

Machines

Hamburg in the shadows

Von Alaiya

XIII – Dacart's mission

Pakhet had been right: It took them only three days to upgrade the Jackrabbit. After that the car was not only armoured, but had chameleon coating as well. It seemed to be somewhat useful and as it did not come her to costly she had gone with it.

It had been Robert who had helped her applying the coating to the car. It had not taken them long and she did not want him to feel left out after she had done the armouring together with Heidenstein. She also hoped that Heidenstein would take some time off to properly heal up.

Ever since they had finished up the car she had put some time into working out again – something she had let slide while first working on the weapons and then on the Jackrabbit. Some part of her still thought she should try to get some distance to Heidenstein, because she just did not want to trust him. That was, why she did not phone him during the next four days. She had to admit that it was almost an odd feeling, as she had kinda grown accustomed to all the bantering.

It was on the fifth day though, when Heidenstein phoned her.

For a moment she hesitated but then she picked up. Maybe he had a job for her after all – and she would not complain about making some more money as she had spent most of the money from the last two runs on the upgrades and also had had to pay the rent for the next month.

“Hey there, doc”, she greeted him.

“Hey, Pakhet”, he replied and quickly went on to the topic. “I’ll make it quick: Dacart had just called me. He’s got a job and he asked me to ask you to come along.”

Somehow she did not trust this. Dacart had gotten hired for a run? “What kind of job?”, she asked.

“Extraction in Neue Mitte. And we would need to go now.”

Pakhet thought about this for a moment. “What kind of extraction? And what sort of payment?”

“A Shiawase employee is being kidnapped. Dacart said sixty thousand for the group if we get that guy out alive and unharmed”, the doc replied. “Twenty thousand if he is still alive when the HTR team is coming in.”

Pakhet hesitated for a moment, even though she knew she barely had the time to do so. “Is Baramesus coming along?”

“He has left the city. So I don't think so.”

“Are you coming along?”, she then asked.

“Yes. I’ll go”, Heidenstein replied after a moment.

Once again Pakhet bit her lips as she realized that she did not want Heidenstein to go there alone with those idiots. Well, drek. "Okay. I'll come. Where?"

"Shiawase office complex in Neue Mitte", Heidenstein said. "I'll send you the address. Can you pick up Kah Pak on the way?"

"Where is he?", Pakhet replied.

"Stornmann", he said.

Pakhet sighed. She was still unsure whether she liked Kah Pak. No, actually she was really sure that she did not like him. But then again they might need some magical support on the mission. "I'm on my way."

"Okay."

With that Pakhet hung up, grabbed her armoured jacket, before running outside, grabbing the Parashield, her heavy pistol and – after a moment of hesitation – her rifle, too. With the weapons in the respective holsters she opened her garage, got into the Jackrabbit and drove off.

As it was just the early afternoon she could only hope to reach the office building in time to still make a change.

On her way to Stornmann she got an invitation from Heidenstein for some sort of videofeed. Three small video screens popped up at the side of her field of view. It seemed to be video shot by drones hovering over what happened. Pakhet turned on assisted driving before looking at the videos.

Apparently it was a live feed from what happened in that office building. The kidnappers – very clearly a group of runners – outmatched the local security. They had taken a rather slender asian looking guy behind them and he looked rather scared. Yep, clearly their mission target. The runners in sight seemed to be four guys: One was clearly a troll, another might have been an ork, the other two seemed to be human.

It was clear that the security in the building was falling back, trying to minimize their losses by being as defensive as possible. They were trying to hinder the runners, were trying to buy time, but were apparently calculating on either them or the HTR actually freeing the hostage.

She reached the point where she was to pick up Kah Pak and was relieved to find the shaman waiting by the side of the street in his running gear. She halted the car. "Get in!", she just barked at him and so he did.

Going as fast as possible without drawing in to much unwanted attention she made her way to the office building, being aided by her satnav.

