

Clan Klars of Mandalore

A fiction written by Appius Taldrya Wight

Mandalore

37 ABY

The people of Clan Klars of Mandalore felt it in the air, the unmistakable harshness of death impending, the icy fingers of the afterlife starting to claw their way up and down their spines. They didn't need to be Force-Sensitive to feel it, they were, after all, Mandalorian. They were the kind of people that were best friends with danger and gave the Reaper a cold glare in the face before kicking him square in the gut. *Fighting* for their existence was in their blood, their way of life, and no matter how many times outsiders tried to take that from them, they clung on to it like a child clinging to its mother for love and safety. What else did they have, if not that?

The loss of Sterion and Appius had been *hard* on the Clan, especially for Darrio. Being *Alor* at twenty years of age came with it a series of challenges that hardly anyone his age was prepared for, then you add in the knowledge that his brother and father had perished out in the wastelands via some unknown assailant, and we had a recipe for stress and grief that most in his position would not have been able to handle. It was like two pieces of his soul had been ripped out and stomped into the barren dirt of Mandalore itself. The pain *hurt*, the anguish was unending. Yet, he carried on. They all did. They had to. Darrio was their leader, and despite the grief, the loss, and trauma bearing on him like a horrid miasma, he fulfilled his responsibility and helped everyone move forward.

Then *he* came back.

He should have known better than to think Appius was dead. Their father's body had been reported to have been seen, but then had vanished. Appius was never found, but the scars of battle littered the Mandalorian wasteland where his little brother and father had been training. They assumed his body had been vaporised, disintegrated, or, in vain hope, had simply been taken elsewhere. Search parties had been created, and Darrio pulled together any amount of credits necessary to get whatever scout he could out there looking for his little brother.

Years passed, and Darrio had given up hope. So imagine his surprise when over a decade later Appius shows up out of the blue, alive, and fully grown.

Damn it all, he was the spitting image of their father too...

He didn't come home. He had commitments elsewhere. Something about being a Quaestor in the *Brotherhood* of all places. He swore an oath to Klars that he'd be there if they needed him, like Darrio was always there for him when they grew up. Darrio was the thunder, and Appius was the lightning. Together, they were an unstoppable storm.

Where was he now when they needed him most?

It started slow. Blaster fire crashed from a distance into the Clan Klars compound. It held firm, and any warrior worth their salt knew that these shots were just tests. Nothing more. They wanted to see how Clan Klars would react. Like the phoenix, they endured.

Then came the cries of war. The sun had set into a crimson red over the horizon like an omen from *Manda* itself. The civilians felt it the worst. Not every Mandalorian was a warrior. Some were farmers, architects, armorsmiths, and teachers. They felt the wind whip through the compound like the Devil's favourite instrument was being played in the sudden gust.

The younger warriors felt it in their guts. Their first, and perhaps last battle upon them, trying to make sense of the irrational fear that gripped them and seemed to thicken the air in their lungs.

The veterans sensed it. The bloodlust in the air made their hairs stand on end as they prepared for battle. They bled for Klars, they died for Klars, and if they died this day, it would be defending their home. This was *their* way.

Darrio fought the rising panic in his heart. His Clan *needed* him; they needed a leader. They needed guidance.

"Get the civilians further inside the compound. Form a barricade on the North and Eastern borders and prepare to defend our home! Klars will not fall on this day, or any day!"

Darrio allowed himself to believe those words. What other choice did he have? All they could do was persevere and hope Appius arrived with backup soon.

It never came. Where was his brother when he needed him most?

The march of a thousand descended upon the Clan Klars compound like a swarm of worker ants willing to die for their queen. It didn't take long for the explosions to rocket against the compound, destroying the fragile barriers on all sides and eliminating the last point of safety for all those on the front lines.

"What do we do now!?"

"Are we all going to die!?"

"We're all going to die!!!"

"Alor, what do we do!?"

Darrio had no immediate answer. He barely had a chance to ponder the reason for the attack in the first place. Was it their beskar? The compound was constructed on top of an old beskar mine that was no doubt worth millions of credits to those in the know. Or was it... Appius? Were they here because of him?

