

LASTChancePUBLICATIONS

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written

by

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episode 12

In Episode 16...

"Where's our last Artifact then?"

"One of their Rangers is running it up the left hill..."

Headwire makes it out with an Artifact and his partners are determined to back him up regardless of the odds

"He doesn't have twenty seconds; the entire blue force is chasing him!"...

Dodging from left to right Headwire fired his last smoke grenade between himself and the oncoming enemies as a blue sniper shot trailed past his head. Gas grenades sailed above him and burst in front of his position, spreading their clouds of toxic gas across his path. He had no choice but to go through it as he was perused by four enemy Techs, a Gunner and two Rangers. He was almost at the stronghold Generator underpass but that was a straight and open tunnel and he would still need to dodge non-stop. It was not an easy task by any means to sprint up a hill, away from perusing enemies whilst constantly dodging left and right and throwing in the occasion boost dodge when his suits energy allowed. He had slowed briefly twice and both times he had been hit, once with sniper fire and once with assault rifle damage. If it wasn't for his Medi-pack dispenser allowing him to heal himself by throwing them ahead of him and then running through them he would have shut down by now.

Despite his efforts the enemy were closing now. A Ranger from behind boost dodged over Him and landed in front, pistol blasting. Headwire jumped back to increase the range and returned fire with his sniper rifle. He hit his opponent but it did not stop the ranger. Headwire's jump back had brought him into range of the Tech's shotguns and immediately he felt pellets impact with his suit. He dodged to his side as two Techs boosted into close range with him.

"This is bad" he thought. He was getting surrounded and at close range a dodge would not save him. He ducked a rocket from the rapidly approaching Gunner and drew his pistol.

A volley of fire was exchanged by all parties, with every combatant dodging left and right whilst trying to score a direct hit on their opponent. Headwire was working on separating the two Techs whilst avoiding getting shot in the back. He new it was simply luck that he had not been hit yet and he prayed his luck would hold. This was by far the worst situation he had ever been in.

As the Melee continued Head fell more on instinct than training, his dodges became more acrobatic and unpredictable. He boost dodged into one of his opponents, sending him sprawling and sprang of him high into the air and shot at another. His constant movement made it difficult for his enemies to track him and kept him alive in a fight with a deadly amount of opponents.

He fired his pistol at the two Techs and at last they dodged separate ways. Headwire dodge boosted towards and over the nearest Tech whilst taking him down with his pistol. The other Techs shotgun fire was too far away to cause any major damage and Head was out of the circle and sprinting for the stronghold.

Just then a sniper shot hit Headwire in the back of the head. He dropped immediately, his suit shutting down to reserve energy. The Artifact disengaged from his suit and lay on the floor just away from him.

"I'm Down!" he cried with dismay, and he watched almost in slow motion as the Ranger that had shot him ran towards the last Artifact. All he had to do was run over it and it would return to their Artifact Node and the battle would be lost. The base would be shut down and OSN would have to immediately leave the planet.

Then all of a sudden the Ranger was down and Headwire was back on his feet. He looked around stunned. Then he saw what had happened.

"You..." said Headwire.

"Told you I'd make it" said Kaio as he finished his revival of Headwire. "Better pick up your Arti, and Get moving Head, here they come". Headwire pulled himself back to the immediate situation

Two red sniper shots whizzed towards a Tech from behind Headwire, one connected

"Woot! I got him" Came Dante's voice over the comms and Headwire turned to see him and Knight riding on top of a speeding Raptor.

"Bout time you guys showed up" Said Headwire

"Time to blow this party" said Chance as he powered the Raptor towards the combat. The two red Rangers boost jumped from the Raptor and into combat, Dante finishing off the Tech with his pistol.

The lack of obstruction allowed Silver to open up with his Raptor turret. Enemies began leaping into boost dodges to avoid the deadly spray. Many of the enemy were injured and one Tech was taken down, but not before he got an EM Grenade off at the Raptor. It landed just to the side and as its energy burnt up it did only minor damage.

Now though the Raptor became every enemy troopers target as they realised its mission. Rockets, EM grenades and Shock Lance fire came flaring in as Chance headed for Headwire.

"Covering fire damn it!" Chance shouted as his vehicle was rocked with impacts and near misses.

Everyone, including Headwire stepped up their attacks on the distracted enemy and silenced a few weapons. Although the enemy weren't firing at their immediate opponents they were still dodging effectively.

Chance ploughed the Raptor straight into one of the blue Techs. The grinders on the front, designed to chomp through rock, made short work of him. A macabre trail was left following the Raptor.

