

Machines

Hamburg in the shadows

Von Alaiya

V – Unwilling ally

Pakhet had to admit that Heidenstein was a rather quick learner and more of a help than she would have guessed. Then again it was rather apparent from his demeanour that he probably had enjoyed academic education and probably was brighter than a typical shadowrunner. Most of all though she was glad that he seemed to have no problem with getting his hands dirty. And while he was not very strong and hence could not help with everything, his witty sense of humour certainly made the work more entertaining at least. Also he had a keen eye and was able to spot minor problems, which was a good help for checking and re-checking their work.

In the end it took them only two afternoons to get every problem with the van fixed. "The team" paid her, she relayed some money to Robert for allowing them to use the garage and then she thought she was done with this chapter. Of course she kept Heidenstein contacts – knowing street docs was just too invaluable.

So she ended up with more free time. Michael did not have any more jobs for her and it seemed that the terror alarm did made for quite some recess, which would be a problem if it lasted.

Still. At least it gave her some time to train and spend some private time with Robert, who all too often complained she was taking her "work" too serious and did not spend enough free time. Of course this was ridiculous considering that she often only worked two, three days a week and lay low the rest of the time. But in the end she liked that he worried a bit about her and she certainly did not complain about lazy evening eating pizza and watching old action movies.

But that would not help paying her rent. And four days after having finished the car she already felt itchy and could barely hold back herself from calling Michael several times a day.

It was on this fourth afternoon, that her commlink started ringing while she was working out. With a mental command she picked up. "Yes?"

A video display appeared in her vision. Dacart grinning at her. "Hey, Pakhet."

"Oh fuck", she muttered and hung up.

Apparently she had forgotten to destroy the metalink from which she had used to rent the truck. And as all her metalinks redirected any incoming calls to her main commlink he had probably been able to call her that way.

Not a minute later her commlink was once again informing her about an incoming call. She ignored it, but it took about twenty seconds until the caller gave up.

"Finally", she muttered to herself. Dacart was certainly a fool, but even he should be

able to deduct her disinterest in any further interaction.

Well, it turned out he was not. About three minutes later somebody with an unknown number called again and again she ignored it. But even then it was not the end of it. Again two or three minutes passed, then another call came in. This time she blocked the calling number and thought that now she was finally done with it.

But even though he was clearly a fool, even Dacart seemed to know the rule about owning mutable metalinks. Another call, a new number.

She sighed, jumped from the treadmill and picked up again. "Whatever it is, Dacart, the answer is no. I am not interested!" Already she wanted to hang up, when Dacart spoke:

"But you could make money!"

For a moment Pakhet hesitated. She really did not want to have anything to do with Dacart, but the truth was that she needed money and if the month continued as it was she would be unable to meet her payments. "Talk. Quickly."

"I might have some job. And I thought I could make up for something", he explained quickly. "It is supposed to be a milk-run."

That set off Pakhet's alarm. There was no such thing as a milk run. Whenever somebody said a mission was supposed to be a milk run, there was a big catch to it.

"How much?"

"10 000 for the team? Maybe a bit more. Have not met the Johnson yet."

Pakhet gave a long sigh. She really did not want to do this, even 1600 would be a help right now. And maybe there was a bit more in. She would most certainly not risk her life for that amount of money. But after all it probably would not hurt to talk with the Johnson. "Alright", she said drawing out both syllables. "I will accompany you when you go meeting the Johnson. Then I will make my decision."

"Great!" Dacart seemed to be satisfied.

"When do we meet? And where?"

"Altona. In two hours. I'll send you the address."

"Great", Pakhet said and most certainly did not mean it.

Once she had hung up she gave a long sigh. Somehow she had the feeling that this "team" was just all sorts of bad news. After all they were the ones responsible for the terror alarm after all. And if it was not for her conscience she probably would just have sold them out to HanSec to get rid of this problem.

But as it was this was quite possible the only way to make some money for weeks, so she certainly would not slip it away that easily. And after all she had worked with other fools before, with some even several times, and that had not been that bad – at least that was what she told herself.

This just had to not become a habit. She did not want to be part of any "team" and most certainly not of this particular one! In the shadow one was better off alone and far away from fools.

