

PIHTT TANCURA:

THE FACE OF
FEAR



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PIHTT TANCURA

THE FACE OF

FEAR

AN SWE ORIGINAL SHORT-STORY

SWE TIMELINE

EARLY AGES



— THE FORGOTTEN ONE:
A TEST OF BLOOD

THE HIGH REPUBLIC



— PIHTT TANCURA: THE FACE OF FEAR*

THE GREAT DISASTER —

— THE FORGOTTEN ONE:
INQUISITION OF THE HEART

AGE OF REPUBLIC

THE PHANTOM MENACE —



ATTACK OF THE CLONES
THE CLONE WARS —
REVENGE OF THE SITH

— THE FORGOTTEN ONE:
A PADAWAN'S GOODBYE

AGE OF REBELLION

SOLO —
ROGUE ONE
A NEW HOPE



— **REBELS**

EMPIRE STRIKES BACK —
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THE DAY THE SKY
TURNED GREEN

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THE LAST JEDI
THE RISE OF SKYWALKER

— THE FORGOTTEN ONE:
RECOLLECTION

CHAPTER ONE: THE TEMPLE

Today was the day! Pihtt Tancura was finally going to take the Jedi Trials. He had been practicing for this very day ever since he was a youngling. Despite all his preparation, he had very little idea what to actually expect; at this point in time he was headed to the temple's hangar, where he would meet his Jedi Master, Rhee Soldarum, before departing for the trial.

Pihtt made his way down the halls of the Jedi Temple on Coruscant. It was early. No, it was too early, but Pihtt was so stressed about the day ahead that he couldn't entertain the idea of arriving the slightest bit late, or even on-time for that matter. He had with him a packed bag hunched over his left shoulder. It was full with anything and everything he would need, and even some stuff he definitely wouldn't.

On his journey to the hangar, he saw many familiar faces. His friend Jeko Raq who nodded welcomingly and presented Pihtt with a crude and totally inappropriate hand gesture that made him chuckle. Master Stellan Gios and his padawan Vernestra Rwoh. He didn't know Padawan Rwoh too well; however he had overheard that she too would be embarking on the trials soon. She was about five years younger than Pihtt, it was rare that padawans were able to take the trials this early in their Jedi path, and if they did it was unheard of that they actually passed them. Master Gios must have had a lot of faith in her, something that Pihtt felt he was missing out on with his master.

Pihtt turned a corner, and there he was waiting. Jedi Master Rhee Soldarum. He was an Abednedo, a grumpy and scarred Abednedo at that. It was clear from his features and the way he carried himself that he had certainly lived a life. Pihtt was never sure quite how old he was, but he was not young, not by a long shot.

"Your great trial awaits you, my young padawan" said Master Soldarum with a smile.

"You really think I'm ready, Master?" Pihtt Tancura questioned.

The two had not always been the strongest pairing, in fact there were many times Pihtt considered requesting for a new master to train him. They had never quite found that connection that the majority of Master and Apprentice relationships had; he always felt that Master Soldarum never truly believed in him. Over time they managed to establish some form of a connection, overall Pihtt respected him as a Jedi, but as a teacher? Not so much.

"I believe that you are ready to be put to the test, yes. Whether you pass or not is another matter," replied Rhee.

"Thanks for the vote of confidence master." Pihtt uttered sarcastically.

"In the many years I have trained you Pihtt, you have rarely been short of confidence."

"That's the closest to a 'good luck' I'm going to get isn't it," he retorted

"There is no such thing as luck, you should know that padawan."

Pihtt loved being right, but in this instance not so much. Was just a little bit of reassurance too much to ask for? Was it impossible for his master to show the slightest bit of pride on behalf of his padawan?

"I do know Master," sighed Pihtt.

Master Soldarum was a stickler for the rules. He never wavered, never once slipped off the Jedi path. He was desperate to be the embodiment of a perfect Jedi. Desperate to be a member of the great Jedi Council. Pihtt didn't much care for that; he was much more about

helping people and doing what he felt was right, and sometimes that meant bending the rules. Much to Rhee Soldarum's dismay.

"What troubles you Padawan?" asked Rhee.

"Nothing," Pihtt replied, bluntly.

"Very well, you may proceed. I will reconvene with you after."

"You're not coming with me?" Pihtt questioned, his face concerned.

"Waiiiit!" A young Jedi screams, running down the Temple hallway towards Pihtt and Rhee.

"Padawan Elio Adfel will be joining you. You will take the trial together."

Pihtt was not expecting this at all, but he wasn't

completely surprised. The two padawans had both grown up in the temple together and Elio was due to take the trials before his master's unfortunate and untimely passing. He had wanted to offer his condolences to him but was unsure how to do so, Elio could be difficult to talk to and even harder to read emotionally. Instead Pihtt decided to keep his distance and to give Elio the space he needed. Pihtt had not seen him since before his master's death, but he was happy to be in his company once more.

Elio caught up to the pair, catching his breath. Pihtt was well acquainted with the young man, there was something about him that Pihtt found so... tantalizing. Pihtt was always very friendly with all the padawans of his age, but Elio is the one he really wanted to be friends with. It was important to him, for reasons he didn't quite understand, something about being in his company just made him feel good.

“Sorry I'm late Master Soldarum,” exclaimed Elio, still catching his breath.

“Not at all Elio. We couldn’t have left without you.”

Pihtt would be lying if he said that didn't irk him, but he showed no visual signs of annoyance. If it had been him who was late, he would never have heard the end of it.

“Hey Pihtt!” exclaimed Elio.

“Hi Elio,” Pihtt said back, a strong but brief smile ignited on his face.

Elio finally caught his breath. He must have run quite some distance as Jedi were renowned for their superior fitness and Elio always excelled in physical training. Pihtt admired his athleticism, he was no slouch but it's the one area he thought he could improve the most. Perhaps now Elio could help him to improve, or perhaps he just wanted to watch him workout-

Pihtt gently tapped the side of his head, as if to wipe the thought from his mind.

Both Rhee and Elio looked up at him, concerned. He rarely had thoughts like this, but they were occurring more and more recently. Jedi were forbidden from forming romantic attraction to others, but Pihtt didn't consider his thoughts about Elio to be classed as attraction, at least he didn't think he did. He knew it was wrong of him as a Jedi to harbour such visions, but it was beyond his control. Normally he would confront his master over such concerns, but knowing Master Soldarum, he thought better to keep this to himself for now.

