

Machines

Hamburg in the shadows

Von Alaiya

XVI – Of grenades and ghouls

It at least could be said, that it took Slap some time to wield proper results – even though they would have to wait either way, as repairing the two vans took several days. This was partly a result of both vehicles being badly damaged and needing repair parts that could not that easily be retrieved – and partly a result of the fact that part of the work could only be done with two people and Heidenstein still had to work in his street clinic. But in the end after about two weeks both vehicles had been repaired and fitted with some extras.

In the end, this was not that bad if it was not for the realization that dawned on Pakhet once they were finished with the repairs: Out of the twelve days it had taken to repair all the vehicles and the drones she had spent only three nights at home. Of course she had reasoned with herself every evening that it just made more sense to stay at the hospital, when she was to go over to work in the garage the next day either way – but she still knew it was foolish.

Of course her kidneys were still in place and she was pretty sure that the doc would not use her trust in any way – as he was just too much of an idiotic, naïve nice guy and by now she was sure that it was not just a mask he had put on – but she was well aware that there was no way denying that they were friends. This meant after seven years of successfully avoiding to get close to any other runner she somehow had made friends with another runner. And yet she did not even feel as much regret about this as she knew she should.

The only thing she felt was fear. Fear, that she would not be able to make the right decision because of Heidenstein. Fear, that she would do something stupid because of him. After all that had been her reason to keep the distance to other runners, to keep distance from everyone but Robert, whom she had known long before she had ended up in the shadows.

But for now it was actually enjoyable to have somebody, who knew the shadows and was not as apprehensive as Robert tended to be. The doc had already ended up in the shadows, though unquestionably through a regrettable circumstances, and Pakhet did not have to be as afraid to pull him in too far – just as she tended to be with Robert.

Also, it was really nice to be – for once – not the one ranting about TV programs. Admittedly it was due to her wanting to annoy him at least a bit, that she had put on one of those unbearable emergency doctors trid series and she had been right on spot.

The doc hated these shows and their depiction of medicine. Well, either that or he just

enjoyed ranting about them as much as she enjoyed ranting about action movies. But for now she did not have to be the wanting complaining about how some shots were impossible and about how nobody could survive being that close to an explosion. Instead she was listening to Heidenstein ranting "You cannot put people in surgery like that!" or "You have to clean out such a wound first!" until she would laugh. And maybe that was the part she should have been most irritated about – as she rarely used to laugh.

While she was repairing the cars Pakhet had neglected one thing: She had not looked after Michael in over two weeks. Partly because she was still angry about the second mission in two month he had charged her with going bad – partly because she just did not like him and some part of her mind rationalized that she had made good money without him over the last few weeks. But she knew she would sooner or later pay him a visit so she finally drove over to Harburg two days after the repairs were finished. She found the shop closed and so she just went over to the apartment building he was living in. She rang the doorbell and once again waited.

"What was that about calling?", his voice asked over the intercom.

"C'mon, let me in", she growled back.

The buzzer sounded and she went inside taking the lift up to his apartment.

As it was so often she found Michael working at his computer station, apparently being actually busy this time. "Take some soykaf, if you want", Michael said and pointed at a coffeepot on the table.

"Thanks", she said and sat down on his sofa.

"You worry me, Pakhet", Michael said without looking over to her.

She looked over to him. "I do?"

"You don't call, you don't come over and that for more then two weeks", he answered.

"I already thought the idiots have taken you. Well, in a way they have, eh?"

The sound of this was somewhat unsettling. While she had somewhat expected that Michael would be at least irritated about her being absent for so long, it sounded as if he had been spying on her. "What are you talking about?"

"You've been running with those idiots several times, haven't you?", he replied. "I've heard of it."

"You did, eh?" Pakhet crossed her arms in front of her chest.

"Yes. And you've been spending an awful lot of time with the dear Doctor Heidenstein, eh? You are not starting to make friends, are you?" Some amusement could be heard in Michael's voice. He was taunting her.

