

Machines

Hamburg in the shadows

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XXIV – Urban Brawl

It was still in the morning, when Pakhet arrived at the arena. It was one of the old Olympia stadium from Hamburg – of course they did not put amateurs in one of the real Urban Brawl arenas. After all amateur teams were made up of some exec sons, who wanted to feel cool but did not want to risk their asses. Thankfully that also meant this game would be with non lethal ammunition, meaning she would not need to worry about killing the other teams when they were playing for wipe out.

Just on the road towards the arena she also saw the team van pulling up in front of her and followed it onto the parking lot of the stadium, where Crash was already waiting, looking as cheerful as he had sounded on commlink. Right next to Crash a young human man was standing – Pakhet did not know it, but she was rather sure it was Murphy.

“Good morning”, she said towards the two, when she took off her helmet.

This time even she had put on some make-up to make herself not instantly recognizable. She also wore a dark blond wig, as her red dyed hair was rather striking. Murphy apparently directly picked up on that. “Did not think you would ever wear make-up.” He grinned.

“Well, I do. At times”, she replied dryly and waited for the others to get out of the van. Apparently Kah Pak had driven the van – which might have been a good idea, considering the alternatives.

“Heidenstein is on stand-by?”, Slap asked, when he got out of the car. He looked weird in his casual wear.

Pakhet nodded. “He will park the ambulance nearby.”

Slap just nodded and the seven of them moved towards the stadium.

The Johnson had provided them with fake SIDs, though Pakhet was not quite sure whether to trust them. Hence she was relieved when they got checked on the entrance of the stadium and no alarm was raised.

Instead they were guided towards a cabin, where they found the equipment Saeder had provided for this tournament.

Slap immediately took a look at the TacNet, started it up and did – well – something with it. Yeah, a new toy for the tech-guy.

“You know that Murphy will get that thing for the game, right?”, she asked.

The decker grumbled something. “Yeah, I know.”

Murphy gave a long sigh. It seemed he still was not entirely sold on this plan.

“So, what should I do?”, Crash asked with a deep snort.

With a faint Smile Pakhet turned towards him. "Well, mostly you need to be frightening – and not to kill anyone."

"I will try", the Minotaur replied. "But I am very strong."

"That's a good point", Pakhet muttered.

Thankfully it turned out that the organizers of the tournament, had already had the same thought, as some people came over to them and tried to fit Crash with some boxing gloves made for trolls – and somehow they succeeded. What followed was a long discussion about what to do with Crash's legs, as nobody had boots fit for his satyr-like legs and hooves but it was out of the question that a kick from one of the hooves would be potentially deadly.

Pakhet just hoped that Crash had his temper under control when a guy from security suggested using some sort of packing foil. But while grumbling about it, Crash allowed them to at least put some foil around his hooves.

Once all the teams had arrived at the stadium, there was a long safety introduction, making Pakhet roll her eyes. Was not the entire point of this sport that the general public enjoyed senseless violence? And here they were listening to the twenty-five ways they should be careful not to kill during the games.

Well, it was not really surprising: Out of the three other teams only one was somewhat professional – the Junior Rams, a young version of the Hamburg Rams. The two others were made up half by some sons of rich people and to the other half of semi-professional players who had been paid to actually win matches. Pakhet knew which of those she had to knock out first.

Then – almost three hours after they had arrived at the stadium – there was an opening ceremony, thankfully a brief one.

The entire three hours this run had lasted so far Pakhet had been nervous. She basically just waited for some of the others to be found out. Something just had to happen! Dacart had to let something slip with somebody listening or Slap just being his awkward self. But somehow miraculously nothing the like happened. Nobody even asked about their team – a team Schmidt had named the "Seagulls" – not having played before and yet somehow being registered for this tournament. Were the people really that oblivious?

Well, she thought to herself, better not to question this.

The matches were drawn by lot and – thankfully – they had the first game against the Junior Rams instead of the team their target was a part of. Pakhet considered this as lucky, even though it meant playing on the target's team winning their own match.

"So, what's the plan now?", Slap asked during those fifteen minutes they had before the match started.

