

Machines

Hamburg in the shadows

Von Alaiya

IX – A helping hand

Somehow they reached the talismonger shop before HanSec was even at the scene. While Kah Pak was carrying the dazed girl on his back, a Chinese teen, Pakhet was giving Baramus the fireman's lift. She was thankful, that the girl did not cry, because she was not good with this kind of stuff.

Her right hand was in bloody bandages, but Kah Pak had reassured her, that the finger could be easily reattached using magic. As she did not know much about magical healing, she had no choice but to believe him.

Mr. Cong came running towards them, once he spotted them through the window. "Huan!", he shouted and ran towards Kah Pak, who let the girl down.

The girl could at least stand on her feet and apart from the missing finger actually seemed to be healthy. Without a word she threw her arms around her fathers neck and just pressed herself against him.

"Huan! Huan!", Mr. Cong whispered, stroking the girls hair.

Not wanting to disturb the family reunion Pakhet just fumbled the comlink out of her pocket and opened the Jack Rabbit's trunk to throw Baramus inside. For a moment she considered to just throw the tailgate closed, but she sat down and brought him into a stable position. His breath was shallow and his pulse very irregular and slow. There were also two minor gun injuries that were bleeding, though they seemed to be grazes.

Finally Mr. Cong let go of his daughter, though he left an arm around her. "Is he alright?"

Pakhet suppressed a snort. "He'll be alright", she said, though she really was not sure. "He is just sleeping." She closed the tailgate and went over to Mr. Cong. "I don't think the Mafia will bother you again. If they do, just give us a call, okay?"

"Thank you", the man whispered. "Wait a moment, I'll get..."

Pakhet shook her head. "It's alright", she said. "Don't bother about the payment." She looked over to Kah Pak, almost waiting for him to argue about it, but he did not. They had taken all the money from the Mafiosi after all – even though it had not been that much, it was more then the one thousand the man had offered.

"But I need to...", started Mr. Cong.

"It's alright", Pakhet said and went for the car door.

Kah Pak just nodded.

There were sirens in the distance – apparently HanSec finally showing up at the scene. Maybe they had been paid by the Mafia to respond late if something was to happen at

that restaurant. Well, all they would find now were several dead or unconscious Mafiosi.

"I'll be going", Pakhet said to Kah Pak. "I'll bring Baramaus to the doc."

"I should be going, too", the shaman replied with a nod.

"Is there really nothing, I...", Mr. Cong began over again.

"It is alright", Pakhet replied before getting into the car. "Take care of your daughter."

And with that she shut the door and started the car.

Thankfully she did not meet any HanSec patrol – after all she was not keen on explaining the unconscious body she was driving around in her trunk. Still she drove very carefully to not risk anything and parked at the site of the street and got out the commlink again to dial the number of Heidenstein.

It took him a couple of rings to pick up the phone – time Pakhet spend drumming her finger on the steering wheel.

"Heidenstein here", his voice finally said.

"Hey doc", she said with a sigh of relief. "Pakhet here. I kinda need your help right now." She almost envisaged to get scolded for using the narcoject even though she had known that he had been at least a bit ailing.

"Not a good time", Heidenstein replied. "I'm busy."

Pakhet pursed her lips. "Well, it is kinda an emergency."

Now it was Heidenstein who gave a sigh. "What happened?"

"Well", she said a bit hesitant. "I might have accidentally almost killed Baramaus..."

For a moment the doc was silent. "What ha...", he began, but then shopped short.

"Come to the hospital. But come through the back door, okay?"

"Sure. Thanks." And with that she hung up and hurried up. Without any further ado she started the car again and drove towards Bergedorf. It was only early afternoon and there were quite a few people outside, even though she – once again – found the parking lot in front of the hospital almost empty.

As she was not keen to once again carry around an unconscious body, she drove around the hospital towards what seemed to be the backdoor. Here, too, two shady guys – one being an ork, the other a rather young human – were standing in front of a plain, white double door.

In front of this she parked the car and got Baramaus out of her trunk. He was still alive. Great.

"I need to go to Heidenstein", she said to the shady guards. "He knows I am coming."

Neither of them said anything, but they did not stop her when she carried Baramaus through the double door. Having at least a rough idea, what the architecture should look like she followed the corridor she found herself on the corridor on which the treatment room she had been in the other day was located.

"Doc?", she yelled into the silence. "Heidenstein?"

One of the doors opened and Heidenstein came out. He shot Baramaus one look, before saying: "Follow me." Once again he guided her to the treatment room, where she thankfully laid the mage down onto a stretcher.