She ended her training and went for her car to get back home. The weather had been changeable for the entire day making the car the better way to get around. At her home she took a shower, put on some more formal clothing and then sat down in front of the trid to pass some time.

When she finally left her house she was still early and would probably arrive about fifteen minutes early. That was when Dacart called again: "Pakhet, by the way: Can you fetch me? I don't have a car and my motorcycle kinda blew up..."

She cursed him and for a moment considered to just get to the meeting alone. But

then again she did not know anything about the Johnson and his connection to Dacart. Of course it might be worth a wager, but it was not her style after all.

So she quickly left her home, got into the Jackrabbit and drove to the address Dacart had send her. The young man was standing there and waved at her, when he saw the car approaching. Was he really so oblivious to the fact that he annoyed the living hell out of her? In a way he was a lot like Michael – just more stupid.

“Get in and hurry”, Pakhet barked at him without even so much as an “hello”. “And stay quiet for heaven's sake.”

“Alright”, he replied and grinned broadly.

Pakhet gave a sigh and hoped that he staid true to his word, while doing her best to still get to the meeting point in time. Thankfully there were three things working in her favour: She knew a couple of shortcuts, her car did not move on the grid and Dacart actually did keep quiet for the entire way. Thus it was two minutes before time, when they arrived at the location, a pretty normal looking street in Neue Mitte, where they found Baramesus and Slap waiting.

“You invited them, too, eh?”, Pakhet muttered.

“Of course”, Dacart replied with a smile. “We are a team after all. The doc and Kah Pak will be there, too, but later... I guess...”

“A team. Sure.” Pakhet got out of the car, wishing to have not come. But then again: Money. And the lack thereof. “Whatever.”

If she interpreted the look in the red cyber-eyes of Slap right, he did not seem to happy either to see her again. Well, at least that feeling was mutual. He just gave her a short nod, before turning away again. Baramesus again did not say anything, nor did he give any motion that he had noticed her, but quietly leaned against the wall.

“We are still on time!”, Dacart announced after getting out of the car. “Great. And thank you guys for coming, by the way.” He basically raced for the door to ring the bell.

It was about five seconds, until the buzzer let them in. The house at least seemed to be a completely normal apartment building. The staircase was actually in rather good shape and the apartments seemed to be lived in.

Dacart was taking the lead, running up to the third floor. With yet another sigh Pakhet followed and so did Baramesus and Slap, though a bit slower then the former two.

On the third floor they found a door opened with a human man standing in front of it – obviously a guard, as he wore his pistol rather obvious. And if to fulfil a certain cliché he also wore sunglasses, even though they were inside.

Pakhet just nodded at him, before entering the apartment right after Dacart.

The guard waited for all of them to enter, before closing the door again and nodding over to another open door. For a moment Dacart hesitated, looking at the rest of them, but when Pakhet shot him an impatient gaze he entered the room.

Surprisingly the room seemed just like a normal living room. There was a cupboard, a trideo, a sofa, a table and chairs sitting around it. Sure, it was a bit weird that both the sofa and the chairs were covered with plastic foil, but there were people with a weird sense for hygiene. The curtains were closed, too, but that was not too big of a surprise.

A woman sat at the table. From what Pakhet estimated, she was at her early 40s, though it was not easy to say for sure, as the lighting in the room was rather dim. After all it was quite possible that she tried to disguise herself with make-up. Her hair was brown and barely reached down to her shoulders. She wore a formal suit and seemed to be patiently waiting for them.

Another guard was standing behind her, one hand at his holster.

There was one chair positioned directly opposed to the woman, while two others were standing more to the side of it.

Dacart hesitated, but took a seat too the side. For a moment Pakhet pondered for a moment, whether she wanted to have Slap or Barameus take the spot of the negotiator before quickly deciding that she was rather to take that spot herself.

She sat down, noticing that Barameus eyed at her angrily for a short moment – a moment that Slap used to sit down on the last chair, making Barameus stand behind them.

Pakhet waited for the Johnson to start talking and hoped the rest of the group was that reasonable as well.

“So, who of you was the one sent here? Dacart, I believe?”, asked the Johnson, leaning forward a bit.

Immediately the adept raised his hand. “Me!”

The Johnson searchingly eyed at him for a moment. “I see. And the rest of you are?”

