

Machines

Hamburg in the shadows

Von Alaiya

X – A case of piracy

Forlorn the old port lay in the darkness of the night. What once had been the main reloading for containers in Germany lay mostly beneath meters of dark and probably poisonous water. The black flood had forcefully moved most of the companies once located here into the west of the harbour or over to Stade. The old port lay in darkness and only few of the former port buildings towered over the surface.

There had been an effort in the 2030s and 40s to rebuild the old port – if not for business then for expensive living room, but both the natural conditions and gang activity had stopped those enterprise. The few artificial islands that had been build back then lay as much in ruin as the few buildings from the old harbour that were still standing.

The arrow Heidenstein had sent her pointed to what once had been a parking lot but now was overgrown by grasses that had pushed their way through the asphalt.

When Pakhet arrived on her motorcycle she found Heidenstein already waiting. Like her he had taken his motorcycle. Even though he was leaning against the vehicle he was still wearing his helmet, but he nodded when she arrived.

Pakhet, too, left on the helmet, as she was not keen to end up with a bullet from some small-time crook in her had. Still she opened up her visor for a moment to show her face and allow him to make sure he was her. He did the same. "So, what are we going to do?", she asked.

"Wait", Heidenstein replied and sent her a message via commlink. It was an invitation to link up their devices. Normally she did not like to do anything like that, but as non of her weapons was running wireless it was not that much of an issue so she accepted.

"This is better", Heidenstein said, his voice sounding in her in-ear monitor.

"Will be better for stealth", she agreed keeping her voice low as she used a microphone integrated into her helmet.

"Indeed." There was once again a hint of amusement in his voice.

"What are we waiting for?", she asked.

"Some guy my affiliate is going to sent", he explained. "A mage, who will use some rituals to find those girls."

Pakhet hesitated for a moment, as there were two question he had not answered yet.

"Are those girls prostitutes?", she finally asked.

Not it was Heidenstein who did not answer instantly. "Well, yes. At least something of that sort. They are escorts, hostesses and, well, prostitutes as well."

Pakhet did not reply to that immediately. She had thought so before and she still had

her doubts about whether it was good for the girls to be brought back. But she knew those thoughts were unprofessional and being a shadowrunner in Hamburg it was not the first time she had to do with prostitution. "Do we know that they actually have been kidnapped and did not just... Runaway?"

"Yes", the doc replied. "The club they are from has been raided this afternoon. The guy who did it have shot some guards and some of the girls. But they have taken six." He typed something into his commlink. "I'll send you the files."

A message appeared in her field of vision with different files attached to it. When she opened them she saw brief profiles with pictures of the missing girl. All of them were in their early twenties which was better than Pakhet had expected. She scanned through them. Most of them seemed to be of eastern European origin or at least their families were, as according to the profiles four of them had been born in Hamburg.

"Thank you", she said. "And do we know who had taken them?"

"Not exactly", Heidenstein replied. "But there are some clues that it has to do with a group who call themselves the Red Band Pirates. But I don't know much about them, as they only showed up a few months ago. And we don't know for sure, that they have been involved, but some of the surviving guards think he has recognized their colours."

"Is that, why we are here?", Pakhet said looking around.

"Exactly."

She scanned the run-down buildings that surrounded them. She had not heard of those self-proclaimed pirates before, but as she tended to stay out of gang business if she was not paid for it it was not that surprising. "What about payment?"

"Rather good", Heidenstein replied. "Ten thousand if we find out where the girls are. Two thousand for each girl we bring back alive and mostly unhurt."

"Wow, that is quite a bit of money", Pakhet muttered. It would definitely solve the problem of her barely having enough to pay the rent.

"It is", Heidenstein said. "I think the woman administering the club actually cares about those girls."

Pakhet just nodded, as she was not so easy to trust into the good of humans.

Instead she once more scanned their environment, without noticing too much. On one hand she did not like in what could be a potential fight with hostages involved, on the other hand it was something that happened all the time. She knew she could deal with it, she just would have preferred to know more about those pirates. Well, first they needed to find the girls.

Finally, after a few minutes, she heard the sound of another motorcycle and in the end somebody drove up to them.

Other than the two of them, who wore full helmets, this guy wore a helmet that did not cover his face at all. When he stopped his motorcycle it became apparent that he was an ork, though he was rather small and skinny for an ork. Even with a clearly armoured jacket he did not really look buff.

"Is one of you Heidenstein?", he asked with a very thick Russian accent.

"That would be me", Heidenstein said once again opening his visor. "This is another runner I asked to come along."

