

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.

"Under the Radar"

A *Gunslinger Girl* Original Fiction by Kiskaloo

The rain had stopped falling, but the streets in front of the headquarters for the Frosinone Provincial Command of the Carabinieri, 75km south-west of Rome on the Viale Mazzini Giuseppe, were still wet as the Ferrari 456 pulled into a parking spot and turned off its motor. As the passenger side door opened, the puddle reflected a shapely leg for a moment before the sole of the brown boot splashed down, obliterating the mirror surface in a fury of ripples.

"It's not fair," Triela noted as she swung her other leg out and exited the car. "I'm chronologically roughly the same age as you, but when I asked Hillshire about formally learning to drive and getting my license, he went pale as a ghost. Meanwhile, Michele is considering working his magic to get you your *Patente B* a year early *and* in the interim he lets you drive his Ferrari!"

Kara could only shrug as she closed the driver's side door. On this overcast September afternoon, Michele had driven with Hillshire in the latter's Mercedes E320 wagon. The car had thrown a fault code once they arrived and while Mercedes Benz of Rome sent a technician to try and diagnose the problem, it required the car to be loaded on a flatbed and taken back to the dealership for further diagnostics. Michele had called Kara and told her to drive out in the Ferrari to pick them up since they didn't want to wait for one of the Section 2 staffers.

The two walked to the main entrance and stepped inside. In order to appear as adults, Triela wore the tan skirt and blazer over a black t-shirt she'd worn while protecting prosecutor Roberta Guelfi and had exchanged her usual pigtails for loose hair. Kara wore an ensemble from Armani Collezioni - a black three-button business jacket and classic pencil skirt with a white blouse and black boots. They flashed their Public Safety credentials at Reception and were shown back to a lounge where Hillshire and Michele were waiting.

"Thank you for coming to get us," Hillshire said to Kara. "You didn't need to come, Triela," he added.

"I was with Kara when you called and I had nothing better to do," she replied with a shrug.

Hillshire nodded. "Well the least I can do is buy you all dinner when we get back to Rome for the trouble," he decided.

"How long have you been driving?" Hillshire asked Kara as they headed north for Rome in evening traffic along the Autostrada del Sol.

"About three months," Kara replied. "Mostly on a track, though Michele lets me drive the Ferrari on public roads now and then to gain experience in different types of traffic situations. This is the first time I've driven by myself, but I know the route well since our training facility is in the same area."

"Triela has asked me to have her start driver's training, but I am not sure I'm ready," Hillshire noted to Michele with a wane smile. In the back, Triela scowled at him.

"My reasons for teaching Kara are selfish," Michele admitted. "I thought Milan was bad, but Rome...Rome is something far worse when it comes to how people drive. Even with my racing background, I feel out of my league most of the time. Kara, on the other hand, seems to not be bothered by it so I would prefer to let her deal with the stress. It's either that or take the Metro everywhere. Plus I remember how much of a chore it was to get my own license at 18 so I am trying to spare her some of that."

"Ah, yes. As a German, I just had mine converted over to an Italian one, which is fortunate as I also have painful memories of when I first received my license. As to the traffic, after dodging slower cars jumping out in front of you while doing 300 on the Autobahn, Italian drivers are not so scary to me," Hillshire commented.

"If you yield to temptation for Kara, I will likely have to do the same for Triela, lest she pester me mercilessly," he added. In response, Triela gave Hillshire's seat a shove.

"Then I should warn you that when it comes to Kara, I'm a pushover," Michele said.

"That's not true," Kara protested.

"My dear, you can play me as well as you do the piano," Michele replied as he looked at Kara in the rear-view mirror. "You may not have Angelica's thousand watt smile, but you can still light up a room and melt a man's heart when you try."

He turned to Hillshire. "So you might as well have the dealership cut a second set of keys for your Benz," he quipped with a wink. In back, Kara's face took on a scowl to match Triela's.

"Part of the problem is that while she is almost 18, her body physically resembles a girl of 14 to 15 so she might draw attention behind the wheel," Hillshire noted. "You might have to change your hairstyle and clothes to like you have now and wear more make-up so you look older," he said to Triela.

"I like the way I look and I like the clothes you have bought me," Triela replied. "But it has been nice to look a bit more adult," she admitted.