"Well, we win this thing", Pakhet said. "Look: Murphy, Silent, Kah Pak and you are the Scouts, Dacart is the Outrider, Crash and I are the Heavies. It is your job to not get knocked out and tell us if anyone from the other team comes near out goal area." She looked at the map of the arena they had just gotten.

Of course the arena was completely designed and did not quite resemble a real neighbourhood like it was in real Urban Brawl games, that took place in actual areas of a city. Instead this was a more or less symmetrical arena with some elements that resembled a harbour area: There were a few containers building more or less a small labyrinth on each side of the field, there were several poles with lights on them and several small housing units, as well as two big ones on each side. In the middle of the field was a tower.

"If we get to choose: Let the others have the ball first", Pakhet said to Murphy. "Then

we don't have to worry about moving enough. If the ball is not moved for ten seconds the other team will get into attack and more importantly people will get a chance to exchange knocked out players. I've looked into the rules of this tournament: As long as all the players of one team in game are knocked out before the team can exchange players they'll loose. So let's play for that. It will make this entire ordeal much more easy." When nobody objected after a few seconds, she continued. "Dacart. At the beginning of the game take me on the motorcycle and bring me to the tower. Once I am up there, I should be able to knock out the others from up there."

"Okay", Dacart replied.

"Good", she said and just hoped this would work. Even without the money on the line: They needed to win this match to have a chance to get to that boy.

Inside the arena everything looked considerably bigger then from the outside or the plans. Pakhet knew that the area was only eighty times a hundred and sixty meters – but with the rather plainly constructed buildings around them and the dirty asphalt ground under their feet the illusion of an actual play field was almost convincing. The good thing about this arena though was, that it was symmetrical – so they knew what they would find on the side of their enemies.

She herself stood right next to Dacart at the front border of the last zone of the playing field, so that they had the best chances to reach the tower in the middle of the arena first.

To her right was a single larger building as well as some plain field with installed flooding lights. To her left was another large building right next to three row houses. They had put their goal zone on top of the last one. Pakhet hoped that was enough as she knew that a goal by the Junior Rams would mean they would get to exchange players.

The Rams would be playing offensive first, getting the ball. So all they needed to do was to stop them from scoring a goal before all of those guys were down. At least in theory that should be possible, right?

Thankfully the amateurs played without medics in the game.

On the top, right in the middle of the stadium was a big AR display with a countdown. Thirty more seconds. Twenty. Ten.

She got ready. She heard Dacart starting up the motorcycle.

Three, two, one... She jumped on the motorcycle behind Dacart, who started it up and raced towards the tower.

One thing she had to admit: The adept knew how to drive, as he did not only accelerate quickly, but also did not loose control over the vehicle when she jumped of it at the tower. Instead he just drove around the tower to guard the middle line of the arena.

Pakhet was somewhat glad that she had managed to land on her feet. Because she had not been entirely sure whether this stunt would work out for her. She really was not keen on a broken foot. But it had worked and now she ran towards the tower's doorway.

Inside there were winding stairs without balustrades leading to a balustrade at the top level of the tower. And so she ran.

She heard shooting from outside – from the Rams' side of the field. It was automated fire and if her hearing was not of it was the fire of bigger artillery. Probably one of the motorcycle-mounted guns, but of course she was unable to tell whether it was Dacart or the enemies outrider. It did not matter for now. She needed to get up.

Pakhet estimated that it took her about twelve seconds to get up onto the balustrade. Still there was shooting so she looked down.

Apparently Dacart was having a fight against the enemies outrider, but while Dacart was certainly a skilled driver, he was not well with the mounted gun and did not quite manage to hit the outrider.

"Dacart, have him riding towards the tower", Pakhet growled into the helmets mic.

"Rodger that", was the enthusiastic reply she got.

Dacart drove off towards the far side of the field and the other outrider followed him. Having reached almost the far end of the arena, Dacart then made a sharp turn – somehow evading his opponents fire – and drove back toward the tower.

His plan succeeded: The other outrider turned his bike around and followed, allowing Pakhet to aim directly at his helmet.