“Right. Let's get this ship moving,” uttered Rhee, getting the situation back on track.

“Aren't you going to debrief us first?” Pihtt questioned.

“If I were to tell you what to expect, it wouldn't be much of a trial. Your objective will become clear upon your arrival.”

Both Pihtt and Elio made their way up the shuttle's boarding ramp. Once on board they turned back to face Master Soldarum.

"Trust in the force," he reminded the two young men. They nodded back to him in return.

The boarding ramp hissed and steamed, kicking into motion. Folding its way shut, separating Master and Apprentice for what could very possibly be the last time.

"I guess it's just the two of us now. Are you excited?" Elio asked.

"For the trials? I'm somewhere between excited and anxious, sure," Pihtt murmured.

The shuttle roared into action, lifting up from the ground and swiftly gliding out of the temple's hangar into the busy skies of Coruscant. Pihtt always loved to gaze out at the planet's skyline.

He would often watch the ships and transports zooming around the city as the sunset; it was relaxing to him, an escape. He would imagine just how different his life could be if he weren't a Jedi, but also it reminded him why he was a Jedi. These were the people he was working for. Not the Council, not the Republic, but the citizen's of the galaxy. All of this was for them.

Elio sat next to him. The two stared out the window as the shuttle climbed higher and the buildings got smaller, savouring the spectacle of it all. Who knows when or even *if* they would see this view again.

“So, where do you think we're going?” asked Elio.

“Where we need to be, with any luck.” replied Pihtt with a wry smile.

Elio let out a small but sincere laugh, at least Pihtt hoped it was sincere. He was starting to get the sense that Elio was troubled by something.

The windows illuminated with a light blue glow, the engines whirled and suddenly jumped. They were in hyperspace. Pihtt didn't know where they were going and he didn't know how long it would take to get there, but at least he knew had a friend, or so he hoped.

CHAPTER TWO: THE SHUTTLE

The ship jolted suddenly, startling the two padawans. They had exited hyperspace and arrived at their destination, either that or they had been forced out of lightspeed. Pihtt scoffed at the idea, ‘like that could ever happen’ he thought to himself. They hurried across to the ship's viewport for their first clue to their mission and anything that might decipher where they were or what they would be doing here. Out of the window they saw a whole system of planets, the closest planet and subsequently the one they were heading towards, was somewhere between grey and silver and surrounded by a halo of asteroids. They also noticed that they were approaching the planet with significant speed. No! Alarming speed!

“Who’s flying this thing?!” demanded Elio

Warning lights and alarms flared, indicating for all passengers to brace for impact. The duo ran to the spacecraft's cockpit to investigate, however when they arrived they found nobody there. Both seats were empty.

“This can’t be good,” they said in unison.

“Oh no,” came a sarcastic sounding voice from behind them, “The pilot has fallen unconscious and it looks as though the ship is going to crash...” The woman took a sip of her drink before continuing. “...whatever shall we do.”

Her hair was as orange as the Coruscant sunset, and just as wide. It was a good thing that she wasn’t required to wear a flight helmet, as there was no conceivable she would be able to fit her bright, frizzy locks of hair into a head protector. Both Pihtt and Elio glared at her with blank and confused expressions on their faces. She rolled her eyes and signalled her free hand to the ship's navigation controls. Elio’s eyes opened wider, realizing what was happening he jumped into the pilot’s seat.

"Oh wait," Pihtt thought, "This is part of the trial isn't it-"

"Pihtt! Be my co-pilot!" Elio asked loudly.

"On it!" Pihtt said, fully catching on.

He leapt into the co-pilots chair opposite Elio and began to study and navigate the ship's controls. Pihtt could handle a stressful situation, mostly because he had a way of making most situations stressful for himself. If it wasn't for the obscure way in which the situation was unravelling, he very well may have been the one to jump into action first, before Elio. This was no competition, however he couldn't shake the fact that he was now losing. Elio would be knighted and Pihtt would have to remain a padawan; even worse, he would remain Master Soldarum's padawan. That depressing thought somehow managed to bolster his confidence.

"The hull's taking some damage were burning up, you'll need to pull up some more," he warned.

“How much more?” Elio shouted back nervously.

Pihtt checked one of the gauges above him. “...15 degrees, and bring her a little to the left,” he commanded.

Elio pulled back hard on the ship's central navigation stick.

“I said 15, not 50!” Pihtt hollered, grasping at his seat to keep himself in place.

Elio shifted it in the opposite direction and raised his chin so that he could look to the gauge above Pihtt's head, and kept pushing it until the arrow was centred. The warning alarms stopped, but the Jedi were not done yet. The ship was entering the atmosphere much slower now but not slow enough.

“Do you want to crash?” asked the pilot. “It kinda looks like you want to crash.”

“How much more?” Elio shouted back nervously.

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“Do you want to crash?” asked the pilot. “It kinda looks like you want to crash.”

She was so quiet throughout all this that Pihtt had forgotten she was even there. Elio lowered the throttle and the ship was reduced to a much more acceptable speed. They were flying casual now, all that was left to do was straighten up and land the shuttle, ideally without breaking anything.

“So where am I landing this thing?” Elio asked, his head looking over his shoulder to the pilot.

“Thing?! This thing is my ship, show her a little respect eh? Besides, I can't help you, I'm too busy being unconscious. Remember?” the pilot responded with a smirk.

“I'll scan the planet, see if there's anywhere or anything that stands out,” Pihtt uttered, trying to get a hold of the situation. He pressed some more buttons and switched his attention to the ship's central computer. “Well that was easy enough, I guess we've found our landing zone,” he declared.

“What makes you so sure?” Elio responded.

“It’s the only electronic reading on the whole planet. A Republic Operations Post, an old one at that.”

Elio checked the signatures coordinates and adjusted the ship's flightpath, drifting the ship into a tight turn. They were now on the correct course, it would be plain sky-sailing from here on out. They could take a moment to breathe as the ship made its way to the Republic outpost. Pihtt glanced over at Elio, who looked lost. The expression on his face was as if he were riddled with nerves. It took a few seconds for him to even notice that Pihtt was watching him, he looked across to glance back at him. Pihtt’s face lit up and he gleamed a small but heartfelt smile on his face, he couldn't help it. Something about seeing Elio this way made Pihtt want to cheer him up, he just wasn't sure how. Elio smiled back, but it was more the kind of smile that said ‘I know what you're trying to do but you can’t cheer me up, but thanks for trying’. How Pihtt could tell that from Elio’s simple

expression alone was beyond him; perhaps it was the force, or something more.

