

DW: Lore Guide

Credits:

u/speedofdeath (Chad who made all the homebrew lore, props to him 😊)

https://www.reddit.com/r/decayingwinter/comments/12m4k2k/compilation_of_some_of_the_lore_in_dw_prone_to/

u/7629Miyuki (sorry about not crediting you, you get big text here now)

Archmexius/red (game dev)

Opening.

The planet Eden-227.

The place you are spawned in is called Eden-227. The geothermal turbines exploded and now it's in a post-apocalyptic state with eternal winter and "Them".

Pre-Apocalyptic State.

"Deployment in T-Minus 50 seconds.' The scratchy voice read through the helmet radio. The cold wind of Eden-227 made far-distance communication difficult, but nonetheless understood. They knew they weren't heading home, not with the ERU on their tails. But Void doesn't give up."

"5.45×39mm 7N6M FMJ with hardened steel core. Void plucked the rounds from the plate, cleaning off whatever dust of the bullet was left. The spalling hurt, but wasn't enough to keep the Commander down. The Neo-Thermal generators were going to fall. There was no saving Eden-227."

"Down to the last man. He fought through the horde, one bullet at a time, placed right between the eyes. Spawns of the devil and wretched humans with avarice, they all fell. But so would Eden-227, the event to seal the fate of the planet into an eternal winter storm. The Collapse."

DISCLAIMER:

Some of the following topics may be considered inappropriate, violent, or suggestive. If you are uncomfortable reading about these topics, don't read them, duh.

Decaying Winter confirmed canon (document created by [u/7629Miyuki](#), copy and pasted here.)

It's not related to Anomalous Activities / Contact: A-888. (They are in a different universe.)

Table of Contents.

Survival of the Fittest takes place in "New Earth", which is outright Earth, however glassed and terraformed to restart a new age of technology and rebuild civilisation. Decaying Winter takes place in another planet, Eden 227, which was another planet discovered during interstellar travel, it's a perfect hub point between two travel points and is frequently used for transporting supplies (before getting "glassed" due to neo-thermal generators).

Featuring companies like the Ulacylon Mega Corporation and the R.I.S. you would participate in an "UMG" Survival of the Fittest based Battle Royale. Contestants would retrieve objects and use them to kill the others. Now all that's cool, but they have nothing to do with Decaying Winter, however these large companies do have ties to an organisation whom contracted YOU, Agent.

The closest tie you will ever have to these two games is:

Reikgon's presence.

UTDSC (Ulacylon Type Deathsquad Cruisers); however this may be more of a reference, with minor presence in the lore as opposed to the game.

What presence did Ulacylon have on Eden 227?



Ulacylon had a vague presence more during The Collapse itself, the Deathsquad itself had witnessed the event, none of which had survived. The most well known Ulacylon Deathsquad Member was “Zealot Void”, a Commander towards this small squad. You will often find his mangled corpse atop the Mountain.

The event documented (also found on the destroyed juggernaut armor in Quatermastery) is simple, Void and his squad were deployed onto Eden 227. The destructive nature of the planet’s climate already made it difficult for them to coordinate and between Reikgon’s shadows and The “ERU”, Void would fight through a horde of hostile targets... however the Neo-Thermal generators would soon fall, resulting in the absolute loss of Eden-227.

Void slaughtered the horde, but thus did the planet also fall into an eternal winter storm. The Collapse of Eden 227 was permanently locked into place forever more.

Eden 227 AFTER THE COLLAPSE.



The Collapse brought about a nasty storm that would often consume the entire planet at once, this would result in people trying to get to warm places in order to get away from the storm, i.e. the wave based raids.

It also brought about a systemic infection: This infection affects the entire body, the more you remain in the climate untreated, the more affected you will be. You are constantly being infected due to the climate. This was inspired by The Division's Dark Zones. Only the brave can withstand the storm itself, in its full force. Most outright perish without finding the slightest kindle.



Who is Reikgon?

Reikgon is a funny man and the reason we can't have nice things in life.

A non-godly entity whom is capable of creating "shadows", with the possibility of long-ranged casting.

These shadows are outright formed to completely annihilate you.

They are tough to kill, and this is absolutely intentional.

They do not appear commonly though.

They also have a cult following underneath them, "Sin" albeit they are likely not directly related.

Wherever Reikgon can see, Sin shall be.



Who are Sin?

Sin is a cult connected throughout planets via Reikgon's power.

Be it brainwashed or willing, it accepts and inducts individuals / civilians (normal people) and will either move them up through ranking *or possibly sacrifice them towards creating shadows(?)*

You may see them in the Agency Facility, but I assure you; they will be throughout most planets, most likely including New Earth.



Who is The Agency?

The Agency is an organisation that could act as a sort of Pseudo-Government in the case the Government on New Earth failed. They are more interplanetary than the government of New Earth and are considerably 'neutral' to everyone.

The Agency has multiple facilities on Eden-227 and the First wave of Agents were actively there before The Collapse.

The Second Wave were sent as a *technical squad*? To supposedly keep the Neo-Thermal reactors from failing.

The Third Wave were denied evacuation and most of them had gone rogue or KIA/MIA.



Notable members:

Yosef, Leader of the Scavengers.

Valorii, Currently MIA.

You are the Fourth Wave, a Research Team that got blown out of the sky supposedly, now you're stranded on a planet surrounded by Scavengers lead by a Rogue Agent whom does not take too kindly to you or your masters.

Trained Agents will be relatives to tiers: Research, Evacuation and Combat (et cetera) relates to their tiers. Only Yosef and Valorii are listed to be Tier 5. Others i.e. Julia, Abbie, Lucky and all are tiered below 5.



Who is Yosef?

Yosef was part of the *third* wave of Agents, him along side his team were refused extraction and therefore abandoned on Eden-227, beyond that there are numerous ECHO locations that roughly detail the story:

Valley Echo: Yosef can be seen aiding a *Guard Scavenger*, only to be shot by two (of his presumably teammates) unknown characters standing a good distance behind them.



Tower Echo: Yosef can be seen hanging 2 unknown individuals off of the side of the Tower structure. The whereabouts of their corpses are currently unknown.

Crash Site Echo: Yosef can be seen along 2 teammates, 1 Valorii, the other unknown.

They are seen to be executing anyone whom were on there at that time: as well as capturing an unknown container / *energy cell*? This would likely be a parting gift between



the group, although is highly ambiguous.

A Tier 5 (5th Pledge) Agent before his Betrayal of Agency, easily describable as Russian with a fondness for Machine guns. His main partner was Valorii (Summers?) another 5th tier Agent whom commonly preferred using a Karambit and AJM 9 during operations. Certain echos will show Valorii, i.e. Outpost, Safe Zone and Crash Site.

Valorii thinks his skull bandana (which was a souvenir) is stupid and mocks him for it. Both of which are still assumingly stranded on Eden-227.



Who are the Scavengers?

Once the sun stopped affecting Eden 227, The First / Second wave of Agents would evacuate all possible civilians. This would obviously exclude the *less kind* group of people, looters, bandits, criminals... They would be referred to as Scavengers by the outside.

A free use resource, all at Yosef's whim.

The scavs are residents or people who came to eden-227 during or after the collapse, they chose to stay behind despite all the evacuation and are in it for pillaging and looting, mostly comprising of criminals, corrupt people and less nice people but there are a wide variety of scavs.

Scavs might often infight, they're not actually an organised group, they are literally just scavengers in a dog eat dog world. A solid few of them are organised or vaguely teamed for a similar goal, but they're just living.



Who are the Raiders?

Beyond Decaying Winter, the only Raider Presence was UMG / SOF, where the infamous Raider "Rayzen" was initially a distinguished contestant from the SOF Game Show whom came back as a Raider to Ulacylon.

After a while, "Raiders" occupied the fairly open Castle, after Reikgon had wiped out anyone whom had originally settled down there in an old ECHO playback that was

locatable in the compound, now Sledge Queen and her followers reside in a more



fortified version of Blackrock Castle.

- Eliminating Sledge Queen will revoke their presence entirely, making the area available for high tier loot scavenging.



This pocket of Raiders are actually *ex-raiders*, having branched out of their main group with a lot of powerful equipment: They hold up a challenging stronghold in the Castle with powerful Modern Firearms and the first enemy type to utilise bulletproof shields. Ideally the Raider's Presence in Decaying Winter is to feature a difficult Raid Boss character: Sledge Queen.

Sledge Queen is:

A Former Fireman (Which qualifies them being a Raider, albeit a former raider.)
NOT an Agent, despite their use of the AGENT Device for:

Equipment Management, Resource Usage (i.e. constructing a powerful Knuckleboom Device), Immunity to the Safe-Area Turrets.

