

Machines

Hamburg in the shadows

Von Alaiya

XIV – Decisions

When Dacart was gone, there was no further doubt: There were sirens in the distance. Pakhet looked around and was glad to not see any HanSec car. But she really did not want to risk anything.

"I'll bring our target to the Johnson", she said.

"Should I come along?", Heidenstein offered.

She looked over at him. He was still standing – or rather leaning – against the group van.

"You can barely stand. I'll do this. It is better that way. I have an explanation why he is with me at least."

Heidenstein did not seem to have any interest in arguing. "Okay."

"I still think she shouldn't go alone", Slap said.

She looked over at him, before starting the car. "Well, tough luck." The last thing she wanted, was to take him along.

And while he did not seem to like this, he did not anything to hinder her from driving away. She still could see a police car cutting around a corner, while she was driving away, but just a moment later the sea gull dashed down at it, very effectively hindering their view by doing its business on the car's front window. Well, shit.

But then she remembered something else and phoned Michael.

"Well, hello my dear, so nice of you to call me", Michael said.

"Cut it off, Micha", she replied. "I've something to ask of you." She gave him the coordinates where the fight had taken place. "There is a Roadmaster. Broken down. But I think I can repair it. I want you to sent somebody to get it for me."

"Why don't you get it yourself?", Michael asked with a sly tone in his voice.

"Because the thing is hot and I don't have the means to get it away from there", she replied.

"How hot?"

"Novahot", she replied with a sigh.

For a moment Michael seemed to consider this. "Very well. Give me five thousand and I'll see what I can do. No guarantees, though."

Pakhet sighed and thought about this. Five thousand and no guarantee. Well, it was worth a try. And normally Michael did not like to fail on such simple tasks. "Okay. I'll transfer the money."

"Very well", Michael said. "It's so nice to do business with you."

Pakhet growled. "Well, now get to work." She hung up and concentrated on driving.

And even though Pakhet would not have thought so, she managed her drive to the

north of Neue Mitte without any unwanted attention – even though the Jackrabbit was missing a door and had several bullet holes in its body. But somehow she reached the address Heidenstein had sent her without being stopped or being pursued by HanSec.

But when she reached the address she cursed. Great, another underground garage. Right. After it went so well the last time. Now she wished she had accepted Heidenstein's offer to accompany her, even though she knew that he would have been more of a problem than anything else, if they had been stopped.

Well, what choice did she have? She drove into the garage, just to find a stern looking Japanese man in a well tailored suit surrounded by almost twenty security guards – mostly human – with formal attire and rifles.

"Oh, damn it", Pakhet muttered to herself, but got out of the car. "You are Mr. Johnson?", she asked the stern looking man.

"Indeed I am", the man said in a pleasant voice. "You are not Dacart, though."

Pakhet thought about the adept who probably had been captured by HanSec by now.

"I am afraid Dacart is indisposed. But I have got your man." She opened the back door of the Jackrabbit, never completely letting the bodyguards out of her view. Then she carried the still unconscious run target out of the car. "We tranquillized him to reduce the chances of him getting hurt in the fire fight", she lied. "But he is fine."

"Very well", the Johnson said and waved, just so that a team of medics came over to her with a stretcher on which she placed the man.

The medics checked his pulse and attached him to a biomonitor, before nodding at the Johnson.

"I hope the run did go over without any complications", the Johnson then said, looking over at the beat up car.

"Yes, there have been no unexpected complications." Another lie but Pakhet was still wearing her helmet – something that was not unusual in situations like this.

"That's good", the Johnson said with a faint smile and waved again. This time one of the guards brought over a small briefcase to him, which he then handed over to Pakhet. "You'll find a certified credstick with the agreed payment inside. You may check it, if you want."

For a moment Pakhet looked at him – she really did not feel like being perforated with holes, while checking the stick, but she also did not want to just take it without checking it. So she got the credstick out of the briefcase, while also releasing the safety of her left cyber-gun. The stick was charged with sixty thousand – just like Heidenstein had said. "Everything seems to be in order", she concluded and looked at the Johnson. "Then I will go now."

"Of course", the Johnson said. "Though I have one more question if you allow."

"Yes", she said a bit wary.

"Might I have your name and a way to contact you?", the Johnson asked. "We might have further use of your abilities."