The ship pulled up on the Republic outpost and the two padawans brought it in to land, planting it softly on the designated landing pad. Compared to the rest of their time flying, the landing was an absolute breeze. Pihtt truly believed in Elio's abilities, but he was also surprised at just how well he managed to land the ship, it was no easy feat.

“Well, that certainly could have been a lot worse, however I will have to deduct points for hull damage and neglecting to get medical attention for the paralyzed pilot,” the pilot chimed in, optimistically.

“You're crazy! Maybe if you actually acted paralyzed we wouldn't have neglected that part!” argued Elio.

“I'm crazy? You're the one arguing with an unconscious person” she replied, followed by a brief pause, and then

manic laughter. Pihtt and Elio glanced at each other. Pilots were often a crazy, wild bunch, but this lady was something else. She hunched over and grasped her hands to her thighs. The laughter came to a close and she took a deep sigh to compose herself, she readjusted her posture to stand up straight and face the two young men. “Relax, you boys did just fine, a little dramatic maybe but that’s what flying is all about.”

“So you're not going to mark us down?” questioned Pihtt.

“I’m not marking you at all. Once we head back to Coruscant I’ll pass a performance evaluation to the Jedi, as well as a maintenance review of my ship.” She answered.

“So...” Elio chimed in, “...does the unconscious pilot have a name.” His trademark smirk had returned to his face. She laughed again, it wasn’t as manic but it was still unsettling.

“Jeeji Lintra ” she finally answered, “Anyways, if I know Jedi, and I’ll be honest, I really don't. You two must have a lot of work to do, so I guess I’ll be seeing you later.”

The Jedi bowed to thank Jeeji and proceeded to leave the cockpit. Before he left Pihtt turned back to face the pilot who was now sitting in the pilots seat, adjusting various buttons and levers as well as her chair that Elio must have at some point managed to conform to accommodate his long legs.

“May the force be with you, and uh, thank you for the interesting landing,” Pihtt lauded with a cheeky grin.

Jeeji swivelled the chair just enough to face him. “Well thank you for not blowing up my ship! Good luck out there kid,” she replied. Pihtt nodded with a smile, and left her to be alone with her ship.

CHAPTER THREE: THE OUTPOST

Pihtt and Elio made their way down the ship's boarding ramp and onto the outpost's landing pad. They could not be more relieved to be back on solid ground, the stress was almost enough to put Pihtt off of piloting altogether. Almost. Elio stood still for a moment and took in a deep breath.

“Here’s hoping that whatever comes our way next is less stressful,” said Pihtt.

Elio scoffed. “I don’t like our chances, but it’s not like we have much of a choice other than to keep going onward.”

The two of them walked side by side down the walkway that connected the landing pad to the outpost's main structure.

“Well, if you want to quit and go back now, I’m sure it will improve my chances of being knighted,” Pihtt joked.

Elio gave him a mildly-hard punch to the shoulder, enough to make Pihtt’s feet stumble. He turned his head away from Elio pretending to admire the planet’s grey, granite scenery so that he could hide the immense amount of blood that had rushed to his now rosy red cheeks, as well as the sly grin on his face. They continued walking and arrived at the rear entrance of the facility, the door creaked open. The building was falling apart and neglected, indicating to Pihtt that this was not the safest planet for them to be stationed on.

A robotic voice came from the darkness that was engulfing the inside of the base. “Pihtt Tancura and Elio Adfel. I have been expecting you.” The copper droid stepped into the sunlight, he looked familiar to the both of them. “Why, I’ve not seen either of you boys since you were curious little younglings,” he continued.

“Huyang?!” Both Pihtt and Elio responded, with genuine shock.

“I thought you were permanently restrained to that old Paladin-class corvette,” Pihtt probed.

“Goodness me. The very notion of the idea, I am much more than just The Crucible’s resident architect droid.” Like most droids of his model, he was never one to let you forget just how important he was; however, unlike most droids of his model he really was important, more important than both Elio and Pihtt even. Huyang was a vital asset to the Jedi order and had led generations of Jedi to Ilum to help them to craft their lightsabers.

“So Huyang, what are we doing on this...” Elio lifted his hand and signalled it out to the rocky terrain. “...well. This rock.”

Huyang held out a holo-disk and a fuzzy, blue image appeared. “This is Abbalyum, a rare mineral that is found

only here on the Graphite Moon of Scalale.”

“And why exactly do the Jedi want this... *Abbalyum?*”
Pihtt questioned.

“It’s a substance that can be used in a collection of different lightsaber hilts, that is why *I* am the one here. *You* are here because it is *your* primary objective to find and retrieve samples of the material,” he briefed them sternly.

“Sounds simple enough,” Elio smirked.

“Padawan Adfel, still over-confident as ever I see. I can assure you this mission will not be an easy one,” Huyang asserted; he was now cycling through biometric scans of various life forms and organisms on his holo-disk, as well as basic information regarding the geography of the graphite moon. “Most of the life on the Scalale moon wants nothing more than to eat, kill or poison you, be especially wary of these.” The vision of a simple but eerie

looking creature appeared on the display. “They will drive you mad with fear. Avoid them!” The droid could not have been more adamant.

Pihtt stared at the projection of the ominous looking being. Its archaic appearance alone was enough to unsettle him. “What are they?” he asked nervously.

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“They have no official species name on record, however most Jedi and explorers who travel here use the term Soul Reapers or The Shudder.” Those names did not help to quell Pihtt’s anxieties. Elio looked over at his Jedi companion and read the look on his face.

“Nothing we can’t handle,” he said, nudging Pihtt and knocking him out of his trance.

“If I had organic visual receptors, let me assure you I would be rolling them,” Huyang joked in his standard dry tone. “You might be needing this, it will show you where to find the Abbalyum.” The droid presented another of his 4 arms, offering a new holo-disk. They both looked at it, then Elio gave Pihtt a signal with eyes that seemed to say ‘You had better take it’, he assumed because of how together and collected he was compared to Elio, who was much more aloof, something he often envied. Pihtt took the holo-disk from Huyang’s cold, metal hand and proceeded to place it in his bag.

“Well, the sooner we get out of here, the sooner we will be back,” Pihtt murmured, with a hint of unease in his voice.