"I'm a member of the Automobile Club d'Italia and we own the track at Vallelunga. Kara has been taking driving lessons there – both general and safety-specific ones – and I could get Triela enrolled if you're interested. The courses are a few hundred Euros, including the driving sessions, but it really makes a difference, even with the girl's memories and reflexes."

"I'll give it a thought," Hillshire considered.

In back, Triela and Kara shared a conspiratorial smile.

Once back at the compound, Triela followed Kara in to the latter's dorm room, which she shared with Gattonero, the third Second Generation cyborg after Petrushka and Kara. Gattonero had short black hair and she was currently away on a mission with her handler, Yarrow.

"So, do you think Michele will buy you one of those when you get your license?" Triela asked, pointing to the poster of a Ferrari Enzo on the wall over Kara's bed. She slipped off her boots and placed them next to the bed, which she then sat on, eschewing the chair and stool pushed against the far wall.

Kara snorted as she took off her suit jacket and hung it in the wardrobe. She then removed her own boots and placed them in the wardrobe.

"I don't think he's going to buy me a €650.000 650hp supercar no matter how much I smile at him," Kara replied.

"Claes said you saw one in Monaco and you seemed quite enamored with it."

"Oh I'd hardly refuse one, but lets be serious," Kara noted. She powered on her Apple Powerbook and ran a USB cable from it to the telescope. She then called up a program that held all coordinates for various sky objects and downloaded the latest updates to the scope. It was time for their monthly star-gazing party and while the weather had looked to possibly force a cancellation, the clouds had continued to break-up throughout the rest of the afternoon and the night sky was mostly clear so they had decided to hold it.

"Okay, done," Kara said. She powered down her computer and changed out of her blouse and skirt and into a polo shirt and khakis. She put on a pair of hiking boots and her Ferrari baseball jacket and grabbed the telescope while Triela picked up her boots and carried them down the hall to her dorm room so she could change.

Later that week, all of the handlers and cyborgs were assembled in the main briefing room, along with all the staff. Minister of Defense Petris and Director Lorenzo were also both present, and the latter stepped forward to the podium.

"As you know, the Milan faction of Padania has been one of the most destructive. They've killed politicians, judges, police, financiers and businessmen. They're very orthodox, which makes them even more dangerous, since they target those that are the most politically effective which has hurt the government's position within Lombardy.

"It was bad enough when they were confining their mischief to the region, but people like Cristiano Savonarola started to 'export' their services to other regions and provinces, including the attempt to sabotage the Straight of Massina Bridge in May which we helped disrupt. We believe they might also have been behind the attempt to kidnap or assassinate Chairwoman d'Angelo. The two might even have been planned together. We also now know Savonarola was the one

who ordered the capture or elimination of Pirazzi's accountant. However, not everyone in the Lombardy PRF agrees with this expansion of operations. We believe it was one of these people who tipped us on Savonarola and remove him from play.

"The same mole who sold out Savonarola is now claiming that the various factions have all agreed to meet and at least try and work out some form of agreement on how to distribute and share power. They also need to plan new operations since we were able to discover their original plans when we recovered Savonarola's computer. The Prime Minister wants to hold a new election before the proportional system resolution under debate can be voted into law, and he feels that a successful strike against them would truly destabilize the PDF in Milan and across Lombardy and also play very well in the press. As you can imagine, every counterterrorist group in the Republic wants a piece of the action, but by the time they figure it out and come to a consensus, it could be too late. Minister Petris has successfully convinced the PM to let us take them out."

He turned to Minister Petris, who leaned forward at the head of the table.

"Last January we launched an operation to eliminate a cadre of Five Republics terrorists planning to kidnap and ransom the daughter of a Senator. We did succeed in killing all of the terrorists and we later discovered they had planned to commit a bombing of the Spanish Steps in Rome with the bombers known as Franco and Franca. This mission reflected very well on us and silenced a number of our detractors inside the government. Eliminating Savonarola, Franco and Franca in Milan in May was yet another feather in our cap.

"I don't need to impress upon you how another success of that magnitude would be beneficial to not just for Section 2's stature, but for the security of the Republic and the safety of the citizenry. Our operations have had a material and demonstrable reduction in Five Republics operations. If we can kill these people, we may very well decapitate the PRF in their largest stronghold city which would allow the government to regain control."

