

Machines

Hamburg in the shadows

Von Alaiya

I – It starts with a bang

It all started with a bang – literally. A bang so loud, that just for a moment it made the city shake. Windows broke, cars stopped and it only took seconds for the sirens of HanseSec to start howling through the streets.

Pakhet, too, had stopped her motorcycle, once she had seen the enormous fireball shooting into the cloudy sky above Harburg. "What the fuck..." she muttered under her breath, knowing very well that both the bang and the fireball originated from an explosion and by the looks of it not a small amount of explosives.

As many others she could not help but wonder, who the hell would blow up that amount of explosives in Harburg. Or even better: Who had gotten his or her hands on that amount of explosives, as prices for explosives were on the rise for months.

But unlike many others she knew somebody who would probably be able to answer those questions. As her curiosity had already kicked in and she had wanted to visit Michael anyway she started the motorcycle again and turned it around.

The woman, who called herself Pakhet once had been named Joanne Snyder, but working in the shadows for seven years that name had become something like a shadow itself. To her it was nothing more than a distant memory.

Seven years ago she would never have believed it, but Pakhet actually enjoyed working in the shadows. In a way it was easier than having a regular job and it was less boring by far. She had not to answer to anyone on the long term and other than in her old life she was actually respected – though not too much. After all she had done her very best to be not known in the shadows. She never wanted to do any of those high profile jobs, that made you money, but were also quite likely to get you killed.

It was one of her personal rules. Those kinds of rules, that every shadowrunner had. Not the general rules in the shadow, like "Geek the mage first" and "Never strike a deal with a dragon", but her own, personal rules. Part of those were inspired by moral – because even in the shadows she was not content to just forget about moral and ethics – some were inspired by honour, but most of those personal rules were in place because of what she considered as common sense.

Some of those were: "Don't get too close to other runners – it will get you killed" or "Don't trust anyone – it will get you killed" or especially "Never trust Michael – he will get you killed".

Michael was her fixer and he had made a habit of knowing everything there was to know in this city, that some people called the "Venezia of the North", while others just called it "another godforsaken hellhole". Michael was great at his job, but anyone who

trusted him was crazy. Pakhet was sure, that Michael would sell out his grandmother, if she would have been still alive, for the right amount of Nuyen. Of course he would sell her out, too, if somebody just offered the right amount of money.

Another reason to keep it low. At least in theory this was to lessen the number of people willing to buy that kind of information.

But in the end Pakhet did not trust Michael. At least not further, then she could throw him – which was seven meters, too be exact, at least if she was angry enough for that. That was exactly, why she had wanted to go see him today anyway. After all it was safer to keep an eye on him.

And so she arrived in the north of Harburg about an hour later. Normally the way took not even half that time, but not surprisingly there had been several blockades on the streets and bridges towards Harburg.

Michael owned a small gun shop here – mostly selling illegally acquired weapons – but Pakhet found the shop closed, when she parked her motorkycle in front of it. Shrugging she crossed the street, as Michael was living in a run-down apartment building just on the other side of the street.

She took off her helmet, so her fixer could see, it was her. After all he was watching most of the street using cameras. Some might have called it paranoid, but in the sixths world it was probably the most sane thing to do. Especially if one had the habit of making “special friends” the way Michael did.

Out of habit Pakhet stroke her deep red hair back, though it was that short – barely more then a stubble – that it made not much sense.

The plates for the bells mostly were not labelled, but Pakhet knew which bell button to press anyway.

It took only a few seconds, until Michael's voice came through the intercom. “Pakhet?” He sounded annoyed. “Why is it, that you cannot phone before dropping by?”

“For fuck's sake, Micha, let me in”, she growled back.

The buzzer sounded and she entered the building.

This was one of those old buildings that had been build more then 50 years ago. Hence it was not one of those sky high grown living quarters, but was only ten floors high. This was a blessing, as the lift had never worked.

Michael's two rooms apartment was on the third floor on the side facing the street. This way he could keep an eye on his shop, even when he was not there. And generally Michael was either in the shop or at home.

The door to his apartment was shut, but Pakhet knew, that she just needed to knock. Soon the door opened. Michael smiled at her in his own, almost-not-fake way. “As I said, you could phone.” He let her in.

