

LASTChancePUBLICATIONS

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written

by

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In episode 5..

"Why is he still pointing his rifle at me?"

Headwire's brush with the enemy has left him shaken

*"So he's returned from exile."*

And his opponent was no ordinary sniper

OSN's base had three on-site Gyms; they offered the latest in muscle stimulating machines and were large enough to service the needs of all those miners and Mercs that wished to train. Only one of the Gyms though, had traditional weights and weight lifting equipment and it was in this Gym that Silver and Chance were now training.

Silver was lying flat on the bench press, his large muscular frame hiding it completely from view. He was pushing up an extremely heavy barbell with what seemed like relative ease. Behind his head Chance was standing with a towel over his shoulders watching in case Silver should get into trouble.

"So what did Dante say?" Silver asked as he raised the bar into the air again.

"Well he said that they met Crying whilst the re-spawn points were off-line. Apparently Headwire had to stare down a sniper rifle for the whole encounter. He reckons the kid is probably gonna be shook up by that for a while."

The barbell made a loud metal on metal noise as Silver rested it on the bench arms.

"Yea course, aint no easy thing. Damn those engineers and their insistence in taking those re-spawns off-line when ever they need to do any small amount of work on them, regardless of our patrols."

"You going up forty this one?" Chance asked as he began adding weights to the bar.

"Eighty mate"

"Oh" said Chance with a smile "you're getting serious now". Silver laughed as he prepared himself for the next set of repetitions. He sat forward on the seat and took a drink of water and slowed his breathing.

"How did Head seem when you spoke to him?" He asked

"Well, he seemed fine. But you know these things can come out later and he's not too bad at hiding his feelings." Silver lay back down on the bench and positioned himself to take the weight of the bar. Then he lifted it off the arms and above his head and began his next set.

Chance looked ahead, at the mirrored wall in front of them. Looking at his reflection he began to remember what it was like when he faced guns without the reassurance that he would simply join the re-deployment queue.

"Seems like a long time ago, that we used to battle without re-spawning. Not sure I can remember what its like to face death so often." He said

"It was a.....long time ago, but I can still remember it. Didn't.....bother me.....not....back then." Silver grunted in-between raises.

Chance laughed, he wasn't surprised at Silver's reply. His comrade in arms had never shown fear or concern for his own life during battle not until he received that report from the General anyway. Although Chance didn't doubt it was mostly to do with his upbringing, the fact that he killed most enemies before they had the opportunity to point their gun at him surely played a part, he laughed to himself.

"Rātau ki!" Silver exclaimed in his native tongue, as with one final grunt of effort he completed his final set and landed the bar back on the rests. He sat up and wiped the sweat from his face with the towel Chance passed to him.

"I think" Silver began "I'll stop in on the way back and have a chat with little Headwire. See how he's holding up"

"Yea, cheers mate. I'm sure he'll appreciate it. I'll finish up here then meet you for lunch" Chance said as he began choosing some free weights from the dumb bell rack.

"Alright mate, 'preciate your assistance with the Bench press as always." Silver said as he walked out of the Gym.

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Silver walked up the steps to Headwire's quarters, "*Probably training, as usual*" he thought to himself as he neared the door, stopping just outside he knocked. After a few seconds wait the door slid open and Headwire appeared beyond it. His face showed worry and he didn't even attempt a smile when he saw Silver standing in his doorway.

"Hi Silver" he said and he began to walk back into his room without even a gesture for Silver to follow, he did regardless.

"Hey kid, thought I'd pop I and see how your doing. Heard you had an encounter with JBC today?" Silver pulled out a chair from under Headwire's table, reversed it and sat down. Headwire sat on a bench opposite him looking down, unresponsive. Silver glanced around and noticed that the room's furnishings were not in their retractable spaces as he had become used to seeing.

"No training today?" Silver enquired looking at Headwire.

"I just froze Silv, couldn't move" came the reply.

"Hey, there's no shame in that. Your spawn points were down."

"He just kept pointing it at me. I felt like I was about to die, he just had to decide when. I've never felt so..." Headwire couldn't seem to find the word, or if he could he didn't want to hear it. "I've had guns pointed at me loads of times" he finally finished.

"You've always had the back up of re-spawning Head. You've grown up not knowing any different." Silver began. "You know me and Chance weren't always Mercs with re-spawning backing us up"

"Yea, you were soldiers."

"Yea, back then the technology didn't exist. We faced death at the end of a gun hundreds of times a day."

"How did you deal with that?" Headwire asked looking up for the first time.

"For Chance it was a fear he had to conquer simply to stay alive. In those situations its kill or be killed, those that couldn't adjust died, simple as that."

"And for you? Was it different because you're a Warrior?"

