

Paci-Fist

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“Good men don’t need rules. Today is not the day to find out why I have so many.”

- The Doctor

When you get punched by a pacifist, you know you fucked up. On the surface, Darius looks like he could throw a man down a flight of stairs. He owns a battle-ready katana, dreams of fighting evil, and even enjoys a good sparring match with a trusted friend (hey, that is me!). But that fighting spirit is an illusion; it is no less a fantasy than the anime he consumes. Sure, we used to pretend to be awesome fighters in our younger days; we had even managed some great feats of strength. One of our favorite games back in the day was something we called “Clash of the Titans,” which involved going up into the California mountains, carrying the biggest logs we could lift to a location that was stupidly dangerous, and then beating each other with said logs. Just imagine two stupid teenagers swinging logs twice their size while standing on a bridge made of two telephone poles tied at the ends, forming a makeshift bridge over a raging river. Yes, we were that dumb.

Yet, despite the bulk and the swords, there lies a man who could not bring himself to harm a firefly. Much like a certain doctor who flies around space and time in a blue police box, Darius is a man who invites loved ones with open arms and a warm smile. He rarely parts his lips, for his two front teeth resemble a football goal post, something he is quite insecure about for some reason. Perhaps it is because I try to kick a field goal whenever he does. It does not stop the ladies from swooning, though. With those rugged cheeks and chestnut hair styled into the perfect storm, he rarely lacked company for date night.

I met Darius in the Porterville High School library during lunch. Where is Porterville? Well, there is a space between the genitals and the anus. Porterville is *that* of California. While sitting at one of the tables, a chess set spread between me and my friend Chris, Darius approached me with this calm, almost shy demeanor.

Understandable, since high schoolers can be little pricks, especially when it comes to what he wanted to ask me. So imagine my hesitation when he asked me the question that sparked our lifelong friendship: “Do you happen to play Pokémon?”

With a raised eyebrow and an expectation to yet again get harassed and mocked, I answered “Yes.”

I do not know what I expected, but I most certainly did not expect what followed. Darius straightened his posture and, in exaggerated motions, pointed his finger at me and said “I challenge you to a Pokémon battle!”

Needless to say, a Pokémon battle ensued. I whipped out my GameBoy and link cable, and our friendship was forged in the fires of glorious combat with digital cartoon animals. Pixelated ice beams and explosive eggs flashed across our little cabbage-green screens in what must have seemed like the lamest of scenes to outsiders: two nerds hunched over little beige bricks. But to us, we were in the middle of a grand coliseum with our creatures waging war on our behalf. I won the battle, and for my efforts, I reaped my prize: his friendship. (He denies it happened this way and will take that to his grave.)

While on the outside, Darius is a pleasant, cheerful, and adventurous man with whom I went on numerous daring quests in the mountains, those narrow hazel eyes hide a sadness that is reluctant to reach out. Behind the extroversion is a melancholic, tortured soul that peeks out through clamshell lids, a soul who prefers keeping the peace over throwing hands. He prefers to resolve conflict with tender words over a sharp tongue. Reserved and calm, he enjoys a good laugh in public and a soft cry in private.

I got into a fight in high school. Some small child posing as a high schooler thought it was a good idea to put his hands on me. I grew up with the code of never starting fights, only finishing them. The moment this action figure touched me, I knocked him out and made him cry to the teacher. It was the first time Darius knew me to act violently outside our sparring sessions. While he did not witness the fight, he knew me well enough by then that it must have been

justified. Still, he never glorified it; rather, he avoided mentioning it at all. Even when I went from being known as the Pokémon kid to having people call me “Pika Tyson,” he never said anything about it. It was not until that same punk demanded I meet him off school grounds for a rematch that he finally mentioned it.

“Are you really going through with this?” Darius asked.

“Nothing’s gonna happen,” I said, “and if something does, I’ll handle it.”

“Good,” he said, “because I’ll have your back if it comes to it, but I’d rather it didn’t.”