Pakhet gave a long sigh. "How is that any concern to you?"

"Oh, please. I'm just concerned. You know how it is: You cannot trust anybody in the shadows", Michael said.

"The least of all you."

He chuckled. "Exactly. C'mon, Pakhet, you know I am right. Why do you hang out with that guy?"

Even though he was still not looking over to her, Pakhet shrugged. "As I said, it does not concern you." She wanted to switch the topic. "Say, who was that asshole we were saving that last time you had a mission for me."

"You know I cannot tell you", Michael replied. "Would ruin my reputation. But I gather that he will end up on your black list?"

"Better so", Pakhet muttered. A part of her would have actually really wanted to run for that Johnson again – just so she could have chance to retaliate.

Michael went silent for a time, doing something on his computer. "So, what are you here about? A job?"

She thought about it for a moment. "Well, if you have something profitable."

"Well, let me see", he muttered and once more fell silent. When he spoke the next time he was talking in what Pakhet realized to be Japanese. As he was wearing a headset it was probable that he had just gotten a phone call.

She leaned back and waited for him to address her again. It was just then that he turned around to it.

"Well, it seems you've jinxed it", he said. "I've gotten something that could interest you. Want to talk with the Johnson? I can forward the call to you."

Pakhet shrugged and got out her commlink. "Alright."

Once again Michael said something in Japanese, then she saw an incoming video call on the display of her commlink – as well as displayed in the AR. She picked up and was surprised to see the Shiawase Johnson who had paid them for bringing back the target from the last extraction mission and if she was interpreting the expression that crossed his face for just a split second right he was surprised as well.

"Ah, Miss Pakhet", he then said with his thick Japanese accent, but of course formally and with audible respect in his voice – just how one would expect it from a Japanese Johnson. "What a pleasant surprise."

Pakhet did not sigh, even though she felt like it. She had dealt with Japanese often enough to know at least some of the proper mannerisms. "The pleasure is mine. I was told you were looking for a runner, so what can I help you with?"

"Yes, yes, of course", the Johnson replied. "We do have a problem right now: A group of runners was crossing the ghoulish zone in Kaltenkirchen and had an unfortunate run-in with the inhabitants, which – I am afraid – they did not survive. But when they were crossing the zone they were carrying an item – a MacGuffin you might say – of great worth to us."

"So you are looking for somebody to get the MacGuffin", Pakhet concluded. She did not ask why the unlucky runners had crossed the ghoulish zone, as she knew it was a common escape route as more often than not the corp security was unwilling to follow there.

"That is exactly what your mission would be, should you choose to accept it", the Johnson replied.

"What are you willing to pay?", she replied and was rather surprised to see the smile of the Johnson twitch a bit with amusement over her bluntness.

"Of course, the payment", he replied. "Well, the last time we saw each other your car was in rather poor condition. What would you say about a new – and better – car?"

Pakhet considered this. To her experience one could not have enough cars, especially as her Jackrabbit – due to its uniqueness – was rather conspicuous. But there was one problem: "That does not sound too bad, but there is one fatal flaw: I won't go into the ghoulish zone on my own. I am good, but I am not suicidal. And a car is hard to divide by two."

Now there was no doubt, there was some amusement in his expression. "That is true, of course. Well, do you think that whoever you are taking along would be interested in a car?"

Pakhet thought about it for a moment – from all she knew Heidenstein did not have a normal car, meaning that he would be probably interested in it. Of course she was thinking about taking him along, as he was the only other runner she knew, she could reach and she trusted enough to just take him along. "So you are offering two cars?"

This was a rather interesting form of payment.

"That would be the offer, yes", he replied.

"Okay, deal", Pakhet finally said.

"Very well, I know you won't disappoint us", the Johnson replied. "And Miss Pakhet? It would be rather kind of you to bring the item to the same place as last time until 6p.m."

So there was a time limit. But she had planned to go there immediately before somebody else was to grab that MacGuffin. After all there were some runners and from what she heard some Mafiosi living in the ghoulish zone and she was also not keen on going there after dark. "Okay", she said. "Then I'll better be on my way."