Before anyone of the others could speak, Pakhet replied: “My name is Pakhet. These two are Barameus and Slap.” She looked the Johnson right in the eye, even though she knew it did not quite have the same effect with cyber-eyes. But the gesture was still clear.

A thin-lipped smile appeared on the woman's face. “Very well. I have a mission for you. And you have two days to accomplish it.” She paused for a moment, looking at Dacart, Barameus and Slap one after one. “You see, there is a auction taking place here in Hamburg the day after tomorrow. Of course this is an auction of delicate matter. It takes place every few month and there has been a particular bidder, that must not attend the coming auction, if you understand me.”

Pakhet pursed her lips. She was not quite sure, whether she liked the sound of that. “You mean, we should kill him?”

Quickly the Johnson shook her head. “No. Of course not. I want you to just make sure, that he is unable to get to that auction. Preferably he will go free after it.”

Pakhet relaxed at bit. “Alright.” Knocking somebody out and locking him up for two days was no preferred method of hers, but it was doable and certainly better then wetwork. “Okay. What can you tell us about this 'particular bidder'?”

“Here is a picture of him”, the woman answered and showed them a hologic of a young man – probably in his 20s. “He arrives at the auction by taxi and goes by the name of Maximilian Winter. But you don't even have to try looking the name up. I have already confirmation that it is a fake identity. From what my research suggests, he arrives at Hamburg always three days before the auction, stays somewhere – I don't know where – and apparently takes a taxi from the Bismarck memorial to the auction sometime on the day of the auction.”

“So basically we only know the fake name, that he is probably in town and will take a taxi sometime tomorrow”, Pakhet said, her voice doubting.

The woman nodded. “That covers it.”

“That should be doable, right?”, Dacart said. “We could wait for him at the memorial.”

Pakhet did not reply to him but rather fixated on the Johnson. “How much?”

“You have not been told?”, the Johnson said, now looking over to Dacart. “10 000.”

Once again Pakhet make sure to look her in the eye. “That's not enough.”

“That is the offer”, the Johnson replied. She looked back at Pakhet with a stern look in her eyes.

Pakhet did not quite know about this certain auction, but she could figure as much as

that it was a black market auction. Michael attended those kind of auctions regularly and she had accompanied him several times, knowing the prices at which wares were traded in. There was more money to make here. "15 000."

"10 000", the Johnson replied.

"Then there is no deal", Pakhet said without even batting an eyelid.

She could feel Dacart leaning over to her. "What are you doing?", he whispered.

Once again she ignored him. As the Johnson did not immediately reply, she spoke again. "As I see this, we might have to go for a shoot-out at a public location – a bit risky, right? Also we have little information and you need results as fast as possible."

It was almost visible how the Johnson, though keeping a stern face, suppressed a sigh.

"Alright. 12 000."

"14 000", Pakhet offered.

It was now the Johnson who made sure to look her in the eye, staring at her for almost five seconds straight. Then the woman relaxed. "Alright. 13 000. That is all I can offer. And I'll give you an advance of 3000." She took out a cred-stick.

For a moment Pakhet hesitated. But for some reason this really seemed all she could get out of this. Well, probably there had been a given limit by whomever pulled the strings here. "Alright. Deal", she said.

The Johnson extended her hand and Pakhet shook it, though she could almost feel the evil glare of Baramus in her back.

"Don't pull such a stunt again without talking it over with us first!", chrome-head scolded her, once they were back on the street.

Pakhet only looked up from the metalink the Johnson had given her for contact for short moment. "So you don't want the extra money?"

"It could have cost us all the money", Slap replied.

Without looking at him Pakhet shook her head. "No. It could not. She was out of options. Apparently already behind her time table. She had to make a deal with us."

"You cannot know that!" He glared at her. "There are tons of runners out in this city desperate for a job."

"But she would have to make contact first", Pakhet just replied.

Boldly Dacart stepped between them: "Stop arguing! I am happy it worked out well and that there is more money. But should we not start with the task at hand, so we can get the money?"

"We should", Pakhet said, finally looking up from the commlink.

Once more Baramus glared at her. "Who made you the boss? Just for the record, I could have made that deal just as well."

For a moment Pakhet looked at him, but did not say anything. Instead she once more took a look at the commlink on which the Johnson had saved all the information, she supposedly had. But no matter how much she looked at it, there was no certain clue. The only thing that seemed certain was that he would turn up on the plaza in front of the memorial the next day.

