

## Greg: Agents of ALIS: Episode 11 – Gangster Royce Wants To Battle!

"HOLD UPP!!!" The human with a silly hat but a not so silly assault rifle screamed into the warehouse. Kyrt and the rest of the forward team stood stock still, frozen in combat with a group of gangsters. The crew of the Hypatia was supposed to be sneaking in to steal a shipment of data that had been stolen by these thieves. Somehow they must have tripped an alarm and a huge fight was breaking out.

Kyrt was already uneasy, made all the worse by this creep staring at him. This humanish masc with a huge gut, thick ropes of brown hair, and dangerous-looking violet eyes were looking him up and down. The rifle was not pointed at Kyrt, but could be with a snap. He was in dark, dull colors of coveralls to facilitate their thievery.

"You're Kyrt Howling-Echo, right? The Genepal League champ?"

Kyrt sighed bitterly. He shouldn't be surprised he was recognized. "No, I'm your Aunt Tilly- *of course* I'm Kyrt."

"Then maybe we don't have to do a knuckle dragging brawl then."

"Maybe we want a knuckle dragging brawl- ow!" Kyrt could hear Kai mumble, the owl likely coming from Tema elbowing him in the ribs. Kyrt hoped it hurt, then felt guilty for the thought. Things have cooled immensely between Kyrt and Kai after their liaison a few weeks ago. Kyrt kept feeling like he had to prove himself. That the captain was thinking he wasn't pulling his weight. That he was a poor spoiled rich boy. Maybe this was the time to prove him wrong.

"I fancy myself a bit of a Genepal Trainer, boy," the gangster holding onto the last syllable of "boy" a bit too long. "Why don't we settle this like gentlemen? If you win, you get what you want, if we win, we beat your asses and throw you out."

"I think I'd rather take the odds fighting", Roscoe said, his hand still on his gun.

Kyrt turned and shook his head. "It's against the Trainer Code to deny a fight if you are willing and able," Kyrt told Roscoe, before turning to face the gangster. "Especially for the former champion. I accept, of course."

With his free hand the gangster snapped twice. From the rafters, the AR lasers of a standard Genepal battle setup honed in on his and the gangster's positions. Sighing, Kyrt put on an AR monocle to see the set up.

Apparently he was facing "Gangster Royce" (*"He's registered with the League as "Gangster? Is he that fucking stupid?" Kyrt thought.*) Royce was a rank 8 trainer. That meant he wasn't doing this professionally, but he also certainly wasn't a novice. He didn't see what Genepal or pals he had, meaning the poor thing was likely stuck in their Capture Crystal. Likely saw training and duels as a hobby, not a lifestyle. Makes sense, what with the whole criminal enterprise thing.

After tossing aside the rifle, sure enough Royce pulled a Capture Crystal from his suit pocket and threw it forward. Out from it sprang a Pea Shooter. ARs clocked it at about a Level 25 combat experience... to Pep Pup's 75 and Sol-Edge's 53.

*(“Can’t say this jerk isn’t ambitious,”)* Kyrst mused as he continued to look over the Pea Shooter. The poor guy seemed like he wasn’t out of the crystal often. His leafy combat fatigues look a touch too brown on the edges, his Popper Gun a bit dry and underweight. Kyrst saw them look back to their trainer, see Royce point forward with a wicked grin, and then turn back to Kyrst and Pep Pup. A frown now filled their face, their helmet drooping slightly. Pep Pup whined, as if he too knew how mistreated his opponent was.

Kyrst knew these kinds of trainers all too well. The wannabes. The aggressors. The get-rich-quick assholes. This Genepal was not his pal, but his tool. It was these trainers, these people inspired by Gerald’s win-at-all-costs philosophy and other popular trainers like him, that he despised the most. He would not have fun throwing this Pea Shooter around, but he would have fun grinding this into Royce’s face.

“Can’t we just use this opportunity to beat these assholes while their leader is occupied?” Kai growled behind Kyrst.

*(“I knew it”)*, Kyrst thought. He knew Kai didn’t trust him. He was about to speak when he heard Tema whisper.

“They have a code, they’ll stick to it. If the others are respecting it we should too. Let it be.”

“Indeed,” Silent Reading replied. “Besides, this will give us time to see Kyrst and Pep Pup’s combat data first hand.”