She returned the meeting back to Director Lorenzo.

"Michele will be in charge of planning the mission to and from the target and Jean will oversee the actual assault on the compound. The reason for this split command structure is that we do not yet know

where they will be meeting, but we can be reasonably sure it will be in a northern province. The PM has ordered the Defense Minister to loan us a Super Hercules transport to allow us to be on-site anywhere in Italia Settentrionale within three hours of us learning where the meeting is. Michele's commission in the Aeronautica Militare has been re-activated and he has orders from the Minister instructing all military personnel to extend him their full and unequivocal support."

Twilight was just starting to descend when Michele visited the armory and checked out the Walther WA 2000 sniper rifle. The SWA had a small collection of precision police sniper rifles like the WA 2000 and the Heckler & Koch PSG1. Because the weapons had prices exceeding €15000, they had been produced in very small numbers. Therefore, the SWA purchased one of each and put it in a pool of specialized weapons that would be assigned to a fratello for a specific mission. This included weapons like the Rheinmetall MG3 machine gun, the Sako TRG-42 sniper rifle and the Barrett M82 anti-material rifle.

Michele took an electric cart over to the outdoor range and set up a man-sized target at a 100m distance. He then took out four 6-round box magazines loaded with .300 "Whisper" subsonic rounds. He was not a great rifle marksman, but he also felt it was not worth having Kara sidelined in a sniper role, especially since he'd be engaging targets within 150m.

He fired off the first magazine, becoming comfortable with the weapon and dialing in the scope. As the light grew closer to what he would encounter on the mission, he set-up a new target and successfully put all five rounds into the head of the target.

"Not bad," Kara commented as she came up alongside him as he was cleaning the gun and preparing to package it up.

"It will get the job done," Michele agreed. He noticed she was wearing a t-shirt and activewear so he assumed she'd jogged over from the dormitory. She had a box of "Koala no March" chocolate cookies imported from Japan and she extended the box towards Michele, who took one. The cyborgs needed a great deal of calories to power their bodies in general, and even more so when they were actively training for a mission. As such, they tended to snack a great deal, though usually on healthier high-energy foods.

Michele completed the cleaning and packed the gun away in the case. He cleaned-up the casings and placed them in a bag and dropped them in the receptacle designated for that purpose. They then drove the cart back to the main compound.

The C-130J-30 Super Hercules touched down on the long main runway of the Aeronautica Militare base at Piacenza-San Damiano and taxied into a hanger, where the door was rolled shut behind it. The rear ramp deployed and a Toyota Land Cruiser (Prado) with black-tint windows, a Ford Transit Connect panel van in Telecom Italia livery and an Iveco Daily commercial van with Italennergia livery were unloaded. The three vehicles exited the base and drove north on Strada Statale 591 to Crème and then on SS498 – the Via Bergamo – to the town of Castelverde and the locality of San Martino in Beliseto. All of the vehicles exited at San Martino and turned onto the main east-west road. They drove past a closed gate and turned into a private residence and parked in the center courtyard about 400m farther down.

Twelve hours earlier, their mole had informed them when and where the meeting was taking place. Their targets were meeting in a casale about 800m due south of them down a private road behind that closed gate. Once the vehicles had parked, Amadeo prepped an RQ-11 Raven UAV and launched it into the air. Fitted with an infrared thermal imaging camera, the UAV sent data back to a workstation located inside the Transit Connect. Giorgio erected a portable UHF antenna and started scanning the eight channels of the PMR446 (Personal Mobile Radio, 446 MHz) band used by most consumer-grade walkie-talkies. He quickly locked onto the frequency used by the guards and began monitoring their conversation while using the thermal imaging camera to keep track of their location. They detected four guards on the perimeter, one at each corner of the house with another in a stone tower who could overlook the roads and the open fields.

Everyone on the team wore black tactical jumpsuits. Hillshire, Michele, Triela and Kara wore black combat boots from the German Bundeswehr while the others wore the taller Italian issue model. The handlers put on their body armor and then black wool sweaters over that. The cyborgs wore neither since their internal structure already met various CEN prEN ISO 14876 body armor standards. In the case of the Generation 1 models, they were armored up to Performance Level 4, which protected parts of them from up to 5.56/7.62mm NATO ball rounds. For the Generation 2 models, they were only armored to

PL2, which protected against 9mm and .40S&W. All carried thigh holsters with their pistols and spare clips of ammunition in the cargo pockets.

