

Machines

Hamburg in the shadows

Von Alaiya

XV – Dr. Anderson

It was half past five when Robert called about somebody bringing over the requested tools, but he had not been able to get a hand on the repair parts for the Jackrabbit. So once the tools had arrived at the hospital, Pakhet started to get to work on the former team van. At least with the tools she was able to get the bend doors off the vehicle – though it was hard work even with the help of cyber-arms. In the end she had to grind the doors open with an angle grinder.

She had worked several hours when Robert sent a message saying that he would have the repair-parts for the Jackrabbit the next morning.

“Well, great”, she muttered looking at her car. She was not keen to drive it through Hamburg. When she drove to the hospital she had been lucky to not get stopped by HanSec and she was not interested in challenging her luck again.

It was already past ten and by now she started to feel tired as well. She went inside and down to street clinic in the basement. “Doc?”, she asked into the empty hallway. “Heidenstein?” Nobody replied.

She considered for a while. Either he actually had gone home or he was passed out somewhere. “Doc?”, she tried again and went to his office in the hope to find him there – but she did not.

After ten minutes of searching she had to conclude that the only person in the street clinic was Dacart, who still seemed to be out cold.

“Well, great”, she murmured, thinking about what she should do. For a moment she thought about calling Heidenstein on the commlink, but then scrapped that plan. She could call herself a taxi but then she would have to make sure that she would be back in time to bring in the repair parts. In the end she decided against it.

She went back into the room where the passed out Dacart was lying in one of the hospital beds, got the blanket and pillow of one of the three empty beds and brought both to Heidenstein's office. She had considered for a moment to sleep in the Jackrabbit, but even with the additional backseat it was a rather small car, while she was a rather tall woman. She had slept in the car before, but it never had been incredibly comfortable. Sure, it was not as if the stretcher inside the office made for a good sleeping surface either – but it was better than laying huddled up on the back seat.

Admittedly it was partly, too, just to provoke a reaction from the doc. Would he for once be at least annoyed? He could not be Mr. Nice Guy all the time.

With that thought in mind she went to sleep – somewhat thankful for having learned

to sleep pretty much everywhere and for the ability to wake up rather quickly once somebody approached.

This time, though, she woke up just when the light in the office was turned on. Thanks to the flare-compensation of the cyber-eyes she was able to properly see within a few milliseconds.

"What are you doing here?", Heidenstein asked.

"Sleeping, as you can see", she answered with a yawn. A short gaze at the time display told her, that it was just before 2a.m.

It was clear that Heidenstein was irritated by this, but somehow he still was not angry.

"But why are you sleeping here?"

Pakhet gave a long sigh. "Because I need to be here in the morning, it was late, I could not find you."

"Then why didn't you call me?", he asked, but she only shrugged.

"Didn't want to interrupt your well deserved rest", she said, now making him sigh.

For a moment he paused thinking about something as it seemed. "Follow me", he then said somewhat condescendingly. "I've a guest room upstairs."

She raised an eyebrow. "Upstairs?"

"Yes, the top floor", he said and seemed to wait for her to stand up and follow him.

After a moment of consideration she shrugged and got up to follow him, as he went down the hallway of the small street clinic which looked just like any other hospital corridor. It was clear he was going to the elevators at the end of the hallway which just made sense if they were going to the top-floor.

"Are there no rooms for patients up there?", she asked while waiting for the elevator to reach the top floor.

"No", Heidenstein replied. "Not right now."

Pakhet did not say anything to this but could not help but to remember her theory from just a few days ago.

With a "pling" the elevator arrived at the seventh floor where it opened to an empty hallway, with closed doors to the sides.

"Here", Heidenstein said and used a rather old-fashioned ID-card to unlock the door.

Behind the door lay not another random hospital room, but what appeared to be a living room. While the furnishing was rather austere, there was a sofa with a fitting low table, as well as a trideo and multiple shelves at the walls.

Pakhet could not help but shoot Heidenstein a side gaze. "You live here?"

"Yes", he said with a sigh. "I rented some rooms as they were barren either way."

Sure, Mr. Anderson, Pakhet thought but kept it to herself. She did not want to argue about it as she was sure he would deny it.

Heidenstein guided her to a door besides a media-shelf and opened it. "You can sleep here, for now", he said. "But really, next time just call me and ask."

"Okay", she replied and looked at him. What was he thinking? This was really not what she had expected to happen.

He hesitated for a moment. "And, Pakhet?"

She raised an eyebrow. "Yes?"

"Just do me a favour and don't tell anyone else, that I live here", he said.

At this she gave a faint smile. "That goes without saying."

"Good." He smiled, too. "Well then, have a good night's sleep. I'll go to work."

"Okay", she replied. "And thank you, Doc."

He nodded before going back to the elevator, while she closed the guest bedroom's door and sat down on the bed. Like the living room the furnishing was austere and

reminded her more of the sterile furnishing-style of some modern hotels. The floor was linoleum, like in the rest of the hospital and there was only a small wardrobe at the end of the bed, as well as a small nightstand at the head of it.

