**A Short Camping Trip**

34 ABY

Kiast

Kiast System

Mauro’s eyes were bloodshot and his brow was damp with droplets of sweat. He sat slouched over in his sea languishing over the final sips of café. The early morning summons from Commander Archenksova had been sobering enough to get the Human out of rack but it could not diminish his fatigue. The trip back from establishing contacts in the Core Region had been long and tedious. The security precautions and secrecy required to get back into the Viteli Empire’s space was wasteful and costly it seemed to Mauro Wynter.

Business aside, the fact remained that the mercenary was not truly comfortable in his new organization and had his mind elsewhere. Despite these concerns, the Quaestor of Satele Shan was not to be taken lightly, and here Mauro sat prior to dawn awaiting his charge. Being a guide and maintaining accountability of several potential Force sensitive youths and promising adventurers was a task seemingly below Mauro’s abilities.

Rising from his chair and shaking the stiffness from his limbs, he strode as best he could from the dining hall and down the long corridors of the Satele Shan barracks complex. He paused to punch a few keys on his comm link and began to receive a partial dossier of the potential recruits that he would be guiding for the day. “A worthless lot” Wynter said aloud.

Continuing onward past reinforced blast doors Mauro stepped into the cold morning atmosphere of Kiast. The binary stars of the system could just barely be seen emerging on the horizon. “Too damn early by a wide margin.” Making a final instinctual check, Mauro felt the weight of his slug thrower hanging tightly from his shoulder down to his armpit in its holster and heard the slight clanking of a small bandoleer of explosives pinned to his concealed tactical vest under his cloak. Wynter smiled, hoping perhaps he could teach some tactics today. He continued talking to the air to clear his head, “no, better I show them some tricks to bypass a security system or jack into secured data.”

He straddled the body of his speeder bike and thumbed the power switch to life and eyed the throttle. Tucking his cloak smartly behind him, the speeder bike began a low hum as a short forward thrust rattled the engine block. As a creature of punctuality and decorum, Wynter knew his tardiness at this seasonal retreat would not go unnoticed and took off with all speed for the recreational training compound a few kilometers away. The sparse terrestrial landscape and its determined beauty held no sway in Mauro’s mind today, just the begrudging task at hand.

Arriving to the recreations compound Mauro’s eyes looked at his comm link and saw that the marshaling area for his guests was nearby. Walking purposefully and conveying as cold of an expression as he could the mercenary took in the sight of his motley band of assigned campers. Few took notice at first, but more and more came on line and began to form up. “Some military background then?” asked Wynter to himself as he neared the group. Roughly half had the sense to stand at ease or at attention while several others continued in hurried conversations or in posturing nonchalance. Smirking to himself, Mauro shifted slightly and released a flash-bang grenade into the palm of his cloaked right hand. He let the grenade drop to the rocky ground below him and kicked it slightly, ensuring it would roll ten meters or so before closing his eyes pulling the hood of his cloak over his head.

The searing noise and eruptive light radiated outward in the blast radius. Those who had been paying attention had time to scurry about and take cover, the unlucky ones did not and were either sheltering their faces in their hands or covering their ears, some bleeding from ruptured eardrums. Mauro stepped forward and smiled, “those of you who are incapacitated need not continue. The rest of you who are unscathed come with me.”