“While that hypothesis may ring true, I would encourage you not to rush this mission. Take caution wherever and whenever possible,” Huyang urged the young Jedi, escorting them to the Republic outpost’s main entrance. “Now, before you go do not forget to patch into the open

comms channel between this base and Jeeji on the ship, we will await your return here.”

The two of them adjusted their communication devices to the correct frequency; Elio patched through first but only by a couple of seconds. The large mechanical door churned open and the sunlight hit them once more. They stepped forward, and continued walking...

CHAPTER FOUR: THE SHUDDER

The padawans had been venturing for hours, they had overcome many challenges together and had made sure to leave an open trail behind them so that their journey back would be easier than their journey there. On their way to this point they had battled all manner of hostile creatures, from Ronbats to Phillaks. These encounters had left Pihtt with a variety of cuts and bruises, but they wouldn't stop him or even hold him back. His body was wounded, but his determination was not. Whenever the journey became difficult, he would simply dream about what he would accomplish by the end of it: Knighthood. He would finally be able to be his own Jedi, he would be free from Master Soldarum.

The Graphite Moon was formed like a labyrinth of craggy, uneven chasms, caves, and canyons, making it

distract Pihtt from the allure of Elio's chiseled and defined features. The way that the sunlight reflected on his tan skin, the glimmer in his emerald green eyes. Pihtt never really felt too bad about noticing just how handsome Elio was, after all it rarely stopped anyone else who knew him, but Pihtt would never make reference of Elio's attractiveness to anyone. He worried that somebody might think less of him, someone like Master Soldarum, and so he kept his wandering thoughts in check as best he could, however recently he felt his control over his emotions -no, his attractions- were slipping.

He pulled his focus from Elio as though to stop his mind from meandering and instead shifted his glare out across the Scalale horizon. This however did not help to clear his head, his thoughts still dwelled on his friend. Anxieties coursed through his mind and his heart raced. That is when he heard it, the bone chilling, deep and husky groan... The Shudder!

Pihtt's body felt as if it were frozen in place. He could not

move, although he would like nothing more than to run.

He saw one of them, a Soul Reaper, standing across from him on a cliff in the distance. It was so far away and yet it seemingly had complete control over Pihtt. Elio was lucky, he was looking in another direction and had not spotted the ominous being. Pihtt could understand why those that had encountered these monsters before him had coined the term ‘The Shudder’. Not only did they send a cold shiver down your spine, and through your very core, but the way that they stood was unnatural to say the least. They gave the impression that they were shifting in and out of the planes of reality, like they were stuck between one reality and the next. They must have had some connection to the force, that was the only way to explain their supernatural and psychic complexion, as well as their immense power. The noise in Pihtt’s head was morphing into voices that he could understand, and they were speaking to him.

“You are afraid that you will fail,” The voices said.

“I am afraid that I will fail,” Pihtt repeated aloud, in a vacant tone. Elio looked across to him with a look of concern. “I am afraid that I will disappoint the Jedi Order,” Pihtt continued.

“Are you kidding? You are one of the best Jedi I know, that includes Master Yoda and Avar Kriss!” Elio charmed, trying to comfort his friend. Pihtt was still stuck in a daze, he took a broad step forward, towards The Shudder, towards the cliff edge! Elio pounced forward and grabbed Pihtt by the arm. That is when he noticed that Pihtt’s once blue eyes had turned as grey as the moon’s terrain.

“I am afraid that I will violate the code,” Pihtt murmured, following the Soul Reaper’s call. Elio attempted to hold him back and restrain him.

“Pihtt, stop this!” Elio demanded with a sound of genuine fear in his voice. He stepped in front of the Pihtt, attempting to detain him and push him away from the

looming precipice but Pihtt's possessed body would not stop trying. Thankfully Elio was able to hold his friend still, blocking Pihtt's view of the Soul Reaper. With their gaze broken, The Shudder's grip on Pihtt was slipping, but not gone. "Listen to me. Please!" Elio's voice was breaking through the audible darkness, Pihtt could hear him amongst the voices, though only slightly.

"I am afraid that I may harbour feelings..." Pihtt outed, still pushing forward. Elio swiped his leg under Tancura's and knocked him onto his back. Pihtt laid there whimpering, "feelings f-for E..." he whimpered. Elio knelt by his friend's side, shaking him to and fro, attempting to convulse The Shudder's curse from him. Pihtt kept mumbling but Elio was too frightened to even properly register what he was saying.

The grey circles began to retreat from Pihtt's irises and he was starting to become aware of his surroundings. Pihtt laid there shaken but conscious, his eyes wet with tears and clammy with sweat from his golden hair to his chin.

He wiped his face as best he could, though he was still shaking uncontrollably. Elio checked him quickly to see if there was any sign of physical injury though thankfully from what he could tell it was only Pihtt's mind that was affected by the Soul Reaper's attack. Even from that vast distance between mountain tops, The Shudder had sensed the fear in Pihtt's soul and had begun to feed on it. Elio was lucky to avoid the Soul Reaper's gaze for now, however now that they had the scent of dread they would be back to feast on them once more.

“Let's get you out of here” Elio said softly, helping Pihtt up to his feet. Elio held Pihtt's arm over his shoulder and acted as a crutch for his ailing companion. They hobbled together side by side.

The orange sunset was fading and transitioning into a violet, starry night. The Jedi had managed to escape their grim encounter with The Shudder; they needed to find a place in which they could properly recover, and if at all possible, sleep. Pihtt reached into his overstuffed

backpack and pulled out the holo-disk that Master Huyang had gifted them. He activated it and began to scan their location in search for a natural hideaway to lay low for a while. The geometric scan revealed a large cave network not far from here that they could use. He packed the device back into his bag and the duo journeyed to the cavern. Pihtt was feeling slightly better now, though the effects of The Shudder's invasion of his soul had yet to fully alleviate.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE CAVE

Their journey to the cave was a short one but tiring nonetheless, after all they had been through they wanted more than to rest. They had yet to find any sample of the much desired Abbalyum mineral but they had to be close, with any luck their quest would soon be nearing its end. They were able to form a makeshift camp with what little materials and natural resources they had at their disposal, it was nothing special but enough for what they needed. They crafted a small fire to keep them warm and allow them to see their surroundings within the cave, as well as the two sleeping areas which, despite their best efforts, were barely comfortable. The handmade beds were laid parallel to each other, separated by the burning campfire.

