

8 WAYS TO LOSE

written

by

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part 1

the four

Episode 10

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LASTChancePUBLICATIONS

"Deploy-point secured" Headwire announced to his Captain.

"Good work lads" Chance replied over the Comms as he received Headwire's communication "but we are now a man down, Jago's re-spawn unit has malfunctioned and he has been forced to disengage from the battle. We have been ordered to revert to defense. Silver and me are on-route to defend our nearside Deploy and Gen. You two will have to hold that Gen and the Deploy. The Deploy is not a priority."

"Roger that" Kaio replied.

"Get our attackers spawning at the front" Headwire shouted and almost before he had finished, the Deploy point went into a spin and two red Rangers materialized. Immediately they sprang off towards the enemy base.

"Hi, fellas." called one of the Rangers over the comms.

"Hey, Dante. Welcome to the Party." Headwire replied.

"Nice to see you in the deep end, Kid" was Dante's reply.

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Chance and Silver raced down the hill in the Raptor, back to the front of their base, past their nearside Gen and on to the front Deploy. As they crossed the flat land they saw two red Techs moving up the hill to the right side Gen. One of the Techs turned round when he heard the Raptor's engines and called over the Comms.

"Chance, we got orders to take the stronghold Gen, you are to hold our Deploy. We can offer you support if needed."

"Roger that, Cage. McGregor's not expecting us to have much trouble then."

"He reckons they'll defend while we've got their Deploy. At most you'll see two attacking Rangers and they'll be trying to avoid combat." Then Cage and Dio disappeared into the tunnel leading to the stronghold Gen. Chance switched his comms back to his team channel.

"Hear that Silv? Only trouble we're gonna see is a couple of Rangers who won't even wanna engage us." he said sarcastically.

"Ha!" laughed Silver "well I hope that's not true I didn't get in to this bloody suit for nothin"

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"Incoming" announced Kaio quite calmly as two enemy techs emerged from the right side garage door of the blue Base and headed straight for Dante and Knight. Both red attackers engaged the Techs from distance with their rifles, whilst still heading towards the base. Headwire boosted straight towards the Techs, firing as he went, hoping to draw their fire.

"I'll draw these two off you guys" he proclaimed

"Confident as always, Head" replied Dante

"Hey when you've got my skills..." he shot back

Headwire was still some distance away from the combat and the enemy Techs ignored his dangerously close sniper shots. Knight was their closest target and he received all their attention. Bullets ripped into him whilst he dodged desperately and as he landed one he was met by close range explosive shotgun fire from a boost-jumping tech. He dropped in a flaming heap, but didn't disengage.

"Someone revive me!" Knight called out.

"On my way, mate!" Dante replied as he swiftly changed direction and sprinted to his downed comrade's aid. Wearing the Ranger suit Dante could revive his teammate using the in-built Medi-Kit. His partner would then be able to function again although initially on very little energy, as such any minor damage would result in shutdown. The Tech that took out Knight began moving to engage Dante

"You're gonna pay for that" Dante shouted. He swapped his rifle for his pistol and began blasting shots at the Tech as they both sprinted towards each other. The Tech replied with some shotgun shells, but at this distance he was only hoping to keep the dodging Ranger busy until he closed to a more deadly range.

"I can take him from here Dante" Kaio's voiced called over the comms

"Hold" said Dante sternly.

The Tech subtly switched his shotgun shells to explosive and smiled at the thought of the Ranger's impending death. He tracked Dante's movements whilst dodging pistol shots with extreme skill. The range was right, he lined up the shot.

"Now!" shouted Dante

At that moment a red sniper shot impacted with the Tech's head making him jerk his shot wide of his target and a split second later Dante jumped in on him and blasted him down with his pistol.

"Nice shot!" Dante said to Kaio, without pausing he then rushed on to his prone teammate.

Even as he closed the remaining distance he saw a gas grenade hurtling through the air, landing next to Knight's body. In a flash the area around him was filled with a cloud of toxic gas. Dante pulled up as quickly as he could, still getting covered in vapours. The remaining enemy Tech had made sure no revival happened.

"Chikushou! Re-spawn Knight" Dante instructed disappointedly and his partner's body began to dematerialise.

Kaio and Headwire doubled their efforts to take down the remaining Tech as Dante boost jumped up the side of the base and sprinted for the teleport that lead into the top level.

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As Headwire and the Tech dueled, Kaio, standing on the cliff edge and dodging slightly from side to side took aim.

"It's under control" called Headwire, sensing an impending shot

At that moment a sniper shot impacted with Headwire's chest.

