Machines
Hamburg in the shadows

Von Alaiya

XXI – Zombies and a Minotaur

"Something happened?", Dacart asked rather positively when he arrived at Pakhet's garage three hours after they had returned.

Pakhet exchanged gazes with Heidenstein, knowing he was thinking the same as her: Maybe it was good that Dacart had not come along before – but maybe he would be of use now. Meanwhile she was not as sure about the dwarf he had brought. It should be noted here, that the adept had not even asked, when he called them back and had rather pointed out that he knew somebody he could bring right before he hung up.

This was the reason they were meeting at the garage, as Pakhet could rather quickly get a new garage-space, while Heidenstein would have a harder time relocating the hospital.

"Yes, indeed, Dacart, something happened", she grumbled. "But first: Who is that?"

"He", the dwarf said, "no need to be so fierce, lady." He had his short arms crossed in front of his chest and certainly had put some effort into not fitting in with any dwarf-cliché. His head was fully shaved and he wore what looked like biker-clothing, but was not pierced in the ears or the nose. "They call me Silent and I'm looking for a job. So when this boy said he knew some runners who had a job I asked him to come along."

It was apparent, that Slap did not trust him any more then Pakhet did – less, actually – as he had kept his face-mask on he normally wore during a fight. "And what are you good at?", he asked.

"Shooting and getting people to talk", the dwarf replied, which sounded like "Yep, I'm an intimidation expert" what Pakhet did not quite buy.

"Sure", she muttered and looked over at Heidenstein, who had stayed silent so far.

"So, what is that job you have?", the dwarf – Silent – asked.

"We have a job, but we did not offer it to you", Pakhet said firmly and almost waited for Kah Pak or Slap to argue about this, but both stayed quiet. Well, it seemed for once that they had found some mutual agreement.

"Ey, lady, calm down a notch, alright?", the dwarf replied. "The boy here invited me."

"Which he had no authority to do", she answered sharply. "And my name most certainly is not 'Lady'." She somehow felt the urge to plant a Narcoject dart into the dwarves neck.

This was when Dacart stepped forward. "Please, Pakhet", he said. "Just give him a change... Whatever we are planning to do."

Pakhet was about to reply that he did not plan on doing anything with a dwarf, when Heidenstein laid a hand onto her shoulder. When she turned her head he nodded,

which apparently was meant to say: "At least give him a chance." Fucking idiot, she thought, as she tended to not give people chances if her live depended on it.

"I still say, we don't do anything", Slap said. "Why don't the Lobatchewsky send in one of their gangs? That's what they have them for, right?"

Heidenstein had phoned his Vory-contact once they had gotten back, who had promptly offered them twenty thousand extra if they went to free the guys from that warehouse. For once Pakhet had agreed with Slap on one thing: She suspected that the Vory did not quite trust them and hence sent them in – and that she did not like.

"If an entire gang shows up, those men are most certainly dead", Heidenstein replied. "We have a better chance to free them if we strike stealthily."

"Well, they could go in stealthy, too", Slap argued with a firm voice. "If your suspicion is right and those things were cyber-zombies I really don't want to face them like this."

"Hey, hey", Silent interrupted them. "Can somebody please tell me what's going on?"

Pakhet looked over to Heidenstein, who himself looked over at Slap, but then finally turned towards the dwarf. "Fine: At noon a meeting was interrupted by some unknown people that are suspected to be part of a gang. They shot some of the people in the meeting and took everyone away. We are rather sure that they were taken to a warehouse near the harbour and are paid to get them out."

"Okay. And what was that about cyber-zombies?", the dwarf asked.

"We suspect some of those people to be cyber-zombies", Pakhet explained condescendingly. "People who are too cybered up."

The dwarf made a disdaining sound but did not say anything.

"So we are getting those people out?", Dacart asked.

"That's the plan", Heidenstein replied and looked over to Slap, who still was not happy about it.

"Can't you at least phone and ask them whether we can get some reinforcements?"

The doc hesitated for a moment. "Well, I suppose I can." He again did not seem to like the thought of getting some reinforcements from the Vory and Pakhet was pretty sure she knew why, as it was another reason she did not like the Vory: Most probably the gang members they would sent as reinforcements would be teenagers as they were considered to be cheap muscle.

"We should first try to make a plan", Pakhet said. "And then see for what we could use some extra force."

"Okay", Slap agreed somewhat grudgingly.

