as far as I'm aware."

Appius rubbed the back of his head and took a deep breath. "Damn it. I gave the order for him to get down here as soon as he can. We need a plan, and a damn good one quickly. What about the Vornskr Battalion and Ember Swarm?"

"The Vornskr Battalion are trying to eliminate high priority targets to give us the opportunity we need to get the citizens away. I haven't heard or seen the Ember Swarm, but they are likely being stopped by the fighting going on above."

Appius sighed. "Of course they are. Jorm might be crazy, but he isn't stupid. It's not worth risking their lives if there's little chance of getting through. Still, at least we can help people here on the ground."

Crysenia frowned at him. "That's all well and good, but this district is the smallest in Port Kasiya. We are quickly reaching max capacity, we don't have enough food, shelter, or water, and I don't know what to do!" She pinched the bridge of her nose. "I'm sorry. I'm just..."

"Tired, stressed, and sick of all the fighting?"

Crysenia smiled for what looked like the first time today. "Among other things, yes."

That got Appius curious. "Such as?"

"The stress over the wounded. Captain Violet is doing her best, but she's been distracted for the last hour."

"Distracted? Why?"

"Your brother."

Appius groaned. Of course it was Darrio. Why wouldn't it be?

"Do you know where he is?" he asked.

Crysenia pointed to the tent behind them. Sure enough, the unmistakable sight of the Zygerrian Field Medic, Captain Violet Zsarrs, stood outside conducting business regarding supplies.

"Thanks. I'll go have a word with him. You are free to go back to your duties, Crysenia."

She saluted and turned to leave.

"Oh, and Crys?"

She stopped and looked back at Appius, who smiled at her. "Thank you. You are doing a great job."

She smiled back and left Appius to his business. Once she was out of sight, he made his way over to the tent. Sure enough, Appius could sense his brother inside, stewing in his own self-pity.

"Captain Violet," Appius held out his hand to her. "A pleasure as always."

"Likewise, Consul," Violet returned the handshake. She spoke calmly, yet warmly towards him. Suddenly, her face scrunched. "Permission to speak freely, sir?"

"Something tells me you are going to anyway," Appius said.

"Sir, if I may be so bold, what happened out there?" she sounded deeply concerned. "He came back and opened a bottle..."

Appius rolled his eyes. "That sounds like Darrio."

"But he hasn't drunk any of it."

Appius' eyes went wide. "That... doesn't sound like him."

"I've tried to speak to him but he won't say anything to me. I'm used to getting some sort of retort from him, so his behaviour has me concerned."

"Sulla."

Violet raised a brow. "Excuse me, sir?"

"He... mentioned a name. It was Sulla. Does that name ring a bell at all?"

Violet thought for a moment until her eyes lit up and her ears twitched. "Yes, it does. She was a little girl I assigned to him. He was tasked with finding her parents and they formed quite the bond. It's kind of sweet."

"Kriff..." Appius said, he rubbed his eyes with his hand and looked away.

"Sir?" Violet asked.

"She's dead, and so are the rest of her family."

Violet gasped and covered her mouth with her hand. She shook her head as tears formed in her eyes. "That poor girl. She didn't deserve this. None of them deserved this. No wonder Darrio is so distraught, they were really close."

"I'm an idiot..." Appius said. "I had no idea..."

"He's still inside. Maybe you can talk to him?" Violet suggested.

Appius gave her a nod. "Yeah, I will. Give us a few minutes. Don't let anyone interrupt unless it's urgent."

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## Chapter 4: Appius Wight

### Port Kasiya

### Taldryan Tower District

40 ABY

Sure enough, Darrio was there, standing against the fabric of the white tent, sans helmet, staring at the open bottle of alcohol in his hand like it somehow held the answers to everything that had happened today. The tent smelt of surgical equipment, save for the fruity aroma that came from the bottle. Appius didn't need the Force to tell his brother was angry, frustrated, upset, and resentful, the look on Darrio's face did that for him.

