

## Fire and Ice

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## Fire and Ice

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### Summary

On their way back from a diplomatic mission, Michael and Philippa run out of power unexpectedly and are forced to land.

### Notes

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*First Officer's Log, Stardate 1134.8.*

*The captain and I are returning from a diplomatic mission to Cygnus II. The mission was a success, and at our current speed we will rendezvous with the Shenzhou in six point four hours.*

\* \* \*

"Are you looking forward to returning to the ship?" Philippa asks, a faint smile playing around the corners of her mouth as she glances over at Michael.

"I would not put it that way," Michael replies. "But I... anticipate the return to our duties."

Philippa's smile grows, but she doesn't reply.

The control panel beeps and Philippa's smile disappears as she looks down at the readings. Michael follows her gaze. The readings for electromagnetic fields are fluctuating wildly. "An ion storm?"

"No," Philippa replies grimly. "Something else. And we're about to fly right into it. Strap in."

The shuttle shakes and rocks, tossed about by an unseen force. Michael's fingers fly over the diagnostic panel, trying to figure out what's happening and, more importantly, how to stop it. Out of the corner of her eye she can see Philippa fighting with the controls, her mouth set in a grim line as she uses every trick she knows to keep the shuttle on course.

The shaking stops so suddenly that it takes Michael a moment to notice. "I think we're through the worst of it," she reports. "The readings are returning to normal."

"Yes," Philippa replies. "But we've got another problem. Whatever that was, it drained our fuel cells. Even diverting all remaining power to life support, we've got less than thirty minutes before we suffocate."

Michael swallows, fingers active once more as she orders a search on the surrounding area. "There's one class M planet in this system, point six parsecs away. I'm plotting a course."

"Let's hope we make it," Philippa replies.

The minutes pass slowly, and by the time they crash through the planet's atmosphere they have only six minutes of oxygen left. The ride down is bumpy as Michael tries to calculate how much power she can divert to the engines without knocking out their life support.

"When I get down to five hundred metres, put all power to the engines," Philippa orders. "It's our only chance."

"Affirmative," Michael replies, readying herself as the ground rushes closer. Eight hundred metres, seven hundred, six hundred...

"Now!" Philippa cries, and Michael slams her hand down on the buttons. The sudden burst of power slows their fall, but whether it will be enough, she doesn't know. On the control panel an alert light begins to flash, signifying the loss of life support, but there isn't time to worry about it.

"Brace yourself," Philippa orders, and Michael does so.

They touch down with a bang, loose items flying around them. Philippa cries out in pain but doesn't lose concentration, keeping her hands firm as they bounce off the surface several times before finally sliding to a halt.

They sit there for a moment, letting the stillness wash over them, before Michael reacts to the still-flickering alert light and hurries over to the shuttle door. She pulls down on the lever and has to brace herself as the door opens and cold air rushes in. Outside everything is white, covered in snow as far as the eye can see.

She turns at a sound behind her to see Philippa approaching, limping heavily with one hand clutching at a gash on her right leg. "Not a bad landing," she says. "If I do say so myself."

Michael is already moving, searching for the medical kit. "Captain, you're hurt."

Philippa shrugs, although a faint grimace crosses her face. "A piece of metal came loose in the landing. A few passes from the regenerator and it'll be as if it never happened." She frowns and adds, "Right now we have bigger problems. We need to figure out where we are and how to signal the *Shenzhou*."

"Right," Michael says.

She finds the dermal regenerator in the medical kit and passes it to Philippa before going to work on the control panel.

The power is almost gone, but she manages to send off a short message stating where they are and that they need help. She has no idea if anyone will pick it up, let alone their ship, but it's better than nothing.

Beside her, Philippa sighs and sets down the regenerator. Michael looks over at her in concern. "Something wrong?"

"Well, I'm no longer bleeding," Philippa replies. "But it looks like that's all I can say. I think the anomaly that drained our power drained *all* power. There was barely enough to close the wound." She frowns at it and adds, "I only hope we won't need it for anything else."

"We'll just have to be careful," Michael reasons, and Philippa shakes her head.

"That'll be the day."

It's cold with the door open, a frigid wind blowing in and nipping at their skin. Michael closes the door as much as she can, but with the life support offline she has to leave a crack to keep them from suffocating, and the draught makes her shiver. She spent her entire pre-Starfleet life on worlds where the temperature never dropped past fifteen degrees Celsius. She isn't used to snow.

"Time to break out the emergency kit," Philippa says. She smiles and adds, "I think there's some blankets in there."

There are, along with emergency rations, flares, and a beacon. Michael wraps one of the blankets around her shoulders and immediately feels warmer. Placebo effect, of course, but she can't deny it helps.

Philippa pulls out the beacon, setting it on the floor and taking a breath. "I hope this works," she says, before flicking the switches to activate it.

The beacon flashes blue, indicating that it is transmitting a distress call. Philippa lets out her breath in a whoosh and smiles. "About time we had some luck."

Michael is torn between pointing out that luck is illogical and agreeing, and ends up staying silent.

Philippa picks up the beacon, wavering slightly on her injured leg. "It'll work better outside," she says. "Come on, let's put it on top of the shuttle."

Michael hurries to help her, and together they carry the beacon out of the shuttle and set it up on the roof where it flashes steadily, sending its message out into space. Hopefully all the way to the *Shenzhou*.

It isn't logical, but hope is a human quality she has come to respect over the years.

She watches the beacon flash for a few moments, then turns, surveying the landscape. All around is white, stretching off to the horizon. Something flickers in her peripheral vision and she turns, but there's nothing there.

