

LASTChancePUBLICATIONS

# 白 武 器 的 知 道 者

written

by

Dave Clark a.k.a Dust

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episode 1

## Prelude

*"I had always avoided signing a permanent contract, the loss of freedom to roam the stars and the independence to choose where and how we would work. Times were changing though and free roaming Mercs were becoming a thing of the past, more and more of us were choosing guaranteed work for Mining Corps, being told where to go and when to leave. I had begun to think we would be heading the same way but now this offer has been made to me. The offer to captain an elite team of mercenaries who will always choose their own contracts and their working terms. The best Mercs in the business preserving the freedom that being a Merc is all about and surely destined to become the most sought after mercenary force in the universe"*

## 6 Months Previous

At his sniper scope's maximum zoom the Ranger could see the perspiration on the face of the man as he ran along the rocky terrain. His short dark hair was shiny with sweat and his middle-aged face showed the strains of running for so long. The Ranger tracked his movements as he ran over and along the rocks, short strides mixed with leaps to jump the gaps he was not as tall as a Ranger might be and this combined with his medium build meant his jumps had to be strong to clear some of the larger gaps. The descriptions matched, the Ranger thought, he lowered his rifle; from here the runner was a barely noticeable movement among the all too similar looking terrain. He had seen enough, The Four were here and his employers needed to know. He turned and sprinted back to the border fence, a hint of red cloth flapping in the wind as he ran. He launched into a jump and gave a boost from his jet pack to clear the fence then headed towards the horizon.

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The base came into view even before the crest of the hill. Two miles high and sprawling for the same distance in every direction it dominated the otherwise barren desert surface. The runner paused briefly to take in the view, as he did every morning, the planets two suns were just coming up over the horizon and the surface was soon to be bathed in sunlight. He continued running towards the base. The gate ahead opened to allow him to enter into the main courtyard. As he passed through he immediately increased his running to a sprint, heading straight for a door at the end of the courtyard. Sweat ran from his body, his muscles ached but he was not going to give up this close to his goal. He pulled up just before he got to the door and relaxed into a walk; reaching for the digital timekeeper on his wrist he pressed the stop button.

"Good run sir?" called a sentry from the wall around the courtyard. A wave and a smile was all that Captain Chance could manage.

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Chance left his quarters, having showered and changed. By now the other mercenaries in the barracks were up, talking about the patrols they were about to go on, or some, the patrols they had just finished. After calling on his partner and finding his room empty he headed down to the garages.

He walked through the barracks, which were housed within the huge On-Planet base. Financed by the OSN Mining Corporation and built partially above ground and partially below, it was large enough to house the companies thousands of miners as well as a small team of mercenary soldiers, of which Chance was one. In addition it contained Training and recreational facilities, masses of mining machinery and even its own Star Port. Still, as On-Planet bases go, this was a relatively small and cheap one, constructed hastily four years ago when the planet was deemed worth mining.

"Morning Silver, early start huh?" Chance called to a pair of legs sticking out from under a jacked up Raptor, light recon-come-attack vehicle. The mechanic slid out and looked up, he was a large muscular man and Chance was surprised the trolley he lay on could support his weight. He had dark skin and short black hair and running down his left arm and up his neck and on his left cheek was a series of tribal tattoos, long thick black lines that curved in various ways on account of his heritage. Upon seeing Chance, Silver smiled, a large smile that lit up his face and belied any impression of fierceness that his appearance otherwise portrayed.

"Gotta make the most of a full day without patrol, haven't I?" Silver said

"I would have thought you'd be sleeping given you're on patrol tonight".

"Na, that's the stupid way of looking at it" Silver joked, Chance smiled back. He glanced around the five vehicle bays in the garage. Most of the vehicles in it were mining diggers and drill trucks but Silver and a few other men had managed to convince their employers to allow them to bring in a Raptor and modify it, as he did on most contracts Chance thought.