"Well, we know that the back door is not as secured as the other entrances to the hall", Pakhet said. "Which makes it smell like a trap."

"Exactly", the hacker replied.

"Still I think it is our best chance to get inside", Kah Pak said. "As long as there is no automated trap hidden behind it, I might know a way to sneak inside."

"Which would be?", Slap asked.

"Well, once inside the mana barrier I could summon a spirit that can cast invisibility onto us", he said.

Pakhet considered it for a short while but had to admit that it sounded at least somewhat like a plan. While the backdoor could well be a trap, she was rather sure that all the doors were guarded on the inside if this warehouse was of any importance. "We can try it", she said.

"Then do me a favour and go in first", Slap muttered, which she ignored.

"If we can go in invisible we can then look for the men like this."

"That doesn't sound too bad", Heidenstein said. "So, what do we need?"

"Big muscle", Pakhet replied. "A troll or something like that. For whatever those giants were. Maybe two trolls. But nothing else."

At that Heidenstein nodded and got out his commlink before leaving the garage to make his phone call.

While he was gone Silent looked around. "Now, I told you who I was, now you could tell me who y'all are."

When neither Pakhet, nor Slap made a move to introduce themselves it was Kah Pak, who went first. The elf, who had once again been mostly silent throughout the entire discussion, stepped forward. "My name is Kah Pak. I am a shaman and hence am mostly doing astral surveillance and things like that."

"A mage, eh?", Silent replied. "Too weak to do anything without magic, eh?"

What a charming personality, Pakhet thought to herself, which was exactly when the dwarf turned to her. "And you are, lady?"

"That really does not concern you", she replied. "But as you might've noticed I am generally called Pakhet – fucking try to remember that, okay?" The truth was that the dwarf remembered her of a certain person she once had known and killed and she was not sure whether she could restrain herself from doing that to him, too. "And I shoot things."

"Ah", the dwarf just made and looked over at Slap. "And you, chrome-head? To afraid to show your face?"

"I just like to keep my identity to myself", the hacker replied. "I'm what is generally called a hacker and on the streets they call me Slap."

"Okay", the dwarf said. "Well, this boy" – he pointed at Dacart – "I know. What is with the guy out there?"

"He can tell you that himself", Pakhet just said, her voice once again rather sharp.

At least that seemed to shut the dwarf up until Heidenstein came back into the garage, his commlink in hand.

"Well, I got him to sent somebody else. Another runner", he said. "He said: Something like a troll and that we'll know him when we see him."

"Mysterious, eh?", Pakhet replied but was at least somewhat glad that it was another runner instead of some gang-kid.

Heidenstein shrugged. "He said we should meat that guy at eight at the old pier ten. His name is Crash."

Pakhet looked at the time display: It was just past seven. "Well, then we should get packed."

It was dawn when they arrived at the harbour, but right before eight in the evening. Once again they had come with two cars: The team van and Dacart's pick-up. Even though none of them said anything Pakhet was rather sure that they agreed on being glad that Dacart had taken Silent with him – even though none of them was sure why they even took the dwarf with them.

At least Pakhet understood what Heidenstein's contact had meant by saying that they would know who they were looking for once they saw him.

They had parked the cars at one of the actual parking lots that belonged to a shipyard and walked to the pier from there: A massive figure was standing there, taller even then a troll and even more buff then any troll she had ever seen before.

Something about the figure seemed off – though it was hard to tell as the sun was right behind him. But the form of his head just seemed weird.

"Hey!", Pakhet yelled while they were approaching. "Are you Crash?"

The figure turned to face them. "Yes", he said with a very deep voice. "That's me. Who are you? The ones I should meet?"

"Yep, that is us", Heidenstein replied.

They came nearer and noticed something else: A bad smell that seemed to be coming from the runner named Crash.

Then, they had almost reached him, Pakhet realized what he was: His face had some features of a bull, though the face was a bit flatter then it would have been with such an animal, and his body was covered with fur. "Holy crap", she muttered flatly. That guy was an actual Minotaur!

"What's up with him?", Dacart asked her whispering. Pakhet had noticed he was wearing a katana on his back this time.

The Minotaur looked at him. "Something wrong?"

"Well, you are... No troll", muttered Dacart.

"Obviously", Crash chuffed at him. His speech sounded at times a bit off, maybe because his mouth was a bit different from other meta-humans. "I was told we are going to bust some guys out. So where are we going?"

"A warehouse", Heidenstein replied. "Follow us."

