

## The Icarus Encounter - a STAR TREK fan audio production

written and audio produced by  
Joe Mignano



The following takes place after the events in  
the fan audio adventure "OPERATION: IMBALANCE"

*Ensign Sara Huxton personal log, stardate 1731.6.*

*My assignment as the new tactical officer aboard the USS Ward has been cut short. For now, at least. Our arrival at Starbase 12 has placed me in two places at once. The station's proximity to Risa and the approval of my shore leave from Captain Lars will provide ample cover for me to be away from the ship for a while. However, the station isn't far from the Romulan Neutral Zone, and Admiral Barlow has summoned me in secret to his office aboard the station. Whatever is going on, I just hope it isn't involving Romulans again. That last encounter on what used to be Outpost 8 was enough for me for a while.*

I like Starbase 12. It has a lot of history, being one of the oldest stations within the Federation. But, there would be no time for sightseeing during this visit.

The door to Admiral Barlow's office slid open, and I entered, respectfully standing at attention.

"Reporting as ordered, Admiral," I said.

"At ease, Ensign. Be seated," the Admiral stated, gesturing to a chair and indicating that this meeting might take a little while.

I sat, wondering what assignment awaited me this time. The need to see me in person underscored the clandestine nature of what I really do, beneath the facade of being a tactical officer aboard a starship.

The Admiral continued. "Let's speak candidly. This office is secure from any outside influence, and I am not really an Admiral," Barlow said, handing me a padd. It outlined the details of my next mission.

"Of course, Director Barlow," I stated, not really wanting to read what was in my hands.

---

There are times when I love my job, and other times when I can't stand it. I love the diversity of assignments that I get, even if they are sometimes dangerous. Okay, usually dangerous. Other times...

Other times I get sent to the strangest of places, to do the oddest of things, for reasons I will never be allowed to know or talk about.

My shuttle departed Starbase 12 without any issue. My pilot, however, was another matter. My job involves many skills, but I've never been a pilot. So, Section 31 provided me with one.

Skramm. No joking. That's his name. Skramm. A Vulcan civilian that hardly spoke. At all. He seemed obsessed with the ancient human game of Chess, but not with me, thank goodness. I always hated Chess. Skramm played endless verbal games of three-dimensional Chess with the shuttle's onboard computer, and sometimes won. His monotonous voice, over and over again... "Knight to Queen's Bishop Three." "Checkmate." It drove me crazy.

Our shuttlecraft, the Icarus, was fast for a ship with only sublight engines, able to go full impulse for a considerable amount of time. However, even at that speed, Risa - where my mission was supposed to take me - was a good many hours away. And with my silent companion at the controls, this was going to be a very long ride.

After a while, I decided to look over my mission parameters, even though I'd already read them several times. Starfleet Intelligence had learned of possible Klingon activity on Risa, of all places. No Klingons were encountered on the planet by vacationing Starfleet personnel, and the locals did not report any such contacts. And no Klingon ships have been encountered so far in

orbit or anywhere in the Epsilon Ceti B system. Risa, being a Federation world and near both Starbase 12 and the Romulan Neutral Zone, makes this bit of questionably-obtained information somewhat dubious. Still, Klingon activity in this part of the quadrant, if true, could only mean something nefarious afoot.

It was decided, therefore, to conduct covert reconnaissance on a Federation member world, without actually doing so, by sending someone that doesn't officially exist to do it. Enter Section 31.

Although an autonomously run secret organization within Starfleet, Section 31 nevertheless falls under the auspices of Starfleet Intelligence; it is from the top brass there that Director Barlow receives his own instructions.

The instructions given to me were simple. Ditch the uniform, put on civilian clothes, and blend in on Risa. Have a good time, and look for Klingons while doing so. What's not to like about that? After hours and hours of enduring my shuttlecraft trip with my non-talkative pilot, I'd never make it to the surface of Risa.

---

We entered the Epsilon Eridani system via a non-conventional route; that went off smoothly enough. But when we approached Risa itself, that was when things took a turn for the surreal.

In orbit above Risa, positioned away from any of the continents but directly over a chain of small islands, was a Klingon D-7 battlecruiser. I instructed my pilot Skramm, also a Section 31 agent, to assume an orbital entry on the far side of the planet, in order to avoid being detected by the Klingon ship. My pilot, under orders to follow my lead, did not do as instructed.

"Don't worry," Skramm said. "The experimental 'Imbalance Device' that was just installed on the Icarus will confuse their sensors enough to keep us from being detected for long."

It was then that I noticed Skramm had a small type-1 phaser pointed directly at me. "I think it is time for you to move to the aft compartment, and change into your civilian attire, Ensign Huxton."

I slowly moved toward the back of the shuttle, as Skramm kept the phaser leveled at me. My mind was working overtime trying to figure out what was really happening; talking seemed my best option for now. But Skramm was not a talker, as I already knew. "The Imbalance Device has a limited range, and is unstable," I said. "If you activate it, there's no telling what it will do to the shuttle. It takes too much power to operate."

“Be silent!” Skramm shouted. Then, to my amazement, he began talking. And not talking like a captor might to a prisoner. He spoke more like someone might speak to a passing acquaintance. Or perhaps even a family member.

“The device is already activated. And, those are not Klingons on that ship. They are Romulans.”

Why was he telling me this? Perhaps he expected me to not live long enough to inform my superiors. It was almost as if he truly wanted me to know what was occurring in front of us.

“The small Klingon crew of that ship has been transferred off. They are on an uninhabited island below, waiting to be picked up. By me.” Skramm then snickered, the right corner of his mouth forming a lopsided smile. It was then that I knew he was not a Vulcan. I stared at him, waiting for him to talk more, incredulous that he had already said so much.

