8 Ways to Lose

written

by

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PART ONE:

THE FOUR

EPISODE 2

In episode 6…

"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."

Silver's talk with Headwire sets his mind right again and Kaio's choice of opponent in their next training match is just the spark he needed to get the suit back on.

"Jago! Let's go! I've got a score to settle."…

Kaio and Headwire stood near their spawn-point at the far end of the battlefield, at the opposite end stood their opponents, Dahmer in a blue Tech battle suit and Jago, in a blue Ranger suit. Between them was about one hundred yards of simulated desert terrain, mirroring their current planets landscape, in the middle stood a Deployment-point.

Cover will be easy to find in this landscape Headwire thought to himself as he waited for the match to begin.

"Headwire, I want to see you employ form three, Kaijiki, for this encounter, defence over attack. Focus on your dodging, staying alive is more important then getting a kill in this situation and remember, if you control the spawn-point…" Kaio began

"….You control the battle, got it" Headwire finished for him.

Kaio could already see that the young Ranger was back to his old self; he switched his suits internal Comms to all channels and gave the signal to start the match. Headwire immediately dodge boosted towards the central spawn point, climbing into the air, Kaio followed him. Headwire reached the Deploy point first; he dropped down into a crouch and activated his suits energy transfer device, which would bring the Deploy-point online for his team.

Suddenly the area all around him exploded in a cloud of gas.

"Chikuso!" Headwire cursed as he immediately boost jumped backwards, out of the cloud, without completing his hack. He then began a series of fast controlled dodges that characterised Kaijiki's defensive style.

Dahmer crested the hill, grenade launcher in hand. In a flash a red sniper shot connected with the Tech's chest, as Kaio jumped into the battle. One shot was not enough to kill him however and Kaio fired a second as he swiftly moved between his opponent and the gas covered Headwire.

The shot caused a metal sound as it ricocheted off the auto turret Dahmer had hastily erected in front of himself, now Kaio and Head had two things to dodge. The turrets guns immediately went into action, their tracking system locking onto Kaio's suit. Dual assault rifle fire ripped into him, at the same time he leapt towards the turret. Swiftly switching his rifle for his Shock Lance and firing a blast downward as his jump took him over the turret. He landed to the sound of mechanics exploding.

Dahmer now closed in on Kaio, shotgun in hand. Kaio spun just in time to see a sniper shot impact with the Tech's head, who immediately dropped and dematerialised.

Headwire lowered his rifle and gave Kaio a glance, expecting praise or thanks, but Kaio was already moving towards the Deploy-point. Headwire dived in too, beginning the hack again. Kaio fired a smoke grenade, covering them and reminding Headwire that there was still a ranger out there. Before that thought had even finished passing through Headwire's mind a sniper shot thudded into Kaio's head and he collapsed at the base of the spawn-point. Headwire turned to his team-mate to revive him, but Kaio had willingly disengaged and his body dematerialised as Head watched.

"Why?" Headwire called over the comms, Kaio chose not to respond. It would be another 20 seconds before he could rejoin the fight.

"That shot was luck Headwire, see this" Kaio thought as he waited to spawn, *"trust in the smoke cloud and finish the Hack on that spawn point."*

A second sniper shot smacked into the spawn-point.

"Jago" Head said to himself, fire lighting in his eyes. He stopped his Hack at seventy five percent and boosted out of the fast dissipating smoke, which took him high out of the cover. Although Jago had hoped for this, his second shot at Headwire missed, the blue streak it made as it passed revealing his position. Whilst still in the air Headwire returned the shot with his sniper rifle, but Jago was dodging and the shot narrowly missed. The two Rangers began duelling, each dodging and shooting, neither able to hit the other.

"Let's see what you got now Jago" Headwire said aloud to himself as he pressed towards his opponent.

Unseen by Headwire, Dahmer, having re-spawned at his starting location, was now advancing towards the Deploy-point. As he neared Jago and Head he slowed and made sure he stayed out of Headwire's vision.

Headwire was paying little attention to anything outside of his fight though, for him the duel was on and he would defeat Jago, as he should have in their previous duel. Headwire hated losing, and a duel to another ranger he hated most. He concentrated on his opponent, so much so he didn't notice that he was being drawn further and further away from the spawn point.

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Kaio and Headwire sat outside the base, on one of the balcony levels, still in their Ranger suits, having removed just the helmets. They had lost the training match to their opponents, and Kaio was attempting to ensure a lesson was learned from this.

"I *know* why we lost Kaio, we lost because I didn't kill Jago quick enough, I did beat him though. I need to work on my accuracy more. He's not better then me and I proved that to him today." Headwire said in an attempt to forget the real reason they had lost. Kaio watched him pace back and fourth, waiting for him to correct himself. Headwire started again

"We lost because the spawn times weren't long enough and they bloody spawned on us when we were hacking the damn thing. Still did you notice, apart from the gas I didn't get a single hit on me. Not too shabby." Kaio could see that the young Headwire wasn't going to get the correct answer anytime soon.

"We lost because they hacked the middle spawn-point Headwire." He said.