"I look forward to hearing from you then", the Johnson said. "I'll send you all the additional information."

"Okay", Pakhet replied before hanging up. She put the commlink back into her pocket and looked over at Michael. "Well, it seems I have a job."

"I've heard it", Michael said with a smug smile. "And I gather you know this Johnson."

"I do. The last run with the idiots."

"White list for him?"

Pakhet shrugged. "Let's see what will be the end of this run, eh?" She stood up.

"You are going to take the good doctor along?", Michael asked, but she just growled.

"Mind your own business." She went to the door. "Well, I'll be going then."

"Don't die", Michael said dryly, just before she opened the door and went outside.

It was only minutes after noon so she had almost six hours left. That should be enough as long as they did not have to go too far into the ghoulish zone. Now she just needed to talk Heidenstein into coming along.

Once she was outside and back in her car she phoned him using a mic and her in-ear monitor to be able to keep driving while talking. Thankfully Heidenstein was rather quick picking up.

"Yes", he started just before she interrupted him.

"Tell me, what do you know about ghouls?", she asked.

"Ghouls are metahumans that are infected with strain two of the MMVV. They normally lose their mind due to the virus and are known to be cannibalistic", he replied as if he was an audio book. "They are also blind and are mildly allergic against sunlight – though they don't burn in the sunlight as some would like you to believe, they just don't like it. It is said they see through astral vision. One can get infected by getting scratched, bitten and so on."

"Great", Pakhet said with a sigh. "Well, then what do you say about getting to Kaltenkirchen into the ghoulish zone?"

"What?" His voice was understandably confused.

"I've got a run", she replied. "From our friends at Shiawase. We just need to get a MacGuffin out of the ghoulish zone. Payment would be in cars. One for you, one for me. What do you say?"

Now it was the doc, who sighed. "I say I pack some vaccine."

"Great", she replied. "Would you be so kind to pack our new team van?"

"Sure", he said. "Anything else?"

"Yep, get some of those grenades from the stash, okay?", she answered and for once was happy to actually have gotten some grenades after realizing how easy the last run would have been if she had just been able to throw a gas grenade into the van of the other runners. And because it would have been a waste to just order gas grenades, she had also gotten some frag grenades. Those had actually been meant for

the case that they would encounter a toxic spirit or something the like but she was rather sure they would work against ghouls just fine.

"Okay", Heidenstein said. "Anything else?", he then repeated.

For a moment she thought about this. "Actually: Pack the drones, too." After all the drones were fixed so why not use them? They would be useful to navigate the ghoulish zone.

"That's it?", the doc asked.

"Yep, that's it", Pakhet said. "I'll be at the hospital in ten minutes."

"I'll be ready", he replied.

Thankfully he really was ready once she arrived at the hospital and had already packed the three rotor drones – as well as two of the spy drones into the van. He was wearing his armoured jacket and had a shotgun in hand. Once she had entered the garage, where both vans were standing right now he pointed at the workbench where all four frag grenades she had been able to get.

"How many of those are you going to take along?", he asked.

"I'm taking all", she replied and got a grenade belt from the back of her car. "Rather take those than take risks, right?"

"You know that we will be in big trouble if HanSec is to control the car, right?", he said somewhat amused.

"I know, but we will also be in trouble if the ghouls decide to have us for lunch", she answered.

"True", the doc replied.

Pakhet put the belt in the back of the van and secured it to make sure that they would not go off inside. Then she pulled herself onto the driver's seat. "Well, let's go then. If those ghouls don't like sunlight, we better get there while the sun is still high. Also we are supposed to get that MacGuffin back before 6p.m." She started the van and waited for Heidenstein to get onto the passenger's seat.

"A time limit, hmm?", he replied. "Well, as I see it we will either have the item till then – or be eaten."

"Exactly", Pakhet said with a grim smile and drove out of the garage.

