

Chapter 146: Resolution

Leandro - GrainScape Technologies

Right at the entrance of a gated facility, a man got off the leading truck and made his way over to the security booth.

“Good afternoon, Lee. How have you been?”

“Same old, same old.”

“Oh, then you’re doing really well, then,” Leandro smirked. “Why don’t we catch up over a beer tonight?”

“Sure. We can chat later. Let’s get this inspection over with first.”

“Okay, I know the drill.”

“I know, but I still have to go through procedures.”

Lee, the full-figured inspector, closed his eyes for a moment before reopening them. His pupils lit up brightly, as if showing off his optics.

“Okay, as an official food inspector working on behalf of the city of NLA, I must inform you that we will begin our inspection. As a reminder, we will be recording throughout the proceedings.”

“Yes, sir. We’re ready.” Leandro replied in a more polite tone than before.

He then turned back to the convoy behind him and signaled for them to come forth while Lee did the same to his people around the heavily fortified compound.

The gates before the convoy soon opened, and the trucks filed in one by one. Each vehicle was then directed to a separate berth spread out around the warehouse by the entrance.

Leandro followed Lee toward where the leading truck was parked. By the time they arrived, there were already half a dozen men going through the contents of the truck. They each wore full-body protective suits and matching masks. On their chest was the label ‘Department of Health’, denoting them as government employees.

Leandro knew better than to strike up a casual conversation as the inspection took place, especially while it was being recorded. He tactfully made himself sparse as Lee headed for his coworkers.

Leandro found himself a quiet spot in the shade and dove into his optics to kill time by reading the news and watching videos when he suddenly heard his name being called out.

“Leandro! Come here now!”

He glanced over and saw his friend, Lee, who was looking over with an urgent expression.

I have a bad premonition about this...

He quickly jogged back over to the truck, where Lee then pointed toward a burlap sack. Leandro knew the contents should be fine grains his company had grown, and other popular ingredients that were high in demand among high-level corpos.

That was why his heart ached when saw the handheld detectors the inspectors used glowing red.

It meant it had detected harmful chemicals at a quantity that exceeded the limit, and not by a small margin. Otherwise, it would only glow orange.

“This...this can't be! We examined the mycotoxin levels before we took off. They should all have less than 5 ppb!”

“Logistics Manager Leandro, I have to formally inform you that we have detected concerning amounts of harmful chemicals in your shipment. Your entire convoy is to be detained as we inspect them thoroughly.”

“That's...okay. Please give me a few moments as I contact my superiors.”

As Leandro moved to make the call, he couldn't help but dread what was to come. The shipment he was responsible for was worth millions, and that wasn't even the worst part.

Their artificial greenhouses were in the center of the continent and transportation wasn't quick or cheap. They had contracts with various customers and if they didn't satisfy them, heavy penalties awaited them.

And all this mess would be blamed on Leandro because the company verified the quality of each shipment before it headed out. He was the last person to touch it and signed off on it. His expression paled when he remembered all the hyenas back in at head office that wouldn't let go of the opportunity to get rid of competition.

Leandro glanced over to his long-time friend and saw that he was on a call as well. That dashed any last thoughts of covering up the incident for as long as possible while he went into hiding.

If only resigning was an option...

I watched as the food inspectors called for backup once they found an issue with the contents of the first truck. They came out of their building like ants from a disturbed anthill, descending in numbers onto the rest of GrainScape Tech's convoy.

“Okay, I’ve seen enough. You guys can take care of the rest, right” I glanced over at Claire, who was still snickering along with the audience.

She waved a hand at me, so I took that as a yes and began to take my leave. While I made my way out, I noticed the field agents who performed the sabotage agents celebrating by clinking their plastic cups with each other. The thing that drew my attention was the brand, Frosteers, one of the regular shops I went to for a good milkshake.

I had rarely partaken in any common brand milkshake anymore, as I had access to the pricey authentic stuff, but it surprised me that others in my company shared a taste for it.

Maybe I should have more milkshake dispensers installed around the company? No, that’s stupid. If I go that route, I should start up my own store instead.

Shelving the unnecessary thoughts, I made my way back into my workshop and resumed working on the power armor.

Now that we had retaliated against GrainScape, we were closely monitoring their reaction and also preparing for talks with them as well. It would be the same play we had with Sensorial, but this time, we wouldn’t be offering any cooperation opportunities.

This was because it simply wasn’t realistic or profitable to continue our fight. At a glance, it looked stupid that we were ending it this way. It was almost as if we caught someone punching us in our sleep, only to go through a whole ordeal of uncovering who it was just to smack them back one time before making up. It was something you’d expect from a quarrel between kids, but that was just how things went when everyone valued profits more than pride.

