

## **Caelus System Space**

### **The Leviathan**

**40 ABY**

*"Sir, there's an unidentified starfighter entering the Caelus System."*

Teebu listened to the comms coming through from his seat in the admiral's chair. It was raised over the bridge of the Leviathan, the Taldryan Republic Navy flagship. He was particularly proud of this ship, and why wouldn't he be? It was a symbol of everything Taldryan stood for, both inside and out. It symbolised defiance in the face of those who would try to control them, power, harmony, and acceptance all at the same time. Within the ship was an assortment of species doing various jobs and tasks as per their rank. If there was one thing Teebu agreed with Appius about, it was the fact that no-one, regardless of species, age, or sexuality was to be excluded. Everyone had a chance to prove themselves and be a part of the Taldryan Republic.

#### ***A brotherhood within a Brotherhood.***

Teebu stood from his seat and folded his arm behind his back. "Very good, lieutenant. Open up communications with the ship and trail it. Do not let it out of our sight."

*"Right away, sir!"*

A flashing light on the console in front of him confirmed communications had been reached.

Teebu cleared his throat. "Unidentified craft. You are in territory protected by the Taldryan Republic. State your name and intention."

Silence. Not a word came from the craft.

"Unidentified craft, you will respond, or be destroyed. You are in the territory of the Taldryan Republic. State your name and intention."

His voice was peaceful enough in tone, like a teacher telling a student they had detention. Yet, the rest of the crew felt the credit drop to the floor. A static noise began to come through. Teebu smiled to himself briefly. That seemed to do the trick as a modulated, high-pitched voice came through.

*"I'm a hunter with Clan Vizsla. I'm here searching for someone."*

The second Teebu heard *Clan Vizsla*, he let out an involuntary sigh. He *knew* this would happen eventually, and it was the reason the entire Taldryan Republic Navy was stationed back in the Caelus System, monitoring any vessels that so much as breathed in their territory.

"And who is this someone you are searching for?" Teebu asked.

"*Darrio Klars.*"

Teebu already knew who it was, he just needed to have it confirmed to his own ears. He was there when Darrio nearly caused an inter-clan incident at Sundari Station. Quite frankly, the Ewok was surprised nobody had come sooner.

Though, this created a dilemma. He could stop the ship, absolutely he could. It would be as easy as pushing a button and having it blown to smithereens before it could get past the asteroid belt, but that would potentially incite war with Vizsla. War was not something the Taldryan Republic wanted with pirate factions becoming an increasing problem in the nearby Saijo Sector.

"Vizslian, you have permission to proceed to Kasiya. Do not deviate from your course, or we will be forced to take action."

"*Understood.*"

Communications were cut off, and the crew looked to Teebu expectantly, no doubt searching for answers as to why he'd let them pass through.

His answer was simple. "Connect me to the Supreme Chancellor immediately."

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## **The Playground**

### **Port Kasiya**

**40 ABY**

It certainly had been a while, and in a way, Darrio was glad that nothing had changed. The *Playground* was still the same depraved hive of scum and villainy it had been before he met Ellisyn. It was a small comfort, but one he would take advantage of whilst he could. Familiarity healed the heart, that's what his father used to say.

Or was it family that healed the heart? He honestly couldn't remember.

Darrio had drunk so much in recent years that it was hard to tell which memories were real, made up in his head, or had become altered or twisted in some way.

Sundari Station, however, was vivid in his head like a spotlight was shining down on it for all to see. *'Look, everyone! Here's Darrio Klars, here to make a colossal fool out of himself! What a disgrace!'*

He could practically *feel* the disapproving glances and unfiltered murmurs, and he deserved it. He knew he did. He franked up, big time, and it was a damn miracle Appius hadn't kicked him out of Taldryan space entirely for what he did. Darrio couldn't say he'd have been so merciful if the roles were reversed.

"Hey, you look a little down, chum! How about a deathstick for your troubles?"