An alert beeped on the control panel near the pilot seat, indicating that the Imbalance Device was beginning to fail. Skramm ignored it.

“A group of Vulcan monks landed on Risa not long ago, hoping to establish a monastery at a remote, secluded place on the planet. Those weren’t Vulcans. They were Romulan agents, like myself, waiting to take possession of our first battlecruiser, compliments of our new partnership with the Klingons.”

Right when I was starting to believe his story, I suddenly didn’t. “The Klingons and Romulans have been adversaries for centuries!” I declared.

“Until now, “ Skramm said. “I don’t know how long it will last, honestly. In fact, I don’t foresee this new arrangement lasting very long at all. But for now, the Klingons are getting upgraded cloaking technology, and we... WE will finally have warp drive. We tried adapting Federation technology to our ships, but dilithium crystals just aren’t compatible. So, we found a different solution.”

Skramm sounded almost proud of himself as he spoke to me. He reminded me of my grandfather telling me stories when I was a kid about the adventures of his younger self serving aboard multiple Daedalus-class ships. Ironic, then, that our shuttlecraft should be named Icarus. And with the alert on the control panel now indicating that the Imbalance Device had completely failed, we were all but certain to meet the same fate as our ship’s namesake.

Skramm didn’t seem to care. In fact, he put his phaser away. I could’ve attacked him, but I didn’t see the reason to. With the failure of the Imbalance Device, we were likely detected by now. And I knew from experience how thorough the Romulans could be. They weren’t about to take any chances of allowing Starfleet to learn about this new sudden shift of power in the quadrant.

The “Imbalance Device” as a Section 31 research project was a dismal failure, though it had shown some promise early on. It would’ve been a strategic bonus and trophy for the Romulans. Thankfully, it would not be.

Skramm could’ve killed me and completed his mission, picking up the Klingon crew from the planet and returning them to whatever vessel that waited to take them back to Klingon space. But, there was no such vessel.

“The Klingons on the planet below are dead, as we soon will be. I’ve enjoyed our time together, Sara Huxton.”

I did not know how to react to his words, which I once again believed were truthful. I let him continue, as he seemed eager to finish saying all he had to say. An alarm indicating a weapons lock interrupted him as he tried to speak again.

My tactical training kicked in, and I quickly took position in the co-pilot seat; my talkative Romulan captor made no effort to stop me. I could tell that he was resigned to our fates being sealed. I was not.

I had no clue how to fly the shuttle. But I found the maneuvering thrusters. I turned us in every direction imaginable. The battlecruiser fired a single torpedo, and then cloaked. Thankfully, it wasn’t a plasma torpedo; the Klingons didn’t have those. It kept closing on us, no matter which thruster I fired.

Fired... The Icarus may not have had an onboard warp drive, but it did have rudimentary shields, and a single phaser bank. The shields, essentially polarized hull plating, wouldn’t stand a chance against the incoming torpedo, but I activated them, while simultaneously firing phasers manually. There was no time to get a target lock; this had to be done by reflex. And this is what I was good at.

I fired phasers from the Icarus two times, then three, each time just nearly missing the inbound Klingon torpedo. My fourth shot, however, hit home just in the nick of time, detonating the torpedo just a few hundred meters from the port side of the Icarus. The explosion rocked that entire side of the shuttlecraft, but we were still relatively intact.

A panel exploded right behind the Romulan formerly known as Skramm. Shrapnel and debris showered his body, deeply penetrating what appeared to be vital organs. He collapsed onto the deck, green blood spilling profusely. I applied direct pressure to try to stop the bleeding. He seemed grateful for my efforts, which to me appeared futile; the bleeding wasn’t stopping.

He smiled gently, then spoke softly, the words of a dying man trailing from his mouth.

“Allow me to properly introduce myself to you this time, Sara Huxton. I am Ramask, of the Tal Shiar. I am in many ways your equal, your counterpart... from the other... side of the... chess board.”

Ramask breathed his last, his eyes meeting mine one final time, a glint of mutual respect reflected between us.

He was the Romulan version of me, doing his job. Only, when the “Imbalance Device” failed, he knew his life was over. Had it actually worked, it likely would’ve been my life instead of his. Or worse, I’d be a prisoner of the Tal Shiar, and Starfleet would’ve written me off, a non-existent operative from a non-existent organization. For the second time in almost as many weeks, I was glad that stupid device quit working.

The Icarus was heavily damaged, and the communications array was knocked out. I drifted there for a little while, slowly trying to teach myself how to pilot a shuttlecraft. Eventually, a familiar shape presented itself through the forward viewport; the saucer section and single-nacelle silhouette of a Saladin-class destroyer. It was the USS Ward, entering standard orbit over Risa.

The communications array of the Icarus might’ve been fried, but I had a personal communicator on me. It wasn’t long before the Ward had a tractor beam on Icarus, and Ensign Huxton was back on duty as tactical officer of the Ward.

I sent a coded debrief about what happened to Admiral Barlow, and never heard anything more about the matter ever again. If I was meant to know, then I’d be told, if it was pertinent to my mission assignment. One thing was for certain, though. The Romulans and the Klingons would both soon have the Federation at a disadvantage, unless the top brass were to do something about it. Upgrading our starships would certainly be a start in the right direction.

I often think about my Romulan “counterpart,” and how he could have killed me, or I him. In the game of Chess, the pieces are at war. We’d been at war with the Romulans before, when my grandfather was an officer on a Daedalus-class ship. His stories of that time, the ones he was willing to share, sounded horrific. And I’d seen my own taste of combat. What we do in the game of espionage and subterfuge, is try to learn about and move ahead of our opponent in order to have the advantage, should it ever come to war. I don’t like Chess, and I don’t like war. But I like what I do. And perhaps, in some small way, my contribution to the game might help prevent war.

END