

Lawman in a Lawless Land

Columbus, Ohio - 7:35 p.m. - August 23rd, 2002

The computer screens flickered back and forth with information vital to the existence of the Red Hand. And Operative Violet Rose watched everything carefully. Every so often there seemed to be what appeared as a small glitch in the system. Violet Rose smirked slightly as he recognized it right away. He tapped a few keys on the keyboard and lifted the mask over his features. The middle view screen came to life, and the features of an attractive red head began to come into focus.

"Well, well," Violet Rose drawled as he sat back in the chair. "Look what we have here."

The woman on the view screen merely smiled her usual sultry smile and shook her head. "What makes you think I was looking for you, Rose," she replied in an equally charming way. "Or maybe I should start callin'

you by your real name, John. Seems only fair, as you figured mine out about two months back."

Rose, or John as was his name, laughed aloud. "Now, I guess I shoulda figgered you'd pick up on that soon 'nough. You bein' the only one smart 'nough ta figger it out. Shoulda known it'd come ta that, Miss Rayne." He paused and studied the view screen for a moment. "Or maybe, seein' how we've upgraded ourselves ta a first name basis, would it be too forward o' me ta call ya Christa."

"I don't see any reason why not, John Walker," she replied with a purr in her voice. "Gotta admit, the chase has been fun, but I'm only one step behind you now, John. Won't be too long."

John Walker's tone became very serious, the smile seemed to fade just slightly. "I hate ta disappoint ya, Christa. I really do. But maybe I seen the light. What we had b'tween us, this game o' cat an' mouse, been fun an' all, but I realized somethin'. It ain't gonna last ferever, an' somebody's gonna get killed b'cause o' it. Now maybe I started ta grow a soft spot fer ya, ain't too sure, but I do

know this. A man b'comes dangerous when he starts spoutin' that he's got God on his side. A man also b'comes dangerous when he's weilding a gun. He b'come down right fanatical when he's got both." John sighed and pulled down the mask as he reached for a pack of cigarettes. "That's sorta what's happenin' with this branch o' the organization, an' while I may be a God fearin' man, I ain't 'bout ta start sayin' it were God tol' me ta do the things I set out ta do."

"What you planning, John?" Christa's tone had become very even. She knew John Walker well enough that he was capable of calling on an air strike from any military in the world. His connections and his ability to subvert had become that great. "Because if it means the taking o' lives..."

"No Christa. No worries there." He lit the cigarette and reached for a bottle of JD. "I'm out. I've had 'nough."

"Come ta me, John. We can cut you a deal, get you relocated...."

"Hell, no," he said cutting her off quickly. "I done

too much ta too many. I know when I die, I'm gonna burn in hell. But let it come ta that when I die. In this life, I gotta make amends in my own way. The only way I can." He took a pull off the cigarette and exhaled deeply. "Wish I could tell ya more, Christa, really wish I could. Be nice ta have a fine filly like you with me, but I can't risk it. I'm sorry." He tapped a few more keys on the keyboard and suddenly the connection was gone.

John Walker, formerly Operative Violet Rose, rose from the chair and gathered up what few belongings he intended to take. A pair of Colt .45s, a Derringer, and an assault rifle. The rest, would go up in flames. He removed his jacket and tossed it onto the chair, then looked back to the computer console. "I need ta see someone I care 'bout, Christa. An' then I need ta disappear, so I can take care o' her."

"We lost the signal, ma'am," a communications officer reported quickly.

Christa Rayne, a.k.a. Red Serge, high ranking officer within Interpol and on lone from the RCMP,

slammed her fist onto the console in front of her. "Dammit, Johnny! Damn you!"

"Orders, ma'am?"

Christa looked to her tactical officer and glared. If Violet Rose escaped now, it could be months, years before they could pick up the trail again. "Get to work. Now! I want him found. If we can bring him in, then there's a damn good chance we can bring this Illuminati to it's knees."

