

Machines

Hamburg in the shadows

Von Alaiya

III – Easy solutions

It was shortly after 9pm, when the truck arrived at a street a few blocks away from the save-house. Pakhet had figured, that parking the truck in front of the bungalow-like building would draw to much attention, and thankfully Dacart had agreed.

So while the later was guarding the vehicle – and probably arguing with its auto pilot – Pakhet drove the Jack Rabbit back to the save-house. While she was well able to defend herself, she really was not keen on testing those skills against an entire gang of youngsters.

Once again she rang the doorbell and was left in – this time by Murphy.

“The truck is set”, she just said, while going back to the kitchen. “So we can get this over with.” She looked around for the pistols she had left on the table. “Where are my weapons?”

Nobody replied, but she spotted the weapons in the kitchen sink anyway, though they seemed to be somehow immaterial, almost see-through. Pakhet reached out for them. They felt normal at least.

It was then she realized, that this had to be some sort of invisibility magic. “Don't ever do magic to my stuff, without asking me first”, she growled, looking at the shaman and the other mage. “Whoever did that: Never. Try. That. Again.”

“Well, I thought this would help to hide the explosives”, Baramaus replied boldly.

“Well, it doesn't.” Without further ado, she put the pistols back into their holsters, checking the security first.

“What do you need those for anyway?” The mage asked.

“For shooting things”, she replied sarcastically. “Decker, err, Slap, Doc” – she had already decided that the name “Doctor Heidenstein” was just too long – “the truck is parked a few streets away. Let's get this over with.”

It was once again Baramaus, who objected: “There is no way, I am staying behind.”

Looking over to Herr Schmidt, Pakhet was waiting for him to say something. When he just nodded, she shrugged. “Whatever...”

And so they ended up in a quite overcrowded driver's cabin, with Pakhet being rather glad, that none of the others were an ork or even a troll, because in that case they would have never all fitted.

“So, where are we going?”, Pakhet asked, looking at Heidenstein.

He gave an address, right at the border of Harburg and Wandsbeck and the auto-pilot loaded route, before reminding the passengers to buckle up.

According to the navigation system, the address was associated with a hospital –

while it made sense with a medic, she had to wonder, whether they could just go and get some equipment from there. When she was still working as a security guard, she would have never been allowed to just take one of the armoured vests for private use.

Apart from that, she also could not help but wondering, whether – if this guy really worked there, he would be really so careless to just reveal a part of his identity. Then again, it was not her problem. So she shrugged it off.

“Hey, you, Pakhet.” It was Dacart leaning over to her with his comlink in hand. “Watch this.”

Man, that dude had a serious need for affection. “What is it?”, she asked not hiding her annoyance.

“Me negotiating with a toxic spirit!” He grinned.

Pakhet gave a long sigh, already guessing, that he would not let it go. So she looked at the screen. What she saw seemingly was a video record done with glasses or a helmet camera. Whoever wore the glasses – it probably was Dacart – was running in a dark environment. She knew it had to be the sewers.

Somebody else was there to. While it was hard to see in the infrared video, it seemed to be an ork. The two of them where getting around a corner, when something huge started to rise out of the slop before them. It took not long for a mostly formless blob to form and block the path.

The ork and the guy recording – Dacart – tried to run through the tunnel at the sides of the spirit, but it threw them back into a slop. They tried again, but to no avail.

The spirit seemed to ready itself for attack, when a voice – clearly Dacart's – screamed: “Can't we just talk about it?”

Surprisingly the spirit held off its attack. “What do you want?”, it asked in a deep voice.

“We just want to pass through”, Dacart replied desperately.

For a moment the spirit hesitated. “What will you give me for letting you pass?”

Some hesitation. Then the view shifted downwards where hands grabbed a grenade from a belt. “I have this nice grenade with toxic gas. Would you like to have it?”

The spirit too some time to contemplate. Then a sloppy tentacle came out of the blob and grabbed the grenade. “Get out of here”, the spirit growled and moved asside.

“Thanks!”, Dacart's voice replied before he ran on.

The video was stopped and the real Dacart grinned at Pakhet. “See? Wasn't that awesome?!”

