**Planet Kiast, “The Village”**

**Home of Battle Team Zirael**

**34ABY**

The halls were as busy as most days, although there was an air of expedience that was almost palpable. Xolarin was on his way towards the forest area nearby The Village – after some further research on Seer Circles over the last few weeks, he had prepared a bag and was going to spend a couple days meditating and see what came to him through his connection with the Force. But alas, the Force had other plans for him this day.

“Xolarin,” came a voice followed by a hand grabbing his shoulder. “They need you, too.” It was Dael, a fellow Acolyte in Zirael.

“For what,” Xolarin asked with a bit of an annoyed tone.

Dael just kept pulling Xolarin and the two ended up down a hall and in a briefing room. The hologram of Vanguard Turel Sorenn had just flickered on towards the front of the room. The two of them shuffled in-line with the rest of the Battle Team.

“Greetings, Jedi.” Turel spoke eloquently and with a rightful confidence when he wanted to. “As you may be aware, we are running a camp for some of our younglings – a summer camp of sorts. The students should be arriving at each of your locations later today. That said, given the recent goings-on with the Brotherhood and the Kiast and Solyiat systems, we are short on instructors. All of you – and I mean all of you – are being assigned a group of younglings to teach and mentor this week. You will be paired up and assigned a bit of curriculum to cover during their stay.

“The details will be included in the dossiers you are all receiving, and any questions can be directed towards your Quaestors, Aediles, or Battle Team Leaders. This a unique opportunity for most of you, so take advantage of it. And as always, may the Force be with you.” The hologram flickered out and datapads began to be passed out.

*“That was quick and dirty,”* thought Xolarin. *“Not like my Master to give orders like that.”*

Dael handed Xolarin the last of the pads in the stack and looked over at his friend. “Hey, you and I got paired up, Xol.”

Xolarin chortled. It was good news, but it was almost too convenient. The two were both good at sensing in the Force, seeing things before they happened, and using that to their abilities. And yet, as he glanced down the list, none of the younglings listed had a lick of decent perception or sensory skills in their assessments and practicals. These were all martial arts experts. “What the…”

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“Alright, let’s get it together, folks.” Xolarin spoke moderately softly, but still with a hint of confidence and sternness. “Quiet down and listen, please.” The younglings actually listened. Someone taught them some decent respect and about the chain of command, perhaps.

Dael then spoke up. “Ok, now that you’ve settled in and had a good meal, we’re going to try something different. The forest around us is the perfect environment for meditation, focus, and bonding.” Xolarin and Dael had planned it so he would get his camping trip after all. “We will venture out this evening, stay overnight, and return tomorrow.”

“You will learn and bolster survival skills,” continued Xolarin, a bit more outspoken now, “a respect for nature, and insights into meditative practices.” He was very clear and concise on their goals.

“And hopefully you'll have some fun,” added Dael, with a grin. A couple of the younglings chuckled. “But first, let us go over…” Dael reached up a smacked his neck as an insect found the younger man’s skin. “Uh, let’s go over the basics of what we will…” Dael reached up and smacked another one.

And that was when Xolarin felt the prickly touch of mosquitos on his own neck. None of the younglings seemed to be afflicted so he smacked a few. *“A cluster must have flown through,”* he postured to himself.

“Ok,” said Dael finally, now clear of the bugs. “Anyways, let’s talk about—“ this time he was interrupted by a small pebble of some sort. He looked up and around, and then another hit him right in the forehead. “Hey, what the…!”

There were a few chuckles from the younglings, and Xolarin began to wonder. He reached out with his senses and felt a spike in the Force from a couple of the boys. And as he looked down at their waists, he saw their fingers moving. A couple of kinetics were having some fun, it would seem, but Xolarin could play that game, too. For him, it was a rather simple task to reach out and gather up the energy in the Force again, extend his right hand, and send out a blast of light movement. Pebbles, sand, some lighter objects on the ground, and even a couple younglings were moved out from an arc from Xolarin’s position.

The Jedi looked out at the kids and scanned them, landing his eyes on the two that he had felt before, and then looking around again. “Enough,” he said sternly and with a finality. The younglings, as well as Dael, looked on at Xolarin, showing a bit of solemn respect for the Jedi. Perhaps they learned their lesson this time.

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**Forest of Kiast**

**Later that night**

“Stay together now,” instructed Dael as he led the group through the woods. They had traveled for several hours and the sun was going down. The forest grew darker with every step. Xolarin followed behind them all and made sure with a visual and mental check that all of them were accounted for.

"Ok, Dael," said Xolarin from the rear. "This should do. Let’s setup camp here on this ridge. You all have gear, so let’s get going. We have an exercise to get to before we turn in.” Xolarin slumped down as he lay down his pack, tired from the day – not the trek, but their company and having to keep his guard up. And this was not your typical guard duty, but actually being quite mindful of the safety of these children.

