

# Distress Call

Sentinel Corps  
Log One

By  
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Draft 3  
v8.6.3

Wordwraith Books

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*To my Wordwraiths: Jeni, Kristin, Sarah, Caycee, Ian  
and Chris (in order of meeting).*

*I love and owe you all immensely.*

## HELLO

Thanks for opening my book!  
I've got a FREE DELETED SCENE from Distress  
Call that I want to give you! Simply hop over to  
[RodWerks.net/SecretSC](http://RodWerks.net/SecretSC) and tell me where to send  
this never-before-seen story. This page can't be  
found navigating my website, so *shhhhhh!*

I hope you enjoy  
SENTCORPS Log One: Distress Call.

**I****Interstellar Civilian Transport Vessel *Emerald Pearl***

A jolt of electricity yanked Rae out of hibernation. She gulped the icy air as if she had just burst to the surface of a deep, dark ocean.

*Where am I?*

Her arms flailed. She searched for something, anything, to make sense of her world. On all sides, cold metal and glass met her fingers. It was several inches from her face so it was not suffocating. Not yet. Confusion assaulted her mind. If only she could see!

*Am I dead?*

She breathed deep. Cool, crisp air filled her lungs. She smelled ethyl alcohol. A tanginess offended her tongue.

*Calm down, Rae, she told herself. Calm down. Remember what Mom said. Deep breaths. Breathe in, breathe out, breathe in... Okay. Take stock. Am I safe?* She didn't know. She was breathing, feeling, smelling, tasting. *Maybe not safe, but not dead at least.*

Something pulled at her skin when she moved. It made her cease her frantic movements. Rae carefully ran a hand up the length of her left arm. She found a small tube and a string. No, a wire. Then another. She discovered several more tubes and wires jutting from her body. A chill ran

down her spine. Her breathing quickened. *Pull them out or leave them in?* She didn't know the answer. Maybe they were keeping her alive?

A yellow flash filtered through her eyelids.

*What was that?*

Rae held her breath. A pulsing in her neck matched the thumping in her ears. She tried to open her eyes. An inky blackness surrounded her. Had she succeeded? *Do my eyes not work? Or is it just too dark in here?*

*Where is here??*

She counted her racing heartbeats to calm herself.

*One, two, three—*

Another flash.

*There it is again!*

Her arm dropped to her side, and the familiar texture of clothing brushed against her palm. *Is that my favorite blouse? The purple one?* She remembered picking out her favorite top for... for what? First day of seventh grade at her new school? No. Not yet. A trip? Yes, the long trip from—

A sound louder than her own heavy breathing crept into her consciousness. It was an alarm. More specifically, a klaxon, like on a vessel. *That's right. I'm on a ship.* But not at sea. Not this time. The yellow flashing every two seconds now made sense. That, combined with the alarm, meant one thing.

Danger.

*I want my daddy.* Rae's chest tightened. *Where is Da—*

*"Emergency. Emergency,"* said a lady's voice. It was oddly calm. *"Hull breach detected. Life Support and Environmental Systems at risk of failure. Immediate evacuation recommended. Emergency. Emergency—"*

**2****Galactic Sentinel Corps Ship *Nightingale***

Captain Moses Elwick sat at a beat-up gray desk and sipped a cup of stale coffee. He leafed through a sketchbook full of colorful drawings and short poems. Hasty scribbles filled the margins. "For Mom" was scrawled next to some, "For Dad" next to others. Some better explained what the illustration or poem was meant to be about. Turning the pages, he paused on a colorful butterfly. It sparked a memory of a peaceful afternoon at home seven years ago, the last stress-free day he spent with his daughter before once again be shipping off to war. The moisture in his eyes blurred everything. A tear fell onto his lap, making a dark spot on his navy blue tunic.

"I brought a little something," Petty Officer Kelly Graydon said from the other side of the desk. She pulled a chocolate cupcake with pink icing out of a small bag. A holo-candle was jammed into the center. She sat it gently on the desk in front of Elwick.

The little cake looked completely out of place in this cold, military environment. "Oh, Kelly." The sweet smell of sugary icing and chocolate made his stomach growl in anticipation.

"It was Zoey's idea," she said quietly. Kelly touched the side of the candle and it flickered to life.

Moses' chest heaved.

"She still loves ya, ya know."

Elwick said nothing.