Typical. Of course some of the spice dealers would be drawn to him. He was alone, and looked miserable. Darrio didn't take his eyes off the drink in his hand. "You have five seconds to get away from me before I take that deathstick and shove it down your throat."

The drug dealer immediately backed away, and Darrio was left alone with his drink and thoughts at the bar counter. He heard the tapping of a glass beside him and let out an exasperated sigh.

"Whatever you are selling, I'm not interested. Get lost."

"That's not a nice way to say hello to a friend."

Darrio recognised that voice, and turned his head to the side. His blue eyes met Violet's emerald Zygerrian orbs, and he let out a groan.

"What are you doing here, Violet?" Darrio asked. "This isn't exactly your scene."

"You're right. It isn't."

Violet sounded uncomfortable as she spoke, and Darrio couldn't blame her. The *Playground*, aptly named, was a place for the lowest of the lows to come experience their version of fun. Drinking, gambling, and even an area upstairs for more *private* ventures for those with more credits than words.

"But there are only three places you'd be. The Taldryan Tower, at home with Sulla and Ellisyn, or here drinking yourself stupid," Violet said.

Darrio grumbled to himself. "This is only my first drink..."

"What are you doing here, Darrio?" Violet asked. Her tone was softer than the Mandalorian felt he deserved.

He glanced at the drink in his hand, then back to Violet. "What does it look like?"

"Doing the exact same thing that got you into trouble in the first place," Violet answered honestly, even if the truth did sting. "Ellisyn told me the news. You got discharged!? What happened!?"

Darrio couldn't look her in the eyes. The pit in his stomach seemed to deepen as he forced a swig of his drink. "I messed up. *Again*. Like I always do."

"Darrio..."

"You don't understand, Violet. Everything I touch goes badly. *Everything*. I'm a walking disaster waiting to happen. I just cause pain and grief no matter what I do or where I go. I got myself imprisoned and nearly lost Sulla. I just... I just can't..."

"Elly said you two had a fight," Violet said.

Darrio seemed to tense and retreat in himself.

"She deserves better..." he finally said.

Then, Violet showed Darrio an expression he had seldom ever seen from her. Raw, unfiltered anger. She was the type to always be in control, especially with being a Captain in Taldryan's Medical Corps. Darrio found himself unnerved as she seemed to gaze into his soul.

"You aren't seriously giving up the best thing that's happened to you in years because you made a mistake?"

Darrio did not answer.

"She's hurt, and she's worried sick about you. You don't realise how good you've got it now, do you?"

At that, Darrio raised a brow and looked at her.

"You've spent the last few years miserable because you lost your Clan, your brother, and your *life*. You finally have people around you who care about you, and you choose to deal with the pain alone."

"Because it's easier," Darrio said. "It wasn't like this before? Do you have *any* idea what that's like? Having *everything* and then having *nothing*? No-one to help, no-one to turn to anymore. No father, no brother, It was just me!"

Darrio didn't know when tears had formed in his eyes, and he only realised when the first trickles fell from his eyes.

"I've made so many mistakes, I almost lost Sulla..." he added.

"And you'll keep making them," Violet said, offering a sympathetic smile. "That's life, Darrio. Everyone makes mistakes, that's just how it is, no matter who anyone is, no matter how powerful or weak, everyone makes mistakes."

"Ellisyn hates me..."

"She doesn't hate you, Darrio. She's disappointed, yes, but you know she'd fight the whole galaxy for you if she had to."

Darrio couldn't stop the chuckle escaping his lips. Unbeknownst to himself, a small smile had formed on his face. "Yeah, she would, wouldn't she?"

Violet realised she was making headway with Darrio. "So, how about you put that drink down, go home to your girlfriend and daughter, tell them how much of an idiot you've been, and that you love them, and never do this again, deal?"

Darrio smirked at her. "I'm not that sappy."

Violet scoffed. "Well, prepare to be. You've got some making up to do, mister."