She took a breath, exhaled and shot – thankful that the machine gun she had gotten was also able to give of single shots. The shot hit its mark, right on the helmet of the outrider and while it was just a rubber bullet, it was enough to unbalance him so far, that he fell of the motorcycle and onto the ground where he lay motionless.

Then she saw a motion from the corner of her eye. Somebody tried to sneak through the alleyway between the buildings in the back of the playing field and a building right next to the tower. She turned and shot – but this time she missed as she had no good shooting field.

"Crash?", she whispered. "The alleyway at the right side of the field. Somebody is sneaking through. Can you get him?"

"Sure thing", the Minotaur answered grimly. "And for a moment I thought you would let the elf-kid take the lead."

The next thing Pakhet heard were hooves on the asphalt. For a moment she could see Crash bursting through one of the open fields, getting ready to slam. Then there was a loud – well – crash when he burst into that alleyway.

A second later he came through the alleyway shoving a rubbish container, parts of a fence and what appeared to be one of the enemies scouts in front of him.

"I think we have just found one of your talents", Pakhet muttered, when the audience started to growl. Most probably because they normally did not get to see such brutality in an amateur game. Well, and there never was a way to see the professional league games live in place.

Next thing she knew somebody fired at her in burst. Just in time she managed to duck behind the balustrade, but did not evade the fire completely. And even though it was only rubber rounds it hurt when they hit her in the chest.

"Dacart?", she muttered into the microphone.

"On it!", was the prompt reply.

Pakhet shortly looked over the balustrade just to be hit once more by the fire of three automated guns. Three of the Junior Rams – two of them apparently the Heavies – were standing there firing at her making it impossible to return the fire without being hit herself.

Then Dacart drove towards them before drifting the bike sideways to slide at them with a broad front. But while they – somehow – managed to jump aside in the last possible moment, Dacart lost the control over the motorcycle and with it ended up against the next wall and right in front of Crash.

It did not surprise Pakhet, that the adept had lost control. Few people could pull off such a stunt without doing so – and all of them were riggers.

But then something happened, which she could have not foreseen: While two of the

Rams standing in front of the tower kept firing at her, the third started to fire at Crash, who seemed to just shrug it off as if it meant nothing. Then Dacart's voice was audible over their team communication: "Throw me, but don't tell the elf."

Next thing she heard was Murphy's laughter.

Well, great, so they were a team of old-movie nerds, eh?

Crash meanwhile gave a confident grunt, picked up the trashed motorcycle with Dacart on it – as if it weight no more than a few pounds and before the Junior Rams even knew what was happening he threw the bike at them, burying them beneath it.

The audience was pumped. Why had that boy never picked up this sport before?

"Somebody is here", sounded Silent's voice over their communication line.

Pakhet looked at the AR display of where everybody was. The dwarf apparently was still with the others at the far end of the field – near their own goal zone.

She heard gun fire – single shot's this time.

"Do they have the ball?", she asked. There could only be two more players from the other team. One of them had to have the ball.

"They do!", Murphy replied.

"They won't get past me!", Silent shouted.

Pakhet rolled her eyes and looked at the AR screen showing the action. She knew the game would be over soon. She had no good shooting field to the alley where they now were fighting and she would not make it there before Crash.

Apparently the last two players had managed to use her distraction with the Heavies to sneak past her. They were now standing right in front of the building on which they had claimed their goal zone.

Silent was firing at them with his gun, while there seemed to be some lightning around one of the players – probably one of Kah Pak's spells. At least it seemed enough to down one of the players. Too bad it was the one carrying the ball.

For a moment Pakhet was worried – but only until Crash got there with the speed of a small motorcycle and literally punched the other player through the wall.

Pakhet just hoped that it had not killed that guy.

But that was it. With this one-punch-hit from Crash the game had ended and even though it had barely taken more than three minutes it seemed that the small audience was pumped.

Pakhet meanwhile was sure of one thing: If he learned to make all of this a bit more – well – epic, he could be the "next big thing".

Apparently Pakhet was not the only one with that thought, because more and more people gathered in front of their cabin once they had retreated there.

While she was lying down waiting for the effect of the painkillers to kick in there was knocking on the door and muffled calls could be heard inside.

