

Machines

Hamburg in the shadows

Von Alaiya

IV – Support

With a sigh Pakhet looked at the clock on her comlink. It was already after 3am. Great. She had to get involved with those fools, eh? She cursed her own curiosity, while she once again sat in the cargo area of the truck.

At least they had gotten the explosives cleaned out and newly ID'd. And she had gotten to drink a few soycaf, thanks to which she felt at least somewhat alive. Still she could not help but looking forward to get over with this run. All she wanted right now was a shower, her bed and real coffee. Maybe not in that order, but still: Those three things took priority right now.

Accordingly she was rather glad when the truck finally stopped and the motor was turned off. "Finally", she muttered, while getting up and opening the ramp.

They were back in Harburg where they had agreed to meet Herr Schmidt again. And of course she had to get the Jack Rabbit back before she could go home.

Thankfully either Dacart or chrome-head had remembered to park a block away from the save-house again. Pakhet got the explosives, which were wrapped in thin plastic foil right now and could not help but give a relieved sigh.

"Let's get this over with." She jumped down onto the cracked asphalt.

Heidenstein landed beside her. "You seem to be utterly keen on getting rid of us."

"You think?", she replied.

The doc did not say anything, while they waited for Baramesus and Kah Pak to get out of the cargo hold. When they finally were out and the truck was locked, they made their way back to the save-house.

This time the door opened rather quickly and Herr Schmidt himself was facing them.

"You are finally back", he said with a worn-out smile and let them in. Once all of them had gone into the kitchen, he closed the front door and followed them. "So, everything went well?"

"Yes", Pakhet replied and handed him the small package. "These are the explosives. The chemical trail has been removed and the IDs exchanged."

"Thank you", Schmidt said while eyeing at the package. Then with a sigh he went into one of the other rooms – apparently to pack the explosives away.

Nobody said anything until he came back looking pretty much as tired as Pakhet still felt. "Well, thankfully this was a solution", he said. He got out a couple of credsticks from his pocket. "This is your payment." With another sigh he said back down. Then he shoved one of the credsticks over to Pakhet. "This should cover the expenses."

She nodded and took the stick to check it with her comlink. Indeed it was loaded with

about 8500 Nuyen, which covered all the money she had advanced with an additional 3000. She gave a sigh and then posted 6500 to one of her accounts before handing back the stick. After all she had not done much and she pitied Herr Schmidt a bit. With all the stuff that had been messed up on this run he was probably going get into trouble because of it and because of the additional costs that had followed. "It's alright", she just said. "I did not do much."

Herr Schmidt looked at her for a moment and it seemed as if he was to protect.

"It is okay", Pakhet repeated insistently.

Still Schmidt hesitated a while but finally took back the credstick without saying anything.

It was apparently then that Dacart realized what it meant and objected. "You cannot give money back! What about the van?"

Pakhet raised an eyebrow in confusion. "What van?"

"We wanted to buy a van for the team!", he exclaimed.

"What team?"

Dacart looked at her clearly hurt. "Well, all of us!"

At that Pakhet only snorted. "We are no team. We are a bunch of runners, who just worked on the same run. That does not make us a team."

Herr Schmidt gave a rather audible sigh. "Indeed." He looked over at them. "But technically you were supposed to be a team. The others know that. This was originally not meant to be a single run. I am sorry I did not make that clear before." Another sigh. "Well, to make it short: This entire ordeal is in preparation for another run that is planned to happen in a few month. Originally I planned to send all of you on different missions to gather certain items that will be needed for the 'big run'. But I guess that won't be that easy after that rucus caused by certain people."

Sceptically Pakhet eyed at him. "So, what is this 'big run' going to be?"

"I cannot tell you yet", Herr Schmidt replied.

"No." Pakhet shook her head. "I am very sorry, but that is not what I signed up for. I am doing this for a couple of years now. I am a professional shadowrunner. I am not going to babysit a bunch of idiots just for them to still be alive for any mysterious 'big run'. I really am sorry, but I don't want to have anything to do with that."

"Who are you calling idiots?" Baramesus stood up to protest.

"Exactly! I am not an idiot!", Dacart agreed.

