

# Machines

## Hamburg in the shadows

Von Alaiya

### XXIII – Callback

[JUSTIFY]Thankfully the further boating lessons were more practical – as in they actually featured boating. But all in all Pakhet found that it was not that hard as long as it was motorized vehicles, that were not so different from normal cars, when it came to steering.[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]In a way Heidenstein managed to annoy her, though, as with everything he was just that much more patient than she was, leaving her feeling rather impatient and irritable. Why did he have to be the biggest fucking nice guy around?[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]But then something that angered her even more. It was the end of the week when Heidenstein called her just before she was off to the boating school.[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]“Yes? What's up?”, she asked upon picking up.[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]“Just a short head's up”, he said with a rather weak voice. “I won't come today. I... Have to call in sick.”[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]This made Pakhet pause for a while. “Is everything alright?”, she asked carefully. “Shall I come over?”[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]“No, no, it's alright”, came the prompt reply. “I'm just... Not feeling well. You go. Have fun. We'll see each other next week, alright?”[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]“Alright”, she said slowly, though she did not really like this. She had a bad feeling and was yet tempted to still drive over to the hospital, to see whether he was alright – but then again he actually sounded as if he would prefer if she did not do it.[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]What had happened? Pakhet was relatively sure that he would not have had a problem if he was just normally sick. So either he caught himself some rather nasty infection or he had suffered some sort of injury. Did he go on a run alone? If so he was even crazier than she already knew he was. He was not bad with a gun – but he just was not good enough to beat several adversaries alone.[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]While without him being there she did not feel as annoyed during the boating lesson, she felt more obliged to be nice to Mühlsteiner, who of course did ask where Heidenstein – or rather “Dr. Anderson” – was.[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]“He called in sick”, Pakhet answered and left it with that.[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]Maybe the worst part of this was, that she had actually enjoyed not doing this alone, as she would have normally done it. It was actually nice to have somebody else around, to have somebody to talk to about what she had learned. Well, maybe Robert was right after all and even she could not stay alone forever.[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]But that was stupid. She could very well do without Heidenstein and without