"So, what are we going to do now?", asked Dacart and looked at them.

"Meeting up with the doc and Kah Pak, I guess", chrome-head replied.

Pakhet looked at him. "Where?"

For a moment nobody replied, but then it was Dacart that spoke again. "Can't we just go and meet at the doc's hospital?"

"I am not sure, that's a good idea", Pakhet replied. After all it seemed that the hospital was a normal working hospital with a street clinic attached to it. Then again it

was Heidenstein's decision to make.

This thought apparently crossed Slap's mind, too. "Why don't we just ask Doc Heidenstein?"

"Yeah, let's just ask him", Baramaus agreed. "I mean, it is not like we have anywhere else to meet."

With a sigh Pakhet took out her own comlink, when Dacart suddenly stopped her.

"Actually we do have somewhere else!", he exclaimed. "My... One of my buddies he owns a bar. I think we can meet there. It is not even far from here! Wait a moment, yes?" He took out a metalink and quickly dialled a number. The following short phonecall went something like that: "Hey Krishan! – Yeah, yeah, I'm alright. Hey, I need your help. – Of course! No, just me and some chummers. We need somewhere to talk. – Thanks, buddy. Yeah, see you later." And with that he hung up and grinned at them.

"Yeah, we can meet at the Druiden."

"Very well", Pakhet said. "Address?"

Dacart named an address that indeed was not too far away. From what Pakhet knew it was only about nine blocks away.

Slap looked up the address on a map. "And how are we going to get there?"

When Pakhet arrived at the bar, she still could not believe it. A group of runners and only two of them had a car? How did they think that was supposed to work? Alright, she could see that Dacart lost his motorcycle – but the rest? Yes, it was why they wanted a van for the group, but it was still ridiculous.

The bar Dacart had led her too, was located in a small alleyway next to one of the wider streets. The area was in a rather better condition than what she would have expected. Yes, there were a few graffiti on several buildings, but the streets and the building themselves were in good shape.

The Druide seemed to be a small, but not too shabby bar. It had a few darkened windows facing the alleyway. There was a dark shield hanging over the door with the name of the bar written on it in white letters. Apparently the bar was still closed – after all it was still early in the afternoon.

Dacart knocked at the door once they arrived and not soon after somebody opened the door. The man letting them in was an ork, probably in his early twenties. He smiled at them. "Good to see you, hon." He patted Dacart's back. "So, what's going on?"

"Just the run you sent me on, dear", the adept answered with a smile. "Need to talk something over with my chummers."

Pakhet bit her lip to not argue, that she was not anybody's chummer.

Now the ork extended his hand to her. "Hey. My name is Krishan. And you are?"

"Name is Pakhet", she said and took his hand. He had a firm grip, just like Herr Schmidt.

"Come in." The ork stepped aside to let them in. "Dacart, the backroom. You can go there."

"Thanks, honey", Dacart answered with a smile, before leading Pakhet into the bar and to a room behind the counter.

The room there was fitted with a table and several chairs around it. It looked like the cliché of that kind of rooms used to play poker. As none of the others was there yet and she saw no point to keep standing up she pulled a chair and sat down.

"Can I bring you anything?", Dacart asked.

"Coffee", Pakhet said. Somehow she had the feeling, that this would once again be a long day.

As an answer stuck his thumb up. "Okay."

Once again Pakhet took out the metalink and scrolled over the information. She wondered whether Michael knew something about this guy, as he would probably be at that auction, too. Maybe she would have been better off being his bodyguard on that auction – but then again there was probably a very specific reason he had not asked her. Still, she would have to ask him about Mr Winter.

Damn it, how were they to find him? She really did not want to pick a fight on one of the tourist hotspots of the city. Especially not considering that HanSec was still vigilant. But maybe they would not have a choice.

Baramus and Slap arrived only about three minutes after them. Both of them seemed to be still pissed about being forced to take a cap. But Pakhet did not address that issue again, as it was not really her problem after all.

Instead she sipped her soykaf and scrolled over the information again. The auction would take place on the next day late in the evening. They had until then.