"Hey," Appius said. He got little more than a huff from Darrio, who turned his head away. "You doing OK?"

Appius waited for an answer, but didn't get one.

"Look, I'm sorry. I didn't realise," he said, taking a step closer. It was a gamble. Talking to Darrio right now was like treading on a live explosive. One wrong step, and he could blow up in his face.

"Of course you didn't," Darrio said through gritted teeth. "It's all just numbers to you."

"What?"

Darrio glared daggers at Appius, like he was trying to pierce into his soul. "You heard me. It's all just numbers to you. Sure, some will die, but you'll spin the story of survival for your benefit and everything will be fine. Assuming we *do* somehow survive this..."

"Is that really what you think of me?" Appius approached Darrio quickly and with purpose. "Do you think I'm some sort of uncaring, unfeeling monster!?"

Darrio shrugged. "You don't treat me like you are my brother. You won't even let me see your kids."

Appius groaned. "This *again!*? Why do you keep bringing this up? You know damn well why we won't let you see them!"

"Because that bitch you call a wife won't let me see them!"

"If you stopped acting like an asshat, then maybe she would!"

"Where is she right now, huh!? Not here helping her *loving* husband fight! Some Mandalorian she is. She has no honour!"

"She's at the Tower looking after *our* children, and that's more honourable than anything *you've* done recently!"

Darrio slammed the bottle to the ground. The shards of glass scattered across the duracrete upon impact as the booze soaked the surface.

"Frakk you!" he said, sticking up his middle finger.

"No! Frakk you!" Appius got in Darrio's face. "I've given you a home, money, food, and enough booze to drown a rancor, and you just throw it back in my face! Do you think this is easy!? Do you think I make these choices because I want to!? I'm so sorry about Sulla, I really am, but if I stopped to grieve over everyone who died today, we'd be burying so many more people right now!"

"She didn't deserve it!" Darrio said, his eyes bloodshot.

"Nobody does, Darrio!" Appius placed his hands on his brother's shoulders.

"Listen, you promised me that I would have you and your blaster through this mess..."

"No. I said you'd have my blaster when we went after our father. I *never* signed up for any of this sithspit!" Darrio brushed Appius' arms away. "When this is all done, I want a ship and I want out of the Caelus System."

"You can't," Appius folded his arms and stood defiantly. "We had a deal and you swore by the creed..."

"Frakk. *The Creed*," Darrio said, carefully emphasising each word. "I don't give a kark anymore. Once this is done. I'm out of here, you got that?"

Appius shook his head. "What the hell is wrong with you!? The Darrio I knew would never abandon everything we were taught!"

"Then you *don't* know me," Darrio said lowly.

"Yeah. Maybe you're right," Appius said, veins bulging on his forehead.

Violet suddenly barged in through the flaps with a serious expression on her face. "Sir!"

Appius rounded on her. "I thought I said I wanted some privacy with my brother!?"

Violet recoiled, and then steadied herself. "I know, sir, but this is important. You are needed outside."

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## Chapter 5: Appius Wight

**Port Kasiya**  
**Taldryan Tower District**  
**40 ABY**

Appius, Darrio and Violet emerged out of the tent and into a gathering of Taldryanites. Crysenia held a datapad in hand, overlooking the information she had just received. What stood out the most, however, was the sudden absence of light from the district streets and buildings. Taldryan personnel quickly rushed to set up backup power generators.

She beckoned them over. "Appius, you better take a look at this."

Appius grabbed the datapad out of her hands, and quickly discovered the Children of Mortis had taken Arroyo, and with it, the factories that powered the city. They were now literally in the dark until power could be restored.

"Vista Del Rey will be their next target, then the City Centre, and then here. We need to hold the line, have every available man and woman in the military grab a rifle. Worst case scenario is we prepare to move everyone into Eastbrook," Appius gave his orders, but the datapad was then snatched out of his hands by Crysenia.