Robert. She had done so many times and for many weeks. And just to proof that point, she did not call Heidenstein again and did not drive over to the hospital, but rather spent the next three days just like she used to: With training, shooting practice and the obligatory visit at Michael's, who was once more busy with some new delivery in the back room of his shop.[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]"Hey, Pakhet", he said when she entered the shop. "Once again really nice to see you. How long has it been?"[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]She sighed, jumped over the counter and came over to him. "Well, I've been busy."[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]"Another run?", he asked.[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]"Pretty much", she replied. "And some training..."[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]Michael looked up from his work. "Another job the good Dr. Anderson got for you?"[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]"Well..." She paused when she realized what he had just said. She cursed silently. She knew Michael, of course he had made his own research. It was his way to ensure having leverage in case he needed something. "Who are you talking about?"[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]For a few seconds Michael eyed at her. "Now are you lying or not? I am talking about dear Doc Heidenstein. His real name: Anderson."[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]Quietly Pakhet looked at him. "You are obnoxious, Michael."[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]"So you did know?", he asked.[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]"What if?", she replied with a shrug.[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]Michael gave a melodramatic sigh. "And here I was thinking you would tell me something like that. After all you are not trust somebody like him, do you?"[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]Pakhet felt how she was getting angrier by the second. She knew Michael just was like that and yet she got angry because he had to get involved in this. "I'd rather trust him then you, Michael. You should know that!"[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]"I am hurt", he replied and looked at her. The hint of a suppressed grin was visible on his face. "Don't tell me you're falling for that man."[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]"I am not", she replied firmly. "But from all I know I've not signed a contract to not have any friends in the shadows."[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]"Oh no, you didn't", Michael replied now unable to further hide his amusement. "It is just so... Not you, Miss Independent."[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]Pakhet once again just shrugged and looked into his eyes, knowing very well that with her cyber-eyes this was a rather creepy sigh that would intimidate quite a few people – but not Michael, he knew her too well.[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]"Maybe I should think about selling him out to Omnitech, hmm? What do you think?", he said. "Dear Dr. Anderson."[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]"Don't even think about it", Pakhet growled at him, her hand on the holster of her pistol. "If you threaten him, if you are even so much as think about selling him out, I *will* kill you."[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]Michael grinned. "So you have fallen for him."[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]"No, it's called having a friend – you should try it at times", she said very slowly and firmly.[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]"No thank you", he said.[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]She just looked at him for a few more seconds, before turning around. "I'll be going now."[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]"So you are not asking for a job?", he shouted after her.[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]"No!" With that she jumped over the counter once more and went out of the shop. She was angry, almost furious at Michael.[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]She got back into her car and drove off, before activating her auto-pilot to have some time to calm down.[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]Yes, of course she knew it was Michael's way to do things. He always wanted to know everything – or at least as much as possible – about everybody he knew, about everyone he had met even once. And with his own skills in hacking and his contacts to other hackers he was normally rather good in finding out more things than one thought should be possible.[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]She still remembered how it was when she first met him. He had done quite a bit of research back then, had known about her parents, about her problems at work, about everything. Back then, she had been angry with him, too. But then she had admitted that he was right in one thing: She had not been able to continue doing what she had been doing till then.[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]But this was different. Heidenstein had apparently good reasons to do what he was doing – even though she could only guess what exactly it was. But she just knew he was actually a good man and because of that she would not let Michael threaten him.[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]It was only when she arrived at home, that her commlink started buzzing. She still had not quite cooled down. Still, there was a certain irony to it when she realized that it was Heidenstein, who was calling.[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]"Yes?", she asked.[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]"Pakhet?", Heidenstein replied.[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]"Yeah. What is it?", she asked with still some anger in her voice.[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]Apparently he chose to ignore it. "Well, I just wanted to tell you: Herr Schmidt called, you know, the Johnson from the run on which we met. He wants to call the team back together again and I wanted to ask whether you'll come, too."[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]Pakhet took a deep breath. The last thing she wanted right now, was to be surrounded by those idiots, but there was still the other side to this: She knew he would go and judged by his voice he still seemed to be rather ailing. "When and where?", she finally asked, cursing herself while doing so.[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]"Today at six in the evening", he replied. "The same area as last time. I'll send you the exact address, if you are going to come."[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]"I'll come", Pakhet said with a sigh. "Should I get you on the way?"[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]A pause on his side of the line. "No, no, I'm alright", he replied.[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]"Sure?", she asked doubtfully.[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]"Yeah, I am alright", Heidenstein assured her. "I'll see you there."[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]For a moment she wanted to object, but then again he was an adult and should be able to look out for himself. "Okay. See you there." She sighed. Great, another evening spent with idiots – just what she needed.[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY] [/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]Just before six Pakhet arrived at the address Heidenstein had sent her. As it was the end of June the sun was still in the sky and the run down buildings and streets of Harburg looked somewhat better than they had those weeks ago. It felt longer than just a few weeks.[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]She had been controlled by HanSec on her way there – but as her fake SIN supported her having a license for pretty much every dubious item in her possession she had had no problem getting through their blockade. Still it seemed that they once