Next after Baramus and Slap came Heidenstein – about fifteen minutes later. He once again wore a coat with the Crashcart logo on it. She had seen him wear it before and in a way it made sense as Crashcart personnel normally had some reason to be at a shoot-out.

"Hey", he greeted them. "Sorry, I am late."

Dacart shrugged. By now he was slurping his second Pina Colada through a drinking straw. "Don't worry. You are still earlier than Kah Pak. Want a drink?"

For a moment the look on Heidenstein's face was doubting. "Coffee, I guess."

"Man, you are boring", Dacart said but once more got up to get another soykaf.

Heidenstein sat down placing his med-kit next to his chair. "I've taken the van here, by the way."

"Thankfully", chrome-head sighed. "We had to take a cab here."

Heidenstein just nodded and leaned back for a moment. "Sorry that I could not be there before. I had to work."

"It is okay", Pakhet said with a sigh.

Not much later Dacart came back with a cup of soykaf and placed it in front of Heidenstein, before sitting down again. He seemed to be rather content with his Pina Colada and took out his comlink to play a game.

"So, what are we hired for exactly?", Heidenstein asked.

When nobody hurried to answer, Pakhet shrugged. "Short version: We shall apprehend somebody and make sure that he won't appear on an auction that takes place tomorrow." She shoved the metalink over to him. "Long version, when Kah Pak is here, too."

Once again Heidenstein nodded and took up the metalink to scroll through the information.

And so they waited for Kah Pak, who finally arrived about another fifteen minutes after Heidenstein.

"Finally", Baramus grunted when the elf entered the room. "Where have you been?"

"I was outside of Hamburg", Kah Pak said. "I am sorry that you had to wait for too long. I had to take a taxi and waited quite a while for it."

Pakhet gave a sigh. Another one without his own vehicle. Great. "It's alright", she said.

"We just should get to work because we don't have a lot of time."

"Sure", the shaman agreed. "What are we here for?"

It seemed that Baramus was done with letting Pakhet speak and cut in even before she could start talking: "We were hired by a Mrs. Johnson. There will be an auction

taking place tomorrow. She will attend the auction and does want us to keep a certain person from attending the auction. I guess she does not want competition on a certain item.”

“You assume too much”, Pakhet muttered. “But we have to come up with a plan. Of course we can wait for him at the Bismarck memorial.” She looked over at Kah Pak. “That is from where he always takes a taxi to the auction.” Then she continued: “We could set up a trap there.”

“But there are too many people”, Slap interjected.

“Exactly”, Pakhet agreed. “It would be still a possibility if we use Barameus' invisibility spell – but we will only have one shot at it.”

“I don't like it.” Heidenstein shook his head.

Dacart loudly slurped his drink. “We need to find out, where this guy is right now.”

With yet another sigh Pakhet looked over to him. “Exactly.”

For a moment there was silence, before Slap made a suggestion: “Well, on the plaza in front of the memorial are quite a few cameras. Maybe I can hack into them and find out more.”

Heidenstein was eyeing out the window, while Pakhet once again drove up the street in Harburg, where Michael had his shop.

The others had gone to the Bismarck memorial to see whether they could find out something through the Matrix. But going there with six persons would have drawn too much attention and Pakhet still wanted to talk to Michael, to see whether he knew something about Mr. Winter. If that guy was really on almost every auction as the Johnson had said, Michael had probably met him. And as Michael tended to know everything about every person he ever met – well, at least he claimed too – it was a good start.

Heidenstein, too, said, that he might know somebody, who might be able to give some information and Pakhet certainly preferred his company over any of the others. Then again she wondered, whether there would be an explosion at the memorial before the end of the day.

Once again she found the shop opened and could see Michael negotiating with somebody inside.

Before getting out of the car, she paused though. “A friendly word of advice, doc. Be careful what you say around Michael. He is good at finding stuff out about you. More than you would guess.” She looked at Heidenstein.

This time it was him who raised an eyebrow. “Okay. Warning noted.”

She had not told him, that Michael was her fixer. After all the “Trust no one” rule was still quite high on her list of personal rules. The more people knew about you, the either it would be to hunt you down.

“Good.” She got out of the car, before waiting for Heidenstein. When the car was locked they went up for the shop. The man Michael was arguing with spoke what sounded like Russian. He was muscular and wore a clearly armoured jacket. Either a runner or a member of one of the Russian gangs. As Pakhet was unable to understand them, she could not say exactly what they spoke about, but considering there were two weapons on the counter, she was rather sure that the point of their discussion had to do with prices.