Shreveport, Louisianan - 7:42 p.m. - August 25, 2002

John Walker gently lay the woman's body onto the ground. She wasn't dead, but merely knocked out. A much more merciful thing to have happen than what the Sisters of the Blade would have done to him. But he needed to be here, he needed to see her. Sister Jade, a woman that for some unknown reason, he felt drawn to. So much so, that together they had a child. And because of that child, he realized that what he did, was no longer an option.

Maybe it was his age, maybe it was the child, he

didn't know what it was, but he couldn't do it anymore. He snaked his way through the base, bypassing security and stealthing past the Sisters that were on patrol. He had to get to her room.

And then he felt it. He cursed himself as the blade rested on his neck. Slowly, he rose to his feet, hands held up to show he had no weapon drawn. "Do yer worst," he said in a gruff voice.

"You are very fortunate that I was the one who found you," the woman said as John felt the blade leave his neck. "Anyone else would have killed you where you were." John Walker turned slowly, and took a deep breath. Sister Jade stood before him.

"You could come with me," he said to her. "Gather up Danielle's things an' come with me."

"You know I can't," she replied in a voice that bordered on pleading. "If I were to leave, you know that both the Sisters and the Illuminati would search the world over for us."

John took a step closer to her, feeling the tip of the blade touch his chest. He didn't look down as he

effortlessly pushed it to the side. But then, Jade wasn't about to use it on him. "Jade, I don't know what it was, but somethin' came alive in my heart. For years, I'd only known one thing. An' that was what I did for the Illuminati. An' I was damned good at it. But when I met you... my world suddenly changed." He held up a hand as Jade began to speak, stopping her. "Don't say anythin', darlin'. Don't. I thought I'd come here, convince you ta come with me. You an' Danny. But I can tell how you feel just by lookin' in yer eyes. Alright, I'll leave. But I will wait fer you, Jade. If I have ta wait ta be on my death bed fer you ta come ta me, then so be it. But if all I have is those final few moments with you, then I know it were worth it."

Jade sighed deeply. She'd trained hard with the Sisters, worked to obtain her station with the Sisters, and was a well respected member. But this man had done something to her. He had filled something in her that she desperately wanted, but knew she couldn't have. "You know what the penalty is."

"I do," he said with a firm nod. "An' I ain't 'bout ta

risk yer life b'cause o' me. When yer ready, come lookin' fer me. I'll leave a trail only you can follow, darlin'. When yer ready, I'll be there." He took one last look into her eyes, then took a deep breath and moved past her. It was the most difficult thing he'd ever have to do.

Bermuda - 8:46 p.m. - August 26, 2002

Johnathon Tiberius Walker stepped off the unmarked Black hawk helicopter, stepping lightly onto the cobble stones that made up the streets of the town. Port William. One of two communities on an island chain at the tip of Bermuda. The other, Cinco Muerta. He looked back to the Black hawk and waited for it to lift off before moving. It sat for several more minutes, giving Walker a moment to pause. Why would they just sit there and wait? It made no sense.

And then the answer came.

A tall, dark haired man stepped off the transport. Walker knew who it was, he'd been the gunslinger's second in command in the the Illuminati unit they ran. Walker gritted his teeth and shook his head. "Omega Six,

what the hell 're you doin'?"

"I'm with you, mate," Omega Six replied in his thick Australian accent. "The way I see it, if I stick it out I'm as good as dead. Especially if I ever have to face off against you. With you, I've got a better chance." He paused for a moment as he studied Walker's reaction. "Besides. You could use my help."

John Walker shook his head and wordlessly waved the Aussie gunslinger over. They both watched as the chopper lifted into the air, and out of sight. "That may have been the dumbest thing you ever done, Monty," Walker said quietly.

"Explain to me how joinin' the Illuminati was smart?"

A chuckle escaped Walker's lips and he shook his head. "C'mon, Monty. We gotta find digs ta settle down in. May as well start huntin'." Monty grabbed his gear and followed the old gun hand. They were fresh and green on this island compared to some, but they had tactical smarts, and that alone would be their saving grace.

