

LASTChancePUBLICATIONS

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written

by

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第 一 回

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エピソード 2

In Episode 1...

"Kaio, I arranged a duel against Jago for this afternoon"

The young Ranger Headwire tests himself once more and Chance learns that his team will have to *earn* their money on this contract

"They've found one, JBC have found one. Battle is inevitable."

The door slid closed behind Chance as he headed down the corridor that led to the main hall. Chance was a veteran mercenary by anyone's standards but he still felt a touch of anxiety after the news in the mess hall. It had been a while since he last saw real action, had the endless uneventful border patrols taken the edge off his skills? In truth he doubted it and looked forward to testing himself when the time came.

As he neared the end of the corridor another giant door raised smoothly up into the ceiling to allow him to pass. He entered a large circular room with a high domed ceiling, hanging from which was a giant well-lit sign, which read "OSN Mining Corporation Training Zone". This was where the mercenary force could hone their skills during peacetime. OSN were well known for offering some of the best training facilities of all the smaller Mining Corps. There were six doors around the room each leading to separate training facilities which offered target practice, vehicle simulations unarmed combat and of course dueling rooms, 1v1, 2v2 or 3v3, these were always the most popular. Chance made for the door labelled Dueling Zone 1. To the right of that door were three teleports, all coloured differently, at a guess he stepped through the yellow one. Almost instantly he was in the small window box that was the spectator area for the yellow dueling room.

The room was circular in shape and large enough to allow two combatants to easily boost and dodge around whilst dueling. Yellow and black chevrons lined the walls and in the middle of the floor and ceiling were grates, which allowed partial sight through to the red dueling room above and the blue one below. Kaio stood at the glass with his back to Chance, looking into the empty dueling room. Chance walked up along side him, looking into the room he said to Kaio

"Hi mate"

"Hi Chief, patrol all quiet?"

"Yep. Your duel with Headwire over?"

"Yes. His duel with Jago has begun. Currently two kills to each Ranger" Duels were normally first to three, making this coming round the last and decisive one.

"Close one then"

"Yes." While they waited for the duelists to begin round five Chance decided to tell Kaio the news he was carrying.

"JBC have recovered an Artifact mate. We will be seeing battle".

"I see, so the question then is will we find the last one before them and have only one Arti to capture or will it be two all."

Whooshing noises heralded the emergence of duelists jumping through the teleports. Two Rangers materialised at either end of the room, both in mid jump. The combatants wore the, full body, Ranger battle suit the one on the left wearing blue, the one on the right wearing red. The suits sat tightly against the skin, designed to allow massive movement and speed whilst still offering considerable protection. To their left legs each Ranger had strapped a holstered pistol and a helmet was also part of the suit, as such Chance could not immediately tell the duelists identities.

Both Rangers were armed with the Sniper Rifle and as they landed the red Ranger squeezed off a shot; despite his haste the shot only narrowly missed his opponents head. The blue Ranger was off the ground immediately, launching into a strong dodge to his right, whilst his opponent began a similar motion in the opposite direction. Whilst in mid dodge the blue Ranger fired his first shot, but it went straight into the wall behind its target, almost before he landed he set off in a dodge the opposite way.

Dodging was a technique employed by all of the three classes of Mercenary, Gunner, Tech and Ranger. Simply put, it was a leap to either the left or right, requiring great leg strength and was seen as a very

important skill in battling. As such many Merc's would train for hours to improve their dodging speed and distance and some combat forms focused the majority of their style on dodging.

Chance enjoyed watching Ranger duels; facing the deadly accuracy of a sniper you could not stay still for more than a fraction of a second. Constant dodging was the only way to avoid a hit, and no class of fighter could dodge faster than the Ranger. One hit from the sniper rifle was rarely enough to kill outright but it left your opponent with so little health that even slight damage could finish them off.

Chance watched as the red Ranger began to settle into a pattern of wide dodges and repeated long-range shots. Without taking his eyes from the combat Chance spoke to Kaio "The kid is holding to Kiso a lot, still not using your training in form three?"

"No, he normally reverts back to Kiso when under pressure, despite my training him otherwise. It would seem that this is a duel he doesn't want to lose and a score of two two is all the pressure he needs. Foolish, as Kaijiki would be much more effective in a pressure situation and certainly against Jago's jokyū kihon-teki form." Kaio replied disappointedly.

Not long after the introduction of Battle suits into warfare combat styles began to develop, these became known as forms. Although there are many sub forms and adaptations there are seven forms that are universally acknowledged and practiced.

Kaio had been training Headwire for over six months in the use of combat form three, Kaijiki. After Head had picked up the basic form of combat, form one, known as Kiso or kihon-teki, so quickly Kaio had hoped that he would adopt the more advanced and defensive form three just as quickly; it had not been the case. He sighed and returned his attention to the duel in progress.

The blue Ranger, Jago, dodged to his left and fired a rifle shot. Instinctively Headwire returned the shot whilst dodging. Once more within seconds these actions were repeated, neither duelist slow enough to be hit by the other. Chance knew that at this point both men's rifles needed reloading, the main limitation of the sniper rifle was its small clip, which held only three shots. Still moving and dodging, the Rangers circled each other and replaced their rifle clips. The two combatants dodged from left to right and past each other with extreme speed and grace as they each fired two more shots, still none found their mark.