Kah Pak closed his eyes and started to mumble something. Magic stuff?

"What are you doing?", she asked grimly, but did not get any reply. Well, he could have asked at least, before he started doing anything magic in her car.

She accelerated as it seemed the runners had reached one of the lower floors of the office building.

Another invitation popped up and she once again accepted it.

"Where are you?", Heidenstein asked over their communication channel.

"Almost there", she replied looking at the map of the satnav, according to which she was still ten about blocks away.

"You need to hurry", Heidenstein said.

Pakhet growled at him. "I know." She took the next turn and then the next, just while she could see how the runners reached a garage.

"Where are you?", Heidenstein hurried her.

"Almost there!", she repeated once more when she finally was able to see the building

down the road. She accelerated again and saw the van of the group parked already in front of the underground garage's exit. "There we are."

Just when she brought the Jackrabbit to a hold a row of thick bars fell down at the exit – a barrage. "What's going on?"

"Slap is trying to hinder them from leaving", Heidenstein explained. "He is doing stuff in the matrix. Dacart is trying to get in there through an emergency exit. Wait a moment." Another invite, which she excepted.

"Drek!", she now heard Dacart cursing.

"What are you doing, fool?", Pakhet barked while activating her normal microphone and putting on her helmet, before taking her rifle and going outside.

Dacart was still cursing. "Well, my blow torch just blew up."

Pakhet could not help but to roll her eyes. She looked down the ramp of the garage and saw another van – a Roadmaster – driving towards the bars which just started to open up again.

"What are you doing?", she now heard Heidenstein ask, when she readied her rifle. She knew it was directed at her, but she did not reply.

She breathed and then shot. Once. Twice. Both times directly at the window in front of the driver's seat. But the Roadmaster did not slow down. The shots did not crack the window and Pakhet had to jump aside to not be run over.

"Fuck", she muttered, when the Roadmaster crashed into their group van. "You okay, doc?" Before she got answer she heard Heidenstein take a deep breath.

"Yeah, we seem to be alright."

The Roadmaster made a backwards jolt, before it turned to drive away.

Pakhet cursed once again and hurried back to her car, started the motor and turned around as well, as the Roadmaster was going down the road she had come. She let the auto-pilot take over to fire several bullets at the tires of the Roadmaster, but once more to no ordeal. Well, Roadmaster's had a reputation of being tanks, but so far at least armour-piercing rounds had done at least a dent at them – making her believe this car had additional armouring as well. Great! She switched back to manual driving. Then the "team van" was next to the Jackrabbit and accelerated in an attempt to ram the other van, but the Roadmaster evaded with ease, falling back in an apparent attempt to ram Pakhet's car. Hastily she rotated the steering wheel and somehow managed to evade the Roadmaster.

It was then, that a bat just popped into existence right beside her.

"What the heck?", she exclaimed, when the bat sat down on Kah Pak's shoulder and looked at him with some expectation.

"Go and scream at them, would you do that?", Kah Pak said to the bat.

"Sounds fun!", the bat replied, before flying right through the front window of the Jackrabbit as if it did not exist for her.

"What...?" Pakhet looked at Kah Pak, understanding that this had to be some sort of spirit.

But the shaman did not reply but rather had closed his eyes once again – doing some other magic stuff again.

Once again the team van tried to ram the Roadmaster and once again the Roadmaster evaded by falling back and trying to ram the Jackrabbit, this time forcing Pakhet to brake hardly. Just then a sea gull appeared on Kah Pak's knee.

"What the hell are you doing?", she screamed at him, but once more not getting a reply.

"What should I do?", the sea gull asked, flapping its wings.

"If you would kindly go into that car there and try to distract the people inside", Kah Pak said to the gull.

"Yeah, can do!" Just like the bat the sea gull flew through the front window, while Pakhet tried to stay in control over her car. She was pretty sure that somebody was rigged into the Roadmaster, which evaded any attacks from the group van with ease. "Can't you summon something bigger?", she growled at Kah Pak, when she had to fall back once again.