The limp form of the monstrosity slipped into the sludge quietly. A woman pulled out the serrated blade with ease and moved back into the shadows. The frayed edges where the arm patches were still bore some of the insignia of the organization she called home. The Sisterhood. Long ago, after witnessing the death of her real sister at the hands of one sect of the Sisters, she decided to leave. The group was no longer a family of hers. They had struck out and killed one of her own. And now it was time for revenge.

A comm on her belt chirped a low sound. She narrowed her eyes as she studied the readout. Blast! she cursed under her breath in a near perfectly enunciated British accent. She hit the receive button as she crept deeper into the shadows. "This had better be important, Eleanor."

"Marianne," the voice on the comm spouted excitedly. "Do you realize how long I've been trying to find you?"

"I really wish you hadn't, Eleanor," Marianne replied with a hint of disdain. "I love you dearly, but you

shouldn't try and contact me." She checked her position, taking note of the Illuminati soldiers that patrolled near what was called the Web.

"Marianne, I noted some movement in the Isles," she said, trying to get her sister to listen. "There's someone there who can help you. Someone you can trust."

"I take it you found all of this via the company you work for," Marianne remarked, a small smirk tugging at the corners of her lips. "How is it, being the personal secretary of Derrick Stewart?"

"Marianne," Eleanor replied with a shocked tone. "Enough. Will you take this information?"

The blade mistress paused for what seemed forever before answering. Having allies in this wretched place would be worth it. And she knew that Eleanor had connections, even more so now that she worked with Stewart Industries. "Who is it, Eleanor?"

"Ex-Illuminati. Codenamed Operative Violet Rose. And his second in command, Omega Six. Both are situated..."

"I know where they are," Marianne said as she typed on the keys of her lap top. While her sister was talking, Marianne connected to the central hub of the web, tapping into the security cameras that dotted the islands. "Port William. I just watched them take out a group of Don Maximus' men."

"How did you..."

"You have your connections, dear sister," Marianne came back with a smirk. "And I have mine." Without another word, she clicked off the comm and gathered her things. It was time to head toward Port William. She knew who John Walker was. She'd undertaken a pair of missions with him during her time with the Sisters. He was good, and he knew the value of honour.

And that was something sorely needed in this lawless land.

Bullets flew across the room. Walker and Monty hunkered down behind a row of beaten up slot machines. Not that they weren't good before this little fire fight, in fact, they were being used quite a bit. Until the bullets

started flying. The pair of Ex-Illuminati agents had busted into the speakeasy quickly, the intent was a warning for one cell of the Family mafia. Frankie Paddaluchi had told the two about this operation, after claiming to know of a good safe house they could use as a base of operations for themselves.

Do this for me, an' I'll hook you two up, capisce?

They never really expected this to be easy, but they also weren't expecting this kind of resistance. And then, they also weren't expecting the Capo to be a woman.

Fancy was her name, with mannerisms that would appear as unseeingly for someone to be associating with the hired gunsels of the Maximus Family. But she was as deadly as she was refined. "I always find it interesting when brutes such as yourselves attempt to rest from my hands the territory and materials that I have worked so very hard to acquire," she called out as she fired off a few rounds from her .38s. "Allow me to ask you gentlemen, what exactly do you believe that you were attempting to accomplish by an action such as this."

"Can I squeeze off a few rounds an' hope ta take

her head off, mate," Monty said in a hoarse whisper. "Her bloody limey's the worst I've ever heard."

Walker would have laughed had the situation not been so dire. "Way I hear it, Ma'am, you been puttin' the squeeze on some honest folk 'round these parts. Somethin' like that just ain't right."

"My word, someone with a heart of gold," she called back with a laugh. "Such a thing as that is not commonly found in the Isles."

"Whyn't ya come here an' I'll show ya my heart o' gold while I'm puttin' a bullet through yer skull," Walker suggested, a touch of venom in his voice. He looked to Monty as he heard the shuffling of feet. The shooting had died down, and gunsels were moving into a better position. Walker and Monty wordlessly positioned themselves.

The guns started blazing again as gunsels tried dropping in on them, only finding ripping death as the guns held by the gunslingers took them out quickly and effortlessly.