Michael did not even look at Pakhet and Heidenstein once and gave no other indication, that he had noticed them. He looked actually more stern, than he usually did, but still was able to keep that annoying smile of his on his face.

The discussion lasted for almost three more minutes, before a cred stick and both weapons changed hands.

The guy – whoever he was – seemed to be not quite content with the deal he had made, but left the shop without further ado.

It was not before Michael had brought the cred stick into his safe and returned that he actually looked at them. "Hey, Pakhet. What was that about calling?"

"I just happened to be in the area and thought I dropped by", she said sardonically.

A smirk appeared on Michael's face. "Well, how very nice of you. Then what is it, I can do for you and..." Questioningly he looked at Heidenstein.

"Doctor Heidenstein", the doc replied. "I happened to accompany her."

"Well, this is nice." Michael did not even try to hide his sarcasm. "Again: Why are you here." He looked at Pakhet again.

Pakhet shrugged and got out the metalink. "Long story short: You know about the auction that takes place tomorrow?"

For a moment Michael paused to eye at her suspiciously. "In fact I know. Why? You are not wanting to bid on anything."

"No", Pakhet said. "I am only looking for information. Where does this auction take place?"

"Why do you need to know this?" Of course Michael was not going to give out information as easy as this, but neither would she.

"I have my reasons."

"And I have reasons to not tell you." Michael smiled at her. He knew very well, that she would not shoot him that easily.

Pakhet looked at him for a moment. Michael loved to act, as if he was fearless. She knew him well enough to understand that he was not fearless, but just well prepared. Once again she hated his smile and would have loved to wipe it from his face, but she did not do anything. "Okay. 100 Nuyen for information on that auction."

At this Michael grinned, hardly suppressing a laugh. "Alright: Blackmarket auction. Big guns. Takes place at the old airport. 3000 Nuyen for entry fee. Per bidder. That's all you get for 100."

Pakhet looked at the metalink and selected the picture of Winter. "Okay. Next question: You know him?" She held the metalink before him. "200 for any random information. 400, if you can tell us, where he is right now."

"Well. Don't know where he is. And I kinda think, that I want to know what you have to do with him. A run I don't know about, I guess. Well, I know he acts under the name Maximilian 'Max' Winter. He goes to different auctions and only bids on very particular items. He bids ridiculous amounts. I am pretty sure, he is bidding for somebody help. Maybe a runner. Maybe a particular kind of wage slave. He also pays a taxi driver to stay at the airport until the auction is over. And I kinda feel, like this information is worth more."

"I already knew most of that." Turning of the metalink again Pakhet took out a credstick to pay him. "Well, thank you anyway."

"You need to tell me about this run and where it came from."

"Maybe." She turned around and nodded to the doc. "Well, I will be going."

Michael checked the stick, but then seemed to remember something. "Hey, Heidenstein, can I have your contacts? I fathom that you are a combat medic."

Pakhet focussed on Heidenstein, silently mouthing: "Don't. Don't do it." She herself had gotten in to much trouble, since she had agreed to help out Michael. Hell, thanks to Michael she had almost died on her first run and still had a scar from it.

"Medic, yes", Heidenstein replied and looked over to Michael. Pakhet could not tell whether he did not see her or chose to ignore her. "I have a street clinic, too." Michael smiled. "Wonderful. It is really hard to come by street docs, you see." "Of course." Heidenstein gave him his contacts, as well as the address of the street clinic.

Pakhet left the shop teeth-gnashingly and waited for Heidenstein at the car. When the motor was finally running, she looked over too him. His expression was indifferent, though there was a hint of a smirk playing on his lips, which seemed to be as much his "standard expression" as hers a stern and angry look. Still, there was something about this indifference, that made her mad right now – or maybe it was just, that he had ignored her.

"Not that it is any of my concern", she muttered, "but that was a mistake."

With apparent surprise he looked at her. "Why?"

"Because you cannot trust Michael. He is sly. Very sly. Even by shadow standards."

Heidenstein shrugged. "As a street doc I make a living by people knowing where to find me."

"Then you'll just have to hope, that you won't end up on his wrong side."