It's worth noting that the Civilian Grade "Omicron" container is referred to as Agent Container "Zero", it is not at all related to the name of an Agent. There is no Agent "Zero".

Sledge Queen is the only "Ultima" hostile to be improved heavily as well as committed to in the base game, rather their own Holdout enemy.

Sledge Queen in ULTIMA

Sledge Queen in The Last Stranded



Who are the ERU?

Mostly a cleanup squad, Eden Restoration Unit, mostly a Paramilitary Company. They are specifically deployed to wipe out scavengers and any living life on Eden 227. The Agency shouldn't be on Eden 227 but kinda have to be. (so are considered hostile.) They were planned to be a lot more involved with the wave 10-20 endgame document, however never made it beyond ERU Scouts. They can be found in the Freedom Fighter wave in Holdout.

Theory:

It's possible that the ERU are based on The Division's "Cleaners", however less pyromaniac and considerably as genocidal.

The Cleaners' goal is to burn away the virus as much as possible, whether it's burning civilians alive or burning down buildings. They established a headquarters which also functioned as a Napalm Production Facility, which ingame also featured a shared theme, "Ferro" by Ola Strandh. (It plays at Decaying Winter wave 10)

Your goal would be to destroy the facility, though this wouldn't stop remnants of the cleaners from patrolling the city as usual.

As Red said the ERU are a clean up squad, they have a heavy amount of transportation tech amok other things, the End Game document (which is unavailable) had plans on having the ERU control alot of the map, meaning you had to manage to pull down a force field and expect heavy enemy resistance...

The ERU would also frequently invade but since they weren't added, scouts are only found in Holdout, though they could've been added around as.. Well.. Scouts.

Assumingly they may be too aggressive for this though, especially with other Scavengers around which may result in them eliminating alot of the regular playstyle. Being hard to implement the ERU are primarily cut content that gets featured during Holdout, as with most Wave Ultima enemies (which can be found on trello under sources) during the Freedom Fighters boss wave, which makes sense as these guys look ALOT like Division Agents.



Other noteworthy things:

Why does the map take place in Crossroads?

(Division Tangent)

DW was going to be alot closer to Tom Clancy's: The Division (1), a snowy hellscape in the city of New York, a massive large open map with the night timer being as long as ten minutes.

Red does not like making maps (it hurts their bones.) so they settled with a winter



hellscape Crossroads.

There were also originally plans like 10 + pledged players invading random games to mess with other players, but otherwise not alot of rogue agents carrying over.

Additionally, the reason why Food buffs you (as opposed to dying due to not eating / drinking) is due to the fact The Division would buff you, but you never needed to eat or drink.

The Hidden in SOF was named Polter. This character does not recur into Decaying Winter, and the shadows Reikgon make are not related.

You can thank a group of people named "The Artisans" for maintaining weaponry and such from Old Earth to be usable. They are often recognised by their use of the artisan spear.

Decaying Winter: Tales from Eden-227.

u/speedofdeath118 homebrew lore. (not official canon)

Hidden

"Alright, so I knew this girl..."

"Was she hot?"

"No."

"Damn..."

This girl was hands-down the most insane person I've ever seen. Properly mindbroken. She was on vodka, like, 100% of the time.

Now, what she would do is load up with this massive tactical rig and backpack, and go out into the wastes. She took an AK-74 with really cheap ammo, but she had tons and tons of it. She called it "hunting" but she'd never come back with anything.

Once, I tagged along with her. We went out into the middle of nowhere. Never said a word the whole journey there.

Suddenly she yelled, "I HEAR YOU!" in the loudest voice ever and sprayed half a mag into thin air - bababababang! Then she whirled around and sprayed the rest straight behind her - bababababang! Then she stared at me and said:

"Didn't you hear that?!"

I didn't hear shit. Looked like she was spraying at nothing, and I've killed my fair share of Hidden. She changed mags and continued stalking outwards into the wasteland, occasionally pulling out a bottle of vodka and taking a swig.

And every so often she would loose off another long spray into the aether. It was like she had an endless supply of magazines - it was those quadstacked 60-round mags. A few times she nearly hit me.

At the end we got to her house, and I was staring in disbelief at that point. As we went through the doorway, she tossed her rifle on the ground, kissed me on the mouth, and slammed the door in my face - all without saying a word."

"... holy shit."

"It was like she was going out hunting for Hidden, but we never saw one of them, let alone killed one. I don't know why she was doing that, or why she was so crazy in the first place. But all I know is... I'm never going out with her again. Crazy bitch..."

The Bucket Man

"You ever heard of the Bucket Man?"

"The who?"

"The Bucket Man.

Look, there was a guy I heard this story from. You know those crazy dudes who go up against the Agents with basically nothing but a hockey mask and a karambit?"

"Yeah, those guys are super fast."

"Yeah. Well, there was another guy, people don't know if he exists or not. He goes in with nothing but a loincloth, a bucket on his head, and a frying pan. Alone. He's completely exposed to the elements, but the cold doesn't even bother him one bit."

"Wait... a bucket? On his head?"

"Yeah, it covers the whole thing, he can't see shit. But the guy who told me this... well, he was planning an assault on an Agency position. This guy walks out of the Storm, and simply says "let me solo them". He doesn't say anything else. Everyone's stunned silent, so the bucket guy simply charges into the Agency base."

"And... what happened?"

"It was unbelievable, man. First the enemy Riskrunner opened up on him, but the Bucket guy somehow dodged the whole bulletstorm, ducking and weaving, until he got up close and smashed the guy's head in. Vagabond had a go at him, but he parried the katana... with the fucking frying pan. Vagabond gets smacked out, bleeding from the head, and the other Agents pile in, but this bucket guy keeps dodging bullets and tackling them like no one had ever seen before.

All of it while still having that bucket on his head.

In the end, he walks out without a scratch, and all of the Agents had their heads caved in, like a gorilla had gotten to them. And what's more... he didn't take a single thing, not even the MREs or water bottles. He simply gestured to the other Scavs to help themselves, and disappeared into the Storm once more, like a Hidden."

"... holy shit."

Director

"Look around you, Director. Don't you realize what's going on?"

I saw the recording of you meeting with the officials so long ago. I saw how you smiled brightly, shook hands earnestly while your photos were taken. And I see now how you still labor just as earnestly as then, trying to find solutions to problems in your little operation on Eden-227.

Don't you see?

This star system is a place of **exile**. There are no solutions to be found here. You preside over the deaths of thousands - not just your Agents, but the Scavs too. They have no plans for aggression - they would be peaceful in the grand scheme of things without the Agency rolling in.

And what is your goal here? Is it the same as it was - to retake the planet? You do not have the resources to take back this place, let alone hold it against insurgencies and the Shadows. You know this. I know this. Your superiors know this, even some of your subordinates can tell.

Not a day goes by without me questioning my allegiances. I could simply never leave a dead drop again, and live out my life in the Scav villages. Maybe even lead a Clan and live in luxury. But I don't - because it wouldn't be the right thing to do, to betray your own organization. And I know that you won't resign, either, not while there are problems to be solved.

That's the problem with us, isn't it? We run on emotions. A logical man would have resigned or went AWOL by now.

Perhaps you could do with being a little more logical. I feel I cannot - because without me, the Agency would be completely blind to the reality of the situation on the ground. But you? Resigning would be as simple as writing a letter, which the Agency would be glad to accept - after all, they're trying to get you to resign by sending you here. You're rich enough to live a fairly decent life somewhere else. Maybe even try having a relationship, I hear they're nice.

But if you're as stubborn as I think you are, then so be it. The dead drops will continue, so don't worry about that. Here's a tip - read less documents, it makes this all less personal. Just delegate them to the appropriate person. Now go, and find solutions to problems that have no solutions."

The preceding voice recording was left by means of a dead drop point, and was retrieved by an Agency team who sent it back before continuing with their regular mission. It was signed only by a pseudonym - "The Informant".

Sickler

"Nice guitar song."

"Thanks. You don't know how difficult it is to get an acoustic guitar out here. They have to be shipped in from off-world."

"Heh, heh. Hey, how about a fireside story? I got one for you - the Sickler Farm."

"Sure, why not."

"Alright, so I heard this from a veteran. He was properly rich - armored head-to-toe in off-worlder gear, and he had an AKM loaded with the best armor-piercing 7.62x39mm cartridges in the solar system. Anyway, he worked as a freelancer for some guy. That guy was also rich - he sold anomaly parts off-world. The money he made went to supplies, ammo, weapons, stuff like that. You name it - he could get it.

Now, his private compound was set up near this old borehole, from the pre-Collapse days. Really, really deep. The veteran was posted next to said borehole - and it was fortified beyond belief. As well as regular heavy machine guns, the guy had Agency equipment and men trained to handle it. Riskrunner machine guns, Immolator flamethrowers, Zealot barriers, that kind of thing. They called it "The Wall".

