

This story uses characters and locations based on the Gunslinger Girl manga written by Yu Aida and published in monthly shōnen magazine Dengeki Daioh. The characters of Kara and Michele are original to myself. The character of Monique is original to Alfisti / wraith11.

"Briefing Notes"

A *Gunslinger Girl* Original Story by Kiskaloo

**ADMINISTRATION BUILDING
SOCIAL WELFARE AGENCY COMPOUND
APRIL**

The main office area for the handlers of Special Operations Section was laid out in an open floor plan. Rather than cubicles, the area was divided through the use of wood bookshelves and rows of metal filing cabinets. Pairs of desks were arranged facing each other, allowing the two handlers to speak with each other. Scattered amongst the corners and nooks were large tables where one could lay out maps and books.

Into this environment stepped a young girl, carrying a plastic tray with two espresso cups and saucers. In contradiction to the majority of girls of similar age, she presented an image of sophistication dressed in a crisp white long-sleeve cotton blouse sporting a Peter Pan collar (named after the collar of Maude Adam's costume in her 1905 role), button front and the famous Burberry House Check trim inside the neck and cuffs worn loose over a flared full skirt in the same House Check pattern with stitched-down pleats, a side button waistband and welt pocket detail. The 25mm heels of her Burberry riding boots added to her 160cm height, the black leather polished to a deep shine and the burnished-gold buckles of the straps wrapped around the base of the shaft gleamed in the harsh florescent light.

That height, combined with a body-type somewhere between slender and skinny, made shopping for outfits a bit of a gamble and she therefore tended to wear either bespoke outfits or off-the-rack subsequently tailored for her frame. Fortunately, her handler's social and economic status made such outfits *de rigueur*.

While her frame brought issues, her short auburn hair solved many. Constructed of prototype artificial hair shafts that could be used in the medical and cosmetic industries, it required minimal maintenance to

retain its original styling.

"Is that the latest financial data from Priscilla?" she asked as she set the tray down and handed one of the cups to the impeccably dressed man seated before an Apple Thunderbolt Display.

"Indeed it is," Michele Pagani replied. "Thank you," he added, taking the cup.

"You're welcome," Monique Pagani replied, taking a sip from her own cup as she positioned herself to the right and just behind the chair, her brown eyes quickly scanning the rows of numbers.

The Pagani *fratello* had been together for about six months and were the newest members of Special Operations, Section Two. Michele's background in the military had been in intelligence and he quickly recognized his cyborg was possessed of a critically sharp mind capable of sifting through enormous amounts of data to identify trends and extricate answers. He therefore nurtured that ability and the two quickly defined their role within the Agency as the team that collected and processed incoming intelligence, which was then used to help prepare missions for the other *fratelli*.

Unlike those other *fratelli*, it was rare for the Paganis to find themselves in the field. His oldest friend and school chum Renato Pisano – Prime Minister of Italy - had roped Michele into the job on the cusp of his retirement from the military and putting said friend in harm's way was viewed by Director Pieri Lorenzo as something that could have very negative repercussions for his Section.

Another reason was that part of the cover for the Social Welfare Agency was that they were developing artificial implants and advanced neurocognitive and neuromotor prostheses to return mobility to amputees and patients suffering from neuromuscular diseases. Therefore, Monique had been fitted with "de-tuned" components closer in specification to those meant for civilian use. Though still capable of Olympian-level performance and easily capable of killing with her hands or feet, she could operate significantly longer between maintenance intervals and needed lower doses of the conditioning medication to regulate them.

"We have that national security meeting at ten," Monique reminded Michele. "There is construction on the A25 between Avezzano and Aiello-Celano so traffic is heavier than usual," she added.

"Thanks, S2," Michele replied, using the NATO continental staff system designation for the person holding the intelligence staff role at the squadron headquarters level as an acknowledgement of her capabilities and competence in her role as his aide-de-camp.

