

### **Excerpt – Book 3: Failover**

The door groaned and sprang open.

Ryan jumped back, his scream echoing through the ship, causing Kat to dive to the side and fumble to draw her las-pistol. A mummified body fell forward, landing in front of him.

Kat moved to a sitting position and put her head on her knees while Ryan leaned against the wall and took a deep breath.

"Sorry," he said. "Wasn't expecting that."

"No worries. I like my heart beating outside my chest."

Ryan put his hand out and helped Kat up.

They moved onto the command deck. Most of the equipment was piled to the left side. How the body got to the door was unknown to them, but others were crushed in the mess of debris. They moved the lights around and found the command chair still anchored in place. The mummified remains of the commander were still belted in. A large piece of metal was stuck in his chest.

"I hope the guy didn't suffer," said Ryan.

Kat pursed her lips, nodded, holstered her las-pistol, and pulled out another power cube that had barely any power left in it. "I'm going to hook this up to the console in front of the command chair. If the cracked screen still works, it should be enough to bring up some data."

"How many of those things do you have?"

"Your next lesson in offworld archeology: always bring a bag full of power cubes."

"That is good to know. I will add that to the adventurer backpack item list for next time."

Kat rolled her eyes and shook her head, then attached the power cube to the console, and the screen flickered to life. She entered commands on the archaic keypad while Ryan focused his light at the open door and kept watch.

"There is a lot of data corruption. From what I can see, they engaged the Woland, and--"

The console flared, causing Kat to jump back and cover her face.

"Well, that sucks," said Ryan, waving his hand at the smoke pouring from the console.

"Yes, it does. We'll have to find the main part of the ship where those life forms are if we want to get any answers."

"Probably best we set up camp here for tonight," said Ryan, holstering his Glock.

"Makes sense. We--"

The loud bang and what sounded like a man screaming interrupted the conversation.

"That was a gunshot," said Ryan, rushing toward the opening with Kat behind him.

Past the sound of the pounding rain they could barely make out a man screaming again. Looking at each other, they nodded and rushed out into the swampy forest.

The rain was coming down harder, and their light source barely showed a way through the darkness, forcing them to navigate by the continued shouting.

The cries for help were now mixed with odd growling and clicking noises. They slowed down to better evaluate the situation when the ground under them gave away. Ryan and Kat slid down a muddy hillside and splashed face-first into knee-deep water.

Ryan sat up and wiped the muddy water from his face and eyes. As his vision cleared, he found himself in a muddy pool surrounded by fluorescent green glowing trees.

"Behind you! Watch out!" yelled someone in front of him.

He turned to his right, and his eyes shot wide open. A humanoid with two heads and red eyes was coming at him. Its mouth chattered quickly, causing its teeth to make a clicking sound. It brought a makeshift club up, ready to strike him. Ryan fired a three-round burst into the humanoid's chest. It spun backward and fell into the water. Ryan then moved to a kneeling position and swept the area.

Kat knelt behind him. "Over there, on the bank of the pool."

Ryan looked over to see a man leaning against a tree, holding a makeshift rifle across his lap. Two other bodies lay next to him, as well as more deformed humanoids.

Ryan and Kat spun around to the sound of cracking branches, and more creatures poured from the tree line. They were all deformed in some way, with multiple arms, heads, clawed hands, or body parts in odd areas.

Ryan opened fire, dropping three of the creatures and causing others to fumble back. Kat fired her las-pistol, which blew a large, cauterized hole in one of the creatures, but her next shot fizzled.

"Not now! Not now!" yelled Kat, shaking the las-pistol.