Every so often, the guys would set up a massive loudspeaker and blast insanely loud stuff into the borehole. Not just music, but "human" sounds as well - footsteps, babies crying, people talking and shouting.

And a horde of Sicklers would come out screaming.

Obviously, they didn't stand a chance against The Wall's firepower. While a lot of them were simply cut down, the man had a bunch of guys on double pay, with stun rods. They'd target a Sickler and

bring it in, prodding it like cattle into a metal cage. The client would send a cargo helicopter when the wind blew over, and carry the huge cage back into his compound.

That was how he did it - every so often, off-worlder ships would come down and buy Sickler parts from him. They might even buy a live one for a huge price. He was making bank out there."

"Holy crap. Sounds like a guy who has his work set out for him."

"Yeah. The veteran actually told me where that guy was set up, and he pays pretty well too. You wanna go see if he's hiring?"

"Sure, why not."

Hanger

"Hey, you ever heard the story of the Pet Hanger?"

"... what the hell?"

"I'm serious, man. I worked security for someone a while back - a leader of a small Clan of Scavs. She had this fortified base compound and everything - she'd even got anti-air guns to prevent drop pod landings. This woman, she was either super paranoid or preparing for something really bad."

"And, uh... what does this have to do with a pet Hanger?"

"I'm getting to that bit. Right in the center of the compound is your regular buildings - barracks, commander's HQ, canteen, main armory, etcetera. But there was also another building - a containment facility. Not a jail for holding prisoners - containment. When I first saw inside it, I was freaked.

She was keeping a Hanger... as a pet.

I was about to throw in the towel right there, but the commander herself stopped me. Said the Hanger was tame - it didn't try to make people kill themselves any more. She'd had the thing for ages and ages - everyone else vouched for the Hanger. So I stayed around - the pay was good, too, she paid us in bullets. It was 5.45x39mm 7N22 - armour-piercing ammo, really rare stuff."

"Wow..."

"Now, here's the weird bit. One day, I was stationed to be inside the containment building. The building itself was just a shell, it was effectively just one giant room. And in that room was a big metal cage... and inside that, the Hanger itself. Now, I was freaked to be in the same building as it, but I was getting paid double so I went anyway. And after a while of sitting there, keeping an eye on her, a thought popped into my head:

"You don't have to be afraid of me."

It was talking to me - like telepathy or some shit. Fuckin' weird, man. And it didn't say nothing else after that, even as I was staring in disbelief. Shift was over a bit later, and I was glad to be out of there."

"Holy crap, man. So... why'd she keep it?"

"The commander? Well... she seemed awfully attached to it. Hell, she wouldn't call the Hanger "it" - she always referred to it as "her", like it was a person. Actually, now that I think about it..."

"What?"

"The guys there, they said that the commander was the mother of a little girl - "Lucy". She died in the Collapse - The Infection got her. And the commander named the Hanger "Lucy" as well, she always called her that. So..."

We thought the commander believed the Hanger was her daughter."

Infection

"Ah, the Infection. The bane of Agents all over this planet. However, it's surprising how much the Agency *doesn't* know about it. Well, to be fair, even the Scavs don't know - for them, it just appeared in the middle of the Collapse.

Well, let's start, then.

It's everywhere in the air, gets everywhere. Lives for a very long time on all surfaces, highly resistant to most antibiotics. Those will delay its effects, but not regress or cure it. Not only that, but

there are other chemicals and effects in the atmosphere that aggravate it, that don't mix well. The Storm and The Infection is a very, very lethal mix, as many of your rookies have seen.

Suffice to say that everything on the surface of Eden-227 is contaminated, and every person on Eden-227 is carrying it. If you're infected, it's a one-way street - all the Agents you have deployed to the surface are dead men walking. But you knew at least this much when you approved the Fourth Wave.

There is only one silver lining to all this.

The Scav settlements know of a cure and/or vaccination for the Infection. Once you take it, the Infection is destroyed, and you are rendered resistant to it from then on - while your body carries it, it cannot harm you. That also means the Storm has no effect on you, so you can live out in the countryside forever - assuming you have the relevant supplies, of course.

The trick, however, is three-fold. First, it includes anomalous components, things taken from the local Shadows. It's why your analysis of Scav corpses has yielded little results. Second, those ingredients mean that it can only be produced here. And third... only a certain few Scav specialists, living in the heavily-defended towns and villages, know how to make it.

Actually, make that four-fold. The Scavs themselves don't know how it works, they just know that it does work and has few side effects. It's like one of those old wives' cures - except that they depend on it to survive.

I suppose that leaves you a difficult predicament, doesn't it? You could continue expending soldiers as you do now - I trust you have an endgame strategy, no matter the human cost. Or you could attack one of the Scav villages and capture a specialist - except that the Scavs will rally against you in huge numbers, and the specialists are probably trained against interrogation. They could give you all manner of fake information to watch your troops suffer and die in unimaginable agony.

The position you have is not one I envy. Then again, my position is hardly comfortable either. That is all, signing off."

The preceding voice recording was left by means of a dead drop point, and was retrieved by an Agency team who sent it back before continuing with their regular mission. It was signed only by a pseudonym - "The Informant".

Yosef

"Main room clear!"

"Locker room clear. All hostiles down - wait, one crawling, gimme a second."

...

"All hostiles down."

"Alright, good, that about wraps it up. You, get some bandages on that wound. And you, stitch that cut up, have a Zagustin. Everyone else, get as much as you can onto the snowmobile sledges - we're getting out of here."

"Damn katana. That thing's sharp."

"Mm. It's no regular blade - it's monomolecular. Needs a lot of maintenance to keep up, though."

"Huh, nice. How'd you know that, anyway?"

"You're the new guy, right? I'm ex-Agency. Knew those things like the back of my hand."

"Woah - ow, fuck, I hate needles. Hey, why'd you turn?"

"You really wanna know...? Fine.

I was Third Wave. It was after the geothermals went down, and the Decaying Winter settled - we were meant to make a big push to take back this planet, restore order and all that crap. It was poorly planned, but we had good gear - wasn't enough, though.

I was a squad leader - Riskrunner class - for a bunch of rookies. Since I had a lot of field experience, I was in charge, but the bandits got all of them after a while. When the Agency pulled back, they had to make sacrifices, since their resources were running a little thin.

I was one of those sacrifices. No dropship came for me - it would be a waste to send one out for just a single man. They slapped me with a laundry list of trumped-up charges too, to ensure that no Agent would try and help me. I was on my own.

So I struck out, fended for myself. Found a doctor, far out in a Scav town, who could cure the Infection - traded my Vulka-MG for it. That meant I could stay in the contaminated zones without a respirator.

When the Fourth Wave dropped in, I tried to reach out to one squad of them - but then they started shooting on sight. I'd found an M60 before then - had to take them all out. After that - fuck the Agency, man. They threw me away like trash - they want me to be the bad guy? Alright, I'll play that game.

So, I got my gang together, and got them the best gear I could - which brings us to today. Finished stitching yourself up?"

"... wow, man. Oh, uh, yeah, I'm done."

"Good, now stop gawping. The sledges are loaded up - let's RTB, we're going home."

"Roger that."

Collapse

"How the hell did you find me?"

Even when I'm in full body armor and masked, you people can track me down. Guess that's the power of technology, huh? I'll make you a trade, then - I tell you my story, and you fuck off and never bother me again. Deal? Good.

...

Before the Collapse, I was a combat medic in the Planetary Defense Force, serving under the local governor. We hadn't seen action in decades, mind - but we were enough to make people think they were protected.

But the threat didn't come from above, in orbital bombardments and dropships raining from the sky. No... it was on the surface of the planet.

The "Shadows", as they're called. They just suddenly appeared all over the planet, for seemingly no reason at all. Anomalous bastards - I say that because they don't seem to work like how *reality* should work. At least they die when shot enough.

The world went crazy. Anarchy reigned. People started looting, the initial form of the Scavs that you see today. Others started killing themselves - and not all of them were due to Hanger influence. Paranoia exploded, too - when a seemingly normal guy can suddenly turn into a hyper-lethal monster, murder and fratricide rose sharply even among the PDF and law enforcement.

And then the terraforming machines went offline. Sabotage, looting, even simply running out of power. The world didn't go uninhabitable, thank god - but it's why it's winter all year round.

That was the Collapse. It wasn't just the monsters themselves that did us in - it was panic. My family were all shot by a mad gunman with an AK - I buried them myself. Authority fell apart... but then the newly-formed Clans stepped in and tried to do *something* about it.

I was one of the first guys to realize what was happening. I grabbed my PDF body armor, loaded up on ammo and supplies, and left my home city as fast as I could. Some other guys did the same - one of my friends is the head of a major Clan, out west of here.

