

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.

"Peer Review"

A Gunslinger Girl Original Story by Kiskaloo

When four *fratelli* gathered in one area, it meant one of two things: they were there to attack a very important target or they were there to defend a very important target.

At a family-run hotel in Vaduz, Liechtenstein, it was the latter reason that brought them together.

In the 21st century, terror was a truly international business. And the heads of six European "special agencies" were gathering in the conference room at the hotel to discuss the possibility of exchanging information. They'd arrived at Zurich and then took a helicopter to Balzers on the border with Switzerland and then travelled by car the seven kilometers on the E43 to Vadur. The capital city of Liechtenstein had been chosen because it was "neutral ground" and the hotel chosen because the secluded location in a residential area and small size allowed them to book the entire facility, which made it easier to defend.

Michele adjusted his tie in the hall mirror. The deep maroon was the only splash of color against the black slacks, shirt, and jacket of his executive suit. Kara came out of the bathroom with a white button-down shirt and a beige business skirt and jacket with matching leather pumps, her HK P2000SK in the small of her back.

They stepped out of their room and headed for the suite at the end of the hall. Out front on a chair sat Rico, swinging her legs back and forth in boredom. She smiled at both as they walked past and Michele knocked twice on the door. Triela answered.

"It's Michele and Kara," she said, stepping back to let them in. Inside on the couch was Special Operations Director Monica Petris along with her two Section heads. Each group had brought one or two aides with them and since Michele had served in a liaison role in Public Safety, he'd been chosen to be Monica's aide and Kara would accompany them as well.

"I'll see you two at lunch," Monica noted to Draghi and Lorenzo and rose. She headed for the door and Michele and Kara fell into step behind her. Jean had appeared next to Rico, who was now standing, and he and Director Petris exchanged a nod of the head as they passed. Monica, Michele and Kara went downstairs and into the main meeting room. The far side of the conference room was large floor-to-ceiling windows so the shades had been drawn and portable bullet-resistant panels had been erected.

Introductions were made, pleasantries exchanged, food and drink items secured and seating locations determined, after which everyone sat down and got to work.

Everyone broke for lunch at noon in the main dining room. Again, the curtains had been drawn and people spread out around the tables. Outside, multiple security teams patrolled the grounds, but all reported no contacts.

"So how goes it?" Giuseppe asked Michele as they enjoyed a gourmet lunch. Directors Petris, Draghi and Lorenzo were dining with his brother.

"Eh," Michele replied. "So far they've mostly been discussing the problem and not the solution. Hopefully we'll see some movement during the second session."

"Well they're scheduled to be on their way back to their planes tonight so..." Giuseppe noted.

At 13:00, the conference began again and continued on until 17:00 when they formally adjourned.

"So, was this trip worth it?" Giuseppe asked Michele in the parking lot as people loaded into their cars.

"I think so. Some serious progress was made, though I expect a few more video conferences will be needed before a final deal is struck."

Giuseppe nodded and joined Henrietta in his Porsche while Jean, Hillshire, Rico and Triela climbed into Jean's CL500. Jean followed the Citroën C6 that carried the three Special Operations directors to the

heliport at Balzers and then headed on towards Rome.

Kara and Michele slipped behind the wheel of their respective cars and also headed out, followed by Giuseppe and Henrietta. Where the Mercedes would follow the E43 and E35 south back into Italy to Milan, the Lamborghini, Ferrari and Porsche were taking a much longer route, also going south along the E43, but branching east at Mastris to follow Swiss Road 28 through Davos and on to Susch and then south to Zenez. Both traffic and police presence were non-existent and all three took full advantage to stretch the legs of their cars.

Unfortunately, the Stelvio Pass was still covered in winter's snow, denying them the opportunity of following what many considered the best driving road in Europe. That road encompassed sixty hairpin turns over a vertical distance of almost 1900m. It was immensely challenging, as most of the road was lined with low stone walls that would not stop a car going off the edge.

The three instead continued south from Zenez on Road 27, skirting the western edge of Schweizer Nationalpark to connect with Road 3 which took them southwest along the shoreline of multiple lakes and through twisting mountain passes to the border crossing at Castasegna. Swiss Road 3 became Italian State Highway 37 at that point and they drove through beautiful forest to the Lake Como, switching to State Highway 36 for the drive into Milan where they met up for dinner with the others. Michele and Kara spent the night at the former's apartment while the others stayed in a hotel.

In the morning, they all drove back to Rome.

The End