"Time to bail Silver" said Chance, as he threw his ride into a 180 degree turn and brought it to a rest. Even before it had fully stopped Silver was out and chucking rockets at the enemy.

"Get in the vehicle!" Chance shouted over the Comms to Headwire. Flames were coming from the bonnet of the vehicle, any damage now and it would blow.

"Roger" replied Head and he boosted towards the open turret. He arced up high and brought himself directly down into the seat.

"Go, go!" He shouted as he buckled himself in and closed the turret up. Chance hit the turbos and the raptor launched forward taking them away from the battle with flames firing out from under its chassis.

Two beeps emitted from the Raptor's dash board in quick succession.

"Missile lock!" shouted Chance "Find the Gunner; take him out before he fires!"

"I've got him" Knight called over the Comms as he spotted the Gunner tracking the Raptor with his Rocket launcher. He sniped him once and closed for the kill, firing his pistol off. The Gunner realized he was finished and he released the three rockets that had locked onto the Raptor before Knight's pistol shots took him down. Before Knight could do anything else close range shotgun fire from a nearby enemy Tech dropped him immediately.

"I'm down!" He called.

"Three rockets away" Kaio informed Chance as he watched the canister from the Gunner's weapon release into the air. It burst open releasing four small rockets, three of which immediately screeched off toward their target trailing a fine column of smoke.

Just then Silver was hit by two sniper shots simultaneously and went down with a thud. From Their position high on the cliff ahead of the speeding Raptor, Boockerr and Delacruz made their entrance.



With the Raptor so damaged the rockets had little trouble catching the vehicle and the first one smacked into the side, exploding on impact.

"Can we survive three impacts?" Headwire asked Chance.

"No" he replied. The alarms from the Raptor were forcing both of them to shout.

"Then we have to bail!" Headwire shouted as the second missile connected exploding off the side armour of the vehicle.

"Not if I can help it." Chance said with strained confidence as he swung the Raptor towards the base of the rocky mountainside to their left. As they sped towards what looked to Head as certain doom Chance kept one eye on his rearview screen and the last missile that was closing on them with every second.

"Um, Chance?" Head called as he watched the very solid looking rocks rapidly approaching.

"Not yet" Chance murmured

"Chance?" Head said again with more than a small amount of panic evident in his voice.

"Now!" Chance shouted and he swung the Raptor into a ninety degree slide to the right, putting them side on with the advancing missile and the mountainside. Then he engaged the Raptors afterburners, flames licked out from the vehicles exhaust pipes launching it forward in less than a second. The missile exploded harmlessly into the mountain where they were only one second before, leaving the mercenaries free to return to base.

"Wow, Chance that was....." Headwire didn't get to finish his sentence as the cabin of the Raptor was filled with the glowing light of two shocklance electro magnetic balls on a direct impact course.

The Raptor exploded sending Chance and Head flying out, Chance's suit shut down immediately but Headwire managed to survive the blast and he dashed over to revive his Captain. As he helped his teammate up he saw who the shocklance blasts had belonged to.



Delacruz landed lightly on the ground, his Shock lance still charged from firing at the Raptor. Next to him landed his partner Boockerr.

"Well that was all good fun" he said on the open channel of Comms "It's time you left our planet now I think."

Chance stood upright, behind him the rest of the team had revived each other and hurried over and formed into a rough defensive circle, that was now being surrounded by the enemy. Chance looked around.

"Not good" he said as he surveyed the situation with the others. Around them stood four blue Techs and three blue Rangers, some having just been revived by others. Ahead of them, blocking the path stood Delacruz and Boockerr.

"Where's Crying?" Silver asked as he looked around

"He'll be behind those rocks" Kaio answered, indicating to a few large rocks high on a ridge near the blue base.

"Six Rangers and four Techs" Dante said as the two enemies faced off.

"Six Rangers!" said Headwire concerned "That's bad news"

"It's the four Techs that will be our undoing" Chance said to Headwire's surprise. "We are close together; they will use their gas to affect as many of us as possible. Then they will drop assault turrets which will track us mercilessly while we attempt to survive duels with their Rangers."

"What's the plan chief" Kaio asked, Chance took another quick look around him and at his team-mates before answering.

"We must protect the Artifact at all costs and get it back to our base."

"We don't have the energy to register it" Knight put it

"I have already notified Dahmer that the enemy is concentrated here, he is on his way to hack two Gens as we speak. So in addition to saving the Arti we must keep the enemy here as long as possible to allow for our Artifact node to come online."

"I am on minimal health as is Head, who also has the Artifact. Silver will be sniped by every enemy Ranger before he moves an inch." Chance said looking at the big Gunner. "The plan, Kaio, Dante and Knight will smoke Silver's position heavily and me and Head will move to that location. I will set up turrets in the cover of the smoke screen, being supplied by Silver. This will be our defensive point."

