

THE CALLING by Branwen OShea

EXCERPT

“All right, get out, men.” Savas had never experienced such peace on the last mission. This was truly pleasant. They climbed out of the rover, and he tripped on his own feet as if drunk.

Laughing at himself, he reminded the others, “Guns out. Stamf, take the lead. I’ll bring up the rear.”

He paused, swaying a bit, while the other two men passed him and then proceeded slowly down the left branch. Sparkling light from farther down the tunnel lit their way. With a quick glance back toward the entrance, he took up the rear.

Then a voice as ethereal as the wind sang, “Caaaaaahm heeeeeeeere...caaaaaaaaahm heeeeeeeere...”

What the hell?

Savas shook his head, blinked, and tapped his ear communicator. Stamf and Abdul, farther ahead, had frozen and appeared confused, swaying in place.

Something was terribly wrong. Was this cave filled with noxious fumes? Had they all gotten cold sickness? The databases talked of arctic workers becoming weak and confused by the extreme temperatures.

Think! Think. Savas wanted to lie down and nap. What’s wrong with me? Images from his childhood tumbled through his head. Not now. Not again. I control my own mind.

“Caaaaaaaahm heeeeeeeere,” the voice lulled, endlessly peaceful.

They all mindlessly continued forward, as if in a dream. A small part of Savas’ brain screamed in warning. I. Control. My. Own. Mind. He grunted with the effort. Fighting the urge to relax, Savas forced his hands to raise his weapon.