

# Machines

## Hamburg in the shadows

Von Alaiya

### XII – Upgrades

“What is that guy doing here again?”, Robert asked without hiding his dismay.

“Well...” Pakhet looked over to Heidenstein, who was still standing outside. “He wanted to help.”

“Okay. Other question: Why did you let him?” It was not typical for Robert to be so openly hostile, but then again this was the first time she had brought another shadowrunner to his garage more than once.

Pakhet shrugged. “Because he helped me out a lot”, she replied. “And why not?”

“Because he is a shadowrunner!”, Robert exclaimed though he lowered his voice. Then he gave a sigh. “You know I am just worried for you.”

“I know”, she replied. “You worry too much.”

Robert crossed his arms in front of his chest and looked at her for a short while. Then he sighed again and handed her a key. “This is for the garage”, he said. “You will find the tools as well as the new parts inside.”

She gave a faint smile. “Thank you.” Then she stood up and went over to the door. “I’ll ask if I need anything else?” She phrased it like a question, as she was not sure whether Robert wanted her to ask for anything with Heidenstein around.

But he nodded. “Okay. Have fun, I guess.”

“Thanks”, she said again before going outside.

After the run with the six orks – how she called it now – she had made a decision. Sure, she had made enough money within two days to live from it for a few month, but as she did not plan on taking a vacation from running anytime soon she decided on spending most of the money on something she had wanted to do for quite a while: Upgrading the Jackrabbit. The confrontation with those drones had been enough to convince her that the car was in dire need for some more armour. And so she had made a call to Robert to get all the necessary materials for her so she could build them in herself.

Admittedly she had anticipated that Heidenstein would “volunteer” for helping her with it, when she had mentioned her plans to him. She had anticipated Roberts reaction as well and while Robert most certainly would have been the greater help, she had more scruples whenever she would ask him to help her for free than she had with Heidenstein.

The only thing that shocked her about this was the reasoning: Sooner or later Heidenstein would benefit from the car having good armour. There was no denying it: She was planning to accompany Heidenstein on future runs – and to ask him the same

in return.

So much for keeping away from other runners.

"What took you so long?", Heidenstein asked – though not impatiently – when she went outside.

She shrugged. "Just talked over some stuff with Mr. Schneider." Of course she still did her best to keep her friendship with Robert a secret, as she did not want him to end up in the line of fire.

Heidenstein looked over to the window of Robert's office. "He is rather distrustful, isn't he?"

"I would say he is a realist", Pakhet replied and opened the driver's door of the Jackrabbit. "He knows we are shadowrunners, after all." With those words she got into the car to drive it into the open garage.

As Robert had said she found an entire array of metal pieces and new windows inside, as well as some smaller parts and several different heavy tools additional to those included at the work bench at the wall.

After turning off the the motor and getting out of the car she looked at it and gave a sigh. No use in kidding herself: She knew this would take her several days, even with the help of Heidenstein. Stuff like this was normally done by robots but as those were not available they would have to do all of it by themselves.

Heidenstein walked into the garage. "And, how do we start?"

"That is a very good question", Pakhet muttered mostly to herself and gave a long sigh. "Well, for now the old plates need to be removed. I would say we start with the hood and work from there."

"Then I guess the hood itself goes first", Heidenstein figured.

Pakhet nodded and went over to the workbench to get the tool belt Robert had left there for her, before putting several screw drivers and a wrench into it. "It would be really helpful if you held the hood, while I unwind the screws."

"Well, then let's see how helpful I can be", Heidenstein replied. He opened up the hood, so she could access the screws and nuts, then waited for her to start.

She went over and once Heidenstein was holding the upper side of hood started to loosen all the attachments. "Just do me one favour and don't start bleeding again, okay?"

"I am fine", he replied.

"Sure", she muttered. "You just have been hit by several bullets two days ago."

"I am fine", Heidenstein repeated.

Pakhet rolled her eyes, before straightening as she had loosened the last screw.

"Offer is still standing. I could take a look at the wounds."

"Last time I checked, I was the medic."

Pakhet knew he was referencing what she had said on that run. Well, she would not make a fuzz about having some medical training, when he was too proud to take medical help from somebody else. "Whatever", she just muttered and went over to the other side of the hood.

Still she paid attention to his movement, while they were working. Even with painkillers and properly cared for injuries some symptoms would show – and so they did. With certain movements it was clear that he was injured at the left side. Due to the blood and the jacket it had been pretty hard to see where exactly he had been hit, but judging by his movements Pakhet was pretty sure that there had been a hit at the side of the shoulder as well as one just beneath the rip cage.

She wondered whether he had taken care of those injuries by himself or if he had

asked somebody else – maybe one of the other doctors that most certainly worked at that hospital. Which reminded her of something else.

“Say, doc, what is up with the hospital you are working at?”, she asked while she was removing one of the smaller plates at the side of where the hood had been.

Heidenstein, who was doing the same on the other side of the car, looked up. “What do you mean?”