Apparently he could as just a few seconds later a giant raven appeared on the hood of her car, forcing her to slow down as she was barely able to see.

"Go and frighten them!", Kah Pak said and off the giant bird went.

Just like those birds – and the bat – seemed to have no problem flying through her front window, they seemed to have no problem with the walls of the Roadmaster. There was a reason why Pakhet did not like spirits: They just did not make any sense! Just in that moment a cover of ice appeared on the street, forcing Pakhet to once again fight over the control the car, while their van started to slide and almost crashed into a wall, making Pakhet glad that there was no traffic on this street.

But just in that moment, when she thought they had lost the Roadmaster for good the large van started to slide, too, crashing into the next car, the backlight dying instantly.

"What the...?" Pakhet did not understand what just had happened, but there was no time to think about it. Instead she got out of the car and ran for the Roadmaster just when it's windows broke completely.

This was a good thing for a change. She pulled out the Parashield and shot inside the van just when she was next to it, just before sliding to take cover next to the Roadmaster, realizing to late that the unarmoured guy who she had shot was probably the guy they were supposed to rescue. Well, at least he would not get in the way when he was down, she thought, hoping that he was not allergic again narcoject. Then the shooting started. The back doors of the Roadmaster were thrown open and people ran out of it. Pakhet looked through the side window, realizing she was not in a good position to shoot at the three fighters who apparently just run out of the van. But there was Heidenstein, too, shooting at them with his normal pistol – probably meaning he was using Pepper Punch again. But the guys shot back, hitting Heidenstein, with what seemed to be a shotgun.

"Doc, are you okay?", she shouted into the microphone, when he went down.

Well, drek.

Just then a motorcycle approached from the direction of the office building, the rider jumping of just before reaching the Roadmaster, letting the motorcycle slide at the three guys, who quickly jumped aside. This had to be Dacart, Pakhet realized, just when the rider took a pistol from a holster starting to shoot at the guys.

Paying too much attention to this Pakhet had not realized that one of the two still conscious guys in the back of the van had drawn a pistol as well, now shooting at her. In the last moment Pakhet ducked down again, somehow evading the bullet, which still graced her helmet. She ducked down, quickly glancing at the videofeed from the drones, that now seemed to hover over the battle.

What she could see was the three street sam firing at Dacart with all they had, while he jumped around like a squirrel on spiked coffee, apparently even evading explosive rounds from whatever the cannon-like weapon the troll was using was.

But once again it was the human fighter, who still had his shotgun, who managed to hit. Dacart went down.

"Drek!", Pakhet muttered, just when she jerked as a sudden pain creped into her head. She knew that kind of pain: Magic.

She looked up realizing that the mage, who had probably also summoned the ice onto the street, was just above her and apparently he was just busy doing something to her.

"Not now!", she yelled at him, grabbed him by the neck, yanked him out of the window and threw him at the wall from which she was only about a meter away.

A nasty crack sounded when the mages head hit the wall, telling her that she had probably just broken his neck. Well, fuck, but she had no time to care about this.

Looking at the videofeed it seemed that Heidenstein was up again, but had opened his med-kit.

"Are you alright, doc?", she screamed frantically.

"I am – somehow", he replied. "But Dacart is not."

Did that idiot not realize that now he took care of the stupid adept he was in point blank shooting range of the three enemies?

It was just then, that the troll with his big cannon went down, vomiting onto the street. Well, the doc was still in shooting range of two of them.

And she had no good way of shooting at them.

But there was a way. She got out her commlink and sent a command to her still running Jackrabbit to drive forward. If they were lucky the car would come to a hold just in between their enemies and the doc.

The Jackrabbit lived up to its name when it jumped forward, hitting the downed troll into the head and running over the human with his damned shotgun, while the ork somehow managed to jump aside.

