

Costa del Brawl

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A single trail of smoke rose from an ashtray on the pool table in the Costa Del Sol bar. Cid Highwind held his pool cue closely to the 13 ball. He stared at the cue ball as if waiting for it to jump.

"Hurry the hell up!" hollered his opponent, Barret Wallace, "I got better things ta do than stand here watchin' you get older!" Cid tapped the cue ball with his stick, it collided with the 13 ball which trailed off harmlessly to the middle of the table.

"\$#&@**!!" Cid fumed, "you made me miss my damn shot!!" Cid angrily took a drag from his cigarette and picked up his beer. Cloud Strife walked out of the men's room and took his seat at a table between Aeris Gainsborough and Tifa Lockhart. The girls were watching the pool game in progress with visibly no interest. Aeris had her elbows on the table holding her head up as if she might nod off at any moment. Tifa blankly stared at the pool table and then looked around the empty bar, hoping something else would catch her attention. Cid let out a string of curses after each sound of a sinking pool ball.

"Shouldn't we get back to looking for the Keystone?" Aeris finally said. "We want to beat ShinRa to the Temple of the Ancients, don't we?"

"Hey! We earned us a little break," protested Barret, "Ain't that right, Cid?"

"Damn straight!" Cid announced. "If I don't take a day off I get real cranky. And you don't want to see me cranky!" Tifa and Aeris looked at each other and smiled in disbelief. Cloud just looked down at his drink, being careful not to make eye contact with anyone else. Barret paid no attention, and sunk the 9-ball.

"**%#@!!!," Cid raged, "I thought you said you ain't never played much pool!"

Barret just grinned and said, "looks like you buy the next round, too!"

"On the contrary," a proper sounding voice announced from behind the group.

Cloud turned his head to see he was facing the double barrels of a shotgun.

"This round's on me," Rufus Shinra said matter-of-factly. The western-style doors of the bar swung open and in an instant the Turks held flanking positions just behind their pompous leader.

Cid took his cigarette out of his mouth, "What the f—"

"What do you want, Shinra?" Cloud asked with a serious tone. "We don't have the Keystone, so you should just keep looking. Elsewhere."

"Oh I'm not here for the Keystone," Rufus answered, "I've decided to take this little side trip to dissuade you Avalanche people from meddling in my affairs in the future."

"And how do you plan on doing that?" Cloud could see down the barrels of the shotgun.

"By finishing you here and now." And with that, Rufus pulled back on the trigger. An eight ball knocked the rifle aside! Cloud flipped the table up onto Rufus Shinra knocking him over! Bottles smashed all over the floor! Cloud grabbed his Buster Sword and leapt at the four members of the Turks! Tseng managed to avoid Cloud's weapon and flip him through the doors of the bar. All four Turks ran out in pursuit of Cloud, with Tifa and Aeris behind them.

Cid took the last swig of his beer, and just as he and Barret made their way around the table towards the door, they were caught in an explosion coming from the other end of the bar! A gaping hole in the opposite side heralded the appearance of Colonel Heidegger, carrying a large sub machine gun. A chain of bullets dangled off the side, and smoke poured out of the barrel.

"Mwah hah hah!" He laughed, "I will enjoy repaying you for my past indignation!" The gun exploded with a payload of bullets as Barret and Cid dove behind the bar where a huddled Mike the bartender had already sought refuge. Heidegger continued to spray the bar with bullets, and alcohol and glass rained down on the three.

"%\$#@!!!" Cid yelled as he put his arm over his head, "why ain't he shootin' through the bar, instead of over it?!"

"I had a couple robberies before," a terrified Mike cried out above the gunfire, "there's an inch of steel between us and the other side!"

"Thank Mog for small miracles...!!" Barret said in a flat, sarcastic tone.

"Barret, where's your Gun Arm?!" Cid bellowed over the noise.

"I took it off to shoot pool an' then put it down on the table. It's out there on the floor somewhere, now!" Barret shouted above the shooting and crashing of glass.

Outside, Cloud, Aeris and Tifa stood facing the Turks in front of the inn. Without turning his head, Cloud swung his large sword behind him, cutting through an oak tree as if it were made of Styrofoam! The great tree fell beside Cloud which caused the branches to crash down onto Elena and Rude! Tifa swung wildly at Reno, who dodged the assault and kicked her in the bread basket! She grunted and fell to the ground.

Inside the bar, Heidegger continued his barrage of gunfire. "President! Snap out of it! You are missing my glorious victory!" Behind the bar, Cid gave Barret a confident nod. At that, Barret threw a whiskey bottle at the Colonel! He quickly opened fire, shattering the bottle! Heidegger held his arm up over his face to block the alcohol and glass that sprayed forth, covering him. At that instant, Cid stood up from behind the bar and threw a lit cigarette at him, and he caught fire! As Heidegger frantically tried to pat the flames from his arm, Barret dove for his gun arm and

rolled up shooting! The Shinra soldier fled the bar, and just as Barret was about to pursue, Rufus arose from the rubble.

"Why don't you try fighting someone your social better," the man said with a wry smile.