"Don't think I haven't noticed what you've been doin' to yerself this past year," his Sister-in-Law said. "Throwin' yerself into yer work won't do the trick. It'll catch up to ya. Probably why you've been havin' trouble with yer tummy lately."

Elwick stared at the faux flame for a long time. "She would have been ten next Friday." He looked up. The hazel eyes of the intimidating red-head stared back at him under her Navy-issue ball cap, already welled up with tears. Graydon's stark features softened to an amazing degree in the light of the candle. Moses watched the holographic flame of the tiny white stick "burn" in an uncannily natural way. It gave off no heat, thus posed no danger of setting off the fire extinguishing systems in the Captain's cabin, but he could have sworn it was the real thing.

Kelly reached two muscular arms across the desk, and covered Moses' hands with hers. "Make a wish for 'er," she suggested. "I know it's not exactly her birthday, but with our hectic lives out here in the Black, there's no tellin' when we'll get this chance again." Her touch was gentle, despite the tremendous potential strength her grease-smudged fingers possessed.

Moses sat for a moment, and tried to come up with something his baby girl might want. Nothing material of course; Alena was above such things and better than that. He nodded to himself when he landed on the perfect wish. With a quick blow, the holographic flame went out exactly as it was designed to do, using the magic of tiny sensors programmed to detect human breath or a strong breeze. Water streamed down his cheeks now. "You know what

they say," he began, but choked mid-sentence. His face corkscrewed in a way few had seen.

Still holding one hand, Kelly walked around the desk and put her free arm around him and squeezed tight.

Had it been anyone else but Graydon, Elwick would have choked it all down like strong military men are expected to do. A ship's Captain simply could not show such vulnerability to those who served under him. Or so he was taught in the Navy. But here in his own cabin, among family, he wept openly. He could hear and feel Kelly sobbing quietly above him. "You know what they say about the good," he finally managed to force out. If she gave a non-verbal reply, he couldn't see or feel it. Moses breathed deep and held it a long moment, staring hard at the little cake in front of him. When he exhaled, he had regained at least some of his composure. "*Deus tecum*, my Angel. Daddy loves—"

"Officer of the Deck to the Captain," a disembodied voice interrupted.

Elwick clinched his eyes and attempted to force the pain and sadness away before he had to speak to one of his men. Since that was impossible, he simply stuffed it back in the dark recess from whence it came for the time being. Seconds later, his eyes burst open and he was in command of his little universe once again. He let go of Kelly Graydon's hand. *Time to get back to work.* To his right, a screen embedded into the dingy, gray desk had illuminated itself. Text poured down the small display at a high rate of speed, and a virtual button labeled "21MC" was illuminated. "Speak of the Devil," he said.

"As I was saying," Kelly smirked.

Moses touched the button activating the Twenty-One Main Circuit, one of dozens of standard communications channels available on naval and some civilian vessels. He now used it to connect his cabin directly and discretely to the bridge. "Elwick." He palmed the tears from his face. "Go ahead, Mister LaRoque."

"Sir, we just received a QE-qué from Deep Space Sentinel 3287. It's an automated distress signal."

"Let's hear it."

"It's text only, sir, and a whole lot of it. I was able to pull out location coordinates, ship registration number, time of—"

"Is that's what's flying across my screen now?"

"Aye, sir."

Moses closed the sketchbook. "Go with the Delta-Lima-Tango."

"Aye aye. Distance: four hundred forty-six point three light years. Time-to-Intercept under Safe Jump Protocol: about three hours. But it's probably going to take longer than that."

Moses stood and lifted his flight jacket from the back of the chair.

"Boy, that's a long ways away," said Kelly.

"Yeah it is," Moe replied. "Safe Jump Protocol be damned; everyone could be dead in three hours. Ozzie can surely get us there in—" *Wait a second.* He paused with one arm into a sleeve. "Lieutenant, did you just say *longer* than three hours? Why? And you skipped the location."

"Well, sir, that's where there's cause for some concern..."

Moses' eyes locked with Kelly's for a moment. "Mister LaRoque, what sector is Sentinel 3287 in?"

"The map says it's assigned to Sector two-four-two Charlie."

"Two-four-two—?"

"Don't bother, sir, I already looked it up. It's immediately inside the Hades Quadrangle."