again did random controls – hopefully not for too long.[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]She went to the house and pressed the bell button and soon the door was opened by Murphy, who grinned at her.[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]“So you are still on board, eh?”, he said.[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]“Apparently”, she muttered grimly and walked past him into the house.[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]Inside she found Dacart, Silent, Heidenstein and Schmidt, though there was no trace of Slap or Kah Pak.[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]Heidenstein was sitting at the table in the kitchen, which was once again somewhat furnished. He looked rather pale and the way he sat seemed odd.[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]“Hey, Pakhet!”, Dacart shouted happily.[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]“Hey, Dacart”, she replied with way less enthusiasm. Once more she looked at Heidenstein, who really looked bad. What the hell had he done? “Where are the others?”[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]“Slap should come soon”, Schmidt said. “Kah Pak said he does not know whether he can come. He had been outside the city.”[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]“Ah”, she replied.[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]Schmidt shot her a short smile. “It is nice to see you again, by the way. I am honest, I did not think you'd come.”[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]“Well, here I am”, she grumbled and sat down. “I hope I won't regret it.” Those words were true. “I don't suppose you'll tell us, what this run is about, before the others – or at least Slap is there.”[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]Schmidt nodded. “That's true.”[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]It was only two minutes later that the bell rang and Slap arrived. He, too, was let in by Murphy and leaned against the wall once he had entered the kitchen.[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]Schmidt went in one of the other rooms to call Kah Pak, but then returned shrugging. “Kah Pak won't make it. I take it that you'll inform him about the run details, right?”[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]“Sure”, Slap said shrugging himself.[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]Schmidt gave another nod, before starting to project something into AR. It was the picture of a boy in his late teens, blond, blue eyed with some freckles. “Well, let's just say, that this is all rather unfortunate. I had planned this differently. But in three weeks time, the big run will happen, whether I like it or not. You'll be the back-up team on that one.”[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]Pakhet coughed. “And what will that big run be about?”[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]“Well, I'll tell you if you manage to come back from this run successful”, Schmidt said and shot her a look.[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]Crossing her arms in front of her chest she leaned back. So they actually were not the back-up team, but this was a test. To see whether they could do it.[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]When she did not say anything, Schmidt continued. “Well, you'll have to manage as it is. This run I am here to hire you for today has two goals. But let me explain: In five days time you'll enter the local Urban Brawl amateur mini-league as an amateur game. As Saeder-Krupp uses those amateur games for some promotion, they'll equip the teams with some of their tech for the bigger amateur games. Which means that you will get a tactical network for once. That is your first mission goal: Manage to smuggle the tactical network you'll receive out of the arena. I don't care

how you do it – but I would prefer a subtle way.”[/JUSTIFY]  
[JUSTIFY]“What for?”, Pakhet asked.[/JUSTIFY]  
[JUSTIFY]“For your team. You'll find it useful on the next run.” Schmidt shot her another look. “The second mission goal: This boy” – he pointed at the AR picture – “will be playing for one of the other teams. Your Johnson has hired you to get him out of the arena – unharmed. His name is Johannes Kemper.”[/JUSTIFY]  
[JUSTIFY]“Is he some exec son?”, Dacart asked.[/JUSTIFY]  
[JUSTIFY]“That is classified”, Schmidt replied.[/JUSTIFY]  
[JUSTIFY]Pakhet hesitated for a moment. “How old is he?”[/JUSTIFY]  
[JUSTIFY]It seemed that Schmidt was surprised about that question. “Seventeen.”[/JUSTIFY]  
[JUSTIFY]Pakhet looked at the picture of the boy. “Sorry. Count me out, I'm not gonna do it.”[/JUSTIFY]  
[JUSTIFY]The others looked at her. “Why?”[/JUSTIFY]  
[JUSTIFY]“Because I am not going around kidnapping boys barely more than kids”, she replied and stood up. “Sorry, not gonna do it.”[/JUSTIFY]  
[JUSTIFY]“He is seventeen. Almost of-age. How does that count as a child?”, Slap exclaimed in disbelieve.[/JUSTIFY]  
[JUSTIFY]Pakhet looked at him. “He is not yet of-age. Technically that counts as a child.”[/JUSTIFY]  
[JUSTIFY]Silent, who had done his name honour so far, made a despicable noise. “Oh, please. How is he a child? I mean, you would kidnap Dacart, if somebody paid for it, right?”[/JUSTIFY]  
[JUSTIFY]Dacart gave him a hurt look. “Hey!”[/JUSTIFY]  
[JUSTIFY]Pakhet shook her head. “Dacart is of-age. And he is a god-damn psychopath, who is a danger to himself and everyone around him. That is something entirely different.” She looked around. “I would not kidnap Murphy, though.”[/JUSTIFY]  
[JUSTIFY]The elf gave an amused grin. “Thanks.”[/JUSTIFY]  
[JUSTIFY]She sighed. “You are welcome.”[/JUSTIFY]  
[JUSTIFY]Schmidt looked around and seemed to think about it for about a minute, until he addressed Pakhet: “On a word in private.” He said and went to one of the doors leading out of the room, apparently waiting for her.[/JUSTIFY]  
[JUSTIFY]While she did not like this, Pakhet stood up and went over to him, following him into the other room, where he closed the door behind her. “Okay, listen. I am not supposed to tell you. But you seem reasonable and upright enough, so I will.” He made a short pause. “The one hiring you to kidnap the boy, is the boy's father. He is an exec at Evo, but he is going to leave for Wuxing. But the boy is living in an acology so getting him out is not that easy. Especially without telling him. And he is afraid to loose his son, if he stays in the arcology, once he leaves Evo.”[/JUSTIFY]  
[JUSTIFY]This sounded awfully like a made-up tale to convince her to come on this run. She looked at Schmidt for a while. He looked honest – but then again he was a Johnson, he would be as good at lying as Michael was. But if what he said it was truth... Well, she somehow doubted that those slops would be able to manage entirely on their own. Drek, she cursed inside. This was harder then expected. “Okay”, she finally said. “I just hope you don't lie.”[/JUSTIFY]  
[JUSTIFY]“I am not”, Schmidt replied with an apparently honest smile. “You can trust me.”[/JUSTIFY]  
[JUSTIFY]Yeah, sure, she thought to herself. Then she turned around and opened the door. “Well, change of plans. I am coming along.” She did notice the gazes both Silent