“Yeah, great”, Pakhet replied dryly wondering whether he did not realize, that this would hurt his image more then anything. But again, this was not her problem, so she shrugged it of.

Dacart though seemed to be enormously proud of this accomplishment.

Well, if he showed stuff like this around, he would see where it would get him.

Thankfully the truck stopped soon and once again there were lucky enough to not get controlled – especially considering, that they had the explosives with them.

But now the truck parked on a mostly empty parking lot in front of a smaller, five story hospital building. The sign above the entryway declared the hospital to be the “Anderson Hospital” though Pakhet had never heard of it. Considering the empty parking slot and the probable lack of patients it was not quite surprising, though. There seemed to be no lights burning over the third story purporting that the hospital was mostly empty.

“I will need help carrying some of the equipment”, Doctor Heidenstein said upon

getting out of the passengers cabin.

"No problem", Pakhet replied happy to get out of the stink surrounding Dacart.

The adept though also volunteered: "I can help, too."

"Yeah, you stunk in a hospital?" Pakhet lifted an eyebrow. "I don't think so." She looked at the elf – Kah Pak – who seemed to be mostly silent. "Can you help?"

"I think so", he replied and also got out of the car.

"I will take care of the on-board console while you are gone", chrome-head said.

"Good", Pakhet said with a sigh, then she followed Heidenstein to the building. She kept an eye on their surroundings – after all hospitals, especially in the shadows, where not always as safe as one would wish.

The guards in the entrance hall seemed a bit shady to her, but she could not quite say why. At least her suspicion about the state of the institution seemed to be validated by the empty entrance hall. There was a human woman at the front desk, but she seemed to be rather bored, though she shortly looked up from whatever she was doing and nodded at Heidenstein.

It was pretty clear that he was rather on edge, when he turned around to them. "Wait here for a moment. I need to talk with somebody about the equipment."

Pakhet raised an eyebrow, but only replied: "Sure" while Kah Pak only nodded.

Waiting for Heidenstein to return Pakhet leaned against the wall across the front desk closely watching the the guards as well as the front lady, just in case anybody tried something funny. But nothing happened and it took the doc about five minutes to come return.

He was accompanied by an ork wearing the same formal clothing as the two guards.

"We can take the equipment", Heidenstein just said.

"And who is that?", Pakhet asked nodding at the ork.

"Somebody to help us carry", the medic replied.

Knowing that it was all he would say Pakhet shrugged and waited for Heidenstein to lead the way. Still she kept an eye on the ork as all of this seemed a bit shady to her. But once again nothing happened. They went to the second floor of the hospital and into a corridor off-limits of patients where Heidenstein lead them to a laboratory that indeed housed quite a bit of chemical equipment.

"Is there anything special we need or don't need?", Heidenstein asked.

Pakhet hesitated for a moment. After all she was not a specialist when it came to the things they were planning. Especially considering that while she had worked with explosives before, she had rarely used professional equipment. "Well, we won't need distillery dishes", she said half joking.

For a moment the doc smiled. "Oh, really?", he replied dryly.

Thankfully Heidenstein seemed to have a general idea of what they needed, while Pakhet herself could at least say quite well what they would not need, so it only took them a couple of minutes to sort out what they would need. They packed the equipment in boxes and soon were on their way out of the hospital.

"You took long", Dacart complained once they reached the truck.

Nobody bothered to reply to him, when they opened the tailift of the truck to put down the boxes. They had the equipment but something was still missing.

"We still need a table or something else to work on", Pakhet remarked.

"And a lamp", the doc added. "I don't think the overhead will cut it." He sighed. "But I think we can take it from one of the unused laboratories."

Once again Pakhet just shrugged. "Alright. Should I help carry?"

After a short moment of hesitation Heidenstein nodded. "Yeah. It would be a great

help.”

So he, Pakhet and the ork without a name returned back into the building to get a proper table, chairs and a lamp from the hospital. And while she did not say anything, Pakhet had to wonder, why Heidenstein would just be allowed to get all of this out the hospital. Was he paying whoever owned it to allow him – after all the hospital would be in dire need of money with the lack of patients – or was there another reason?

