

THE NEXT LEVEL

Written by

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EXT. SHED - DAY

Two police officers lean against the outside corner of a shed - a warehouse stands about fifty yards away. Bulletproof vests on, pistols at the ready. This is SHAWN (27) and BENSON (29), lifelong friends turned lifelong partners in the line of duty.

BENSON
(calm)
Okay, he's on the second floor.
Bolt Action Sniper.

EXT. WAREHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

A man stands in the cutout of a second story window. He holds a long-barreled sniper, propped between himself and the base of the frame. This is GREG (53).

BENSON (V.O)
The hostage is tied up right next
to him. Which means we need to do
this carefully.

EXT. SHED - CONTINUOUS

SHAWN
Does that mean (no grenades?)--

BENSON
(over)
No grenades.

SHAWN
(quickly)
Damn!

Shawn slowly lowers a spool of grenades in his hand, back into his bag.

SHAWN (CONT'D)
So what's the plan?

BENSON
(pointing)
I say we make a run for the side
entrance over there. I can hoist
you up through the louver, where
you can--

SHAWN
Take him out.

BENSON
Exactly... Which puts me on hostage
duty.

Shawn slides a duffel bag Benson's way. He zips it open.
Several electricians tools rest inside.

SHAWN
Hostage duty usually means bomb
duty.

BENSON
Okay, but there isn't always a bomb
involved...

They both look at each other.

BENSON (CONT'D)
I'm taking it for my own reasons,
not because you want me to.

Benson zips it back up. A beat.

SHAWN
You ready?

BENSON
(he looks to Shawn)
Yeah.

Shawn inches forward.

BENSON (CONT'D)
WAIT!

Benson's now extended arm blocks Shawn bringing him to a
halt. Just then, a bullet pierces the ground at the base of
Shawn's feet.

INT. WAREHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

GREG
(reloading)
SHOW YOURSELVES YOU FILTHY PIGS!
MAKE YOURSELF KNOWN!

EXT. SHED - CONTINUOUS

SHAWN
(stunned)
Nice one!

BENSON
You should follow my lead.

SHAWN
Duly noted.

Benson stands in front of Shawn, counting on his fingers like Greg's trigger finger is on some sort of timer. He gives the hand signal to go.

INT. WAREHOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Greg jumps up, as he excitedly spots the duo scurry across his magnified scope. His finger grips the trigger.

EXT. WAREHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

BENSON
(signaling)
Okay, stop.

Shawn hurriedly stops behind him, almost knocking them both over.

INT. WAREHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Greg shoots, hitting the ground just inches in front of them.

GREG
(FUCK!)
Shit!

He rushes to reload. The hostage squirms behind him.

EXT. WAREHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

BENSON
Okay, go-go. Go now!

They both continue sprinting, one foot after the other until Benson clips a short wire running between two posts. A mechanical contraption fires and Benson collapses.

Shawn whips around, turning back.

SHAWN
BENSON!

He quickly grabs Benson and drags him to the side of the warehouse.

BENSON
(panting)
Oh shit...

SHAWN
You're bleeding!

BENSON
...I forgot about the tripwire.

SHAWN
It's gone through the vest. We need
to get this thing off you.

Shawn begins to reach around Benson's back.

BENSON
No, no... Stop. It's okay. This run
doesn't even count.

Benson snaps his fingers.

SHAWN
Wh--

EXT. SHED - DAY

Benson and Shawn lean against the outside corner of a shed.
Bulletproof vests on, pistols at the ready, set for round
two.

BENSON
(calm)
Okay, he's on the second floor.
Bolt Action Sniper. The hostage is
tied up right next to him. Which
means we need to do this carefully.

SHAWN
(slowly)
Does that mean...

BENSON
...No grenades? Yeah.

Shawn looks down at the grenades in his hand, puzzled.

BENSON (CONT'D)
Oh, and uh watch out for tripwires.
He can get pretty crafty.

SHAWN
(dazed)
You just got shot.

BENSON
I did?

SHAWN
You just got shot!

BENSON
I did! Oh my God you remember?!

SHAWN
(panicked)
Yes, I- Why wouldn't I fucking
remember?! What the fuck is this!?
How are we - How are you--

BENSON
This is amazing, do you know how
long I've been waiting for this!?

Shawn shakes his head in disbelief.

BENSON (CONT'D)
Eight-hundred cycles! Eight-
hundred! I thought you were just...
insanely stupid but it looks like
all you needed was an update to
your memory!
(hysterically)
Wait, look around. What do you see?

Shawn slowly drags his head across his surroundings.

SHAWN
Uhhhhhhh...

He spots a first aid kit, full of bandages and other
appliances, floating in the distance. It glows a cartoonish
cool blue, illuminating the ground.

BENSON (O.S.)
That's a health pack. You collect
it if you're injured; it restores
you back to your fullest you.

BENSON (CONT'D)
(pointing)
That over there, by the side of the
warehouse.

EXT. WAREHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

BENSON (V.O.)
That's an ammo crate.