"I was brought up in war, for me it's not kill or be killed. I was born into combat and fighting was a part of our daily life. There was a coming of age quest in my village, one that all children had to undertake." Headwire was looking at Silver with interest now, it was a rare occurrence that any of his partners would speak of their past and Silver's was certainly very intriguing.

"At the age of sixteen we had to journey from our village alone, deep into the deadly Vangrian Jungle, armed only with a knife and seek out the largest and deadliest creature living within, the Gargant. This beast was huge, the height of three men when it reared up, armour hard skin covering its body and a mouth lined with razor sharp teeth. A deadly foe for even a Warrior hunting party to encounter. To complete the coming of age ceremony the young Warrior had to present the tongue of the beast to the village council." Headwire was fascinated by the story and itching to ask questions.

"Did you complete this quest?" he asked

"I did" Silver replied.

"Wow, you killed a Gargant when you were sixteen!"

"Actually the elders of our tribe agreed to my argument that I was old enough to complete the quest when I was a little younger then sixteen."

"How old?"

"Eight. The youngest Warrior ever to even embark on the quest let alone return with the trophy."

"Wow." Headwire then considered this with his own concerns of fear and death "weren't you afraid of fighting this beast?"

"Warriors are taught from a young age to ignore fear but despite this I was filled with terror when I met the Gargant. Only the shame for my family if I were to fail pushed me onwards. Sometimes a fear must be conquered with a greater fear, in this case fear of failure and the will to do well for my family."

"Hmm, I see, but it was fear of death that froze me to the spot today. How do you overcome that? Did you feel fear during battle in the wars Silver?"

"No" Silver answered certainly "I had never been afraid of dying during a battle, for the Warriors there was only one honour higher than dying in battle and that was to kill in battle. As such we went to war without fear."

"Then you don't know what I went through Silver" Headwire pointed out and turned a disappointed expression to the floor. He heard no words from the big Gunner for a while and then Silver finally spoke.

"Thirteen years ago my home planet was destroyed in a war, the whole planet gone. My tribe and every tribe of Warriors was destroyed along with it, gone forever. Only those Warriors like myself that had been recruited into the armies had survived. I was given this report whilst I was stationed on a planet still fully engaged in battle. Not only were my family and tribe dead but I also realised that I was one of perhaps as few as one thousand Warriors left in existence." Headwire was speechless.

"I had to go into battle for the first time fearing that I might die. That I might be the last of my race gave me a great conflict. To seek death in battle but in doing so end the blood line of my tribe and even my race."

"What did you do?" asked Headwire

"Chance saved me from part of that terrible burden. Re-spawning technology was coming into widespread use in the frontier battles. It had previously been agreed that re-spawn technology could not be used in planetary wars since what were called The Re-Spawn Wars, during which there was a single battle that lasted for two years and saw millions of soldiers die from the mental strain of re-spawning thousands of times over many months and years. Our service terms were coming to an end and Chance had the idea of becoming Mercenaries and generally only fighting battles with re-spawn back up. That way I got to battle without fear that I would die." Headwire looked at Silver.

"But you still carry the burden of being one of the last of your kind."

Silver gave a heavy nod "Yes, and it crosses my mind every time I put on my armour."

Headwire looked thoughtful for a while "Well if you can put on the suit and go out there day after day despite that burden and the knowledge that something could go wrong I think maybe I can."

At that point the buzzer on Headwire's door sounded, Headwire gave the verbal command for it to open and the door slid back, allowing Kaio to walk into the room.

"Greetings" Kaio said as he walked towards where the two men were sitting. "How are you feeling Headwire?" He asked.

"Better, I was feeling pretty shit but my buddy Silver has sorted that out. Have you heard this guy's history?" Headwire finished with expression as he gestured towards his Warrior partner.

Kaio smiled as he looked at Silver "yes, some. It is a rich history."

"Not as rich as yours Kaio, and that's just the stuff I've managed to pry from you" replied Silver with a smile. Kaio returned a thin smile then looked towards Headwire who couldn't help notice his swift change of subject.

"I'm pleased you're focused again Head because I've arranged a training match for this evening. A two versus two midfield domination match." Headwire's expression changed to one of concern.

"I'm not sure I'm ready to get back out there just yet...um...can we do it tomorrow maybe?"

"Our opponents will be Dahmer and Jago" Kaio added

"Jago!" Headwire's expression changed once again, this time to one of determination. "Let's go! I've got a score to settle." Headwire stood up and began to hurry towards the door.

"Kid" Kaio called after him "It's not for three hours". Headwire didn't stop.

"Good, that's three hours of warm up then." He called back as he disappeared out of the doorway.

## In episode 2 of 8 WAYS TO LOSE...

*"At the opposite end stood their opponents, Dahmer in a blue Tech battle suit and Jago, in a blue Ranger suit"...*

**Headwire and Kaio engage in a two versus two training match and The Four get the news they have been waiting for...**