Though... there is one good thing about all this - the offworld market for anomalies. The corpses of Shadows themselves, or bits cut off them. Samples of the Storm are hard to contain, but that just makes them all the more valuable. "Shadowed" objects - things that have been tainted by the Shadows, that don't act as they should. All of them are big business - do you ever wonder why we Scavs haven't run out of food or ammo after all this time?

Which brings me to a new question - why the hell are **YOU** here? Why hasn't the government glassed this godforsaken planet from orbit?

The government wants their hands on the supply of anomalies. They want absolute control of it - not having to acquire it through the black market. That's why they deployed you, and the other waves of Agents.

Don't you see? You're just pawns in a game. A scout team. They want to see the reality of the situation down here, even if you die in the process. That's why I've already disrupted your bodycam feed to your command.

Now get out of here, for real - unless you want to desert and become a Scav like me. Better than dying out there to the marauders."

Scav

"Alright... this thing on? Okay.

Well, I just had a weird little encounter. You know how the story usually works - we Agents go out, look for stuff, and come back. The Storm rolls in, we fight Scavs who come out, then catch some sleep while one of us keeps watch. Same thing happening every day.

Except for that one time.

Now, it was pretty far into the mission. We had an MP5 and a military machete along with a few other guns and hand-to-hand weapons. Out of the storm walks this guy, alone, and he was absolutely loaded. Full body armor and a gas mask, with a tricked out AKM and a military axe on his hip. No doubt he could have dropped one or two of us before we got him.

But he's the guy that says "whoa, whoa. No need for violence, lads - I just need a place to stay for the night." He pulled off his gas mask, let his AKM down onto the sling strap, and sat himself down next to our fire. Turns out, he was a nice, talkative guy. Filled us in on the state of Eden-227 - stuff that the Agency didn't tell us.

He said he was a Loner - the term for Scavs that live alone and just wander from place to place, but "there weren't many of him any more". Turns out, when the Collapse happened, he lost his whole family. Chose not to leave on the evac transports - after all, who would take care of his family's gravestones? He goes there every year, on the anniversary of the Collapse. Every year, the Scavs celebrate the birth of the New World - it's forbidden to kill on that day, lest you become an outcast among outcasts.

Scav gangs were roaming everywhere after the transports left. Everyone scrambled for weapons, cutting each others' throats when a particularly good gun was on the line. Thousands more people died, and the survivors picked through their remains, too.

You've got all the trappings of a scavenger world here - apparently, the Agency doesn't really know anything about what's happening down here. They've built their own societies here - bandit clans, some more civilised villages and towns, but nothing bigger than that, really. Some Scavs that you find in the villages are nice people, but there's a lot more violent guys than them. Not to mention the "Shadows", as the Scavs call them. Those monsters all over this planet, knocking off guys that get careless. The Scavs don't know where they came from, either, just that they appeared in the Collapse.

After he finished telling his story, he opened his backpack, and brought out this glass bottle - it was bourbon whisky, a rarity in this shithole of a planet. We toasted to our continued survival, and bedded down for the night.

When we woke up, the Storm was just fading, but the Scav was gone. The only sign that he'd ever been here was an MRE on the floor, and a note simply saying "thanks".

We never did catch his name."

Skinner

"Pass the can opener. The tab broke off this one."

...

"Thanks, man. Hey, I heard a story a while back, wanna hear it?"

"Sure, go ahead."

"Alright, so this guy was a veteran Scout for one of the Scav Clans. The guys that go in first, alone, to investigate an area before the salvage teams get there.

Now, as he was out there, he saw an unusual sight. Three Skinners, all sitting around a campfire. He'd pulled one of those goggles off an Agent and modified them, so he could tell they were Skinners.

But he was watching real intently. Three Skinners, in the same place and time, sitting around a campfire? And when he got closer, he swore he could hear them *talking*."

"What, to each other?"

"Yeah. It was like they were trying to learn or imitate human behavior, with no understanding of what they actually mean."

"Wow, that's freaky. You think the Shadows have some kind of intelligence?"

"Hangers do, I'm pretty sure. They can talk using their minds and make people cut their own throats. But the rest of them, I don't think so. They're just animals."

Sledge Queen

"Hey, man. Mind if I take a seat?"

"Not at all. Here, have a can of beans."

"Thanks. Hey, you heard of the Sledge Queen?"

"Nah, man. Who's she?"

"A Scav Clan leader.

Back in the Collapse, a lady officer in the Planetary Defence Force gathered as much gear and manpower she could, and vanished into the countryside as the world turned cold. She and her gang emerged later as a major Scav Clan, christening herself the Sledge Queen. Even so... they remained hella reclusive. Didn't add many to their numbers - and they were very

exclusive, too. The clan's almost entirely made of specialists - all technicians, scientists, and soldiers. Every single one is upper crust at what they do.

Now, everyone and their dog has heard of Yosef's clan, right? The legendary Agent Hunters. They made an agreement with the other clans that they had dibs on everywhere the Agency deployed their guys. Looks like the Sledge Queen has sent her own forces to mess with the Agents, too - led by her proxies and lieutenants."

"Whoa. You don't mean...?"

"Yeah. Two major Scav Clans are at war. Hell, I even heard of gunfights in the Scav villages. This shit is history in the making - no precedent at all."

"Wow. Guess this was a bad time to join up with Yosef's lot, then."

"Indeed."

"Huh? What do you mean...?"

click

"You see, I work for the Sledge Queen."

BLAM BLAM!

Shirose

"The lieutenant isn't happy today, it seems."

"The Long Winter does that to you. To everyone. She's... way different from when I first met her. A lot more snappy, a little cabin fever maybe. She doesn't like being cooped up in the compound while her clones are out in the field with the boss's clones."

"Guess so. You were in the squad that found her?"

"Sure was. Take a seat, and I'll tell.

Yosef - I mean the real one, not a clone - was going out on a low-risk scavenging mission. He wanted to keep in touch with the snow and the cold - didn't want to end up like those other Clan leaders that sit on their asses and get fat.

Anyway, our job was to dig through a dead Agency base. The Loners had taken the Agents there to task, gave them a beating and moved on. We were going to dig through the remains and toss it onto our snowmobile to take home.

And then we saw her.

She was out cold, and had bled a hell of a lot - but the bleeding had stopped, she'd live. Even so, the medic's prognosis was bad - either the Infection would get her, or plain old exposure would do it. She wouldn't last very long like this.

We considered whether to execute her or not - she was an Agent after all. Aren't we the Agent Hunters? But Yosef simply said, "It is below us to murder someone so close to death already."

So we loaded her onto the snowmobile, and when the storm lifted we were off back to base. Our in-house specialist cooked up a dose of the Cure and healed her up.

When she woke up, Yosef was sitting next to her, thinking. Now... well, I wasn't there, but the story goes that Shirose drew the Impusca Vana on him - he grabbed the barrel like lightning and the bullet went through a wall. One short fistfight later and she was restrained by like four guys.

It took a little convincing, but eventually we got her to stop struggling at least. Yosef said she was quite safe in there - then dropped the bomb. The Agency had disavowed her, too - just like they had with Yosef. She was "compromised", no going back.

And after a while, Yosef trusted her enough to take her out on another low-risk scavenging mission... and the rest is history."

Compound

"Well, lucky me. Attached to this message are co-ordinates to a compound used by Yosef's Agent Hunters.

A compound, mind - not *the* compound. There is no real home base - he shifts between them every so often to avoid being assassinated.

Time for the threat assessment, then. I'll summarise it here, with the detailed one attached too.

Large number of armed hostiles. Small arms ranges from pistols to assault rifles and general-purpose machine guns, with anti-armour weaponry included. Shock troopers using sledgehammers and other melee weapons are also present. The inner guard has access to the latest armaments from off-world - energy-based and magnetic weapons. In addition, multiple watchtowers containing snipers.

Multiple walls of varying materials - chain-link fences and concrete walls, all topped with barbed and razor wire.

Heavy machine gun emplacements are mounted, pointed at defensive chokepoints. Anti-air guns and SAM batteries in the middle, as well as hidden around this area. Mortars in the centre as fire support.

And the centrepiece - an anti-starship railgun, with detection systems accomodating it.

This all in addition to regular patrols, usually on snowmobiles. An airfield at the centre of the base can also provide close air support.

This is serious firepower - and in just one base. The AA systems render the use of dropships nonviable. The anti-starship railgun makes planetary bombardment not an option either, as additional fire will come in from compounds we have not yet pinpointed. The choice is between an armoured assault using tanks, or an insertion of shock troopers using drop pods. Both will likely come with huge casualties.

But, if you wish to eliminate Yosef for certain, we must find all of these compounds... and destroy every single one."