Pride was great if it resulted in profits in the form of reputation, but at the core of corpo decision-making were still benefits.

As they say, there are no entire allies, only eternal benefits. Well, in this case, it’s enemies instead of friends, but close enough.

Two days after our successful sabotage, GrainScape Tech reached out to us.

“Greetings, I am Will, from GrainScape Technologies.”

“Thorne.”

Thorne stoically responded to his offer for a handshake, which made me chuckle. I was watching from the feed through my optics as my fine employees had ‘persuaded’ me to sit this one out.

They did it as a precaution against any hostile acts, despite them sending a messenger into our stronghold. I argued it would project me as weak or afraid, but they weren’t having it.

I didn’t put up much of a fight once they pulled out the ‘you can stay in your workshop’ card.

As I programmed the software the power armor would be using, I made sure to at least occasionally keep track of what was going on in the talks.

“I’ve heard both our companies had the misfortune of having to deal with... unfair circumstances that hinder our business. I am here today to see if we would pool our strength together to remedy that.” The GrainScape diplomat said in a friendly tone.

He waited for Thorne to respond, but the cyborg simply crossed his arms and glared at him in silence. I couldn’t help but let out another chuckle at the sight of that.

I would’ve enjoyed this entire negotiation more if Thorne continued to stay silent, but it seems our negotiation team sent him some instructions as I heard him let out a hearty sigh before speaking.

“Let’s cut to the chase. We both want our problems gone. We think that’s possible if you invest some resources into us.”

“Please, this should be a joint venture to end any business disruptions. We should carry the burden equally. There is no need to pool our resources.” Will replied while visibly straining to keep his business smile.

“Really? I think if these unfortunate incidents keep happening to our business, we are in a better position to persist through them.” Thorne shifted his posture to become more aggressive.

I’m sure he meant that it was because they were just on the losing side of the war, but it almost appears as if he was threatening him with a show of force. I doubted that would work against corpos, though.

“Please, Mr. Thorne. We should focus on more positive aspects of cooperation. Focusing on the negatives does none of us any good.”

“Well, our point still stands. We don’t believe we will be able to put these issues to rest unless you invest some resources into us.”

“...I am willing to hear your plan out. Why don’t you tell me what these ‘investments’ entail?”

“Ten million cred—”

“Unacceptable.”

“If your company is having cash flow issues, we can accept other forms of payment as well.”

“This is not about insolvency. The amount is ridiculous for such a small matter. There is no way our shareholders would agree to it.”

“Well, our company won’t budge, either. We would like to see you guys take responsibility for your actions.”

Come on Thorne, you're directly referring to them now. Well... I guess I should be surprised he even entertained Will's corpo talk at all.

"...On the responsibility issue, our company has an answer for that. It turns out a former worker of ours may be involved in the nefarious activities against us. They were terminated recently after the squabble with your alliance, and it seems they didn't take it well."

The agent from GrainScape Tech proceeded to place down his handheld terminal and placed a call through it. It was answered right away, and the terminal projected a holographic image in between him and Thorne.

The projection showed an unfamiliar man tied up to a chair with his mouth gagged. I didn't even have to search him up, as a quick message from Claire identified him as an executive from GrainScape who had managed one of their branch offices. That office was exactly the one our alliance had attacked toward the end of our conflict with the High Gate Group.

"As you have said, we are more than willing to take some responsibility." He turned to the projection and called out to someone on the other side. "Do it."

Having heard his words, a figure swiftly went into the frame, positioning themselves right behind the restrained corpo. In one casual motion, the figure held a gun up against the former executive's temple before pulling the trigger.

At the sound of the gunshot, I paused my work and focused on the video feed.

"I believe we have shown our sincerity, don't you agree?"

Thorne scoffed at him, but soon received additional instructions from our negotiators.

"Five mill—"

"We are willing to invest two million credits in your company to resolve these disruptions."

"Three."

Will's eyes flashed for a moment and he went silent.

It seemed the general direction had been settled and only minor negotiations remained. I tuned them out once more and refocused on the work before me. They could slowly decide on the precise amounts themselves. I had more important matters to attend to.

However, as much as I wanted to continue working on the power armor, the successful talks with GrainScape meant it was now okay to proceed with our cooperation scheme with Sensorial.

That was why I muted Thorne's meetings and placed a call to my new friend.

“Rollo...If I’m receiving a call from you, I assume things have settled, then?”

“Yes. Let us start seriously considering how to cooperate toward more beneficial pursuits. Would you like to come visit my workshop?”

“...Do I have a choice?”

Why does he sound so hesitant? I thought we made it clear that we’re cool.

“Of course. We can go to yours if you want.”

“...”