

Volume 2 - Chapter 34 - Weapons

"Are the UHF the 'good guys'? Well, ain't that an awfully philosophical question, Missy... But fair enough, I guess you are around that age now..."

The thing is, nothing as massive as the UHF could ever truly be called the 'good guys.'

With several trillion people living within the UHF's area of influence, there's bound to be billions of bad people. Murderers, rapists, torturers, and worse.

A Faction is nothing but a collective of individuals, Missy, never forget that.

Some people try their hardest to be good, others don't even bother to attempt it at all.

Take Thomas, for instance.

In the more than fifteen years I've known him, he's never once denied entry to someone seeking shelter, never once raised his voice unduly, and never once denied a request for aid from somebody in need.

I've stitched him up more times than I care to remember, whenever things went sideways for him as a result, yet he has never hesitated to do it again and again.

I'd call him the epitome of a good guy—but even Thomas stumbles, I'm sure of it.

Humans are fallible by nature. Nobody can be a good guy forever, without occasionally straying from the path here and there.

*As for the UHF... At its core, it's a military. And there are **no** good guys in a military.*

*No marine, no officer, **no general** could ever claim to be a good guy, because their sole purpose is to **not** be a good guy when the time comes.*

And that's fine. Somebody's gotta do it.

So people like Thomas can keep trying their hardest at being the good guy, again and again..."

[Memory Excerpt: *Dinner Table Conversation*, James McKay, 936 PFC]

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Moving through the shopping district, now with slightly less urgency than when she'd bolted from the last store to avoid the crowd of clamouring Marines, Thea found herself scanning storefronts for a weapons vendor that actually *spoke* to her.

Mid-search, a sudden realization hit her like a brick.

“Ah, fuck... I forgot to actually buy the damn Module,” she muttered, face twisting in frustration.

She’d gotten so thrown off by the clerk—who’d just *stood there* the whole time like a ghost while she geeked out over the Augmentation Bench—that she’d completely skipped half the reason she went there in the first place.

Sure, she’d added the Module Slot to her armour’s blueprint, but she hadn’t actually purchased the Nano-Bot Swarm Forge Module *itself*. The armour would just have a sizable hollow in it now, when she printed it.

That wasn’t even the *only* thing she’d forgotten to pick up, now that she thought about it.

Letting out a groan, she slowed to a stop near the edge of the street, palming her face in defeat. The idea of turning around, heading back through that same swarm of agitated Marines—and maybe getting recognized as the girl who’d just walked out of Levitas’—was not a prospect she wanted to entertain at all.

She let out a sharp sigh and mumbled, “Fuck, I’m such an *idiot*...”

Then, deciding to at least *try* being smart about this, she asked the only other entity she figured might be able to help her in this moment.

“Sovereign... Is there any way I can, I don’t know, buy equipment remotely or something? If I know exactly what I need, can I just... pay you and you grab the licenses for me or whatever? Please say yes?”

The Sovereign responded instantly, its voice soft and calm—deliberately directed into her ear to avoid broadcasting into the street noise.

“Affirmative. However, transaction routing must follow standard protocols. You would not be paying *me*, but the store directly,” the Sovereign clarified. “All registered vendors aboard this vessel maintain digital storefronts. These storefronts are accessible via the ship’s intranet and through the galactic net. As a UHF Marine, your security clearance grants full access.”

Thea let out an audible breath of relief. “So I just need a datapad or something?”

“Correct. Any secure terminal with the proper access permissions will suffice. Data-pads would be one such option.”

She immediately glanced around, scanning the surrounding storefronts and side alleys for any sign of a public data station. She remembered seeing a few during that first tour Major Quinn had given the Recruits—something that already felt like it had happened in a different lifetime at this point.

Those stations were simple but practical—small, enclosed booths that let anyone with access credentials connect to the Sovereign’s internal net or the wider galactic net.

A lot like the old galactic-net cafes that used to dot the lower wards of Lumiosia.

According to Thomas, even the Undercity had once had their own versions of those cafes.

A place where people used to gather, browse, connect.

By the time Thea had been old enough to care, though, they'd already gone extinct—long replaced by personal access units and neural uplinks, as well as just the general decay of the Undercity having made them untenable to keep active.