“I know, man. Don’t worry, I’ll take care of it.”

When we reached the meeting spot, I saw the loser brought a friend as backup. I had no doubt he thought the same about me, so to make a point that Darius was not there to fight, I had him wait by the road and approached the two alone. After some shit-talking and things started to get heated, Darius called out to me.

“Come on, bud. If you have any pride, you’ll walk away. Do you have any pride?”

I looked at my opponent, took a deep breath, and said “No.”

The guy stared at me for a long moment and left, apparently deciding I was not worth a second black eye. I walked back to Darius, who just gave me a long, silent look. Saying nothing, he turned and we headed for the movie theater.

That was the day I learned of Darius’ pacifism. He did not outright tell me, but he showed me in various ways. One day, while we were playing Pokémon cards in the library, some asshole walked up, slapped my cards out of my hand, and said “What’re you gonna do about it?” I stood up, but Darius intervened.

“Dude, don’t,” he said, grabbing my arm from across the table. Then he shot the guy a glare and said “Get out of here.”

“Or what?” the punk said.

“Or I’ll let him show you why everyone calls him ‘Pika Tyson’.”

The asshat’s eyes darted between me and Darius, and finally, his two brain cells met and generated the only good idea his Cro Magnon ass ever had: he walked away.

“He needs to be taught a lesson,” I said. “I could’ve taken him.”

“Just because you can doesn’t mean you should,” Darius said, sitting down and picking up his cards. “I don’t want you getting expelled. Now finish your turn.”

Strange words for someone who loved making fictional animals duke it out so much, but I could not deny his wisdom. Little did I know he would fail to heed them himself.

The town of Springville, a place where Darius lived but never called home, held the Apple Festival every October. It became a sort of tradition for us to attend the festivities and see what kind of goodies we could find. From handcrafted necklaces to gourmet tamales, the bounty from that year’s harvest numbered more than just apples. Children ran amok through hay bale jungle gyms, while farmers and craftsmen erected their stands. With the Sierra Nevada looming overhead, the stage was set for a grand, eventful day. Little did Darius or I know it would start off with a bang.

“We should check out those necklaces,” I said.

They were cheap products with premium prices, but I always ended up buying one. Darius preferred bracelets himself. We had our own specific tastes in accessories.

Darius smiled. “Last year, they had some nice beads-”

“hEy HeY-!”

CRACK!

A clown jumped out from behind the splintered Apple Festival plywood sign. A middle-aged man caked in runny make-up, I have no doubt he was just trying to make a couple of teenagers laugh. Instead, his painted smile met meaty knuckles. His red rubber nose flew past my face. The clown flopped cartoonishly onto the road, arms and legs splayed about. The crimson grin had a new sheen spreading across it. For a split second, time froze, and I thought the street would soon be decorated with a brand new chalk outline.

Then time snapped back into place. The idiotic clown flailed about like a crab on its back, trying to find his footing. He dug his heels in, grabbed his nose, and looked up at us like we had committed some cardinal sin.

“Why?” he asked, as if he did not already know.

Darius said nothing; he just walked away. Since no answer was provided, I looked down at the clown, pointed my finger, and scolded “You know why.”

Did I know why? Of course not. I assumed it was due to the idiot’s sudden appearance from out of *fucking nowhere*, but jump scares never yielded such a violent reaction from him before. It was not until that evening, when we sat upon the playground swings, that Darius told me he had coulrophobia (fear of clowns). He regretted that punch, even though I thought it was a perfectly reasonable response to such a colorful ambush. At the very least, it did not ruin our day. We never saw that clown again (this includes future festivals), and had a pretty good time. To cheer him up, we tortured the poor souls at The Hamburger Stand by ordering peanut butter and chocolate shakes. They hated making those things.