"What has happened?", Heidenstein asked, while starting to examine Baramaus. He felt the mage's pulse and checked his eye movement, before connecting him to an biomonitor.

Pakhet gave a long sigh and leaned against the desk. "Well, I got myself talked into helping Kah Pak out. He had been asked to return a girl. The daughter of a talismonger. She had been kidnapped by the Mafia – the Italian Mafia. Well, long story short: Baramaus pissed them off, there was a shoot-out, they gave up. Then Baramaus

wanted to shoot them. Well, he shot one of them. And before he could shoot somebody else, I narcojected him... And he might have been a bit ailing."

"I warned you about that", Heidenstein said. By now he had gotten out a syringe and taken some blood. "Narcoject is a strong drug."

"It is not as if I had much of a choice", Pakhet replied defensive.

Heidenstein did not reply immediately, as he was browsing through the medicine cabinet. He seemed to be thinking about something, but finally got out a small flask and filled up a syringe with the liquid inside. "This will stabilize him." He gave the mage the injection.

"I would not just wake him up", Pakhet said carefully.

"It won't", Heidenstein replied. "It will just stabilize him."

Pakhet was silent and just watched, when he set an infusion and hang the back up on an I.V. pole. When the cardiogram finally normalized Heidenstein's posture noticeable relaxed and turned around.

"Look. I can understand, why you have done it, and I would have probably done the same", he said. "Just be careful with narcoject. It is a strong drug."

Pakhet rolled her eyes. "I understand that. As I said: I had to act fast."

For a moment Heidenstein looked at her, but then he nodded and gave her a short smile. "I understand."

There was silence and Pakhet once again looked over to Baramesus. If it was going to be anything like with Winter before, he would be unconscious for at least a few hours. And she was sure, that he would be angry, once he was awake. "So... What are we going to do about him?"

Heidenstein, too, looked over to the mage. "We could bring him into some empty room, bind him to a stretcher and then wake him up?", he suggested. "If he throws a tantrum, I will just anaesthetise him again."

For a moment Pakhet was not sure. Would binding him up hinder Baramesus' magic? She rather would not try out, but she knew that he would have to wake up eventually.

"I'll take care of the gazes first", Heidenstein said, when she did not reply.

Pakhet gave a sigh. "Alright."

About half an hour later they had cuffed the mage to a movable stretcher. They were in an entirely empty room, somewhere on the second floor of the hospital. Heidenstein had put three syringes on a trolley next to the stretcher. Pakhet knew, that one of them had to be filled with the antidote to the narcoject, while another probably was filled with some anaesthetic. She had no idea about the third syringe, but also did not ask. The biomonitor was also on the trolley and still showed a regular cardiogram.

Pakhet had crossed her arms in front of her chest and looked at the unconscious mage. A part of her regretted to not have just shot him outright.

"Let's do this", Heidenstein said with way more optimism then she felt. He took one of the syringes and injected its contents through the portacath.

It took a minute or two, until Baramesus' eyelids started to flicker. He threw his head from one side to the other, moaning and then opened his eyes. His eye movement was erratic and it took quite a while, before he was able to focus.

He tried to say something – and there was anger in his voice – but his words came out so vague, that Pakhet could not understand. He gulped a couple of time, before he was finally able to speak properly.

"You bitch!", he started, gulped again, and continued: "Why did you do that?"

"Because you would have killed innocents", she replied with cool voice.

"They were not innocent!", he yelled, his speech still a bit slurred. "They were with the Mafia! You fucking bitch don't know, what you've done!" He tried to break loose from the handcuffs but was unable to. "When I get out of here, I'll..."

Heidenstein sighed and got one of the other syringes from the trolley. "Well, that's it..."

"What... What are you doing?", Baramesus asked, when the doc attached the syringe to the portacath.

"Putting you back to sleep", the doc replied with a calm voice. "I won't let you threaten anybody here."

"I am not threatening anybody!", Baramesus protested.

Pakhet raised an eyebrow and looked at him. "Sure..."

It looked like Baramesus was going to continue his tantrum, but then he took a deep breath. "I won't threaten anyone, okay, doc?", he then said, his voice much calmer.

Heidenstein looked at him for a moment, but then distached the syringe, though he kept it in his hand.

"I am sorry, okay?", Baramesus said. "Okay... Okay..." For a while he was silent. He closed his eyes. "Okay", he then repeated once again. "I ran a way from a corp, okay? When I came to Hamburg, one of the dons took me in. I worked for him and the Mafia. When they find out, I was involved in the shooting, they'll kill me! And now those people are alive, they will tell! They will find out!" With every word there was more anger and more panic in his voice.