"Pakhet", she introduced herself

The ork, who seemed to be rather young, nodded. "They call me Slove", he said and paused. Then he added: "I was hired to find those girls. Not to free them. Not to fight any pirates. If a fight is going to start, I'll be gone."

Heidenstein gave a short nod and shut his visor again. "Understood."

Slove opened his jacket a bit and a small animal crawled out from underneath to sit on his shoulder. It seemed to be some sort of chameleon. The ork got out a small package from his pocket and took something out of it to give it to the animal. "I have the information about the girls", he then said. "If you don't mind, I will start now." Somewhat wary of him Pakhet just watched him. After all this was Heidenstein's mission and no matter what he said she did not entirely like it. But she had agreed on it, she needed the money and it would not feel right to leave him on his own right now.

"Alright", Heidenstein agreed and nodded at the ork.

"If you don't mind, I will need some distance to properly concentrate", Slove then said and when neither of them objected, she took something out of his motorcycle and moved away from them for a while, going for a small alleyway next to the parking lot. Pakhet leaned again one of the trees sitting at the side of the parking space to keep an eye onto the opening of the alleyway. After all there was no reason to trust the magician, shaman or whatever he was. Several times she also glanced over to Heidenstein, who seemed to look on something in AR that she was unable to see.

She was curious whether the mage actually would be able to find something like Kah Pak had been at least able to validate that this one girl had been in that McHugh's. It certainly would make this entire mission easier. Though she was still not sure why those pirates would kidnap those girls. To sell them to someone else? Probably, but it seemed somewhat random. Maybe they wanted to make deals with the Lobatchevski and needed leverage.

Finally the shaman came back, the chameleon still sitting on his shoulder. He did not speak until he was only in three meters distance. "The girls are here. But out on the water. I think an island or something. But I cannot say for certain. Too far away, too much saltwater in-between."

Pakhet looked over at Heidenstein. "I don't suppose that you have a boat, do you, Doc?"

"No", he replied with a sigh. "But I am pretty sure I can get one."

At that Pakhet shrugged and watched him, while he once more produced his commlink out of his sleeve. He cut the direct communication with her for a moment and phoned somebody. He spoke with the voice dampened – even more so as he still had his helmet on and probably used the microphone inside to talk, as he had done to communicate with her.

"We will get a boat – and a driver", his voice finally announced through the in-ear monitor. "We will meet with him though." With a message a pointer appeared on a map of the area. It was on what once had been one of the piers.

"Alright", Pakhet said before speaking up to talk to Slove, who had taken the chameleon from his shoulder and was talking to it in Russian. Shamans... "Will you come along to help us find their location?"

The shaman looked up. "I will come. But I will not fight."

"Yeah, I have understood that much", Pakhet muttered, before speaking up again. "Well, then let's go."

"No need to hurry", Heidenstein replied. "The boat won't be there within the next twenty minutes or so."

"And we don't know whether we will get into a gangfight on the way", Pakhet said and leapt onto her motorcycle.

"Good point." Heidenstein did the same, while the ork carefully allowed the chameleon to climb back underneath his jacket, before mounting up, too.

Pakhet could not suppress a smug grin, when there was a gang apparently controlling the drive to the pier, even though nobody could see this grin. Thanks to the cyber-eyes she was able to see details, even though they had halted to motorcycles in a safe distance to the control point of the gang, and was surprised to see that most of the gang members sitting there were not in their teens anymore. Most of them even seemed to be of Asian origin, which stroke her as odd. After all Hamburg was not known for Yakuza or Triad activity – but then again she had just learned that the Cosa Nostra tried to gain hold again in the city.

“Should we try to bribe them?”, she asked Heidenstein.

“I don't think, that would be a good idea”, he answered. “Look at their arms.”

She did. They all had red scarves bound around their left arm. Apparently their gang leader really had not the slightest hint of imagination. “Well, they are not red bands”, she said half jokingly.

“Too close to risk it”, replied Heidenstein.

“Yes.” Pakhet gave a shallow sigh. “But what about your boating service?”

“I'll send a message”, he replied.

Soon enough another pointer appeared on the map – this time away from any of the piers and next to a piece of land that mostly had been sunk by the black flood.

When they arrived there a mid-sized boat was already standing there, waiting for them to climb aboard. Somebody seemed to have thought things through, as the boat appeared big enough to allow another ten persons to find shelter on deck.

Pakhet did not like the idea of leaving her motorcycle behind, but as they had to wade through the cold water for a bit and then climb aboard, there was no way to take it along.

So she parked it next to the motorcycles of Heidenstein and Slove in an alleyway between the ruins of what once had probably been warehouses. She made sure to activate even the last bit of security, even though she knew it would not stop determined gangers.