The preceding voice recording was left by means of a dead drop point, and was retrieved by an Agency team who sent it back before continuing with their regular mission. It was signed only by a pseudonym - "The Informant".

Truce

"Alina... or should I say, Sledge Queen. Nice to see you."

"And you, darling. It's been so long since the last time we met - and you haven't changed a bit."

"Uh, Yosef? Why's she calling you "darling"?"

"We had a thing a few years back. Ancient history."

"Oh, history? To me, it seems like just days ago. And who's the sweet piece you've brought me? Oh, she's adorable."

"A-adorable?! Hey, keep your hands off me!"

"Oh, relax, honey bunny. Just messing. Darling, how about I keep your honey bunny for a week, and we can call it even, hm? I'll take good care of her..."

"Stop harassing my lieutenant, Alina."

"Ah, fine. It was worth a shot. Well, I tire of messing with the Agents, too - you can have them. Just tell your men to stop shooting my anomaly dealers in the towns - we're both hurting each others' businesses."

"Hmph, sounds okay to me. You stay out of the way of my men, and I'll stay out of the way of yours."

"I will... unless you ask me to "get in your way", you know? Haha... see you, darling. And you, honey bunny. If you call and ask nicely, maybe you can stay over for a while..."

...

"Urgh, she gives me the creeps."

"I know, Shirose. Honestly... it's the same on my end."

Morale

"When you train with a squad for, say, six months, you develop a special kind of bond with them. The kind that makes you into a well-oiled machine, a band of brothers. You laugh together, cry together, drink together. Fight the enemy together. And every single one of you is prepared to die for one another.

On this planet, you *will* die for each other.

But you'll take turns.

When the first friend goes down, you begin to question yourself. Could you have done better? Could you have saved his life? Was it a mistake that you made earlier that doomed him? All of these will be bouncing around your head in the first few minutes.

After that comes the second realisation.

He died for you. His life, for your life.

Is your life worth sacrificing someone's for?

And you don't know. You'll never know. But the sacrifice was made all the same. And you don't know if your life is worth his life.

When the second one goes down, the same questions will bounce around your head. Except in a different tone - because now you're thinking that one's a coincidence, two's a trend. And

you're a constant. So... is it your fault? The "you" in the question begins pointing towards yourself, rather than to the squad as a whole. Are you dragging the team down? Is it your fault that both those men, those friends, died? Is your life worth the lives of those two?

You don't know. You'll **never** know.

And then the third goes down, ripped to death by the bare hands of the cultists. The screams, the cries of terror, are still echoing.

Then the fourth - he stares at you in terror as he plunges his knife into his own neck, the blood spraying from his arteries and staining the snow red.

And then it's just you, on your own, surrounded by corpses and blood and rot and death.

And you still don't know if your life is worth all of those lives that sacrificed themselves for you.

And then the monsters come for you."

ERU

"Did you ever hear the legend of the Eden Restoration Unit?"

"No... go ahead. Here's a can of beans - a tip, you know, for the story."

"Cheers.

So, in the early days of the Collapse, there was a unit. The ERU - a PMC based here that sorta went completely nuts. Like, suicidally pro-environmental nuts. We don't know why - maybe it was part of the Collapse, or a sort of collective madness had befallen them.

They put out a statement - that the world was defiled and deformed. The hands of man had twisted this place into an abomination against the gods - and it had fallen to them to "restore" Eden to its true state.

That the "true state" of Eden-227 was a barren, cold, lifeless rock was not mentioned, but they didn't give a shit.

The Collapse had already started the Long Winter by destroying many of the "planet-heaters" - big facilities that kept the planet terraformed enough to be habitable. The ERU took it upon themselves to destroy the rest of them, and render this place completely uninhabitable. Now you get what I mean by "suicidal", see?

So, they go out and wreck shit. The ERU dudes are trained - regular Loner Scavs like us get torn to bits by them. Clan Scavs fare better, since they're heavily equipped and trained - they're probably like their equals. I hear even some Agents got in scraps with them - early Fourth Wave.

The Clans took over security of the planet-heaters, to slow the ERU rampage. And it did - we were trading casualties, roughly man-to-man with them.

Eventually, one of the Clans got a spy into their command structure, and all was revealed. Turns out, the ERU was operating out of a single, massive compound. Fortified to hell - pretty much no one could crack it open... from the ground, at least.

The Clans quietly leaked the position of the ERU compound to the Agency, with a promise not to fire on Agency vessels within a certain window. For "mutual benefit".

An Agency cruiser came into orbit, and all was promptly resolved."

Rumour

"I have heard of a rumour spreading through Eden-227 recently, in the circles of the Agent Hunters and the Sledgers. Though it is unsubstantiated intel, I felt that it should be passed on.

It is that the real Yosef is dead or incapacitated, and Shirose is currently leader of the Agent Hunters.

The rumour appears in various forms. Some say that Yosef died in an accident, or that he was assassinated, possibly by Shirose herself. Others say that Yosef remains alive - that, like an emperor and shogun system, he is a mere figurehead while Shirose makes the major decisions.

Some variants of the story talk of whether this is voluntary or not. It is possible that Yosef simply wished to step back from leadership, and allowed Shirose to control his organisation-slash-country. Some others suggest that Shirose created a subtle, long-term mind control device - like our Mindflayers' "Headcrabs", but implanted in the subject's brain - and controls Yosef using that.

It may even be that none of this is true at all, and nothing has actually happened.

Whatever the case, I suggest that Shirose be made a prime assassination target of equal importance to Yosef."

The preceding voice recording was left by means of a dead drop point, and was retrieved by an Agency team who sent it back before continuing with their regular mission. It was signed only by a pseudonym - "The Informant".

Cult

"The cults are getting braver.

Armed cultist forces have been sighted on the move - lashing out at everyone, whether they're Scavs, Clan members, or even Agents. They're armed, aggressive, and highly dangerous.

They have roots at the beginning of the Collapse. After all, when things that can't be explained start turning up, a sizable chunk of the population will begin worshipping it. It was the same here - cults for the "Great Dark" cropped up all over the planet.

These individual cults have begun merging and marking out their own territory. No-go areas for Scav patrols - even heavily armed Clan squads. They say it's because some of them have... "magic powers". Channelling the Dark or something - making them immune or resistant to bullets. That, and they're in large numbers and have built their own weapons.

They are to be considered hostile, and will attack on sight.

...

Haha... oh, Director. More problems are cropping up day by day. You didn't even have solutions to the problems you already had, and now you have more on your plate. What with the Sledgers and the cultists - I wouldn't be surprised if the Eden Question isn't solved within our lifetimes... or ever. This planet simply doesn't want to be held, does it?

But you're still too stubborn - or dedicated, perhaps - to recognise that. Oh well."

The preceding voice recording was left by means of a dead drop point, and was retrieved by an Agency team who sent it back before continuing with their regular mission. It was signed only by a pseudonym - "The Informant".

Ulacylon

"Hello, Director. As if this situation wasn't bad enough already, it appears that corporate interests are now making themselves overtly known - the Ulacylon Mega Group has deployed their own private forces to Eden-227.

In case you've been living under a rock, they're a large conglomerate spanning essentially all industries. The same guys that run the death games on New Earth. The same guys that won the Rheinland War and the Skirmish over Lupina-981. The same guys that instigated the Monet Incident and got what they wanted out of it, unlike everyone else. They're so big that they can essentially flout the law as long as it remains relatively contained - because outright war is bad business.

Hence why their troops have forced their way through our orbital blockade and have established a base of operations on this godforsaken rock. Bloody brilliant - now we have a political dimension to this whole mess! Like we didn't have enough to deal with already!

...

I... apologise for my loss of temper. I suppose I should keep some pretence of professionalism on this record, even as it all goes to hell.

Anyway... their forces remains relatively small in number for now, though they are all highly-trained elites. They haven't caused much trouble... yet. However, since the law here is "might makes right", they will freely engage our own Agents in combat, which is where the political dimension comes in.

We can't really do anything big to them, or they'll officially begin hostilities against us, other megacorporations will wade in, and it's the Intercorporate War all over again - and that would cripple absolutely everyone for decades. The only way we could avert that would be to crush their forces here quickly, and we can't do that while the Scavs are present in such large numbers. Nor do they seem to be willing to negotiate some kind of alliance - they're wild cards out for themselves. Probably here to exploit the "local resources" - the Shadows, or the Reikgon, or whatever they're called.

Therefore, we just have to treat them as another occasional enemy faction, rare as they may be. Like we didn't have enough enemies on this planet as it is.

With every day that passes, the Eden Question looks more and more... intractable."

The preceding voice recording was left by means of a dead drop point, and was retrieved by an Agency team who sent it back before continuing with their regular mission. It was signed only by a pseudonym - "The Informant".

Reminisce

"Thanks for taking me out to dinner, darling. Even on this godforsaken planet, there's fancy restaurants."