He let out a vocal groan, loud enough so Violet could hear. The two of them walked towards the entrance to the *Playground* and walked through the giant double doors, leaving the ruckus and noise behind.

The Port Kasiya air had a way of reinvigorating his lungs after he'd been inside for a little while. Perhaps it was how crisp the chill air was. It was a shock to the system of many species that came to the city. However, on this particular night, the city was quiet, not a creature was stirring as only the breeze was felt and heard.

Darrio didn't like it. "Something's not right, it's too quiet..."

They were both startled by a bright light erupting from the Taldryan Tower. The thunderous boom could be heard echoing through Port Kasiya as the sky above transformed into a reddish hue.

"What's going on?" Violet asked.

"That's the Shieldgate," Darrio said, staring up at it. If Appius had activated it, then circumstances must have been dire. Were they under attack again? If there

was one thing Darrio hated about being discharged, it was the lack of information he now had about Taldryan happenings.

That was when a thin, fibreboard wire wrapped itself around Darrio's body. He didn't have time to ask *what the hell* before the wire tightened around him. He was dragged along the floor on his front into a pile of trash cans. They piled on top of him, covering him from view.

"Darrio!"

Violet attempted to run towards him but was halted by a heavily armored Mandalorian landing in front of her. The man wore light blue armor, with a distinct white pattern on his helmet. Violet had no idea what it was. Not that it mattered, especially when she was backhanded by the Mandalorian in question. She fell to the ground hard, and reflexively raised her hands to her face.

The Mandalorian towered above her for a moment before heading back towards his quarry. Darrio could hear the hard footsteps across the duracrete as his attacker got closer. The only thing visible of Darrio was his leg, which was sticking out from the bins in a comical fashion.

The Mandalorian attacker began to remove the pile of metal and plastic from atop Darrio, which was exactly what the latter was hoping for. Once an opening was made, Darrio shot his arms through and activated the flamethrower attached to his vambraces.

The fire erupted like an angry viper, and the light blue Mandalorian staggered back from the heat. Darrio forced himself out of the pile of trash cans just in time to see Violet get to her feet. Darrio's would-be attacker had finished swatting the embers from his undershirt to notice too.

Violet began to back away slowly. "I... I'll go get help!"

She began to sprint away in the other direction, and that was when the light-blue Mandalorian retrieved his holstered blaster. Darrio could already see what was coming.

"Violet! Look out!"

Two shots. That was all it took to end her life, and she never saw it coming. The blaster bolts collided with her spine, and she dropped to the ground, her body lifeless and unmoving.

Darrio let out a blood-curdling roar. He activated his jetpack and launched himself at his fellow Mandalorian. All he saw was red, fury and grief overtaking any rationality in his thoughts as he intended to make Violet's killer suffer a fate worse than death.

Darrio slammed the Mandalorian attacker against the wall, the latter gasping for air against the hard impact. Darrio clutched his right hand against their throat with his cybernetic hand and squeezed. With his right hand, he retrieved a circular device from his belt.

Before he could use it, Darrio keeled over, letting out a gasp of pain, followed by a high-pitched whimper. He didn't expect to be kicked in the groin.

The light-blue Mandalorian seized his opportunity and grabbed Darrio's cybernetic arm, bending it back until it snapped out of the joint. Darrio howled like his shoulder was on fire as his arm was tossed into the middle of the street, still clutching the explosive.

*"It's over. You're coming with me, scum!"*

The altered, high-pitched voice came through as they kicked Darrio in his ribs. The latter began to slowly shuffle himself away.

"Who... are you?" Darrio asked.

*"It doesn't matter who I am. It only matters what you did."*

They kicked Darrio again, and again, and again. They started to show ragged breathing, clenching their fists at their side.

"You... seem to be... enjoying this..." Darrio forced the words out of his mouth, he could feel the bruising in his ribs, and he was thankful his beskar protected him the way it did.