But again, it did not concern her and so she did not ask any questions.

It took about twenty more minutes until they finally had everything they needed in the cargo area of the truck. They had not yet set up the equipment to prevent damage on the ride as without even talking everyone seemed to understand that they could not do what they were planning on the ride.

“So, what now?”, Heidenstein asked. “We cannot park the truck here while working.”

Pakhet gave a sigh. “Wasn't planning on it.” In her mind she considering where they could park the truck while working. She preferred somewhere without many people around – just in case something went wrong.

“Can't we get something to eat first?”, Dacart, who was still sitting in the driver's cabin, complained. “I am hungry.”

Pakhet wanted to object, but Heidenstein cut her off before she could even start.

“That actually is not a bad idea”, he said.

Not sure whether she should get angry she looked at him. “Huh?”

“I know a parking lot mostly used by drug dealers up in Kaltenkirchen. It's also near to one of those fast food restaurants”, he explained quickly. “That probably would help in both accounts.”

Once again Pakhet almost smiled. So here was actually somebody who also tried to keep the risk for bystanders down, eh? Again she did not say anything, but acknowledged it silently, as it was a rarer virtue then she would have wished for.

Happy to not have to sit in the driver's cabin again she chose to stay in the cargo area. Yes, it was generally not allowed, but if they were to be controlled by HanSec they would be fucked either way, considering that they were taking explosives associated with a terrorist attack for a ride.

She was not really surprised to see Heidenstein, Baramesus and Kah Pak joining her, so that only Dacart and chrome-head remained in the driver's cabin. She did not know whether chrome-head had no sense of smell, had some smell-filter or just wanted to do his job, keeping an eye on the console, but she did not mind either way.

Thankfully the auto-pilot had a rather smooth way of driving, so that they had not to worry about the equipment being thrown around the cargo area.

Pakhet had to admit, that she had imagined the group responsible for that explosives to be more fun. Well, maybe it was because the actual culprit – at least if Dacart did not lie about it – had already taken to his heels, leaving only Dacart as the no so proverbial fool, but still she was pretty sure, that this was to be a rather easy solution. She watched Kah Pak and had to wonder, what his deal was. It kinda felt like all of this did not concern him. While she was pretty sure, that she could not stand the other mage (apart from also wondering, why he was even here), she was not quite sure where to place the elf.

After a while the silence got on her nerves. “That hospital of your's”, she finally started addressing Heidenstein, “is it a street clinic?”

The doc, who seemingly had been reading something in AR – he seemed to have

Cybereyes as well, even though he apparently had made an effort to obscure this, other than her or chrome-head – looked up. “Part of it is”, he answered.

“What kind of street clinic?”, she asked.

For a moment he hesitated with a reply. “The honourable kind, I hope”, he finally replied.

Pakhet smirked. “So no chop shop?”

“I hope not”, he said with emphasis, as if this question had insulted him.

“Good to know”, she replied with a shrug.

He eyes her with apparently a bit of suspicion. “Why?”

“It is just useful to know more then one street clinic. For more then one reason.”

“Sure”, Heidenstein just replied.

Once again they fell silent, so that it was a relief to Pakhet when the truck came to a stand still and somebody knocked against the side of the truck.

Somebody opened the loading ramp.

“You guys alright back there?”, Dacart asked.

Pakhet got up and went towards the ramp, to look around at the parking lot where they had hopefully arrived. Indeed they found themselves on a parking lot that was apparently designed to offer pitches for quite a few cars. Considering that it seemed to be mostly empty it was surprising nobody had used the space to put houses on it. But right now it was exactly what they needed and indeed – just as Heidenstein had said – there was the golden sign of McDonald's glowing not to far away.

Dacart stretched. “I will get something to eat. Anything I should bring?”

With a sigh Pakhet got out a cred stick topped up with 100 Nuyen. “Here. Get a menu for everyone or something.”

The adepts face creased into a smile. “Thanks. You are not so bad, you know?”