"You're welcome. And stop calling me "darling". That romance ended months ago."

"Oh, that was a fun time... really fun. You, me, and our gangs, blasting through everyone who opposed us. Do you remember that anti-ERU crackdown? We kissed as the blood pooled up around our feet..."

"Yeah... I remember. And I also remember I got more kills than you did."

"Shooting a guy that I was about to execute doesn't count as a kill, that's just low."

"Haha, still sore about that? I'm pretty sure I have the bodycam recordings somewhere - I'll send you a copy if I find them."

"Aw, thanks, darling."

...

"God, Alina... what the hell happened to us?"

Freedom Fighters

"The Agency is coming for us! The Scav Clans are coming for us! The cults are coming for us!
We are alone on this planet!

I know what the Agency did to you - what the Clans did. Both of them conspired against you,
and destroyed your home from orbit. The ERU is no more.

But from the ashes, we rise like a phoenix! Weapons formed against us shall not prosper!

We're here for freedom - real freedom. The Agency is tyrannical, the Clans are corrupt, the
cults insane. All of them are plotting to take our liberty, our planet away from us. We are the
people, and this is our planet and ours alone!

Join me, and we will lead the charge forward to a new dawn! We will burn down the old world,
and build a new, freer one for ourselves!

We are the Freedom Fighters!"

Pawns

"Yosef...?"

"Yes, Shirose?"

"Why don't we try talking to them again? The Agents, I mean. They can't all be that bad, right?"

"Well... they're just pawns, ultimately. Enemy pawns - and we have to knock them off. It's what
we do."

"But if they're pawns, can't you turn them to our side? Like me?"

"I took a big enough risk with you. I saw you were dying, couldn't bring myself to shoot you - even if I really should have. For all I know, you could have left after a few months and leaked everything I told you to the Agency - trying to get back in their good books.

Those other guys are the same risk. If we recruited every single Agent we could, one of 'em will eventually have second thoughts - and getting back to the Agency with a lot of knowledge in their head would be really, really bad."

"I... see."

...

"You know, Shirose... I'm not exactly happy with it either. Honestly, I wish the Agency had never thrown me to the dogs in the first place. But that would require them to be a nicer lot.

I kill all these guys because, ultimately, I'm hurting the Agency itself. Because, frankly, I hate them for what they did to me, what they're doing now, and what they will do."

"And... what's that? 'What they will do'."

"A lot of bad things, I guess. First on the list is killing me... and killing you."

"Heh, never knew you cared."

"You're my XO, of course I care. After that - probably killing Alina and the other Scav Clan heads. And then... well. Killing a lot more people - anyone that gets in their way. You know... standard operating procedure for the Agency."

Woman in the Storm

"Sometimes I wonder if I did the right thing.

I know, Yosef saved my life. He was the enemy, and he chose to save me. Gave me sanctuary when my own organisation threw me away to die. I should be grateful, and I am.

But I wonder if I should have rejected his offer - and tried to shoot him again. What would that have done?

Well, I would be dead, for starters. His men would have avenged him - slowly and painfully.

If I succeeded, Yosef would be gone - the Agent Hunters would collapse. But... it would just be a power vacuum that someone would fill eventually. Probably the Sledge Queen. She'd probably take up the job of killing Agents, too. Nothing would really change, would it?

...

But I chose not to shoot him - to join him, instead. Clinging to life... clinging to him for survival. Even if he'd just let me go, I wouldn't have lasted a week. I'd be starved to death, die of some disease from trying to drink snow water, or be lying dead in a ditch after getting ambushed.

I mean, it was the logical thing to do, right?

God, but I'm murdering my former comrades now. I mean, it was just scavenging at first, with Yosef and some other soldiers. After a few sorties, we saw an Agency squad - Yosef decided to attack them. I just watched as the five Agents were effortlessly massacred. They didn't stand a chance.

Then we started to go out to fight, not to scavenge. Agency squads needed knocking off, right? This time they entrusted me with a gun - a Hi-Capa.

First blood.

And after that it was just escalating from there. An SKS, a P90, a customised AKM, and eventually my Impusca Vana and Knuckleboom too. I was one of them.

But who is "them", anyway? Are they murderers or defenders of the planet? Insurgent or freedom fighter? Good or bad? Oh, it's childish to try labelling them - they're firmly in the moral grey, it's their element.

But... God. I killed those Agent guys, so many of them. Tonight, I'm going out again to kill five more people, and probably after a few days, five more again. I was once one of *those* guys - shouldn't I feel some remorse? What if I was in their position?

Maybe I am a murderer. But I can't give it up... right? I'm with them now - the Agent Hunters."

Rogue Agent

"Sometimes I wonder if I'm doing the right thing.

Part of me doesn't know why I kill Agents any more. I tell myself they deserve it - but it isn't them, it's the Agency that deserves it. Is there even a difference?

What's it for, anyway? To fight the Agency is an open-ended answer - it's decent, but not great. Perhaps it's that I don't have any other reason to live, to exist. Killing Agents is my *raison d'être*.

But if that's true, why didn't I kill Shirose?

It was simple. One bullet in the head. That'd be it. But I didn't - I chose to bring her back despite all the risks. I took her under my wing, as my own. Why?

Nothing's simple any more. Actually, nothing was *ever* simple - it's only now that I know how complex it really is.

I know that I have to resist the Agency. 'With great power' and all that. But when it comes down to combat, man to man, it's on a personal level - but I have nothing personal against these people.

Does this even count as resistance? They have millions upon millions of soldiers - after all, they're willing to throw them away five at a time into this hellhole. They *expect* people like me to kill them. Are we just playing into their hands - or do they not even care?

God... I wish there was some way to take the fight to the Agency itself. But what the hell can I do? Assassinate the Emperor, attack Agency HQ, get Ulacylon to start a war? Even assuming I can pull that off, it wouldn't do anything good. It wouldn't get them to leave us alone.

I've got no other options other than to keep doing what I'm doing. Trying to make this planet a better place, taking care of Shirose - she'll probably replace me. Maybe I should get back together with the Sledge Queen... heh, maybe later.

Oh, well. There's nothing I can really change on the grand scale, but maybe I can do something on the small scale - one Agent corpse at a time."

Shot Glass

"Hey, you guys wanna hear the story of the Sledge Queen and the shot glasses?"

"Sure, why not."

"It's a game that she'll play with you, if you ask. Talk to her about the "shot glass game" and she'll play it.

She'll offer you two glasses of vodka. She'll ask you if you smell anything - you won't. And she'll say that there's cyanide there, and simply ask "where is the poison?"

You pick one, you both drink, and you die. Both of them are poisoned, but she's resistant to it."

"So... how would we know about it? How it works?"

"Simple, because I've built up a resistance to cyanide too."

"Holy shit, that's lit. You can have this can of beans, that was a great story."

"Wait, that was the shot glass story? I heard a hell a different one to that."

"Another story? Hell yeah."

"Alright, so the Queen was at some sorta party, with her girlfriend - this was before she had the fling with Yosef, mind. Someone starts up a marksmanship game, where you shoot a shot glass off someone's head.

The Queen being the Queen, she takes him up on it, and her girlfriend volunteers to be the one with the shot glass on her head. But both of them are super drunk. She grabs an SVD, takes aim - BANG! The girl's head is, like, gone. Chunky salsa.

After that, she swore off using guns forever. That's why she goes around with that sledgehammer all the time."

"Oh wow."

"Nah nah, I've heard a way better story than that. Looks like a hell of a lot of Sledge Queen stories have shot glasses in it."

"Huh? What is it?"

"Well, I mean, it was a video I saw once. Sledge Queen's at a bar, just drinking on her own. Already had a fifth of vodka. Now, some guy pulls a knife quietly, starts walking up to her from behind, his mate filming it - but she already knows he's there."

He goes in for a low stab, the Queen grabs his knife arm and clocks him on the jaw. Twists the knife arm around his back, and there's a sickening snap, bones breaking and shit. Dude starts screaming.

Knee to the gut, bam. Then she grabs one of the shot glasses off the table, and... she fuckin' rams it into his eye."

"Woah, shit."

"Yeah... man collapses backwards, he's fuckin' flailing around, covering his face, screaming his lungs out. Bar goes deadly silent. Everyone's staring."

Now, she simply flashes one of those shark-teeth grins, fetches her sledgehammer, and then smashes the guy's head in - chunky salsa. Massive pool of blood, bits of bone everywhere, she's splattered with so much of it. And then she flounces out happily, like a little kid.

And everyone is still dead silent."

"... holy crap."

"I'll find the video at some point, show you guys. It's fuckin' mental, bro."

"Huh... maybe Sledge Queen really is mental."

"That's right. I'd stay well clear of her if I were you. She could kill all of us without even blinking."