Elio had offered to go out and hunt for something that they could both eat, however Pihtt declined the generous

offer. Of all the creatures they had encountered on their journey so far none of them exactly screamed ‘fine cuisine’, or even acceptable cuisine for that matter. Instead, Pihtt reached into the pouch of his backpack and pulled out an emergency rations pack that he subsequently shared with Elio. There was not much and it was mostly tasteless, but it would help them to energize and recover. Pihtt insisted on sharing the rations equally, whereas Elio figured that Pihtt would require more than he did, not only that but it was Pihtt who had the foresight to pack the food in the first place. They finished eating and sat on either side of the fire, reminiscing of the challenges they had overcome together, most notably their encounter with The Shudder.

“How are you feeling?” asked Elio.

“Better now, though still sorta... fuzzy.”

“Do you remember anything?” Elio inquired, leaning in to listen.

“Just moments really, like visions...” he spoke. “I remember not being able to see anything but a smokey blur, shimmering like liquid rock. It all started with a deafening moan, and then I heard the voices.”

“And they asked you what you're afraid of?”

“No...” Pihtt replied “...they didn't ask me. They told me! That thing looked into my soul and it read my mind!”

Elio could tell he was growing uncomfortable, and so he was going to attempt to change the conversation, before he could however Pihtt simply said, “I’m sorry.” Elio was confused, and in his confusion, more concerned.

“Those things are clearly dangerous, and I wasn't gonna leave you there, no need to be sorry,” Elio comforted, but Pihtt shook his head.

“No, not that. I wanted to say I’m sorry for not being there more when your master...” Pihtt stopped, trying to find a way to finish the sentence, but he couldn’t bring

himself to say it.

“It’s ok, I’m not gonna pretend that it was easy to get over, she meant a lot to me. But she’s one with the Force now,” Elio responded. Pihtt had never seen Elio this low before, it was rare to see him without a smile or a smirk on his face. He wasn’t entirely sure why he thought to bring this up now, it wasn’t his intention to upset Elio. It was something that had been weighing on his mind for a while now, ever since he learned of his master's death some weeks prior, why hadn’t he gone to comfort his friend? The mood in the cave was a somber one, it felt like now was the right time to confront him about it.

“Well, if you ever need anything, know that I will be there for you” Pihtt promised. Elio nodded in return.

“I know.” The conversation shifted to quiet for a moment, neither one of them knew what to say, but the silence was painful. Pihtt’s mind was abuzz with thought, mostly thinking about what Elio could have been thinking. Then

suddenly, “Can I ask you something?” Elio questioned.

“Of course,” Pihtt responded.

“What are your thoughts on love?” Elio asked. Pihtt was as anxious as he had ever been. Why was he asking this? Why now? What did it mean? He searched his mind for the right words to say, but his mouth stumbled, he decided to instead answer with another question.

“Why do you ask?” he countered, attempting to keep a neutral face, “What are your thoughts?”. It was immediately after saying this that Pihtt regretted it, he sounded far too confrontational, too angry. Thankfully Elio didn't seem to read into it.

“I think I felt something for someone once. It is only natural after all, but as Jedi we must overcome it. My master taught me to suppress my feelings. Now thanks to her teachings I know I will never be tempted again, the concept of love and attraction no longer holds any allure

to me.”

Pihtt’s heart crumbled. All this time he was convinced that the way he felt about Elio wasn’t love, and yet this revelation destroyed him anyway. Part of him wondered if that someone that Elio mentioned was him, not that it would matter. His lip quivered, his emotionless face slipping, he attempted to hide it as he digested Elio’s confession.

“Well then I must say that I feel the same as you. Love is not for Jedi!” Pihtt subconsciously lied. A moment of silence passed as Elio’s mind churned, looking for a response.

“You sure that's how you feel?” Elio probed.

Pihtt was unaware what to make of that response, it sounded to him that Elio knew more than he was letting on, but maybe that was his anxieties getting the better of him. But what exactly did Elio know, and what was he

trying to get at? He tried to stay relaxed, but his nerves were beginning to get the better of him.

“I am. What makes you think I wouldn't be?” Pihtt inquired in return. This stand-off of words was much more arduous and painful than any lightsaber duel he had ever taken part in.

“It's just... when you were attacked by that Soul Reaper, the fears in your head, they weren't just in your head... You said them out loud. I heard everything, Pihtt,” Elio confessed begrudgingly.

Pihtt's mind became ablaze with an overwhelming amount of thoughts, each one of a varying emotion. He did not know how to react and he did not know what he should say. One thought amongst what felt like thousands stood out to him: ‘Why didn't he say sooner’. It seemed that he deliberately made a point of trying to catch Pihtt in a trap, to get him to admit something he did not want to, or was not ready to admit. He felt angry, upset, sick,

but most of all betrayed. He expected this kind of mind game from his master, but not his friend.

“Well, as you say, it’s only natural after all. But like you, those thoughts are behind me now,” Pihtt lied again.

“In which case, I’m sorry I doubted you,” Elio responded somberly.

That stung, after all Pihtt was beginning to realise that Elio was right to doubt him, from a certain point of view at least.

“It’s okay...” Pihtt said, after all what damage could one more lie do? “...If you don’t mind, I’m going to attempt some rest.” Elio nodded and before he could reply Pihtt rearranged his position in his bed to lie down, facing away from Elio as much as he could.

“Rest easy,” Elio said before extinguishing the fire. The cave went as dark as it was silent.

CHAPTER SIX: THE BEAST

Pihtt awoke to the sound of a loud, echoing roar. He opened his eyes but could see nothing, the cave was still dark: another clue that something was gravely amiss. He reached for his lightsaber hilt and ignited it as he jumped to his feet, the light blue blade lit up the cave. The first thing he noticed was that Elio's bed was empty. He heard the roar again, followed by a whimpering scream. Pihtt ran as fast as he could through the dark cave network. If Scalale was a maze, then this cave was a maze within a maze. He tried his best to follow the sound growling and stamping, he kept on running and turned a corner. Suddenly he could sense the beast straight in front of him. He raised his saber up, lighting the area in a hue of azure blue, sure enough there it was! Its hulking, blemished back faced him. But where was Elio?

