

Buchholtz...the name is Karl Buchholtz

6/5/16 Match Conclusion

Captain Soo-Z was sitting behind her desk, motionless like a statue of herself, staring as if in a trance at the wall of her office trailer. The rookie, his broken arm now splinted and in a sling, sat across from her. Lieutenant Souchik sat next to him reviewing the notations he made while debriefing the rookie. For the previous hour, the captain listened to Souchik's careful questioning of the embarrassed senior ZK followed by this interview with his rattled and battered young comrade. She asked a few brief questions herself, but left most of the probing to Souchik. He was very good at it and shared her intuitive sense of which recollections were important and which were not. After a few minutes, both the rookie and the lieutenant became aware of the awkwardness of her stony sustained silence.

"Captain?" the lieutenant asked.

"Wow," she said softly, still transfixed at some imaginary point on her office wall. Then she slowly turned as if waking to lock eyes with the rookie.

"I'm sorry captain," the rookie said humbly, hanging his head in shame.

"To recap, you actually handed a prisoner your shotgun to cover you while you pooped outside the tent because he seemed like a good guy to you after an all night gab-fest. Then he bludgeons you unconscious with it and leaves you for dead, which you surely would have been had your partner not saved you. God must really look after idiots like you because its a miracle you didn't get your partner killed too. You know wherever you go in the Dead Zone you pick up a tail of zombies, right?" Leaving him asleep in an unguarded tent should have been a death sentence. Thank goodness for you he's a light sleeper. I should have you whipped, or perhaps branded with a letter "S" on your forehead. That's "S" for stupid. Lieutenant, can you have this imbecile branded?"

"We've never done that before captain," Lieutenant Souchik answered in a grave tone. We don't actually have any branding irons, but I guess we could make one up."

"Yikes," she said in distress, "we have enough work to do in this company already without making more. Looks like the stupid rookie's luck is holding. She stood up and leaned over her desktop to get closer to him. As her face welled up in his, he instinctively withdrew as far backward as his chair back allowed. Three feet from him, she held up her small balled fist and extended it toward his face.

"Before you do anything in the Dead Zone, ask yourself these two questions first," she hissed menacingly. She extended one finger and asked, "Will my actions support the mission?" then extended a second finger and asked, "Will my actions endanger my comrades?" Then she sat back down, an expression of disgust on her face, and said, "You'll have extra duty as soon as you've recovered enough to do it. You and your partner need to go to city hall immediately and describe the escaped prisoner to a police artist so he can make up a wanted poster. Get out!"

The rookie got up and saluted with his good arm. The captain returned his salute and he departed in haste. She waited until the door closed and his footsteps faded before speaking to Lieutenant Souchik again.

"That kid needs to be with a hard NCO to wise him up if he's going to survive out there. Move him to Sergeant Miller's squad."

"Already did it captain. What about his mission mentor in this debacle?"

"He shouldn't have trusted the kid, but fatigue can cause bad judgment. To his credit, he woke up fighting, killed two zombies with a bat inside their tent and flattened a solid wall of them with a pistol just outside it. Then he spotted the prisoner calmly escaping into the woods while the kid is screaming for help crawling on his belly about to be eaten by four zombies; but he made the right call and saved the kid with four consecutive head shots at 65 yards in half a minute. That's no small feat even with a rifle. Once the rookie was safe, he went after the prisoner. That was the right way to make the best of a bad situation. The fact that he didn't recapture the prisoner is a disappointment, but I don't think it reflects too badly on him. He did kill 37 zombies single handedly and save another ZK's life.

"ZK Jason Conley is a recent transfer to the unit but a regular-tornado-of-zombie-killing in Sergeant Kruer's words."

"Colorfully described, but his commendable combat performance isn't the important part of this embarrassing little failure of a mission. The escaped prisoner is. Do you agree that this Karl Buchholtz skillfully played our ZKs to gain information about our defensive perimeter, Live E-town day-to-day activities, and the research project at the hospital related to the zombie plague?"

Lieutenant Souchik nodded in agreement and added, "While our hero slept, Buchholtz was clearly mining the kid for some very specific information. I think he pegged him as gullible at the start, worked to win his confidence on the march and waited until his more cynical senior partner was asleep to exploit the kid for intelligence. It's significant that he never offered up anything regarding the valuable information of interest to us that he claimed to possess. I am sure that was a charade. He never had any intention of sharing information with us. I think his intent from the start was to make contact with us to find out how best to gain entry into Live E-town."

"And for what purpose does he desire a clandestine entry into our fair city?" the captain asked, like a college professor would challenge a student.

"I'm not sure," Souchik replied, "but my guess is he is interested in spying on our plague research."

"I feel it's more than that," the captain countered. "I know Mayor White would gladly share anything he's learned from the plague research project if he thought it could help get us closer to a vaccine or anything to help us fight. From what the kid says he told Buchholtz, it is very likely he was aware of this too. Therefore, Mr. Buchholtz is not interested in advancing our understanding of the plague. I think it's actually just the opposite."

"You think he's going to sneak into Live E-town and somehow stop our research?" Souchik asked?

"Exactly," the captain affirmed. "You served as a contract security operator in Iraq; does this Buchholtz not remind you of a professional operator? The way he melted into the woods and disappeared without a trace leaving a rear guard of agitated zombies to slow down pursuers...the way he just tossed the shotgun on the ground when he realized it was empty and made his escape unarmed...the way he didn't kill our guys outright as a professional courtesy. He is not a spy. His actions are too bold and transparent. He is

too overtly confident. He is more likely to be a professional assassin, or kidnapper, or burglar, or maybe all three.

"My sense was that he is a pro and he's on a mission," Souchik replied. "The question is, what's the mission and who sent him on it?"

The captain reached for the handset of the vintage black rotary dial telephone on her desk and spoke to him as she dialed the Live E-town operator. "Well, I'll tell you this...I don't think it's any coincidence that the area he was picked up in by our recon patrol was the vicinity of that crashed black helicopter we found last year. I shouldn't need to remind you of all the laboratory equipment it had on board, the manifest of scientist passengers and the leaking biological sample containers that seemed to pacify the aggressiveness of the nearby undead. Thanks to the blabbermouth rookie, Buchholtz also knows that Dr. Vincent Von Bloom is heading up our research team. I'll bet you a jar of Nutella that Buchholtz is intent of killing or kidnapping Von Bloom and or stealing those samples."

Before the lieutenant could reply, she was holding up her finger in a gesture for his patience and continued silence. "Operator," she said, "this is Captain Soo-Z. I need to speak with Mayor White."