"We can't go to Eastbrook, at least not yet," she said, tapping upon the screen to display a video of something that made Appius' heart skip a beat, and then drop

into his stomach seconds later. He tilted the screen to show Darrio, and the older brother had the same reaction.

An older Human man in ripped and torn Jedi clothing was seen in Eastbrook, keeping a neutral expression like he was waiting for something. His hair had grayed, and he possessed a cybernetic replacement for his right arm, but there was no mistaking the resemblance to both Appius and Darrio. When he tapped into the Force, Appius sensed his familiar presence, but something felt... off. Yet, he couldn't put his finger on what.

"Do we split our forces to confront him?" Crysenia asked.

"No!" Appius said more sternly than he had intended, shocking her. "No. Keep the military and members focused on keeping those... *things* out of the Taldryan District."

Darrio stepped forward. "We will deal with the Jedi ourselves."

"Looks like you get to make good on your word after all," Appius placed his helmet on his head, and activated his jetpack and soared in the direction of Eastbrook before anyone could protest.

Darrio inhaled a deep breath, placed his helmet on his head and followed him. Perhaps there was still something that could be salvaged today.

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## Chapter 6: Appius Wight

### **Port Kasiya Eastbrook District 40 ABY**

Eastbrook had, for the most part, been thankfully left untouched. The rich and wealthy that lived in the Port's most elegant and expensive district had chosen either to hunker down in their bunkers, or flee to the Taldryan Tower District for their safety. Mansions littered most streets, a sign of how many credits could fly through the Corellian Trade Line.

Yet, it was like a ghost town, but as Darrio and Appius landed in one of Eastbrook's exotic cul-de-sacs, they came face to face with *him*. It hadn't been too long since they had last seen him, but both brothers were at a loss for words.



"Appius... Darrio..." Sterion said in a monotonous tone. "I've been waiting for you."

"Dad..." Appius managed to choke out. Just like on Pendroh-I, his body went numb at seeing his father again.

"How?" Darrio asked. "How are you here!? We saw you get beaten by the Harbinger on Pendroh-I. Did you escape!?"

Sterion held out a hand towards the younger brother. "Appius. come here, my son."

Appius glanced at Darrio. The voice *sounded* like their father, but there was something otherworldly about it. Regardless, Appius complied with his request. He steadily approached until he was in front of Sterion, right in the middle of the cul-de-sac.

"Take off your helmet," Sterion said.

Appius obeyed, and two sets of blue eyes stared back at each other. Sterion placed his hand on his youngest son's cheek, the latter shuddering at the touch.

"My son..." Sterion said.

"Appius!"

He heard Darrio's warning first, then felt the warning from the Force, followed by the ignition of a lightsaber. Appius instinctively grabbed his weapon, but immediately found himself on the ground, looking up at the stars. He saw his father stand above him, raising his weapon for a downward swing.

A jetpack roared and Darrio launched himself at their father, the latter twisting his body to face the threat. Darrio slammed himself full force into his father with reckless abandon and pinned him to the ground. He wrapped his hand around Sterion's throat.

"What the hell are you doing!?" Darrio bellowed. "You tried to kill him!"

With a flick of Sterion's wrist, Darrio was sent careening tens of feet and through a glass conservatory belonging to one of the mansions. Appius returned to his feet in time to witness his older brother be smashed through glass.

"Darrio!"

"Now, where were we?" Sterion said, his tone of voice unmoved and unchanged.

Appius reluctantly grabbed hold of his weapons, igniting the emerald blades and connecting the two hits to form a saberstaff. His heart pounded in his head, he did not want to fight his father here, now, or ever.

"What happened to you!?" Appius exclaimed. "What happened on Pendroh-I!? Do you not remember helping us escape!?"

Sterion suddenly amplified his speed with the Force, closing the distance between himself and his youngest son in a heartbeat. He swung hard, and Appius had to block. Green clashed with blue, and Sterion continued to attack like an angered krayt dragon.