She circled a small cluster of shops and still came up empty. No data station in sight.

"Typical..." she muttered, rubbing her forehead in frustration—only to jolt in surprise as a datapad shimmered into existence right in her hand, the lightweight device settling gently into her palm.

"Huh...? Uh... Thanks, Sovereign?"

"You are very welcome," came the immediate response, flat and almost soothing in its precision. "This is to be considered a one-time convenience. I have been instructed to optimize Marine morale and satisfaction during post-Assessment leave. I have detected a significant spike in your stress and anxiety levels over the last four minutes and twenty-two seconds. Intervention was deemed appropriate."

Thea grimaced. '*Great. Emotional breakdown assistance, officially sponsored by ship AI.*'

Still, she wasn't about to complain.

A datapad was a datapad, and if it saved her from an awkward repeat encounter at Levitas', she'd take the assist any day of the week.

She tapped the screen and navigated to the Sovereign's intranet with practiced ease—as it was the same place that she had found a lot of the technical documentations she had read during her medical wing stay—finding Levitas' Armours' site almost instantly, now that she knew it existed.

The layout was clean and oddly familiar—clearly designed by the same company that handled the store's holographic ads. Dozens of armours rotated slowly across the screen, light- and medium-types mostly, paired with click-to-expand specs and sleek video loops.

'*Okay... module, module... there you are.*' She tapped to add the "Major Module: Nano-Bot Swarm Forge" to her shopping list, then scrolled down to the related items. '*And the other version—yep, "Nanobot Reserve (Visual & Audio)". Done.*'

She paused for a moment, letting herself double-check the list and mentally confirm that this time she hadn't left anything out. No forgetting. No turning around.

A system prompt blinked into view:

[System: Do you want to pay 1,450 System Credits to "Levitas' Armours" for: 1x "Major Module: Nano-Bot Swarm Forge", 1x "Major Module: Nanobot Reserve (Visual & Audio)"?]

Y/N]

She confirmed the purchase with a single thought.

A quiet smile crept across her face as the datapad disintegrated into digital motes, vanishing before she even had to wonder where to put it.

“Thanks again, Sovereign.”

“You are welcome. Have a productive day.”

With that squared away, she turned her attention back to the search for a weapon store.

She didn’t have a fixed destination in mind—Bullseye’s Rifles was her fallback if nothing else clicked—but for now, she was just enjoying the feeling. Getting to roam freely through what was basically a high-end tech market built into a warship felt oddly luxurious.

Military-focused or not, this was still the closest thing to a tech paradise she’d ever seen. And for once, she actually had the Credits to enjoy every bit of it.

As she wandered through the bustling deck, searching for the right weapons store, Thea revisited her choices for the armour upgrades she’d just completed, double-checking everything one last time. She wanted to make sure there was nothing she’d overlooked, since now would be her best chance to go back and fix anything she wasn’t happy with.

‘Switching from the (Illusion) variant to the (Visual & Audio) version of the Nano-Bot Swarm will definitely reduce my ability to hide visually—but the added ability to mess around with audio will more than make up for it, I think...’

Her current Nano-Bot Module could already make basic sounds, but they were rough and very limited. Without using a huge chunk of the swarm, she couldn’t even really make loud enough noises to distract people consistently.

And after her run-in with the Psyker duo during the Assessment, she had realized just how much she’d underestimated audio manipulation in combat. Facing someone who could flawlessly mimic voices during one of the toughest battles she’d ever fought—maybe even tougher than anything from her gaming days—had completely changed her perspective on these things.

‘I don’t really need the full-blown visual hiding ability of the (Illusion) Module unless I plan on cloaking all of Alpha Squad. And given how rarely that would’ve helped in the Assessment, downgrading that visual stealth for far better sound control feels like a smart trade-off. I can still hide us well enough visually if we’re careful, and having the ability to completely muffle our sound—or even create distractions—feels way more useful overall...’

She’d spent more time than she cared to admit turning that balance over in her mind while lying in the medbay, stitches still fresh.

The conclusion had always been the same: Adapt and upgrade.

