

HUXTON:

a STAR TREK fan audio production



Sol System. Earth. Arizona.

From her bedroom window, young Sara Huxton peered through her antique telescope at the large Starbase in orbit. A Constitution-class starship was exiting through its massive space doors, and she was taking in the sight as it happened. Sara marveled not just at the impressive ship, but also at its purpose; those giant ships were meant for exploration. Although a young girl of ten, she had already understood that there were wonders and perils far out in the deep unknown reaches of space that were just waiting to be discovered, and she wanted to be a part of it. For now, of course, she would attend school in her still-rural hometown and assist her ailing father as best she could. But one day, she told herself, she would go out there, thataway, as she watched the big starship above leave orbit.

Earth. Starfleet Academy. Twelve years later. Stardate 1689.3

Although I wasn't at the top of my class, Graduation Day was the first real anomaly I encountered during my career in Starfleet. As the rest of my class graduated, I was instead summoned to the office of the Director of Starfleet Intelligence, not far from the Academy itself.

As I entered, the Commodore immediately rose to greet me, and then had me sit in front of his desk. That would become unwritten standard procedure in the future, whenever a new mission would be presented to me in my true role as a Section 31 agent. But this is where it all began. In this room.

The other cadets graduating from Starfleet Academy, now freshly minted Ensigns, were to be given assignments based upon their career choices within Starfleet. Some would go on to be scientists, others engineers, others specialists of different kinds. But not me. The Commodore described for me what I would really become, if I chose to accept the offer. An offer that was made to me because I seemed like “the perfect person for the job,” in his words.

I had studied to become a tactical officer. My proficiencies in both personal and shipboard weapons training, as well as military decision-making impressed my academy instructors. But I wasn't there to impress anybody. In fact, I didn't like having attention. Of course, I wanted to see the universe and explore and have adventures. At the same time though, I didn't want to be in the spotlight. That is what the Commodore laid out for me in his “offer.” Once I heard it, I readily accepted.

Officially, I would become the new tactical officer of a ship currently moored at Spacedock. A job not usually given to a new Ensign fresh out of the Academy, but the USS Ward had just lost their entire tactical team, along with some Starfleet Marines, on a rescue mission that went terribly wrong. The Ward was now here, and I was available. Unofficially, I was to be a resource for a non-existent organization within Starfleet Intelligence. For someone like me who doesn't enjoy the limelight, I liked the sound of that.

Before being posted to the USS Ward in my cover position as tactical officer, I was given my first assignment. The Ward was an old Saladin-class destroyer, recently converted and given a new registry as a search-and rescue ship, while still retaining its destroyer armaments. There was even a platoon of Starfleet Marines permanently stationed aboard, sometimes even more than that, depending on the nature of the current mission.

The last mission of the Ward saw her answering a distress call that turned disastrous, and my assignment was to help get to the bottom of that. The tactical officer, her entire security team, a number of Marines, and a medical team were lost on that mission. An unsuspecting freighter had allegedly struck a mine, and everyone from the USS Ward that transported aboard the freighter during rescue operations was lost when the freighter suddenly and inexplicably exploded. All except for one Marine, the sole survivor of the rescue party, who was able to transport back to the Ward just as the explosion occurred.

Severely injured, the Marine was transferred from the Ward to the well-equipped medical facilities at Spacedock. It was there, of all places, that my first assignment for Section 31 would bring me. One would think that this would be a simple job for Starfleet Intelligence itself to handle, but for some reason the Commodore felt that an unassuming asset was needed for this matter. And he was right.

Dressed in a tight-fitting blue uniform with Medical-division insignia, I proceeded on my mission to question Private Shurntak, a male Andorian, about the rescue-mission-gone-awry under my guise as a nurse. I would have preferred a different outfit, perhaps one with slacks instead of the ill-fitting skant that I was issued. Still, I proceeded with what I was given to work with.

The medical annex inside Spacedock was enormous. After a short time, I located and entered the room to which Private Shurntak was assigned. He was in his bed, connected to various equipment, the most prominent of which was an autofuser, providing Shurntak with transfusions of blue Andorian blood at programmed intervals by his physician. The poor Marine had bad internal injuries, and wasn't expected to survive. In fact, it was somewhat of a miracle that he was still alive at all, despite being unconscious. I needed to talk to him, and then get out quickly before being encountered by actual Starfleet medical staff.

I had a hypo on me that would briefly bring him around to a semi-lucid state, at great risk to his life. Still, I was operating on orders, and had a job to do. After waiting for the right moment when no medical staff were nearby, I quickly disabled all video feeds from the room interior, and then administered the hypo.

After a few seconds, Private Shurntak slowly opened his eyes, the two antennae atop his head standing straight up from the shock of sudden reawakening. He then looked at me, a confused expression on his face. "Tell me the last thing you remember, Private," I said, my altered medical tricorder recording everything.

"The freighter," he began to say, "wasn't hit by a mine. It was damaged on purpose."

That took me by surprise. "How do you know this? There were no other ships in the area. Just the freighter and the USS Ward," I said.

"I can't explain it," the Private replied. But we were meant to think it struck an old Klingon mine. There were mines inside the freighter. Not outside. I must tell my superiors!"

"Relax, Private," I said, trying to calm him, while also realizing the urgency with which I needed to vacate the premises before being discovered.

Shurntak began to have trouble breathing - an indicator that the hypo was wearing off, and it was taking its toll on him; he wouldn't be alive much longer. He struggled to speak as I opened my communicator and signaled for a quick beam-out.

"They... detonated... the mines..."

He breathed his last, just as the transporter beam activated. A code-blue alarm had sounded, and medical staff rushed to help Private Shurntak. But they were too late, and I was already gone.

Present day.

Of course, I immediately submitted my report to the Commodore. I was then dismissed, and told to report aboard the Ward wearing a Security-division red uniform, and assume my new cover position as the ship's Tactical Officer. That was it. My first mission as a Section 31 agent.

Although it was never made public, the freighter was used by the Romulans to lure a Federation starship, in this case the USS Ward, into a trap. The result left the USS Enterprise the only other starship available to patrol along the Romulan Neutral zone when our outposts in the area suddenly came under attack.

I often look back at those memories; they make me both happy and sad. Happy that I did my part for the Federation, and sad because I would do anything to have those old days back again. Now, in my retirement, all I have left of my old adventures are these holodeck programs, which just aren't the same.

"Computer. Turn this bloody thing off."

END