and Slap shot Schmidt and could very well guess what they thought. They assumed he had offered extra money to do the job – well, at least Slap should by now know her better than that. [/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]“Well, I am not sure, whether I could come along”, Heidenstein said. “I am not in the best condition.” [/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]“I've noticed”, she muttered and looked at him, still worried. “Well, but we'll need Crash. And Murphy.” [/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]“Me?”, the elven boy replied surprised, before giving a smug grin. “Oh, I am honoured.” [/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]“We need somebody, who can make a good face, while smuggling that thing, the TacNet, out of the arena. And you said, you can talk people into anything. So: Time to proof it”, she said calmly. [/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]“But why do we need Crash?”, Dacart asked. “He seemed to be not that... Awesome.” [/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]Pakhet fixated him. “Are you fucking kidding me? Have you seen him? He is so big and bulky, if nothing else he will be great at just running around holding the god damn ball.” She sighed. “By the way: What is going to be the payment?” [/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]“Seven thousand each for seven people”, Schmidt replied. “Exactly one amateur team full of people.” [/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]Pakhet thought about this for a while. For years she and Robert had watched Urban Brawl games. She knew the rules – well, most of them at least – and how those games played out. The question remained: How were they going to get some expensive equipment – and the boy out of there. [/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]“Also: There will be prize money of a hundred thousand, from what I've heard”, Schmidt added. [/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]“A hundred thousand?”, Silent echoed. [/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]That sounded useful. Better than just seven thousand. But how were they to win a game in the amateur league? They were fighters, but no athletes. She rather doubted that the others would do a good job with a ball – well, she herself probably would not. Then again there was another way to win an Urban Brawl game... “Wipe out”, she muttered to herself. “We could win by wipe out.” [/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]“What?”, Slap asked. [/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]“Wipe out”, she repeated. “It is a rule. If all players of a team are unable to play the other team wins by default. It's called the wipe out rule. What it means: We just have to knock everyone from the other teams out.” [/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]“And how do you think we can do that?”, Slap asked further. [/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]“I am going to be a Heavy and shoot the other's K.O.”, she said. “Well, and I think Crash will be great with that, too.” She pondered about this for a while. “About the boy: If you, Slap, hack into the system of the arena, you could have the Doc called in case of an emergency, right?” [/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]The decker nodded. “Of course I can.” [/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]“Great. We just need to knock him out and then play it out as if he was badly hurt”, she said. “And then Doc just gets him out with his ambulance. You could do that, right?” She looked at Heidenstein. [/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]“I think so”, he replied. “Though none of the vans looks like ambulances.” [/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]“We can change that”, Pakhet said and he just nodded. Well, if he looked like this nobody would believe him to be a doctor. What the hell had he done? She continued with her plan: “About the TacNet: We could stage a fight between us

