

Episode 23- "At All Costs"

We made it onto the ship.

"OK we know our stations. Let's do this." I said. I looked at Rory, "You got this."

Rory nodded, "Thanks Hunter."

We split into groups as we had planned. It was Tori, Dustin, and Claudia; Marah, Blake, and me; Rory, Brielle, and Peyton; and Kapri and Finn. We each headed to our assigned location. For my group that meant hunting down as many gems as we could. I led my team to the room I'd found Michelle's Amethyst in before. We used a gadget Cam made to crack the code and went in then started grabbing gems and teleporting them back as fast as we could. There were so many that even with 3 of us it was time consuming. We worked as fast as we could. Once we cleaned out the 1st room we found another and did the same. We were happy to be ninjas as we avoided detection for awhile. We made it to a 5th room and about halfway through Marah spoke up.

"Hunter, look at this...I think this is the Silver Amethyst Michelle was looking for...the one that belongs on Saturn." Marah said holding it up.

I nodded, "You're right. Get it out of here."

"Kapri to Hunter." a voice in my ear said. We all had in ear coms for this.

"Go for Hunter." I said.

"Finn and I just overheard Stefano. We know the plan. These gems aren't taken strictly for their value. They are taken by design. The specific configuration of gems they are stealing have power together...when combined they can alter the balance of the universe and give Balassario enough power to rule any or all planets should he desire." Kapri said.

"I know there was more to this than monetary gain. Good work Kapri." I said.

"I don't know how much longer we can stay hidden. We've had some close calls. What's everyone's status?" Rory asked.

"Almost 5 rooms down." I said.

"4 down." Claudia replied.

"We have 4 too. How many more?" Rory asked.

"By my estimate there are about 25-30 rooms total so you guys are about halfway." Kapri said.

"Keep going. Just be careful." I said.

We got off the coms and got back to work. We still had a lot more to do before we left and we needed to not be seen.

Michelle

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I was continuing to argue with SPD, but not so much they ended talks.

"The fact is we do have the same end goal...why can't we find a way to agree on how we handle Balassario?" I asked.

"Because you won't stand down." Charlie said.

"We could work together...I'd be willing to suspend my war on SPD if we could just team up." I said.

"You refuse to work within the guidelines of SPD." Charlie replied.

"You're right. I do. I will not impose SPD's rules on civilian Rangers." I said.

"Then no deal. And you said it yourself. "Civilian Rangers". That doesn't need to be a thing." Charlie said.

"Commander, I am attempting to compromise but your lead officer doesn't seem willing to give in any regard." I said.

Cruger sighed, "You are right Ms. DeSantos. For that I apologize. Officer Lopez, if I command you to work with the Sonic Rangers you will do so without question. Is that understood?"

"Yes sir." Officer Lopez mumbled.

"Excuse me?" Cruger said looking at her.

"Yes sir!" she said more forcefully this time.

"Good." Cruger said.

"I appreciate that Commander, but the fact remains, if we are to work with you my Rangers are under no circumstances your Rangers. You are not their commander and we do not follow SPD rules." I said.

"Ms. DeSantos, you do understand we have rules for a reason." Cruger said.

"Then why is your casualty count higher than ours?" I questioned.

"That is not our discussion." Charlie growled.

"It should be! There have been FAR more civilian Rangers than SPD Rangers, yet, SPD has had more die in the line of duty. The only real difference in our teams are those rules and regulations." I said.

"While my sister makes a valid point...Mich, all teams have their own rules. These Rangers just have their own." Tommy said.

"Not true Thomas. Most teams have only 3 rules. 1) Never use powers for personal gain, 2) never escalate a battle, and 3) never reveal your identity as a Ranger. Aside from that we do whatever it takes to save the world and stay alive. And with a single exception we have managed to do that." I said.

"These talks are getting us nowhere. We're wasting time." Charlie said.

"Indeed, but because of your attitude. You came in unwilling to discuss. I want to find a way to make this work...a middle ground." I said.

"That's reasonable." Tommy said.

"I agree. I believe we can still come to terms." Cruger said.

I nodded. This was perfect. Charlie was making me look reasonable and buying me more and more time...that said, I hoped the Rangers would hurry.

Hunter

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We had almost all the gems recovered when there was a call on the com.

"We've been spotted!" Tori's voice called.

"We've done what we can. We need to get out of here now." I said.

"Cam, get us out of here!" Claudia called.

"I need you guys to get back to the point I teleported you to so I can get you back." Cam said.

"OK, move it. Let's hurry." I said.