She sighed unsure of what to do now – sleep, of course, but what was about Heidenstein or rather Dr. Anderson. On the one hand she was tempted to address the issue how easy it had been to find out about his identity, but then again she was not sure whether that would be the right approach. Something told her, that he would not listen to her.

But she had to admit, this was not what she had expected. Of course even having the suspicion, that he was Anderson she could not have known that he actually lived in the hospital. Even if she had known, she could not have seen this coming. In the shadows distrust kept one alive. Nobody except Robert and Michael knew where she lived and she had put some effort into keeping it this way. Never would she let anyone know where she was living and so she would never have been able to foresee some other runner letting her into his house – or in this case in his few rooms inside a hospital.

She sighed. Why would he be so stupid to trust her? Considering what she had read about Anderson and what she had seen from Heidenstein she could not help herself but conclude that he had to be one of the most genius idiots or the most idiotic genius in town.

Maybe she should be more wary, a voice in her head said. This could be a trap. After all she knew what happened in some street clinics and she felt rather attached to both of her kidneys. But she did not even really consider Heidenstein to do something like that. He was just too Mr. Nice Guy for that.

She sighed, shook her head and then got up to turn off the light, before lying down and going once again back to sleep.

Pakhet awoke with both her kidneys still in place about four hours later. It took her only a moment to remember, where she was. Once more she chided Heidenstein an idiot but then took a look at her commlink to see whether Robert had already sent an estimate when she would get her repair parts. He had not – at least not yet.

She gave another sigh and cursed the fact, that she had not taken her own motorcycle along before. She was hungry and neither of the vehicles here would suffice for getting something to eat as they were just too notably damaged as they were.

Still, she wanted breakfast and most of all she wanted real coffee. Making a mental note to start having a small emergency stack of real coffee in her car, she got up to search for Heidenstein. She took her jacket and left the room.

He was not in his make-shift apartment – though she had not thought him to be – and so she left the apartment to look for him in the street clinic, but once again found only Dacart, who seemed to be awake by now.

"Hey, Pakhet!", he greeted her.

"Morning", she replied grumbly. "Have you seen the doc?"

"Heidenstein?" Dacart shook the head. "I've seen him... Twenty minutes ago or so."

"Well, great", she murmured.

"If you find him, would you kindly ask him to unbind me?" He lifted his left hand which was apparently cuffed to the bed. "I really need to do something."

Pakhet raised an eyebrow. "Like going to the toilet?"

"No, like getting the weapon I hid back!" Dacart said this in an enthusiastic tone, as if he could not imagine anything better.

"I am afraid, you'll have to ask the good doctor yourself", Pakhet replied with a sigh.

She left Dacart to himself and wondered how long it would take him to free himself. There was no way that he was sane enough to stay put because something as "minor" as a shot to the chest. He was a complete fool after all.

Once more she went upstairs, this time to see whether she would find Heidenstein in the garage, which she did indeed.

Heidenstein had taken one of the drones – apparently the one she had shot down the day before – and put it on the work bench and was taking it apart.

"Upgrading to drone repair?", Pakhet asked.

"More or less", he replied while unscrewing a broken piece of metal, that was fixed to the side of the electric motor. When the motor lay bare he looked up. "Did you sleep well?"

"Well enough", she replied. "But I'm in dire need of coffee."

"Soykaf?", Heidenstein offered, but Pakhet shook her head.

"I'm sorry, but the spoiled girl really wants her real coffee." She looked around in the garage and her gaze was caught by Heidenstein's motorcycle. It had a few scratches from Dacart's stunt the day before, but apart from that it seemed to be intact. "Would you mind loaning me your motorcycle so I could get some coffee and proper breakfast?"

He looked over at the motorcycle and seemed to consider for a moment. "Aren't the repair parts for your beloved car coming soon?"

"I don't know, R... Mr. Schneider did not call me yet", she replied, just grasping control of herself to not say "Robert". "And I don't think it would take me terribly long."

"You do know that is the motorcycle on which Dacart had a pursuit with HanSec carrying a highly illegal weapon, right?"

She gave a faint smile. "Yeah, I know. But I've noticed you already replaced the number plate and probably the grid signature." Looking at his face she knew that she was right. "And speaking of Dacart, I'll bet you, that he'll try to escape sooner or later – to get the aforementioned highly illegal weapon."

"He is still badly hurt", Heidenstein muttered.

"I know that. He... I am not that sure", she replied and shrugged. "Now, will I get my coffee?"

Rolling his eyes, he looked at her. "Fine. Though I kinda feel like I might regret this."

He got the key out of his jacket. "But make sure to be back, soon."

"Sure", she replied and took the key. "Should I bring you anything for breakfast?"

He thought about this. "Well, I've had breakfast already. But I wouldn't say no to a sandwich."

"I'll see what I can do", she said with a smile, before going over to the motorcycle.

"See you in a bit." With that she started to motorcycle and drove off.

It did not take her long to get a few sandwiches at a supermarket as well as some real coffee. Just for good measures – and because she really felt like she needed it – she also bought a plastic cup of freshly boiled coffee at a coffeeshop she drove by on her way back.

