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# *DEATH CALLING*

*Captain Sarah Vega and the Crumbling City*



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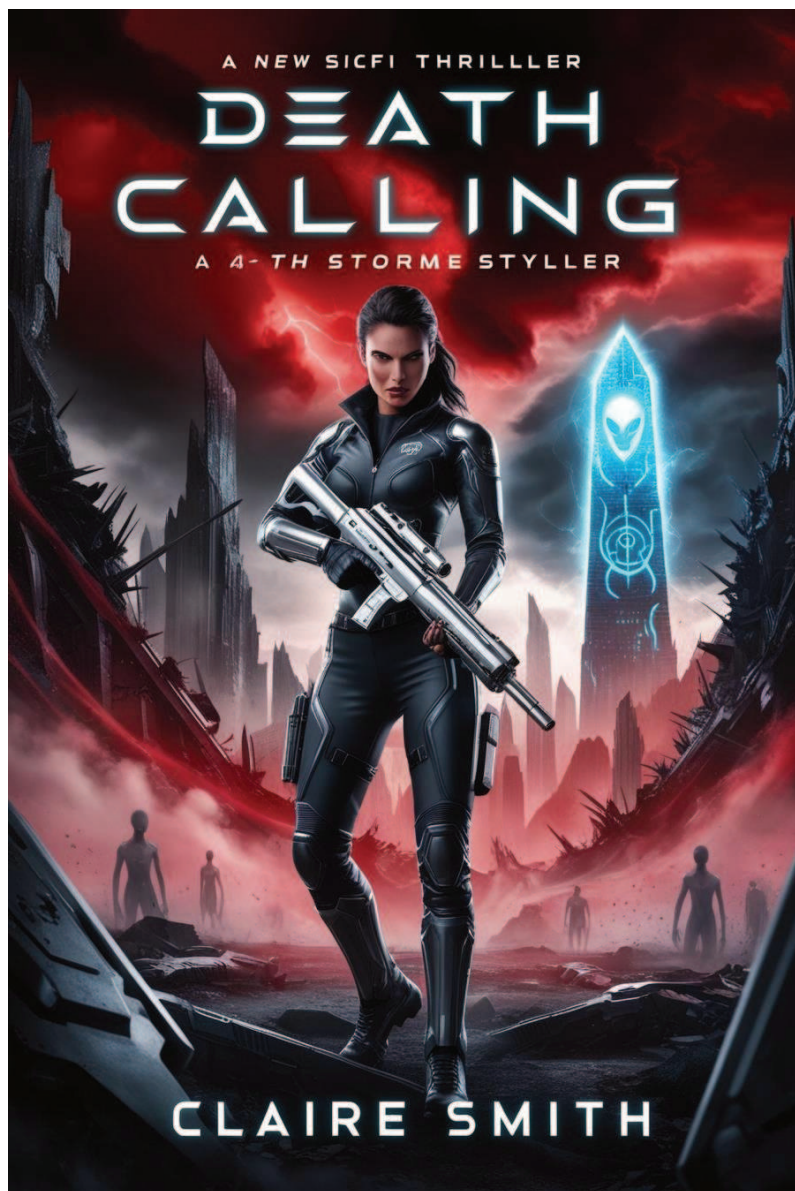
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# *Prologue*



## **The First Call**

At first, it was nothing more than a faint pulse—a static hum lost in the white noise of deep-space transmissions. Engineers dismissed it, astronomers ignored it, and governments denied it. Just another anomaly, they said. Nothing to worry about. But then the voices started. It was subtle at first, a soft murmur that crept into the airwaves. People heard it in the static between radio stations, in the hum of power lines, in the dead silence of midnight.

A name, a whisper, always familiar. Calling... No one could trace it, no one could explain it. And those who heard it—truly heard it—were never the same. They disappeared, drawn to the ruins at the heart of Nexus, their final transmissions filled with fragmented pleas and cryptic warnings.

“It’s calling us. We have to go.”

Captain Sarah Vega watched as the world descended into quiet chaos. One by one, they vanished— scientists, soldiers,



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friends. The city of Nexus, once a thriving metropolis, became a graveyard of shadows and secrets. And through it all, the signal grew stronger. Now, as Sarah stood on the edge of the ruins, the whisper echoed in her mind—a soft, insistent voice that carried the weight of something ancient and terrible.

Her name.

“Sarah...”

She tightened her grip on the rifle, her eyes fixed on the darkness ahead. Whatever lay beyond that threshold—alien, ghost, or something worse—was

waiting.

The call had begun

# *Chapter 1*



## The Call

**N**exus stood as a monument to survival and devastation. A sprawling city of steel and glass once thrumming with life was now little more than a husk.