Even with the time limit she made sure to not drive on the roads that were known to be frequently controlled by HanSec. And she was lucky enough to not come across any police control on the twenty minutes drive over to Kaltenkirchen.

By now she had gotten the data from Shiawase: A picture of the MacGuffin which seemed to be some sort of data carrier as well as the coordinates where the other runners last had been known to be. Thankfully it was only about four hundred meters into the ghoulish zone – so maybe they would be able to get there without getting unwanted attention.

"Well, there we are", she muttered when she stopped the car in front of the fence at the border of the off-limits zone. All five poles of the fence there were warning signs to not enter the zone and there were automated towers which were supposed to fire at ghouls coming towards the fence but from the looks of it those were out of order. Well, great, for a secure zone this did not seem to be very secure – even though it meant that they would not have to deal with towers firing at them.

"So, how are we getting in?", Heidenstein asked.

She sighed. Actually she had hoped to be able to drive in with the car as the armour of the Roadmaster should have been able to hold off the ghouls. But it seemed that if she wanted to get to a gate she would have to take a major detour and waste

precious time. Also she had no permission to enter ghoulish zone, so it was rather unlikely that they would be able to take that route. "I guess we get a bolt clipper out of the toolbox and make a hole in the damn fence."

"I don't think we need something that large", the doc replied and produced a wire cutter out of his sleeve.

"Okay", Pakhet said and jumped out of the van.

She opened up the back doors and started the drones, in the hope that they would be able to find the bodies and maybe the MacGuffin. Sooner or later she should fit those drones with some sort of arms so that she would not need to get inside a ghoulish infested area.

"What are you doing?", Heidenstein asked. "You know that those things might get us unwanted attention."

"Yeah, but they are also going to be useful to keep the ghouls of our heels", she replied and started the drones over the console. She put the feed from the cameras into her AR display though she minimized it, so that she would be able to see what was actually happening in front of her.

Heidenstein sighed. "You might be right." He got his shotgun out of the van and started to work on the fence.

The drones quickly reached the area matching the coordinates the Johnson had sent her. It became obvious very soon that the runners did not come very far. While there were no bodies in sight this probably was because of the pack of ghouls crouching on the street with blood running over the street from underneath them. Well, this was not really appetizing but at least it meant the ghouls were fed, right?

Still, she was not keen to come head to toe with those ghouls and that was exactly why she had taken the drones along.

On command the drones started to fire in bursts and the ghouls quickly scattered and ran for the next manhole, leaving the mauled remains of some metahumans behind. It was then, that the manhole cover was lifted up and before Pakhet could be sure what had happened one of her drones was hit by something and went down.

"What the hell?", she muttered.

"What is it?", Heidenstein asked.

"I think a ghoulish has just shot at one of my drones." She put in a command for the drones to fire single shots at both the manhole covers in sight from time to time in hope to keep every thing that was down there from coming up.

Heidenstein looked at her, but did not say anything to this. "Well, after you." He pointed at the hole he had made in the fence.

Pakhet sighed. "Thanks." She grabbed the grenade belt and went for the hole to climb through it. Her Ares Predator in hand she looked around, once she was standing on the other side, waiting for Heidenstein to follow.

The doc was quick to do so, but then knelt down to close up the fence again with the help of some wire.

"What are you doing?", Pakhet asked.

"Making sure no ghouls run loose", he replied.

Pakhet sighed once more with some annoyance. Sure, she was all for protecting bystanders, but somehow she had a feeling that they might have to make a hasty retreat and she was not keen on having to cut open the fence again by then.

Slowly she moved forward and looked around to make sure that there were no ghouls around. There was some movement on one of the manhole covers and just to make sure she fired a shot at the cover.

Something made a sound and the movement stopped with the cover falling down again.

"Are you coming?", she asked Heidenstein and looked around once more.

"Yes", he replied and followed her.

Slowly and carefully they moved over to where Pakhet knew the bodies were. It seemed – right now – that the ghouls had retreated, but she was not willing to bet that it would stay at them. If they were as controlled by their hunger as people said they would not be able to resist the fresh meat for long.