Both duelists now had one shot left before reloading. For several seconds they simply dodged around each other, neither one taking the shot, tension mounting with every second that passed. Then, to Chance's surprise and he assumed Jago's also, Headwire, whilst dodging, swiftly but calmly ejected his clip and reached for a new one.

"An opening" Chance muttered

"Perhaps" said Kaio

Jago saw his opportunity and slowed his movements to take aim. Then suddenly Headwire sprang towards him and he fired his rifle in surprise, the rushed shot narrowly missed and Head now closed in. Jago dropped his rifle and swiftly reached for his pistol, knowing he would not make it before the impending rifle shot hit him. Then once again Headwire made a surprising move, whilst sprinting towards his vulnerable opponent he suddenly launched into a sideways dodge against the arena wall and then boosted off it, to sail high above and behind his opponent, he clipped home his ammo and brought his rifle to bear.

Jago was shocked by this trick jump but it was all the time he needed to draw his pistol. He spun around in a second and snapped off three pistol shots at the slow moving target Headwire had become as he crossed through the arena above him.

Headwire took the pistol shots to his helmet before he could finish squeezing the trigger and he dropped sharply to the arena floor, his suit disengaged.

"Nice shot" Chance called over the sound system as the body of the red Ranger dematerialised. The Blue Ranger stood straight and disengaged his helmet; with a hiss it was removed. Jago looked over at the spectator room and gave a slight smile at Chance and Kaio.

The three men walked out of the Training Zone, the corridor was wide enough for them to walk in a line. The youngest of the three, Headwire, was still talking about his defeat.

"I was robbed. Can't believe how lucky he was with those three shots, I pulled the trigger on my rifle but the suit had disengaged." He said disappointedly.

"You should simply have finished him Headwire, once he had missed his third shot you had the advantage and opportunity to defeat him." said Kaio disapprovingly.

"Yea but I wanted to finish with a bit of style and..." Headwire began before Kaio interrupted.

"In a battle situation Head, you must neutralise your enemies quickly and efficiently, there are no points for fancy trick jumps." Headwire looked at Kaio directly, then his gaze dropped to the floor in silence.

"I have to agree with Kaio, but you still pulled off some great shots and your movement is looking better than ever." Chance was rarely one to criticise his partners, unless it was required as part of his duties as a Captain when he could be as hard line as anyone. "What do you think Kaio?" Chance asked looking over at the taller Ranger.

"If he went into a duel mentally prepared for anything then his chances would be much greater; instead of going into it feeling that he has already won." Kaio replied, not exactly what Chance was hoping for in a statement of encouragement

"How did you fare against Kaio?" Chance enquired.

"Lost" Headwire said straight out. It was a rather well known fact among The Four that he had never beaten Kaio in more than one hundred duels. This didn't seem to bother Headwire too much but he was clearly unhappy about the result of his duel with Jago and despite the efforts of Chance by the time they reached the barracks Headwire wanted some time alone.

"I'll see you guys tomorrow" he said and began walking towards his room.

"Head wait" called Chance "We're gonna watch some X-Ball in my quarters. Why don't you join us?"

"Na, I'm gonna practice some stuff then sleep. I got the early morning patrol"

"Alright mate, see ya tomorrow for lunch" said Chance.

"Night Head" Kaio added

"Night" Head replied as he jogged up the stairs to his room. The two men watched him for a moment.

"Little harsh on the kid weren't you?" Chance asked

Kaio considered his reply "Perhaps" he said.

"You know something though Kaio, I have never seen a Ranger as experienced as Jago surprised as often as he was during that duel."

"Yes, that is something that Headwire does often." Kaio turned to face Chance "I see elements of the lost Form in his duelling style sometimes, like the trick jump to move behind Jago just now."

"The lost form? Form IV? That hasn't been practiced in years"

"No, but just as he leans towards kihon-teki when he is under pressure, he instinctively leans towards elements of four when he is feeling confident."

"I don't know much about the fourth form of combat but I have heard that it can be extremely powerful and effective" Chance said.

"Yes, but that is only when used by someone who has mastered it. Form IV employs many trick jumps and boost dodges in an aggressive, constant attack. But it has many fundamental flaws and in the untrained it simply produces numerous openings for an opponent to score a deadly hit. As such it has gone unpractised for many years."

"You would not know how to train him in this form then I suppose?"

"No, form IV's origins are almost unknown and I know of no-one having practiced it."

"I imagine then that it is something he will grow out of with experience and age, like his headstrong attitude, perhaps they are one in the same. I understand that you are his mentor and he is your second, you have to be able to trust that he will perform the way you need him to." Chance stated.

"And the way you need him to, Captain."

"Agreed" replied Chance

The two men turned and headed towards Chance's quarters.

In episode 3 of 8 WAYS TO LOSE...

"I will make them notice me. I will make them notice me"

Headwire is determined to prove his worth