"Right mate, have a good morning" Chance finished "see you for lunch. I'll just go check in with the other two."

"Have a safe patrol" Silver replied as he slid back under the Raptor.

Chance now made his way to the training zones. After several minutes he came out of a corridor onto a metal walkway high above a very large open courtyard. This area was equipped with the latest terrain simulation equipment allowing the operator to program in any battlefield layout they desired, with in the dimensions of the yard, which would then be projected or produced in fully realistic 3D. The terrain would look, sound, feel and react the same as its real life counterpart, even stopping solid objects from passing through it. It was the perfect tool for practicing battlefield strategies.

From his vantage point up high Chance could see that Kaio's training of Headwire was about to begin. Both men were fully suited up in the red Ranger battle suit and they were about to start a practice match against each other. Kaio was at one end of the battlefield and at the other end Headwire waited. The terrain between them was desert and rocks, mimicking there outside environment. Both men had a Deployment point behind them and in the middle of the battlefield there was a single neutral Deploy-point. Kaio caught sight of Chance and the two men waved a greeting to each other.

"Good luck, have fun!" Chance yelled then he was off to give his patrol briefing.

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"Right, this is a simple enough training exercise Headwire" Kaio called to him over the Comms. "Hack the Spawn and hold it for two minutes. The Spawn Point is the most important objective on the battlefield for those with midfield responsibilities. It's both your goal and mine, the goal of both your team and the enemy. Let them take it and you will spend the rest of the battle fighting against respawn times. Take it and you can dominate the surrounding Generators or open a route to the enemies' base for your attackers."

"Yea, yea. Spare me the details and let's just do this. That spawn point is as good as mine." came the impatient response from Headwire.

"If I am boring you then we shall...Begin!"

Headwire immediately dodge boosted towards the deployment point in the middle, his sniper rifle at the ready as he moved, watching for Kaio's appearance. There was ample cover around and neither Ranger had a clear view of their opponent's starting point. After several boosts Headwire was at the Deploy. He dropped straight into a Hack, activating his energy transfer device to take control of the Spawn. The process would take ten seconds. As the counter on his Heads Up Display read fifty percent complete Headwire looked around for Kaio.

"Too slow old man" Headwire said with a smile.

Just then a sniper shot hit Headwire in the arm, dropping his suits health down to ten percent.

"Where's your smoke screen Head?" a disappointed Kaio asked over Comms as he jumped in towards Headwire.

Headwire wasn't hanging around. He dodged backwards, disengaging his Hack and engaged his closing opponent with his rifle.

"I like to see my enemy coming" Head replied as the two men began to fire shots at each other. "Smoke screens limit the possibilities of a duel."

"You didn't see me coming" Kaio replied.

"No, but you saw me and that's almost as good, either way I get to take you down." Headwire said as he dodged a rifle shot from Kaio and returned fire. On this little health Headwire knew he was in trouble, even two pistol shots would shut his suit down now.

That is precisely what happened next.

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Clank! The metal tray smacked down against the table.

"One hundred and twelve" said Silver as he squeezed his large frame into the all too small chair opposite his tray of food. Next to him sat Kaio, opposite sat Chance and Headwire.

"One hundred and twelve days we've been on this stinking planet, tell me again why you signed us up for this?" Chance looked up from his meal and offered a smile to his old friend. He was sure he'd answered that question one hundred and eleven times before. Chance started

"Mercenaries shouldn't complain about being paid t..."

"...To do nothing" The three other Mercenaries finished for him in unison, all four men broke into laughter. They were sitting at their usual table off to one side of the mess hall, around them other Mercenaries, as well as miners were eating and chatting in their various groups. There were three mess halls but due to the sheer number of workers and the very small number of Mercenaries a lot of the time workers would use the Merc's Mess Hall if it was a shorter walk for them.

"How was the patrol this morning, Chancie?" Silver asked as he reached for his protein wrap, even though he was pretty sure of the answer.