She could not help but to roll her eyes. “Just go, okay?” After all money really had not been a problem for her. While she already knew, that this run would barely pay anything, that was not true for the runs she normally did. When Dacart turned around to run over to the fast food restaurant, she turned to face the other, who mostly had come out of the truck by now. Only Kah Pak was still standing in the opening at the back of the cargo area.

“Doc, can we get started?”, she asked. “I want to get over with this soon”, she added under her breath.

“Sure”, he just replied and followed her back into the truck.

In silence they started to properly assemble the equipment on the table, before taking only a bit of the explosives.

“Do you have anything to scan of active IDs?”, Pakhet asked, when they were done with the assembly.

Heidenstein shook his head. “Nothing particular. But ask Slap. His deck should be able to pick things up, right?”

“He should be, yes”, sighed Pakhet. While she was unable to put her finger on it, there was something about chrome-head, that she found utterly unlikeable. Still she got up to ask the decker. After all she had not to like him for him to do his job.

Just when she jumped out of the cargo area she saw Dacart running over towards the truck. He stopped right in front of her, while she was going over to the driver's cabin where Slap was apparently still sitting.

Dacart held up a big, nidorous bag. “Here. Also, here. There is still some money on it.” He handed her back the cred stick.

“Thanks.” A bit surprised she took the cred stick. She would have thought that even if

he did not spend all the money he would keep the rest. But it seemed that while being a fool, he was at least a somewhat honest fool. Well, as honest as professional criminals got.

She knocked against the door of the driver's cabin. "Hey, Slap, there is food and we might need your help back there for a moment."

The door was half opened and opened completely the next moment. "Very well", he said and seemed not to be too happy about it. He sighed, when he saw the McDonald's bag. "Well, you can call it food, I guess."

"With flavoured soy stuff, where is the difference?" Dacart took one smaller paper bag out of the plastic bag and picked a burger out of it. With that he sat down on the concrete floor and started to eat.

"It is still soy stuff", Slap muttered but got himself a paper bag, too.

Without much appetite, as she did not like the fatty soy food, she took one of the burgers herself and sat down on the ramp to eat, while most of the others seemed very hungry. They probably had not eaten in a while, but it also meant that they could not continue until they were done. Then again she reasoned with herself that she rather had a non hypoglycaemic doc helping her with the explosives. After all while they had equipment the equipment was not meant for what they were doing with it. Not to mention, that the cargo area was far from being a proper laboratory.

So she waited for him and chrome-head to finish eating, so they could help. When Slap finally came around to the cargo area she sighed with relief.

"Can you just check for the ID?", she asked.

"Of course", the decker said and lifted his metal arm in front of the explosives, that was now laying on the table.

Pakhet could not see a deck, so she had to assume, that his deck was somehow integrated into the chrome-arm. She knew that it was possible and as she knew how expensive cyberdecks tended to be, it seemed to be quite reasonable.

After a few seconds Slap looked up. "The things have a signature. It is encoded. I could probably somehow overwrite it, but from what I know those things need to use a certain encode."

"Also, we don't yet know about any chemical trails", Pakhet added. It would have surprised her, if the explosives had not been ID'd.

"Exactly", said the chrome-head.

"Well, I guess, we will have to find out." She turned towards Heidenstein. "So we should get started."

He nodded. "Yes, we should."

"Good." Pakhet turned the desk lamp they had taken from the hospital on and had her comlink display a list of the most common chemicals used for chemical trails in plastic explosives at the right side of her field of vision.

She noticed, that Heidenstein sat down besides her.

"I have a list with chemicals that are used for this", she said showing her comlink. "I know how to handle explosives, you know chemistry. So I would take that you know how to identify this chemicals?"

"I would think so", Heidenstein replied with a smirk. "Would you mind sending me the list?"

Hesitating at first she nodded. "Sure." She suppressed her number. "Number?"

He gave her a number and she had to wonder whether it was his actual number or a metalink wired to relay all messages. At least his comlink vibrated not a second later and from what she could say he did the same she had done and displayed the list in

AR.