When they finally had boarded the boat the helmsman, who seemed to actually be of German, not Russian origin, as he spoke without the slightest accent and had introduced himself as “Martin”, set the vehicle into motion.

They were mostly silent, while they were driving out onto the open waters of the former port. Slove seemed to be meditating and Pakhet could just hope, that he would be able to pinpoint where the girls were right now, because an island was not very precise in this area.

Pakhet leaned against the rail and looked out onto the water. Even with the low-light amplification of the cyber-eyes the water seemed to be black as ink and without many light sources around even the small islands with the occasional ruins on it where barely more as shadows in the dark. If they were to search on each on everyone on them, it was more likely for those self-proclaimed pirates to find them – or HAZMAT for that matter – than them finding those six girls.

Suddenly Slove stood up. “They are near”, he said, before going over to Martin, the helmsman, to talk to him.

Pakhet exchanged gazes with Heidenstein, but did not say anything. Instead she started to check her weapons, as she was rather sure, there would be a shoot-out rather soon.

They drove towards a group of half sunken islands, on which there actually was light. It were two islands. On both there were ruins of warehouses standing, both largely overgrown with ivy. Somebody had constructed poles with floodlights at their ends,

which illuminated a make-shift pier on the island towards which they were heading. Thankfully Martin had enough wits to drive around the island and anchor behind some sickly looking bushes. There was no pier on this side of the tiny island, but also not much illumination, as the only light was a rather small lamp right over a small door on the backside of the warehouse.

"Can you make sure that those girls are in here?", Pakhet asked Slove, as she really did feel no urge to fight with whoever was inside just to realize they were on the wrong island.

"I can make sure, once I am ashore", the ork replied with plain voice.

Pakhet managed to suppress an impatient sigh and jumped ashore glad that the dry parts of the island were in jumping distance for her. Heidenstein and Slove were less lucky as she heard two splashed behind her, while Heidenstein was cursing quietly.

"This is enemy territory, right?", Slove asked.

"Probably", Pakhet said.

"Keep watch over my body", replied to ork.

"Sure."

While the shaman once more allowed his chameleon to climb up to his shoulder Pakhet looked around saw Heidenstein doing the same. This side of the island seemed to be completely abandoned and from all the shrubs growing here it seemed as if whoever was operating from here had not paid any concern about this shore. And while Pakhet did not quite like moving through these bushes, the ork seemed to be rather comfortable in this small wood.

"I don't like this", Pakhet muttered into her microphone.

"What exactly?", Heidenstein replied. "The creepy islands, that make-shift pier...?" There was still some humour in his voice, which Pakhet found in a way more unnerving than the things he spoke of.

"The fact, that they don't even try to hide and HAZMAT is ignoring it."

"Seems like they are well organized", Heidenstein said.

Pakhet shook her head and went over to the edge of the run-down warehouse to look over to their "pier". Unsure what to make of it she listened, as there were clearly voices from the other side of the house. The voices were all male and while she could not understand whatever language they spoke, she was pretty sure there were at least four or five people out there. "We will be outnumbered, if we pick a fight here." "I know", replied the doc, now without the humour in his voice. "I hope we can handle it."

She turned around to him. "We?"

"I can help, too, you know?", he said. "At least a little."

Pakhet did her best not to snort. She had heard that many times before from other non-fighters right before they got shot. Of course, if Heidenstein was using his Parashield and had some knowledge about it, he probably was somehow capable of using it – but there was a big difference between "being able to use a gun" and "being of actual help in a fight." So she just replied: "Just don't get shot, okay?"

"Didn't plan on it", he replied. "And we don't know whether the girls are here at all."

Pakhet sighed and finally went back to where the shaman was sitting, still in meditation or whatever they called it. Nothing seemed to happen until the ork finally opened his eyes again. Hastily he looked around, took a deep breath and then stood up.

"They are here", he then said looking at them. "In this warehouse. There are guards in there, too. The girls are together. And they are afraid."

"No wonder", Pakhet muttered and looked back at Heidenstein, who now was just behind her.

He nodded. "Then we'll go in."

"Okay", Slove just said. "I'll be back on the boat." And without waiting for a reply he hurried back towards the boat, as if he could not wait to get away from this island.

For a moment Pakhet looked after him just hoping that his flight from the island had not to do with any spirit or anything magic – because she really did not like the prospect to stand in a fight again a spirit without an awoken on her side.

"I guess we'll take the back door", Heidenstein said making her turn around to him.