"The usual, its getting harder and harder to keep the guys alert on these things. I have to remind them that we are not alone on this rock".

"Yea what of that other Corp, what's the name?" asked Headwire as he tucked into his food. He was the youngest of The Four and the newest addition. His mid length red hair flopped around his face as he leant forward to eat and he flicked it back away from his face.

"JBC, well they have busied themselves mining since they landed, I figure it's a race but we got the lead."

Silver gave a look of disapproval. He had never much liked the idea of letting a rival mining Corp set up a base so near to theirs let alone allow them to mine for exactly the same Artifacts that they were searching for.

"We shoulda gone over there as soon as they landed and blasted them back into space, no "excuse me sir but I think your on my rock," just a face full....of rocket fuel!" he finished with a shout and looked across the table to Headwire with his right arm raised.

"Yea! Frag 'em and bag 'em" Headwire shouted as he leant over and gave Silver a high five.

"Maybe me and Silver should go over there after lunch and convince them that this is our planet now." Head said as he returned to his seat.

Chance smiled up from his meal, it was an interesting situation but that was frontier-mining law. No Mining company could legally attack another's base on a G-class planet, this was the main reason Mining corps were not allowed a standing army and even their mercenary force was a minimal size, certainly not enough to threaten a main base defence system.

"Well we'll see action soon enough if they find an Artifact before us, like that battle last year on Karagen IV" Chance replied.

A G-Class planet meant that there were alien Artifacts to be found somewhere under the planets surface. Four in-fact, and if these were brought together at an Artifact Node they allowed complete harvesting of the planets energy solely to the owner. Currently OSN had recovered two Artifacts in their four years mining on the planet. Their newly arrived rivals, JBC, had recovered none but if they were to find even one

then both Corps would have to do battle as per the Laws of Frontier Mining set up many years ago, to decide who would control the planets Artifacts.

"You sat that one out didn't you Head?" asked Silver

"Yea, well I'd only joined up with you guys about a month before." Headwire replied.

"Still learning which end of the rifle did the talking" Silver joked

"We didn't even charge DWG for you on that one, Kaio had just brought you onboard as I agreed to take the contract with them." Chance added

"The Three became The Four" laughed Silver. Officially Chance had never named the group, which started initially as just Silver and him and became well known by Mercs and Corps alike as they completed numerous contracts along the frontiers. This reputation had further increased when Kaio joined and continued now with its fourth member Headwire. When he had been recruited a lot of Mercs began referring to them as "The Four".

"How's the kid doing Kaio? Training an all" Silver asked

Kaio was leaning back on his chair, as he looked at Headwire, who was looking back at him expectantly. He had asked Chance to recruit Head after meeting him and had taken on the responsibility of training him as a Ranger. Kaio was in his late twenties although he sometimes showed more experience and history than a man of twice his age. His face was sharp but his peaceful expression would often distract from this. He ran his hands through his black hair and considered his answer.

"He's doing well....much to learn though"

Headwire made a dismissive noise in response. "I'm more than ready should a battle come our way, I took care of business with our last contract didn't I?" He asked all three men.

"You sure did Head" Chance replied, seeing a bit of emotion in Headwire's words. He decided to enquire about Silver's morning activities,

"What's your progress on the Raptor, Silv?" he asked.

"Now there's a subject worth talking about" Silver replied. "Me and the boys got it running past seventeen hundred this morning! Flew along the straights, yours truly behind the wheel. I almost had doubts about hitting the afterburners at that speed to tell you the truth".

"You serious about racing them?" Kaio asked, slightly concerned for his friend's safety hearing that speed count.

"Yea gotta be done aint it, precious little else to do on this rock, 'sides polish my armour" he laughed. The four men continued eating their protein-boosted meals. Headwire finished and sat back content and considered if now was a good time to bring up something he had been thinking about.