Thankfully the sun was still high on the sky leaving not much shadow on the streets, but considering that the ghouls just had been sitting in the sun to feed it was clearly not stopping them. She really would hate to end up as a dessert, which made her all the more nervous looking around again and again.

It was just when they had almost reached the bodies, that one of the manhole cover moved again.

Pakhet gave another shot at it and then sprinted towards it in the hope that her weight was enough to keep the ghouls down there.

Heidenstein was right behind her and went over to the bodies. He bent down to look at the remains, apparently searching for the MacGuffin. But just after half of a minute he turned around and Pakhet knew why, as she had heard it, too.

There were ghouls – and not only two or three, but at least seven of them coming down the street from the north.

"Oh drek", she muttered lifting up her pistol.

Heidenstein readied his shotgun and waited for the ghouls to be in reach.

It was a lot like in one of those old zombie films that Robert enjoyed from time to time. After all the ghouls looked a lot like zombies with their pale, diseased skin and their keratonic nails, that were more reminiscent of claws.

Then she heard something and turned around just in time to see five more of those creatures coming out of a manhole further down the street west from where they were standing.

She cursed and pointed her gun at them. "I'll take those", she yelled at Heidenstein. She did not wait for him to answer, but rather started shooting, as those creatures were already in reach of her pistol.

The first ghoul went down with just one bullet, but when she fired a second time the ghouls scattered and started sprinting towards them.

A burst of fire from one of the drones brought down a second ghoul and her fourth shot killed another one, just before it was able to reach her.

"Oh shit", she muttered when she threw one of the ghouls back with the help of the cyber-arm.

A loud shot sounded – and she knew it was Heidenstein. She just hoped that he was more lucky than she was.

The ghouls were fast and now that they were up close it was even harder to aim at them. Nope, she really did not want to end up like one of them, she decided and cursed again, when the manhole cover beneath her vibrated again.

The ghoul attacked again and she shot once more, right before he – well, she suspected that it had been a male metahuman before – reached her. It was a head shot which seemed to be enough to bring down one of those creatures, so they seemed to still have a central nervous system.

This left one more ghoul, which was circling her now. Well, at least it seemed to be focussed on her – the last thing she wanted was it attacking Heidenstein from behind.

The cover beneath vibrated again when something tried to lift it up.

"Drek", she muttered and fired at the ghoul, but it evaded the attack and jumped at her. She fired again – twice this time – and one of the shots hit its target, bringing the ghoul down, but this also meant that her Predator was out of ammunition.

She put it back into the holster and readied her cyber-gun, just when one ghoul ran at Heidenstein. The ghoul seemed to be hurt, but was apparently not deadly wounded. Pakhet fired and once again missed due to the quickness of the creature. But at least her shot hindered the ghoul from directly attacking Heidenstein, who was able to pull out one of his pistols too. His shot hit the ghoul, but there were two more, that either had been somewhat able to evade the shot gun or had just come up from one of the manholes.

Pakhet shot two times, but missed, allowing the creature to run towards her and jump. She almost lost her balance. The only reason the claws did not pierce her chest was her armoured jacket which seemed to be too much for the claws to penetrate. She grabbed the ghoul's neck and shot another bullet from her palm killing the creature.

It was when the second ghoul fell down – shot by Heidenstein – that she saw what they had come from: The white device lying some meters away from the mauled bodies. Apparently it had been cast away being uneatable.

"Doc!", she yelled. "I've found it." She still did not move from the manhole cover.

"Great", he replied tensely loading up the shotgun again. "Then let's get the hell out of here."

"But when I move there will be more ghouls", she shouted, stomping onto the manhole cover in the hope to scare the ghouls away.

Heidenstein looked around. "Well, I think we will get more company either way." He aimed at the cover beneath her. "Grab that thing – I'll shoot anything that comes through here."

She looked at him. She did not like it – but there was no arguing that the shotgun was the best weapon they had against those creatures. "You grab it, and I follow as soon as you have it."

