

OPERATION: IMBALANCE

a STAR TREK fan audio production

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This fanfiction short story takes place immediately after the events in the Original Series episode, "Balance of Terror."



Captain's log, stardate 1723.4 U.S.S. Ward NCC-1267. As a Starfleet destroyer recently retrofitted for search and rescue missions, we've been assigned to patrol and survey the remnants of Federation outposts near the Romulan Neutral Zone that were recently attacked by a Romulan vessel which also engaged the U.S.S. Enterprise in combat. Our primary task is to survey the damage caused by this new "plasma" weapon the Romulans are using, including measuring any residual radiation, and ascertaining just how much of a major threat this new weapon of theirs poses to the Federation. And of course, we will look for any potential survivors, unlikely as that may be.

After completing his log entry, the captain looked at the asteroid field ahead from the viewscreen of the bridge around him. His attention focused on a large asteroid remnant, approximately one mile wide. The complex of structures within the interior of the asteroid comprising Outpost number 8 was all but obliterated, pulverized and exposed to space. Except for what appeared to be a singular annex on the southernmost end of the ruins. A very small section of Outpost 8 was apparently spared from complete destruction.

The science officer, an Andorian, reported while bent over her viewer. "A passageway, various compartments, and a laboratory are still intact, sir. With minimal atmosphere and gravity plating still operational."

Captain Lars sat back in his command chair, stroking the stubble of his short beard. A middle-aged human male, Lars was a veteran of the conflict with the Klingons. He knew full well that the Federation would be ill-equipped to handle another war with the Romulans right now. He needed to gather as much information about this new weapon as possible. The fact that part of Outpost 8 still remained was highly curious.

"Could it have been deliberately left that way?" the Captain asked.

"Doubtful," the science officer replied. "Although, considering the apparent nature of this new weapon of mass destruction, there is a slight chance that part of the base may have been randomly spared unintentionally by the Romulans."

"Very well," Captain Lars stated. He turned to address his new tactical officer.

"Ensign Huxton. I want our platoon of Starfleet Marines to beam down there and establish a safety perimeter. Once that is established, you will then transport down and lead a small science, medical, and recovery team. Radiation levels appear to be acceptable for you to be down there a short time; make sure you salvage what you can, learn what you are able from the damage down there, and bring back any survivors. You have one hour. Understood?"

"Completely, sir" Ensign Huxton replied.

A human female in her mid-twenties, Huxton recently graduated from Starfleet Academy, and was posted to the USS Ward right away. The ship's previous tactical officer was lost during an away mission aboard a disabled freighter that had struck a gravitic mine left over from the Klingon war. Huxton inherited the job, due in large part to the small crew complement aboard the Ward.

As Ensign Huxton entered the transporter room, she inquired with the Chief at the controls about the status of the Marine detachment already aboard the fractional remnant of Outpost 8.

The transporter chief replied that the Marines reported five minutes ago that they'd secured a safety perimeter and were now standing by. However, communications were interrupted during the last few minutes, and he could no longer establish a transporter lock on their positions.

"Very well," Huxton said, as she and the rest of her team stepped onto the transporter pad. Her small team consisted of a medic, an astrophysicist, and a geologist. "Four to beam down within the established perimeter."

Huxton and her team materialized within a darkened passageway, the air stale, but breathable. She looked around for the Marines that preceded her, but there were none to be seen.

Just then, a loud scream followed by the unmistakable sound of phaser fire could be heard from the laboratory, in the next compartment. Huxton ordered her team to stay close together, as they made their way toward the sounds of violence.

At the laboratory entrance, Huxton covered her mouth, so as to not let out an audible gasp, as she discovered the remains of one of the Marines.

His uniform was similar in nature to standard Starfleet-issued uniforms, the main difference in appearance being his olive drab colored tunic and shoulder insignias indicating his rank and unit identification. He appeared to have been badly wounded before succumbing to his injuries; Huxton pulled him from the lab entranceway to the relative safety of the corridor outside.

The medic on Huxton's team examined the corpse of the unfortunate Marine, and then gave her the grim news; the Marine was killed by disruptor fire.