Moe closed his eyes. *Damn.* He prided himself on having successfully avoided such unpredictable regions of space throughout his entire naval experience, both during his former military career and now his civilian one. If he assumed this mission, he would be forced to dive headlong into an area officially off-limits to ninety-nine percent of the population of the galaxy, and dragging his entire crew in with him.

As if reading his mind, Kelly offered playfully, "Hey, come on, what are them stats again? Somethin' like three in ten ships don't come back? Only three? Eh, we can beat those odds any day!" She smiled.

Moses stared at her and finished donning his flight jacket.

"Right?" She held the smile, but her gusto disappeared.

He looked down at his daughter's book of drawings. *Well, we only live once, don't we, Allie? And such a short time it is.* "Understood, Kyle. Have Mister Floyd begin plotting his jumps."

"Aye aye, Captain, he's already started."

Elwick glanced at the timepiece strapped to his left wrist. Orange digits read "18:46". He had put off evening chow in lieu of a depressing walk down memory lane. Now he'd likely miss dinner altogether. But his stomach would have to wait.

"I'd better get back down below decks," said Graydon. She moved quickly in the direction of the door.

"On my way, Mister LaRoque." Moses said and closed the circuit. "Kelly."

She looked over her shoulder, her hand on the door latch.

"Thank you."

Two long strides later and Graydon was crushing him with a tight hug. Then she regained her military bearing, patted his shoulders with rigor, and disappeared through the only exit to Elwick's quarters.

Moses carefully placed his precious book in a nightstand. "Duty calls, sweetheart. As it always does." He looked up and stared at the words "*DEUS GUBERNAT NAVEM*" above his door for a moment in quiet reflection, then departed his cabin with a purpose.

**3*****Emerald Pearl***

*"Emergency. Emergency. Atmospheric System failing. Environmental System failing. Immediate evacu—"*

A muffled sound entered Rae's consciousness. It sounded like a voice. But not like the one she had just heard.

"Addy!"

*Addy?* The voice was louder than the lady making announcements. And that voice was mechanical. Rae guess it was the computer. This voice sounded human, but Rae couldn't be sure.

"Mommy!" came another muffled call.

That one was unmistakable. Her mind found focus, and her eyelids shot open. "Tabby!" she croaked. Rae lunged forward and pushed with all her tiny might. The lid to her hibernation pod rose reluctantly. She tumbled from the coffin-like structure onto the cold floor. The motion pulled hard on the tubes and wires inserted under her skin. She lifted herself to hands and knees, and froze. *Oh no.* Her eyes darted to the many plastic "strings" dangling behind her. No puddles of red or clear fluid pooled on the gray tiles. Built-in breakaway joints on the tubes had allowed her to escape without making a bloody mess of herself. She thanked the Great Mother Nature for what her own

mother called "small favors." The yellow light flashed again. Every two seconds... She ignored it.

Rae breathed. It was hard to do so. She couldn't feel her hands, though they were right in front of her. She lowered her head and saw her knees, both legs wrapped in black leggings. She couldn't feel those, either.

*Tabby.*

Rae tried to climb to her feet. Her legs wobbled like a foal only learning to walk, and she fell back onto her knees. *Why won't my legs work? How long have I been asleep?* She tried again, this time turning in a slow circle back toward the cryopod from which she had recently tumbled, and used it for support. Her arms burned and shook with the effort. Her knuckles turned white as she held onto parts of machinery jutting out from the sarcophagus.

"Ayyyyy!"

She looked to her left. *Tabby!*

"Rae, get me out!" Her voice was muffled but Rae could understand her. Her younger sister stood in the partially illuminated stasis pod next to her own, banging away at the curved glass.

Rae dove to the chamber holding her sibling, her arms and legs screaming as a million invisible needles pricked every sinew and tendon. "It's okay, Tabby! I'm here!" Rae dug her fingers into the seam of the door. It didn't budge.

"Get me out of here!"

"I'm trying!" Rae noticed a lit screen to her right. It flashed words she didn't care to read. She pounded on the display, first with her palm, then with her fist. It flashed green, and the glass door hissed. It took forever to rise. Rae flung her arms around Tabitha, but the ten-year-old fell into her, sending both girls to the floor in a heap. The fall

made quick work of the tubes and wires that held Tabby prisoner.

The little girl looked around. "What happened? Where's Mommy?"

"I don't know," Rae replied.