Darrio shook the thought from his mind and gave the order his ancestors would have been proud of. "Stand and fight!"

And so they did, bravely, and honourably, the Clan fought on. Bit by bit its members fell, joining *Manda* as the proud warriors they were. Death rang out in a cacophony of chorus' that Darrio thought would have the whole planet trembling under its impact. No matter how he shaped it, the outlook was bleak. It was the many versus the few, and no amount of pride, tactical prowess and sheer ingenuity was going to be enough against an enemy that didn't care about their losses.

Darrio cared about *Klars*. Every life lost was another Clan member who wouldn't get to see their wife, husband, children, or family, and it was his decision that caused their deaths and things only got worse when their leader stepped forward, a mask covering the lower half of his obsidian coloured armor, crimson lightsaber in his hand. They raised their weapon above their head, and the blaster fire stopped. The sudden silence across the landscape was almost as damning as the endless battle. Their leader stepped forward, and let out an anger-induced roar.

"Who among you is your leader? Will they dare to fight me in combat?"

Darrio looked to his left, the frightened children looking to him to answer. It was a haunting look he'd never forget for what little time he remained alive. He looked to his right. The proud, yet confused warriors, unsure of what to do. Survival seemed like a distant dream, living today was going to be nothing short of a miracle.

Darrio did like to tempt fate. It could kiss his ass for all he believed in it. If there was a way out of this, then the first step was telling it to go frakk itself as he dug them out of this with his own two hands. Thankfully, said opportunity just presented itself to him on a silver platter. He stepped forward over the wreckage, glancing back to the men, women, and children in his care.

"Treat this as a challenge under *the creed*. Do not interfere under any circumstances. Whatever happens, happens."

"What do we do if you don't succeed?"

The question hinted at the doubt in Darrio's leadership, and his whole decision-making process. Not that he could blame them. Their lives potentially rested on his shoulders.

He had no intention of failing. Failure meant they would die. Darrio had been *Alor* for over a decade by this point, and he had no intention of letting Klars' legacy end here.

"I won't."

He marched onward, ignoring the pleas from those behind him to stop and reconsider, deciding instead to listen to the voices among them egging him on, to follow in the foot of their ancestors and make them proud.

The Sith was a hulking behemoth of a man, if he could even be called that. Crimson-yellow orbs pierced into Darrio's soul, but instead of striking fear into his heart, his eyes hardened behind his visor, his fingers grazing the twin blasters at his hips.

"Where is he?" the Sith demanded. "Where is the son of Sterion?"

That told him everything he wanted to hear. They were looking for Appius. Darrio brandished his blasters, wrapping his fingers around the triggers. Like hell he was going to sell out his little brother. "You're looking at him."

His twin Westar blasters erupted in an avalanche of blaster fire so rapid that most enemies would have succumbed to the shots as they collided with their flesh. The Sith was no mere mortal. He expertly wielded his lightsaber like a fast-flowing shield, deflecting each blaster bolt away from him.

Darrio grimaced beneath his visor, his opponent had made that look so easy that it was almost daunting. He hardened his fighting spirit and activated his jetpack, ascending several feet into the air. He reached towards his bandolier, the thin strap that held his explosives, retrieving a small cylindrical thermal detonator from its pocket.

The Sith held out a hand, and Darrio immediately felt an invisible pull yank him down towards solid ground. No amount of counter-thrust from his jetpack could stop him from crashing chest first into the Mandalorian dirt. It knocked the wind

out of him, and he could swear he felt the break in one of his ribs that felt like he was being stabbed through the chest.

He staggered back to his feet as the Sith approached him, his breathing ragged from the fall. Like the warrior he was, Darrio grit his teeth, fought through the pain, and threw a hard fist at the mask covering the Dark-Sider's face.

The Sith caught it, and tightened his grip around his knuckles. Pain instantly flashed across his hand, and Darrio's knees buckled at the pressure applied to it. He was pulled into a hard knee to his abdomen. Agony burned across his ribs, paralyzing him. It left him defenceless as the Sith curved his lightsaber through the gap in Darrio's armor, severing his left arm.