Princess

"Happy birthday, darling!"

"Thanks, mom! Hey, I wanna play with the people over there!"

"Over there? But honey... that's the compound's prison."

"Yeah! Uncle Yosef gave me this as a present, he said that you could use it to chop up bad guys! Those are bad guys in there, right? I wanna chop them up!"

"Uncle Yosef gave you... a combat knife?"

"Yeah! Look at all the engravings! So fancy...!"

"Christ, I... er... um..."

"Come on, mom, let's go!"

"Ana, wait...! Oh dear... damn you, Yosef."

...

"Hullo, ma'am. Hey there, Anastasia."

"Stop calling me that! No one calls me that, it's too long."

"Alright, Ana. Yosef sent a message ahead, we've got a guy tied up to a chair now. Duct tape or no duct tape?"

"No duct tape! I wanna hear the sounds!"

"Roger that. Daniel will show you the way to the bad guy. See you later."

"Thank you, Kola! Bye bye!"

...

"Kola?"

"Yes, ma'am?"

"... do you think we're turning her into a sociopath?"

"Well, ma'am, you can't *turn* someone into a sociopath - they're born like that. And... well, she seems to be enjoying it, right? Wow, look at her go. Absolutely no hesitation. I wouldn't worry about it - she is what she is, right?"

"Yeah..."

"Hey, don't look like that, alright? This planet's tough, you need to be tough to live on it. What with all the Shadows, and the other Scav Clans, and the friggin' Agents dropping out of the sky. When you're retired, she's gonna be the Sledge Queen, you know."

...

"She's gonna be a good Sledge Queen, won't she?"

"I..."

Medieval

"Hey, there's a weird new Scav clan I've heard about. Led by two elite guys calling themselves "Emperor" and "Commander"."

"Huh, never heard of them."

"Yeah. They're going around in plate armor and chainmail, with swords and spears and shit. Even Commander has this huge mace - that thing can, like, explode your skull with a good downstroke."

"Wow. And these guys, they don't use guns or anything?"

"Only Emperor does - these two magnum revolvers. The rest are all medieval. I mean, it kinda makes sense. Ammo's pretty rare on this planet, but since they don't use guns, they don't give

a shit. And you've got no chance in melee - their armor's damn good, made of modern stuff. They'll dogpile you and hack you to pieces."

-Perk lore

Knuckleboom

"The idea was always intriguing to me. I've always been partial to wrist- and shoulder-mounted weaponry. That meant that when *they* approached our company to design a wrist-mounted grenade launcher, I agreed.

It couldn't have been any conventional grenade calibre, though. Too much recoil applied to a human arm. We adapted the 12-gauge shotgun calibre instead - it could carry a fairly large explosive slug while not breaking the user's arm in the process. The gunpowder load in the shotshell had to be reduced, though - the recoil was already on the border of injuring the user.

The concept was similar to a few pieces of old media I'd heard of - a kind of colourful anime series about monster hunting, and a video game about blood-drinking robots fighting through hell.

By the way, the Saint Petersburg Declaration of 1868 doesn't count - none of the countries today signed it, since they didn't exist at the time. So it's not a war crime if you use it in combat - and even if it was, who watches the watchmen? This is the Agency we're talking about.

Anyway, enough sidetracking. We initially designed a full bracelet launcher, but reduced it down to a half-bracelet with front and back cuffs. We had it neural-linked to the user - that means it fires when it should, and doesn't fire when it shouldn't. An ND - a negligent discharge - could be disastrous.

Then a second requirement came in. It was to have two firing modes - a close-range and long-range firing mode. That was tricky.

The close-range was simple, since we'd already designed it. However, we had to try an unconventional solution with the 'Longshot', as it was called. The launcher had two barrels - the first, straight-arm firing position used the short-range. The second had the user's arm bent in front of their body, braced with the right hand. In the second barrel, there was a second propellant - essentially a blank cartridge. Both the shotshell and the blank would fire at the same time, propelling the explosive slug faster and further than normal.

We presented the result to the Agency after refining the design, and they were satisfied. Our own scientists dubbed it the Pocket Rocket, but the Agency called it the Knuckleboom instead, which was slightly better.

Several other clients have indicated interest in the Knuckleboom - most notably a young, tough woman with only one eye, calling herself royalty."

Impusca Vana

"The Agency had contracted us to build a hand cannon for their marksmen. Compact, accurate, and powerful enough to reliably kill a man in a single shot. Ammo capacity was no factor.

Excellent. We quickly created a weapon for them.

Though the Impusca Vana looked like a revolver, it was definitely not. Instead of a revolving cylinder containing six bullets, it was instead given a power pack. The weapon fired a single, accurate, high-powered laser pulse, enough to kill most infantry targets in a single shot.

The power pack, though containing only enough 'juice' for a single shot, was easy to recharge. Exposing it to sunlight was enough - a second shot would be ready after a short waiting period. Particularly desperate soldiers could throw it into a fire and retrieve it for an even faster reload,

but it would decrease the service life quite rapidly - not to mention the difficulty in retrieving it anyway.

Results were even better than expected. We put them into production and the Agency quickly snapped up thousands of these armaments, issuing them widely.

However, there was another firing mode. One the Agency didn't ask for in the contract, but was added anyway.

'Overcharge'.

By pressing a covered button in the frame, the Impusca Vana could be set to Overcharge mode. Firing it would not only permanently deplete the power pack, but would mean that it would never fire again.

The resulting laser pulse, however, would reliably penetrate armour all the way up to APC-class. A lucky shot could even penetrate through IFV-class rear or top armour, or (with exceptional shot placement *and* luck) disable the tracks or engine of a tank. In effect, it would turn the Impusca Vana into a single-shot light anti-tank weapon.

However, since it is far more expensive than your typical LAW for the same results, that mode is generally for emergencies only."

Vulka-MG

"The Agency had another contract coming up. They wanted a rechargeable, lightweight squad automatic weapon for their Riskrunners. A crowd control weapon designed for sustained fire.

Obviously, we reused the Impusca Vana concept. A solar-charged power pack feeding into a pulse laser weapon.

The design we produced was a rotary machine gun with six barrels. That would mitigate the issue of heat, spreading the heat across six barrels rather than one - lasers are very hot, you

know. We also added a special stabiliser to it - as it applied a centripetal force to the rotating barrels, the stabiliser enabled it to gain accuracy as it fired.

The requirement for sustained fire only was incorporated into the design. The weapon was unable to fire when not fully spun up - firing out-of-battery (when the barrel was not properly aligned) would be catastrophic to the weapon.

Sure enough, when we presented it to the Agency, they were delighted, ordering large numbers of this weapon to equip their squads."

Nomad Blade - "Kira"

"The Agency, once more, had a contract for us. A relatively simple one - a melee weapon that can cut through most infantry armour and kill the wearer in one quickdraw swing. Apparently, melee specialists were in vogue.

We based the Nomad Blade on a katana - as you know, a katana is a curved single-edged sword between 60 and 90 centimetres long. The Nomad Blade was thus placed at 60 cm long - as it was meant to be wielded one-handed in a quickdraw, keeping it short was a good idea.

But therein lay a problem. Katana were generally not made to be wielded like this - iaijutsu is meant to be performed from a solid standing position, not while on the move. The blade itself was too heavy - that is, if it was metal. Using carbon nanotubes lessened the weight enough.

For ease of cutting through armour (and flesh), the blade was near-monomolecular - only a few molecules thick. Another problem - sure, it would cut easily with a single swing, but we couldn't harden it enough to make it *stay* sharp. Another solution - the use of nanomachines to effectively field-sharpen the sword.

In addition, we created an "adrenaline amplifier" for use with the Nomad Blade. It magnifies the effect of adrenaline on the user, rendering them much more prone to positive "combat high" effects. Faster movement is always good in hand-to-hand - though it may also increase recklessness, which will have to be dealt with in training.

We presented the result to the Agency. Testing against live targets showed great results, and the effects of the Adrenaline Amplifier were also explained and demonstrated. They were delighted, and mass production began."

Calamity Serum

"Another contract from the Agency. Instead of a high-mobility melee specialist, they want a heavyweight - they requested a combat stimulant tailored towards hand-to-hand combat.

We based the stimulant on adrenaline, modifying it to increase potency. The reloadable autoinjector that applied it had a time lock built in, preventing 'chain-injections' that could result in an overdose. The issue of chemical tolerance was raised as well - the users of this Calamity Serum would have to be rotated out of active duty, preventing them from regular access and thus tolerance... or addiction.

The stimulant was a powerful one, increasing both speed and strength while nullifying pain. In addition, it also increased the body's ability to self-repair.

However, while it was potent, it was also extremely short-lasting - roughly eight seconds. That time was simply too short to capitalise on its effects. The original compound had to be modified.