Just when she was about to leave her commlink started to vibrate. She quickly picked up as she could see Robert's number displayed.

"Good morning, Joanne", he greeted her.

"Morning", she replied. "Please say, you've good news."

"I have", he answered. "The parts have just arrived."

She sighed. "Finally."

Not surprisingly Pakhet spent most of her morning with the repairs of the Jackrabbit, though Heidenstein helped her. He seemed to be better which was why she did not hinder him from doing so. Of course the most pressing repair was the new door, but after properly attaching it, there were still dents in some of the plates. Apart from that Pakhet had had to order more chameleon coating as some of it was chipped off – not to mention that the new door had no such coating.

When they were finally done and the Jackrabbit looked mostly like new, the garage smelled of varnish, burned metal and plastic.

“Well, number one is crossed off the list”, she said and leaned back into one of the chairs Heidenstein had gotten for them.

“Which leaves only two badly damaged vans”, Heidenstein said.

“One of which I'll still have to get here”, she sighed.

Heidenstein smiled. “Well, we are in no hurry.”

“Unless those idiots find the next run completely out of their league within a few”, Pakhet muttered grimly.

“Then I'm afraid they'll have to walk”, Heidenstein said. “But I think I know what will be the next run either way.”

Pakhet raised an eyebrow. “You do?”

His smile became a bit more smug than it had been before. “Well, I've spoken with Slap yesterday and asked him to get some information. If he manages to do so, I'll be the next Johnson hiring 'the team'.”

“You mean the Chaos Crew”, Pakhet replied dryly.

“If you want to call them like this: Yes.”

Pakhet gave a long sigh. “But why won't you hire a group of runners, who are actually good for something?”

“Because that would be too expensive”, Heidenstein said sighing himself.

Pakhet shot him a side glance waiting for him to elaborate, before asking: “Then what do you want the Chaos Crew to do?”

“Well, I want some proper equipment for the shadow clinic”, he said. “And, well, the owner of the hospital really needs some laboratories. So I asked Slap to see whether he can find a corporate hospital that has not yet opened, where we could get the equipment.”

Once more she had to fight down the urge to say something about him talking about the “owner of the hospital”, but she managed to stay silent about it. “Let's say Slap finds such a hospital”, she replied, “how are we going to transport all the stuff? That will certainly be more than what fits in a van.”

Heidenstein nodded. “I know. I will probably have to hire a rigger – as well as some muscle to carry the equipment.”

“Hurray”, Pakhet muttered, making him look at her inquiringly. She shrugged. “Just thinking that for once I'll not have to carry everything by myself.”

“So that means you would come along?”, he asked somewhat hesitantly.

Again she shrugged but shot him a faint smile. “I guess so...” She paused for a moment. “What kind of laboratories are you thinking about?”

Once again she noticed that Heidenstein was hesitating. “Well, the hospital really needs laboratories and equipment for producing bioware – as well as cyberware, though... That might be the harder part.”

“Why?”, Pakhet asked once more raising an eyebrow.

“Because cyberware nowadays is often produced with the help of nanoids... And... Well, have you heard of CFD?”

"CFD like in 'one of the best reasons to not stick your fingers into an unknown viscous liquid'?", she replied. It was one of those things she had heard from in rumours: Nanoids that were infected with a virus would act like an actual biological virus once they had entered a metahuman body, ending with an A.I. taking over the human brain. Creepy, though it were only rumours from what she knew.

"Yep, that one", Heidenstein replied. "The owner of the hospital would hence prefer a more old fashioned cybertech laboratory. But you won't find that in a new hospital."

"True", Pakhet admitted. "Well..." She paused for a moment to think. While she did not want to be too demanding, there was something she had wanted for a while now. "Say, doc, if we got that equipment... Would it be possible to upgrade me a bit?"

Heidenstein did not reply instantly but rather watched her for a moment. "What exactly are you thinking about?"

"Let's just say, that right now the rest of my bodies is not quite on par with my arms", she replied.

"Are you talking about cyber-legs?", the doc asked, but Pakhet shook her head.

True, she once had had her arms replaced not out of medical necessity but to improve further than training would allow, but the thought of being just a torso without the chrome had always freaked her out. There was a reason why she had decided against wired reflexes. "I'm more thinking of bioware."

"That would be possible, yes", Heidenstein replied.

"Good", she said.

For a few seconds there was silence before the doc spoke again: "I'll tell you something: If we manage to get all the equipment I need from some corporate hospital, I could offer you the upgrades as a run reward. I was thinking about offering bioware as run rewards either way."

Even though she did not show it, Pakhet was impressed by this offer. She knew how much proper bioware was worth – even though she also knew that normally the hospitals offering it had a rather impressive profit margin. Still, it was a generous offer. "Sure. That sounds... Very good." She hesitated. "Thank you.."

"Well, we need to see, whether Slap can find what I am looking for – and whether everything then goes according to plan."

"True", Pakhet said and swore to herself, that she would kill the other if they were to mess this up.