“Well, it is a public hospital”, Pakhet said before throwing the removed part in the same corner where the old hood and some of the other removed plates were lying.

“Yet it seems to be rather badly frequented.”

For a moment Heidenstein was silent. “Well, I don't really know. I have just rented the space in the basement for the street clinic.”

Pakhet cursed silently, when the nut holding the next part in place did not move at first. She had to be careful as thanks to the cyberarms she had bent pieces out of place before. “Means that they are pretty desperate, eh? I mean, most people don't want to be associated with any part of the shadows. And a hospital... They might be in some troubles if HanSec found out.”

“It is too close to Harburg”, Heidenstein replied. “HanSec does not care.”

When the part finally came loose she looked over to him. Something seemed rather weird about how he replied, though she could not quite put it. “They don't?”

“No, they don't”, he said. “But you might be right. The hospital is probably not as busy as it should be.” The way he spoke made it clear that the topic was done for him, making Pakhet even more curious.

She was pretty sure, that Heidenstein knew more than he admitted, but she had no interest in arguing about it. Hence she dropped the topic though she made a mental note to do some research later on.

To her surprise it took them little more than two hours to strip off the plates from the car front. They had also removed the front window as this was easiest with the plates and the hood gone.

“What now?”, Heidenstein asked once they had organised the stripped plates.

“How about a break?”, Pakhet replied. “If we continue like this, we will be done by tomorrow.” She was surprised about this herself, as she had been sure it would take them at least four or five days without the help of Robert, but it was going a lot smoother than she had imagined.

Heidenstein wiped his hands on a cloth. “I am not going to complain.”

She believed him as she had noticed that he had become more and more pale over the course of the last twenty minutes or so. Apparently he was not completely healed up, just as she had thought. “How about I order us some pizza?”, she suggested.

“That doesn't sound too bad.” Heidenstein gave her a faint smile before sitting down on one of the folding chairs next to the work bench.

For a moment she considered sending him away, as he really was rather pale and looked more like he could use a few days of rest. Then again something told her that even if he was not here, he most certainly would not rest.

She grabbed her commlink which was lying on the workbench to place an order, before going over to a door in the back of the garage. “I'll see whether I can fetch me some coffee. You want one, too?”

“Sure”, he said. “Sounds great.”

“Okay. I'll see what I can do.” Of course she went straight for Robert's office, where she had stored a bit of real coffee – because to hell with soykaf – but found it locked. Well, this had to mean Robert was probably in the working hall, so that was where she

went next.

She was right. She found Robert talking to a customer who apparently had just brought in his car. As she did not want to hurry him she waited for the customer to leave, before waving at Robert.

He nodded and went over to her. "What can I do for you?", he asked.

"Coffee", she said with a faint smile.

Robert shot her a cheeky grin. "What else could it be?" He chuckled and got out the key for his office. "And, what is the Jackrabbit doing?"

"I imagine my car is feeling a bit naked right now", Pakhet replied.

"So you are progressing well?", he concluded still chuckling.

Pakhet nodded. "Better than I expected." Once they had reached the office door she waited for him to unlock it. "Though we are taking a break for now. I ordered some pizza."

The expression on Robert's face shifted. "Pizza? And you did not ask me?"

"Well, that would make the entire 'I rented the garage' story less believable, right?", she said apologetically. Of course she knew why he reacted this way – after all the "pizza meetings" had always been their thing.

"Doesn't the real coffee do the same?", Robert asked – one eyebrow raised.

"Maybe you had some and I paid you for it", Pakhet suggested, though she knew he was right.

In disbelief he looked at her. "Yeah, I'll note you once I make enough money to afford real coffee."

She gave a sigh. "I understand what you're saying."

"So?" Robert looked at her challengingly. "Soykaf?"

Once again she rolled her eyes. Then she bit her tongue as she knew him to be right, but also really, really wanted her real coffee. In the end she gave in. "Alright. Soykaf, then."

Robert shot her a smile and started to brew up some Soykaf.

It was maybe five minutes later that Pakhet returned to her Jackrabbit and Heidenstein, who seemed still rather pale. Once again she thought about sending him away, but then once again decided against it. "Hey there", she said. "Bad news: It is only soykaf." She went over to him and handed him one of the two mugs Robert had given her.

"I am not that set on real coffee", he replied with a faint smile. "Thank you."

Pakhet shrugged and sat down on the work bench. She sipped some of the coffee and grimaced. There were people who said there was not difference in taste, but whoever said that had probably just never had a real coffee.

She looked at her commlink to see when the pizza would arrive. The timer was still at about five more minutes. She sighed.

"Have you build in those back seats yourself?", Heidenstein said nodding in the direction of the Jackrabbit.

"Yep", Pakhet replied. "Mr. Schneider helped me though. You just cannot do this stuff alone."

"So you did take apart the entire car?"

Once again Pakhet shrugged. It pretty much summoned up what they had done. After all they even had to modify the car's body. "Pretty much."