"Kaio, Dante and Knight will engage the enemy. The Tech's gas will drop those of us on low health quickly and can also dissipate the smoke screen; they must be your priority targets. When the time is right Headwire will break from the screen and make for the base, with as much support as we can give him."

Both sides stood tense, eyes fixed on each other. Then Chance gave the order to go and all hell broke loose.



Immediately Silver was covered in smoke as the three Rangers followed their instructions, numerous blue sniper shots passed through the smoke screen even as it was forming, none finding their mark.

Gas grenades exploded where the group were standing only a second before, they had all dodged away thanks to Chance's warning.

Chance joined his partner in the smoke and began hastily placing auto-rifle turrets while Silver used the Gunner's re-supply pack to keep supplying him. The red team's lack of energy meant that Chance could not place Rocket turrets.

Headwire followed Chance into the smoke screen, not before taking a pot shot with his rifle at one of the blue Techs.

"Head get in here!" Chance shouted.

"Affirmative" he replied as he saw his shot connect then he ducked into the clouds. A blue sniper shot impacting where he had just been standing.

Kaio, Dante and Knight were outside the screen, engaged in a hectic fight with nine enemies. They were concentrating on taking out the four Techs while attempting to simply evade the enemy Rangers shots.

Dante sniped the Tech Headwire had hit, dropping him to the floor.

"One down" he shouted.

"Two down" said Kaio calmly as he and Knight neutralised another. Then the enemy auto-rifle turrets the remaining Techs had set up began to open fire on the red Rangers. One of the Techs was to the front of the three of them and they swiftly bore down on him, silencing his turret and then him.

"Gas!" shouted Kaio as he saw the last Tech launch a grenade towards them. The three Rangers immediately boost dodged away, Dante and Knight to the left and Kaio to the right.



From within the smoke screen three auto rifle turrets began to beep as they picked up enemy Rangers. A blizzard of auto rifle fire began to streak out of the clouds and rip into those blue Rangers foolish enough to move within tracking range.

Dante and Knight found themselves being closed down by three Rangers, they swiftly settled into form I's dodging patterns and began sniping at their opponents left and right. The battle was constantly moving, with Rangers boost dodging past each other and quickly switching to pistols to attempt close range damage.

"Knight, my target" Dante said

The two red Rangers focused their attacks on one Ranger, Knight sniping at him and Dante with his pistol. Dodging the incoming shots from their other enemies they quickly closed down his dodging options and took him out. Sniper shots came in at both of them and Dante boost dodged away from his partner to get behind a blue Ranger and quickly finished him with three pistol shots to the head.

Then a sniper shot connected with his suit.

"I'm hit" he said as he began a dodging pattern.

Delacruz and Boockerr boosted over his head to their fallen comrades and quickly revived one of them. They turned to look at Dante, watching as Knight dodged next to his partner.

Without a word the red Rangers opened fire with their pistols. In a blur Dela and Boockerr separated, allowing their two other team mates to take the fire. Then they reappeared, dodging in between Dante and Knight and unloaded their pistol clips into their heads. Both the red Rangers dropped to the ground.

"I'm down" they cried in unison.

"Affirmative" came the reply from Kaio as he finished off his Tech and boosted to their aid.



Kaio landed his boost jump in front of Boockerr and Dela and quickly saw that both Dante and Knight had been forcibly disengaged by the blue Rangers, no chance of revival.

"The famous Kaio" Dela remarked on open Comms when he saw the Ranger land.

"Would have to be, he's the last Ranger on the field" said Boockerr.

"And that's how this battle will end" Kaio said with calm confidence.

"Oh?" said Dela doubtingly as the three other blue Rangers began to surround him. Kaio looked around at them all, then switched his Comms channel to his team.

"Now's a good time for Head to make for the base Cap" he called

"Roger that, Kaio" came the reply "I'll cover him, Silver is on his way to back you up" the smoke screen was beginning to dissipate around them as he spoke.

"Kaio" said Silver "You're quite a way off, try and bring them towards me and the turrets"

"Roger" Kaio replied.



Kaio didn't need to look around him to know he had been surrounded; he looked at the nearest Ranger and then ended the stand off. He snapped into a boost dodge straight into his opponent, leading with his

knee, he dropped the Ranger and then dodged away as sniper and pistol shots ripped into the poor Ranger, his suit shut down at the damage done by his team-mates.