We made our way back to the transport point, but now everyone was on high alert and it didn't take us long to get spotted. We fought our way. We made it back. Everyone but Rory.

"Where's Rory?" I asked.

"He was holding off several aliens so we could get through. He's still back there." Brielle said.

"We have to go back for him." Peyton said.

"No. I do. Cam get everyone else home. I'm going back for Rory." I said.

"Hunter, no..." Blake said.

"Cam, now!" I demanded.

In a flash they were all gone. I fought my way back looking for Rory. I finally blasted through several aliens and was able to find him. He was fighting hand to hand with Stefano.

"Sorry, this was not on our agenda." I said as I blasted Stefano.

"Hunter...thank you." Rory said.

"I got your back kid. You get back to transport point. I'll hold off big ugly here." I said.

"I resent that Ranger. I am the most attractive being in the universe." Stefano said.

I rolled my eyes.

"Hunter, no...let me have your back too." Rory said.

"Kid, I got this. Go. Now." I demanded, "We don't have time to argue. Go."

Rory nodded and ran off.

"I got Rory. Get out of there." Cam's voice said moments later.

"I've been spotted!" Kapri cried.

"We don't have time. Set self destruct." I said.

"Hunter, you have to get off first." Cam said.

"We don't have time. Kapri, Finn...do it now! That's an order!" I commanded.

"Yes sir." Kapri said.

Cam

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I had some very large piles of gems in MS Ninja Ops and a group of very anxious Rangers. Kapri and Finn teleported back in as I saw the ship explode on my radar.

"Hunter!" Blake cried.

"No!" Rory echoed.

"No..." I whispered.

"Please tell me you had one of those last minute Cam saves the day tricks." Dustin said.

I shook my head. "I'm sorry...I couldn't lock on to him. I tried. I failed."

"So...my brother's really gone?" Blake asked.

"I think so Blake. I'm so sorry." I said.

"This can't be happening. I can't lose him too." Blake said as he started to cry.

"Oh Blake..." Tori wrapped Blake in a hug and they cried together.

"He had my back. I should have had his." Rory said.

"He wanted you off the ship. He was right. We could have lost you both." Rocky said.

"Someone has to tell Michelle...this is going to destroy her." Kapri said softly.

"Let me tell her...please. I know this will hurt her and I want it to come from me." Rocky said.

I nodded. "Of course. I'll text her and let her know it's ok to leave SPD and to meet you at home. She should be home with her husband and daughter when she gets this news."

Rocky nodded, "Thanks Cam. I'm going to pick up Harley from Mina and Adam's. I'll let them know what's going on then meet Mich at home."

"Yes. Go hug your daughter." I said.

"I need to hug mine. I'm calling my sister and having her bring Lindsey to us." Tori said.

Blake nodded. "Absolutely. We have to find a way to tell our Pre-Ker that her uncle is gone."

Tori nodded. "I'll call Emily"

I was in shock. I couldn't believe Hunter was gone. It wasn't a stretch to say he was the love of my life. I didn't know how to even begin to process this.

Rocky

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I knew there was every chance that Michelle considered Hunter the love of her life and now I had to tell her he was dead. I had to remember that however she reacted had nothing to do with our marriage or her love for me. This would be hard on her. I needed to be sensitive to that.

I got to Mina and Adam's to pick up Harley. Mina could tell something was wrong.

"What happened?" Mina asked.

"We lost another Ranger in the battle against Balassario." I said.

"Oh god...come in." Mina let me in. She and Adam were in the living room. Harley was upstairs playing with their girls.

"Who was it?" Adam asked.

I sighed, "Hunter."

Mina's jaw dropped. "Hunter? No...it can't be."

I nodded.

"Does Mich know?" Mina asked.

"No. I asked the others to let me tell her though." I said.

"Damn...I'm sorry man...he was a good guy." Adam said.

"And Harley idolized him. I don't know how to tell her either." I said.

"If you guys need anything you know we're here." Mina said putting an arm around me.

I squeezed her hand. "Thanks guys. I just want to hug my daughter and get home. Michelle is on her way home from New Tech City. When she gets home I have to tell her and I don't know how."

"Do you need me to come with you?" Mina asked.

"No...but be ready for her call. I know she is going to need her best friend to get through this. I know Mich loves me and our marriage is strong but I also know a part of her heart will always belong to Hunter. This is going to crush her." I said.

Mina nodded. "Whatever you guys need. I'm here."

"Thanks." I nodded. I called Harley down and headed home with her. We got home and waited for Michelle.