"Okay", the Minotaur replied. Nobody even asked about what he was there for – not only because they had asked for muscle, but also as it was just too apparent. Still, Pakhet noticed that he was wearing a couple of spears on his back and no pistol or something like that. So that was his weapon of choice.

Slowly and carefully they moved through the shadows between the warehouses standing here. The last thing they could need was somebody alarming HanSec because that somebody had seen a suspicious group sneaking around. And they would draw quite some attention with the Minotaur around.

Yet they arrived at the back of the warehouse they were looking for. The entire property was surrounded by an wire mesh fence about two meters high. But as it was apparently not under live Heidenstein just cut a hole into it just like he had done in Kaltenkirchen.

They all moved through – well, all, except Crash, who just looked at the hole. "Funny", he said.

"Sorry", Heidenstein replied quietly. "No offence intended." After a moment of hesitation he just cut the entire fence apart right in the middle between two poles.

The back door was secured with a door-pad, so that Slap went to work right when they reached the door, while Kah Pak sat down.

Pakhet remembered that he wanted to call a spirit that turned them invisible so she did not say anything.

"Hey, Pakhet", Dacart whispered and came nearer. "Sure we should take him inside?" He pointed at Crash.

"Yeah, why?", she replied.

"Because... He is bulky."

"What difference does it make, when we are invisible?", she replied.

"Well, I don't know..." Dacart was looking at him, but Pakhet just rolled her eyes and gazed over to Kah Pak.

In front of the shaman a misty figure had appeared and even though they did not communicate in any audible way Pakhet was rather sure they were talking to each other. Then the door opened and Slap turned around to them.

"Well, the door is open", he said and his voice made it clear that he was not eager to

go inside.

"Okay", Kah Pak said and paused for a moment. "Well, I can take three people with me as the spirit had told me that he can turn only four people invisible."

"We need to sneak, right?", Dacart asked. "Then take me. That's one of the things I'm good at."

"We'll probably need to go into close combat", Kah Pak interposed.

"That's why I brought my katana!", the adept replied.

The shaman did not seem to be sure about this, but finally nodded. "Okay, fine. And I'll take Pakhet."

She shrugged and then gave a short nod. "Okay." In all honesty she was rather glad to be able to go along as that way she had at least some sort of control over the situation.

Kah Pak seemed to consider whom he could take along. "Silent", he finally said. "You come along, too."

"Alright!", the dwarf said, while Pakhet just looked at the shaman in disbelieve.

Why would he take him along? Was is not apparent that the dwarf was even more of an idiot then even Dacart? But she did not say anything – maybe the dwarf would just get himself killed once they were inside.

"Well, then let's go", Kah Pak said. He did once again look at the spirit and next thing she knew Pakhet could not see him, Dacart or Silent anymore, even though she could still see her own body – but somehow she knew even she was invisible.

"We need to stay together", she heard Kah Pak's voice.

"Okay", she replied. "I'll go in first." And as nobody objected she moved towards the door and opened it.

Nothing happened. The door just opened, but there was no gunfire. So no trap? Maybe.

She looked around in the inside of the warehouse: She was standing in front of a wall made up of containers. There was a rather bad smell in the air – a stink different from the Minotaur's bad smell. It was somewhat familiar, but she hoped it was not what she thought. Still she activated the air support inside her helmet to not have to smell it anymore.

There was a corridor about one meter wide between the wall and the containers leading down to the far end of the warehouse, where she could make out the same kind of office container she as they had found in the warehouse from where she and the doc had saved those girls.

But this container had a large window through which she was able to see two human figures – one of them had his back turned toward the window – and one of those large monstrosities.

"Inside?", Kah Pak's voice asked right beside her.

Pakhet hesitated. She had the Parashield in hand and was rather sure that she would be able to take care of the two humans with it. But something told her that the monstrosity would not be knocked out by Narcoject. But then again: If it was a cyber-zombie there was a good chance it would not understand what was going on and with the right calibre it might be possible to knock one of those things out.

"One of those guys is a mage", Kah Pak added when she was silent.

"Okay", she finally agreed. "Let's try."

In all honesty one of the reasons she agreed was that she was not keen to have that thing in her back if somehow their invisibility failed them.

So they sneaked up to the door of that container, where Pakhet waited. "Is everybody

here?", she asked very, very quietly.