‘Emulate. Improve. Break. And then take what’s left and make it yours,’ she thought with a crooked grin, echoing one of her go-to mantras from the old gaming days.

The grin widened as she suddenly realized she'd stopped walking.

She blinked, took a small step back, and saw where she'd ended up.

A storefront loomed in front of her with bright, flashy advertisements showcasing a huge variety of impressive gear. Glancing up at the store's name, Thea felt her grin widen even further.

This place looked exactly like what she'd been hoping to find—variety and seemingly *plenty* of it.

In bold, neon-lit letters, it read: "Abundant Ammunitions."

Stepping inside Abundant Ammunitions felt like walking straight into a weapon-lover's dream.

Thea paused briefly, just taking it all in.

The sleek interior was softly lit by rows of gentle, blue-tinted lights, illuminating displays stacked neatly with polished guns of every imaginable kind.

Polished, metallic racks lined the walls, showcasing a dazzling array of firearms.

Immediately to her left was a hulking rack filled with heavy machine guns—brutish monsters of steel and polymer, sporting thick barrels, large drum magazines, and reinforced stabilizers.

Each gun looked like it could chew through an entire squad without breaking a sweat.

'Isabella would absolutely love these... But she seems more than happy with her Devastation so far,' Thea thought to herself.

A pair of Marines stood close by, animatedly discussing one particularly nasty-looking beast with quadruple barrels.

"Sure it's heavy, man," one Marine argued, gesturing at the enormous weapon. "But who cares when you're throwing lead at 3,000 rounds per minute? You can pin down anything short of a full tank."

His companion shook his head, skeptical. "Yeah, until you're out of ammo in fifteen seconds flat. Not to mention that recoil'll shake your bones loose. Big pass on that. I'd rather go with less RPM and focus on ammunition economy. The Assessment had several areas where resupplies weren't possible, so it's ridiculous to think you'll just have infinite ammo available wherever you go!"

Thea moved past them with a faint smile, heading toward another display as the discussion continued behind her.

Here, a large variety of grenade launchers sat ominously in secure glass cases, their dull, matte-black frames looking more like heavy construction tools than conventional weapons.

Next came rows of standard assault rifles—compact, efficient, and reliable.

They ranged from sturdy, classic designs, like variants of the AR-303, as well as redesigns thereof with durable synthetic stocks, perfect for frontline infantry, to more modular variants bristling with attachment points, customizable optics, and under-barrel launchers.

There were also a huge host of assault rifles that looked completely different from the AR-303 and its variants as well. A trio of Marines hovered near these specific ones, quietly debating the merits of adding suppressors versus compensators, weighing stealth against precision.

“This one’s great for close-quarters,” said a female Marine, holding up a more stubby rifle variant, clearly built for maneuverability. “But you lose way too much accuracy at range... Not sure if it’s worth it for missions that might stretch past mid-range... What do you guys think?”

Her friends nodded thoughtfully, checking their datapads and scrolling through specs and stats as if they were trying to solve some intricate puzzle, while giving some of their opinions on the weapon.

Farther into the shop, the weapons got... *stranger*. That was the only word Thea could come up with that felt even remotely accurate.

Esoteric creations lined the walls, their designs a far cry from the more grounded firearms she’d passed earlier. Sleek curves, experimental shapes, and far too many glowing parts made them look like props from a mid-budget movie rather than actual battlefield-ready gear.

One in particular caught her attention—a polished, energy-based rifle with a barrel that glowed a soft, rhythmic blue. Embedded along its casing were thin, pulsing strips of light that traced the weapon’s frame in tight, angular patterns.

The label beside it read: “Hyper-Laser Rifle.”

‘*Whatever the fuck that means,*’ she thought, narrowing her eyes and checking the stats hovering in the data-pad beside it.

It didn’t seem to have any standout specs compared to her Gram.

No absurd energy output. No miracle-grade refractor. Just some minor tweaks to beam stability and thermal dispersion, and a slightly improved power cycling rate.

‘*So... just marketing bullshit, then.*’

With a soft scoff, she moved on.