Pakhet just shook her head not acknowledge them with an answer. "I am sorry, Herr Schmidt."

Instead of saying something, Schmidt just nodded at her but looked even more tired.

"But what about the van?", Dacart asked once more.

For a moment Pakhet thought about just ignoring him. Then again he was still young and after all it was not really his fault, that he was a fool. So she turned around to him.

"It is not my problem."

Like a whipped cur he looked back at her. It seemed that at least he really wanted to be part of a team. But he probably did not work in the shadows for long, so maybe he really believed in those idealized shadowrunner myth from certain trideo-shows. After all runners in trideo shows were either ruthless or idealistic idiots. The later kind always worked for the corp financing the series.

Pakhet gave a sigh. "Alright. You know what? I can offer you one thing: You buy a cheap, used van, I vamp it up for a bargain price. But that's it, okay? I am not going to babysit you for the next month. I'll just help with that van."

"We wanted to buy a used van either way", chrome-head said and something in his

voice hinted, that he too was hurt about the "idiots" from before.

"Well then, great", she said sardonically.

"And we'll need your number", chrome-head then added.

She sighed. This really was the last thing she wanted. As well as every shadowrunner worth his salt she had an entire collection of cheap metalinks for this kind of endeavour. Still she somehow had the feeling that she would regret it giving any of them her number. "Alright", she finally agreed. "I will give the doc my number." This seemed to be the most reasonable – especially as it was never a bad idea to add a street doc to one's contacts.

The next day Pakhet had almost forgotten about the promise she had made about helping to vamp up a certain van. She had slept until noon, had enjoyed real coffee for breakfast (only real coffee) and then had went out to the gun range she frequented. While she did not think too much about the rather easy run from the day before she still felt somewhat angry and shooting always helped her to clear her head and cool her emotions down.

The last thing she needed was her emotions getting in her way on the next real run. Because most of the times the solutions did require a lot of shooting and running. Being distracted often resulted in death. She had seen others die that way and it was certainly not the way she was going to go.

Maybe the reason she was still angry was that there was still a terror warning for the entire city and knowing how the same had played out the last time, she knew that running would get harder for the next month or two.

Still she felt better after an hour of target shooting, which was when Michael called her.

Taking a long, deep breath she lowered the pistol and went out of the shooting hall, to answer the call. Being the annoying bastard he was Michael of course did not hang up to wait for her to call back. Instead she saw his name blinking up at the side of her field of vision for two entire minutes and would have been annoyed with the ring tone, too, if she had not muted it.

"What is it, Micha?", she barked once she answered the call.

"It seems you are in your best mood again", was the prompt answer. "Great. I am still waiting for a certain information."

"Then wait", she replied.

Michael gave a melodramatic sigh. "You are not going to tell your best fixer?"

"Why would I?"

"I might pay you", he offered. "Not much. But I am still intrigued."

Pakhet sighed. After the last real run she had gone too had been pretty much a disaster – mostly due too misinformation – and she had declined most of her payment yesterday she was still short on money. Also it was not as if she had anything else to do. "Alright. I'll come over. But make sure to have some coffee ready."

Michael laughed. "Alright."

"So much for this", Pakhet muttered to herself, while putting her gun bag into its holster and making sure it sat safe. Well, she tried to cheer herself up, at least it gave her a way to check in on Michael again – as there was still the trust issue they had.

Soon she was back on her motorcycle and on her way towards Harburg. On the way she was once again saw several police blockades. What a waste of time, she thought, considering that the explosion had nothing to do with terrorism. Then again: Maybe HanSec knew that as well and still used the opportunity to sort out runners (as well as

other people with fake SIDs).

When she finally arrived in front of Michael's shop she found it open. With a sigh she parked the motorcycle and went inside.

"Michael?", she asked into the apparent emptiness of the shop.

"Back here", his voice replied from the backroom. "Doing some inventory." The door behind the counter opened with Michael waving out of it. "Come in."

Instead of taking the long way around Pakhet just jumped over the counter. "How much?" She entered the room.

Other than the shop, which was mostly held in different shades of green (after all it was officially a shop for hunting-equipment), the backroom was mostly white and rather barren. Michael was sitting on a table and with ammunition magazines lying in front of him.