She just nodded and went for the back door, when she noticed a camera on the edge of the building. "Doc?", she whispered into the microphone. "I think we are watched."

He looked over to the cam. "If they are watching, they will have probably already seen us."

For a moment Pakhet considered that. She knew if she was to take out the camera she would probably trigger an alarm. And after all they could not even be sure whether somebody was watching any monitors. The security camera could be from whatever had been in there before or maybe was just a mockup. "I just hope we won't walk into a trap", she murmured and then went over to the door. She almost jumped when a twig cracked beneath her own feet.

Of course the door was locked. "What now?", she said. "When I jank it open, we will probably be noticed."

"Leave this to me", Heidenstein replied and knelt in front of the door. Then he produced a small case out of his sleeve and got two lock picks out of there and started to work on the old lock. Not before too long she heard a clicking sound the door moved a bit. Heidenstein tried to open the door carefully, but after a few inches it would not move.

"Let me do this", Pakhet said very quietly. She first looked inside, but from what she could see nobody was waiting for them inside. So she lifted up the door to make it easier to open and indeed she was able to open it wide enough for her and Heidenstein to glide inside. "Let me go first", she said and was glad when he did not argue about it.

Carefully she glided through the opening. Only half inside she looked around. There were container offices both to the left and the right side of the door and guards standing with to both sides, though further away from the door. It seemed neither had noticed her and so she hurried through the door and took cover at the side of the container on their left, where a small path was left leading towards a ladder that apparently belonged to the skeleton of what once had been a crane.

"Be careful", she whispered into the microphone. "There are guards."

"Okay", was the only reply she got, before Heidenstein, too, slipped through and sneaked over to her position.

"It would be great to know, where the girls are in here", she muttered.

Heidenstein looked around, before his gaze found the ladder. "I'll go up there", he said. "You cover my back?"

For a moment Pakhet did not reply, as she still was not willing to trust his physical skills, but then she nodded. "Okay."

While Heidenstein started to carefully climb up the old and rusty ladder, Pakhet moved back onto the edge of the container, from where she could look into the warehouse.

It seemed to be mostly empty and for all the care those "pirates" had taken to get

their pier into shape, the inside looked almost as rundown as the outside of the building. There were apparent water leaks in the ceiling and on the walls and only about half of the old lamps on the ceiling seemed to be working properly, which maybe was why they had installed simple floodlights on top of the containers but facing into the hall.

The later half of the warehouse seemed to be an assorted store of crates that seemed rather untidy. There were two more containers there, which looked like they had been here before half of the island had sunken down, as rust was creeping up their walls.

Between those containers she could see another guard, who had sat down on a crate and apparently was talking to someone. His gun lay in his lap and he seemed to be rather relaxed, leading her to believe that they indeed did not expect them.

"Pakhet?", she heard Heidenstein's voice over the monitor.

"Yes?", she replied.

Another message appeared in her AR display and she opened, seeing a picture taken from up on the crane showing that part of the warehouse she could not see from her perspective. There were five more guards, three of which seemed to be talking at the far end of the hall. Heidenstein did send another picture which showed the entire hall and all the guards. Four of them – the two in front of the containers, the one she could see sitting on the crate and the one he seemed to be talking to – were marked red, the other three blue.

"You take out the red ones, I take the others", Heidenstein said over their connection.

"Okay", Pakhet answered, though she was unsure whether this would really work out.

"Wait until I have taken out the first two."

"Okay", confirmed Heidenstein.

Without further radio contact, she moved forward and waited at the edge of the office container she was hiding behind. She took out the Parashield and checked the darts, before waiting for a good moment. She wanted to take out the guy in front of the opposite container out first, as he would be able to see her more easily, should he get suspicious.

Right now that guy – like all the other gangers – seemed to be rather bored, though he at least tried to pay attention.

She aimed and shot. The next moment the ganger lifted his hand to feel his neck, as he apparently had felt something. But she did not wait for him to notice the dart and rather aimed for the other guard, who seemed to have noticed nothing. Once more she shot and heard the guy mumble something in another language she by now suspected to be Mandarin, just before both guards hit the floor almost in the same moment.

Outside a motor suddenly howled, but the noise soon faded. Probably a boat driving away and Pakhet could just pray that it was not their boat.

She moved forward, ducked to the ground, as she was rather sure that somebody was inside the two office containers and both had windows in them. She pressed herself close to the metal of the containers, hoping that the talking guy, who would have her in plain view by now would be blinded by the light.

There were about twelve meters between the end of the office containers and where that guy was sitting – twelve meters with a couple of larger crates in between, that would make it harder to see her approaching but right now also hindered her from shooting. There were only three more darts, before she had to reload so she did not want to waste them.