Pakhet considered this. This guy, who spoke with a heavy Japanese accent, had at least so far not shot at her – bonus points for that. But he was a Johnson. Of course, he was a Shiawase Johnson, from all she knew, and Shiawase had a rather good reputation with runners. Well, to hell with this. "The name is Pakhet. You can reach my fixer with this number." She gave him the number of Michael.

"Well, thank you very much, Miss Pakhet", the Johnson said with the same formal smile as before.

"Thank you", she replied and slowly returned to the Jackrabbit. She hinted at a bow,

as she knew it was custom with the Japanese, before getting into the car and starting it.

The security guards saluted, but did not seem to get ready to attack her.

So she just drove out of the garage without any complications. She breathed with relief, once she was on the road again and made sure to bring some distance between herself and the garage, before she phoned Heidenstein.

Thankfully he picked up rather quickly. "Yes?"

"Pakhet here", she said. "I've got the money. Where do we meet?"

"I am at the hospital together with everyone else", he replied. "So it is probably best if you come here."

"Okay." She looked at the hole beside herself, where once the door had been. "I'll make a detour. I will be there in about an hour."

"Understood", Heidenstein answered. "Take care."

"I will." She hung up and gave her sat-nav the command to find a route circumventing most control points.

After quite a long detour through the outer districts of Hamburg Pakhet finally arrived in front of the Anderson Hospital a little less than one hour later – just as she had said. She drove onto the parking lot and around the hospital to where the entrance of the street clinic was. To her surprise she found the gate of what should have been a garage for ambulances open and the team van, as well as a motorcycle parked inside. The others – meaning Heidenstein, Kah Pak and Slap – were inside, too. When Heidenstein saw the Jackrabbit he waved her to drive into the garage, too, making her wonder whether the hospital did not even have any ambulances left.

"Is everything alright?", she asked.

"Yeah, we are fine", Heidenstein replied. "Dacart is less so."

Pakhet looked at him with surprise. "You mean he is not on his way to Big Willy?"

"Yep", the doc answered. "I literally had to cuff him to a bed, though. Because he thinks he is alright."

"After having taken a flchette round into the chest?", Pakhet replied amused.

Heidenstein rolled his eyes. "Exactly. I pumped him full with painkillers and adrenalin before. But he thinks he just does not have any pain."

A sadistic part of her felt amused by the thought. "Well, I look forward to the painkillers will lose their effect."

The doc shot her a look, but did not say anything to her comment. Rather he closed the garage door and went over to the pretty dented van. "Well, now that you are here, you could help with those." He opened the back door of the van, revealing two dead bodies. The first was the human fighter, the other Pakhet assumed to be the rigger, as he had some nasty cuts that were probably made by the beak of a bigger bird.

She sniffed. "What about them?"

"Their ware", Slap said a bit impatiently. "Doc said he can sell it, remember. Might make some money."

Pakhet looked at the two bodies. Other than some other street samurai she had met, she never had enjoyed killing and even tried to not kill – but in many times people did not leave her much of a choice. Still, butchering them up for their ware seemed a bit disrespectful to her, even though she knew that this was unreasonable sentimentality. Slap was somewhat right: They would not need their ware anymore and she knew very well how much one could make selling used cyberware. "Okay", she

finally agreed.

Together with Kah Pak she heaved the two bodies onto a stretcher, before helping bringing them into an OR inside the street clinic. Heidenstein got into a lab coat and put on gloves, before getting scalpel and other tools.

"Is there anything we can help with?", chrome-head asked.

"Do you know anything about medicine?", Heidenstein replied with faint hope in his voice.

"Nope, not really", Slap answered.

"Then, no", Heidenstein said.

It was then that Kah Pak turned around to Pakhet. "What about the payment?"

Without saying anything Pakhet got the credstick out of her pocket. "Sixty Thousand. Divided by five that would make twelve thousand per head."

"Make that divided by four", Heidenstein said looking up from the body he was cutting open. "Dacart grabbed the hacker's Cyberdeck and I think I will keep it."

"What do you want with a deck?", chrome-head asked.

"I know a bit about hacking, too", Heidenstein answered matter-of-factly.

"Well, there is something else", Pakhet said. "I've paid somebody to get those guy's Roadmaster to safety."

"So?" Slap looked at her.

Pakhet shrugged. "So I thought you might want to have a new 'team van'? A Roadmaster is a fucking tank."

"Why do you care about that?", Kah Pak said.

She shrugged again. "It was just a thought. I can also just sell the thing after giving it a general overhaul."