A box of gun ammunition, containing various types of bullets, hovers in place. This one glows a light brown.

EXT. SHED - CONTINUOUS

BENSON
Those are the only two. The first level doesn't have a lot of loot.

SHAWN
"First level?"

Benson nods towards the warehouse.

EXT. WAREHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The front of the warehouse reads in painted bold red text:
"Guns of Fury: LEVEL ONE"

BENSON (V.O.)
You never saw that?

EXT. SHED - CONTINUOUS

SHAWN
(foggy)
Wasn't there before.
(a moment)
You snapped your fingers?

BENSON
Yes.

SHAWN
And we ended up here?

BENSON
Correctomundo.

SHAWN
Are we in some... alternate reality
or something?

A bullet zips past them both, hitting the ground by their feet. Shawn jolts back, Benson remains still.

GREG (O.S.)
SHOW YOURSELVES YOU FILTHY PIGS!
MAKE YOURSELF KNOWN!

BENSON
No, no. Of course not.

He grabs his bag and starts to remove several items from it.

BENSON (CONT'D)
We're in sort of a time loop
scenario. Y'know, like Groundhog
Day? Only this time, the loop
restarts every time we snap our
fingers...

Shawn looks down at the palm of his hand.

BENSON (CONT'D)
...Every time we take too long...
(quickly)
...Or when we die.

Shawn gives Benson a sharp look. Benson continues to dump
items from his bag.

SHAWN
What are you doing?

BENSON
(obviously)
We won't need most of the stuff in
here.
(a pause; Shawn still
taking this in)
The only way to get out of this
loop is by taking this guy down and
freeing the hostage up there... At
least I think.

INT. WAREHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The hostage sits in a corner of the second floor. Hands tied
to a pole, mouth duct taped shut, a vest bomb is strapped to
their chest. Greg stands away, aiming.

BENSON (V.O)
Only I haven't been able to do that
yet, and I hate to say it... but
it's because of you man.

EXT. SHED - CONTINUOUS

SHAWN

Me?

BENSON

(nodding)

If this is level one, then there has to be a level two. Every time we take this motherfucker down, which isn't that often by the way, we're each supposed to choose to go to the next level. But you NEVER choose! You kind of just stand there, like this.

Benson stands upright, completely still, arms spread out in a t-pose.

SHAWN

That doesn't sound like me.

BENSON

Well, it is, okay. And I've seen way too much of it.

(exhaling)

The timer on the loop drains out and we go back to the beginning. Been like that for a while now... It's like ever since that last cycle you've been on goddamn autopilot or something!

A beat, then:

SHAWN

Why am I just now remembering?

BENSON

It was an update to your memory. I don't know how it works, but I guess PTSD will do that to you. Maybe my last death was just the breaking point - I don't know for sure, but all I know is that your mind wasn't erased... Same thing happened to me when it started. You died. Hostage duty wasn't my job, it was yours. Something happened, maybe you missed a wire... And then boom. Guts everywhere, y'know?

Shawn takes this in, then rests his hand on Benson's shoulder.

SHAWN
Hey, well I'm here now. I'm back.
We're in this together, right?

BENSON
Right.

A beat, then:

BENSON (CONT'D)
Follow my lead?

SHAWN
Always.

INT. WAREHOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Greg scans the environment, until he tracks Benson and Shawn in a sprint towards the side of the building.

GREG
(mumming)
I got you two now.

EXT. WAREHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

BENSON
Stop!

The game of Red Light, Green Light resumes when a sniper bullet lands in front of them.

BENSON (CONT'D)
Go!

They both sprint towards the side of the warehouse. Benson jumps over the tripwire, Shawn runs through and collapses to the loud sound of a gunshot.

BENSON (CONT'D)
Shawn!

SHAWN
(panting)
Yeah, I know... I know.

He snaps his fingers.

EXT. WAREHOUSE - DAY

Benson runs through the health pack. This time they both jump over the tripwire and make their way to the side of the warehouse. Benson locks his fingers together as Shawn collects the ammo crate.

SHAWN

In your eight-hundred cycles how did you never get bored of doing the same thing over and over and over again?

Shawn puts his boot on the base of Benson's hands.

BENSON

I had to spice things up a little bit. One time I kind of chased the hostage around with Greg's sniper.
(a beat; quietly)
The good ol' days.

SHAWN

Wait, his name is Greg? Also you're not supposed to admit that to me y'know. I'm still a cop.

Benson lifts Shawn up to the base of the louver. Shawn removes the front cover, creating a window inside.

BENSON

And I'm still your best friend.
(...)
Besides it wasn't that bad...

A spherical object drops from Shawn's bag just as he enters through the newly-made window. It lands at Benson's feet. He picks it up, alongside the pin that detached from it.

BENSON (CONT'D)

I thought I said no (grenades)--

INT. WAREHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

BOOM! Greg turns towards the loud sound. He spots Shawn looking down out of the window.

GREG

Hey you! Guns on the floor, hands up!