Finally they got to work. It became apparent very quickly they were dealing with high rated explosives – no wonder Herr Schmidt or whoever was behind him wanted to get his hands on the stuff. But obviously the explosives were accordingly ID'd in every possible way. The ID tags were micro tags, making it practically impossible to remove without the right equipment. Instead of one chemical trail the stuff used at least two different ones. Apart from that there was one more problem for the use of these explosives: It was designed to be ignited with the help of micro-chips with a special signal or something similar.

At least they worked rather quickly. Pakhet saw with a relief, that Heidenstein really did knew what he was doing and worked determined and focussed. Still it took them about two hours to go through all of the common chemical trails, so that they did not finish before midnight.

"Well, this is not good", she muttered to herself, looking at the notes they had taken. By now she felt rather tired. In a way working on the explosives was more exhausting than an hour of extensive fighting.

"We should talk to the others", Heidenstein said. Somehow he looked less tired and Pakhet envied him for that.

"You do that", she replied and got out her comlink. "I make a call."

He raised an eyebrow. "What kind of call?"

"My fixer. We will need somebody to clean this stuff up, if we don't want to break into HanSec headquarters."

Once again he gave one of those short smirks. "True. But we need to talk to Herr Schmidt before getting someone else involved."

"Yeah. But I would prefer naming him a price", she replied.

"Well, then do it your way", he said. "Just don't be too precise."

She rolled her eyes. "This is not the first time I am doing this kind of stuff, you know?"

"Sure", he said and opened the ramp, to talk to the others.

Though she was pretty sure Michael was already asleep, she speed dialled his number. She was not surprised that it took him a few seconds to get onto the line and did so with an audible yawn.

"You know what time it is?", he said and his tired face appeared on the screen.

"Sure I do", she replied annoyed. "But I need something and I am rather sure you can deliver."

"Huh?" It seemed to take him a few seconds to understand what she was saying. "You know that it will cost extra for waking me up."

"In this case not my problem. Listen: I need somebody who can clean out and retag explosives. A specialist. I am sure you know at least one person able to, right?"

After a moment a smug grin appeared on his face. "So I was right."

"I might tell you later", she said. "So you know somebody?"

He hesitated for a moment. "I do know somebody. I am not sure whether I can reach him at this time. I will write you. Just a moment."

"Hurry, alright?", she urged him, before ending the call without even so much as saying good-bye.

Then she got up. After all she realized that she should at least tell the others what she was going to do – even though she was going to do it no matter what any of them said.

"So you want to hire someone else?", chrome-head asked, just when she jumped out of the cargo area.

"Basicly like that", Pakhet sighed and looked over to the doc. He already had told them, eh?

"So you cannot get that stuff out yourself?", Baramaus asked his arms crossed.

"No I cannot", she barked at him. "But other then you I am good for something."

The mage just shrugged. "We can still just break into some HanSec station, right?"

"Right. Great idea." Her voice was gushing with sarcasm.

"I would rather not break into any HanSec station", Kah Pak said quietly.

"I'll have to second that", Heidenstein said. "I think hiring somebody to clean up the explosives is still more efficient then trying anything..." For a moment he hesitated.

"Stupid."

Chrome-head gave a long sigh. "Technically I agree, but we are not getting a lot of money for this either way, now that it is already divided by six."

"And I really need money", Dacart muttered.

Baramaus once again stepped up to them. "I would not mind getting at least something out of this."

Pakhet snorted. "You don't complain. You are basicly getting money for sitting around." With anger she looked around. "So, do you prefer to attack the next HanSec station? If so, be my guest, but don't count on me accompanying you!"

"I thought you were muscle", Baramaus muttered.

She flashed at him. "I am muscle, but I am not stupid and more then that: I am not suicidal." Still she was holding her comlink in the hand. "I mean it is your call. Those of you, who want to do something stupid are welcome, too. I will call Herr Schmidt, when you are locked up." Of course she was bluffing as she knew it would made for bad rep to let the bunch of them run into their own demise.

There was silence for a moment and just as she thought nobody was jumping to run to the next HanSec station.

As – after a full minute – nobody had said anything, she got out the number she had gotten from Herrn Schmidt. Thankfully Michael had replied, too. 5000. Well, it was much, but it was the decision Herr Schmidt would have to make. "I gather, I can call Herrn Schmidt now, right?"

Nobody objected.