"She in that bunch?" Walker asked in a loud voice,

knowing the answer, using his words to taunt.

"No, mate," Monty replied, just as loud. "Dare say that's a lotta Armani that just got wasted, though. Bloody shame, ya ask me."

"Nah, it ain't no shame. I'd rather go fer a good pair o' Wranglers any day."

Fancy shook her head as she listened to the words coming from the pair. "Dreadful, truly dreadful that such as yourselves would even consider yourself at such a station as we are."

"Hell, Shiela. Ya boys're dead, an' we're still breathin'. I would gather that we're doin' alright. Whaddya say, mate?"

"Hell, boy," Walker replied with a chuckle. "I wager I'm gonna haveta agree with ya." Walker's voice had a smile in it, knowing right away, even before asking, what Fancy's answer to his upcoming proposition would be. "Darlin', tell ya what. Whyn't ya make this easy on yerself. Just call it off, agree ta Paddaluchi's terms an' we'll stop shootin'."

Fancy laughed aloud as though she were on stage.

The mere thought of such a suggestion was, in truth, laughable. "And where, pray tell, would the profit be for such a venture as that?"

"Well," Walker replied with a smile. "Fer one, we'd stop usin' so many bullets. I think Monty here missed a coupla times."

"I bloody did not, mate," he remarked with a voice that sounded angry, but he couldn't help but smile as he spoke. He knew what Walker was doing. Wearing down the opponent with verbal jabs, and keeping them off guard. "Not like you hit one hundred percent..."

"Oh for!" Fancy finally cried out in dramatic voice and posture. "I give you... gentlemen the same offer you gave me. Give up, and I'll allow you to crawl back to Paddaluchi, and receive whatever punish..."

Her words were cut off as she stared at the serrated blade that now protruded from her chest. She marveled at it for a while as she watched the blood begin to drip from the wound. And then she felt the arm wrap around her throat, and her body thrust backward, held fast by a muscular, yet lithe individual.

"Let me guess, Miss Fancy," Marianne Wollcott whispered in Fancy's ear. "A little girl from Oregon wished to be British, and far higher than her station. So, she joined with Don Maximus, first as a whore, and then worked close to the Don and secured herself some property. All the while pretending to be, oh so Shakespearean. How boorish. Bloody colonial." Marianne pulled the serrated blade back, ripping new wounds into the woman's flesh. Fancy fell to the floor, tears streaming down her eyes.

"I could... I could have had everything..."

"No," Marianne replied with a whisper, knowing full well that the life had ebbed from Fancy. "No you couldn't. Because this was always your fate." She surveyed the room as the gunsels looked to her. One held up his gun and Marianne replied by pointing her blade in his direction. "If any of you fools knew who you were dealing with, then all of you berks would have run scared well before this fight ever started. Your so called boss was an ignorant bitch. She deserved what she got."

"Is she bloody dead?" Monty called out as he

peeked over a crate. "Shite! Walker..." The gunslinger sat up, and peeked over the crate. What he saw was an amazing sight. The gunsels tossed down their weapons as they warily watched the woman who had just killed Fancy.

"Son of a bitch," Walker whispered.

"Aren't the Sisters sticking close to the Web?" Monty asked in a hoarse whisper.

"She ain't a Sister," Walker said with a smile as he pointed toward the woman. "The patches. They been ripped off. She cut an' run, just like us."

Marianne stood her ground as the gunslingers crawled out from their bunker, weapons trained on her. "This is not exactly the reception I had hoped for," she said with a scowl.

"Then respect the fact that it ain't usual procedure fer a member, whether ties 'r cut 'r not, o' the Sisters come save us poor ass the Illuminati."

"Ex-Illuminati, if I remember correctly," Marianna replied.

"Bloody hell," Monty said as he lowered his gun and looked to Walker. "She's good."

Walker nodded to the woman as he lowered his rifle. The frays on the patches weren't new. They'd been ripped off a while ago. "What's yer name, darlin'?"

"Marianne Wollcott," she said quickly. "And if I might say, Operative Violet Rose, your reputation proceeds you. Your exploits are known amongst the members of the Sisters."