Rae now had a full view of the cryogenic stasis chamber as she lay on her back. Visual and audible chaos assaulted her from all sides. And every two seconds it became bright as day. "Wasn't Daddy across—?"

"Daddy!"

Rae looked "up" from her perspective to where Tabby pointed, and waited for the recurring yellow flash. *There!* Their father was indeed in the pod across from Rae's. But it was—

"Mommy!" Rae's head snapped down and she saw Tabby looking at the pod next to her own. In another two seconds she saw their mother's face. Her pod was dark, unlike Rae and Tabby's, each of which glowed with a dim white light in the darkened room. In the flash of the emergency lights, Mother's upper torso was in full display behind the glass of the "coffin."

"Looks like she's not awake yet," Rae said.

"Neither is Jamie."

Rae saw their brother Jamie in a fourth pod, on the other side of their mother. Four others lay beyond his in a small alcove. No, eight more.

*"Emergency. Emergency,"* said the calm lady once again. Her voice echoed in the metal room. *"Hull breach detected. Life Support and Environmental Systems failing. Immediate evacuation recommended."*

Tabitha was off Rae now, enabling her to sit up. She looked over her shoulder toward her father's pod, and saw

three others beside his. Her eyes darted back and forth, using the two-second strobe to piece together the entire cryogenic chamber.

The cryopods in her father's row were all dark. The small datascreen jutting out to the right of each pod was also dark. When Rae looked back at her mother's screen, it had several blue, jagged lines plodding across it. Words labeled each line, "Cardiac," "Respiratory," "Neurological," among others. Jamie's was the same, as were the other four next to his. Her father's screen showed none of these things, nor did any of the other seven along his wall. *What does that mean? That they're turned off? Or broken? Surely all eight can't be broken!*

Rae dragged herself to her mother's pod, made her way to her feet, and touched the small screen. Instantly, soft white lights snapped on in the interior of the unit, illuminating her mom's face and chest like Tabby's was a minute before. The light glinted in multiple hues off the diamonds adorning the woman's neck, ears and nose. The pewter Triple Goddess pendant hanging between her collar bones seemed to almost absorb the light that fell upon it, but its center lilac-colored amethyst stone shone with a brilliance Rae had never before seen, and the tiny amethyst stones embedded in the crescent moons on either side of the center circle seemed to sparkle with life. The Wiccan symbol of maiden, mother and crone made Rae smile. Her eyes fell downward upon the sleeveless, forest-green dress her mother wore for the trip. It caressed the floor when she walked. Rae could only see half of it; the metal casing of the pod concealed everything below the waist. Her mom's long, golden hair was pulled to one side as if in a hurry. She did that often, out of habit. It was probably the last thing she did before settling in for the long sleep. *She looks*

*like an angel*, Rae thought. *So peaceful. I almost hate to wake her up.*

The next time Rae looked, the small screen displayed additional information. She read it and navigated through a surprisingly simple menu. It appeared it was possible to interrupt the hibernation process. But each friendly blue virtual button she touched immediately turned an unfriendly red, and a nasty notice appeared on the screen. *"No authorization to perform this function."* She tried various approaches and received similar messages. Mother did not wake up. She didn't even seem to be breathing as far as Rae could tell. But all indicators said she was alive.

Rae limped to her father's pod. Her legs ached with each step, but at least the needles were beginning to disappear.

She touched the small dark screen on his pod several times. Nothing happened. She could see her father's face through the glass that separated them each time the yellow light flashed. He didn't look peaceful like Mother. His face was all twisted up. He was in pain. Rae's heart nearly burst from her chest. She began to cry. "Daddy!" she shouted. But there was no response. Her lower lip quivered. *No...*

Dear Reader,

I hope you enjoyed this introduction to SENTCOPS Log One: Distress Call!

If you did, I could always use Advanced Copy Readers prior to this book's publication date! ARCs are wonderful, angelic souls to whom I will send two years of hard work—the entire e-book—free of charge, TODAY. I ask only one small, quick thing in return. That you hop on Amazon.com when the book is officially published later this year and leave an honest review of the novel (good, bad or mediocre, your choice). ☺ I will notify you via e-mail when the book is published and provide instructions! Please drop me a line at [rod@rodwerks.net](mailto:rod@rodwerks.net) and let me know you want to be an ARC reader!

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I thank you from the bottom of my heart for your time and support!

-Rod

PS – In case you were wondering, SENTCORPS Log Two is well underway...