This was nothing like the spars on Mandalore they had whilst Appius was a teenager. Sterion, right here, right now, was actively trying to beat his son into submission. A fact that tore into Appius as a fire burned inside him. He grit his teeth, his eyes hardened, and he seized the opportunity within his father's onslaught and attacked with his saberstaff. He then followed up, blasting him with telekinetic energy. Sterion grunted, the force of the attack felt like a punch in the gut as he was sent back. Yet, as quickly as the pain came, it was gone again, replaced with a smirk as he landed on his feet.

"That's more like it," Sterion said, dusting himself down. "It's good to see you using Niman's *pushing slash* the way it was intended. However, you failed to capitalise, and you let your opponent recover. A fool's mistake."

Appius gripped his weapon so tightly that his hands started to tremble. "What happened to you? Why are you attacking us!?"

"I simply serve *The Father*. I exist to realise his will." Sterion said.

Darrio emerged from the conservatory, cuts ebbed into the gaps of his beskar armor. He let out a roar and drew upon his blasters.

"Will you really shoot me, Darrio?" Sterion asked, turning to face him. He got his answer when Darrio pulled the triggers.

"You are with the ones who killed Sulla!" Darrio's voice was coarse and raw. Volley after volley of blaster fire rained down on Sterion. Yet, their father remained unperturbed and relaxed as he deflected each shot away from him.

"If you could not protect someone, then that is down to your own inadequacy. You always were a failure, Darrio."

In the right hands, words had the power to do more damage than any weapon ever could. Darrio activated his jetpack, dropped his blasters, and retrieved a small spherical object. It beeped in his hand as he soared towards his father.

Sterion sidestepped, gripped Darrio under one arm, and forced him to the ground. The momentum from Darrio's jetpack carried him several feet before it finally stopped. The device in hand beeped rapidly, but when he threw it, Sterion waved his hand and sent it back at him.

"Too slow."

Darrio caught the device and tried to throw it again. Appius tried to rush to Darrio's side, but was too late. A small explosion rocked the cul-de-sac, dust and debris obscuring Darrio from view.

"Darrio!" Appius yelled. When the dust settled, Darrio's cybernetic limb had been half-destroyed. His armor had survived the impact, though shrapnel had embedded itself in the unprotected gaps. Blood seeped out and stained the floor red.

"It is useless to resist," Sterion said, and when Appius looked at him, he saw his father's eyes glow red with malevolent energy, one born from the Dark Side of the Force.

"I knew it... I knew something was wrong!" Appius bellowed.

"What are you waiting for?" Sterion asked. "Darrio is dying. He needs help."

Appius somehow knew this was a trap, but when he tapped into the Force, he could sense Darrio's life force fading. He rushed over, and dropped to his knees beside his brother.

"Darrio! Darrio, *vod*, I'll get you out of here. Just..."

Appius felt the threat, a warning from the Force niggling in his mind. He rose, and spun to face his father, when he was blasted by tendrils of lightning. It seared his flesh, and scorched him in his armor.

"Again," Sterion said. "Too slow."

Then Sterion did it again, and again, and again, and again. Each time he stepped closer, each blast was more painful than the last, as if that were possible. Appius collapsed to the floor, twitching and convulsing, writhing in pain. Finally, Sterion

stood above him, panting, but triumphant. The blank look on his face still haunted both brothers.

"Father... please..." Appius feebly raised a hand upwards, but was met with one final stream of electricity. It wrapped around his body, and he shrieked in pain as his eyes rolled into the back of his head. He fell unconscious, and Sterion had won.

He stood above his sons and placed his lightsaber back on his waist. He then scooped up Appius, and carried him over his shoulder.

Darrio helplessly dragged himself towards them with his one remaining arm. His head pounded, and every movement caused him great pain. "What... are you doing?"

"What does it look like? I am fulfilling *The Father's* will. He will be taken to the asteroid to meet his fate."

"I won't... let you..."