There were whispers of agreement and she held the Parashield closer and counted to three, before opening the door and pulling the trigger while running inside. She hit the first guy, who was still in the motion of turning around, right in the neck, and with the second shot managed to put another dart into the hand of the other normal human, just when he reached for his gun. That guy still managed to draw his weapon but then fell down unconscious.

Well, at least that was taken care of without much noise – but now there was the weird monstrosity that once had apparently been a troll. From what she could see she was rather sure Heidenstein was right: This was a cyber-zombie as the former metahuman had parts of his head and his arms exchanged with cyberware – and that was only the parts she could see. It's cyber-eyes seemed to glow from the inside while it looked for the threat.

She put the Parashield away but that was the moment when Dacart appeared out of no where and rammed his Katana into the zombie. Well, at least that was what he had apparently planned, but the sword just got stuck in the torso of the zombie.

"Oh shit", Dacart muttered and ducked down when one of the cyber-arms was striking at him.

"Down!", a voice suddenly sounded – Silent's voice – and before Pakhet could do anything, before she could say anything a shot sounded and Silent became visible holding his shotgun in the hand.

"What kind of an idiot are you?", Pakhet hissed and let go of the Parashield to get the rifle she had carried on her back all the time. It was filled with armour-piercing ammunition – which should be worth something, right?

She was well aware that a rifle – a sniper's rifle at that – was no weapon to be used in a container that was only five times five meters large, but it was not like she had a choice as she was sure that the pistols would not do anything.

And while the shot gun did not do much of a hint, Kah Pak, who now was visible, too, did something and electricity fizzeled around the troll-zombie, who at least paused for a moment.

Pakhet used that moment, aimed for the head and shot.

The zombie fell down onto the floor and just a split-second later a beeping sound sounded.

"Out of here!", Kah Pak yelled understanding a moment earlier then her what was going on. He already ran for the door.

She did not object, bent down to get the Parashield and the ran out of the room, Dacart and Silent right behind her. The next moment there was an explosion and the window of the container office bursted with bits of blood, tissue and chrome flying through the opening.

"Cortex bomb", Pakhet muttered after getting back onto her feet. Yep, those things were definitely zombies.

But there was another problem: Now basically everyone in this warehouse knew they were here. Great.

She looked around and saw two man, normal man from the looks of it, appearing from behind the containers in the next corridor just between the container row near the wall and the next row. But that was not their only problem, she realized.

There was that weird feeling again and without thinking about it, Pakhet let herself fall down and rolled aside. A good decision considering a huge bumb appeared in the container she had stood next at.

So those things were not only cybered up for good, but they were also going with the Rutheneum Polymer look? Well, great!

She jumped back onto her legs and tried to see that thing. She knew what to look for with Rutheneum coating, but having cyber-eyes made that much more harder.

She kept moving and listened for anything that suggested that the zombie was coming near again. Those things could not be completely noiseless, right? She corrected herself on this once she realized that Crash was standing right with the others and even though he had hooves she had not heard him coming near.

Something told her to jump backwards, which she again did with any further thought about it.

Meanwhile Crash seemed to have problems on his own: He was trying to use the spears he had brought along – but those were apparently not build for somebody with his strength as Pakhet saw two of them breaking, while Dacart was sarcastically clapping his hands at this display. The others were firing down the corridor.

But she could not pay too much attention to the others, as there was still something mostly invisible after her. She readied her rifle and waited. She had a plan – though she was not sure whether it would work. If it did not, it would kill her.

She waited, rifle in hand, and waited until that creature came near again. The problem was that for that she had to do something she normally hated to do: Relying on her intuition. Her heart was bumping in her mouth, when that creepy feeling was there again.

Once again she ducked down and fired upwards just in the hope that the rifle would do enough damage. And she was lucky: The troll-zombie became visible, leading her to put another bullet into its head.

Like the other one this zombie fell just over and the beeping sound started again.

At this Crash ran over to the lifeless body, grapped it, ran back and threw it down the corridor. The bang of an explosion sounded across the hall.

So that was taken care of, Pakhet thought grim satisfaction, when somebody jumped out a door firing at her. It was an elf, from all she was able to see, and considering how pale he was he was not used to fighting.

But before Pakhet was able to grab the Parashield again, Dacart had drawn his pistol and fired right in the guy's head.

"Yeah!", he exclaimed, when the guy fell down.

Pakhet looked at him with some level of annoyance. "You know that dead people won't talk, right?"

"So? We already have two hostages!", Dacart replied.

This could have been the start of an argument, if it had not been for the automated gunfire they heard.