"You know what?" Heidenstein once more looked up from his work. "How about I give you ten thousand, buy up the old team van and compensate you for the Roadmaster. I guess we could fix it up together?"

"Fine by me", Pakhet replied with a sigh. "Though I don't think we can use Schneider's garage again."

"I'll think of something", Heidenstein replied before looking over at Kah Pak and Slap.

"Well, I guess that's okay", Kah Pak said.

Slap just shrugged.

For a moment Pakhet hesitated, as there was something else. "What about the drones?", she asked as she had seen the three rotor-drones, three spy-drones and a rigger console in the van as well.

"I wanted to sell them", Slap said.

"Well, I would keep them." Pakhet crossed her arms. "If nothing else they might work for a good distraction."

"You know what they are worth?", Slap replied.

"Not that much used on the black market", she just said.

"And don't forget that this will make for some more money", Heidenstein said.

"Well, fine", Slap finally gave in.

"Great", Pakhet said and looked over at the bodies. Then she decided that she really did not want to sit around while Heidenstein took them apart. "I'll take a look at the vehicle damage."

Well, it did not took Pakhet too long to establish, that both vehicles were heavily damaged. The Jackrabbit was still better off then the van. Of course the door was missing, but as it was one of the front doors it would be rather easy to get a

replacement. She would have to get new hinges, too, and repair some of the dents in the plates. Apart from that the chameleon coating would need some work, but while that would be costly it would not be hard work in any way.

The van on the other hand had not only a completely dented side where the Roadmaster had crushed into it, but the car body itself had taken damage from that crash. That would be harder to repair, though she was sure that Robert would be able to get the materials she would need.

While she was inspecting the damage, she received a message: "I've got the car. Brought it into a garage." Coordinates of the garage were attached.

She thought about calling Robert, but she did not want to force any interaction between Robert and Michael. This meant, she would need to rent a wrecker to transport the broken Roadmaster herself.

As she had nothing better to do, she started to pull the rest of the destroyed hinges out of the door opening of the Jackrabbit. She had found a toolbox in this garage and had decided that Heidenstein probably would not mind. Once she had finally managed to get the hinges loose, she went to work on the dents.

"That armouring really paid off, didn't it?", she heard a voice behind her.

"It did", she said and turned around to Heidenstein. "We probably would've been dead without it."

"Yep", he agreed. "You see, I thought about getting a proper equipment for repairing the cars in here."

Pakhet raised an eyebrow. "Doesn't the hospital have any ambulances?"

"It doesn't." Was it imagination or did Heidenstein evade her gaze? While it was hard to read something into cyber-eyes it seemed to her as if he did. "I've talked to the owner about renting this space for a while."

"Okay", Pakhet said though she did clearly remember her assumption from only a few days before. "Then we could start getting to work on the van." She knocked on the dented door of the old team van. "And the new one, too, I guess." Silently she cursed herself when she realized what she was saying.

"That's what I thought", Heidenstein replied. "How long do you think it would take to get the tools?"

"The tools? Let me do a few phone calls and give me the money and we should have them within two hours. It will be harder though to get all the repair parts for the van." She looked at the bend in cross-bracing. "May I ask what you are planning to do with it?"

This time it was clear to see that Heidenstein hesitated. "Well, as I said, I talked to the owner of the hospital and we thought that we actually could rebuild the van into an ambulance. It would belong to the hospital but I might be able to take it along on runs, if they are too dangerous."

Yeah, sure, Pakhet thought to herself, but did not say anything. "That doesn't sound too bad."

"Exactly", Heidenstein replied.

She looked at him and for a moment was tempted to ask about Dr. Anderson. She was still not quite sure, but all the "Yeah, that is allowed" just seemed too much. If that Anderson-guy had managed to bring that company up to an A-rank corporation, would he really be willing to risk everything by closely cooperating with shadowrunners? Well, if there was anything left to risk, that would be. After all it seemed to be hard to believe that the hospital did not even have any ambulances left.

"Say", she finally started another question, "what are you going to do with the dead

bodies? You cannot leave them lying around, can you?"

His expression quickly became grim. "Well, I've phoned a friend to take care of them." He paused. "You don't like it, right?"

She shrugged it off. "I see that it would be a waste and that it does not make that much of a difference, because there is a good chance that HanSec won't threat this with more respect as for them they will probably just be John Does. It just seems... Wrong."

"I know", Heidenstein replied. He took a deep breath, before looking over to the van again. "Well, if you can get all the tools, then be my guest. I'll pay for it, just tell me how much."

