

And Then There Were None:
The Tragedy of Darth Panda the Pantsless

“Did you ever hear the tragedy of Darth Howie the Pantsless?” gurgled the Dread Lord of Plagueis, well into her second bottle of Whyren’s.

Admiral Cyvaria Ranin rolled her eyes. It had been over an hour since Captain Owen Serrus and she had retreated to Ronovi Tavisae’s personal quarters on the *Ascendancy*, drinking and smoking cigarras. There was a decent lull in the conflict near the *Nesolat* platform, and so what better way to celebrate than shirking official duties for a rendezvous with the big boss? Therefore, it was inevitable that the only-so-booze-tolerant Epicanthix would start telling stories. If Ranin were a betting woman, she would hazard a guess that at least ninety-nine point nine nine nine nine percent of said stories were completely made up. And of course, they always started the same way.

“No, my Lord,” the Admiral sneered. “I don’t believe I have.”

Ronovi hiccuped and waggled a finger at the woman. “I thought not. It’s not a story the Jedi would tell you.”

“Does she always do that?” asked Serrus bemusedly.

“Yes,” grunted Ranin. “Yes, she does.”

“It started,” Ronovi began, “over twenty years ago. Darth Howie resided in the great city of Coruscant. He was strong, brave, and very, very into bamboo. But he also wore the finest of pants. Slacks. Breeches. Pantaloons. Even shorts from time to time. And they all had one thing in common.”

“A point, unlike this saga?” teased Ranin.

“You’re lucky you’re cute, Cyvy,” slurred Ronovi, “or I would Force tase you. *Anyway*. They had *pockets*. *Loads* of them. Big pockets, li’l pockets. Pockets with zippers, pockets with buttons, pockets with velcro. Pockets in the front, pockets in the back.”

“Were the big pockets in the back?” chortled Serrus, winking lewdly.

“Shut up, Owen. The point is, Darth Howie could store *everythin*’ in those pockets. He could even stick bottles of ale in there if he so chose. The Admiral knew how to turn himself into a walkin’ storage unit. It was beautiful, I tell ya. *Beautiful*.”

Ronovi leaned back in her heavily cushioned chair, dousing her tongue with more whiskey. She belched and proceeded in her tale of woe.

“Then, one day, Darth Howie was called to a special meeting and banquet with the Imperial Remnant. He was to be the guest of honor. And what a party it was! Loads of rich foods, music, dancin’ - some bumpin’ an’ grindin’, iyanowhaahmsayin’...”

“I don’t, but go on,” sighed Serrus.

The Dread Lord cleared her throat cartoonishly. “A-hem-hem-hem-*heeeeem*. Any dang way. One of Darth Howie’s comrades sat him down on the best chair at the head of the table, and he announced that the Remnant had put together a gift for the Admiral. The panda, of course, was intrigued. What could it be? The finest bottle of ale? A bottle of Corellian wine? ...More booze?”

“Clearly, you’ve got something on your mind,” grinned Ranin.

“So they *brought the present!*” bellowed Ronovi, suddenly forgetting how to control the volume of her voice. “And it was a simple gift, not even wrapped up the nicest. But Darth Howie didn’t mind. It was the thought that counted, right? Well, obviously, the thought had shat the bed that night, ‘cause when he opened the gift, he lifted out...a brand new spankin’ pair of shiny black pants.”

“Okay, so more pants,” said Serrus. “What was the problem?”

“The *problem?!?*” roared Ronovi; clearly, she was acting offended on behalf of this panda character.

“The *problem* was that the pants *had. No. Pockets! None at all!* How could Darth Howie *possibly* wear these? *How* could he carry around his booze? Store his lightsaber? Sneak off with the remaining Bahmat steak and Trammistan chocolate ice cream?!”

“The ice cream would melt.”

“*That doesn’t matter!* What *mattered* was that the present was a prank. A *sham*. They bequeathed this monstrosity to Darth Howie to *mock* him. And oh, was he *mocked*. The members of the banquet laughed and laughed. ‘Darth Howie without pockets!’ they jeered. ‘What is the poor beast to *do?*’”

“So what happened next?” asked Ranin, ashamed that she actually wanted to hear the conclusion now.

In reply, Ronovi seemed to finally calm down. She exhaled, drank more whiskey, burped some more, and finally, chuckled. “I mean, he did what he had to: He murdered everybody at the party, stole all their pants, and burned the things on a funeral pyre a la Darth Vader.”

For the first time in a while, an awkward silence lingered among the three of them. Serrus became heavily focused on his cigar and Shesharilian vodka. Ranin took a long, cumbersome sip of water because she was a boring teetotaler. And Ronovi, waiting for a reaction, grinned like an idiot.

“Well? Hell of a story, don’t you think?”

“*That’s* why he doesn’t wear pants?” laughed Ranin.

“Um...duh!” snickered Ronovi. “He vowed not to be tricked by them tricky trousers ever again. That, and pants chafe his divine thighs of thunder. And we don’t want that.”

“So...is there a moral here, or...?”

Ronovi stood up, albeit wobbly, and loomed over the Ascendant Admiral.

“The moral of the story is,” she boomed, “a pants without pockets is worse than a panda without a *soul*.”

Then she drained her bottle of whiskey, collapsed back into her chair, and promptly fell asleep.

“Should we tuck her in?” Serrus asked.

“No,” said Ranin.

“Does she snore?”

“Oh, yeah.”

Serrus blinked. “How do you know?”

“Why did you ask?”

They silently came to the same conclusion as Ronovi [boarded the train to Sleepy Time Junction](#).