Shawn turns around immediately and lowers his pistol to the ground. His hands shoot up.

Greg slowly walks towards him as he holds him at gunpoint, nudging Shawn over to the corner as he looks out the now blood stained window.

GREG (CONT'D)

HA HA! Holy shit, aren't-- Sorry -
weren't you guys a pair! How 'bout
that. Shit... I might as well hand
you ol' Betsy over here too!

(he pets his rifle)

Greg continues his unstoppable stream of criticism and laughter. And with that, Shawn snaps his fingers.

EXT. WAREHOUSE - DAY

Benson gives Shawn a death stare as he hoists him through the window once again.

SHAWN

Sorry.

BENSON

I've done worse to you in other
cycles anyways.

SHAWN

What?

A vertical sliding door stands right next to Benson. He pulls on the string of chains nearby as the door rises.

INT. WAREHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Shawn takes out his pistol.

SHAWN

Freeze! Greg, stop what you're
doing, put the gun down... Slowly!

Greg lowers his rifle to the ground.

GREG

How do you know my name?

SHAWN

Let's just say we've run into each
other a couple times.

Benson makes his way to the hostage and starts to cut the wires that are strapped onto them.

BENSON
(to himself)
I hate bomb duty.

SHAWN
Get down. Lay down on your front
Greg, hands behind your back.

BENSON
(to the hostage)
You're free to go, get out of here.

The hostage runs out the building as Benson makes his way over to Greg and handcuffs him.

SHAWN
Do we even need to say his Miranda
rights? I mean, how do the rules
even work in here?

Shawn holsters his pistol.

BENSON
(to Shawn; grinning)
I won't tell if you wont.

SHAWN
(a beat)
So what now? Is that it?

A man in a white suit and pants enters the building. He reaches the second floor and presents two boxes in each hand. The top sides of the boxes are gone.

Inside each box rests a clearly visible label. One box says "RETRY," the other reads "NEXT LEVEL."

BENSON
Reach into your pocket.

Shawn digs deep into his pants pocket and pulls out a small glowing yellow orb.

SHAWN
What's this?

Benson holds his out too.

BENSON
Think of it like a vote.

He drops his into the "NEXT LEVEL" box.

A beat, then Shawn walks over to the "NEXT LEVEL" box and hovers his orb over it.

A pause, then he pulls it back.

BENSON (CONT'D)
What are you doing?

He turns to Benson.

SHAWN
What happens to us afterwards?

BENSON
What do you mean?

SHAWN
I mean, what if we don't carry over to the next level? What if it's two other guys in the next level and then we're just trapped here... forever... with... GREG!

GREG
I don't wanna die!

SHAWN
You see?!

BENSON
Okay, that doesn't mean anything! He just said that because that's what bad guys say...

SHAWN
What if only one of us carries over to the next level? Benson, what then?
(a pause)
I- I don't know if I can do this. I mean we're safe here right? Let's just stay here...

Benson grabs Shawn by the shoulders, steadying him.

BENSON
Shawn! Listen, I don't know what goes on in the next level! I wish I did! But what I do know is that as long as we do things together, we'll be just fine. Right?! Nothing can separate us, nothing!

A beat, then:

SHAWN
You really mean that?

GREG
He didn't!

SHAWN/BENSON
Shut the fuck up Greg!

BENSON (CONT'D)
(a beat)
Of course I mean that man! We're
brothers until we die! And guess
what: we don't die. I mean look at
us, we're still here!

A large smile creeps across both of their faces.

SHAWN
You do have a point there, we're
pretty fuckin' immortal.

Shawn drops his orb into the "NEXT LEVEL" box.

SHAWN (CONT'D)
And it's official...

Benson rests his hand on Shawn's shoulder.

BENSON
(smiling)
Proud of you buddy.

A long pause, then: The warehouse suddenly grows dark. The man in a white suit and pants is gone and the sunlight that enters the room soon grows faint.

INT. WAREHOUSE - NIGHT

SHAWN
Has this ever happened before?

BENSON
No, this is completely new to me!

BANG! Benson and Shawn both flinch. The sound of a gun blast echoes throughout the room. Greg carries a shotgun on the floor below them.

GREG
SHOW YOURSELVES YOU FILTHY PIGS!
MAKE YOURSELF KNOWN!

BENSON
Oh fuck, it's a close encounters
level!?

SHAWN
Does he always say the same thing?!

A strip of grenades floats and emits an orange hue in front of them. Shawn gives Benson a look.

BENSON
(realizing)
Yeah... Go for it. You earned it.

SHAWN
Yes!

Shawn dashes over the grenades, making them disappear. He holds out his hand as a grenade procedurally builds in his palm.

SHAWN (CONT'D)
So cool!

He grips it tightly and kisses the grenade with deep admiration.

SHAWN (CONT'D)
Do me proud.

He releases the pin and sends the grenade down a busted service pipe that leads to the first floor. The grenade rolls right in-between Greg's legs.

GREG
Aw shit.

THE END