



The Campfire

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The *Millennium* officers gathered around the small pile of wood as darkness began to fall. Given the local conditions – including their altitude – it was clear to all that things were about to get *very* cold.

Young Jason Nunn, the ship's pilot, had been meticulous about creating the fireplace. It was about two metres across and ringed with rocks with a space cleared

around them to prevent the fire spreading. A collection of dried wood branches sat off to the side that everyone had assisted in gathering. All was prepared.

“Here goes nothing,” he said, gritting his teeth. At this moment he was ruing the fact he had opened his big mouth and boasted of being able to start this fire without modern intervention. He felt the weight of his audience's eyes as they watched him prepare small twigs and wood shavings he would use to kindle the fire once he had created enough heat. Once all was in place, he began rubbing the stick between his hands into the small notch in the log beneath. He paced himself. He knew this would take a little while to get a flame going.

The ship's engineer, Scanner, could not help but watch the young man with more than a touch of scepticism. Regardless of his claims regarding his woodsman's skills, there was no way they were going to get a fire going before they all froze to death. “Are you sure you don't want a hand with that, son?” he asked, trying to keep his feeling from showing but now quite carrying it off.

His wife, Manny, stirred next to him. She was already feeling the cold, despite her Caitian fur. “Give him a chance, Scanner,” she said gently as she purred, doing her best to keep herself – and her husband – warm.

Around the circle, all eyes turned to their Captain. It was her call. She simply gave them a slight grin and shrugged her shoulders. Jason deserved a chance to prove himself.

Jason rubbed and rubbed. Yet, as the minutes passed,

and the temperature began to plummet, he seemed to be having no success. Sweat began dripping from his forehead and his frustration was showing. He paused for a moment and held his hand over the spot that he had been working on, trying to get a feel for *some* heat. There was nothing.

“What is the matter with this stuff?” he growled. He shivered then and realised just how cold it was getting. His breath was beginning to fog before him. It was time to swallow his pride. “Bugger it,” he swore as he reached into his kit bag. He rummaged around for a moment before withdrawing a box of matches.

As he bundled together a small pile of light bark and twigs, a collective sigh went up from his shipmates. This had gone on long enough.

Then came the snap-puff of the match being struck and Jason cupped the flame before putting it under the dried twigs. He held it there for a moment, waving it gently under the wood before the flame finally caught his fingers and he let it go with a quick expletive.

He lit another and did the same, this time dropping the match *before* burning himself. The result was the same. Nothing.

In the twilight, Jason shook his head in wonder. He flicked on his torch and gazed at the wood in wonder. “This bloody stuff isn't even *singed!*” he said, amazed.

Rolling his eyes, Scanner extricated himself from Manny's warm fur and stepped forward. “I don't profess to tell you how to do it in the “High Country”, son,” he said

with a mild rebuke, “but let me show you how *engineers* light fires.”

Stooping down on the other side of the fireplace, Scanner slipped a laser welder out of his sleeve pocket and applied it directly to one of the twigs. The red light played over the surface for a moment, achieving nothing. “What the hell?” he said incredulously before he dialled up the setting and tried again. This time he managed to lightly scorch the surface.

“If that's your idea of a fire, Commander,” Jason said lightly, “don't invite me to an engineer's BBQ. I like my meat cooked, not mooing.”

The corner of Piper's mouth twitched upward in jest. Scanner had deserved that. All the same, the situation was beginning to degenerate. They had to do something.

With her first officer, Sarda, so close, he had overheard her thoughts and guessed her next move. He produced his tricorder and scanned the wood looking for its composition as it's density was no different to Earth's many forms. The display surprised him.

“What is it, Sarda?” Piper asked, wanting a full report and knowing everyone else's curiosity needed to be sated.

Sounding almost apologetic, Sarda reported: “The wood is not carbon-based, Captain. It is silicon-based. It is similar to Earth's asbestos in many ways.”

Scanner nodded as he chuckled. “No wonder,” he muttered. “This stuff will burn as well as concrete.”

Piper's eyebrow shot up. She had an idea. She got to

her feet, drew her phaser and said: "Even concrete will burn with enough heat, Scanner." Dialling up the setting, she aimed the weapon at the largest log and gave it a good ten second blast before it erupted into white hot flame. It quickly caught and spread to the rest of the pile, producing a flame that had the group recoil at its intensity. It was like having a BBQ on the sun.

Regrouped and sitting ten metres away, the *Millennium* crew warmed themselves. Their fire was doing a brilliant job of not only taking away the night chill, it's bright light lit up the space around them to one hundred metres.

Scanner's eyes went wide as he pondered the situation. "I ain't cooking no marshmallows on *that*," he said a little fearfully.

Piper simply smiled to herself, satisfied. "Now that's what I call a campfire," she said cheerfully. "From now on, phasers are to be taken on all camping trips."