Kaio slipped into Form III, Kaijiki and began an extremely fast pattern of dodges as the four enemy Rangers took shot after shot at him. This was a full Ranger battle now, with boost dodges over and behind each other and sniper and pistol shots ripping into both red and blue Rangers alike.

No Ranger could score a hit on Kaio with their sniper rifle and he was slowly drawing them towards Chance's turrets and the on rushing Silver. Delacruz noticed what was happening and decided to try and cut off Kaio's route. He dodged to get in close to engage Kaio with his pistol, Kaio dodged the shots then boosted over Dela's head, landing behind him and doing some serious suit damage to him and another Ranger with his pistol.

All four remaining Ranger's had now switched to their pistols, the rate of fire giving them a better chance against a Ranger with such excellent dodging ability. The pistol shots began to tell on Kaio's suit and his health dropped to ten percent.

"Silver I'm not gonna make this one" he said as he finished off his second Ranger with his pistol while dodging more incoming shots.

"I'm engaging now" Silver said as he sprinted towards the battle, he used his Rocket Launcher's secondary firing option and locked on to one of the blue Rangers. The Ranger was alerted by his suit that four rockets had locked onto him and his distraction allowed Kaio to intercept his slow dodge and finish him off as well. Kaio dodged into him, directing him subtly with his left arm into the pistol in his right, which then emptied into the Ranger's chest, he was dematerializing before he hit the ground.

"Thanks Silv..." Kaio's transmission was interrupted as the last of his suits energy was finally taken by Boockerr and Delacruz's constant pistol fire.

"Damn it" cried Silver.



"They've broken for their base" Boockerr announced over Comms as he noticed the red Tech and the Artifact carrying Ranger sprinting, already some distance from the combat.

"Go!" shouted Dela to his partner and they leapt into boost dodges after their opponents.

They were immediately stopped in their tracks by a ball of burning napalm landing in front of them. Its spiralling flames inches from their suits.

"Leaving so soon?" came Silver's voice over the all channel Comms as he landed behind the blast, barring their way.

"Want another shot at the title fellas?" he asked, goading.



Headwire's heart was beating in his ears as he sprinted into the tunnel which marked the halfway point to the red base. Behind him Chance was struggling to keep up, his Tech suit simply wasn't built to match the speeds of the Ranger, that and the twenty plus years between the two mercenaries meant quite a gap began to open between them.

"Keep going kid, make it back." Chance called "Dahmer, if the Raptor has re-spawned come and pick him up, if not get your ass out here and give support." He instructed to his defensive Tech.

Headwire exited the tunnel before Chance even entered it and bounded towards the base that now came into view and he saw the distant figure of Dahmer exit and run towards him to offer support.

"I'm gonna make it, I'm actually gonna get back to the base and register this Arti" Head's thoughts began to drift off, imagining the respect he would gain from this act, he knew his career as an attacking Ranger would begin based on the events that took place today.

Suddenly his suits health dropped to less than ten percent and he was snapped back to the present.

"Sniper on the ridge!" Dahmer cried over the Comms.

"I'm hit!" shouted Headwire in panic as he launched into a basic dodging pattern, an impending second shot raking his mind.

"Smoke kid, puff smoke" came Chance's voice, calming Head slightly despite the edge of concern that carried with it.



Up on the ridge far above the tunnel a blue Ranger crouched, the red cloth on his left arm flapping gently in the breeze. He watched the young Red Ranger, through the scope of his rifle, frantically dodge from left to right as he tried to make it back to his base and safety.

Crying was pleased with this situation, when he had seen Chance's plan he had left his position behind the rocks and quietly but swiftly made his way up here, whilst all of his team-mates had engaged in the maelstrom of the battle below. Now in the gentle wind and silence of his lofty perch he was able to secure the victory for his employers.

He tracked the kid as he smoke grenades to cover his passage, Crying kept his scope on the Ranger's head as he entered the smoke. Using his skill and experience he followed an estimated path and speed through the smoke, unable to see his target. He pulled the trigger....



Headwire stumbled out of the re-spawn chamber and into the deployment room. Behind him followed Chance, Silver and Kaio. To their right the others exited, Dante and Knight and Dahmer and Brock.

"Kisama baka yaro! You've cost us the planet!" came the shout at Headwire. He looked up to see Cage and Dio standing in the room with Jago. "What the hell were you thinking disobeying orders and deserting your position!" Cage yelled at him. Before Head could answer Chance replied from behind him.

"Cage leave it out alright, he knows he did wrong, but we can't do anything about it now. Let's not forget we were two men down anyway, Jago and Asta."

"All the more reason he shoulda kept his position, he deserted it, disobeying orders.."