during the last game. Murphy takes the TacNet, gets hit and then acts as if he had been knocked out. Or even better: Gets knocked out for real.”[/JUSTIFY]  
[JUSTIFY]“I am not sure I like that plan”, Murphy replied.[/JUSTIFY]  
[JUSTIFY]“Don't worry. I'll make sure you won't get seriously injured”, she said – and when he did not reply anything, she added: “I'll buy you some ice cream.”[/JUSTIFY]  
[JUSTIFY]The elf gave a sigh. “Okay”, he muttered though he did not sound very confident in this plan.[/JUSTIFY]  
[JUSTIFY]After he had spoken, silent fell in the room, as nobody seemed to have anything to add.[/JUSTIFY]  
[JUSTIFY]“Well, there is no way this will work”, Slap muttered. “The TacNet is not small – and it is expensive.”[/JUSTIFY]  
[JUSTIFY]“That's why we give it to the boy”, Pakhet said. “He has a way to influence people.”[/JUSTIFY]  
[JUSTIFY]“There are still many things that could go wrong”, the hacker objected.[/JUSTIFY]  
[JUSTIFY]“Any additions to the plan?”, she asked.[/JUSTIFY]  
[JUSTIFY]Silence was the answer. Actually Pakhet had not planned on being so bossy – but after the things she had seen on the last run and considering that this was some sort of test, she was also not willing to leave it to somebody who considered a shot gun as a stealth weapon. Also she was still mad at Michael and yelling at the others felt like a good way to relieve some stress.[/JUSTIFY]  
[JUSTIFY]And as if he knew she thought about this, Silent got out his commlink. “I'll call Mr. Minotaur”, he said and went to the door, closing it behind himself.[/JUSTIFY]  
[JUSTIFY]Thankfully Crash had given them his number. Apparently he knew that being well connected meant making good money in the shadows.[/JUSTIFY]  
[JUSTIFY]They could hear Silent talk in the other room for quite a while, but were unable to make out words. Then he finally returned, his face red. “He is not going to come.”[/JUSTIFY]  
[JUSTIFY]“Why?”, Slap asked.[/JUSTIFY]  
[JUSTIFY]“Said he wanted more payment”, Silent muttered – with something in his voice catching Pakhet's attention.[/JUSTIFY]  
[JUSTIFY]She looked at the dwarf. “How much did you offer him?”[/JUSTIFY]  
[JUSTIFY]“Well, nothing of course”, Silent said. “I am not paying a stupid Minotaur.”[/JUSTIFY]  
[JUSTIFY]Yeah, who was stupid here. “Idiot!”, she said, got out her own commlink and turned her back to the rest of the group. She, too, dialled Crash's number and it only took one ring for him to pick up.[/JUSTIFY]  
[JUSTIFY]“Just fucking dwarf, if I...”, a deep voice growled at her.[/JUSTIFY]  
[JUSTIFY]“It's not the fucking dwarf, it's Pakhet”, she interjected. “Calm down, big guy. The dwarf is an idiot and we both know it.”[/JUSTIFY]  
[JUSTIFY]“You can tell him he can go fuck himself and if he tries to mess with me again, I'll personally come by and put his damn ass up a pole!”, the Minotaur ranted.[/JUSTIFY]  
[JUSTIFY]“I'll tell him that”, Pakhet replied. “But I am here to make you a reasonable offer.”[/JUSTIFY]  
[JUSTIFY]“Not interested”, Crash said.[/JUSTIFY]  
[JUSTIFY]For a moment she was afraid he would hang up, but thankfully he did not. “Wait, Crash. Listen. You'll get a fair share of seven thousand. How does that sound.”[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]The only reply she got was: "Nope."[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]"And if we win the tournament you'll get your cut of the prize money", she added.[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]"Hey!", somebody – she was pretty sure it was Silent – protested behind her, but she did not care, as she knew very well that they needed some serious muscle to win those games. And for all intent and purposes Crash was serious muscle.[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]"Go on", Crash growled.[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]"Actually I'll give you eight thousand", she then said. "We'll cut the one thousand from Silent's payment for being an idiot."[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]Another protest behind her. "Hey!"[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]A deep chuckle that sounded rather strange was heard. "Okay. Sounds fair", the Minotaur finally agreed.[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]"Great. I'll text you with further information", Pakhet said with a smug grin on her face. "Thank you, big guy." Then she hung up and turned around.[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]It was apparent that Silent was angry. His face was burning red when he looked at her. "Who gave you the right...", he started, but once again she interjected.[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]"I did."[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]It was not long before the others finally went back home. There was nothing much to add to their plan – even though Pakhet herself knew that it still had some gaps. But without knowing more about the arena, there was only so much they could do. She still had a few more days to think about backup plans and as long as the others were unable to offer any, she did not see herself liable to come up with such plans on the fly.[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]But there was one thing she could not stop herself from, when most of the others had already gone: She followed Heidenstein into the garage. She wanted to talk to him in private and as she had the feeling he was avoiding her, this seemed to be the best moment to do it.[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]"Hey, Doc", she said, while he stood prone at his motorcycle, putting his med-kit into the compartment beneath the seat. "You are not going to tell me you came here on the motorcycle, are you?"[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]"Yes, I did", he replied with a sigh and turned around to her.[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]"And you are driving back? Like that?", she asked in disbelief. She had already seen him being a rather unreasonable patient, but considering how pale he was this was just ridiculous.[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]"I am", he just said.[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]She looked at him for a moment. "What has happened to you. You look bad. Really bad."[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]"Nothing", he replied. "Let's just say I did somebody a favour and then got shot at."[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]"A run gone bad?", she asked, but he shook his head.[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]"As I said: A favour." Even though it seemed to cause him some pain, he turned the motorcycle around.[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]Pakhet grabbed his hand. "Let me drive you home", she offered. "You look really bad."[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]"I am fine", he replied stubbornly.[/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]"No, you are not! God damn it, Heidenstein, what's wrong with you? Why won't you let me help you?" She did not shout those questions, but rather spoke quietly, emphatically. She really did not understand why he would not let her help.