Skeletons of skyscrapers clawed at the sky; their glass windows shattered into sharp edges glinting in the dying sunlight. A blood-red haze lingered over the horizon, casting shadows that seemed to move on their own, as if the city itself still writhed in pain from its scars.

The air was dense with unease. Footsteps echoed strangely, swallowed too quickly by the silence. The streets below were a patchwork of survival: makeshift markets set up between heaps of debris, children playing games in alleyways while their

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parents kept nervous watch, and armed patrols ensuring no one stayed out too late. Night in Nexus belonged to something else.

Captain Sarah Vega leaned on the railing of a crumbling balcony in the administrative tower—a building that had miraculously survived the first invasion two decades earlier. Her short, dark hair was tucked beneath the brim of her tactical cap, her brown eyes scanning the ruins. She often thought of Nexus as a graveyard. Not for bodies—most of those were long gone—but for hope. Every corner held a memory, every shadow whispered a warning.

“Another call today,” she murmured to herself, her voice low enough to vanish into the wind. A chill ran through her, though the air wasn’t particularly cold. These days, the temperature didn’t matter. It was the weight of absence, of things unseen and unanswered, that froze her.

“Captain?”

Sarah turned, her expression hardening instinctively. Dr. Alan Cross stood at the entrance to the balcony. He was a wiry man, his thin frame dwarfed by a heavy coat that looked like it had been scavenged from an old military surplus. His glasses were slightly askew, the lenses catching the dim light and obscuring his dark, tired eyes. He seemed out of place here, his nervous energy contrasting with the military discipline that governed the rest of her team.

“What is it, Alan?” Sarah asked, her tone clipped but not unkind.

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He hesitated, his lips parting as if to speak, but no words came. Instead, he reached into his pocket and retrieved a communicator. It was small, battered, and flickering with static. The screen was cracked, its glow casting faint shadows on his face. He held it out to her, his hand trembling slightly.

“It’s... it’s the signal again,” he said finally. His voice was soft, almost apologetic, as though he was delivering a personal affront.

Sarah’s eyes narrowed. She took the device from him, her fingers brushing against the cold, scratched surface. A faint crackle of static emitted from the speaker, and then came the sound that made her blood run cold. A voice. Soft, musical, and impossibly familiar.

“Sarah...”

Her name, spoken as a whisper, hung in the air like a ghost. Her grip on the communicator tightened, and for a moment, she forgot to breathe.

“It’s getting stronger,” Alan said. “More people are hearing it now. We’ve lost three more... the patrol team sent to investigate the signal didn’t come back.”

She forced her gaze away from the device, locking eyes with Alan. “And the bodies?”

“Nothing,” he admitted, his voice dropping. “We found their comm units near the centre of the ruins. Same pattern. No

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traces of struggle. It's like they just... disappeared."

Sarah turned back to the ruins, her mind racing. The signal had first been detected three months ago, a faint, eerie frequency emanating from deep within the city's heart. At first, it was dismissed as interference, a remnant of old alien tech left behind from the invasion. But then the disappearances began. One by one, people were drawn to the signal, leaving behind nothing but their gear. It was as though the city itself had swallowed them.

And now, the signal was calling her by name.

The Nexus Operations Command Center (NOCC) was a stark contrast to the ruins surrounding it. The reinforced underground facility buzzed with activity, its steel walls lined with monitors displaying feeds from drones and patrol units scattered throughout the city. Soldiers moved with precision, their boots clanging against the grated floors.

Sarah entered the main briefing room, her presence immediately commanding attention. Her team was already there, waiting. Commander Tate, a grizzled veteran with a scar running across his left cheek, leaned casually against the wall, his arms crossed. His sharp blue eyes tracked Sarah's every move. Beside him sat Rina, a young scavenger who had proven herself invaluable during reconnaissance missions.

Her dark curls framed a face that was too young to carry such a haunted expression. She fiddled with a piece of broken machinery; her hands restless. Alan followed Sarah into the

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room, staying close to her shoulder like a shadow. The quiet tension in the room thickened as Sarah stepped up to the central table, where a holographic map of the ruins flickered to life.

“Three more gone,” she began without preamble. Her voice was steady, but each word struck like a hammer. “No traces, no signs of struggle. Just their comm units left behind.”

“We know where the signal’s coming from,” Tate said. It wasn’t a question. His voice was gruff, like gravel grinding underfoot. “The old Nexus Central Tower. Same as always.”

Sarah nodded. “And it’s getting stronger. Strong enough to call me by name.”

Rina looked up sharply. “You heard it?”

“I heard it,” Sarah confirmed. She glanced at Alan. “Dr. Cross has analysed the frequency. It’s consistent with the earlier signals. Whatever’s out there... it’s escalating.”