"Why you quit?" he asked as he pointed to the torn patches.

Marianne looked down to her shoulder and then back to Walker. "Do you know of Stewart Industries?"

"Course I do," Walker said with a scoff. "One o' the biggest biogenetic an' pharmaceutical companies in the western hemisphere. Have ta be an idiot not ta know. Why?"

"My sister, Maxine Wollcott, was the personal secretary for the CEO, Derrick Stewart," Marianne explained, a cold look in her eyes. "A sect of the Sisters killed her when Mandrake attempted a very hostile take over of the company. Mandrake failed, and my sister paid the ultimate price. I left the Sisters as soon as I learned

what happened."

Walker nodded as Marianne gave her reasons. He studied her for a long while, sensing there was no deception at work. "Ya realize what me an' Monty 're doin'?"

"Law in a lawless land?"

He smirked as he heard the answer. "Well, I guess ya do. Ya ain't gettin' no feelin's o' takin' that pig sticker ta me 'r Monty, an' darlin', we'll get 'long just fine." He looked back to Monty and smiled. "Three o' us is better 'n two. What say we go back ta Paddaluchi an' see what he's got fer us in the form o' property ta set up our shingle."

Monty nodded and flashed a smile to Marianne. She merely responded with a nod, not falling for the perceived charm from the Aussie. But at least now, she had allies. And ones she had known of from her former life. Things in the William were about to get more interesting.

"This ain't fair," the ganger screamed from behind a row of crates. "I carved this little piece of heaven for

myself and I'm gonna keep it."

"Ain't nothin' personal," Walker shouted back as he squeezed off another round from his assault rifle. "We just need a place ta hunker down, an' Frankie tol' us ya might be willin' as long as ya vacated this here spot." Walker wasn't exactly impressed with what Paddaluchi had told them. Originally, the deal was take down Fancy, and he'd find them a place. There was nothing stated about having to clear out a den of gangers.

"Blood hell, mate," Monty shouted as he put two into an advancing ganger. "Frankie never said a damned thing about us having a place filled with scorch marks 'r removing bodies from it."

"Maybe Frankie should be talked to," Marianne suggested in a calm and rational voice as she fired her crossbow.

"I doubt that any amount o' rational conversation'll sway the bastard fer us," Walker replied as he pushed a crate out of the way, revealing Guido Franetti, cowering against the wall. "Get yer ass up!"

"Don't shoot me. Please don't kill me." Franetti

had been turned into a quivering puddle as he found it difficult to rise from the floor. Monty stepped forward and frowned, muttering about the stench. Bloody pissed himself. "Look, I'll... I'll leave. Just don't... don't shoot me, 'kay."

"Goddammit! Yer just some squirt kid," Walker observed with a sigh as he cradled the rifle. "Get yer ass up, an' get the hell outta here. An' don't let me 'r any o' us see ya in the William 'gain. Got it?" Guido crawled past the three before managing to find some purchase on his feet and sprinted out of the warehouse.

Walker took a cursory look around before giving out details. "Monty, that room over there looks like it'd be a decent one fer storage. Annie, see if ya can find what sorta electrical system we're lookin' at. How old it is. We may have ta start cullin' parts t'gether. I'll handle the bodies. When we're done the initial with the buildin', drag 'em down ta the Head an' give 'em a proper burial." Both Monty and Marianne nodded, quickly moving out to take care of their orders.

Walker looked around one last time. Even with the

death, scorch marks and all, he smiled.

Home. They finally found a home.

Sometimes yer gonna find that the best way we can help ourselves, is by doin' worse 'n what some men do. We may have ta take jobs we ain't gonna like. But we make a promise. Ain't gonna take no job 'gainst no honest folk. Any o' them scumbags out there, if we get word on somethin' they got an' we can use, then we take it. Just pray that we may be judged in a way less harsh.

Marianne and Monty quietly entered the ship. The old barge creaked as it rocked on the waves. They'd heard word that the vessel was carrying some cargo that might help them build their medical center. Because they certainly didn't trust the island's Medical System. They were given the job, snatch a few boxes, deliver them to their contact and leave.