In the end of the day they actually managed to not only exchange the front plates of the car, but also the front window as well as two of the door windows. Pakhet felt

some sense of accomplishment that usually came with this kind of manual work, though she also felt the need to take a shower, as of course the work had been messy, too.

The hot shower felt good and helped her relax, though she could not shake the feeling that something else was still bothering her. She was not sure what it was exactly. Maybe it was the fact that Robert was at least a little angry at her. Was it because he was envious? Probably not. Rather he was once again overly worried about her and he was probably right with this.

She was still not sure why she was not more reasonable as it was her style. Even though Heidenstein seemed to be alright it was still bad news to get too attached to another runner. She did neither want to feel bad for somebody dying on a run, nor did she want to do something stupid to prevent something like that from happening. And there was still something off about Heidenstein and she could not really put a finger onto it.

Maybe that was what bothered her.

She went into her bedroom to cloth herself thinking about this. Why did he not want to talk about the hospital? Something seemed weird about this. Maybe he had a contract with whomever owned the hospital to not tell anything – but then why was it such a secret? It was obvious that the hospital had not as many patients as it should have.

“Oh, fuck this”, Pakhet muttered to herself while clothing herself.

Her curiosity started to bug her again – just as it had when she had gone on the run with that bunch of idiots just to find out who had been stupid or crazy enough to blow up all those explosives.

Well, in this case the answers might be found easier as the Matrix should be able to offer some sort of information about that hospital. That thought in mind she went into the living room once she was finally clothed. She took her commlink and displayed the matrix in AR.

It did not take her very long to find the matrix presence of the Anderson Hospital. Maybe there was a clue somewhere in here.

The matrix presence was clearly well crafted, though not that well maintained. She was no decker, but that much was even apparent to her. It did not take her long to find the next that seemed weird, as the list of doctors working at the hospital seemed rather small. Normally even small hospitals had twenty to thirty medical professionals while according to the matrix the number of doctors working at the Anderson hospital numbered eight in total – including the director of the hospital: Dr. Joachim Anderson.

Some more research told her that the hospital actually belonged to a company named ABC Technologies. That company was apparently one of those cases with a rather short history: Established only thirteen years ago, ruined three years ago. And it seemed that Dr. Anderson was the company's director as well.

Even though it had been ruined after just ten years the company had managed to gain A status during that time. Apparently they had mostly produced bioware, cyberware and different medical supplies.

Pakhet went through the archives of some local news as the headquarters of ABC Technologies had been in Hamburg as well. She suspected that the company had probably made too much money and therefore had caught the attention of some other company, who then had done their best to wreck them down.

What she found in the archives seemed to confirm that assumption: There had been

accidents in the factories, forcing them to close down. Considering how many accidents suddenly had started to happen it had probably been sabotage. Some deliveries had gone missing – probably sabotage as well. And several hospitals had been wrecked – sounding a lot like runner teams being hired to do exactly that. The company then had made deficits and had to sell more and more of its properties, leading Pakhet to believe that there was probably not enough money to employ more professionals in the hospital.

Either that or nobody wanted to work there after all the accidents and other stuff that had happened or the company did not have the money to employ more professionals – either way that was probably the reason the hospital had barely any patients: There was still some apprehension because of things that had had happened and there was little personal to take care of them. It would also not be surprising, if they were missing equipment if some shadowrunners had wrecked it.

That answered at least part of her question.

But one thing was still bothering her and she was not sure what it was exactly. She kept poking through the archives. That Anderson-guy who was still the director of the ruined company apparently had founded it when he was still in his early twenties. He seemed to be one of those child prodigies. From the information she was able to find about the foundation of the company he had worked with Universal Omnitech and had already had two PhDs at the time. Well, Omnitech was probably not happy with him leaving to found his own company.

It would not surprise her, if the company hiring the shadowrunners had largely been Omnitech. It was common practice to sabotage people leaving one of the big corporations – some corps tended to hire assassins just to make sure that company knowledge did not get in the wrong (meaning someone else's) hands.

A suspicion arouse in her. Maybe it was just her paranoia seeing connection where there were none, but maybe this was what had put her off all the time.

She turned off the matrix-overlay and thought about this for a moment. She was still pretty sure that Heidenstein came from an academic background meaning that he had not always lived in the shadows – but that had not to mean anything. There were many that ended up in the shadows after being blamed for some accidents, being extracted in a shadowrun or simply because they were in the way of somebody else moving up the ranks.

That Joachim Anderson also was barely older then her, while Heidenstein seemed to be in his fifties. But then again there were guys completely disguising themselves as somebody else.

It would at least explain why he did not want to talk about the hospital too much.

Well, maybe it was just her paranoia. She had nothing to go on that would suggest her hunch being right – except his academic demeanour, which could mean anything. Apart from that her hunches always tended to be wrong and she had learned to not trust any “feeling” telling her something. Some people tended to give a lot of credit to “a woman's intuition”, but she was probably not woman enough to have such a thing.

Still. At least her curiosity felt somewhat saturated. A hospital of a ruined company – which explained why parts of the hospital would be rented to a street clinic.