Michele disconnected his Retina MacBook Air and locked it in a drawer. He grabbed his suit jacket from the coat rack located next to the desk while Monty retrieved her Burberry trench coat and Burberry Haymarket Check messenger bag. They walked to the stairs and descended to the main floor and exited the building into the adjacent parking lot, making their way to a Rosso Letto Lamborghini Gallardo LP560-4 Spyder. Of Michele's sizeable garage, Monique liked the Gallardo convertible the best because it offered her excellent visibility and whenever the weather allowed, this was the vehicle they drove. Monique understood that the thin aluminum shell of modern super coupes was even more useless at stopping a bullet than the multi-layered top of the Gallardo and if a trained sniper had their respective numbers, well a closed or open roof really wouldn't make much of a difference.

After placing her messenger bag and coat in the boot, Monique settled into the soft Bianco Polar leather passenger seat, activating the seat heater. She noticed with satisfaction the absence of any dust lying atop the contrasting Blu Scylla leather that covered the top of the dashboard and instrument binnacle.

"How was tea last night?" Michele asked as he pulled out of the parking area and waited for the security gate to open.

"Not as interminable as I feared," Monique admitted. "Your chocolate-hazelnut tart was a big hit...especially with Henrietta," she added.

"Always a benefit to be on her good side," Michele noted. "And you helped make it so I hope you took at least some of the credit."

While Monique's natural intellectual attributes served her very well in her working role, they rather failed her in her social life. It frustrated her that things that were so clear to her were at times so opaque to her peers and she often found herself biting her tongue during briefings when she felt ten too many questions were being asked by them of the data she was presenting.

Michele's natural gregariousness meant that she could not wall herself away in her room and focus on her work, but she did not actively seek out the company of her fellow cyborgs and tended to only socialize with them when ordered to by her handler – as was the case with the "all hands tea party" overseen by Triela the previous evening to take advantage of a rare conjunction of all the occupants of the Cyborg Warehouse. Due to the size, it had to be held in the main dining room as opposed to the normal venue of the room Triela and Claes shared.

Monique acknowledged the professionalism of Triela and Rico, though the latter's naturally chirpy personality tended to grate on her after time. She would even admit to mild admiration at the pragmatism expressed by Claes. Of them all, she held Elsa di Sica in the highest esteem for she was a cyborg who dedicated herself one hundred and ten percent to the mission and her handler to the exclusion of everything else.

They soon approached the construction zone and traffic slowed to a more sedate pace as it wound through the kilometers of orange cones and yellow construction vehicles. They joined the Autostrada dei Parchi and soon enough they exited out from under the Pittaluga Tunnel and the Eternal City came into view. They exited into the chaos that passed for traffic flow as they wound their way towards the third Rioni at the center of the municipality.

"One of these days I'm going to hand over the driving duties to you," Michele threatened as he pulled off the Via dell' Impresa and through the colonnades into the central courtyard of the residence and office of the Prime Minister of Italy.

"Uh, huh," Monique replied, verbally calling his bluff once again as she knew she could always play her two trump cards: the first of which was her being 14 and the driving age in Italy was 20; and second, while she had learned the basics along the back roads of the SWA compound in his Aston Martin DB9, her clear lack of interest at improving her aptitude insured she would always be in "the right seat" on their trips.

After parking the car they entered the Palazzo Chigi and, after Monique surrendered her Beretta Nano at the security checkpoint, were escorted to the second floor, though the Salon of Gold and into the Marine Hall. The official dining room of the palace, Prime Minister Renato preferred using it for his breakfast meetings instead of the larger and more formal Hall of the Maritime Republics.

Already present were Minister of Defense Monica Maria Petris and her Vice Minister, Piero Gerini; Foreign Minister Enrico Pantano; and Minister of the Interior Stefania Tremonte. Moments after Michele and Monique entered the room, the Chief of the Defense Forces and head of the Agenzia Informazioni e Sicurezza Esterna arrived. Last to enter was Prime Minister Renato, accompanied by Chief of Staff Angelina Brunetta and National Security Advisor Catherine Aragon.

"Take a seat everyone," Renato instructed. Monique joined the junior staffers along the wall, taking a seat behind Michele. Waiters brought out plates of food and after initial pleasantries and PR photography, the plates were cleared away and the briefing began.