While the new compound was also very short-lasting, it also reacted with the body's natural adrenaline, essentially replicating itself using the normal adrenaline to sustain the effect. The user has to sustain a state of high adrenaline in the thick of hand-to-hand combat - which shouldn't be a problem for a melee specialist.

Sure enough, the Agency were delighted. The autoinjectors and the doses of Calamity Serum were quickly mass produced."

HIVE Actuator

"The next contract was somewhat unconventional. They wanted a swarm of debilitating and lethal flying insects that could be controlled by a commanding soldier.

This called for gene-modding. While technically - uh, well, explicitly illegal by law, this was the Agency we're talking about. Who watches the watchmen?

Anyway, we created an insect to the specification - its poison was indeed both debilitating and lethal. The enemy would begin projectile vomiting almost immediately upon attack by the swarm, and would die in agonising pain.

I suppose I can personally vouch for its effectiveness - there was a containment breach during development and two people didn't make it behind the containment door in time. I watched as they both threw up and tried to scream at the same time, pounding on the reinforced glass - a horrid gargling noise, which continued until they collapsed to the floor and stopped moving. Even in their death throes, they were still trying to scream, thrashing around in agony, and the horror was etched on the faces of the corpses.

Now for the control mechanism - we created a neural link between a control chip implanted in the commander and the chips implanted in the insects. Sure enough, they would only attack those the commander mentally designated as hostile.

A side effect was that the commanding soldier would essentially become one with the insects, while still perceiving themselves as separate at the same time. This led to a shift in personality - the user would address themselves as "we", speaking for the swarm as well as themselves. They would consider themselves a hivemind - fortunately, this would not impede combat performance or loyalty to the Agency.

We presented the insects and control mechanism to the clients, and they were satisfied. However, the rollout of the HIVE Actuator was somewhat more restrained than that of other equipment - perhaps they considered the side effect to be worthy of caution."

MD.K1LR-68 Prototype

"A new contract had come up - a particularly difficult one. The details were deceptively simple - a mobile method of temporarily mind-controlling a resisting enemy soldier.

Psionics and The Dark were a bust - especially the latter, as its study was still in the early stages at the time. Technology, once again, was the answer.

The idea was that a small, deployable autonomous robot would latch onto the enemy and control their mind temporarily. Sure enough, we designed a spider-like robot for this purpose, which jumped onto the subject's head and... uh, interfaced with their brain.

An issue was with friend-foe identification. Initial testing on live subjects had them lash out at anyone regardless of whether they were allies or enemies. They also had trouble using firearms, instead opting to use them as bludgeons. These problems, however, were rectified with redesigns.

Control was only temporary as well - the enemy's mental resistance would eventually cause enough instability in the psyche to kill them outright or make them commit suicide, no matter how painful the method. A variety of creative methods were observed - for example, when a subject was given no weapon, he simply smashed his head into the wall until he died. Unable to fall unconscious as the brain was directly interfaced, he expired only when the brain itself was destroyed.

The issue of friend-foe identification was resolved by implanting a chip into the wristwatches of Agents. The chip would be recognised by controlled enemies - anyone wearing a non-disavowed watch would not be attacked.

We presented the MD.K1LR-68 Prototype to the Agency, which satisfied them. Thousands of MD.K1LR-68 units were ordered.

However, we ultimately deemed it a prototype, as further iteration was still possible. Development continued with three aims - to make the mind control more stable to prevent

suicides, to no longer require a MD.K1LR-68 unit to be permanently attached to the subject, and to be able to precisely control what elements of the personality are changed.

This would allow for civil use of the MD.K1LR-68 - i.e. in prisons. Using this method could have greater potential than normal procedures - faster than conventional rehabilitation, and more subtle than the brute-force nerve stapling used on the worst offenders. With the MD.K1LR-68, any prisoner can be quickly resocialised and placed back into society after a short observation period."

Kill Warrant GPNVG-M42

"A joint contract came through - the Agency and an anonymous but very rich third-party. They wanted a way of verifying kills made in combat in real-time.

The third-party, I suspect, is Ulacylon. After all, they're the ones with the most access to Warp technology - a promising field of study. They planned to integrate that technology into the system, creating their own class of Agent.

We created a visor based on existing night-vision goggles. Multiple features were added in - the ability to see through walls (and detect the Hidden-type Shadows) was one. It could also display the crimes of viewed targets, referenced from the Agency databases. More importantly, it could detect when a target dies, which allows the "client", as I must refer to them, to log the kills made by the user.

The system was simple - the Agent would kill enemies while the Kill Warrant is active, and the client would beam down supplies to them while also paying a handsome bounty per head.

We also packaged in an Adrenaline Amplifier, with similar design to the Vagabond class. The focus here was on physical strength - higher adrenaline levels would increase the force the Agent could put behind their strikes.

Both the Agency and client were satisfied. However, we were not in charge of the manufacturing process - instead receiving a large fee. The client company was the manufacturer.

The client also trained their own operatives, seconding them to the Agency when ready. They were issued the Kill Warrant GPNVG-42 and designated by the Agency as Executioners."

Aegis VOID-DS

"Another contract arrived from the Agency. They were surprisingly specific - a defensive kit that included a shield which could resist gunshots and melee attacks.

Ballistic shields have been around for a very long time, so we had plenty to work with - but we needed more than that. With Agency squads only deploying in groups of five, they needed as much firepower as possible, and having one hand out of ten tied up holding a ballistic shield wouldn't always be the best choice.

As such, we decided on having two modes to our defensive equipment - one a ballistic shield, and the other a deployable shield. The user could switch between modes by extending and retracting the shield.

The ballistic shield was fairly simple to design, made of an extremely durable composite and rated to stop full-powered rifle cartridges with tungsten cores. We integrated nanites into it, similar to that of the Vagabond's katana, so that the shield could repair itself in the field while not being used. We also took the liberty of electrifying the shield - any hostile striking the shield in hand-to-hand would be in for a thoroughly unpleasant surprise.

The deployable shield was to be placed horizontally in the extended state. This would also project a one-way energy shield above the resulting waist-high cover - while the user and their allies could fire upon enemies from behind it, incoming hostile fire would be blocked.

The end result was satisfactory for the Agency suits, but some Agents suggested adding a small turret to the deployable shield mode for harassing fire. We concurred, and added a small laser turret, using similar technology to the Impusca Vana. Even with the meagre solar energy produced by a white dwarf star, the turret would be good for a decent length of time.

Mass-manufacture of the iterated version began immediately."

Suicide Knife

"The next request from the Agency was... interesting. A cheap, "humane" weapon specifically for the purpose of committing suicide.

Never had that request before.

But seeing some of the footage of conditions down there? I'm not surprised. Our team got to work immediately.

We developed a small, near-monomolecular knife - no nanites this time, being that reuse was not a factor. It was coated in an extremely strong painkiller, enough that a person would simply not feel it if they stabbed themselves with it, and the effect would rapidly spread throughout the body. As well as providing a painless, smooth cut, the knife also injected more of the same painkiller into the user - death by overdose would be a matter of seconds. The user, upon stabbing themselves with it, would simply feel as if they were drifting away from this plane of existence.

The Agency accepted the prototype - after some human testing, they began issuing it to all Agents deployed to Eden-227. It has apparently come in handy many times.

Unfortunately."

Ritual Dagger - "Cytherean"

"I... I need to write the report. But it's not any regular report. Because this... this is special. Because I saw GOD.

Not some old man with white hair and a beard in the sky. NOT THAT ONE. God is REAL. God is DARK. No... God IS the darkness. The Great Dark.

They asked us to do research on it - the Great Dark. The Void. Whatever the fuck you want to call it. But it was there, and we had to LOOK at it. And it LOOKED back, because IT WAS ALIVE.

There were CULTS and RITUALS. I did horrific things in service of IT. I killed kids, man. Slaughtered them, drained their blood into the circles as they screamed and claws and tore. Because the book TOLD me to. Because we HAD to - for science. But that wasn't science, that was religion, but this time the religion was REAL.

And it ANSWERED. It TOLD us things, unspeakable knowledge. It GAVE us things - first and foremost, a dagger. A HOLY dagger, for the sacred darkness.

IT warned us not to corrupt the Darkness. Not to go any further - because if we did, we would regret doing so. We took what we could - but what we could was TOO MUCH.

God damn...

And *they* like it. What we've done. IT gave us a ritual to summon a sacred dagger. IT gave us the knowledge of how to summon spectral blades from the ground, how to resurrect the dead and force them to obey. We wrote it all down and gave it to *them*, and *they* were satisfied.

But then we delved deeper... and we regretted it. We saw too much. I can't TELL you about it... you'd never believe me. But I HAVE to tell someone about it - and I CAN'T.

Oh my god...

Someone help me."