"Why don't you take a long nap," Barret frowned as he raised his weapon.

Cid grabbed Barret's arm, "You go help Cloud and the others, I'll handle this pansy."

With that, Barret ran out of the bar, "Aww crap..." A Shinra ship loomed on the horizon, as dozens of small boats headed for the shore. Each boat carried two Shinra soldiers, armed for combat. And in front of them, a soaking wet Heidegger walked up onto the beach.

Aeris blocked Tseng's punch with her staff, and countered with a shot to the jaw! Tifa swept Reno's legs with low kick, knocking him on his head! Cloud started fighting the first wave of Shinra Soldiers that arrived on the beach! Barret ran down to aid his comrade.

Back in the bar, Rufus dropped Cid with a whirling roundhouse! Cid landed on his hands, and a single trail of blood trickled out of his mouth.

"Give up, old man," Rufus crooned, "you should be resting in a home somewhere."

Cid's lips curled in a sneer like he was the Grinch who stole Christmas, "....go time....." The old pilot leapt to his feet, but Rufus struck with a kick to the ribs! Cid reeled. Rufus took another swing, but Cid caught his fist.

POW! Cid hit him with a right-cross! Then a left! Rufus rolled across the floor! Then he noticed he had landed on a hard metal object. His shotgun. The two looked down at the gun, then at each other.

Outside, Cloud, Tifa, Barret and Aeris were desperately fighting the Shinra troops, as well as the Turks and Heidegger. It began to become apparent that this may not be a fight they would win. Boat after boat pulled up on shore each carrying more and more soldiers!

Cloud frowned at the sight of the additional troops, "It doesn't matter how well we fight, they'll soon overwhelm us by sheer numbers alone."

"\$&*@!!!, Shinra!!" Barret hollered as he fired his gun, "I hate 'em more everyday!!"

The four members of Cloud's team began to move back towards the bar, as almost a hundred soldiers moved toward their position. Suddenly, a mighty roar echoed through the air! Everyone turned to see Vincent Valentine, Yuffie Kisagari and Cait Sith running down the hill, with the sleek puma-like form of Red XIII leading the way! The cat leapt high through the air and into the first clump of soldiers, knocking them from their feet! Vincent wildly swung his metal arm carving a path through the soldiers, as the others rejoined the fray!

"Time to narrow down the other side!" Yuffie shouted as she raised a shiny red orb in her hand. A bright glow emitted from the strange object, and behind the fighting the water began to bubble and move. The astral form of a huge eel-like creature, the Leviathan, arose from the ocean and let loose a shattering scream! A huge tidal wave washed up on the shore and overtook most of the Shinra forces! Bodies were flung through the water as shouts of the men could be heard above the rushing water! Then the sea creature vanished as quickly as it came.

Suddenly a Robot Scorpion climbed up onto the shore. Its large red, metallic legs dug into the sand with each step. It raised its giant metal tail. A circle of light started to form around the tip, as it prepared to fire. A barrage of blasts sent Cloud and the others flying backwards through the air and only the sound of Heidegger's laughter was heard over the fire. The mechanical scorpion began to move into position for a second assault. Then two more mechanical creatures took position aside the first.

Suddenly, shotgun sound erupted from inside the bar.

All was silent.

Both Shinra and Avalanche alike turned to face the doors. A lone figure in a dusty white suit emerged from the bar. Rufus Shinra.

Aeris turned white, "Cid...!!"

The old pilot walked out right behind Rufus, holding a double-barreled shotgun to his back.

"We're gettin' outta here," he exclaimed. "You Shinra idiots stay back or I'll air out your pretty-boy president's suit!! I'll leave him on a raft once the rest of us are in the clear!"

"No!!" Rufus Shinra harked, "No one gets out of here alive. Heidegger, if I am harmed in any way, I want these terrorists eliminated as painfully as possible!"

"Yes, my President," the old soldier said with an evil grin.

"I've got an idea," Cait Sith whispered to himself.

Just then Heidegger's cellular phone rang.

"What is it," he boomed, "I am in the middle of my greatest victory yet!"

"It's Reeve, sir," said the voice on the other end. "There have been sightings of Sephiroth in the Shinra building! And many of our troops are at Costa Del Sol. We need the manpower to defend the company!" And with that Heidegger's face turned pale.

"Perhaps we CAN make a deal," he said to Cid. "You exchange our president for your lives. The Shinra has more dire business to attend to."

"Deal. I'll leave 'Sears-catalog boy' adrift as soon as we're clear." With that, Cid and the others climbed aboard the Tiny Bronco with their hostage, Rufus.

On their way back to the Gold Saucer's Ghost Hotel, Cid sighed heavily.

"Good work team," Cloud announced.

"Yeah it's a good thing Cait suddenly decided to leave the hotel to see how your pool tournament was going," Yuffie said as she sorted through her materia crystals.

"And it was pretty lucky the Shinra ran into their own trouble when they did," added Tifa.

Cait Sith just grinned and stared back at the raft carrying Rufus getting smaller and smaller in the distance.

Cid looked back while piloting the small seaplane, "The next time I want a day off, someone smack me!!"

The End!