Just then something came flying through the window of the Roadmaster landing right besides Pakhet.

It took her a moment to realize it was a grenade. Somehow she managed to jump away, as it went up in a flash. She ran for the Jackrabbit, hiding behind it as well. Heidenstein was still busy caring for Dacart, who – as she could now see – had taken a shot into the chest and seemed to be bleeding from several small holes.

The sound of burst fire sounded and she realized too late that it was directed at her. It hit her in the shoulder, but she did not feel bullets pierce her skin. While she ducked down to evade more bullets she took a look at her own shoulder – the bullets stuck in her jacket. "Lucky."

She shot back at the ork. One shot from a Parashield, then another one before she had to duck down again, as more burst fire hailed onto the Jackrabbit. She had missed. The ork was heavily armoured and it was pretty impossible to place one of the darts between his armour.

This would not work, so she put the Parashield away and got her Ares Predator out of the holster, to start firing at the ork with that. Like the rifle the Predator was loaded with armour-piercing rounds – meant especially for cases like that. She saw that she hit the ork in the shoulder, but somehow he still did not go down.

"What are you doing?", a voice behind her asked.

She shot a side glance to see Slap running up to her, stumbling on his way. Was he good for anything? She did not honour him with answer, but rather kept firing.

More burstfire was directed into her direction, when a white shadow darted down onto the ork. It was the sea gull, trying to peck him, it seemed, and it was too close for the ork to hit with his machine gun. Finally he stopped shooting and rather lashed out at the bird which flew up into the sky again.

Pakhet used this moment to hit the ork again, though he still did not go down. Then she realized that Kah Pak had also run to hide behind her Jackrabbit. Well, great, what were they doing? This made for a great way to motivate the stupid ork to come around to them.

The ork seemed to have the exactly same idea when he saw Kah Pak vanishing behind the Jackrabbit.

Pakhet wanted to shoot at him again, when another burst of fire hit the concrete beside her. She looked up and saw three drones up in the sky above them – not the drones filming this entire ordeal for them, but rotor-drones with gun. “Oh drek”, she muttered, opened the car door and jumped inside, leaving the door open so the others could follow.

“How long until you are done, doc?”, she barked.

“Just give me a few more seconds, okay?”, he replied grimly.

Slap jumped into the car besides her, just while the ork was coming around the Jackrabbit. The decker left the door open, while Kah Pak jumped on the back seat, pulling the door shut.

“Fuck”, Pakhet muttered when the ork reached the other side of the car. For a moment she was afraid he would just shoot Heidenstein in the head, but he completely ignored the doc and Dacart, but rather pulled a grenade from his belt, grinning at them.

“Oh, fuck! Close the door!”, Pakhet yelled at Slap, who tried to pull the door shut, but the ork yanked the door open and threw the grenade inside.

“Oh, fuck! Fuck! Fuck!” Pakhet stretched out her arm to catch the grenade, but it evaded her grip. “Fuck!” She reached for it again and this time was able to close her hand around the explosive. She had only a split second to think – but she knew she could not just throw the grenade out at the ork as she would kill Heidenstein and Dacart with that, too.

So she somehow managed to yank open the door next to her and throw the grenade out, before pulling the door shut. Not a moment too soon, as the grenade exploded just a split second later, splinters hailing down onto the car, making Pakhet rather glad to have upgraded the armour just days earlier.

“Now will you pull the door shut?”, she yelled at Slap, but did not get a reply. Slap had apparently collapsed in his seat and the ork was reaching for another grenade.

But then the ork jerked. Something had clearly hit him, as he seemed to be squirming. Then Dacart jumped suddenly up, pulled up his armoured vest, got out a knife and stuck it into the orks chest, who still kept standing.

The next moment mewing filled the street and before Pakhet knew what was going on a pack of cats jumped at the ork, dragging him down.