Darrio reached out towards Sterion's ankle, but was swiftly kicked in the abdomen for his effort.

"You are unimportant," Sterion said, turning to walk away from his eldest.

"Aren't you... going to kill me?" Darrio asked.

"I could, but it is a waste of my time and energy. You will rot here and meet your demise on your own," Sterion walked further away, but turned to give one last look to Darrio. "Or don't. I couldn't care less."

Darrio could do nothing but watch as Sterion left with Appius in tow, unable to do anything. He continued to feebly drag himself along the duracrete, leaving a red trail of his blood behind him, but he was tired, exhausted, and every effort pained him. His vision began to blur, and it became harder to breathe.

As unconsciousness ebbed closer the young Madalorian had nothing left but to stew on the words of his father. They had hurt, hurt more than if they had come from anyone else. It had dug into the deep vestibles of Darrio's psche to rip and tear at the weakest part of him.

He lay in the pool of his own life, and it slowly but surely began to grow. As it did so, he felt his grasp on consciousness slip further and further away from him. Eyes feeling heavier and heavier as he slowly lost the battle with his own will.

"Captain! The Consul's brother is over here!"

An unfamiliar voice was heard, but was slowly muffled.

"Darrio!" Violet's familiar tone entered his ears. "Hold on, we'll get you out of here! I need med packs and bacta, now!"

Darrio closed his eyes, his body had given up as everything fell to darkness.

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## Chapter 7: Darrio Klars

**Port Kasiya**

**Taldryan Tower**

**Taldryan Tower District**

**40 ABY**

It was like walking into a morgue. Darrio barged through the office door, sans helmet, with little regard for who was on the other side. The atmosphere inside reflected that of the world outside, hopeless, grim, and downright depressing. Darrio entered amidst the gathering of Taldryanites and their allies, taking special note of Ankira who was sitting in her seat with her hands balled into fists on her lap. Aylin was next to her, her green arm wrapped around her shoulder trying to comfort her, though Ankira remained deathly silent and still. Who could blame her? Her husband was in the hands of the enemy, probably dead and if not? Then who knew what they were doing to him?

Various other Taldryanites were scattered around the office. Thankfully, backup power had been restored, so they were clearly visible. There was Dasha, Appius' apprentice, huddled up in the corner being held in the arms of some Twi'lek boy, the late Vodo Biask's son, Zakhai. Her boyfriend, perhaps? Darrio didn't know, and right now, he didn't care. Scions of Taldryan gathered at this time, because of course they did. Taldryan had lost a lot of its power. It had nearly lost its home, again, and it had lost its Consul.

A pity it took a disaster to bring them together in one place. One particular individual of note was the giant Twi'lek with a large chin, Zentru'la. He wasn't a member of Taldryan per se, but a keen ally, but he held himself with the guile of a seasoned veteran, and he looked the part too.

Nevertheless, despite the bodies in the room, Darrio's target was in front of him, sitting in a seat that *should* have had his brother in it. Instead, it was Taldryan's Proconsul, the Grand Admiral of Taldryan's Navy and pint-sized Ewok, Teebu.

Violet rushed in after him. "Darrio! Sir, I am so sorry. I tried to get him to stop, but.."

"That is fine, Captain. I understand the situation. Darrio, please, do come in," Teebu said as he beckoned Darrio closer. "I trust you are fully healed? I trust the new arm feels better or at least as good as the last one?"

"No, but I doubt you care," truth be told, he wasn't fully healed. Violet might have been a miracle worker under pressure, but there was only so much she could do when he refused to stay in a bacta tank. "We need to talk."

Teebu placed his pawed hands on the desk. "What about?"

"You know damn well what about!" Darrio shouted, marching up to the desk.

A few heads turned towards Darrio when he answered, then quickly turned to Teebu.

"If this is about Appius..."

Darrio slammed a fist onto Teebu's desk. "You're damn right it's about Appius! He's been gone for mere *hours* and you are running away!?"

