

LASTChancePUBLICATIONS

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written

by

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In Episode 2...

"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."

Headwire has trouble accepting his loss to Jago in a training duel and his mentor's lack of belief unsettles him further.

But could the young Ranger's belief in his own potential be well founded

"I see elements of the lost Form in his duelling style sometimes"

The lights came on as Headwire entered his room and he commanded the door to close and lock. His room, like all the Merc rooms in these barracks, was well sized.

He grabbed some of the left over breakfast he'd managed to sneak out of the mess hall, from his table then touched a panel and the table retracted into the wall. He walked to the side of the room and stood facing the far wall. He tensed his legs and leaned his weight a little to the left.

"One hundred dodges" he said. He pushed to his left and put all his strength into a low, fast, controlled leap, pushing the other way as he landed.

He counted each as he went, soon though his mind began to drift to thoughts of earlier that day.

"Where's your smoke screen Head?...He's doing well....much to learn though"

Headwire began gritting his teeth as he dodged. His efforts became more forceful as he thought of Kaio's criticism.

"Fifty, fifty one.." He counted

"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 was always criticising him. When Head had joined The Four he had looked up to Kaio, a Ranger with such skill and experience impressed the young Headwire easily. He had been so eager to learn from Kaio and spend time with him, but as the months passed Kaio had not seemed to grow any closer to Headwire and this had upset him. Headwire began enjoying their training together simply for skill improvement rather than Kaio's company.

"I'm not worth liking" he thought, "My Father, Kaio, no one seems to notice me, no matter how well I do."

"One Hundred" he said as he landed his final dodge. He stood strong in his finishing position and looked straight ahead.

"I will make them notice me. I will make them notice *me*" He spoke with determination.

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"Another great score!" shouted Chance as he and Kaio watched a point scored.

Chance could see his friend was not enjoying the game as much as usual. Kaio's eyes were looking at the screen but his mind was elsewhere. Chance lowered the volume of the match and turn to his partner.

"Is the kid troubling you Kaio?" he asked. Kaio turned to face Chance, his expression unchanging.

"He is becoming very arrogant and believes that there is very little left for me to teach him. He has ability and has improved very quickly in such a short time but also in that short time he has gone from trusting my every comment to being offended by them"

"He is young Kaio and young men sometimes need encouragement as well as guidance." Chance offered, "In Headwire's case, growing up without a father, I would say he needs both in equal measure." As his eyes were drawn to the screen again he decided to change the subject.

"You ever gonna start playing X-Ball again mate?" he enquired

Kaio looked up "Well I never say never"

"You were rather good. Me and Silver went mad the time you scored that reverse dunk off the roof. Unbelievable."

"Huh, yea, well it was the only way to get past their defence" Kaio said with a smile. "Was easier than it looked" he said modestly

"Yea, yea I don't doubt that" Chance replied, "Because it looked impossible." The two men laughed and Chance turned up the volume of the match.

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Headwire was standing in the middle of his room in a balanced stance, his left leg forward and his right leg back, he knees were slightly bent making his stance strong. His right arm was held firmly into his side and his left arm was held out in front of him, above his left leg, bent slightly at the elbow and held firmly, both his fists were clenched.

Looking forward he snapped his right arm forward into a punch whilst he took a step forward with his back foot, putting his body's strength into it. As he did this he retracted his left arm making the finishing stance the opposite of how it began. Then he threw his back leg up and completed a roundhouse kick through the air. He continued this training for a long while, focusing his anger at Kaio and Jago and others out through his punches and kicks.

Jago would probably be mocking him tomorrow if they were on the same patrol, he thought. He was angry he had lost, that was something he would have to set right at the next opportunity. Jago had already refused another duel immediately after, but he would challenge him again tomorrow.

"Ha, and Kaio can watch me beat him." He said aloud as he produced another high kick. He wondered if he was the only Mercenary here who practised Martial Arts, he was certainly the only one in The Four. He had never revealed it to anyone or even enquired but he knew it was true. Chance was not the type to train much at all, let alone self defence. Silver? Well Silver's size surely didn't allow for the kind of movement required although he did wrestle on occasion and Headwire knew he was a Warrior in his past. Did Kaio do martial arts he wondered, highly unlikely, when Kaio wasn't telling Headwire how much he had to learn he was meditating. No, The Four did not respect the art, that's probably why Headwire hadn't told them that he practiced it.

Headwire had taught himself martial arts from a young age, seeing people get beaten up in his neighbourhood was enough to convince him to train. His mum was against it and refused to let him get a tutor so he developed it on his own, some from books and some from the actors he had seen in movies. Though very much untested it had helped him in two situations when he was a child, simply the ability to stand strong and throw a good punch had won him his first fight. His second had required an amount of skill, kicks and balance for him to defeat the three attackers he had met.

He continued this martial arts training long into the night, as he did every night. Then, when he was finally satisfied, not to mention exhausted; he collapsed into his bed and fell into a deep sleep.

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When the match had finished Kaio said his goodbyes to Chance and headed out of the barracks. As he passed the stairs to Headwire's level he looked up.

"Probably still training" he thought to himself. Then he continued out of the barracks and towards a lift. As it opened its doors he stepped inside and chose the roof level, a full three hundred floors up.

The lift rocketed up the distance but due to its pressurised interior Kaio could barely tell it was moving. After less than thirty seconds the lift slowed and came to a stop and the automated voiced called the three hundredth level as its location. The doors slid open and Kaio exited. He stepped out into the open-air roof gardens, a place where the workers and mercenaries could come to relax. They were large

enough that a walk from one end to the other could take over an hour and they were densely populated with plants from various planets that were able to survive in this atmosphere.

Kaio walked along a path past various plant life, organic and simulated and also past numerous people relaxing outside. It was night time on this side of the planet but the three moons and close orbiting planets provided enough silvery light to encourage people to stay out.

Kaio reached the end of the path, which was also the end of the garden at this side. There was a barrier ahead of him and beyond that was a drop running all the way down the side of the base to the ground. From this height the base disappeared in darkness some way down, despite all the lights.

Kaio lightly stepped onto the top rail of the barrier and stood up straight, balancing perfectly on the rail, a slight change would send him plummeting two miles to his death. He turned around, so that he was facing the garden and bent his knees slightly. He then launched himself to his left, travelling high through the air his right foot landed on a support strut sticking out of the roof support beam. With his right leg he pushed off again up over and onto the roof. He landed softly on the top and sat down facing the planets three moons.

He was alone up here and he liked it that way, often returning here to find peace. He crossed his legs and placed his hands together into a prayer position, his elbows out to the sides. Kaio closed his eyes and bowed his head, completing his meditation pose. His thoughts began to drift away from the present as he let his mind wander.

He came to thoughts of Headwire and their relationship. He remembered his vow and his decisions, which had brought them together, and the man he had done it for.

"I am sorry old friend; it is not as easy as I had thought. I am not able to get close to the boy, perhaps it will have to be enough that he *will* become a great Ranger now."

In episode 4 of 8 WAYS TO LOSE...

"Headwire, Merc 27.68 reporting for AM Patrol"

The young Ranger heads off on another patrol, this one led by an attacking Ranger he respects and admires and Headwire isn't going to miss an opportunity to learn everything about the role he is sure lies ahead of him. But is their Patrol going to be as uneventful as they all believe...