Yes, he was stubborn, but this was once again just ridiculous. [/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]“Because there is nothing you can do for me”, he said and somehow got onto the motorcycle. “I’ll be alright, okay?”, he then added, put the helmet on and drove off. [/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]“You are a fucking idiot”, Pakhet muttered and got out her commlink to call Kah Pak. If Heidenstein would not let her do anything for him, he would have to live with magic healing. [/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY] [/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]About half an hour later Pakhet arrived at the hospital. She parked the Jackrabbit in the back of the hospital and was rather relieved when the goons in the back let her in. The way Heidenstein had acted in Harburg, she had not been sure whether he had explicitly told them to keep her outside. [/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]She looked into the garage and was glad to see his motorcycle – so he had made it home. Good, she had been worried. [/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]For a moment she considered whether she should look for him in his flat, but then she reminded her that him resting in his apartment would mean him being reasonable and when it came to his own injuries he most certainly was not. [/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]So she went down into the street clinic. As soon as she had reached the basement she heard what sounded like chanting. This had to mean that Kah Pak was already there. [/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]She followed the chanting and found the door to Heidenstein's office left ajar. Apparently the chanting came out of there so Pakhet completely pushed the door open to look inside. Just to burst out laughing. [/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]Heidenstein was sitting right in the middle of some sort of arcane drawing that Kah Pak had drawn onto the floor with red sand. Birds' feathers and clusters of animal fur were positioned around him, while Kah Pak was walking along the outer lines of that arcane cycle chanting something in a language she did not understand. [/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]This enough was already weird enough to be somewhat funny, but it was the expression on Heidenstein's face that got her. He clearly looked half ashamed, half annoyed and a bit uncomprehending, too. His upper body was stripped, though he was still wearing bandages on his arms and a large plaster over his side. [/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]Pakhet just could not stop laughing. She leaned against the wall of the corridor outside. The situation was just too weird. [/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]“It's not funny, Pakhet!”, he protested, once Kah Pak had stopped chanting. [/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]She did her best to grab a hold of herself, but it took her still a few more seconds to properly calm down enough so that she would be able to speak. “Well, in a way it is”, she said and looked inside again. [/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]“It is not.” Heidenstein carefully checked under his bandages and then took off the patch on his side, before taking it off entirely. While there was a still reddish scar beneath, it seemed that the wound was mostly healed. “Thank you”, he said with a sigh to Kah Pak, his voice rather stiff. [/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]The elven shaman shook his head. “You are welcome.” Then he turned around to Pakhet. “You said, you wanted to bring me up to speed about the run.” [/JUSTIFY]