Hence she approached him in the cover of the crates, ready to take out both guards in

direct combat, but just when she made half the way, the guy who so far had been out of her view and was talking to the one sitting on the crate, casually looked around and spotted her. She could see the surprise in his face, as he too shocked for a moment to react.

She sprinted forward, just as he shouted a warning and readied his machine-gun. He wanted to shoot just in the moment she reached him and yanked the gun upwards, so a short salvo perforated the old roof.

Pakhet wrenched the gun from out of his hands and knocked him out with a punch to his forehead. With fluid motion she turned around to the other guard, who nervously tried to unjam the safety of his gun – but he was too slow and got sent to the floor within a blink.

There was no further shooting, so she had to assume that Heidenstein either had not done his move or actually knocked all of those other four guys out. She looked around, but could not see any of the other guards standing, though she had no time to go looking for downed gangers. “Well, interesting”, she muttered to herself, though knowingly that he would probably hear her.

The next moment she ran for one of the rusting containers to take cover behind it. After all there had been more guys outside and she did not know how many of those. “Careful”, she said quietly. “There might be more.”

“What was that about?”, Heidenstein asked back.

“Saving ammunition and getting a proper field of fire”, she replied grudgingly. Looking around she right now could not see any more gangers, but looking towards the big warehouse gates opposite to the container they were open for about a meter. Sadly though the opening was right behind another stack of crates though she could not properly shoot if somebody was to get through it.

She could hear shouting from outside, though. While waiting to be able to shoot, she refilled the Parashield with two more darts.

“There are three more”, she heard Heidenstein's voice over their connection.

Once more she walked to the other side of the container, staying hidden behind it, and tried to make out one of the gangers coming inside. Then the first of them came into view. “You take the last one, I take the first guy.”

“Okay.”

She took aim and shot, while the ganger looked around. He jumped, when the dart hit him, and started shooting in her general direction without hitting her. Then he fainted, while she could also here another body hit the floor.

The last guard moved forward, looking around frantically. “Who is there?”, he shouted in German.

Pakhet aimed at him, but just when she shot he moved forward and she missed him. While she could not be sure, whether he had noticed the dart or was just panicking, he now ran for one of the two office containers.

She cursed silently, when the ganger reached the door and found cover inside.

“So, what now?”, she asked.

“Now we hope the girls are still alive and where not on the boat”, Heidenstein replied.

“I will take a look at those containers.”

Pakhet hesitated, as she would have rather taken care of it herself. But than she agreed: “I'll cover your back.”

“Thanks”, he replied.

When she looked up at the crane, she could see him move back towards the ladder, where he climbed down. Crouched she moved for the ladder, too, trying to stay out of

view from the windows of the two offices.

"I'll take that guy out", Heidenstein said.

"If there is only one guy", Pakhet replied.

While she faced the hall and stood against the edge of the container, she raised her gun again, ready to shoot at anything that would move.

Meanwhile Heidenstein moved closer to the window of the first container – the same container the one ganger had run inside. Carefully he tried looking inside, when a shot sounded and the glass of the container window broke with a crash, but Heidenstein ducked in time to evade the shot. Somebody inside the container yelled something, though Pakhet could not understand what he was saying.

Then Heidenstein hesitated for a moment. He put the Parashield back into the holster, but in the next moment another weapon seemed to just appear in his hand. There were a few seconds of silence, though by now Pakhet, too, could hear some muffled screams. She was tempted to do something herself, but decided against it. She wanted to see what was to happen next.

The person inside yelled again, but then Heidenstein stood up and in one fluid motion raised his arms and shot with what Pakhet now realized to be a Defiance Ex-Shocker. Somebody inside – a man – screamed and then there was silence.

Pakhet looked at Heidenstein, who took a deep breath.

"The girls are here", he said.

Pakhet nodded and looked over at the second office. "Take care of them. I'll make sure we don't have no more company."

"Okay", he just said and went inside the first container.

Meanwhile Pakhet carefully moved towards the other office, before kicking in the door. She looked around the gun drawn, but there was nobody here. The office was mostly empty, though it seemed to have been recently used.

She exhaled with relief, before moving out of the container to investigate the rest of the warehouse – just to make sure no other ganger was still standing, but she did not find anyone. All of the gangers lay unconsciously on the floor, all but the two she had taken out in close combat, having a small injection-dart in their neck.

Looking over to the offices, she had to smirk. So the good doctor was able to shoot. Well, that probably was worth something. Yes, it was interesting, interesting indeed.