"Well, looks like somebody got some fans", Dacart said, lying down himself. Once again he had more in common with a mummy than anything else. Why the hell had he hold on to the motorcycle? Pakhet had decided not to ask.

Crash meanwhile did not look very excited about his newfound popularity. He sat on a bench and threw the door angry looks, while his name was shouted outside.

"Problem", Slap said. "I could not hack into the stadiums network from inside the arena."

"Then do it now", Crash grunted.

"I would. But they are watching us", Slap replied nodding at a security camera in the

corner of the cabin.

The Minotaur just gave another grunt and got up. As it to stretch his muscles he walked a bit before leaning at the wall in front of the camera. As this stadium was rather old and the rooms just barely big enough for Crash to stand upright this was probably enough to block the cams view. "Better?", the Minotaur asked.

Slap nodded and got out his wire. "Could you put that at the camera's wire?"

"Sure", Crash said and only a few seconds later Slap "fainted" when he started to hack the system.

The knocking and calls seemed to get louder.

"Pakhet?", a voice startled her. It was Murphy, who was now standing at her feet.

Slowly she sat up. Her chest was still hurting from the rubber rounds. "What is it?"

"A word?", he replied and nodded at the corner.

Pakhet shrugged and went to the corner with him. "Spit it out", she said.

"Well, I am not quite sure how we will go about the entire 'getting the TacNet out' ordeal", he said with some hesitation.

"One of us knocks you out", she replied.

"One of us like in Crash?", the boy asked.

Yet again she shrugged. "Well, he would make it seem most dramatic. And I think he can sell the entire 'not having his temper under control' part best."

Murphy cringed. "That's what I am worried about." For a moment he paused and looked over to the Minotaur. "I don't think he likes me."

Pakhet gave a long sigh.

"Also I think nobody can get the security to overlook two people in one ambulance like I can", he added.

Considering that the boy seemed to be able to pull of some sort of mind tricks there might be something to that, Pakhet had to admit. "Well, okay. I'll do it. I get Crash to hit me. You talk the people into overlooking the entire 'two people' ordeal... As well as the TacNet."

Murphy seemed to be really relieved – even though it was always hard to tell what was an act and what the truth with a face. "Thanks, Pakhet", he said with a smile. "But I'll still get the ice cream?"

She replied with a faint smile: "We'll see about that."

"Okay", Murphy replied.

More knocks sounded on the door, while Pakhet turned around and saw that Slap was once again conscious. "Change of plans", she then announced to the others. "I'll play the 'team leader' for the next game. And Crash", she looked at the Minotaur, who gave another grunt to signal he was listening, "you'll have to knock me out. Just don't kill me."

He gave a grin, showing his tusks. "I'll do my best."

"Now what do we do about the people out there?", Silent asked.

"I think that is mostly up to Crash", Kah Pak said and looked at the Minotaur.

"I don't know", Crash admitted and shot the door another angry look.

Slap coughed. "Well, Crash... How old are you?"

"Nineteen", the Minotaur replied. This surprised Pakhet as even for a goblinized race she would have thought him to be at least in his twenties.

"Well then, Crash", Slap said. "Just a friendly advise: I think this could be your way out of the shadows. You are still young. So... Think about it."

It seemed that the Minotaur was thinking. "But I don't even have a proper SIN."

Slap gave a faint smile. "We can take care of that later. It will probably suffice for

now.”

Crash once again looked at the door. All of this did not seem to be quite sane to him. Well, considering how much he stood out from the crowd, it was maybe not that much of a surprise. He seemed to be hesitant. “Well... Okay.”

It was at that moment that Murphy got to the door. He quickly checked his clothing – as well as his fake reflection in the mirror, before he opened the door. “Please, gentleman! Ladies!”, he shouted before the people in front of the door could trample him down.

Pakhet could not help but wonder how all of them got here so quickly.

“Please! Calm down! I am this team's manager”, Murphy introduced himself. “Now if you'd all calm down. I'll speak for Mr. Brüger. So, everyone who is interested in hiring him now name your price.”

And prizes they named.