"I prefer to call it a tactical retreat," Teebu said in his usual calm demeanour. "Port Kasiya is lost. The shield gate has been destroyed, the loss of life is in the thousands, and there is little to no chance of reinforcements coming to our aid from the Dark Council."

Raistline scoffed. The House Thanatos Quaestor stood at the side of the desk and folded his arms. "Like the Dark Council would ever come to *our* aid. They have a history of leaving us to die, especially after Karufr."

"Unfortunately, Raistline is correct," Teebu said. "We must assume we are on our own. In this scenario, the safest and most secure course of action is to pull out of Kasiya and out of the Caelus System entirely. We can find a new home in a new system and begin the rebuilding process from there."

"No," Darrio seethed. To anyone looking at him, it looked like he was about to reach out and strangle Teebu from the opposite side of the desk.

"Excuse me?" Teebu asked, remaining composed. "Need I remind you that you have no authority here, Darrio. You aren't even a part of Taldryan. The *only* reason I allowed you in here is out of respect to Appius. You would do well to remember your place."

Darrio let out a hard laugh. "Respect!? You've shown no damn respect, you overgrown fur ball! Appius has barely been gone and already you are in his chair calling the shots. I bet his seat is still warm, isn't it?"

The mood in the room turned cold as Teebu and Darrio glared daggers at each other.

"How dare you..." Teebu said. "Appius knew the risks when he went to the frontlines."

"At least he went to the frontlines and stood alongside those same men and women, risking his life. My brother might be a karksucker, but at least he has honour and pride!"

"Give me one good reason I should risk the lives of many good men and women, some of them in this room, to save the life of one individual," Teebu laid down the challenge, and all eyes turned to Darrio. "Just one, and I will consider it."

Darrio leaned in closer to Teebu and spoke lowly. "Because if the situation were reversed, he'd do everything in his power to rescue you, and you know that."

Teebu's eyes went wide. He fiddled with his fingers in his hands and seemingly muttered something incoherent under his breath.

"He'd do the same for anyone in this room!" Darrio continued as he pointed at different Taldryanites in the room. "You, you, you, and even you! Yes, he's a kriffing idiot, but he's a kriffing idiot that cares about all of you enough to risk his life alongside you, unlike this little furry womp rat!"

"I was under the impression you and Appius weren't getting along. What happened out there?" Aylin suddenly asked.

Darrio looked at her, a heavy look in his eyes. "I... we... I've lost too many people today. I lost my father, and I lost someone special to me. I will *not* lose my brother the same way," he marched over to the doorway from whence he entered the room. "I'm going to go after him. It's up to all of you if you want to come with me."

Darrio stood in the doorway, waiting to see if anyone would join him. Nobody moved for a moment until Ankira suddenly shot up to her feet.

"Ankira?" Aylin asked.

Ankira seemingly ignored her Nautolan friend and followed Darrio's lead, joining him at his side, much to the latter's surprise. This had to be the only time that Ankira and Darrio had ever seen eye to eye on anything.

"Hey, Ankira! Wait up!" Aylin said, joining her friend.

Dasha then freed herself from Zakai's arms and joined them too, and if she was going then so was Zakhai. If Zakhai was going, then so was Shanree, his master. A small collection of bodies gathered around the entrance. It was an impressive sight, especially when Zentru'la offered his services, for the right pay of course.

"Well?" Darrio asked.

Teebu looked to every individual that was prepared to risk their lives for Appius. He smiled, and Darrio had to wonder as each man and woman stood beside him if this was what *'A brotherhood within a Brotherhood'* meant.

"Very well," Teebu said. "We will remain here and triple our efforts to regain Port Kasiya and rescue Appius, but Darrio? Any loss of life will be on your head. Remember that."

Darrio gave a small nod and left the room, the small army he'd assembled following suit. He clenched his fists at his sides and steeled his eyes. He was going to get Appius back, no matter what. No Force or Space Wizard kark was going to stop him now.

**-END-**