*"Do not speak to me. You have no right to speak to me!"*

Another kick, and Darrio was positioned in the middle of the street next to his cybernetic arm. He rolled onto his front and attempted to grab it. He succeeded, but was rewarded for his efforts with a stomp into his spine.

*"That was my brother you set ablaze. I sat with him for hours in Sundari Station watching, and waiting for him to get better. It was your fault. EVERYTHING WAS YOUR FAULT!"*

That answered the question of who, and why. Darrio grimaced under his helmet. It seemed Clan Vizsla weren't the type to forgive or forget.

*"It's a shame Korvis wants you alive. You **deserve** death, but he never said you had to be captured in one piece."*

They were so consumed with anger they failed to notice Darrio claw onto the explosive, prying it free from the grip of the durasteel. Darrio was rolled onto his front as the Vizsla Mandalorian pinned his torso to the ground.

Darrio responded by pressing the ignition on the explosive. It flashed red, and beeped loudly, grabbing the attention of the Vizslian. Darrio threw the explosive in the Vizsla members' face. The resulting boom sent both Mandalorians careening away from each other, with Darrio coming to a stop when he collided with a building.

He lay there on his side. Everything *hurt*. Beskar was an excellent protection against most things, but if he wanted to move, it couldn't cover *everything*. He looked down, and sure enough, the parts that were unprotected were ripped, cut, and bleeding profusely onto the duracrete floor.

"That was for Violet, you son of a bitch..." Darrio said as if the other Mandalorian could hear him.

It then dawned on him. Violet was gone. His best friend was *gone*. She was the first to show Darrio any kind of compassion when he was resigned to her care in Taldryan's Medical Corp. She was his, and Ellisyn's chosen babysitter for Sulla. Violet was the one they could trust most, and now she was dead because of him.

To his shock, and disdain, Darrio heard slow, metallic footsteps stagger towards him. He slowly lifted his head and forced himself to look his assailant in the eye. Half their helmet was destroyed, and Darrio stared into the brown eye, bloodshot, and full of pain and rage. To hell if Korvis wanted Darrio alive! To them, this was much more personal!

They approached Darrio and clasped their hands around his throat. Despite this, Darrio managed a smirk. If he was going down, he was going to go down spitting in their face with no fear in his eyes.

"Not beskar?" he managed to croak. This Vizslian was clearly not a higher ranked member if they didn't seem fit to grant him the greatest protection Mandalorians ever created; their beskar armor.



The Vizsla Mandalorian grabbed at a holstered vibroknife by his ankle, and raised it into the air. This was it. This was how Darrio was going to die. They were about to plunge the knife into Darrio's skull...

*Snap-hiss!*

When the most distinct sound in the galaxy was heard behind them, followed by what could only be described as the roar of a krayt dragon. The Vizsla member tensed as a green hue was visible to either side of him.

"You have five seconds to get off of my brother before I send you back to yours in a bodybag."

The Vizsla Mandalorian slowly turned his head, and sure enough, there was an emerald-bladed lightsaber being held inches from his face. The man wielding it was none other than Taldryan's Consul, the Supreme Chancellor, Appius Taldrya Wight. He was quickly flanked by members of Port Kasiya's Protection Programme, who in turn were backed by the Taldryan military. All blasters were primed and aimed at the Vizsla Mandalorian. He was vastly outnumbered.

Seemingly realising this, the Vizsla member dropped the vibroknife to the ground, stood upright, and raised their hands in the air.

"Appius... Violet..." Darrio gestured in the general area where his friend had fallen.

Appius' head moved slightly, but then dropped. Darrio understood what that meant. He couldn't sense her, and that meant...

"Retrieve the body, and inform her family," Appius said, though with regret, and a hint of malice as he tightened his grip on his weapon. "As for you, *Vizslian*, you have taken the life of not only a Taldryan Republic citizen, but a Taldryan Republic Military Officer as well. You will answer for your crime in front of the Senate."