The lumbering creature had not yet noticed that Pihtt was there, or perhaps it had chosen to ignore him. Suddenly the beast flung its arm around in the air, releasing Elio from the grip of its oversized hand. Elio screamed and his body collided with the cave wall, he slid down the wall and his body crashed on the floor, but he did not get up. Without any hesitation Pihtt shouted out in terror.

“Elio!” He cried as he ran across to his companion's limp and motionless body. Now the beast had noticed him, but Pihtt was too focused on helping Elio to take that into account. Thankfully, Elio was still breathing, but fresh blood dripped from fresh wounds and he was littered with bruises. He needed medical attention and fast. So long as Pihtt could get him to camp, he should be able to at least patch up a few wounds and stabilize his condition, if only for a little while.

He was scared for his friend's life, but he wouldn't have the time to process that feeling just yet. The creature roared at him and without hesitation Pihtt prepared to

attack. He lifted his blade and turned to the beast, running straight for its left side to slash at what he assumed would be its ribs. Its skin was thick, so thick that Pihtt's lightsaber barely did any damage. He slashed again, this time closer to the monster's hip, its skin seemed less protected there, but not enough. The beast whipped its tail around, sending Pihtt flying through the air. He adjusted his position and was able to recover himself, he planted his feet against the cave wall that his back was rapidly approaching, and used the momentum he had gained to push back against it, launching him forwards to the beast at incredible speed. He adjusted his weapon in his sullen grip, ready for another strike. That was the first time he had noticed the animal's face, it took him by surprise, which in turn caused his attack to falter. He managed to get a slight hit in on its hide but was sent tumbling across the cold, hard floor.

His body ached but he needed to get up. Pihtt pushed up with the palms of his aching hands and stood up on his feet once more. He looked over to check on Elio, who

was still not moving but Pihtt could sense that he was alive. The beast stalked towards its prey slowly, giving Pihtt a good look at its face. He recognised the grey mist in its eyes: this animal had been infected by The Shudder, just as Pihtt had been. It was more than just enraged, it was overrun with fear, he could see that now. Attacking the creature would only make it more afraid and more angry. Pihtt decided to search for a different solution and in doing so deactivated his weapon, clipping it to his belt. He closed his eyes and reached out the palm of his hand toward the creature's head. Its approach slowed, but it only stopped once Pihtt's hand gently collided with its head. The Shudder's psychic poison was far stronger here, Pihtt was only stuck in the Soul Reaper's gaze for a matter of minutes, and from a large distance at that. This beast must have been prey to The Shudder's attack for far longer and at a much closer distance.

Pihtt used a version of the mind touch that was more susceptible to non-humanoid beings to ease the fuzzy beast's mind. Instead of planting a request into the

subject's mind, Pihtt relayed a series of calming images from his own mind to relax the creature, as well as enforce the idea that it could trust him. It exhaled heavily through its wet, round nose, as if expelling all the anger and negative energy from its gargantuan body, followed by a whimpering groan. The fear was still there, but Pihtt had managed to convince the animal that he was not there to anger it. He stroked its fuzzy snout and the grey in its eyes began to fade.

“I know, I’m afraid too,” Pihtt said calmly. The beast shuffled its head, whimpering again. “I am sorry if I caused you any pain,” he continued. The animal opened its mouth, for the briefest moment he thought that it was trying to eat him, but instead it proceeded to lick him from bottom to top in one swift strike of its tongue. Pihtt grimaced, it both smelt and felt disgusting, but he couldn't help but giggle. “See, you’re not so scary are you?” The beast shifted its body deeper into the cave. Pihtt watched the animal as it escaped, proud of himself for not giving into his rage and potentially slaughtering an innocent

creature. “Elio!” he spoke to himself, and ran across to check on his unconscious cohort. Pihtt brushed the hair away from Elio’s closed eyes, revealing a large cut on his forehead. He found Elio’s lightsaber hilt just across from his body and he attached it to his own belt for safe keeping. Pihtt hoisted his friend into his arms, and made his way back to the camp.

Once he had arrived back at their makeshift encampment, he took a moment to wash and bandage Elio’s wound as best he could. He worried for his friend but he had to stay strong. He decided he should call Huyang and Jeeji to make them aware of what had transpired, so that they could make any necessary preparations for their return to the ship. He opened the comm channel and to his surprise it was Jeeji who answered first.

“Heya, Pihtt, how’s things?” she asked optimistically.

“Not well I’m afraid. Jeeji, we’re going to need an emergency evacuation if possible,” Pihtt responded,

though he secretly did not air much hope.

“No can do, Kiddo, now I am one heck of a pilot, but other than right here on this platform, I cant put this down anywhere. The terrain simply won't allow it. What's happened?” Jeeji asked, much less optimistic this time. Huyang joined her in the ship's cockpit.

“It's Elio. He was attacked by a possessed creature, and by my limited medical knowledge I have determined his condition is near critical.”

“I'll make some room for him, you just get down here in one piece. I wish I could do more, but it looks like this is up to you alone. Sorry, kid,” Jeeji said solemnly.

Huyang took this chance to interject. “And what of the Abbalyum samples?” Despite possessing a personality, Huyang had a very robotic way of cutting to the chase.

“Unfortunately I have been unable to retrieve any. It is

unlikely I will be able to find any on my return. For now it will have to wait,” Pihtt responded with confidence.

“You are willing to forfeit your trial?” Huyang inquired.

“I am.”

“Very well, I shall inform the council of the developments. We await your return.” Huyang left the call, seemingly to immediately contact the Jedi.

“You’ve got good instincts Pihtt, I’m sure you’ll be back in no time. Stay safe okay?” Jeeji interjected.

“Thank you Jeeji. I will do my best.” He said, forcing a faint smile. The call dropped and he was left alone again.

He lifted Elio up and carried him out of the cave. The looming presence of the red planet ‘Scalale Prime’ hung in the starry, indigo sky. Outside of the cave Pihtt found

an old friend: the beast he bonded with was waiting outside for him. It approached him slowly and bent its front legs down, seemingly signalling for Pihtt to climb up onto its back. He obliged and carried his friend up and laid him down on the fluffy creature's large back. Pihtt then sat at the base of the animal's neck, his legs around either side. He scratched the behinds of its droopy ears and the lumbering animal set off across the granite moon.