Huxton immediately pulled out her communicator and opened it, activating a pre-set direct channel to the communications station aboard the Ward. Inside the lab nearby, additional phaser fire could be heard, mixed with indecipherable yelling.

"Huxton to Ward. Emergency. Please respond."

There was no response. The static that was audible sounded randomized, indicating that the frequency was being purposefully jammed by someone.

Huxton ordered one of the scientists on her team to set his tricorder for emergency distress, turning it into a beacon for the Ward to eventually discover, whenever the jamming stops. She then ordered each person on her team, including herself, to stand back-to-back, forming an outward-facing circle, phasers at the ready. In this defensive formation, they slowly made their way back into the laboratory.

Aboard the Ward, tension was mounting. Communications with the landing party were clearly being interfered with, and even their life signs were becoming sporadic. Captain Lars was in the middle of deciding whether or not to risk sending another away team, when his science officer spoke.

"I am reading phaser fire within the Outpost ruins, sir. And disruptor fire."

"Red Alert! Man battle stations and raise shields!" Captain Lars ordered.

Romulans. Still here. But why? And why would they leave their people stranded in the ruins of an outpost they'd just destroyed? It made no sense. But, one thing was for certain. With his shields up, coupled with the inability to establish communications with his own away team, they were stuck down there, on their own for now.

As the group of four entered the Outpost laboratory, each person visually scanning for any threat, Huxton spotted another body. Another Marine.

Founded in 2161 by Malcolm Reed immediately after the the initial war with the Romulans, in which no one on either side ever saw the faces of their opponents, the Starfleet Marines as an organization were directly descended from the MACOs, a division of the United Earth Military that was dissolved the same year. These Marines were highly trained, combat-ready troops. Huxton knew that she and the rest of her team were in great peril. But, unable to leave anyway, she pressed forward, searching for survivors. And answers.

Huxton's tricorder was nearly useless. Unable to register any life signs nearby, it also couldn't display the material composition of the asteroid remnant they were standing on - something a tricorder should be able to do with relative ease. It was being jammed, just like her communicator. Thankfully, the phasers still worked. Or, did they?

Huxton took both the hand phaser and the level-three phaser rifle from the dead Marine she'd just encountered. Both were set to vaporize. Standard Starfleet procedure when entering an unknown situation was to have phasers set to stun. This left little doubt; the Marines were attacked first.

Just then, a disruptor blast narrowly missed Huxton's head, as she and the rest of her team ducked for cover. A single phaser blast from someone not on her team replied. Huxton called out, identifying herself. The green disruptor beam narrowly missed her again, attempting to

zero in on her position. The distraction gave the person behind the replying phaser blast the opportunity they needed to find their target; the silhouette of a Romulan soldier could be seen vaporizing a split second later.

The person behind that phaser then called back out, in reply to Ensign Huxton.

“Corporal Galloway, first platoon! All clear! That’s the last of them.”

Huxton and her team revealed themselves from their partially-covered positions. The corporal slowly walked toward the Ensign, pointing toward a deactivated piece of equipment as he did so. There was a deceased human next to that equipment, not wearing a uniform.

"Section 31," Corporal Galloway said. "They were using this hidden laboratory near the neutral zone for something, and the Romulans wanted it badly enough to send a covert team here to get it, while their mother ship caused diversionary havoc throughout the system. Whatever its purpose, once this device was rendered inoperative, our tricorders started working again."

Ensign Huxton's communicator beeped, indicating that communications were restored. The Ward was calling, having finally picked up the tricorder distress beacon set up by Huxton's landing party earlier.

Huxton spoke, as she raised her communicator to signal her reply. "We'll take this back to the ship. I'm sure Starfleet, or Section 31, or whoever, will want it back. Good job, all of you."

After debriefing Captain Lars about the mysterious equipment her team had recovered, Ensign Huxton tried to relax in her quarters, but could not. A coded personal message had just come through for her, and she was hesitant to play it back. Reluctantly, she did so, duty winning out over hesitation.

"You did well retrieving the device and not letting it fall into Romulan hands. You will go far in our organization. We have another assignment for you when you reach your next destination."

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