“Really, cats?”, Pakhet growled at Kah Pak, as she realized that this had to be the doing of a spirit. “Can't you, I don't know, summon something big and actually useful?” Burst fire. Again. Apparently directed at the cats who seemed to run to all sides. Then another burst of fire hit the car door. It was only, when the door suddenly fell down, that Pakhet realized that the fire had not been directed at the door, but at the hinges, which were not really enforced. “Fucking rigger”, she muttered when one of the drones drifted downwards and seemed to be ready to fire into the car.

Thankfully Pakhet still had the Predator in her left hand. She switched it into her right and fired at the drone, shooting it out of the air. Then, in the next moment the fire stopped.

After a few seconds of silence Pakhet dared to look out the passenger's door. The

other drones were landing.

"You are welcome", Slap said, as he opened his eyes.

She ignored him, as somebody else was running out of the Roadmaster – the guy who had thrown the other grenade at her, probably the decker.

Pakhet got out of the car and shot at him two times, before lowering her gun. Well, if he was fleeing he would not be a problem for them anymore.

But Dacart seemed to think differently: He started running, together with the cats, trying to shoot him with his pistol. Somehow the decker evaded the first and the second shot and also managed to not be bitten by any of the cats. But then his luck ended. One of Dacart's bullets hit him in the head it seemed, as he instantly collapsed onto the street.

And like this everything ended. All of the other runners seemed to be either unconscious or dead.

The gull spirit landed on the top of the road master. "Well, that was fun. What are we going to do now?"

"I would say, we should try our best to get away", Pakhet said and turned around. Then she remembered something and ran around to take a look at Heidenstein.

She was glad to find him conscious again, though he seemed to be a bit groggy.

"Are you alright, doc?", she asked, perching down next to him.

"Yeah", he replied. "I am fine. Don't worry."

She looked at him, but from what she was able to see, he was not bleeding, even though his hands were bloody thanks to Dacart. "Okay", she then said and stood up.

"Well, we should grab all our things and then just go!"

She ran over at the Roadmaster to take a look at their extraction target and was relieved to find him only unconscious. So she lifted him up and carried him over to the Jackrabbit, laying him down onto the backseat.

HanSec would be here very soon and she had no interest to try and explain all of this to them. She took her heavy pistol, as well as her rifle and handed both to the doc.

"Take those. I might be able to explain him being in the car – but not those things."

Heidenstein nodded. "Okay."

"Hey, what are we doing about them?", Dacart yelled over to them, pointing at the bodies of the other runners.

For a moment Heidenstein hesitated. "Are they dead or unconscious?"

"I think they are dead", Dacart replied.

"Well..." Heidenstein sighed. "We can take them with us, I guess. They seemed to be pretty cybered up and I might be able to sell their ware."

"Sounds great", Slap agreed.

"And we can take their gear", Dacart said, while helping Kah Pak to carry the bodies over to the van.

It was just when they had taken the rigger, who still had been inside the Roadmaster, to the van, that Dacart stood still, staring at the ground. "Oh man!", he exclaimed and picked up the weapon the troll had carried. "I can't believe it. This is a Krim Cannon!"

"And thus a highly illegal weapon", Pakhet muttered, while getting into her own car. She was pretty sure she had heard sirens in the distance.

"I need it!", Dacart whispered. "I need this weapon."

"Yeah, sorry to burst your bubble. But we are not taking this along", Heidenstein said. Dacart picked up the weapon, which was troll sized and hence almost of the same height as Dacart himself, then picked up the motorcycle. "Then I'll take it!", he exclaimed, starting the motorcycle.

“Wait! Idiot! That is my motorcycle!”, Heidenstein yelled, when Dacart started the vehicle, still experimenting with how to carry the weapon while driving. In the end he clamped it between his legs, before accelerating the motorcycle and driving off. Even though nobody was able to see it, Pakhet raised her eyebrow watching him leave. Then she shook her head. “Why do I get the feeling he is compensating for something?”