Pakhet looked at him for the span of a few seconds, pondering about whether he was telling the truth. She exchanged gazes with Heidenstein. If Baramesus was telling the truth, she could somehow understand why he had tried to kill them, but it did not change, she could not allow him to run around like a loose cannon. "Baramesus, I am sorry, but I cannot have something like that happen again."

"Well, you never wanted to come with us in the first place!", the mage bawled her out.

"True", she admitted, when Heidenstein interrupted them for the first time:

"I won't allow it either", he said matter-of-factly.

It seemed as if Baramesus wanted to bawl him out, too, but he grasped a hold of himself and stayed silent.

Once more Pakhet pursed her lips. "I'll give you an advice, Baramesus. If you have pissed of your Mafia buddies, just leave the city. Because if they won't kill you, it might be me who will." For a moment she shot Heidenstein another gaze. While he did not say anything, it was clear from his expression, that he did not like her threatening the mage.

"And where do you think I should go?", Baramesus asked.

Pakhet looked at him. "I don't care", she simply replied.

And like that Baramesus was gone. They let him go from the hospital in the evening and much to Pakhet's surprise he did not try anything funny. He just left and did not bother her again. Some part of her would feel bad about it later on, as she knew very well how desperate some people became after running away from a corp. But randomly killing people would get him killed and whomever he was working with.

"Thank you", she said, while once again sitting in the treatment room of the hospital. Baramesus had only left maybe half an hour ago and somehow she had stayed at the hospital to help the doc clean up, though they had finished rather quickly. Now she sat on the stretcher, while Heidenstein had taken place on the doctor's chair and just

had handed her a cup of soykaf.

"Compensation, though it is only soykaf", he replied with a faint smile. Once again she noticed, that he looked pretty tired.

"No", she answered. "For helping out."

He shrugged it off. "It's kinda my job, right? Though I would prefer to work without anyone threatening anyone else."

"Sorry, about that. Just said the truth."

At that he did not reply and took a sip of his soykaf.

Pakhet looked at her cup. She still did not like soykaf, even though it had caffeine, but she would not complain. Out of the corner of her eye she peered over to Heidenstein. Something about him still did not seem right to her, yet she was still sitting here, even though she could have left when Baramesus had. She was still toying with an idea, though there was a voice in her head warning her it was not a good idea.

After all she had done so very well before to not hang out with other runners – but then again she tended to be annoyed with most other people. Well, she still was unsure, whether Heidenstein annoyed her or not. Still, he was a doctor, he had sold her the narcoject cheaper than she would have been able to get it otherwise and he seemed to have wide knowledge.

She sighed. "Say, Doc, you said you modified your Parashield pistole yourself, right?"

His smile became a bit smug. "Yes. Why?"

"How about compensation for the mechanic course?", she suggested.

It seemed as if he had to consider for a moment. "Why not? Not as compensation, but fine by me." He paused for a moment. "Though I've got to admit, I am surprised. You have not learned it before?"

She just shrugged. "I know the basics. But I have Michael – I know him for so long..."

Once again she shrugged. "I know how to fix weapons. I know how to assemble and reassemble rifles. But for everything else I have Michael."

"Michael, whom you cannot trust", Heidenstein replied amused.

Pakhet gave a short smirk and took another sip from the soykaf. "Exactly. In battle I would not use a weapon he sold me, without having tested it in any possible way."

At that he started laughing, nearly choking on his soykaf. "Any possible way?", he echoed suggestively.

It took her a moment to understand what he was meant and growled. "Very funny", she replied snappily. "To everyone his own, but I am not suicidal."

Heidenstein, who was still chuckling, shook his head. "Sorry." Somehow the apology did not feel sincere, mostly because his voice still seemed amused.

Still grumbling to herself Pakhet did not reply, but just took another sip of soykaf. Something told her, that she should just drink up and go and this time she absolutely agreed. So she hurried up to empty the cup. "Do you have a workshop for weapons?"

Heidenstein paused for a second, before giving her an apologetic smile. "I am afraid no. At least not in the moment."

How was it, that she had almost guessed this? Pakhet sighed. "I'll ask Michael whether we can use his workshop."

"Michael, eh?", he asked, once again raising an eyebrow.

"Yes", she said and stood up. "Believe me, it is better to keep an eye on him."