"We will see", Michael replied to her question.

"Alright", she said with a sigh. "Coffee?"

Instead of answering Michael just pointed to a coffee machine on a table right in the back of the shop. "There."

Pakhet took herself an already cracked cup and filled it with coffee, before sitting down on the other side of the table. "Alright. To make it short: You were right. It has been a bunch of runners who blew the stuff up. And yes, they wanted to steal some of it. The Johnson wasn't particularly happy with them because of it. They managed to steal some, but basically alerted HanSec, HAZMAT and who knows whom else. Apparently they should steal the stuff for something bigger, but that's all I know about it. And the guy responsible for blowing it up has already taken his heels to his hands. He has left the mission and – if he has some sense in him – probably the city."

"What's his name?", Michael asked while taking some notes in AR.

Pakhet just shrugged. "Dunno. Have not met him. He was already gone when I got there."

For a moment Michael studied her face. "And the others?"

"You know I cannot tell you."

"Not even for money?", he asked.

"Not even for money", she replied. "Bad rep. They are a bunch of idiots, but I won't sell them out. You know that."

Now it was Michael who shrugged. "Too bad."

"So: How much?", she asked.

"I already knew most of that." He crossed his arms and looked her in the eye.

She did not evade his gaze. "So?"

"50", he offered.

"200", she replied.

"Don't joke around."

"I am not."

"That's not what that information is worth."

She snorted. "Right. It is compensation for the headache it caused me."

"100", he replied.

"Deal."

"I'll send it over", he said in his best business voice.

"Great." She got out her comlink to see whether he was true to his word, just to see that she had gotten a new mail. Too late she remembered that she had disabled the display for the gun range and opened the mail.

It was a message from Heidenstein, sent about 20 minutes ago: "Have the van. Were

should I bring it?"

Now Pakhet remembered what she had forgotten. Quickly she made sure that Michael had sent the money, then she emptied her cup and stood up. "I have to go."

"Already?", Michael replied.

"Admit it: You are happy I go", she just said.

He grinned and shrugged. "Take care."

"Sure." She left the shop while already dialling the number of somebody else. Robert.

Robert Schneider was the only person in the world Pakhet really considered her friend – and while she did not admit it also the person thanks to whom she had not gone completely insane. She knew him since they had been children and they had been friends for years even before she had ended up in the shadows of Hamburg. Also Robert had what she needed right now: He owned a small autoshop in Wandsbeck including a couple of garages.

He picked up just after two rings.

"Jo!", he greeted her.

"Get my name straight", she sighed.

"Sure", he said, a bit cooler now. "Pakhet."

While Pakhet still did consider Robert her best friend, he never approved of her work in the shadows and always talked to her, as if she was still Joanne – somebody she most certainly was not anymore.

"Is everything alright?", he then asked.

"Yeah", she said – though her voice did say something else. "Everything is fine. With you?"

"Everything is great", he replied and she could hear a smile in his voice. "What's up? Why are you calling?"

She smiled a bit, while putting on her helmet once more. "I have to ask for a favour."

"Has it anything to do with a shadowrun?", he asked cautiously.

"Indirectly", she replied. For a moment she was silent thinking about what best to tell Robert, then she explained: "See, some poor chummers asked me to vamp up their car. I would need one of your garages."

Robert hesitated for a moment. "Some chummers, eh?"

"Yep." Pakhet started the motorcycle. Thankfully she had fitted the helmet with a micro, allowing her to keep the line. "I'll tell them that I rented the garage."

Again there was some silence, until Robert finally replied: "Alright."

Pakhet smiled. She had known she could count on Robert with that. "Thank you. Is it alright if I tell one of them to drop the van of?"

"Sure." Robert did his best to sound unworried, but she still knew that he did not like it. She would have preferred to drive the van there herself, but she needed to get changed first and also wanted to take the Jack Rabbit – just in case Heidenstein needed a ride home.

"I owe you", she said. "I'll be there in about an hour."

"Okay. See you then."

"Yeah, bye." She hung up, before accelerating the motorcycle.