Darrio instantly recoiled, he gasped for air, clenched at his limbless wound before letting out a high-pitched cry. The lightsaber cauterized the wound, and Darrio would have proffered breaking every bone in his body compared to what he felt now.

The Sith wasn't done. Corrupt fingers bent forward, channeling streams of Force Lightning into Darrio's body. The streaks wrapped around Darrio and the burning in every fibre of his being forced him to the ground. He writhed in the dirt like somehow it would ease his suffering.

It did not.

Again and again, the Sith poured his hatred into Darrio, turning it into a lethal weapon until his skin started to blister as smoke rose from his flesh. Mercifully, it stopped. Darrio didn't realize he had shut his eyes until he forced himself to pry them open. The Sith towered above his fallen frame, slowly shaking his head. He practically radiated disgust.

"You are not the one we seek." The Sith declared. "Kill them all, and let this one watch as everything burns."

Darrio wanted to scream and fight back. He wanted *anything* that could stop the slaughter, but no matter how hard he tried, no words came out. Instead, in one last act of desperation, one last *frakk* you to the Sith and his troops around him. He grabbed one of the few explosives in his arsenal and readied to blow both himself and the Sith to kingdom come. Maybe the blast would distract the enemy for long enough that it would buy a little time for his clansman to escape.

Alas, it wasn't meant to be. The Sith was keenly aware of what Darrio was trying to do, stomping down on the Mandalorian's remaining wrist with his full weight.

Darrio gasped as his hand went numb, letting go of the device in his hand. The Sith kicked it away, out of sight and out of reach.

He didn't say a word as he gazed at the pathetic ruin of a man that was Darrio Klars. Yellow orbs had all but damned him to suffer. The Sith marched on towards the Clan Klars compound. All Darrio could do was watch as it burst into flames, and the screams of his people entered his ears, tearing his heart asunder.

Where. The *hell*. Was Appius!?

He'd abandoned them. All of them...

Finally, the physical and emotional anguish was too much to bear as his world faded to black.

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Caelus System

Port Kasiya

40 ABY

This was the third night in a row. At least it was a routine, though it was not one Ellisyn wanted to get into.

Darrio had shot up, sitting straight up in the bed. The sudden movement jolted her awake. After the first night, Ellisyn slept with one eye open just to keep an eye on him. The bags were heavy under his eyes, and he broke out into cold sweat. He mumbled something inaudible under his breath, like he had the previous two nights. Ellisyn couldn't quite make out what it was, but she would be willing to put a good amount of credits on it being something to do with the recurring nightmare Darrio kept having.

Ellisyn *hated* it. She was so used to having an adversary she could defeat in a war of words within the confines of a courtroom, or punch directly in the face if necessary. She wasn't used to *this*. She felt helpless. This wasn't an enemy she could defeat with lawyer logic or by smacking it hard enough. She did the only thing she knew she could. She wrapped her arm around Darrio and pulled him close to her. She gently rocked him on the bed, brushing a hand through his hair.

"It's okay, I'm here..." Ellisyn shushed him gently. His mumbling slowly stopped. He was still wide-eyed until his breathing became steady again. His body relaxed, and he drifted back into a deep sleep.

Darrio had told her all about the nightmares. Reliving his most traumatic life experience was a kind of hell that Ellisyn was familiar with. She just wished she knew of a way to help. She'd managed thus far to keep them away from Sulla, lest she sees her adopted father in this state, but for all Ellisyn knew, she might have seen it already.

An idea formed in her head. It came from one of Darrio's many ramblings that he had after his nightmares. He had mentioned before that Appius had spoken of nightmares that he had after discovering of Klars' destruction. As much as Ellisyn didn't want to, maybe a talk with Darrio's younger brother was in order. At the very least, she might get some insight into how to stop the horrid dreams from occurring. At the worst, she'd punch Appius in his stupid face. It was a win-win.

For now, she was content with holding him, comforting him, and supporting him in whatever way he needed. What else could she do, if not that?

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