In the end they spend the following three afternoons in the workshop located underneath Michael's weapons shop. While Michael had been hesitant to let them use it, he finally had agreed to leave it to them and allow them to overhaul some of the

"used ware" he had gotten in.

To some degree Pakhet was glad that she was able to pick up the craft rather quickly, as Heidenstein's quick speed with the mechanics had somewhat annoyed her. And she was thankful, that the doc did not try any more inappropriate jokes, so she was unsure whether it was because of her reaction or because that kind of jokes were more of a rarity with him.

These afternoons helped her to not think about Baramesus and what had happened in front of that McHugh's as her mind was too busy processing the new information. Still there was a voice in her head during those days being unhappy with the information. Because no matter how hard she tried to pass this off as "learning" it had an awful lot of qualities identifying it as "hanging out socially" – and after all she had done so well so far to never to this.

The worst part of this was, that Michael noticed the same. Just on the third day, when she arrived at his shop, he looked at her with the same smug expression on his face he tended to wear all the time. "Since when do you spend time with other runners?", he asked while sipping some cheap coffee.

"It is not 'spending time'", she replied and shot him a look. "He just teaches me, because you wouldn't."

Michael shrugged, but seemed to be amused. "I would. Just not for free."

"Well, Heidenstein does it for free", she said.

"And that's exactly, why I don't like him", Michael replied and sat down behind the counter again. "Whatever, Pakhet. But you know: Trust gets you killed."

"That's why I don't trust you", she retorted, making him grin.

"Exactly."

She took the key, he had laid on the counter before, and already went for the basement. With one last gaze shot towards Michael, she opened the door to the old staircase and went downwards.

The basement, which was made up of two rooms, was heavily secured and Pakhet knew that this was less to protect the goods, but rather to be a bunker for himself, if once again somebody tried to kill him. Michael really had a good hand making friends. The walls of both rooms were heavily reinforced and covered with black tiles, that on one hand were able to soak explosive blasts without reflecting too much of the force, while on the other also dampening all WiFi signals, making it harder or maybe even impossible to hack anything down here. One of the rooms was lined with shelves containing tools and some weapons, while a bigger work bench was standing right at the left side. The other room – Pakhet knew – contained crates with weapons, but some necessities to live in there was well. The key Michael had given her only lead into the first room, as the other room was locked behind several locks of different kinds. It was his safe-heaven after all.

She took one of the weapons from a shelf, as she knew it was left there by Michael for her and Heidenstein to work on. And as Heidenstein was not there yet, she started to work by herself. All the weapons needed a new RFID-chip so she started with replacing it.

After not even ten minutes he arrived – she heard his steps on the stairs and looked up, when he entered the room. No matter what Michael said: She did not trust Heidenstein more then him or anybody else.

"What is wrong with your friend up there?", he asked when sitting down.

"Hmm?" She started to work on the gun again.

"He said something... Weird", Heidenstein replied and seemed genuinely puzzled

about that. For a moment it seemed as if he wanted to add something of further detail, but then he restrained himself from doing so, even though Pakhet had a good idea, what Michael would have said.

"He is desillusional", she just muttered.

"Okay", Heidenstein slowly answered. When she looked up, she could see that he had once again raised an eyebrow.

But they left it at that and once again started to work, though not entirely without occasional banter. If she was honest with herself, she would have had to admit that it was probably that banter she enjoyed most of all. Most of the time Robert was not very good with banter, while she had to be careful about what she said bantering with Michael – as she could be sure that everything she said would be used against her. And the list of people she spent social time with included the two of them exclusively. Of course she reminded herself that she did not know whether Heidenstein would use anything she said against her – but somehow she tended to remind herself of that too late.

"I still am kinda surprised that neither of those idiots have not been apprehended yet", Pakhet muttered as the talk once again had started to revolve around the team of total idiots – as she had started to call them. "I mean, sure, HanSec is corrupt and maybe not that capable, but..."

"Maybe you underestimate those 'idiots'", Heidenstein commented.

For a moment she paused pointedly as if to think. "No, I don't think so."

"Well, then they maybe have guardian angels of some sort", he replied with a smirk.

"Maybe", Pakhet muttered and laid down the gun, the ID of which she had just replaced. "But I cannot help but wonder whether HanSec really think it was a terrorist attack."

"Probably not", Heidenstein said. "But why let an excuse to do more checks go by?"

Doubtingly Pakhet looked at him. "Because checks of any sort cost money. I understand them doing raids for the next week or so, but by now it should have already cost them quite a sum. Still they left the terror level up."