Now that they were on location, command of the mission shifted from Michele to Jean. They double-checked their weapons and then their digital tactical radios (which were on the TETRA system used by EU government, emergency, transport and military services). By the time they were ready to go, it was early dusk and the sun was low on the western horizon. It was not yet dark enough for night-vision optics, however the performance of traditional human optics was significantly degraded and the *fratelli* used this to their advantage.

They crossed the road into a grove of trees on the other side. From there, a line of trees ran 800m directly to the house and the *fratelli* travelled along it, using the trees and the shade for cover. At 400 meters distance the line of trees shifted to the east and they followed it. Before them the fields lay mostly fallow as the last of the summer cereals were being harvested and preparations were being made to sow the winter cereals. This made cover a bit difficult and they stayed in constant contact with the comms van to coordinate their movements to minimize exposure to the guards walking the perimeter.

As they closed on the casale, the farm plots gave way to a manicured park-like setting with hedges, bushes and trees. It was here that they broke up into two groups. Group 1 was Hillshire, Alessandro, Triela, Petrushka and Kara. Group 2 was Jean, Giuseppe, Marco, Rico, Henrietta and Angelica. Group 1 held their position while Group 2 continued on around towards the other side. Michele, operating independently, set up the WA 2000 and started sighting the guards. Beside him, Kara had a hand-held video receiver that was being sent a copy of the feed from the Raven. Marco had one with Group 2. All of the girls were armed with pistols and their PDWs. Triela had wanted to carry her M1897, but she had been overruled by Hillshire and had her HK MP7.

"Monza is in position," Marco called. "I have two perimeter guards in view."

"Imola is in position," Jean called three minutes later. "We have one guard in view."

"Silverstone is in position," Michele noted. "I have solutions on three guards."

"On my mark...three...two...one...fire," Jean ordered.

Michele took a breath and held it. The WA 2000 barked and the round struck the first target in the head, dropping him immediately. Michele released a bit of his breath and shifted to the second target and fired again, dropping him as well. He then repeated this to take down the third guard.

At the same time Michele was firing, 800m away Amadeo fired the Sako TRG-42. Due to the range, his .308 Lapua Magnum could not use a subsonic load and as such exited the barrel at close to Mach 3 and with a supersonic crack. However, the 275 grain bullet covered the distance to the guard in just under one second and tore through his upper chest, doing massive damage to his heart and lungs, flinging him backwards, dead before he hit the ground.

Once the perimeter guards were down, the comms van jammed all eight PMR446 channels by broadcasting the latest techno track over them. The intent was to make people think some university electronics undergrads were playing "pirate radio station" and the goal was to prevent anyone within the compound to communicate with each other.

"Start your attack," Jean called. Triela, Angelica and Kara made for the western building as Rico, Henrietta and Petrushka started their approach to the eastern building. Their handlers counted to 30 and then started after them, with Michele hunting for the fourth guard, getting directions from the Raven pilot.

There was precious little cover and the grounds were relatively well-lit which forced the girls to stay low and fast as they approached, hugging to the natural and artificial shadows, their weapons at the ready. Rico, Henrietta and Petrushka reached the wall and skirted under the arced windows as they went for the front entrance. Triela, Angelica and Kara went around the back and parallel to the center courtyard. Angelica climbed the stairs to the second floor while Triela and Kara entered the kitchen. A servant had just set some pans in the cabinet and was closing the door when he turned and saw the girls coming in. Kara shot him twice with her suppressed pistol and his body quietly slumped to the floor.

Triela cracked the door and Kara snaked out a fiberscope. In front of them was the dining room, but it was unused. At the far end was the dining room with a large fireplace. She could see three men in chairs

in front of the fireplace and a guard on the balcony above. They also saw a white-jacketed servant coming towards them so they yanked back the fiberscope and took positions. Triela had brought the M1917 bayonet normally on her shotgun and when the servant walked past her, she slammed it home into his kidney and then worked the blade up into his heart and lungs while Kara closed the door behind them. He struggled, but was no match for Triela's augmented strength and he soon went limp in her arms.