CHAPTER SEVEN: THE RETURN

For the first time since leaving the Jedi temple the following day, Pihtt was left with time alone to process his thoughts. It felt like so much had happened in the last few hours but he had barely had any time to sit and take it all in. He perched on the beast's back, watching over Elio's unconscious body, and let his mind simmer. He could only have had a couple hours of sleep maximum, if not minutes. He would attempt to sleep right now but he was far too determined to get back to the ship, and even if he did try it was highly unlikely he would be able to achieve sleep, it would have to wait. He put his hands to his face and rubbed his eyes in an attempt to keep him focused, he kept them there for a moment and then swiped them down to his chin. He was mentally and physically drained and yet he persisted. 'That is what Jedi do', he thought to himself, 'they persevere'.

Suddenly, Elio coughed and sputtered, he was coming around! Pihtt rambled across to his aid, Elio's eyes twinkled as they tried to open. Pihtt knelt at his side and gently restrained him, if Elio moved his body too much or in the wrong position, he ran the risk of injuring himself even more. "Pihtt?" the wounded young man cried out.

"I'm here Elio. Don't worry, we're heading home. You'll be ok." Though Pihtt couldn't exactly promise that, he needed to force himself to think positively.

"The trials. You'll fail,." Elio groaned, struggling then to even get the words out of his mouth.

"I would rather be a padawan that saves lives, than a knight who endangers them," Pihtt simply responded.

"The Shudder?" Elio coughed.

"I've been thinking about that, I think I have a plan."

“You think?” Elio chimed, it sounded more like he was talking in his sleep than actually talking to Pihtt.

“Well, it’s better than no plan at all,” Pihtt assured him. He did not reply, instead Elio had faded from consciousness once again, but still holding on. Pihtt gently slipped away and climbed over the beast, sitting behind its neck again. It continued on its journey, wandering the craggy surface on all fours. Pihtt was grateful that the beast had come to his aid, if it weren’t for his new friend, he doubted he would ever make it back to the ship. He still doubted they would make it at all, but the odds of them getting through this whole endeavour were much higher thanks to the animal’s assistance.

The creature came to a slow halt, but Pihtt knew they were not yet at their destination, however he gathered that this would be their stop. The beast whimpered and lowered its head to look at the ground: it was afraid, The Shudder must be close! Pihtt collected Elio and climbed off of the beast’s hide, he lugged Elio over his own broad

shoulder as carefully as he could. With his free hand, Pihtt ruffled the creature's neck as a thank you. It pressed its snout up against him, and then it left him, escaping in the direction they had just journeyed from. It was time for Pihtt to put his plan into motion.

He reached into his trusty backpack and retrieved a short roll of bandages; he had used most of them on Elio, but he made sure to save enough just in case this very situation occurred. He placed his companion's body gently on the floor for a moment, and reeled out what was left of the bandages, wrapping them around his eyes. Pihtt figured that it was the Soul Reaper's gaze itself that poisoned the minds of their prey, if he was blinded they would not have any effect over him, he couldn't be sure but he did have to try. He would instead rely on his connection to the force to guide him on this path. He placed Elio's body over his shoulder again, drew a deep breath and took his first blind, but not visionless step.

The return was slower than he would have liked, but he

was not an expert at using the Force to see what his eyes could not. One wrong step and he could send the two of them cascading over a cliffedge, it required all the focus he had to keep them on a safe path.

It did not take long for The Shudder to find him, he could hear an unclear amount of Soul Reapers around him. Thankfully his plan was working, with his gaze blocked they could not control him, but they could distract him. He reached for his weapon and ignited its icy coloured blade, slowly swinging it in his proximity in an attempt to keep the hunters at bay. It was working: though he could sense their dark presence near him they were unable to get too close, however a few had tried. They kept pushing him and Pihtt was growing increasingly nervous. What was worse is he wasn't entirely sure what the creatures looked like. Though he was stuck in one's gaze before, it was at such a distance that Pihtt could only make out a rough silhouette of the being.

Soul Reapers had grown in numbers and hostility, they

were brushing past him now, making him stumble on his path. He tried his best to concentrate on his breathing and on his movement, but his fear of The Shudder had caused him to falter. He missed a step and stumbled, causing him to fall to the ground. He lost his grip of Elio and of the Force, he was completely blind now.

“NO!” he screamed. He rose to his feet and with his now free hand, he took Elio’s lightsaber from his belt and ignited it alongside his own. Dual wielding the blue and gold weapons he swung frantically around him, sending the Soul Reapers into a short retreat, but not for long. They waited for Pihtt’s attacks to slow before making their own barrage, and sure enough they did. Pihtt was able to get a few hits in on his targets but they overwhelmed him, pushing and pulling him in varying places. His eyes were clenched shut, they had been since he placed the blindfold over them, what he hadn't noticed however was that the bandage had slipped free following his collapse to the floor. One of the Soul Reapers gave him a hard shove, forcing his firmly sealed eyes open.

The sun had begun to rise, and Pihtt was overwhelmed by the light, everything was fuzzy and he did not want to keep his eyes open, but alas he did not have a choice. For the briefest moment he saw the blurry vision of a silhouette standing some feet away from him, standing before the ascending sun. Within mere seconds, his eyes clouded grey once more and he was lost to The Shudder's gaze. He dropped both lightsabers, and the voices started to speak to him again, exposing the secrets of his own mind. He stepped towards the being.

“You are afraid that you will perish here,” the voices in his head spoke.

“I am afraid that I will perish here,” Pihtt responded vacantly. He took a step forward, his eyelids flickering struggling to stay open but also fighting to close shut. Pihtt had a flicker of consciousness over himself. Unlike his previous encounter he was now aware that he was being controlled. He could hear his own expression among the voices and cries of The Shudder, though it was

quiet. His body took another long step towards the silhouetted creature.

“You are afraid that you are not a perfect Jedi,” they spoke again.

“I am afraid that I am not a perfect Jedi... but I don’t have to be.” Pihtt fought back against his fear and against The Shudder. His body however took another step closer. Though he could not himself see past the cloudy grey mist blocking his vision, the rising light of the sun was starting to wear on his mortal eyes.

“You are afraid of your feelings and connections to people.” The voices grew louder.

“I am afraid of my feelings and connections to people... but I can deny them no longer.” Pihtt’s consciousness grew stronger, but his body was harder to reclaim, his eyelids continued to flinch as he planted another step forward. Pihtt was slowly growing more control over his

body but he could still not see anything though the grey mist of his eyes. The nerves through his body surged as if pulsing with new energy.

“You are afraid of me.”