"Nan za jigoku!" shouted Headwire, instinctively launching into one of Kiso's evasive dodging patterns.

"Sniper" replied Kaio faintly, "I've got him" and at that same moment he fired the shot he'd been lining up, hitting the sniper in the window of the blue base squarely. The enemy Ranger quickly disappeared from view.

"Sorry Head, had to wait for him to present himself." Kaio said, then to himself *"didn't expect him to aim and hit so quickly, undoubtedly this is him."*

"Nice" Headwire replied sarcastically. "Is he dead?"

"No, he'll heal himself before returning though. That should buy us some time."

"Right, spose I better quit playing with this guy then" Headwire said as he dodged yet another shotgun blast. The fight had become a little more dangerous for Headwire though. Having been hit by sniper fire he could not afford to take any more damage, long range shotgun scatter, even slight exposure to gas would shut his suit down, this was exactly the weapon the Tech now produced.

The Tech only managed to get one shot off before a rifle shot, one from each red Ranger connected with him mid dodge. The two shots pushed his body in opposite directions and he flipped fully over before hitting the ground and dematerialising.

Headwire could see the grenade coming towards him but there was little he could do about it whilst he was in the middle of a dodge already. He had one chance, if he could land even half a second before it, he may be able to boost jump away and clear the cloud. As if in slow motion, he touched the ground and launched into a boost jump away from the grenade, which hit the ground and exploded. Even before he landed his jump the vapours had him and his suit shut down dropping him to the floor just outside the reach of the gas.

"Kuso! Lucky shot" he said, "Well hurry up and revive me Kaio"

"On my way" replied Kaio who was already leaping towards him.

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Through his scope the sniper watched as the red Ranger sprinted along towards his fallen comrade. He tracked him for a short way, the crosshair on his head; he wanted to make sure this shot counted. He fired; a blue sniper shot flew towards Kaio's head.

Moments from impact Kaio halted and launched into a backwards dodge, the shot imbedded into the ground only inches from his boots.

The sniper pulled back from his scope in surprise.

"How did he!?" he thought

Kaio stood looking directly up at the sniper, poised to dodge. He hadn't been able to bring his rifle up to return fire; it was all he could do to dodge back from that shot.

Still on the floor Headwire called out.

"Get me up man; I'll help you take him out."

"Negative Head, re-spawn. Crying isn't going to let me get near you." Kaio replied, without taking his eyes off the sniper.

Headwire's eyes widened, "Crying" he repeated "How do you know it's him, did you see the red cloth?"

"No, you recall what I told you about his tactics?" Kaio asked

Headwire remembered back to Kaio's words whilst they were preparing for the battle.

"He is trained in the old style of Ranger combat, not what we do today, an older form of Saikaku na shi. He sets up kill-zones, a place where he can trap the enemy then he waits until they enter his sights. He will not engage in a battle unless he has an advantage."

"This is his kill-zone; he waited in that window for the perfect opportunity to hold as many of us back as possible" said Kaio

"Why didn't he simply join the battle when the Techs were attacking us?" Headwire asked

"A re-spawn battle is very different to conventional battles, different tactics must be used. In some situations there is a bigger advantage to be gained by allowing your enemy to continue then there is to be gained from killing them. The Techs did their job; they took down one of our attackers ensuring that their defence wouldn't have to face two. If both Dante and Knight had been killed they would have respawned together and attacked with each other's support. Once the Techs had been killed their next level of defence is Crying, by setting up this situation he is delaying our advance, most probably until the Techs can return."

"Then we need to kill him quickly, revive me Kaio, he will have no advantage against the two of us" said Headwire.

"His advantage is you Headwire" replied Kaio to Headwire's surprise.

"By dropping you he can be confident that I will attempt to revive you, drawing me in and making me an easy and predictable target. Even if I chose not to revive you immediately there is a mental distraction and pressure from the need to aid you. Disengage Headwire."

"But he could sit up there all day, hiding and healing, you're gonna need my second shot to finish him" said Headwire, Kaio slowly began a dodging pattern from left to right, still focused on his opponent.

Headwire decided to give up his protests and disengaged "Your gonna need my second shot Kaio" he repeated as he dematerialized

"Perhaps" Kaio muttered.

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"Crying looked down on the scene below him. The downed Ranger had decided to respawn, that showed experience; he was disappointed his bait was gone but he still had the advantage of cover. It would take a very accurate shot to hit him up here and although he did not doubt this red Ranger's accuracy, one shot was not enough to kill...."