"Who knows", Heidenstein muttered and took another gun. "Maybe they plan for something big."

At that suggestion Pakhet shrugged and went back to work. "Michael probably knows you have been involved."

"Another warning?"

"No. Just a note."

Heidenstein paused. "Have you told him?"

She looked at him, making sure there was plenty of outrage in her expression. "No. He is just... Good in connecting the dots." For a second she paused. "That how he is. He knew..." She cut her own sentence short, realizing that she had nearly admitted for Michael to be her fixer. "He had a suspicion about the explosion having to do with a run. And I told him when I went on the run. He connected the dots."

It was rather clear from the expression on Heidenstein's face, that he did not entirely believe what she said. "And you don't trust him?"

"No. He would sell me out, if the price was good enough." She sighed. The only reason this had not happened yet was that there never had been any bounty on her head.

"How extremely nice."

"Don't you think?" She shrugged. "The reason why I keep an eye on him."

With the hint of a smirk on his face Heidenstein looked at her, but then continued to work, starting to explain what to pay attention too when fixing a gun's barrel. As he

once again started to talk with a stereotypical teacher's voice, Pakhet rolled her eyes, but said nothing.

Some time later it was the ring of Heidenstein's commlink interrupting them. He paused, took out the device and looked at it, before excusing himself: "I'll have to take this. This might be important."

And with that he stood up and left the room – probably because of the bad connection down here.

Pakhet paused, too, unable to help herself she started to listen. When Heidenstein picked up he started with something in Russian but soon enough changed back too German. "When?" – "Sure. I'm on my way." – "Yes, Victor, I'll be there in half an hour." Victor? Russian and Victor? She sure hoped that he had not been talking to Victor Lobatchevski, because the Lobatchevskis meant bad news.

She heard his steps on the stairs, when he came down again and took his backpack. "I'm sorry", he said. "Something came up. I need to go. We can continue this another time."

Pakhet nodded. "Sure." She hesitated. "Anything I can help with?"

"No", he replied shaking his head. "But thanks for the offer." Getting into his armoured jacket again he left the room and hurried up the stairs.

She looked after him, shrugged and finished the pistol she had been working on before cleaning up and leaving as well. She locked the door behind herself and gave the key back to Michael once she was in the store again.

Michael was laying back in his chair and had his goggles on – probably to read something – but sat up once she entered. "Your friend left rather hastily, eh?"

"He is a doctor. So he probably had an emergency or something", she said. "But I'll be going, too. I don't know whether we'll be back tomorrow."

"Whatever", Michael replied boredly.

"Call me, if you have a job for me, okay?", she then added, before going over to the door.

"Sure", her fixer said and then she left – once again without saying so much as "good-bye".

She was somewhat surprised that it was already sunset, when she left the shop, but drove home with the thought of taking the evening off and just watch some trid. Maybe she could take a bath later, as she had not done so in quite a while. Once in a while even she could use a lazy evening for herself doing absolutely nothing.

But it seemed that this evening was not meant to be one of those. She just had finished eating some soybased dinner, when her commlink once again started ringing. Much to her surprise she saw Heidenstein's number popping up on her AR display. She picked up. "Yes?"

"Good evening", the doc replied. "Heidenstein here."

"You don't say", she muttered before she could grab a hold of herself. "I saw your number."

"Sure", he said, before pausing for a moment. "Say: Is your offer to help still standing?"

Pakhet was thankful she did not use a video feedback as he would have seen surprise on her face. "Well, maybe. Depending on what kind of help."

"I've been hired for a run and I could use some muscle."

She did still remember her hunch from before. If he really had been called by Lobatchevski, she was not sure whether she wanted to be involved in this. "May I ask what kind of run?"

Heidenstein hesitated for a while. "Some girls have been kidnapped from the establishment of somebody I know... I was hired to bring them back. For good payment, too."

Pakhet considered this for a few seconds. Establishment sounded an awful lot like "a whorehouse" and as she knew that many of the girls working in that industry did not do so on their own free will, she was not sure whether "kidnapped" was the right word. Maybe they had run away? Then again maybe they really had been kidnapped and needed help. And she, herself, desperately needed money to pay her next rent. "Alright", she finally agreed. "Where do I meet you?"

"At the harbour", Heidenstein replied. "You know where the eastern border of the old container port has been?"

Of course she knew, as she had worked in the port before becoming a shadowrunner. "Yes."

"We'll meet there. I'll send you an arrow", he said in a businesslike tone.

"Okay", she replied and got up.