Michael was a human man, from all she knew almost 40 years old. But his brown hair was – dyed or not – still without any white streaks. As always he wore more elegant clothing, though she knew for a fact that it was armoured and able to withstand most bullets – at least the smaller calibres.

“I could, if I wanted to”, Pakhet replied. She waited, until the door was closed again, before she asked: “So, what do you know about the explosion?”

“What explosion?” He did his best to look innocent and failed horribly at it.

Pakhet rolled her eyes. “You know exactly what explosion.”

Michael only shrugged and went back to his desk, which was clustered with computer screens and holograms. “Yeah, but you know how it is: Information costs.”

“And you know, that you still owe me for the last disaster”, she growled, before sitting down on the old sofa standing in the middle of the room. She did not take off

the armoured jacket, she was wearing – as stated before: She did not trust Michael. It was bad enough, that she could not properly wear the helmet inside.

"What disaster?", Michael replied without looking up from the screens.

"Don't fool with me, Micha." Pakhet gave him an annoyed gaze, though it went unnoticed.

"Alright, alright." The man gave a defeated sigh. "But I don't have all the information and even if I had: Some parts would cost extra. Okay?"

"Start, please", barked Pakhet.

"Well, the explosion was probably caused by explosives stolen only a few days ago. Gelignite that was stolen from one of the bigger construction companies on an transport from the port. They stole about 600 pounds."

Pakhet lifted an eyebrow. "600 pounds?"

"Yes. At least according to my information."

"Who are 'they'?", Pakhet asked, when Michael did not continue.

"A smaller Go Gang from Harburg. Call themselves the Iron Raiders. I have heard some rumors that their boss is some sort of Toxic Shaman, but I am not sure, whether those are true."

Well, while there were some toxic shamans and mages who liked blowing stuff up, they normally did not use explosives for that. So one question remained: "So, why did the stuff blow up?"

Michael shrugged. "I don't know, yet. And even if, that information would not be free."

"Yeah." Pakhet sighed dramatically. "Of course it does." For a moment she paused. When Michael did make no move to continue, she added: "So that is all you can or will tell me?"

"Yep", he replied, concentrating on one of his screens. "Anything else you want to know?"

She looked at him, even though he did not seem to notice. "Nope."

"Looking for a job, maybe?"

"Maybe." She shrugged. "You know my rules." Of course he knew the rules, most importantly, that she would – under no circumstances – do any sort of wetwork for anybody.

"Yes, yes." Michael's eyes were scanning the top right screen. "I might have something for you later on. But there is something I need to take care of first. As I said: You should call, before you come here."

"Whatever", Pakhet murmured and took up her helmet. "So that means, you are going to phone me later on?"

"Probably..." Michael did not look up. "You don't have anything to do, right?"

"Who know's", she replied and went to the door. She had actually hoped that Michael would know more about what had happened. But than again, it did not concern herself, whoever blew up... Well, whatever they had blown up. "I'll be going."

"Sure, bye."

"You're too kind", Pakhet grunted, while opening the door. "See you later."

When she left the building, she looked south, where still a large column of smoke rose towards the bleak sky. She was still curious, what the meaning of this was. After all, there was a story behind every big explosion, right? And be it just a dumb ork, that was just not careful enough...

After all she really had nothing to do for the rest of the day. So she ended up driving back to Wandsbeck, where she had rented a small house. As she had already guessed,

half of the DeMeKo channels were talking about the explosion. Somebody apparently had already decided, that this was indeed a terrorist attack, so most of the news were speculating which organisation was to blame for it. Maybe the ork Underground? Maybe the Huminis? Maybe GreenWar? Different specialists were talking to different reporters and of course nobody said anything about stolen explosives or a small go gang.

It was just before 6pm – Pakhet just had made herself coffee (real coffee, mind you, no fake soykaf) – when her Comlink started buzzing. A look at the screen told her, it was Michael.

“So, you have a job for me?”, she asked, while turning down the trideo volume.

“Good evening”, he replied in a chiding manner. “And yes, I do have a job. And I think, you will love it. You owe me for this one.”

Pakhet rolled her eyes. “I am all ears.”