Headwire picked up "That's what I'm saying; we didn't kill them quick enough. We shoulda been aiming for that spot in the head that kills them instantly. I think you're holding out on me Kaio, you know about it." Kaio's eyes rolled but he waited patiently, whilst Headwire continued.

"Come on Kaio there is a point in the helmet that if you hit it directly with a sniper shot it kills them out right, no second shot needed. A glitch with the suits that has never been corrected apparently, course I've never met anyone that has hit it or seen it done but I know it exists."

"Kid, sit down and listen to me." Kaio instructed. Headwire almost argued against that but decided to sit.

"We lost today because you didn't see a spawn-point out there, you saw two opponents."

"Hey, I hacked at the Spawn twice" Headwire interrupted

"Only when there were no enemies around" Kaio replied "The goals of the midfield Ranger are the spawn-points and the Generators, the enemy is a distraction, not a goal. You must not set off into battle with the mind to engage and kill as many enemies as you can. In a battle with re-spawning you will never win."

Kaio let this sink in for a bit, he had been training Headwire as a Ranger for over a year. In the beginning Headwire had picked up the Duelling and combat techniques very quickly and had put these to use quite a few times in many battles for mining corps with The Four in that time. But as a midfield Ranger he lacked the basic understanding of his role and its importance. He continued.

"Our opponents today performed perfectly, Dahmer did not join his team-mate in his fight against you, he deliberately avoided it. Jago drew you away and the Tech hacked the spawn-point. You should have guarded the spawn-point and not let them hack it; you cannot allow yourself to be drawn away."

Kaio stood up "In this you failed, you let yourself slip into a duel with your opponent at the expense of all else. In a team game, that will always cause defeat." He looked at Headwire, who avoided his gaze. Kaio turned and walked inside the base.

"Then why did you choose Jago?" Headwire called after him, but Kaio was already out of earshot.

Headwire got up and walked along the balcony, his head hanging down, his shoulders hunched. He could understand Kaio's point, Spawns and Gens gave a tactical advantage, he knew that, but there was little skill required in hacking them. In Headwire's opinion that was a Techs' job, their suits were built for quicker energy transfer and they could place turrets for defence. A Ranger was quick and agile, designed for speed. His weapons were chosen for quick strikes, the Ranger was an attacker and a duellist. That's what Headwire wanted to be, an attacker, not a midfield Ranger as Chance wanted. His chat with Dante in the morning had confirmed this desire. All the best Rangers were and had been attackers, including the legendary Zekkari himself, that's where the glory was.

Headwire wished that he could find out more about the great Zekkari but very little was known about him and what was known was mostly passed through word of mouth and was generally accepted as being extremely inaccurate. The legends spoke of a unique man who hailed from a planet far from the frontier worlds and was the first ever to wear the Ranger suit, although an early prototype. He achieved great victories for his allies in battles and missions and possibly even became an Artifact runner towards the end of his time. Over the eighteen years since his disappearance, Zekkari and his achievements had become almost myth and in fact few Mercs truly believed that he achieved what is said and some even doubt that he existed at all. Among the majority of Mercs though, he has become a symbol of frontier combat and of achieving the impossible. Headwire wanted to believe all the stories he heard about Zekkari, he wanted to achieve them himself, to be as legendary.

He reached the edge of the balcony and looked out over the desert planet as two of the three suns began to set, it was only early evening and the third sun would not bring night for a good few hours yet.

"Kaio couldn't be an attacker" Headwire thought, *"he doesn't have the flair, I will be an attacker, the best attacker ever. I just need an opportunity to prove myself, an opportunity to show them the great attacker I can be."*

With that thought he swiftly dodged against the wall to his right, as he touched it he strongly pushed off and engaged his suits boosters. This wall jump took him high into the air and up two floors, where he landed on the balcony and walked inside the base, to return his suit

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As Headwire walked towards his quarters he began to notice a certain commotion among the miners he passed, they were talking in groups and signalling to others.

"Have you heard?" he heard someone call out, and then more shouts around him. Then he heard someone calling to him.

"Headwire!" he looked down the corridor to see Chance heading towards him with Kaio in toe.

"What's up boss?" Head asked as the two men reached him.

"The last Artifact has been recovered" Chance said "JBC pulled it up less than an hour ago. We go to battle, briefing in forty-five minutes. I've gotta go prepare" and with that he and Kaio continued past him, down the corridor. Headwire considered the news for a moment; the rival Corp had recovered the fourth Artifact, meaning each side would have two. This was not the result OSN had wanted; if they had recovered the fourth Artifact they would be in a strong three against one situation. As it was the battlefield was now even and interesting, two Artis to defend and two to take. A smile formed on Headwire's lips.

"An opportunity." he said "Game on."

In **ЄPISODЄ 8** of
8 WAYS TO LOSE…

"At ten-zero and one yesterday the Janerian-Border Mining Corporation, our neighbouring rivals, recovered an Artifact from the planet's core, the third Artifact to be found.   Approximately ninety minutes ago they recovered another, the fourth and last remaining Artifact on the planet. Under the universal laws governing frontier mining on a Class-G planet such as this, both JBC and ourselves must now engage in a re-spawn Battle to decide who dominates the planet's resources."

The battle lines are drawn…