“I am afraid...” Pihtt said. The rising light of the sun had become too much, and though he did not know it, this light gave him the edge to finally clench his eyelids shut. He could feel the mist evaporating, and the voices faded. He reached his arms back and with the Force, pulled the two lightsabers back into the grasp of his hands, igniting them both. He plunged them forward but was surprised to feel no impact. He took a second, but he felt nothing around him, so he decided that he would risk opening his eyes, so that he might know what was happening. He was not prepared for what he saw before him. “...of...me?”

The vision of Pihtt’s own form stood in front of him. It would be an exact mirror of himself, if not for the gleaming smile on the doppelganger's face. Pihtt looked

on in confusion for a moment, and deactivated his weapons. The duplicate's smile did not break, instead it stood before him beaming down at him.

“What are you?” Pihtt asked. The vision did not speak, instead it kept smiling and took a step towards him, it reached its arms out and wrapped them around him, embracing the confused young Jedi. He couldn't feel it physically but something inside his mind or his heart clicked for him. The doppelganger evaporated into dust and blew past him, scattering and dancing in the wind. He stood there for a moment trying to process what had just unfolded, until interrupted by his comm device beeping. It was Jeeji and Huyang.

“Pihtt! Just wanted to check in on how you're doing?” Jeeji asked him. Pihtt took a second to form his reply.

“I'm... doing good.”

“That's good news, you had us worried,” Huyang

expressed, surprising Pihtt; it wasn't like him to get emotional.

“I won't be long, the hard part is behind me now,” Pihtt advised.

“Look forward to seeing you kid,” Jeeji rejoiced. He smiled back and dipped his head. The call ended and Pihtt clipped the lightsabers to his belt, wiped the sweat from his forehead and made his way to Elio's body. Picking him up carefully, he placed him over his shoulder for what he hoped would be the final time.

He proceeded on his path with his fear diminished, but not gone, and the sun rising behind him.

CHAPTER EIGHT: THE JEDI

“By the right of the Council, by the will of the Force, I name thee Pihtt Tancura, Jedi Knight of the Republic!”

The ceremony was glorious. Though the Jedi were not one to make a spectacle, Pihtt could not deny there was something so magical about the occasion. He saw many faces he recognised that day, more than just the Jedi Council themselves that knighted him, but many of his Jedi companions and inspirations he had known throughout the years. Despite Pihtt achieving exactly what he had set out to do, something inside his mind still pulled at him. The trial he was knighted for was not the one he had set out on, he had failed on the mission that he was given and yet was knighted anyway. He couldn't help but feel as if he had cheated in some way. Though he accepted his knighthood, he still questioned whether or

not he had actually earned it. He raised this concern with a Jedi that had taught him much, and who he respected deeply: Master Jora Malli, who was in attendance with her padawan Reath Silas. She told him that the council determined that he had passed the trials because in the face of fear and uncertainty, he listened to his instincts and took the selfless path, choosing to save another at the cost of his own wants and desires.

As the after ceremony celebrations were winding down Pihtt's now former Master, Rhee Soldarum, took him aside. "Congratulations on your knighthood, my apprentice."

"Thank you Master. It was certainly a challenge but I am grateful that the council has deemed me worthy of knighthood." Pihtt braced himself. Whenever Soldarum expressed anything remotely nice to Pihtt, he knew that he would likely follow it up with something more demeaning or negative.

"It is worth noting however, that despite the council's decision. The mission you were tasked with was still a failure," Soldarum imparted firmly. Pihtt had to practically restrain himself from rolling his eyes.

"Yes. I did fail. But it is our failures in life that distinguish who we are, and I must say... you are a very distinguished man Master Soldarum," Pihtt blurted, surging with a new found confidence. Rhee was taken aback and unsure how he should respond to Pihtt's retort.

"I... I just mean to say that even as a Knight there will always be more to learn." Rhee stuttered.

"I look forward to it," Pihtt said, looking at his old teacher with an almost smug smile.

"Speaking of learning, I would like you to officially meet my new student?" Soldarum stated. He reached his hand out to a cluster of young Jedi who were standing around gossiping not far from them. "Padawan, come here." He

requested. Pihtt was mildly shocked to hear that Soldarum had already enlisted a new apprentice, it was rare that a Jedi would immediately take on a new padawan, but not unheard of. Pihtt was more shocked to see the face of the young man who hobbled through the crowd, it was Elio! Pihtt had not seen Elio conscious since their mission to the Granite Moon. He had been to visit him in the Jedi Temple's med-bay just once since their arrival to see how he was doing as well as to return his saber to him. He had hoped Elio was awake when he ventured to the med-bay, but part of him was relieved that he was resting when he was there. He wanted to say something to him but he was not sure what, he was still trying to understand how he felt about him.

“Elio, how are you?” Pihtt asked.

“I am doing better now, thanks to you.” Elio dipped his head in gratitude.

“I'm glad,” Pihtt responded, followed by an

uncomfortable silence, made even less comfortable by Soldarum's looming presence. He registered the hint.

“I shall leave you both to it.” Soldarum uttered, followed by his slow departure.

Pihtt spoke first. “I am sorry you were not knighted as well, I spoke to Master Yoda and...” Before Pihtt could finish, Elio interrupted.

“Pihtt. It's okay, You carried me through that trial way before I was knocked out by that monster. I never expected to be knighted, I am just grateful that you saved me,” Elio confessed.

“You would have done the same for me,” Pihtt reassured him.

“Look, about all that Shudder and feelings stuff. If you ever need anyone to talk to...” Elio flipped his palms up and out towards Pihtt. As if to say ‘You can talk to me’

without actually having to say it.

“Thanks for the offer, but I'm good. I've come to terms with it,” Pihtt responded. The two wrapped up their conversation and went their separate ways.

His feelings had always scared and confused him, and though he knew now that he harboured feelings for Elio, they had now diminished. Pihtt knew this would not be the end of his journey of the heart however, he knew now that Elio was not the first boy that he had feelings for, and he doubted they would be the last. One day he would meet someone else, someone that would capture his heart again and maybe this time the young Jedi would be willing to embrace these feelings, to embrace what it means to love another. It still worried him nonetheless, the fear stuck with him just faded. The Jedi were forbidden attachments, if he were to form a connection with another, Pihtt would have to make a difficult decision, to follow the Jedi or follow his heart.

THE END

THE FACE OF
FEAR

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