Appius made a gesture, and several KPP officers quickly disarmed the Vizsla Mandalorian before chuffing his hands. They placed a shock collar around his neck, and dragged them away. The last thing Darrio remembered before falling unconscious was Appius kneeling beside him.

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**Taldryan Tower 70th floor**  
**Port Kasiya**  
**40 ABY**

"And that's what happened."

Appius explained the whole situation. *All* of it, and doesn't skimp on any of the details. From Teebu finding the Vizsla Mandalorian and contacting Appius, to learning the Vizslian's identity, to the shield gate emerging to trap the Vizslian inside, to the death of Violet at the hands of the Mandalorian in question. Not to mention everything that involved Darrio.

The audience for Appius' story was a fellow Mandabro, and the Consul of Clan Vizsla himself, Korvis. The blue-hued image of the Vizsla Consul remained unmoving, arms folded across the chest of his beskar armor as he listened to the whole thing.

"And where is he now?" Korvis asked.

"Currently rotting in a cell reserved for scum like him," Appius said, not bothering to hide the frustration and anger on his face. He had every damn right to be angry, and deep down, he knew Korvis knew too.

Darrio might have injured one of his men, but one of Korvis' had *killed* one of theirs, and one that was beloved throughout many in Port Kasiya.

"Good," Korvis asked.

"Good? *Good!*? Is that all you have to say!?" Appius was beyond keeping his composure at this point. "Do you have any idea what he's done!? I've got protests out in the street demanding justice for Violet!"

"Then give them what they want."

Appius paused for a moment, the implication of what Korvis said was clear. "You don't want him back?"

"He disobeyed a direct order. His target was Darrio, and Darrio alone. Anyone else was to remain unharmed. Your *Senate* can decide his punishment."

"Oh, believe me, they will, and let me tell you, Korvis, it's *not* looking good for him."

If Korvis had any visible reaction to that comment, it was well hidden behind his helmet. "Then if we are done..."

"No, we are not done," Appius interrupted. "The fact remains that a Vizsla Clan member killed a citizen and Military Officer of the Taldryan Republic. You imprisoned Darrio and placed a bounty on his head for slightly less."

Appius didn't miss Korvis digging his fingers into his armor.

"He burned a House Deathwatch guard!" Korvis responded.

"And he's still alive thanks to Kaled and me!" Appius retorted.

"I already said you could keep him and punish him as you see fit," Korvis said, frustration evident in his voice.

"And unfortunately, Korvis, that's not good enough!"

A momentary silence dawned between them. A credit could drop between them and it would have made more noise than either Mandalorian.

"Then what do you suggest?" Korvis finally asked.

Appius held up two fingers in front of him. "I have two conditions. First, Darrio is to not be hunted within Taldryan territories. I am aware of the bounty on his head, but this is a safe haven for him. If he ventures out, then he's fair game. The second condition is that if Clan Vizsla members wish to venture into the Caelus System, they are to get verbal authorisation from *me* first. I don't care what the reason is, they could be coming to wipe their own asses for all I care. They are not to be in the Caelus System without my express permission."

"And if they are?" Korvis asked.

Appius spoke in a low tone of voice. "Let's just say they won't make it back to Zsoldos."

Korvis seemed to think for a moment, his index finger tapping lightly against his forearm.

"No," he said. "I said you could keep him, and I stand by that. There's no honour in killing innocents. We're done here."

The holographic image of Korvis vanished, leaving Appius alone in his spacious, yet dimly lit office. The muffled sounds of the Port Kasiya crowds could be heard even as high up as the seventieth floor. Appius let out a sigh, at least he had *some* good news to give them. Being the Supreme Chancellor was as much a blessing as it

was a curse. Every decision had consequences, for better or worse. Appius just hoped this didn't fall into the latter.

The sliding doors to his office opened, and Appius' attention was drawn to his older brother. He looked like hell incarnate. He'd been given a new undersuit to wear, midnight blue the same as the majority of his armor, but his bloodshot eyes told of the pain he was in.