A bit more than an hour later Pakhet pulled up in front of the garage with her Jack Rabbit. She could already see both Heidenstein and the van (a white CMG Bulldog which actually seemed to be in rather good condition) standing there. Robert was probably around, too, as he would not trust any shadowrunner.

It was obvious, that Heidenstein had a lot more patience than she had herself, as he

was calmly waiting leaned against the back of the van. When he saw her getting out of her car he stood up properly and made a few steps towards her.

Actually she was surprised that he had waited. After all she had guessed that he would just drop the van off. Then again maybe she had been right and he was in need for a ride back home.

"Hey", she greeted him, once she had almost reached the van. "I hope you haven't waited for too long." Already she was eyeing at the van. From nearby it was apparent that it was a used car. The paint was a bit worn, there were a few small notches in the car body and if she was not mistaken the springs were also worn out.

"Not at all", Heidenstein replied with a smile.

"I did not think you would come over this early", she said, while circling the car once.

"Well, we'll need to start early to get anything done today", Heidenstein said still smiling.

Pakhet raised an eyebrow. "We?", she echoed.

"You are more than welcome to take care of that on your own, but I thought I might be able to help you out a bit."

"Do you know anything about mechanics?", she asked once more suppressing a sigh.

"A thing or two", he replied a bit sardonically. "If you assemble cyber-limbs for a living, you'll tend to get the gist of it."

"A car is no cyber-limb." Though Pakhet had to admit that she herself had no idea how exactly cyber-implants worked.

Heidenstein shrugged. "No, normally they are more complicated. The cyber-limbs, that is."

For a moment Pakhet paused. "Well, but they don't use combustion engines."

At that Heidenstein grinned. "No", he admitted, "most of them don't. You think you can show me the ropes then?"

Now Pakhet gave a sigh – maybe a bit melodramatic. "Alright. But then you tell me how the hell the little mishap came to be? I asked the fool yesterday, but his tale left a few questions open."

"I guess with 'the fool' you mean Dacart?"

"Indeed."

Heidenstein smirked. "Fine with me", he replied. "Now, where do we put the car?"

Pakhet looked around. She could not see Robert anywhere, but he was probably somewhere inside. "Wait a moment", she said. "I need to find somebody to give me a key." With that she went over to the main garage from where she could hear the sound of some electric tools. "Schneider?", she shouted, calling Robert by his last name. After all she still went with the "somebody who was willing to rent me the garage" story. Nobody should know that Robert was her friend – just in case she made the wrong enemies.

Not soon after she had the key for one of the smaller repair shops to the side of the garage. It was actually still one of those oldtime manual keys used to lift the garage gate, as the smaller shop had its own gate.

Actually she was rather thankful that Robert had not hung around to wait for her, because she was not sure whether he would tip someone off. Yes, Heidenstein seemed to be a nice guy, but seven years in the shadows was enough to teach you that it was especially the nice guy whom to be cautious around.

Soon the van was standing on the service lift in the shop with the gate closed behind them.

The motor was still running smoothly – at least it sounded like it – though it would

need a general overhaul considering that Bulldogs were most certainly not known for their speed.

Pakhet got herself a glow stick before lifting the van up to check its lower side. "Now", she began while scanning the wiring for obvious faults, "what happened?"

"Where should I start?", Heidenstein replied. He climbed down beneath the car himself, also scanning the belly of the car.

"Well, what I know: That gang stole the stuff. You somehow were all hired for the run", she said. "That's about it when it comes to what I know for sure. And something about an ork-buddy."

"Okay, from the very beginning then", Heidenstein started with a sigh. "We were hired for something big. Something even we don't quite know about yet. Schmidt said he is tasked to train us to be the emergency team in case that 'the first team' doesn't make it."

"How charming", Pakhet commented.

"Yes. Quite. Anyway... Schmidt figured that while we trained we could just as well salvage some supplies. That kind, you can hardly come by – at least by normal means. One of those supplies were explosives. He told us some gang had hijacked a corp's delivery..."

That was the part Michael had already stumbled across. "The Iron Raiders getting the stuff from Hoch- und Tiefbau, right?"