Kara opened the door and Triela rushed out, Kara behind her. They stood side-by-side in the dining room and started engaging targets. Above them, Angelica stepped onto the balcony, shooting the guard standing there with her Steyr AUG A1 before he could fire on the girls below. Within moments all were dead and Angelica headed down the balcony towards the master bedroom while Triela and Kara headed for the TV room and the ground floor bedrooms.

As the first attack was underway, the door to the gym opened and two older men in swimsuits and towels walked towards the pool with three bodyguards accompanying them. All five saw the flashes of gunfire inside the other building through the huge windows and the guards ordered the other two men down and moved to cover their retreat back towards the gym.

As they did so, Henrietta and Rico appeared and drilled the guards with their FN90 and SiG SG551 carbine, respectively as Petrushka sprayed the men in swimsuits with her Spectre M4. Rico and Petrushka entered the building and Henrietta guarded the terrace area.

In the other building, Kara and Triela stopped and turned to watch the gun battle out on the terrace and neither saw the bathroom door open and another bodyguard rush out, weapon in hand. Kara and the guard detected each other's presence at the same time and swung their respective weapons into position. Kara's quicker augmented reaction time and limb speed allowed her to bring her HK XM8 carbine into position first and a press of the trigger sent three 5.56x45mm NATO rounds towards her target, slamming into his chest and puncturing his heart and lungs.

While clinical death happened with the stopping of his heart, biological death was still a few moments away thanks to the blood that remained in the brain. As such, the terrorist was still able command his finger to pull the trigger on his KBP 9A-91 carbine, which was set to full-automatic. A spray of ten 9x39mm steel core bullets exited the

weapon for the second the trigger was depressed. His aim was not as sharp as Kara's and seven of those bullets went wide. Three, however, struck her in the abdomen, causing her to fall back, landing on her buttocks.

"Are you okay, Kara?" Triela called out.

"Check the other rooms," Kara ordered through clenched teeth. Triela did so and found them all empty. She came back to Kara, who was now leaning against the wall, and Triela saw dark splotches soaking through the front of the other's jumpsuit.

"I need Doctor Cerutti up here. Kara's been shot and it looks serious," Triela called into the microphone of her tactical radio.

Overhead, the Raven had led Michele to the fourth and final perimeter guard, whom he had dispatched. Nobody other than the SWA members were showing up on the ground and it looked like with the bodyguard Kara had shot, they had secured the casale and eliminated everyone.

Meanwhile, the Transit Connect had left the house and driven back to the main gate. Amadeo stepped out and used a small charge to blow the lock, pushing the gate back to let the vehicle through, followed by the Toyota and the Daily. Amadeo closed the gate again, walking down a ways and settling down with his HK G3. The vehicles drove up the macadam drive and pulled to a stop. The side door of the Transit popped open and Doctor Licia Cerutti rushed out. Triela flagged Licia and showed her where Kara was.

"Three shots, all clean-through. That could work in our favor if they didn't hit an artery," Licia noted. She opened a portable ultrasound machine and began her examination. Michele arrived a few moments later and hovered nearby.

"Her liver and kidneys appear undamaged, which is good. It looks like the bullets went through part of her digestive tract, but also missed the bowel." Licia asked Kara if she felt any acute pain or tenderness while she was performing the ultrasound and Kara replied no, which implied that peritonitis had not yet occurred.

"The damage doesn't look life-threatening," Licia noted. "We'll need to get her back to Rome tonight, however. I will stabilize and sedate her for the journey."

"Understood," Michele said and opened his cell phone to make a call. The others collected and bagged the bodies, which they placed in the back of the Daily as it was cooled to 3° C to preserve them. They also collected what shell casings they could find and cleaned up the blood as best they could. They removed the bloody cushions and put them in the van. They took the damaged furniture out into the fire pit and broke it up with axes and then set it alight using accelerants unlikely to be either investigated or detected. They then all boarded the vehicles and started the drive back to Piacenza-San Damiano. Kara was placed flat in the back of the Transit to reduce the stress on her abdomen.