Next came an absolute brick of a weapon—heavy, awkward, and clearly not meant for casual use. Its body was thick and compact, but the muzzle flared outward into a weird, rectangular cone, making the whole thing look more like an industrial cannon than something you’d carry into a fight.

The glowing label identified it as a “Concussive Wave Projector,” supposedly non-lethal but capable of flattening entire groups at once.

‘Knock people down without killing them... Maybe useful for crowd control? Capturing high-value targets...? That or somebody just really hates furniture and support beams.’

And then, finally, she spotted what she had really come here for: the sniper rifles and designated marksman rifles section.

Thea’s pace slowed as her eyes scanned the wall of long-barrelled weapons, and for a second, she just stood there, grinning like an idiot.

Rows of polished precision tools lined the reinforced wall mounts, some upright, some angled for easier inspection, all of them promising death from a distance.

She recognized several right away—familiar frames and names she'd already pored over back when she first browsed through Bullseye’s Rifles during that early shopping trip aboard the Sovereign.

Models like the BRX-7, the “Jarelin,” and the modular S-Type “Cyclops”.

Reliable workhorses that had cropped up in countless weapon breakdown vids and reviews she’d consumed over the past few weeks.

But nestled between the familiar options were a few stranger entries—things she hadn’t seen before during her first trip, even in passing. One, in particular, caught her attention: A massive, matte-black single-shot rifle mounted dead center under a thick spotlight. It looked like a tank shell launcher pretending to be a precision weapon.

The tag below it read: **VX-19 “Whisperlance.”**

It was far more akin to her Caliburn than any other type of weapon she had ever seen carried by a Recon/Sniper.

She leaned in closer, scanning the specs and immediately found what she had expected to see. *‘Anti-material rated, yep. That makes sense. Single-shot... twenty-second cycle time between rounds?! Fuck me.’*

Its listed kinetic penetration stat was completely *obscene*. It made the Gram look like a toy in comparison; which was completely fair, since the Gram was never designed with anti-materiel capabilities in mind.

‘This thing’s not for taking out people. This is for deleting bunkers... Like the Caliburn.’

There wasn’t even a scope included either—just a digital jackpoint for interfacing with external recon units.

‘Guess you’re supposed to shoot it with spotter support or a drone uplink...? Not exactly my vibe, but damn if it isn’t cool-looking.’

Right beside it was something far more grounded: A slim, almost elegant rifle with a matte dark-grey body and a collapsible stock.

The digital plaque beneath it labeled it the **SR-04R “Strider”**—a semi-auto designated marksman rifle with a mid-range optic, heat-dissipating barrel shroud, and smartlink compatibility.

She read through the stats and hummed.

‘Three-shot bursts or single fire, depending on mode... good calibre, solid projectile speed, good recoil control... not bad. Not bad, at all. Not flashy, but very practical. This is more of a squad support weapon than a sniper’s precision tool, though, isn’t it...?’

Compared to her Laser Gram, the Strider didn’t have quite the same pin-point, surgical feel—but it *did* offer something Thea had occasionally found herself lowkey craving: Faster follow-up shots.

Sure, the Gram could theoretically fire as fast as she could squeeze the trigger, but it still wasn’t *built* for speed.

Not like the Strider.

That thing could supposedly rattle off three-round bursts like it was made to punish hesitation. And while Thea had made it through the Assessment just fine with the Gram’s slower cadence, she wasn’t naive enough to think she wouldn’t end up in tighter situations eventually.

Having the option to fire faster wasn’t something she *needed*—not yet, anyway—but it was definitely one of those things she filed under “luxury features.”

‘Variable fire rates, clean recoil management, and enough stopping power to actually matter.’

That was the sweet spot in her mind.

‘Not as sexy as punching through a bunker in a single shot, but this thing’s built for rhythm,’ she mused. *‘Fire, shift, fire again. It’s more forgiving if you miss, and way easier to reposition mid-fight compared to the heavier stuff...’*

Satisfied with her mental comparison chart, she let her gaze drift further along the wall—until her eyes locked onto something instantly recognizable.

Her Gram. Or rather—all *three* Grams.

Ballistic. Gauss. Laser.

All lined up side by side like they were waiting for her to come pick her poison.