"Bullshit orders!" Headwire shouted

"Quiet Head" Chance ordered sternly. The last thing he needed was Head openly criticising given orders and confirming he disobeyed them

"So he chooses what orders he obeys? Then decides he wants to be a hero. The kids a liability, never shoulda been out there with us." Headwire bit back his anger as he felt Chance's grip on his shoulder.

Dante stepped into the argument "Cage, this *Kid*, by the grace of Zekkari, got an Arti out from a node room packed with defences, on his first try. When Knight and me couldn't even get in the damn base, are you saying we shouldn't have been out there either? Maybe if you'd have stuck around instead of bailing on us we could'a turned it around."

"Dante, of course I'm not saying you two shouldn't be out there. But if he hadn't left his position we could've held the mid." Cage replied with slightly more control.

"Doesn't surprise me" added Jago "He's no good at keeping his position" he said with a hint of spite.

"Hey, fuck you Jago!" Head spat. Jago's face changed to anger immediately and he stepped in on Headwire shaping up to him.

"You better watch your mouth kid or..." Jago fell quiet as Silver's large frame stepped between the two of them.

"Or what?" Silver asked. Chance quickly stepped round and separated the two men with his arms, pushing Jago back.

"Come on lads, what is this, the school playground?" A few of the men gave a little laugh and visibly relaxed, although Cage did not. Chance continued, "We're all professionals, this is our job. We've all lost battles before and contracts *and* planets" he looked at Cage directly. "Your on a planet contract with OSN the same as us, win or lose you would be leaving the planet after this battle." Before Cage could reply Chance continued "I know you won't get the bonus but you still get paid. I'm not gonna make excuses for Headwire and I don't have to, he made a mistake. Whether that mistake cost us the battle or not is for McGregor to decide not us and certainly not here. If *we* are to blame" he said gesturing to The Four "then *we* won't get paid, simple as that. OSN lose the planet, but is it the greatest planet to serve on anyway?" He looked around at all the men. "Personally I think that three suns is over the top and too bloody hot for damn six hour patrols" He finished to the laughter of most of the men.

Jago stepped towards Headwire with an extended arm "Sorry Head, caught up in the moment" He said with an apologetic smile as Headwire accepted the handshake. "I'm still pissed that the system dropped me after ten minutes" He looked at Chance "Gonna speak to the bloody Engineers about that one."

Chance saw the opportunity for a different conversation and was quick to reply. "Yea, so what happened? I've known guys to drop from the system before but it's never the same problem twice."

"Well I don't know, I was heading up to the right side Gen then all of a sudden my HUD shut down, then the suit and then I was disengaged and back in the re-spawn chamber."

As Chance and the other Mercs listened to Jago's account Kaio watched Cage and Dio leave the room. Although he couldn't hear what they were saying as they left the room it was clear that Cage was still angry about the situation. An announcement came over the internal PA system.

"All Mercenary Captains to report to General McGregor's office for debriefing immediately"

"Me and you Chancie" said Dante.

"Right well I better get up to the office then Silver and Kaio I'd appreciate it if you could take care of the admin down here for us." Chance said.

"See you guys in the Mess Hall a bit later and hey Head, you did alright mate." Said Dante giving the young Ranger a pat on the shoulder, then he and Knight left, Headwire gave him a little smile of acknowledgement.

"I'm off too, see ya later" Jago said with a bit of embarrassment, no doubt due to his earlier actions. The men made their exits leaving The Four in the Deployment room.

Chance turned to Headwire "Head you wanna give Silv and Kaio a hand?"

Headwire took a moment to respond before saying.

"Na, I'll take an early lunch and get some alone time if I can"

"Ok mate, well don't worry about this too much. We'll talk about it as soon as I get out of the office." He said. Headwire gave a nod and began to walk out of the room towards the main building.

"Hey Head" called Kaio after him. Headwire turned round and looked at Kaio.

"I'll be up there as soon as I get done down here"

"Ok" Headwire replied and turned and left.

"You wanna go up there with him now? I'll take care of all this on my own mate" Silver asked Kaio as they began approaching the Deployment room orderlies.

"No, he wants some time alone." Kaio replied as he handed in his equipment. "Kaio, Merc 2767" he said to the orderly behind the counter.

"Right cheers guys, so you gonna be on the main ship with us when we leave or you guys got your own transport?" the orderly asked.

"We're only on contract for this Planet base so we'll be taking our own ship and heading for the job market" Silver replied.

IN EPISODE 10 of 8 WAYS TO LOSE...

"You cost us our jobs!..."

Headwire runs into some unhappy miners before his team leave the planet.

"Well if I'm gonna go down I'm gonna make them remember this fight for a while"...