"We don't have time to argue", he replied. "Turn around."

She did and instantly saw what he meant: More ghouls and if she did not miscount it was nine of them. "Drek", she muttered.

Heidenstein still aimed at the manhole cover. "Go!"

With a deep breath she readied herself and then sprinted for the MacGuffin. She reached it within two seconds and heard the shotgun go off behind her. While she ran back for the fence she put the item into her pocket, but she could not help but notice, that the shotgun did not go off again.

She turned her head around to see and realized that the ghouls had almost reached Heidenstein, who was following her but was not nearly as fast on his feet as she was. He blindly shot back with his pistol, but the ghouls just scattered. There were too many of them either way.

"Oh fuck", she muttered and grabbed one of the grenades. "Fuck, fuck, fuck..." She pulled the lock pin and threw the grenade. "Doc! Jump!", she yelled. The grenade landed right in the middle of the ghoul pack – just as she had intended – and at least some of the ghouls seemed to have enough wits to run from it.

Heidenstein ran, too, but it was a split second before the grenade went off that she realized that he would not be quick enough.

"Jump!", she screamed again, just when the grenade went off.

Splinters were flying around shredded through some of the ghouls who had not made it. But Heidenstein went down, too, while Pakhet was unable to tell whether he was unconscious or worse.

Some of the ghouls that had been able to bring enough distance between themselves and the grenade would probably not care either way, leaving Pakhet only a few seconds to decide.

She cursed herself. This was exactly why she always had made sure to not make friends with other runners. It made things complicated. She had the MacGuffin. She had what she had come for. And she really does not want to end up as a ghoul or a ghoul's lunch. Still she fired at the ghouls with her cyber-pistol, running back to Heidenstein.

At least the ghouls who had run from the grenade were also intelligent enough to understand that she might have more of those weapons and did shy away for a bit, when she approached.

She felt relief, when she heard Heidenstein groan. At least he was not dead.

"Fucking idiot", she muttered and picked him up, as he was clearly in no condition to walk. Then she threw him over her shoulder and ran, while at least some of the ghouls had just decided to pursue her.

She did not care, she just ran for the fence now cursing Heidenstein for closing the hole up again.

"Oh damn it", she muttered upon reaching the closed hole, knowing well that the ghouls were only a few meters behind.

"Let me down", Heidenstein groaned.

Normally she would have objected, but she did not have a way to quickly open the hole again before the ghouls reached them.

She let him down and then turned towards the ghouls, just in time to stop one of them from jumping at Heidenstein. She shot the ghoul into the neck, being glad for having two cyber-pistols.

There were three more ghouls just waiting to attack. Maybe it was because of the adrenalin pulsing through her body, but when she fired again – two times – both bullets hit their target and brought it down, leaving only one ghoul, who seemed to be less interested in her.

As Heidenstein seemed to be bleeding heavily from his back he was probably smelling like a delicacy for the ghoul.

"Get away from him", she muttered and grabbed the ghoul by the shoulder, once again firing directly.

With relief she saw that Heidenstein had finished opening the hole and was climbing through again, but she had also seen more ghouls running their way.

She pulled out one other grenade and threw it down the street in the hope of scaring at least some of the ghouls away. Then she followed the doc through the hole.

While Heidenstein was once again closing up the hole – though he did so with shaky hands – she opened up the back doors of the van and gave a command to the drones to fly back. Then Heidenstein stumbled over to the van, before collapsing onto the load bed, just before the drones followed him into the van.

"Hey", she whispered and bent down to try and take care of his injuries, but just then she heard something else: Sirens. Had somebody reported the shots in the zone? Maybe HanSec was here for another reason, but she really could not afford to find out. She looked at Heidenstein, who only seemed to be half conscious, and hesitated for a moment. She would be unable to take care of him if they had a meet-up with

HanSec. She had to get to safety, first. "Please don't die", she muttered, before closing the back doors and climbing to the drivers cabin to get away from here. She knew she did not have to drive far as long as they were not yet pursued and she had to take care of Heidenstein. So she drove maybe for a mile before driving into a narrow street and parking the van.

