

Marike was tired - and overheated and stinging in several places that she never would have believed a training 'bot could land a shot upon. That last humiliated her somewhat, but she ignored it. During her past four years association with the Jedi Academy, she had become quite skilled at ignoring humiliation, real and perceived. Instead, she focused upon three – she believed it was three – training 'bots that hovered in the cold, dimly lit gymnasium.

Marike believed in challenging herself, although the selfish part of her mind grumbled at not only having to get up in the middle of the night, but also having to work out in a freezing room clad in only her nightclothes. Fortunately, she had also become facile at ignoring her selfish impulses. *Progress is more important than comfort*, she reminded herself sternly.

The door slid open behind her. Marike diverted her attention just long enough to sense that a very confused Pavel O'Connor was peering into the room. That moment was also just long enough for a hoverbot to duck under the guard of her lightsaber and unleash a stinging bolt at her stomach. Marike flinched and stifled a curse.

*Relax, Marike*, she thought. *Finish this, and then you can explain to Pavel*. Breathing deeply, she cleared her mind and returned to her task. She had to see past *all* distractions - the darkness, the cold *and* unexpected spectators.

Pavel leaned against the doorframe, curious but not wanting to disturb the scenario. The purpose of combating three hoverbots in an extreme setting was quite obvious – although the reason for the exercise's timing eluded him. Pavel had to admit that he would have remained unaware of the situation if he hadn't suffered a disturbing dream earlier and heeded an urge to check on the students in his care.

Pushing aside his curiosity, Pavel settled down to watch Marike. *I may as well evaluate this exercise*, he decided, shivering slightly in the chilly room.

Marike had already shoved any self-consciousness aside. Pavel's presence was just another distraction to be ignored. Two minutes concentrated exertion dispatched the three hoverbots, with no further indignities. But Marike still frowned as she turned the lights up to more normal levels, and brought the heat back online.

"Not satisfied?" Pavel asked mildly.

Marike shook her head as she put the hoverbots away. "No," she replied simply, shrugging on a spare robe in the equipment closet. "It took too long. *I* took too long," she shrugged. "I couldn't wake up quickly enough." Her tone was bland, barely critical.

Pavel regarded Marike carefully, "And emergencies don't always occur when one is awake and feeling fully rested, is that it?"

Marike smiled slightly. She suspected that Pavel would see right to the heart of her actions. "Precisely. I've programmed a variety of scenarios into the computer, and randomized the timing." She fetched a glass of water and sat down on a convenient bulkhead. "The exercises range from fairly simple – such as sensing who is on the ship at a given moment – to this." She waved a hand to indicate the scene Pavel had just witnessed. "All in all, I prefer the simpler exercises." She smiled wryly, rubbing at a bruise.

Pavel hovered between irritation and satisfaction. On the one hand, it was good to see a student take initiative in their training. But such exercises could leave Marike in less than peak shape the next day and none of them could predict what crises each day could bring. Now, if they were at the Academy, if the galaxy was at peace...

*If... if...* Pavel shrugged off the thought. *If wishes were ships, beggars would fly*.

"I'm glad to see you take the initiative," he chose his words carefully. "But given current circumstances, I don't want you to push yourself too hard."

Marike stiffened. “Given the circumstances, I thought it would be best that I ensure my readiness for dealing with unexpected situations.”

Pavel suppressed a sigh and smiled slightly, throwing Marike off balance. “Your enthusiasm is commendable, but it is one of my responsibilities to keep you from overexertion.” He remembered some comments made by Marike during previous group sessions and suddenly understood the reason behind Marike’s ambition. “You mustn’t set too high a standard for yourself,” he warned.

Marike’s expression softened as Pavel’s point went home. Of course, he had seen to the heart of her unspoken issues – her ongoing doubt about her abilities, her sense that she just wasn’t as good as her fellow students, yet. “Coruscant wasn’t built in a day, hm?”

“Precisely,” he nodded. “Although I wouldn’t mind a set of your plans.”

Marike blinked in surprise. “A teacher is often hard put to challenge students,” Pavel admitted. “Maybe you’ve got some ideas that this tired old Jedi can appropriate?”

At that, Marike had to laugh. “Alright, I’ll send the program to you when I get back to my quarters.” She gathered up the last of her things, preparing to do just that.

“Thank you. And one more thing?” Marike paused in her progress towards the door. “From now on, have your computer notify me when you’re doing this nocturnal exercises. I don’t want to wake up to the sense of you in combat, and assume the worst.” *Which is why I ran down here in the middle of the night*, he didn’t add.

Marike looked confused for a moment, then nodded her assent as she realized the implication.

“That’s all. Goodnight, Padawan.”

Marike suppressed a smile. She still wasn’t quite used to being addressed with that term. Furthermore, she couldn’t quite tell if her teacher was making some private joke. “Goodnight, Pavel.”