

'The beginning'

Cassidy strolled into the crumbling building that passed for a bar these days, smiling to himself. Reaching the counter, he took a seat on one of the shabby stools, taking off his backpack and placing it at his feet. Within moments a portly man with a warm but weathered smile stood in front of Cass, leaning on the bar. *"Heya kid, what can I gecha?"* Cass gave the bartender a smile, the usually cool young man thawing quickly to him.

"You got any rum?" Cass asked, removing his hat. He heard the sound of the door swinging open and three sets of boots walking in.

The bartender acknowledged the new comers before nodding to Cass. *"I got a few bottles alright, you want a glass or naw?"*

"I'll just have the bottle for now thanks." Cass responded, placing his hat in his lap. The three sets of boots got closer as Cass heard a very familiar voice.

"Well if it ain't the 'Amarillo Gunslinger' himself, Cassidy Kelly, how the hell are ya!"

Cass turned, just in time, to see his mentor Lillian charging towards him flanked by two others who Cass didn't recognize at a glance. Lillian engulfed the sitting form of Cass into a crushing hug as her two companions chuckled at her actions. The bartender placed a bottle of rum in front of Cass as he let out a hearty laugh at the reunion of the two, clearly a brief ray of sunshine in the dreary little bar.

After a few wholesome moments Cass let out a wheeze of, *"Lil your crushing me, please have mercy."* Lil laughed for a few moments before letting him go. Taking off her own backpack as well as her shotgun, she carefully laid them before her as she took a seat beside Cass. *"So, want to introduce me to your new friends Lil?"* Cass asked as her two companions took seats either side of the duo.

"Well Cass meet my new partners, Willa and Titus." Both of them nodded to Cass as he picked up the bottle in front of him.

"So how did you poor, poor souls end up with the great 'Red Lilly?'" Cass asked the two as Lily elbowed him softly in the stomach. However, things had been put in motion that could not be stopped and Lilly's two companions burst out laughing.

"Red Lilly eh? How does one come by a name like that?" Willa asked as Titus orders the trio drinks,

chatting idly with the bartender.

“Ohhhh she hasn’t told you the legend of ‘Red Lilly?’” Cass replied in mock surprise.

“Stupid name someone gave me after some nasty work in Austin. Came out covered in blood shotgun smoking and some smart bastard cracks that he reckons I’m a Red Lilly.” Titus turned his head towards Cass as Willa and Lilly shared a laugh at the story.

“And how did one such as yourself acquire the moniker of the ‘Amarillo Gunslinger?’” Titus questioned while Cass took another drink.

“Well, there was a little problem in Amarillo, some nasty folks were trying to take over the town through intimidation, extortion and the usual.” Titus nodded clearly familiar with the ways of the world.

“Well some of the folks of Amarillo didn’t take too kindly to it. So, they got some money together and hired myself and a few others to take care of their problem.” The trio nodded as Cass continued. *“Well next time them folks decided to visit Amarillo we were there to stop em, ’cept a few of the boys I was meant to be working with turned tail. Some ran and some turned on the rest of us. So, there were ’round three of us against their eleven all things said and done. So, we did the only thing we could do.”* Cass paused taking a drink as the trio, as well as the bartender, waited, wanting to hear the resolution to the tale. *“I drew both my pistols and started shooting. Bastards thought that numbers would carry the day but I cut them numbers in half within seconds. My compatriots drew and started firing and all things said and done there were two of us standing and none of them.”*

Lil clapped Cass on the back proudly. *“That’s how you do it, good thing I taught you so well, eh Cassy?”* With the ending of the tale, the bartender returned to cleaning glasses.

Willa and Titus looked at the pair smiling. *“Yeah you did, but you haven’t told me how you met these two.”* Willa looked down while Titus looked at her sympathetically.

“I’m from a tribe known as the Mountain Eagles; as the name suggests we lived in the mountains, specifically the ones of Nevada.” Titus paused a moment before continuing. *“I was exiled for daring to challenge the chief when he executed prisoners of war. I met Miss Lillian when I was near death and on my last legs. She helped me through and taught me the ways of this strange world.”* Cass nodded at the story as Lil had a small smile on her face clearly remembering it well. Moments later, Willa spoke up.

“I’m a Sequoian ranger. I had just brought a found-one back to the forest. That was when we suffered a devastating Eclipan attack. The damn Eclipans burned some of our villages and... well, suffice to say, it was bad. Most of our northern communities were devastated and withdrew into Sequoia itself. Nearly all rangers have been recalled to defend the forest.”

Cass listened intently not knowing much about the legendary but elusive Sequoian people before replying. *“But why are you here then ranger? Shouldn’t you be defending your people?”* Willa frowned at the question before answering.

“I happen to be from the north of Sequoia, I knew a lot of the dead and missing from them attacks. Specifically, my mother and brother; both missing, probably enslaved by now. I want them back Mr Cassidy and in order to get them back I need help and money, and what better way to make money than bounty hunting and protecting trade with two close companions?” Cass nodded understanding her plight. Sadly, it wasn’t the first time Cass had heard of an avenging relative seeking those who had taken someone from them. Heck, Cass was doing the same in his ever-bleak search for his father’s killer.

“And that’s the real reason we are here Cass. I heard you were in California and the trail lead right here. We want you to help us hunt the Eclipans, trust me there is plenty of money in it, and rumour is someone you’re interested in is working with ’em.” Cass took another drink looking at the three.

“Alright, who’s paying and what’s the actual job?” The trio smiled at him.

“Good to know you’re interested, The Frisco Republic has a bounty on Eclipans in general then the sequoians are paying for the return of their people and finally the King of Reno is paying for the heads of the Eclipan chiefs, any high ranking tribal members as well as any associates.” Cass nodded his head in acceptance the others smiles grew as Lillian slapped her own knee. *“I knew you’d be in Cass, offer’s too good to pass on!”* Cass himself smiled finishing his drink. The coin of Destiny had once again fallen in his favour.

“So where do we begin?”