She went to the back. "Doc? Doc?" She knelt down besides him and checked his pulse. He was still alive even though his pulse was weak. Thankfully he had had the automated med-kit attached and was apparently drugged. "Hey, doc..."

It was stupid, but she felt bad even though she knew that it had not really been her fault. If she had not thrown the grenade the ghouls would have gotten to him. She had thought he would be able to make it far enough away from the grenade to not be effected by it.

Carefully she tried to take of his helmet and when she managed was glad to find him at least half awake. "I am sorry."

"It's okay", he muttered with a weak voice.

She thought for a moment, what she could do, as there was not much she would be able to do about the bleeding before the splinters were removed. "You said you brought vaccine, right?", she then asked.

"In the med-kit", he replied.

She grabbed his med-kit and opened it. Thankfully she quickly found the disposable syringes filled with what apparently was the vaccine. She knew Heidenstein had not been bitten or scratched but she did not want to take any chances to end up with an cannibalistic doctor. As he did not object when she started to ready the syringe she figured that he had the same thought.

"Can you take off the jacket?", she asked.

He carefully sat up and somehow managed to peel out of the bloody rests of his jacket.

She administered the vaccine before looking into the med-kit again. She found what she was looking for: local anaesthetic patches, even one large enough to fit most of his back. It would not do much against the bleeding, but at least it should allow him to sit up.

"I am really sorry for what happened", Pakhet muttered once she had administered patch.

Heidenstein gave a sigh. "It is okay. I understand."

"I really thought you would be able to get far enough before it went off", she said.

"I know", he replied. "As I said, I understand."

Pakhet nodded, but still could not help to feel bad about it. For a moment she really had thought that she had killed him. Normally she did not make such mistakes, normally something like that did not happen to her. But normally she would also not have run back for another runner. What the hell was she doing?

"Can you sit?", she finally asked.

He tried and it was clear from his face that he was in pain doing so. "Well, I can..." But it was clear he did not exactly want to.

"Lie down", Pakhet said.

"Tell me, when we are driving up to the meeting point", he replied and she nodded, before standing up and starting the car again.

She knew that Heidenstein should get to the hospital as quickly as possible and hence she hurried to get to the garage where she was supposed to meet with the Johnson again. Still she had to use detours to avoid to run into HanSec, but she tried at least to

take the shortest detour. Just before driving to the street, on which the garage was located, she halted the car and helped Heidenstein onto the passenger's seat. He was wearing his helmet and jacket again and at least the helmet covered his pale face. She herself left off her own helmet as the Johnson had already seen her face and at least she was relatively sure that he would not try anything funny.

Like the last time the Johnson was standing there surrounded by a few guards, apparently waiting for her.

Before she jumped out of the van Pakhet took the MacGuffin out of her pocket. Carrying it very visibly she then went towards the Johnson.

"Miss Pakhet, you are already back", the Johnson said with his formal smile.

"I am." She wondered whether he would have stood here just like this until 6p.m., if she had not arrived before. "And I have the item you asked me to bring."

"Very well", the Johnson said. "I was sure you would not disappoint and it seems that I was right." He took the data carrier and put it into a briefcase. "Well, if you look to your right" – he pointed to his left – "you'll see the promised cars."

She did. If she was right both cars were Ford Americas and both were black – a bit boring for her taste but it would be easy to change the colour later on. "Thank you."

"Shall I have to cars brought somewhere?", the Johnson offered.

Pakhet thought about this. She had to drive the Roadmaster and Heidenstein was in no condition to drive any vehicle. "That would be very nice", she replied. "If you would be so nice to bring them to this parking lot." She sent him the coordinates of a parking lot near the hospital.

"That will be done", the Johnson replied. "Well", he then continued. "It is a pleasure to conduct business with you."

"The pleasure is mine", Pakhet said with the hint of a bow and turned around to get back to the van. She needed to get Heidenstein to the hospital.