"A few thousand, probably", she said and fumbled her commlink out of her pocket.

For a moment she considered whether she was to call Robert or Michael, as she was rather sure that either would be able to get the necessary tools for her. She then decided on calling Robert – for one thing, he would not try to get more money out of it then reasonable, and he was also much more trustworthy then Michael.

She was able to reach him rather quickly and he promised to have somebody bring over the tools as well as a work bench and all the repair parts she needed for the Jackrabbit within a few hour. At least the tools should be there. He was not sure about the repair parts.

"So we wait?", Heidenstein asked when she told him about the results of her phone call.

"Seems that way", she replied. "You don't happen to have coffee here, do you?"

A faint grin appeared on his face. "Soykaf, yes, real coffee not so much."

"Well, great", she muttered.

He chuckled. "You are not at all spoiled, are you?"

"I am not – I just don't like soykaf. It does taste nothing like real coffee."

"And I always thought this was about the caffeine." Heidenstein smiled and went for the door that connected the garage to the hospital. "Let's go in. Well, at least if you want soykaf."

"I don't have much of a choice, have I?", she replied and followed him. "And it isn't just about the caffeine. It's also about the taste." She paused. "Do you at least have something to eat in your clinic? Because I'm getting hungry."

"I'll see what I can do", he said with a smile. "That is if soybread is good enough for you."

"Well, I can live through it", she replied shrugging again.

Waiting for the tools to arrive or Robert to phone again, they sat down in a small office in the street clinic. From somewhere Heidenstein got soybread as well as some cheese – at least it was real cheese, Pakhet noticed somewhat relieved, as she really hated the texture of that artificial stuff. It had been hard enough to teach her kitchen how to use real cheese.

"So, what are you going to do now?", Heidenstein asked after a while.

She looked up. "What?"

"The group", he clarified. "Are you willing to keep running with them?"

She nipped on the soykaf, then shrugged. "I don't know. What about you?"

He shrugged to. "As I said before: I was hired by Schmidt for something bigger – as was the rest of them. Schmidt wanted to train them, to make a team out of them, so I'll keep with them till then." He made a short pause. "And offering them a new van sounded kinda as if you were going to stay, too."

Rolling her eyes she took a bite of the bread. "Well, maybe. Depending on what kind

of run they drag along next." Somehow she knew that she would live to regret this decision, but then again she maybe did not even have much of a choice.

Heidenstein shot her smiled at her. "Okay."

"How are you, by the way?", she asked.

He raised an eyebrow. "Good, why?"

"Because I've seen you being hit", she replied cautiously. Not to mention, that he was still rather pale, she thought to herself, but did not say it.

"You've been hit, too", he said.

She shook her head. "At the arm. That rarely counts with these." Just to put emphasis on this she showed her cyber guns. "It's all chrome."

Now it was Heidenstein who rolled his eyes. "Well, okay. But I'm fine. And you should be careful with the the arms, too."

"I know", she said with a sign. "I know."

It was not long before Heidenstein went to take care of Dacart, who seemed to finally have noticed that indeed he was pretty injured. This meant though that Heidenstein remained short on an answer to her question. It was apparent, that even as a medical expert he was completely blind when it came to his own injuries. For a while she considered to offer him help, but as she thought it less likely that he would accept that kind of aid.

As chrome-head and the shaman had obviously already left and there was nothing else to do for her, Pakhet went back to the garage to see whether there was anything she would already be able to do. With the equipment from the toolbox she had found she started to try to remove the completely bended side doors of the "team van". But it was not possible. The doors were simply to bend and she was pretty sure she would need a crowbar to force them open.

"Can I be of any assistance?", Heidenstein asked, when he finally returned.

"No", she replied firmly. She looked at him. By now he was rather pale. "You should lie down", she added with a softer voice.

He shook his head. "I am fine."

"You are not", she said. "Take your own pulse. I bet you that it way too slow. Just look at yourself."

For a moment she thought that he would again argue about it, but then he sighed.

"Maybe you are right."

She eyed at him. "Go home, lie down. That is, if it is okay for me to stay here to wait for the tools."

"I cannot go home", he replied. "I have to take care of Dacart."

"How is he?", she asked.

"Asleep, for now."

Pakhet sighed. "Well, at least lie down for a while."

At this Heidenstein rolled his eyes, but then nodded. "Maybe you are right."