The boxes, they found, were crates that they had to divert to the United States. And they contained a disease.

"Annie," Monty said in a whisper. "I gotta say, don't feel right 'bout this, love."

Marianne looked to Monty for a moment. She'd grown used to the nickname that he and Walker had given her, asking that they only use it while they were in the field. "Bloody hell. You pick now of all times to grow a conscious? We're halfway to Paragon. What do you propose?"

Monty furrowed his brow, and then gave Marianne a stern look. "There's a coupla people I know in Interpol. Give it ta them, an' then we scam."

She gave him an incredulous look. "Interpol? Are you completely loony?" She sighed in frustration and looked around the cargo hold of the ship. The containers of the disease sat in a false wall, just in case the coast guard stopped the boat for inspection. "Wait a minute. I've got an idea." She opened the false compartment, dragged out the four containers and moved toward a few packing crates. Carefully opening them, she slipped the containers in amongst food stuffs. "This will nail the boat captain. I've seen him around, not a very nice fellow. Come on." She motioned toward false compartment, and crawled in.

Monty stared in wonder at the woman. "You expect the two of us to fit in there?"

Marianne had crawled in and was sitting in what appeared to be a rather uncomfortable position. "Fine. Then you explain to the coast guard what your doing in the hold of this ship." Monty looked around for a moment for another hiding spot, then moved to the false wall, muttering as he crawled into cramped quarters with Marianne. "Get your bloody foot out of my face."

"Little hard, mate."

Once they both were comfortable, they replaced the false wall. "There. Now just to make sure the coast guard gets a call."

"Marianne," Monty said quietly as they sat in the cramped space.

"What is it?"

"Shouldn't we have done that before crawlin' into here?"

"Grab my comm, it's on my left hip," Marianne replied in a huff. "That's not my bloody comm, you pervert!"

"It's bloody dark in here."

Marianne's muffled voice explained the situation to the coast guard. All they had to do was wait and it would be all over. In their cramped quarters, Monty spoke in a near whisper. "Marianne?"

"What?"

"You owe me a back massage for this, mate."

The pair walked slowly along the dock, letting the kinks work out of their muscles. They stayed in that compartment for three hours before it finally pulled into port in the William. The man who owned it was a legitimate businessman, even if her captain, hired to sail her, was not. The coast guard detained the ship, then sent her back. The containers of the disease were confiscated and sent to the CDC labs in Atlanta. All in all, a days work complete.

But it wasn't over yet.

"This'll be a hoot, explainin' this ta Walker," Monty commented as he rubbed his shoulder.

"Walker will understand," Marianne replied. A

small ruckus along the dock caused her to look up. A ship was unloading horses, and the handler was being none too kind to the cargo. Smacking a grey filly viciously. Marianne scowled, and without thinking, she dashed off toward the handler, ignoring the pain that screamed in her muscles. She reached the handler, threw him up against a wall, and backhanded him across the face. For good measure, she slapped him with a hard, open hand. "Hurts, doesn't it?" she said with venom. "Give me those reigns," she added, ripping the leather reigns from the handler's hands.

"This is Don Maximus' goods," the handler spouted as he wiped blood from his face. "They gonna hear about this."

"Go ahead and tell them you lost the shipment, then," Marianne said with a smirk as she began to lead the filly down the length of the dock. There were two other horses standing at the dock and the former Sister motioned for Monty to lead them as well.

"Great, Annie," Monty called out to her as he held tight the reigns of a chestnut mare and a brown quarter

horse. "Lovely, we saved the horses. Now what?"

Marianne just looked back without any answer. The action was impulsive. The horses reminded her of the time she spent show jumping when a little girl on her family's estate in Sussex. But what to do with them now. They really couldn't keep horses. Unless...

"The back room, behind the storage area in the Safe house," Marianne explained. "What about there?"

Monty blinked as he came to a stand still. The brown quarter horse nudged his shoulder, seemingly interested in this human, one of his saviours for rescuing him and the other pair from the hands of these men. "Ya sayin' we make a stable?"