*'At least he's moving under his own strength,'* Appius thought.

"How'd it go?" Darrio asked.

"About as well as expected," Appius saw the concerned look on his brother's face. "It'll be fine. Clan Vizsla isn't going to be popular around here for a while, so this is for the best."

"You're still going through with your demands?" Darrio asked.

"Of course I am," Appius said. "Korvis doesn't get a say in the matter."

Darrio gave a small nod, then decided to change the topic. "When is the funeral?"

Appius could tell it hurt his brother to ask. The loss of Violet was still fresh.

"In a few days. She'll be getting a state funeral for her services to Port Kasiya during the Children of Mortis attack."

Darrio, again, gave a small nod. "Thank you."

That stunned Appius. He stared at Darrio with a raised brow hidden behind his helmet. It wasn't too long ago that the thought of Darrio apologising to *anyone* was damn near laughable. His friendship with Violet meant more to Darrio than Appius realised.

"You're welcome?" Appius said.

Neither brother knew what to say to the other, and Appius faked a cough. "Well, I better go tell the crowds what's happening before Port Kasiya gets wrecked."

"Why do you keep helping me?"

The question was so sudden that Appius had to stop and process it for a moment. "What do you mean?"

"You keep helping me after everything I've done, after everything I keep doing, why do you keep helping me? I even tried to kill you once."

Appius shrugged. "So do most people I meet. I apparently have a face people just want to stab with a lightsaber."

Darrio frowned. "I'm being serious."

"So am I."

Appius deadpanned him. Though, he could see the disappointed look on Darrio's face. Appius walked over to his desk in the centre of the room, which gave a perfect panoramic view of the city.

"The honest truth is I don't know," Appius said.

"You don't know?" Darrio repeated.

Appius let out a big sigh. "Yeah, I don't. You're right, you know. Most people would have given up on you, and yet, here I am, giving you chance, after chance, after chance. Ankira thinks I'm too soft on you."

Darrio scoffed. "She would."

Appius let himself chuckle and then continued. "I think I'm scared, you know? I'm scared of losing you again. Yeah, you make a lot of mistakes. Yes, you and I fight like cat and dog, but you are my *vod*. Do you remember what our father said to us before he died?"

"Look after each other," Darrio said.

This time, Appius gave a small nod. "He didn't need to tell me that. I already intended to. I'd like to say when it comes to you that I can be impartial and do my duty as a leader, but I can't. I thought I was alone. I thought I'd lost you, father, our entire Clan, and then I find out you were alive, and it broke me a bit inside that you blamed me for our Clan's destruction."

"Appi.. "

"I guess what I'm trying to say is, you're my brother. No matter what, I love you." Appius took a couple of steps towards Darrio. "But if you *ever* pull a stunt like the one you did on Sundari Station again, I'll make the bounty on your head the least of your worries. You'll be in sithspit so deep you won't be able to see the light of day. Do you understand me?"

Darrio, once again, gave a small nod, but there was a hint of a smile tugging at the corner of his mouth.

"Good," Appius said. "Now, I believe Sulla and Ellisyn will be waiting for you. I've gone ahead and let them know that you're fine and will be home soon."

"Ellisyn is gonna kill me..." Darrio lamented.

"Yep!" Appius clasped his hands together. "I know that feeling all too well."

Both brothers, for the first time in a while, shared a laugh.

"I should get going, and your people await you," Darrio said.

"Ugh, don't remind me," Appius turned to leave out onto the balcony where the holofeed would project his visage across the city. From there is where he would address the Taldryan Republic. "Well, I better get this over with. I'll see you around."

Appius left through the balcony doors, leaving Darrio alone with his thoughts. Finally, he turned to leave, but spared one last glance back towards the balcony.

"Love you too, *vod*..." Darrio whispered, before leaving Appius' office, his judgement from Ellisyn awaiting him.

**-END-**

Appius Taldrya Wight. Pin #15685