They arrived at the main gate of Piacenza-San Damiano and drove along the perimeter road to the hangar containing the Hercules that had brought them. The vehicles were winched backwards into the hold, the hangar doors opened and the plane taxied out to the runway and lifted off into the clear Italian night.

As the plane droned through the night at a steady 650 km/h, Doctor Cerutti monitored Kara's vitals for the hour-long trip to Roma-Pratica di Mare Air Base. Upon arrival, the vehicles were unloaded and made their way back to the SWA compound and stopped in front of the hospital.

"What happened?" Doctor Belgonchi asked. He developed and adapted most of the artificial organs inside the girls so he was the one who had been roused out of bed.

"She's been shot three times in the abdomen by a small-caliber round," Licia reported. "All the rounds have gone clean through. She is haemodynamically normal and I did not detect any signs of peritoneal inflammation. I have injected some broad-spectrum antibiotics as well as analgesics and sedatives."

Two orderlies removed Kara from the back and placed her on the gurney and wheeled her into the examination room and ran a multislice CT scan on her. The field ultrasound Doctor Cerutti had performed was sufficient to determine if Kara was hemorrhaging or leaking pericardial fluid, but it was not considered overly accurate

when it came to determining the actual extend of intra-abdominal injuries. The multislice CT scanner was a more effective diagnostic tool and prevented the need of a laparoscopy, which was extremely invasive.

"Okay, it looks pretty straightforward. The wound track is very linear and clean, with minimal damage to surrounding tissue," Belgonchi noted as he watched the images appear on the monitor. "Prep her for surgery," he ordered and stepped outside and headed for the waiting area.

"No need to worry, Colonello," Belgonchi assured Michele as the latter rose from his chair. "We've identified the damage and it is easily repaired. She'll need to spend a day or so in the hospital and she'll be on yogurt for a few days after that, but she'll make a full recovery and be back in service within a week. So head home and get some sleep. You can visit her tomorrow afternoon."

"Thank you, Doctor," Michele said. He decided against going home and instead headed for his room in the dormitory.

The following morning the handlers were all assembled in Director Lorenzo's office. He started the meeting off with asking about Kara's health.

"Doctor Belgonchi successfully repaired the damage to her abdomen and organs," Michele stated. "She's confined to the hospital for today and tonight and then light duty for the rest of the week."

"Good to hear," Lorenzo noted.

"We successfully eliminated all five principals, plus their bodyguards and staff," Jean reported. "They're all in the morgue now being recorded for posterity before cremation."

"The extraction and clean-up went well," Ferro added. "A competent CSI team will likely be able to figure out there was a gunfight there and people were shot, but I am confident we didn't leave anything that can be traced back to us."

"Very well. I'll inform Minister Petris and she can tell the Prime Minister," he noted. "Well done. Well done, all."

"I owe Claes an apology," Kara muttered later that evening as she unenthusiastically moved her spoon around in the bowl.

"How so?" Michele asked.

"Well I always figured she was kind of a chow-hound, but after being forced to eat the same...gruel...she does, I can understand why she's happy to have real food."

Michele smiled. "I'm afraid Doctor Belgonchi said it will be a few more days of the...gruel. And then likely pasta with alfredo sauce for a few days after that."

"Great. Just great," Kara grouched.

There was a knock on the door and Triela appeared, dressed in a white button-down shirt and blue skirt with hiking boots.

"How are you feeling?" she asked.

"I'd kill for a Monte Cristo sandwich and a chocolate shake," Kara admitted.

"Is that the stuff they make Claes eat?" Triela asked. Kara nodded and Triela tried some on her finger.

"No wonder she's cranky before a test," Triela noted, scrunching her face in distaste. "So I imagine you won't be coming to Kempo practice this week?" she asked with a smile.

"I'm afraid I'll have to miss it," Kara replied with a smile of her own.

"That's okay. I'd rather sleep in, anyway. Will you be able to still show me some more *tachijutsu*?"

"I will need to be careful what kata I practice so I don't tear any of my sutures, but yes," Kara replied.

"Cool. I'll sneak you some cannoli, later, when nobody is looking," Triela said, smiling at Michele. "Take care of yourself," she added as she left.

"Get some sleep," Michele said, brushing back bangs and kissing her forehead. He turned and left the room, lowering the lights as he did.

The End