The evening went on quite well, with everyone participating and being well-behaved during their meditation exercise. Xolarin could even a feel a few of them growing in their focus in the Force, and he and Dael had consulted each other on that fact. “See, they’re not so bad, Xol,” said Dael, with a slap of his hand on Xolarin’s chest. “I’ll see you in the morning.”

Xolarin turned in after that, although he did not rest all that well, waking up every hour or more. Perhaps it was the children nearby, or the natural dangers of the forest, or something else. But he was distracted. And then it was obvious to him around midnight – something was wrong, and the feeling was strong.

The Jedi exited his tent and found Dael’s and shook him gently. “Dael, wake up. Something’s wrong.” He continued on to the other tents and the campfire, which was now out – it had been put out by water, not by natural fizzle. And some of the tents, nay all of them, were empty. An anxiety like nothing before suddenly leapt into Xolarin’s heart and stomach.

Dael had been checking other tents and looked over at Xol from across the way. “They’re all gone!”

Xolarin nodded and closed his eyes, trying to bring calm and focus. Dael followed his lead and they connected in a way, as they often did during their training. It only took a few seconds before they got a sense of where everyone was. “Let’s go,” said Xolarin.

The two Jedi bound out towards the direction they had sensed, just down the ridge from where they were camped. It was the middle of the night, although the moon glowed down low, glistening through the trees. The weather was all but perfect which helped a bit. But the situation was nonetheless harrowing. “Over here,” said Dael in a louder whisper. Xolarin heard it too, as the sound of footsteps walking slowly through the woods came closer to them.

The two stood still and waited for it to get closer. Dael jumped out suddenly and lit up a lantern. “Hah, gotcha!”

“What’re you doing, Acolyte!” It was Ranger Corvus, followed by two padawans. “What are you guys doing out here?” He looked over at Xolarin as well.

“Sorry, master,” said Dael admittedly.

"Our younglings seemed to have left our camp, master.” Xolarin bowed his head slightly, joining the group. “We were on their scent until you showed up.”

Corvus nodded. “It would seem my friends here,” he said with a motion of his hand to the two padawans with him, “have had the same misfortune with their troop. Their group had come this way as well.”

Xolarin squinted his eyes in his normal fashion when he was on to something. “I think we have some…”

Xolarin was cut off by noises in the woods. The noises were footsteps. The younglings? More instructors with lost students? Creatures in the night? Whatever it was it became obvious that they were surrounded all around, all five of them. Xolarin avoided grabbing his saber hilt, although he could sense his comrades had felt the same anxiety.

As the noises grew a bit loud and closer, there was a loud snap, like a branch stepped on or perhaps intentionally broken, and then everything grew quiet. Even the crickets and frogs and other creatures of the night were silent. And then there it was, the surging noise of a lightsaber and the sparkling yellow light of a training saber blade. And then another across the way, and another. Soon there were a couple dozen yellow blades lighting up in a circle surrounding the instructors.

Corvus smiled, understanding fully what was happening, although his pupils took a bit longer to understand. “Good one,” he said plainly.

Xolarin sighed, his tension waning quickly, replaced with anger and frustration. If one looked closely, behind each lightsaber blade was one of the younglings – half from Xolarin and Dael’s class and half from the two padawans.

"May the Force be with you, masters,” said one of the boys, chuckles following from most of the others, their lightsabers wiggling a bit from the laughter.

The older male Xolarin did not take it as well as the Ranger. He merely shook his head and walked off into the forest, back towards their camp, leaving the cleanup to Dael and the others.

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*“And in conclusion, these are some of the most insolent and immature Jedi potentials I’ve seen during my entire stay on Kiast in Zirael.”* There was a definite sense of frustration in Xolarin’s hologram recording. *“However, they are also very talented and dedicated. And they are but children. With some maturity and some guidance from the Clan, these could be excellent Jedi. Constant shenanigans aside, they performed exceedingly well and went beyond my expectations. I just hope they don’t attempt to dupe their instructors every day at the next camp. Acolyte Xolarin out.”*

Xolarin closed out the hologram and encapsulated it into the datachip. Dael happened to walk by. “Hey, did you get your report in yet?”

“Just finished,” replied Xolarin.

“You know that wasn’t so bad, Xol. Not every day you get to see to the growth of our younglings.” Dael was an optimist, that was for sure.

“Not every day you get to make them clean up toilets and grease pits in the hangar for every stunt they pulled.” Xolarin grinned, knowing that even though it was a pain for the younglings, they enjoyed every minute of their camp, including their punishments. And secretly so did Xolarin.