"Come back inside," Philippa calls from the doorway. "I'll open some ration packs."

Michael glances around once more, checking for anything out of the ordinary, but everything is still. A gust of wind blows past, making her shiver, and she turns and heads back inside.

With their power drained and the beacon set, all they can do is wait. Michael occupies herself by fiddling with a communicator, trying to boost the signal. Being light-powered, the communicators weren't affected by the anomaly, but there's no way short of a miracle that they'll be strong enough to reach the *Shenzhou*. Still, she has to try.

"Do you hear that?" Philippa says suddenly, breaking Michael's concentration.

Michael looks up. "Hear what?"

Philippa doesn't get the chance to answer as something slams into the side of the shuttle, sending them both off balance as it rocks. Out of instinct, Michael scrambles for her tricorder, only to find the power drained. The shuttle rocks again, accompanied by a roar from outside.

Beside her, Philippa pulls the shuttle's two phasers out of their compartment and checks them. "Almost drained," she says, "like everything else, but it's the best we have." She hands one to Michael, who takes it and clicks it to heavy stun.

The animal or whatever it is seems to be moving, as the next roar comes from the back of the shuttle. Michael's eyes flick to the doorway, the door that is almost but not quite closed. Swallowing, she raises the phaser, pointing it at the opening.

The first she sees of their assailant is a set of long black claws scraping around the edges of the door. They scrabble for purchase before slowly beginning to lever it open.

Michael knows the exact amount of force required to open a Starfleet shuttlecraft door, even one that is already cracked open, and she begins to wonder if their phasers will be enough.

As the gap between the door and the shuttle grows, the claws are joined by a large black paw, which reaches in and swipes around wildly. Michael shoots at it and the paw retreats, going back to trying to lever the door off.

With a shriek of metal the door tears away to reveal a huge scaly beast, vaguely lizard-like, with beady black eyes. It tosses the door aside and roars at them, and Michael raises her phaser and fires.

Philippa does the same, but their combined hits merely cause the beast to stumble before lunging forwards. It's too large to fit into the shuttle, but it pokes an arm in and grabs for them. Michael flicks the phaser to 'kill' and fires again, only to hear a click as the power runs out.

The creature roars, its frantic swipes coming worryingly close to hitting them. Philippa fires her phaser once more, but then it too runs dry. She presses herself against the shuttle wall as the creature's claws glance off her boot.

A rush of protectiveness hits Michael at the sight, and she grabs one of the flares from the emergency kit, lunging in front of Philippa just in time for four razor sharp claws to rake across her arm. Ignoring the pain, Michael ignites the flare and jabs it directly into the creature's chest.

The beast howls in pain and staggers backwards. With a last roar of frustration, it turns and runs, heading into the distance. Michael watches it go before slumping against the shuttle wall in relief.

"You're hurt," Philippa says with concern, and Michael looks down to see her arm is bleeding.

"It's just a scratch," she replies, but the adrenaline is beginning to wear off, leaving behind pain and an odd weakness.

Philippa rummages in the emergency kit for a roll of bandages. "Wish I could offer you the dermal regenerator, but I guess we'll have to do this the old fashioned way."

With Philippa's help, Michael manages to get her arm out of her sleeve, frowning at the large gashes in her uniform. She feels strange, like her muscles aren't quite cooperating. She watches as Philippa sterilises the wounds, then covers them with gauze and bandages.

"There," Philippa says, setting down the roll of bandages. "How does that feel?"

Michael flexes her arm experimentally. It seems to take a lot of effort. "It's fine," she says, and Philippa frowns.

"I'm going to give you a shot of painkillers," she says.

Michael wants to protest, but she can't seem to find the energy. "Mmm," she agrees, letting her eyes slip shut.

"Michael," Philippa says sharply. "Stay with me."

It's the kind of tone that would usually have Michael jumping to attention, but even her captain's orders can't override the lethargy spreading through her limbs. She makes a feeble attempt to open her eyes, but her eyelids feel like they are made of lead.

Heedless of Philippa's attempts to wake her, she lets go and spirals down into darkness.

She drifts for what might be days or might be minutes, lapsing in and out of consciousness. Several times she swears she hears Philippa speaking to her, but cannot make out the words.

*It's not your fault*, Michael tries to tell her, but she doesn't know if Philippa hears it.

Dream slips into reality and back into dream, so when she finally awakens to the sights and sounds of the *Shenzhou's* sickbay, it takes her a few moments to convince herself that it's real.

"Oh good, you're awake." Doctor Nambue appears at her side and immediately begins running scans. "How are you feeling?"

"I'm fine," Michael says, trying to sit up. "What happened? Where's the captain?" Her arm no longer hurts, and when she looks the injury has been healed, as if it never happened.

"She's on her way," Nambue replies. "We picked the two of you up about thirty-six hours ago, but you were unconscious. We had to flush your whole body to get the poison out."

"And the captain?" Michael repeats impatiently.

"Completely fine, thanks to you." Philippa's voice rings out, and Michael whips her head round to see the subject of her thoughts smiling at her from the doorway. Philippa crosses to her side and takes her hand, squeezing it gently. "I'm glad you're all right. I was worried."

Michael squeezes back, taking comfort in the touch. "You were?"

"Of course!" Philippa shakes her head. "Do you know how much paperwork it would take to replace you?"

Michael's lips twitch in spite of herself, and Philippa's expression grows fond. "Thank you," she adds quietly.

"You're welcome," Michael replies. It's all she can think of to say, but from the way Philippa's face warms at the words, she thinks her message has been understood.

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