She didn’t hesitate.

Stepping up to the rack, she tapped the purchase panels beside both the Ballistic and Gauss variants, adding them to her shopping list without a second thought. She made sure to

include all standard attachments and core modifications, even double-checking that her Laser-variant's missing pieces got filled in at the same time.

'One of each,' she nodded to herself, 'that should give me plenty of options to work with. Figure out what fits which situation best.'

With that settled, there were only a couple more things left on her mental checklist.

She glanced around, looking for one of the store's robotic clerks so she could ask a few follow-up questions or at least confirm her pickup point. But as she made her way back toward the front of the store, she slowed to a halt—then stopped entirely.

The store was quiet. *Too* quiet.

The handful of Marines that had been browsing when she walked in? Gone. Not just relocated to a different part of the store, but vanished entirely.

In their place were about half a dozen human clerks moving around the space in a slow, deliberate rhythm—organizing shelves, wiping down counters, scanning inventory.

Only one stood still, right behind the shop counter, staring forward in that polite, slightly-too-still way that all service workers eventually seemed to learn and adapt.

No sign of the easy-to-deal-with robots anywhere.

Thea blinked. *'What the actual fuck is going on with these stores today...? Am I being punished for something...?'*

She breathed a heavy sigh to steady herself, squared her shoulders, and approached the clerk behind the counter.

"Hi," she started, already half-bracing for some weird reply. "I was looking for one of the robot clerks—are they, uh... busy or something?"

The human behind the counter—mid-forties, clean uniform, not a speck of dirt on him—smiled with the exact sort of customer service precision that probably came with the job.

"Welcome to Abundant Ammunitions, Recruit McKay. It's an honour to have you in our establishment today," he said, tone polite but just a little too rehearsed. "As for the robotic clerks, they are currently undergoing scheduled maintenance. I sincerely apologise if this proves inconvenient in any way. I, and the rest of our team, remain at your full disposal."

'Scheduled maintenance. Of course it is...' Thea sighed again, this one internal. *'Of course I decided to go shopping during global robot nap-time. Fucking figures.'*

Still—no point turning back now.

"Right," she nodded, shifting her stance as she focused in. "I'm looking for a list of... more experimental weapons. Hybrids, ideally. Something like a laser-ballistic fusion, or

ballistic-gauss. Maybe gauss-laser if there's a stable prototype floating around. Preferably DMRs or long-range platforms, but honestly? I'll take a look at anything if the numbers make sense."

The clerk's expression didn't budge, so she continued, already falling into her more technical rhythm.

"I'd like to inspect the energy dispersion rates, focal lens arrangements, and pulse-cycle timings on any laser components—bonus points if the emitter's modular and adjustable in the store already. For the ballistic or gauss portions, I'm looking for anything with a precision-machined, non-modular, threaded barrel, long-form or bullpup layout is fine, and a receiver that isn't allergic to custom triggers. Caliber flexibility's a plus, but I'm more focused on barrel harmonics and internal bracing, especially if it's a hybrid casing system. Also gonna want to review the weapon's thermal dissipation methods and material composition—carbon polycomposites or lightweight alloys, preferably with vibration dampening if available. And whatever System Material components are inside them as well, if the spec sheets can tell me."

She paused just long enough to take a breath, then added—

"Oh, and if there's a visualizer or AR breakdown of the internals? That'd be *phenomenal*."

For a moment, the clerk just stared at her—no reaction, no comment.

He blinked once, then again, before slowly reaching beneath the counter and pulling out a sleek datapad. His fingers tapped across it with practiced ease, navigating through a few menus. Once finished, he set it down in front of him and gave her the kind of polite, practiced customer-service smile that screamed retail training.

"I've just sent a request to one of our senior inventory specialists. They'll assist you with your inquiry momentarily," he said with a calm, almost mechanical cadence. "If you'd please be so kind as to wait just a minute or two, they'll be with you shortly."

Thea gave an eager nod, her posture relaxing slightly as she leaned on the counter with both hands.

'*He didn't say no,*' she thought, already feeling her anticipation spike again. '*Didn't even blink at the hybrid question either, so that's gotta be a good sign... Right...?*'