"Why not?" Marianne shot back, and continued leading the horses off the dock and down the street of the William. "We'll keep the horses out of sight as we construct it. Should take only a day, if we work quickly enough."

"Marianne," Monty replied with a snort. "Walker's a Texan. Trying to hide horses from him is like trying to hide cheese from a mouse. The man probably already has

some sixth sense that says we're bringin' horses home." Marianne didn't reply. She'd think of something, she always did. At least they saved the horses. Right now, that was the only thing that mattered.

John Walker cocked his head as he heard the noise come from the back room. He got up from his desk and wandered through the storage areas, past the make shift medical bay and to a large door that lead to a room not yet cleared. He'd heard the sounds, hammers banging and saws cutting, but had at first thought nothing of it. They still had repair work to do, and this wasn't exactly something unexpected. But to go on for eight or nine hours was something else.

He grabbed the handle of the large sliding door and attempted to push it open. Locked. Or at least it was held firm by something. Drawing his pistol, he stepped back from the door and took a deep breath before calling out. "Annie? Monty? What the devil's goin' on?"

There was a sudden sound of scrambling, followed by... was that hooves? "What the hells goin' on in there?"

he shouted again.

"Sorry boss," Monty's muffled voice called back. "Just fixing up a few things, mate. Be right there." Walker could hear a hushed conversation between Monty and Marianne, but couldn't catch the details. The sound of metal being pushed back indicated that the lock, or whatever else it was, being opened. Slowly, the large sliding door was pushed back.

"What in blue blazes..." Walker began before his eyes finally registered what was in the room. Like entering into a church, he removed his hat and studied the three new faces that turned to greet him. The chuffing sound each gave as they looked to see who this new person was that entered their new home. The back room had suddenly been transformed into a rustic stable.

Monty stepped up beside Walker as the elder was standing solemnly in the entrance. "Um... yer not gonna start ta cry, are ya, mate?"

Walker looked to Monty for a moment and just chuckled. He approached the brown quarter horse cautiously. The animal craned it's neck to inspect Walker

carefully before reaching down to nuzzle Walker's hand, sniffing to see if there might be some food held there. Walker ran his hand down the length of the animal's neck, marveling all the while. Still standing beside the creature, Walker looked to the pair. "You two set all this up?"

"Don't look at me," Monty replied. "Blame her fer alla this, mate."

Marianne smirked at Monty before looking to Walker. She explained what happened, starting with the disease containers, staying cramped in a cubbyhole for three or four hours, and seeing the treatment of the animals upon returning to port. Walker nodded as the blade mistress retold the story. "This probably won't sit right with the Mafia," Walker mused. He looked back to the brown quarter horse and sighed. "Fuck 'em. Who cares if they can't take a joke," he said with a smirk. Marianne and Monty looked between each other before offering a kind smile toward the old gunslinger.

But each of them realized one thing. They were in a hostile land. More than likely hated already by most of the organizations on this island. Probably being gunned

for at every turn.

But at least this was now home.

The pounding of hooves echoed down the streets of Port William. Citizens ran out of the way, onto the sidewalks as the three horses carried their riders down the pathways. Gangers and Mafia ducked into the shadows of alleyways, not wishing to be seen by those three who tore down the street.

The trio spurred their charges on, galloping up the hill toward the mark where the Muerto and Port William joined. Mafia gunsels just watched, hoping that none of the riders would look their way, with a sudden desire for extracting justice.

As the sun set on the island, the three riders stopped their mounts at the top of the hill. Each surveyed the village below with a watchful eye. They were in hell, and each knew that was where they were eventually destined for, but at least for now, they could try to make good on their sins from the past.

It may take a while, but they'd make this village

their own.

"Well, mates," Monty said as the grey shifted under his weight. "What now?"

Walker looked toward the villas that dotted the beach front, a small smile cracked on his face. "Mafia's got an illegal gamblin' an' racin' operation goin' on," he said quietly. "Even under the law o' this here island, it's still illegal." He looked to Marianne and Monty for a moment. "Let's go misbehavin'."