[JUSTIFY]She nodded, still fighting down a chuckle, while Heidenstein was getting rid of the bandages. “It's mostly simple”, she said. “In five days there is an Urban Brawl amateur league with short games. We are supposed to steal some equipment and

kidnap one of the other players, while filling in as a team ourselves.”[/JUSTIFY]  
[JUSTIFY]Kah Pak nodded to signal he had understood, but did not say anything. Rather he started to collect the bird feathers and bits of fur.[/JUSTIFY]  
[JUSTIFY]Once they had properly cleaned up the left overs from the ritual and Heidenstein had put on his shirt Pakhet started to explain their plan – though she still had no backup-plan. But other than Slap Kah Pak did not say anything about it. Rather he asked about different things, like what team the boy was playing for and such.[/JUSTIFY]  
[JUSTIFY]Then, after half an hour he left, as he said he needed to be back with his family. Pakhet still wondered whether he already had children of his own as he did not seem to be that old. But maybe it was just his parents or some sort of uncle.[/JUSTIFY]  
[JUSTIFY]“We still need to take care of the ambulance”, she said to Heidenstein, once Kah Pak was done.[/JUSTIFY]  
[JUSTIFY]Heidenstein shrugged and sat back onto his chair.[/JUSTIFY]  
[JUSTIFY]She looked at him. “You are not pissed about this, are you?”[/JUSTIFY]  
[JUSTIFY]“I am not”, he replied.[/JUSTIFY]  
[JUSTIFY]Geez, what the hell was wrong with him? Maybe it was because she was not used to having social contacts, but she really could not make sense out of his behaviour. She leaned against the stretcher next to his desk and crossed her arms in front of her chest. “What is wrong, Doc?”, she asked slowly.[/JUSTIFY]  
[JUSTIFY]“Nothing”, he said.[/JUSTIFY]  
[JUSTIFY]“God damn it, Doc, something is wrong. Why are you suddenly so... Irritable? Normally that is my job, isn't it?”[/JUSTIFY]  
[JUSTIFY]This at least made him smile, even though just for a second. “It's nothing, really. It's just... This is the second time I nearly died in... What? About a month? Not quite flattering, eh?”[/JUSTIFY]  
[JUSTIFY]“Happens”, Pakhet said. Her total count of almost dying so far was stuck at five, but only because she had become that much more careful after the third time. “Bad luck. What happened?”, she asked again.[/JUSTIFY]  
[JUSTIFY]He gave a long sigh. “Nothing. As I said: I helped out a friend. Nothing big. Just lending a hand. Something went wrong and he got attacked. I helped out. I got shot at. And I was unlucky enough to be sent to a public hospital, when I fainted. The emergency medic did a horrible job. That's it.” He looked onto the turned off screen on his desk.[/JUSTIFY]  
[JUSTIFY]“I was worried, when you called me”, she said. “You know that, right?”[/JUSTIFY]  
[JUSTIFY]“You don't need to worry about me”, he grumbled.[/JUSTIFY]  
[JUSTIFY]She shrugged: “Well, too late for that.”[/JUSTIFY]  
[JUSTIFY] [/JUSTIFY]