"Exactly. We did some legwork, discovered that the gang were the Iron Raiders. We also found out where they had their hideout, where they used to hang out and so on." For a moment Heidenstein paused to think. "Two of our team – the brawlers, if you'd want to put it like that – were set up to infiltrate them. We made contact with the gang in one of their bars, put on a nice show for them to proof themselves and made sure the gang was convinced to take them in. Subtle, of course."

"Let me guess: The two of them were Dacart and his 'ork-buddy', eh?" Pakhet climbed out from beneath the car to check on the motor.

"Yes. Them. The only ones who made for believable gangers." He did not follow yet but still seemed to study the wiring. "At first everything seemed to go according to plan. They confirmed the location of the explosives and started to win the Raiders' trust. So we planned for them to actually steal the needed explosives."

"And then everything went BOOM, eh?"

He, too, climbed out from underneath the car, his expression sour. "Yeah." The look on his face made it unmistakably clear that he was still angry about what had happened. "The two of them were to get into the building the gangers were storing the explosives in, acting as part of the gang. After all they were close to being accepted gang members. Slap, Kah Pak and I had scouted out a nearby empty building from where we would be able to supervise and support them, if needed. Slap for matrix support, Kah Pak magically and I for medical support. Also I had my sniper's rifle along, just in case." He took out a bullet from his jacket to show her.

The bullet's tip was entirely made out of yellowish gel, something Pakhet had seen before. "Gel rounds, eh?"

"Yeah. Didn't want to actually kill somebody", he said wryly.

"Not too stupid. At least makes for less enemies – for the most part." Pakhet gave a short smirk, barely noticeable. She herself tried to avoid unnecessary kills, but she knew as well that especially many younger street sams did not do the same.

"Kah Pak summoned a spirit to protect Tower – the 'ork-buddy' – invisibly and the two of them went in." Heidenstein gave a long sigh. "I don't know exactly what went

wrong, but something did. Next thing we knew fighting broke out. Slap messed with their equipment, I shot some of the gangers I could see through the barricaded windows and the two of them fought their way to the storage room. Tower almost got killed by some kind of explosive trap, but they managed to get to the explosives." Pakhet looked at him. "And then BOOM?", she asked half jokingly.

"Not quiet yet. The gang got reinforcements and Slap and I had to lay down suppressive fire, but couldn't hold them off from getting into the building. In the meantime – or so Dacart says – they somehow managed to brake down a part of the rear wall... And then Tower rigged the remaining explosives. Then BOOM." Heidenstein's expression hardened, when he got to that part.

Pakhet sighed, though partly amused. "And they managed to get out of there in one piece?"

"Didn't see that part. But from what Dacart says they somehow escaped into a nearby manhole."

"Hence the stink", Pakhet remarked.

"Yeah", Heidenstein said. "And that about covers it. After that we retreated to the save-house. Since the goods were now hot, Slap and Hazel tried to hack into HanSec and obscure the trail. Or at least they tried. Hazel barely made it out and that was when we decided to hire some outside help."

"And that's where I came in." Pakhet looked up from under the hood. "And the pretty useless mage."

"He claimed to be able to make things invisible", Heidenstein quickly explained. "And it seemed like a good idea, in case HanSec tried to search for the explosives one house at a time."

Somewhat amused Pakhet remarked: "Well, he did not quite live up to it, did he now?" Heidenstein just shrugged. "No time to check beforehand."

"True." With that Pakhet closed the hood and leaned against it. This was still too entertaining to interrupt it with technical explanations. "One thing though: Did you really consider breaking into HanSec for chrome-head to hack into their servers?"

"I was voting against it, but yes, somebody brought it up. Thankfully you convinced them otherwise."

"I always tried my best to stay on HanSec's good side... Well, too not end up on their bad side. I ignore them, they ignore me. Would've been a pity to put a black spot on that record."

With a bemused smile Heidenstein nodded, before he finally got back to business.

"About the van", he started. "I believe the break lines are pretty loose."

Pakhet gave a short smirk and nodded. "You believe right. Also the suspension should be exchanged and the motor will need a general overhaul, at least if you are going to use it as an escape vehicle." And with that they got to work.