“Is that all you think about?” Roscoe moaned.

“You don’t think about it?” Silent Reading replied.

The laser light show signaling the start of the match broke Kyrst from his reverie.

“Pea Shooter!” Royce shouted. Figuring this guy was going to immediately start with an attack, Kyrst shouted “Pep Pup, Wind Dance!” to have his companion start with a defensive maneuver before Royce could finish his sentence.

“Atmo Bullet!” Royce finished as both he and his Pea Shooter were surprised by Pep Pup’s evasive maneuver. The bolt of lightning from Pea Shooter’s gun would have struck Kyrst, but was blocked by the arena ARs, thankfully. Kyrst was even more upset with Royce. Not only did he start the match with an obvious attack maneuver, he also wasted it and wasted what was assuredly one of Pea Shooter’s most powerful attacks. Any amateur can spam attacks and maybe win through brute force. It’s hack as all hell, but “defense wins championships” is a saying for a reason.

“Pep Pup, Rip and Tear!” Finishing his dance of rapid hops, Pep Pup leapt to the side of Pea Shooter and dug in with his teeth. Kyrst winced as he heard the yelp of pain from the other Genepal, and saw that from the adjudicator program it did maybe half of Pea Shooter’s life points.

“Gods damn it Pea Shooter! Use Tactical Retreat!” Kyrst was mildly shocked that this Pea Shooter knew a maneuver and not simply attacks. More shocking, Royce was not using this obvious opportunity to heal his Genepal. Kyrst had Pep Pup use a Charge Build to power up any electrical attacks he’d use later.

The Pea Shooter suddenly reached under his leafy coat. Kyrst stared at Pep Pup, who returned the gaze. Using hand gestures amongst his six hands, Kyrst signaled their Sigma Beta maneuver “Act Foolish”. Lull the opponent into a false sense of security. Knowing the pain Pep Pup was about to feel, Kyrst called for a Rip and Tear knowing the words that inevitably came out of Royce’s mouth.

“Pea Shooter, use Seed Grenade!” Like clockwork, the giant seeds flew from Pea Shooter’s hands and at Pep Pup’s paws. The seeds exploded into a veritable buckshot of smaller, harder pips, smacking at Pep Pup and dealing a good chunk of health. Hearing Pep Pup’s whine of pain broke Kyrst’s heart, especially knowing they were baiting Royce into a false sense of security, but it seemed to work.

Kyrst called Pep Pup back for a time out to use a healing item. Rather than standard potions, he made sure to keep a supply of Lemonade, many a Genepal’s favorite beverage, inclusive of his Pep Pup. As he cracked the can open and let him drink, he used his minor limbs to give more hand signals. Epsilon Theta; Maneuver then Strike.

As Pep Pup drank, Kyrst was cursing himself. He should have known better. He underestimated his opponent and assumed his strategy. They fought back and Pep Pup took some damage. Still, Royce wasn’t healing, wasn’t strategizing, just tapping his foot. If the pair could execute a decisive combo, Kyrst was sure he could end the battle swiftly.

Upon the time in, Kyrst immediately shouted for Pep Pup to use an Upward Gale to bounce high into the air. Sure enough, Pea Shooter’s next Atmo Bullet flew harmlessly away. Knowing Royce would go for the kill, this expenditure of energy left Pea Shooter vulnerable for Pep Pup’s own retaliation.

“Henshin Kick!” Kyrst commanded as Pep Pup rocketed back to earth, savagely kicking Pea Shooter down to ensure he was fully in contact. This left the opponent stunned and Pep Pup in the air. In prime position for the finale.

“FINISHER! PEP PUP, SYSTEM CRASH!!!” Kyrst roared with a mighty buzz. While in midair, a peal of thunder seemed to emit from Pep Pup, before a flash of lightning filled the AR arena, blinding all. Before things went white, as it had so many times before, Pep Pup discharged so much electricity it almost looked to Kyrst like he became a living current.

When the light died down. Pep Pup was standing and panting, yet wagging his tail. The Pea Shooter was down for the count, his life points down to zero. The snappy ditty of victory played. Before either man could react, Kyrst was declared the winner, and his winnings (*“5,000 credits? Awful rich for this guy,” Kyrst thought*) were transferred into his League account. Royce was left stammering.