“It’s a trap,” Tate said flatly. “Whatever’s sending that signal knows exactly what it’s doing.”

“Maybe,” Sarah replied, her gaze steady. “But we can’t keep ignoring it. We’ve already lost too many people.”

“Then send a drone,” Tate countered. “Better yet, send a whole fleet of them. No need to risk more lives.”

“We’ve tried that,” Alan interjected. “The signal scrambles

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electronics within a certain radius. Every drone we've sent in has either malfunctioned or disappeared entirely."

"And now we're supposed to just walk in there blind?" Tate asked, his tone laced with skepticism.

"We don't have a choice," Sarah said firmly. "Whatever's out there, it's not going away. If we don't act, more people will vanish. We need to end this."

Rina set down the piece of machinery she'd been toying with. "I'm in."

Sarah met her gaze. "Are you sure? This isn't a scavenging run. We don't know what we're walking into."

Rina's expression hardened. "I don't care. My sister was one of the first to disappear. If there's even a chance she's alive... I have to try."

Sarah nodded, a flicker of understanding passing between them. "Alright. Then it's settled. Tate, Rina, Alan—you're with me. We leave at first light."

The ruins of Nexus Central Tower loomed ahead, its jagged silhouette rising like a broken tooth against the grey sky. The team moved in silence, their footsteps crunching over debris-strewn streets. Each carried a standard-issue plasma rifle, except Alan, who clutched a handheld scanner with trembling hands.

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Rina led the way, her movements agile and deliberate, honed by years of scavenging. Sarah followed close behind, her eyes constantly scanning for threats. Tate brought up the rear, his demeanor calm but his weapon always ready.

The closer they got to the signal's source, the heavier the air seemed to grow. A faint hum vibrated in the back of their skulls, just at the edge of perception. It was an almost physical presence, an unseen weight pressing down on them.

"Anyone else feel that?" Rina asked, her voice tight. "Yeah,"

Tate replied. "And I don't like it."

"It's the signal," Alan said, his eyes glued to his scanner. "We're entering the radius of its strongest output. Stay close."

The group pressed on, the skeletal remains of the tower looming larger with each step. As they reached the base, Sarah felt an unshakable sense of being watched. She stopped, holding up a hand to signal the others.

"What is it?" Tate asked.

Sarah didn't answer immediately. She scanned the shadows, her finger hovering over the trigger of her rifle. The hum in her head grew louder, almost deafening.

"Sarah..."

The voice came again, clearer this time. It was the same soft,



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melodic whisper that had haunted her earlier, but now it was accompanied by a faint echo, as if coming from all around them.

“Did you hear that?” Rina asked, her voice barely above a whisper.

Sarah nodded, her jaw tightening. “Stay alert. We’re not alone.”

From somewhere deep within the ruins, a low, guttural sound rumbled—a sound that no human throat could produce.

“Move,” Sarah ordered, her voice cutting through the rising tension. “Now.”

The team entered the tower, their footsteps swallowed by the oppressive silence. Behind them, the shadows seemed to shift, following them into the dark.

The interior of Nexus Central Tower was a mausoleum of time. The once-grand lobby stretched before them, its marble floor cracked and strewn with debris. Broken glass crunched underfoot, and skeletal remains of office furniture lay scattered like battlefield relics. The dim light from their flashlights danced across faded murals, depicting humanity’s pre-invasion triumphs—a now-bitter reminder of all they had lost.

A faint vibration thrummed through the floor, syncing with the low hum of the signal. It was both oppressive and hypnotic, a sound that resonated deep within their bones.

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he said, his voice barely above a whisper. “We’re close.”

Rina crouched near a pile of abandoned gear—a torn backpack, a shattered comm unit, and a boot, its laces still tied. She ran her fingers over the backpack’s fabric, her expression darkening.

“This is new,” she muttered. “Fresh. Someone was here recently.”

“Or something,” Tate said grimly, his rifle sweeping the room.

“Stay sharp,” Sarah ordered, moving toward the central stairwell. The shaft yawned above them, a dark throat swallowing their flashlight beams.

“We’re heading up,” she said. “Alan, how many floors?”

“Signal peaks around the forty-fifth floor,” Alan replied, consulting his scanner. “But there’s interference. It could be higher.”

Tate snorted. “Great. A haunted skyscraper scavenger hunt.”

They ascended in silence, their boots echoing against the rusted metal stairs. The oppressive hum seemed to grow louder with each step, seeping into their minds like a toxin. By the twentieth floor, Sarah noticed Rina’s breathing had grown shallow, her pace slowing.

“You alright?” Sarah asked.

Rina nodded but didn’t speak. Her hand tightened around her weapon as her eyes darted toward the shadows. Sarah felt it