I never saw him act violently again after that. Even our silly little sparring sessions slowly faded out, much to my disappointment, though I am certain our bodies thanked us for it. He still loved swords and Dragon Ball Z, but his love for nature and animals emerged a lot more. Hikes, mountain climbing, and bareback river

riding became more frequent. Outwardly, he seemed so jovial. Yet, despite all our adventures, that sadness in his eyes lingered. Always reserved, he rarely talked about his personal issues, but over the years, he let some of them out, little by little.

“She gambled it all,” he told me one day.

We sat on a Springville park bench, watching fireflies blink in and out of existence. The sun sank toward the horizon; I imagined it loomed over Porterville much like the moon did for Clock Town in Majora’s Mask.

I was confused. “I didn’t know your mom even liked gambling,” I said.

“My grandmother’s inheritance... she gambled it all away. I have nothing.”

It was a somber thing to hear. His grandmother had left him a quarter-million dollars when she passed, but his mother’s gambling addiction sapped it away into oblivion. In one hand, he saw it as no change; he continued to struggle making ends meet all the same. In the other, he condemned his mother for her complete disregard for anything outside her tiny bubble. He fought it back, but I could see his world crumble just a little more. His mother, just like his father so long ago, had abandoned him.

A long-standing tradition for us that broke when I joined the Army involved venturing out to buy the newest Pokémon game the day of its release. GameBoys in hand, we marched into Target, slapped our cash on the counter, and demanded the newest games the moment the store opened. Then we found a cozy outdoor place—a park, a playground, the peak of Mount Mordor—and just played our new games. These are the memories I cherish most. They were carefree times, when we had few responsibilities, where we were old enough to enjoy freedom away from parental supervision, yet not old enough to shoulder the soul-crushing weight of adulthood. A time when we could insert ourselves into a fantasy world of quadruped harbingers of doom and psychic murder cats, and ignore reality.

I think he resented my joining the military. Maybe he will never admit it, but perhaps his pacifist nature did not like the idea of his best friend going to war. He did confess that he expected me to return in a box rather than a plane, and gave me a Yu-Gi-Oh! card when I found out I was deploying to Afghanistan. “The Warrior Returning Alive” the card was called, featuring a battered armor-clad fighter returning from battle. It sounds like a cheesy gift, I know, but the symbolism was not lost on me. I kept that card in my breast pocket each day I was out there and still have it today. I keep it safe in my treasure box.

One day, shortly after I left the Army, Darius sent me a video clip. In it, I watched a lanky, yet handsome man in a bowtie confront a spaceship with a giant eyeball and claim to be the Earth’s doctor. It did not mean anything to me at the time, I must confess, but Darius said “Isn’t that the most epic scene ever??”

“Sure, that’s pretty cool,” I said, not knowing what I just watched.

“You should check out Doctor Who,” he said. “It’s an awesome show!”

So I pulled up Netflix and watched the first episode, thoroughly confused because the lanky bowtied man was nowhere to be seen. Yet, the leather-clad man presented to me had an edgy humorous personality that I vibed with. As I consumed episodes, it dawned on me why Darius liked the show so much: he was the Doctor. So much of what I saw in the Doctor, I saw in Darius. Fighting enemies with words and wit rather than fists and guns, while looking oh so cool seems on point for him. But the Doctor, like Darius, hid an anger that burned within the pits of his soul, an anger that crept out once in a while. Though it was on a much lesser scale, I liken Darius’ clown punch to the Doctor’s war incarnation. It was something he did that was so out of his nature, he regretted it with his entire being. But I have no doubt it was the culmination of every struggle he kept buried deep inside lashing out in a very human way.

Darius is a father now. Parenthood has only made him a

better man. He still carries his demons, and though he has shared some with me, I know there are many more he keeps locked up. His tender parenting with his daughter shows he refuses to pass those demons on to her. His kind, compassionate, pacifist self shines a light upon his little girl's life. Though she may not see it now, her father fights the shadows that loom over him. He may seem kind and gentle, but I have personally witnessed the anger he buries deep inside. Is he a pacifist? I say he is, but even pacifists have a breaking point. I pray to God we never see his.

"We're all stories in the end. Just make it a good one."

- The Doctor