“Fuh... fuh... Finishers aren’t legal!” Royce bellowed.

“Of course they are. Have been since the 86.23 rules update... 15 years ago.”

“But in private battle-”

“Then you have to request it and both battlers have to agree. Which you didn’t. You didn’t even stipulate if this was a one on one match, multimatch, whatever. I could have had Sol-Edge in there.” Kyrt said, striding to Pep Pup and scritchng his neck for a job well done. “There’s so much you could have done to help you, but you just had to prove in front of your crew that you were superior.”

“But... but... it’s not fair-”

“LIFE ISN’T FAIR.” Kyrt shouted, startling himself. “But we have rules, and you didn’t even use them. You don’t even keep to the code, the poor thing looks like it hasn’t seen a star in weeks? Months?”

“I make sure the thing is fed-”

“*The thing*, he’s not even your partner.”

“He’s a tool, just like that mutt is!” Royce screamed. He started stepping towards the assault rifle, which Pep Pup slid further away from Royce using a bolt of lightning, shaking his head no.

“Pep Pup is my partner. My best friend. Pal is *in the name*, for gods’ sake. You don’t deserve to be a trainer, Royce. You’re a third rate trainer with a fourth rate strategy, and bottom ranked compassion.” Kyrt growled as he strode closer to his opponent.

“Guh... guys, get them!” Royce shouted. Before Kyrt could even turn, he heard the thuds as Kai, Tema, Roscoe, and Silent knocked out the rest of the gang in unison, having positioned themselves behind the gangsters during the battle. As if the Hypatia could all smell the inevitable betrayal regardless of circumstance.

Kyrt did not let Royce utter another word as he got close enough to lunge. Three fists converging for a kidney punch made the human topple like an overloaded burger. Kyrt turned to look towards the Pea Shooter. His heart was broken.

As he planned his wording for a report to the League on potential Genepal mistreatment, Kyrt pulled a Smelling Salts from his pouch and woke up the Pea Shooter. It woke up with a jump, and seemed panicked. Kyrt held his arms akimbo, trying to display calm.

“Relax buddy, relax. It’s OK.”

“Puh... Pea?” The Pea Shooter stammered.

Sighing, Kyrt grabbed another Lemonade and offered it to the Genepal. After a tentative reach, it found the courage to take it, and gulped down the refreshing liquid. Kyrt swore he saw the Pal become more verdant even from a little treat. He wished there was more that he could do. More ways he could help. But he had a job to do with his crew, and League dictation and responsibilities meant he could only do so much after having battled.

"I wish there was more I could do buddy, but... Thank you for the battle. You did your best," Kyrst said softly, patting the helmet of the small Genepal. He could hear a snuffle, then creature then looked up and into his eyes, and gave a nod.

"Pep Pup Pep!" Pep Pup yelped with delight, licking Pea Shooter's face and wagging his tail.

"Kyrst, we gotta load up and lift off before these assholes wake up!" Tema shouted. Kyrst and Pep Pup started to run, but before he got too far he felt a tugging on his pant leg. Pea Shooter let go, then looked up again. He gave a salute. Kyrst returned it in kind, Pep Pup even mimicking as best he could with his foreleg. The pair then ran off, likely never seeing this Pea Shooter again. Like so many other fighters they've fought.

After loading the last pallet into the Hypatia, the ship flew away from the warehouse. Kai clapped Kyrst on the back.

"Well done champ. That saved us a lot of time and bruises."

"No sweat, captain."

"Pep Pup Pep!" the Genepal exclaimed, earning some scratches from Kai. Kyrst hoped maybe things were softening up.

"You two and the rest of us deserve a treat after that. Roscoe, look up on the planetary index, let's find a bar, my treat."

"Is that really going to be a gift, Kai?" Tema sighed.

"It will be."

"I guess dinner and a show is a gift. Just warn us if you get into a fight?"

"I can't make no promises," Kai laughed, giving a grin to Tema, then Kyrst. As they braced for takeoff, Kyrst sat down and held Pep Pup. He'd fill in the Professor after the battle, then they'd hit up that bar. Drink a little, sing a little, fight a little, whatever. For the first time in a while Kyrst felt like he could relax more. Like he did have a place in the Hypatia.