"Hey guys, I've heard from other Merc Rangers that there's a spot in the Helmet that, if hit with a sniper shot means instant shut down."

Both Chance and Silver stopped eating and laughed out loud.

"Who told you that Head?" asked Chance still smiling

"Just heard talk of it, few people here and there that's all" he said, a little embarrassed.

"Well I've never heard of it" said Silver "What about you Kaio?" All three men looked over at Kaio, Chance and Silver still very much amused. Kaio looked at the men in turn and then at Headwire.

"I think you should worry more about not getting hit and less about aiming for a four percent target in the head". Chance and Silver sat back laughing again. Headwire's eyes widened and in a low voice he said to Kaio.

"I never said it was a four percent spot. You know about it... don't you" His eyes lighting up. Kaio didn't reply, his face showed no expression. Silver leant in on Headwire with a big smile on his face.

"Kid, it doesn't exist" then he laughed again "I swear on the legend of Zekkari, if it did I would just weld some extra armour over it!"

Headwire lent back and laughed with them. When the laughter had subsided Headwire spoke again.

"Kaio, I arranged a duel against Jago for this afternoon, you up for a warm-up duel with me before hand?"

"Of course" was the reply

"Hey, Head how many times you duelled this guy?" enquired Silver

"This one, hmm I don't know" he lied "but we're about even on victories and loses, so I gotta set that straight and no one else was up for a duel today." Headwire said

"Ha, that's coz you beat most of them on a regular basis" laughed Silver, Headwire smiled.

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Headwire and Kaio finished up and made their exit, off to the duelling rooms. Chance and Silver remained at the table, each content with the others company and a drink in hand. Silver's gaze followed Headwire as he and Kaio walked from the room. His walk was slowed to match that of Kaio's but his body language betrayed his eagerness to reach his destination.

"Don't think there's a day goes by that the kid doesn't duel someone." Silver said

Chance nodded in agreement "he feels he's got something to prove."

"That's for sure, when he's not volunteering for extra border patrol duty he's challenging anyone and everyone to duels in the training rooms, ill tell you something though, he wins more than he loses. He sure doesn't have to prove anything to me."

"No, but to himself" Chance looked distant then returned to the present "I wonder if we would have duelled much at his age if the technology had been around."

"What do you mean? I was duelling as soon as I could stand up mate."

Chance laughed, "I meant in battle suits and all that, not with..." Chance paused as he tried to imagine what Silver might have been armed with based on what Chance knew of his homeland. He decided "Poorly fashioned swords and bone knives!"

Both men laughed aloud.

"Not too far off mate!" Silver replied. "The tribes didn't let the young'uns use the advanced weaponry that's for sure and at that age I probably did use swords, but knives of bone?" He laughed again. Silver began to recall a tale from his youth but stopped as he saw Chance had become distracted.

Chance was looking around the mess hall; a murmur of conversation seemed to have sprung up. He watched as each table picked some information up from the next until it was clear everyone was talking about the same thing.

Silver looked at Chance "We've found another Arti?" he offered

"Na, this is bigger"

Chance stopped an orderly that was walking past "What's the news mate?"

The porter lent in to their table "They've found one, JBC have found one. Battle is inevitable."

Chance lent back in his chair "Hmm" he said "no doubt".

## In episode 2 of 6 WAYS TO LOSE...

*"Liquid noises heralded the emergence of duelists jumping through the teleports. Two Rangers materialised at either end of the room. The blue Ranger dodged to his left and fired a rifle shot. Instinctively the red Ranger returned the shot whilst dodging. Once more within seconds these actions were repeated, neither duelist slow enough to be hit by the other."*

**Headwire duels his OSN teammate, the Mercenary Ranger Jago. He's confident of a win but how would a loss affect the young Ranger.**

*"Then the blue Ranger, whilst dodging, swiftly but calmly ejected his clip and reached for a new one. The red Ranger saw his opportunity, he slowed his movements to take aim, and fired..."*