

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.

"It Was a Very Good Year"

A Gunslinger Girl Original Story by Kiskaloo

**MILAN, LOMBARDY
LATE JANUARY**

*When I was seventeen
It was a very good year
It was a very good year for small town girls
And soft summer nights
We'd hide from the lights
On the village green
When I was seventeen*

As she listened to the "Chairman of the Board" croon to the accompaniment of Count Basie and his orchestra from the Coppa Room of the Sands Hotel in 1966, seventeen-year old Kara Michele Deleroux looked out the window across the Via Montevideo at the white Christmas lights adorning the trees of the Parco Don Giussani and admitted that it had indeed been a very good year for the Five Republics Faction.

A year prior Cristiano Savonarola launched his personal vendetta against Section Two of the Social Welfare Agency's Special Operations group. Himself crippled in an assassination attempt by Section Two, he wielded his revenge through Giacomo Dante, an ex-mercenary turned terrorist who cared little for the goals of the Five Republics, just their money and the freedom to spread chaos they sanctioned.

And chaos he did spread, first bombing the bell-tower at St. Marks in Venice before following a few weeks later in a day of violence that included bombing Rome's Leonardo di Vinci International Airport, holding the faculty and students at the Royal Spanish College at the University of Bologna hostage and attacking the Carabinieri provincial command center in Florence.

While Cristiano's actions were undertaken for personal reasons, the Five Republics Faction used them to advance their name and cause. Rather than bring the Republic together in condemnation, Dante's attacks widened existing fracture lines and emboldened the various independence movements in the autonomous regions with special statute.

In the region of Trentino-Alto Adige, the South Tyrolean Freedom party came to power with a platform of seeking to rejoin with the Austrian states of North and East Tyrol, of which they'd been a part of as the Princely County of Tyrol under the Austro-Hungarian Empire, before Italy had annexed them at the end of World War I. The Italian government resisted the attempt, however the Five Republics and the Padania nationalist movement provided overt and covert support to the separatists and terrorist acts under the banner of "Tyrol Bridge Builders" increased throughout the area against Italian government and military facilities. The government responded with force and the conflict climaxed with the infamous "Butchery of Bolzano" when elements of the 5th Alpine Regiment opened fire on protestors in the capital city of South Tyrol, killing 34 and wounding scores more. The domestic and international outcry forced Prime Minister Renato to accede to their wishes and not stand in the way of their reunification with Austria.

In defining their five republics, the Five Republic Faction generally followed the guidelines laid down by Gianfranco Miglio, who'd divided Italy into three "macroregions": *Padania* (composed of Veneto, Lombardy, Piedmont, Liguria and Emilia-Romagna); *Etruria* (Lazio, Marche, Tuscany, Umbria); and *Mediterranea* (Basilicata, Campania, Calabria, Apulia, Abruzzo and Molise). While Miglio had included Sardinia and Sicily in *Mediterranea*, they were left as independent republics under the FRF.

In March, elections were held in 13 of Italy's now 19 regions, including most of the northern and central regions along with all of the southern regions. While the parties affiliated with the Five Republics Faction lost ground in central and southern Italy, they made significant ground in the northern regions thanks to financial support from northern industrialists and organized crime syndicates.

By early Fall the situation had turned surreal to Kara's eyes. The pro-Padania parties had successfully put on the ballot resolutions seeking to create the Federal Republic of Padania, though these resolutions as of yet stopped short of calling for independence. Instead, they sought

greater cooperation between the regions in terms of legislation, administration and finance. They also demanded to keep at least 50% of their levied taxes.

For Prime Minister Renato, losing Trentino-Alto Adige, while painful, was not a critical blow to the Republic. Losing Lombardy, Piedmonte or Tuscany would have a significant impact. The government therefore waged a vicious propaganda campaign against the referendums, the Prime Minister using his control over much of the media to do so. In response, the wealthy financial backers of the FRF spent money on an equally vicious campaign in favor of them.

When the votes were tallied, Emilia-Romagna, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Liguria and Veneto all passed the resolution. The resolution failed in Piedmonte, Lombardy and Tuscany, though the vote in Lombardy had been very close and polls showed support growing within the population on joining the Federal Republic. This resulted in demonstrations for and against a new vote and both sides often clashed violently in Milan, Bergamo and Brescia.

To restore order, the government sent in the Army to support the Carabinieri and Polizia di Stato and they never left. Originally viewed by many as an occupation force, over the months they became as normal a feature as the statues and fountains. Earlier that day she'd walked past Milan Cathedral and had seen a Centauro tank destroyer parked in the piazza, festooned with blue flowers representing Padania and the crew of four focused on flirting with pretty girls rather than possible threats to public safety.

For the moment, the quiet and peace of the Christmas and New Years Holidays continued, but Kara wondered how long it would remain so. Perhaps her assassination of the two brothers who ran the 'Ndrangheta group in the commune of Corsico that morning would extend the peace a bit longer, but she knew that soon enough one of the neighboring cosche would step in and fill the void and the cycle of violence would rear its head once again.

She saw the reflection of her handler appear in the window as he came up behind her.

"Are you ready to go?" Michele Pagani asked.

Kara nodded and they headed for the garage.

The End