Pakhet realized that it came from behind her, but had been directed mostly at Crash, who somehow had managed to evade the bullets. She turned around – just to see nothing. Another zombie? Well, great. Just great.

"Pakhet, get away from there!", Kah Pak shouted, as he was doing something, that was probably magic, she did not even ask and ran for it.

Once again small electric bolts frizzled around a huge figure, that slowly became visible. It most certainly was another cyber-zombie. She started to reload again, while the others focused their fire at the creature, which was at least slowed down by their efforts. Then there was more electricity in the air, before two of Dacart's bullets hit somewhere, where the creature bled. It fell over and the beeping sounded again.

It was Crash, who ran forward and once more grabbed the creature and threw it down

the next corridor, where the cortex bomb exploded. And after this last loud bang, there was silence – at least for a few seconds.

Then: "Is anyone there?", a voice sounded from behind the door the elf had jumped out of.

Pakhet turned around and went inside – the door was still open. Inside she found an unconscious Asian girl, maybe around twenty years old, as well as five men, two of them unconscious or dead and heavily bleeding and all of them were bound with handcuffs.

"Doc?!", she shouted.

It only took him five seconds to be there and without asking any questions, without saying anything he got to work.

"Where is the other one?", Slap asked one of the guys. "There were six of you, weren't there?"

"They took Taras in another room", one of the man said with a light Russian accent. He was black haired and pale, but Pakhet recognized him to be the negotiation leader from the video. "I think he was dead."

Pakhet looked at Heidenstein, who was still doing is best to stabilize one of the unconscious men. For a moment she considered to take care of the other men but then decided to leave it to him. Instead she went out of the container-room and to the container next to it. This door was still shot and in apprehension of another enemy behind it, she once again had her Parashield in hand. She opened the door.

Behind it she did not find any more adversaries, but rather a rather gross sight. The inside of this container seemed to have been furnished to be a make-shift surgery but from what it looked like not to actually patch people back together: A men lay on the surgical table, obviously dead. His entire torso had been cut open and many of the organs had been removed, though they still lay open in plastic bags. Apparently the surgeon had been interrupted by the sudden fighting and had probably fled the scene.

Something told Pakhet, that this meant her initial thought about the stank in the warehouse had been right: It was the smell of death. The smell of decay.

When she got out of the room she realized that she was not the only one, with that thought: Kah Pak was heading for one of the closed containers.

Slap looked at her. "The last guy?", he asked as if he knew what she had found.

"Dead", she just replied and looked over to Kah Pak, who opened the container – not much to her surprise they found bodyparts inside, stored in open boxes. The sight was sickening, but her self-control was good enough to not vomit. The same seemed to be true for the others. "We need to call HanSec", she said.

"Why?", Slap replied.

She would have given him a stern look, but as she was unwilling to open the visor of her helmet or remove it she had to settle with turning her head towards him. "Because this is a crime-scene"

"So?" The hacker looked back at her – which did equally little as he still wore his mask.

"So HanSec need to get here to look for missing persons", Silent suddenly interjected.

"I say we just throw them into the harbour", Dacart said. "There is barely anything left."

Slap nodded. "For once I agree with him."

But Pakeht shook her head. "I'll call HanSec, whether you like it or not." She could feel the glares from the others, but did not move. It was clear that they did not agree, that they did not like it, but it seemed that nobody wanted to actually challenge her.

"What about those guys that are still alive?", Dacart asked. "One of them is a mage right? We could sell her as a slave."

That type of idea could only come from somebody like Dacart. "Nope", Pakhet said and hesitated. On one hand she knew that the Vory would want the surviving adversaries for questioning and her pity was not too great considering what had apparently happened here, on the other hand she also knew that the questioning would probably mean torture and death and some of them seemed to be rather young. But she also knew that the others would certainly not be willing to leave the survivors to HanSec, that it would also mean risking the wrath of Victor and Vassili. "The Vory will probably want them", she finally said tensely.

About ten minutes passed until Heidenstein was done with his work.

"How are they?", Pakhet asked when Crash carried out the first of the unconscious men.

"They'll live if they get further medical aid", he replied and looked over to the open container. "What's in there?"

"I doubt you want to see it", she said. "Do me a favour, will you? I'll call HanSec and I'll wait at the harbour for them to arrive. Can you pick me up later?"

"Sure", Heidenstein said.

She nodded her thanks, before moving to leave the warehouse. She just wanted to get out of there.